

Young Adult Persistent Offenders and the Uncertain Path to Desistance

Prof. Anthony Bottoms and Prof. Joanna Shapland

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It is widely known that even fairly frequent offenders often reduce their offending during their 20s, but this offending career pattern has until recently been under-researched. It is now clear : (i) that, where reductions occur, they are usually gradual rather than abrupt; and (ii) that predicting later reductions from data available at age 18 is difficult, suggesting that fresh social processes influence criminality choices in the 20s. The Sheffield Desistance Study has followed a sample of male persistent offenders, recruited at circa age 20, for a period of 3-4 years, including four interviews. The study is therefore able to shed new light on processes of within-individual change or persistence in these crucial years. Among the results of the study is a picture of surprisingly conventional aspirations among the men. Arising from the results, the authors propose a "Second Start" policy initiative, building on most men's wish to put criminality behind them as they progress into adulthood.

Anthony Bottoms and Joanna Shapland are co-Directors of the Sheffield Desistance Study, which was conducted at the University of Sheffield as part of the ESRC Research Network on Social Contexts of Pathways in Crime (SCoPiC). Anthony Bottoms is Emeritus Wolfson Professor of Criminology at the University of Cambridge, and Honorary Professor of Criminology at the University of Sheffield. Joanna Shapland is Professor of Criminal Justice and Director of the Centre for Criminological Research at the University of Sheffield, and currently a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge.

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