

“I JUST HAD TO BREAK AWAY FROM THAT SHIT”

Juvenile Offenders’ Narratives of Desistance

PETRA SUONTAUSTA
University of Tampere
School of Social Sciences and Humanities
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”The events that go wrong in our lives do not forever damn us.”

George E. Vaillant and Caroline Vaillant (1981)

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE
School of Social Sciences and Humanities

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This research explores the process of desistance of juvenile offenders. Aim of the research is to understand how juveniles with a history of persistent offending perceive the factors that have led to cessation of deviant behavior and supported their desistance from crime.

Eight Finnish men aged 16-30 years were interviewed for the study. Data was collected using open interviews and analyzed by narrative analysis. Life course model is used as a theoretical framework to explain how life history and social context affect human agency.

Findings of this study indicate that the negative experiences related to criminal life and substance abuse, such as constant threat of violence, initiate a volition in the juveniles to break away of the criminal life. This personal volition starts the process of desistance. In addition, supportive environment and alternative possibilities that the juveniles perceive as meaningful enhance desistance from crime. Important supporting environments for desistance are peer support networks, official services and social relationships, such as family. Desistance is also supported by the juveniles' belief in self-efficacy and experiences of succeeding, and pro-social goals for the future and belief in being able to achieve them.

Keywords: Juvenile offender, desistance, youth crime, narrative

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Tämä tutkielma käsittelee lainrikkojataustaisten nuorten desistanssia eli rikollisen käyttäytymisen loppumista. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on ymmärtää lainrikkojataustaisten nuorten kokemuksia siitä, mitkä tekijät ovat vaikuttaneet rikollisten tekojen lopettamiseen, sekä mitä tekijöitä he katsovat tärkeiksi desistanssiprosessin tukijoiksi.

Tutkimuksen taustateorianana on elämänkaariajatteluun pohjautuva malli, jonka mukaan yksilön käyttäytymiseen vaikuttavat sekä elämänhistoria, ajattelutavat että sosiaalinen ympäristö. Tutkimusta varten on haastateltu kahdeksaa suomalaista 16-30-vuotiasta rikostaustaista miestä. Tutkimusmenetelmänä on käytetty avointa haastattelua. Aineisto on analysoitu narratiivisella analyysillä.

Tämän tutkimuksen keskeisin tulos on, että desistanssiprosessin aloittaa lainrikkojataustaisen nuoren oma tahto lopettaa rikosten tekeminen, joka syntyy rikolliseen elämään ja päihdekäyttöön liittyvien negatiivisten kokemusten, kuten jatkuvan väkivallan uhan seurauksena. Oma tahtotila ei kuitenkaan nuorten narratiivien mukaan ole riittävä tekijä rikollisen käyttäytymisen loppumiseen, vaan lisäksi tarvitaan tukea ympäristöltä ja muutoksia nuoren omassa ajattelussa. Desistanssia tukee usko omaan onnistumiseen ja konkreettiset onnistumisen kokemukset, sekä tulevaisuuden haaveet ja usko näiden saavuttamisesta. Tärkeitä muutosympäristöjä ovat esimerkiksi vertaistukiverkostot, viranomaisverkoston tuki ja läheissuhteet. Rikollisen käyttäytymisen vastapainoksi ympäristön täytyy voida tarjota nuorelle jokin vaihtoehtoinen ja nuorelle itselleen merkityksellinen tapa elää erilaisten mielenkiinnon kohteiden ja aktiviteettien kautta.

Asiasanat: nuorisorikollisuus, desistanssi, narratiivi, nuori lainrikkoja

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1 INTRODUCTION

I have been interested in criminology as a discipline for several years. Before studying social work, I had a dream of becoming a police officer. However, this dream changed during one summer when I worked as a security attendant at a local supermarket. I got to spend several hours in a closed booth with the “bad guys” I had caught from stealing, waiting for the police to come and pick them up. I often had conversations with my captives. I found their stories interesting, yet often sad and miserable. During that same summer I was studying social politics at the University of Tampere. The combination of hearing the stories of these “bad guys” and learning about functioning of the society and especially marginalization, I grew to wonder: is it really as a police officer that I would have the best chance to “fight crime”?

After that summer I decided to apply to the social work Master Program. At the very beginning of my social work studies I knew that my Master’s thesis would have something to do with social work in the corrections field. In summer 2012, just before starting to work on my Thesis, I did a three month social work internship at the Criminal Sanctions Office Tampere. I worked as a criminal sanctions official, which basically meant supervising adult and juvenile offenders in probation. (In the Finnish Criminal Code, offenders aged younger than 21 are referred to as ‘juvenile offenders’.) Before my internship, I had thought on exploring prisoner re-entry in my thesis, but during the internship my interest grew on the phenomenon of juvenile offending. Some of the most chaotic (and at the same time most touching) life stories of some of the juveniles I got to work with made me reflect on the movie “The Butterfly Effect” (USA 2004), which portrays how changing one small thing in one’s life course can have a huge effect on shaping one’s future. I found the life stories of juvenile offenders intriguing, especially how they perceive the factors that lead in and out of criminal behaviour. I decided that the topic for my thesis was going to be juvenile desistance. As a reverse concept to recidivism, which means that offending is repeated, desistance is a concept that describes the process of ceasing of offending behaviour (e.g., Laub & Sampson 2003; Maruna 2001).

Because one of the biggest risk factors for adult criminal behaviour is criminal history in adolescence (e.g., Gendreau, Little & Goggin 2006), tackling juvenile offending is essential to reduce adult offending. However, although most adult offenders were also juvenile offenders, most juvenile offenders do not become adult offenders. Offending prevalence and incidence are at their highest at the age of 17, drop about 50 percent by early twenties, and 85 percent by the age of 28

(e.g., Farrington 1986; Massoglia & Uggen 2007, 95; Bottoms, Shapland, Costello, Holmes & Muir 2004, 370). It has been argued that the ones that continue offending to adulthood can be characterized as showing signs of problematic behavior as early as at the age of 8, increasing delinquent behavior during adolescence and cumulating negative social capital throughout the life course (Moffit 1993). It is also noted in several studies that a small fraction, about 5–10 percent, of juvenile offenders, is responsible for as much as 70–80 percent of the committed crimes of the age group (e.g., Kelley, Huizinga, Loeber & Thornberry 1997; Elonheimo 2010). This means that majority of juvenile offenders commit only one or just a few offences. More problematic is the small group of persistent offenders, who commit several crimes during adolescence and thus have a greater risk of continuing deviant behavior into adulthood. The purpose of this study is to understand what makes juveniles with this kind of history of persistent offending to stop. To achieve this understanding, I have interviewed eight young men who have committed several unlawful acts, but who are currently desisting from crime. How do they narrate the process that has led them out of crime? What has supported and what challenged the process of desistance?

Because my study is about how juveniles with offending history perceive the process of cessation of criminal behaviour, it provides more understanding on how the corrections system could support desistance from crime. Social work profession has a fairly strong foothold in the Finnish corrections system. Most under-aged offenders are intervened by communal social service providers, and also most criminal sanctions officials working as probation supervisors have a Bachelor's or Master's degree in Social Work or Social Services. Finnish corrections system has been successful in using rehabilitative and re-integrative methods to reduce recidivism, rather than having a corrections system just to control and deter people from committing crimes. The Finnish system is even referred to as “gentle justice” (Ekunwe 2007), which is very different compared to for example the United States, where corrections system is promoted as “getting tough on crime” or even “war on crime” (e.g., Simon 2007). In my view, this contradiction of concepts is very interesting, and because of my own history of wanting to be a police officer to “fight crime”, I can understand it. Research, however, has shown that rehabilitative correctional programs, such as cognitive-behavioral therapies, reduce recidivism more than sanction-based programs. Harsh sentences and incarceration, on the other hand, have either no effect or even negative effect on recidivism. (Cullen 2007, 719; Koehler, Lösel, Akoensi & Humphreys 2013.)

My thesis starts with presenting the theoretical framework. In chapter 2, I familiarize the reader with the phenomena of youth crime and desistance from crime. I introduce Robert J. Sampson and John H. Laub's dynamic theoretical model of criminality over the life-course, which is argued to be

the most strongly empirically-supported theory (Bottoms 2006, 23) of offending and desistance. The theory underlines that although some factors in childhood predict adolescence and adult delinquency, not all children exposed to those risk factors become adult offenders. To understand what causes persistent delinquency or desistance from crime means to understand the difference in the life course of individuals who desist or who keep on offending. For example, childhood antisocial behaviour and family poverty are seen as risk factors to adolescent and adult offending, but not everyone with those risk factors grow to be adult delinquents. According to the theory, positive life experiences and relationships, such as marriage and a steady job, build social bonds that account for desistance together with individual's choices. (Sampson & Laub 1993; 2003.) Previous research and literature on desistance has noticed the interconnectedness of internal and external factors and how change happens on multiple levels, such as family and community (Bottoms et al. 2004; Maruna 2001; Laub & Sampson 2003).

Chapter 3 describes corrections system for juvenile offenders. Corrections system in Finland follows scientific knowledge on 'what works' in reducing recidivism (Harrikari 2010, 30; for more on concept 'what works', see e.g. MacKenzie 2006). Corrections work with juvenile offenders, as with other sentenced offenders as well, aims at reducing recidivism by making a change in the offender's criminogenic needs. Criminogenic needs are factors associated with higher risk of criminal behavior. These factors are both internal, meaning offender's beliefs and attitudes, and also external, meaning factors closely related to marginalization, such as unemployment or substance abuse (Harrikari 2010, 32). I also introduce an organization called "CRIS", Criminals' Return into Society. CRIS is a non-governmental peer support organization for ex-offenders. The organization works in co-operation with Finnish corrections and social services systems to re-integrate people with offending background into the society and to prevent marginalization and drifting to a criminal career of juvenile offenders.

Chapter 4 describes the research setting of this study. I explain how I use narratology to understand desistance from crime as experienced by juvenile offenders. Results are presented in chapter 5, where I introduce thematically how the eight young men interviewed perceive the process of desistance. The chapter is largely devoted to the voice of the interviewees. In chapter 6, which is the concluding chapter of the study, I extrapolate my findings on how an offender's own volition to change is in interplay with external supportive factors. I also discuss the role of social services and corrections system in supporting desistance from crime and also reflect on research on crime.

2 CRIME AND DESISTANCE

2.1 Crime and juvenile offending

Crime is something that exists in all times and societies (e.g., Durkheim 1893; Christie 1994). We all have a certain perception of what crime and criminals are, but still, criminology has found it troublesome to develop a specific definition to these concepts. The simplest definition is that crime is a violation of criminal law and criminal is someone who has violated the law (Sutherland, Cressey & Luckenbill 1992, 4). “Violating the criminal law” is not a specific definition either, as it still leaves the concept dependent on the social and historical context. For example, different countries have different policies regarding possession of marijuana. Also some acts that would be considered as crime in the criminal law are accepted in some situations, such as manslaughter in state of war. Interesting is also the concept of a “criminal”. If someone commits an act that is against the law, but does not get caught, is he a criminal? If someone is caught and serves a prison sentence, is he still a criminal after that prison sentence?

Because this study is not about the social construction of crime, I use the definition of crime as a violation of the criminal law, which in this case is the Finnish Penal Code. I use the concepts ‘delinquency’, ‘delinquent behavior’, ‘deviant behavior’, ‘offending’ and ‘criminal behavior’ to describe behavior and committed acts that violate the law. In criminological literature, the concept of juvenile delinquency is also used to describe other types of wrongdoings of adolescents, such as drinking in public or running away from home (Muncie 2004, 39). In my study, however, the concepts refer only to acts that would be liable to criminal sanctions after age of 15, such as violent behavior, theft, larceny, and drug-related crimes. Subjects of this study are referred to as ‘juvenile offenders’, although they probably should be referred to as ‘young men who have in their past committed acts that are against the Finnish criminal law’. I recognize that the concept ‘juvenile offender’ has very negative socially constructed associations, as already only the concept of ‘youth’ connotes to immaturity and rebellion (Muncie 2004, 3), not to speak of the label attached to being a ‘criminal’. To save space and to keep this report legible, I indulge in using the concept of juvenile offender, but I wish to resign from its labeling feature.

Studying crime and especially juvenile offending is of importance, because history of offending is the biggest risk factor to future offending (e.g., Farrington 2003). Crime is also connected to accumulating marginalization. As the Finnish national Council for Crime Prevention states (2012),

Crime is connected with marginalization. The connection goes both ways: marginalization increases crime and being labelled as a criminal increases marginalization. The "criminal classes" form a future threat. There is a danger in Finland that a large sector of the population [of criminal classes] will remain permanently outside of working life and other systems that provide the individual with a stake in lawful society.

In Finnish research, the relationship between marginalization and higher risk for youth delinquency is clear. Weak financial situation of the family, low level of parents' education (Kivivuori 2009, 11–12; Elonheimo 2009), parents' divorce, only mother as guardian, and family's disadvantaged position due to parent's sickness or unemployment all increase the risk of offending (Kivivuori 2009, 16–17). International research has parallel results, as risk for criminal behaviour in adolescence has been discovered to increase also if childhood antisocial behaviour, parent inconsistent discipline, delinquent friends, living in a high risk neighbourhood, low educational success and not being attached to normative institutions of the society (e.g. Wikström & Loeber, 2000; Stouthamer-Loeber et al. 2002). Features of marginalization can also be seen when examining the features of Finnish youth sentenced to conditional imprisonment¹: Only about one of four has any occupational studies after compulsory education² and almost half are unemployed. More than one third are assessed to drink heavily, and about one tenth to have problematic substance abuse. The longer the criminal record of the juvenile is, the more accumulation of many disadvantaged conditions. (Harrikari 2010, 43–48.) Disadvantaged conditions then again increase the risk of future offending (Stouthamer-Loeber *et al.* 2002). This is why intervening offending behaviour in adolescence is of utmost importance, as it could prevent marginalization and continuing criminal behaviour in adulthood.

A study of juvenile offending also takes part in the conversation of the spread of organized crime. Gatti and his colleagues found in their study of youth gangs that gang membership predicts the rate of offending even more than just having delinquent friends (Gatti *et al.* 2005, 1186–7). Risk factors to gang membership are very similar with risk factors of marginalization and criminality: previous delinquency, having delinquent friends, lack of parental supervision and teacher's evaluation on

¹ In Finnish corrections system this means that sentenced is supervised under the criminal sanctions office. For more information, see section 3.2, this study.

² In Finland, compulsory school consists of grades 1.-9.

high disruptive behaviour at ages 11 to 13. To reduce crime, it is vital to “prevent gang formation, and youths from joining gangs” and “acting to reduce the duration of their membership” (p.1188). Early interventions in youth delinquency and bonding marginalized youth in the conventional society should help to prevent organized crime.

Juvenile offending is interesting also from the viewpoint of science. Age seems to have an independent effect on offending, as late teens seem to be the “busiest” time of deviancy. Offending prevalence and incidence are at their highest at the age of 17, drop about 50 percent by early twenties, and 85 percent by the age of 28 (Farrington 1986; Massoglia & Uggen 2007, 95; Bottoms, Shapland, Costello, Holmes & Muir 2004, 370.) Offending rapidly decreases in early twenties and when reaching the age of thirty, most juvenile offenders have “matured” (Glueck & Glueck 1974, 175) out of crime. Explaining this “peak” in offending in adolescence has been under much interest in criminological research. Some argue that aging causes offending behavior to decrease for all offenders (Hirschi & Gottfredson 1990), while others argue that most offenders’ deviant behavior is limited to only adolescence and only a few continue deviancy into adulthood (e.g. Moffit 1993; Blumstein & Cohen 1987; ref. Ezell & Cohen 2005, 3). Interesting is that there seems to be both continuity and change in deviant behavior over the life course. As Robins states (1978, 611; quoted in Ezell & Cohen 2005, 6): ‘adult antisocial behavior virtually requires childhood antisocial behavior, yet most antisocial children do not become antisocial adults.’

According to a Finnish register study of almost 3000 young men aged 16-20, most common offences of juveniles are traffic violations and crime against property. About 11 percent of the study population had a record of these offences. About 4 percent had a record of drug felony, 5 percent of drunk driving and 7 percent of a violent crime. Adolescents seem to commit several types of crimes and not “specify” in certain types of offences. For example, about 60 percent of those with a record of drug felony or violence crime also had a record of property crime. What is most intriguing is that only 4 percent of the young men with recorded crime commit more than 70 percent of all the crimes. The young men in this group also have the most accumulation of psychosocial risk factors, such as parents’ low level of education, psychiatric problems and use of alcohol and drugs. (Elonheimo 2010, 47, 52.)

The interest of my study is to understand what causes juveniles with the biggest risk of drifting to a criminal career – history of several criminal acts – to stop offending *before* adulthood. The theoretical framework that I am using to depict processes of offending and desistance from crime is

age-graded theory of informal social control developed by Robert Sampson and John Laub. Using the life course approach to understand what causes persistent delinquency or desistance from crime depicts both inter-individual and intra-individual changes in different ages and stages of life course. This means that the approach gives insight on both the difference in the life course *between individuals who desist or who offend*, but also changes *in an individual's life course* and how these changes affect his offending behaviour. The life-course model is a developmental theory, as it highlights the changes over time in internal and external factors that affect criminal behaviour. It is also an integrated perspective, as it draws together several criminological theories. Life-course approach is “in research terms...the most strongly empirically-supported theory currently available” (Bottoms 2006, 23). This theoretical model of crime was first introduced in Sampson and Laub's 1993 book *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turningpoints Through Life*. In 2003 Laub and Sampson published *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70*, which is a revised version of their 1993 book. Theory in *Shared Beginnings* is more centred on interplay between human agency and external factors: How do personal choice, situational context and personal history influence on who continues offending (persists) and who stops (desists) (Laub & Sampson 2003, 9).

Data behind life course approach consist of a detailed description of lives of 1000 men from Philadelphia, originally collected in mid of 1900's. 500 subjects had troubled backgrounds and deviant behaviour in adolescence. The other half was a matched control group of 500 non-delinquent boys. The original study, “Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency” by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck in 1950, concluded that early onset of antisocial behavior was predicted by poor parent discipline and lack of emotional support (Siegel 2011, 302). Fifty years later, Sampson and Laub were able to computerize the original and follow-up data of the 500 delinquent boys and also of the 500 controls. When using quantitative measures to analyze the lives of these men to an older age, they discovered that although some factors in childhood foreshadow adolescence and adult delinquency, not all children exposed to those risk factors become adult offenders. *Crime in the making* is a quantitative study on factors that affect offending behaviour. For *Shared Beginnings*, Sampson and Laub tracked 52 of the original delinquent subjects and conducted qualitative interviews with them of their full life course to gain a deeper understanding on how desisters and persisters perceive different factors affecting their offending. (Sampson & Laub 1993, 47, 244.)

Based on quantitative analysis on the original and follow-up data, Sampson and Laub argue that informal social control and social capital are the most important factors in determining deviant

behaviour. In adolescence, informal social control is created by attachment to family and school. Parental supervision and emotional attachment to parents decrease offending behaviour in adolescence, whereas parents' punitive discipline and rejection of the child increase offending. However, because of mediating the structural effects such as poverty, the "blame" should not be put on the parents. Sampson and Laub argue that it is as much as 75 percent of the effect of structural factors that are mediated through family. Poverty and disadvantage increase the risk of offending, but this effect is mediated by low level of social cohesion (Sampson et al. 1997) and collective efficacy (Morenoff, Sampson & Raudenbush 2001, 550). The effect of low level of social cohesion and collective efficacy have on criminality is again mediated by family processes (Vieno et al. 2010, 324). This means that structural factors influence family processes that statistically have the direct effect on delinquency. (Sampson & Laub 1993, 243–247.)

The impact of family is an external factor in determining individual's delinquent behaviour. It could also be argued that internal factors of the child affect the interaction between the parent and the child. This is what Hirschi and Gottfredson argue in their *General Theory of Crime*. According to the theory, criminal behavior is determined by individual's low self-control and impulsiveness. Impulsiveness complicates the formation of social bonds, and together with low self-control causes difficulties to engage in school and work. When opportunity arises, these crime-prone individuals are likely to commit crime because of their impulsivity and weak social bonds. (Hirschi & Gottfredson 1990.) Individual's low self-control and impulsiveness do play a major role in deviant behavior (Agnew and Cullen, 1999, 175), but low self-control is not a sufficient explanation to movements in and out of crime. Something else than change in internal factors should explain patterns of persisting and desisting from crime, because many studies have noted that there seems to be no significant changes in antisocial behaviour through life course (White, Moffitt, Earls, Robins, and Silva 1990; Robins 1978; ref Moffit 1993). Sampson and Laub found in their study that troublesome behaviour in childhood has a significant direct effect on future offending, but the external factor of informal social control explains more of the variation in delinquency than childhood troublesome behaviour: informal control by family and school in adolescence and attachment to work and a spouse in adulthood have a larger effect in determining delinquent behaviour than individual's low self-control (1993, 93, 153).

Sampson and Laub found that having delinquent peers increases deviant behaviour, regardless of attachment to family and school. The impact seems to be quite large, as the probability to become a delinquent is increased by 90 percent if having delinquent friends. (Sampson & Laub 1993, 120.) The reason why having delinquent friends increases offending is, however, not so clear. It could be

that “birds of a feather flock together” (Hirschi & Gottfredson 1990), meaning that people with a tendency towards deviant behaviour select friends with similar tendency (Sampson & Laub 1993, 122), or then the effect could be explained by learning theories. Criminological learning theories are for example *differential association theory* by Sutherland and *social learning theory* by Akers. These theories argue that criminal behaviour, including attitudes, techniques, justifications and motives, are learned in interaction with other people. Differential association theory recognizes that not everyone have the same perception of what is right and what is wrong, and if an individual is more exposed to values and habits that reinforce criminal behaviour and not conventional attitudes and beliefs, they will more likely commit an offence. Justification for offending can be for example “I needed it more than him”, “He was asking for it” or “At least I don’t sell drugs to kids” (these justifications are some examples of what some delinquents said during my internship at the Criminal Sanctions Office). A person commits an act that breaks the law when committing the act makes more sense to him than not breaking the law, and this “sense making” or reasoning is very much a learned process from his social environment (Sutherland & Cressey 1978, 85). Also reward and punishment following an act are key factors in endorsing the learning process (Akers 2000, 78–79). Rewards, such as a positive feeling, social acceptance or admiration, or getting more money as a result from crime, act as positive reinforcement. Punishment, on the other hand, inhibits wrongful behaviour. Punishment can be a negative feeling, such as shame, or losing something or negative reactions from others following the delinquent act. Imitating behaviour of other people or from the media are also a processes of learning (e.g., Surette 2002, Alvesalo & Santtila 2004; ref Kivivuori 2006).

Learning theories have been criticized because they do not explain the origins of crime (Siegel 2011, 275). Sampson and Laub also argue that social learning and differential association do not overrule the impact of family and school informal social control (1993, 122). However, it has been noted in research that having delinquent peers, using substances and spending time unsupervised in city centres or clubs increase the risk for offending for individuals that can otherwise be characterized as possessing only medium-level risk factors of deviant behaviour (Wikström & Loeber 2000). When talking about juvenile delinquency, learning theories can be argued to be significant in explaining deviant behaviour. Receiving admiration from peers when breaking rules is a positive result that, according to learning theory, may reinforce deviant behaviour. Adolescents are also likely to imitate and learn behaviour from others. For example, smoking is detected to increase when interacting with peers that smoke (Harakeh & Vollebergh 2012). Especially having low levels of informal social control means less negative consequences for the child from the

wrongdoings. Low level of informal social control can be due to low level of parental supervision. Also, if parents use too harsh measures of punishment, they are more likely to lose the respect of the child and this way lose the power to discipline the child (Sampson & Laub 1993, 68). In both of the cases, no discipline or too harsh discipline, the child will not perceive it as a negative consequence. If the adolescent also has weak attachment to school, negative behaviour cannot be controlled from school either. Social learning from peers can thus play a crucial role in increasing deviant behaviour, especially when combined to low levels of informal social control.

Learned behaviour or not, there is continuance in deviant behavior. Sampson and Laub found the powerful relationship between childhood misbehavior and later offending in their data. For example compared to non-delinquents, getting arrested in young adulthood is three to four times more likely to those that were delinquent in childhood. (Sampson & Laub 1993, 129.) This would point out to Hirschi and Gottfredson's theory that offenders with low self-control are likely to keep offending throughout their life-course. However, as the age-crime curve portrays, most juvenile offenders stop offending in early twenties. One explanation for this is that there are two separate groups of offenders: *life-course-persistent* and *adolescence-limited* offenders. This 'dual taxonomy' was developed by Terrie Moffit and it partially explains why most adolescent delinquents do not become adult offenders. For adolescence-limited offenders, criminality is just a temporary period of adolescence. Life-course-persistent offenders are the more problematic category of juvenile offenders. Life-course persistent offenders' antisocial behavior can be seen to have started before the age of 10, continuing with increasing offending at adolescence and cumulative problems that together with an antisocial personality hinder the growth of social capital or building positive social relationships, and thus increase the risk of continuing deviance. Because these two groups have such different aetiologies of criminal behavior and continuity of offending, they should be studied separately. (Moffit 1993.) This theory of a group of persistent offenders makes sense, because risk factors to deviant behavior are of cumulating sort. Also Thornberry and Krohn argue (2001) that problematic behavior in childhood increases the risk of weaker social bonds, which again increases the risk of deviant behavior in adolescence. Criminality in adolescence again weakens social bonds and increases risk for future offending.

Also Sampson and Laub agree that there is much continuity in criminal behavior, but they argue that these kinds of categories of offenders are blind to the changes on individual trajectories. Because there is variation in individuals' patterns of offending throughout the life course, categorizations are instable. (Laub & Sampson 2003, 4–5.) Sampson and Laub argue that social bonds explain more of the variations in offending than earlier delinquency or low self-control per

se. What they found with quantitative analysis of their data is that social bonds in adulthood in forms of marital and job stability and quality of attachment have an independent effect on adult offending, despite prior criminal propensity and childhood experiences (1993, 156). This they were able to discover thanks to the large sample size of both delinquents and controls, as key findings were parallel for both groups: Also for the non-delinquent control group, weaker social bonds in adulthood cause increased risk of offending. (Ibid. 188–203.)

2.2 Desistance from crime

Now that I have presented how informal social control and social capital affect criminal behavior, I turn the focus to desistance from crime. Desistance is a concept that describes the process of cessation of criminal behaviour (Fitzpatrick 2011, 225). Its studies are part of the more solution-focused and future oriented view of crime than traditional crime causation studies and “nothing works” –idioms (e.g. Martinson 1974). For example as criticized by Maruna (2001), earlier research has lamely stated that offenders mature out of crime, without specifying what it is in ageing that could affect cessation of deviant behaviour. The interest in desistance studies is in what makes offenders not to re-offend, a shift toward thinking “what works”. Successful desistance is not only a decision to stop offending, but a longer process that has to be maintained (Maruna 2001, 24). Desistance studies are a fairly new branch in the discipline of criminology. In early 1980’s a few researchers sought to understand cessation of criminal behaviour from ex-offenders subjective perspective, and in 1990’s the paradigm of life course and criminal career were introduced. However, it was not until the millennium that theories of desistance really started to bloom. (Farrall & Maruna 2004, 358–9.)

Key point in desistance is that it is not one single event of termination of deviant behaviour, but a process towards conventional lifestyle. The process can be described to consist of a reciprocal effect of ex-offender’s maturation, a narrative change in personal and social identity and life transitions that form social bonds that gradually shift the ex-offender away from criminal lifestyle (e.g., Maruna 2001; Farrall & Bowling 1999; ref. McNeill 2012, 9). Desistance theories suggest that these stages do not appear in a certain linear order, but as interplay of several factors (McNeill 2012, 9–10). Change from criminality to desistance is gradual and requires changes in several areas of life (Maruna 2001).

For researchers, it is somewhat problematic to study desistance, because it is exploring something that did not take place, the absence of criminal activity (Maruna 2001, 17). Quantitative studies of desistance attempt to discover associations between life circumstances and likelihood of desistance (Brame, Bushway & Paternoster 2003, 426), and qualitative studies rely on ex-offenders' subjective knowledge (e.g., Maruna 2001; Laub & Sampson 2003). Laub and Sampson's life-course theory relies on both quantitative and qualitative data. In *Shared Beginnings*, the factors that affect desistance are looked at from the narrative perspective of the desister to unravel the interplay of human agency and external factors. A wide range of studies have shown that cognitive changes are key factors in maintaining a new lifestyle (Maruna 2001, 34). *Shared Beginnings* provides more information on how structural factors can initiate and support these cognitive changes. As the interviewed men in their study narrate their life stories, it also provides a deeper understanding on *how* social bonds affect criminal behavior and absence of it.

According to life course approach, human agency determines much of decision making, but it is always intertwined with the social and historical context. Desistance is a dynamic process, which is shaped by both internal and external factors. Life is full of stimuli (or happenings) that shape individual cognitions and life course, and individual characteristics and personal history influence how these stimuli are perceived. Positive life experiences can work as "hooks" or "turning points" to enhance desistance, as well as negative experiences can enhance antisocial behaviour. The more positive and protective factors, the more stable the desistance process is. (Sampson & Laub 1993; 2003.)

Laub and Sampson (2003) found in the interviews of the former delinquent boys that residential change and having new routines in life support desistance. Being separated from the environment and people that could increase the risk of offending could happen because of joining the military or being sentenced to a reform school. This "knifing off" from delinquent environment supports desistance especially for those from very disadvantaged conditions, because it removes them from the old environment and places them in a new setting that provides structure in life and opportunity to learn new skills and build social relationships, to "start anew". Marriage was also described to create new routines and structure in life, especially if having children. For some, marriage meant residential change, which again breaks the ties to the old life and thus decreases risk of offending. (Ibid. 130–137.)

Building self-esteem and having new stability in life were also factors related to sustainable desistance. What comes to employment in enhancing desistance, Laub and Sampson discovered in

the narratives that employment increases stability in life and teaches one to be responsible, and this way builds one's self-esteem by providing experiences of success and accomplishment (Laub & Sampson 2003, 138–139). Also Maruna argues that better self-esteem and belief in succeeding are important supporters of desistance. If a person believes he will not succeed and that he cannot do any better, deciding to quit or ruining things immediately without even trying works as self-protection against possible failure and also gives the person a sense of being in control, as it is his own decision not to succeed. (Maruna 2001, 78–79.) Participating and being productive are proof for the ex-offender that he really can succeed. In Maruna's Liverpool Desistance Study, self-help and peer support groups were perceived as important environments of enhancing desistance, because in a peer support group one not only has a feeling of belonging, but these groups also provide possibility for enhancing belief in self-efficacy. In a peer support group, one can have a meaningful, productive social role and see stories of success and this way be empowered in his own life also. Peer support groups are also important environments of learning a new lifestyle without crime. (Maruna 2001, 119–127.)

Having meaningful relationships with other people have also been found to support in making a life change. For example Graham and Bowling (1995, 72) and Vaillant (1988, 1154) have argued that it is very important for a recovering addict to form a relationship with a person that has not caused any negative consequences for him in the past. The relationship supports recovery as it provides a sense of belonging and also new direction in life. For the desisters Sampson and Laub interviewed, this was also true. For some, their wives were one of the first people to actually care for them. Also going to church or AA, or having a mentor as an influential relationship gave new direction and meaning to life for some of the men. (Laub & Sampson 2003, 137–141.)

The role of human agency is crucial for external factors even to have the chance to function as supporters of desistance. As Laub and Sampson discovered, desisting interviewees *wanted* to start a new life, they *wanted* to have a family, and they *wanted* to stay sober and go to AA (2003, 141–3). A person makes choices in his life, and these choices affect his future desistance (ibid. 279). Made choices can gradually (and sometimes even unnoticed by the ex-offender) build something in the person's life that he does not want to risk losing by committing crimes (ibid. 148). This is how a single choice or an event can start the accumulation of protective factors of desistance. However, choice alone does not ensure desistance if the social context is not supportive. For example, having a family supports desistance because it provides new daily routines, meaningful activities, and new roles and goals in life (Laub & Sampson 2003, 145–7), but if the person is from very disadvantaged

conditions, having a child has been found to *increase* property offending (Massoglia & Uggen 2007, 100).

Laub and Sampson argue that positive structural turning points work as accelerators of desistance process, as they affect changes in behavior on the long run, sometimes even without the deliberate decision-making of the desister (2003, 278). This argument is supported by Robert Agnew's *general strain theory* (Agnew 1985). Although strain theory is a theory of crime causation, in reverse it could also explain desistance. The theory argues that committing crime is a result of experiencing severe or long-lasting strain. Strain can be caused by 1) not being able to achieve one's goals, and 2) experiencing agonizing conditions by increase of negative stimuli or by decrease of positive stimuli. For juveniles, goals that they may want to achieve, but lack the skills or possibilities to obtain, are for example excitement, money, masculinity and autonomy. Experiencing negative stimuli or loss of positive stimuli can be, for example, death of a friend, losing a parent, being physically or verbally abused or breaking up with a girlfriend. If a person lacks the skills and social support to cope with the caused strain, and especially if he perceives the situation as unjust, it may lead to experiencing frustration and anger. These emotions may cause the want to revenge or correct the situation. A special feature of anger is also that it lowers one's concern for consequences and ability to negotiate. (Agnew 2012, 34–36.) If negative experiences and lacking skills and support to cope with them increase the risk for offending, then positive turning points and social bonds can be argued to decrease offending by their effect on relieving emotional strain and providing more social support and ways to cope with negative emotions.

Scientifically it has been rather difficult to state causal relationships between subjective and social factors in desistance (LeBel *et al.* 2008). Maruna (2001) emphasizes human agency and identity transformations as determining desistance, whereas Laub and Sampson highlight social factors (1993 and 2003). It is quite clear, though, that human thinking does not develop in a social vacuum (Shapland & Bottoms 2011, 276). For change to take place, something has to happen to make the offender doubt his previous behaviour, and the environment has to support the change, for example by providing alternative activities (Haigh 2009, 318). But still, not everyone is able to take advantage of even the most supportive turning points and environments (Laub & Sampson 2003, 249). How experience is perceived, depends much on personal, historical and social context – how individual gives meaning to that experience in the certain stage of his life (Laub & Sampson 2003; Giordano 2002 ref. LeBel *et al.* 2008, 135).

However, human agency is not set in a stone by its past. As Laub and Sampson's argue, external positive 'hooks' have the power to influence human agency and work as supporters of desistance. This argument is supported by research that has shown that rehabilitative corrections programs engender lower rates of recidivism than punitive corrections (e.g., Lipsey and Cullen, 2007; Koehler, Lösel, Akoensi & Humphreys 2013). Research on corrections for juvenile offenders will be presented in next chapter, alongside with introducing how juvenile offending is intervened in Finland.

3 TACKLING JUVENILE OFFENDING

3.1 To punish or to rehabilitate

Some theories suggest that crime control should concentrate on working as a deterrent, to scare people from committing crimes because of the unwanted consequences for the self, meaning loss of liberty as a punishment from committing an unlawful act. The classical deterrence theorists argue that in situations where people ponder whether or not to commit a certain crime, the possibility and severity of a sanction deters from committing the crime if consequences are a greater pain than what the crime would pay. (Taylor, Walton and Young 1973; ref. Wright, Caspi, Moffit and Paternoster 2004, 182.) This understanding of punishment being an effective measure of crime control is still working as a presumption in several correctional systems, although research has shown that harsh sentences and incarceration have either no effect or even negative effect on recidivism (Lipsey and Cullen, 2007). For juvenile offenders, programs that operate on the principle of creating fear of punishment, such as incarceration, have been noted to even increase rates of offending. Especially for those with less self-reported offending, institutional placement has been discovered to raise the level of offending. (Mulvey *et al.* 2010, 471). The negative outcomes have been argued to be caused by the fact that incarceration weakens the juvenile's 'good' social relationships and exposes him to 'bad people' (Lipsey and Cullen, 2007).

In Lipsey and Cullen's meta-analysis of hundreds of studies, rehabilitative correctional programs were found to reduce recidivism more than sanction-based programs (2007). Research has shown that recidivism can be decreased when targeting individuals' criminogenic needs, meaning decreasing risk factors related to offending and promoting protective factors related to desistance (Dowden and Andrews 1999). As I demonstrated in chapter 2, there are several different pathways and risk factors to offending, as there are many different pathways out of crime. This is why it is essential to build holistic interventions (or corrections) according to offenders' personal needs (Lipsey & Cullen 2007).

Research has also shown that programs that use cognitive-behavioural approaches can reduce recidivism, because they influence cognitive dysfunctions and in tandem teach pro-social behaviour. Corrections programs should not only target the individual level, but also family and neighbourhood levels. Community-based treatment services and family-based interventions are

more cost-effective and have been noted in some studies to reduce recidivism more than incarceration. Because many risk factors to offending originate from family and community, it only makes sense to implement the intervention in the setting that is part of process of crime causation. This way the juvenile is also able to learn new behaviour in his normal environment, not only be temporarily isolated from it for the time in institutional placement. (Lipsey & Cullen 2007.)

3.2 Corrections system for juvenile offenders in Finland

In Finnish legislation and corrections system, criminal responsibility starts at the age of 15. Up to the age of 21, offenders are referred to as “juvenile offenders”. (The Finnish Criminal Code.) Finnish corrections system does not punish juvenile offenders as severely as adult offenders, mainly because deviant behavior is seen to be symptomatic of personal or social problems (Kuula, Pitts & Marttunen 2006, 337). Offending in adolescence is also perceived not to be intentional and carefully planned, and thus is not punished as such. The most important aim of corrections to juvenile offenders is to enhance integration into the society to reduce recidivism, but of course also to discipline the wrongdoing (Ministry of Justice 2004). Lighter sentences aiming at integration to the society are used to avoid harmful effects of incarceration, such as stigma and isolation that increase the risk of marginalization (ibid. 84). Corrections increase volume gradually if delinquent behaviour increases or repeats (ibid. 17). Social services and corrections system work together to guide juvenile offenders to conventional lifestyle (Ibid.8–9). (Ministry of Justice 2004.)

Offenders younger than 15 years of age are reported to municipal social services by the police. The work of social services is always regulated by Child Welfare Act, not the Penal Code. (Ministry of Justice 2004, 10.) The main principle that guides the work is the wellbeing of the child is (Child Welfare Act). Social workers assess the situation of the adolescent and decide on appropriate measures to be taken (Harrikari 2006, 251). Measures can vary from a short period of non-institutional care to longer placements in custodial care. The latter is used only if the child is at risk to drift to a criminal career, non-institutional support is not sufficient and if the child’s wellbeing is otherwise endangered. (Child Welfare Act.)

The corrections system if Finland is modified to correspond to the developmental processes of adolescents. 15-21 year old juvenile offenders are still seen as growing to adulthood. (Mohell & Pajuoja 2006, 279.) Corrections used for juvenile offenders (in severing order) are notice from the

police, fine, conditional imprisonment, community service and prison sentence (Marttunen 2006, 282–283). A fundamental principle of penal policy of juvenile offenders is minimizing incarceration (Marttunen 2006, 303) and rather using sanctions that are carried out in the community. This is because preventing marginalization and reducing recidivism are important purposes of the corrections system. These are aimed at by trying to make a difference in the juvenile's social environment and affecting the criminogenic factors (Ministry of Justice 2004, 93).

Imprisonment is never sentenced to under-aged offenders, unless there are substantial grounds and if the prison sentence would be longer than 2 years. (Mohell & Pajuoja 2006, 279; Ministry of Justice 2004, 17, 82.) In percentage, this means that only about 2 % of convicted 15-17 year old offenders were sentenced to prison (Marttunen 2006, 303). In numbers, there are approximately only eight offenders aged 15-17 incarcerated in Finland at any given day (Ekunwe et al. 2010, 3). Overall sentencing of offenders aged 15-17 is lighter than of over 21 year olds. Offenders in this age group are usually managed under social services and can be placed in custodial care under same principles as under 15 year old offenders. Incarceration of juveniles aged 18-20 is also minimized by using conditional imprisonment and supervision. The average number of prisoners in Finland is 2.800, and only 100 of these are aged 18-21 (Ekunwe et al. 2010, 3). Incarceration is seen to be harmful because of exposure to older offenders, stigma, and being cut off from school and work: incarceration makes it even harder to integrate into the society and grow to secure adulthood. Otherwise sentencing of 18-20 year olds is similar to offenders older than 21. (Ministry of Justice 2004, 17, 84.)

Before conviction, an inquest (or report) is made of the social situation of the juvenile offender and how different corrections may affect it. If this inquest suggests that the juvenile would benefit from supervision under the Criminal Sanctions Office, then supervision is attached to conditional imprisonment. What supervision means in practice, is meeting a criminal sanctions official on average once a month.³ Also all incarcerated juvenile offenders are supervised during probation.

Emphasis of supervision is on social integration. The objective of supervision is to minimize recidivism by affecting the offenders' cognitions, behaviour and social situation. Young offenders are encouraged to take responsibility and interest of their lives. Specific criminogenic needs are assessed and worked on with every offender. Together with the juveniles, officials assess their social situation, which includes mapping out the history and current situation related to education,

³³ This information is based on Criminal Sanctions Agency's statistics in www.rikosseuraamus.fi (accessed 10/24/2012) and my personal work experience at the Agency in Tampere, Finland.

work, family, living and income. Specific risk factors, such as heavy use of substances, are taken into consideration and worked on during supervision. This can be drug counselling, motivational enhancement or encouraging and guiding to rehabilitation services. Officials estimate the cognitions and attitudes that may affect recidivism and try to work on them during supervision. Important aspect of supervision is the conversations of the crime(s) the offender has made. These conversations aim at increasing the offenders' understanding on their responsibility, decisions and emotions in the situation, and also causes and consequences of the crime. Building a trusting relationship between the supervisor and the young offender is important, but sadly the changing of staff has a negative effect on building sustainable relationships. (Ministry of Justice 2004, 22.)

As stated in this chapter, social work profession has an important role in Finnish corrections system. In the United States, for example, social work's toehold in the field is described to be marginal. As Peters (2011) argues, "*...those involved in the correctional system are among the most vulnerable and oppressed individuals in the United States today....Yet social work has an almost negligible presence in the key roles of this domain*" (p.355). This is an interesting contrast, especially when in Finland, social work knowledge and skills are even more and more merged to corrections system (Kivivuori & Honkatukia 2006). As I have described in chapter 2, crime causation is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, which is very strongly connected to marginalization. Social work can thus be argued to be a key profession in the corrections system, as it holds the expertise and skills of enhancing social integration.

3.3 Peer support at CRIS – Organisation of ex-offenders

CRIS, Criminals' Return In to Society, is a non-governmental peer support organization of former criminals and drug addicts aiming at helping ex-offenders and addicts to re-integrate into the society and adapt to a conventional lifestyle. Since CRIS plays an important role on organizational level in rehabilitation of people with offending background, and most of the data of this study is collected via CRIS Helsinki, it is necessary to introduce this organization a bit closer.⁴ The four underlying values that guide all work of CRIS are honesty, abstinence from substances, fellowship and solidarity. The organization originated in Sweden in 1997. In 2013 CRIS operates also in Finland,

⁴ For more information on CRIS, see www.kris.fi (for CRIS in Finland) or www.kris.a.se (for CRIS in Sweden). All information of CRIS in this study is based on www.kris.fi (accessed in January 2013) and consultation (in January 2013) with Timo Valkama, the President of CRIS Finland and with Mikko Kangaspunta, the Project Manager of CRIS Helsinki.

Denmark, Russia, and Belarus. CRIS Finland was founded in 2003. In 2013 CRIS works in seven different cities in Finland and is aiming to expand in the future. CRIS also provides youth work in four cities in Finland. Youth work of CRIS is targeted for 15-25 year old young adults with offending background and addiction problems. The organization is an important co-operation partner with prisons, Criminal Sanctions Agencies and social services.

The aim of CRIS is to help ex-convicts and addicts to integrate back into the society by providing support to achieve drug and crime-free lifestyle. CRIS works on basis of peer support. Older members of CRIS have disengaged from the criminal lifestyle, and thus are well aware of the struggles an ex-inmate might face when trying to integrate back into the society. This is why CRIS is a well-known and trusted organization among Finnish prisons and inmates. CRIS also keeps on informing of its presence and support system by sending out brochures and visiting prisons. The aim is to inform convicts of a possibility of another kind of lifestyle and of the support available to achieve this, and set “a living example of a changed lifestyle”.

If a convict is interested in receiving support from CRIS, building the supporting network starts already before release. When released, CRIS comes to pick up the released prisoner from the prison gate and provides intense support during the first days and weeks after release. Older members that support new members are called “mentors”, a very similar concept to for example Narcotics Anonymous’ “sponsor” (Kotovirta 2009, 120). Besides mentoring, CRIS also helps in building a support network with officials. This is another very important aspect of CRIS work, especially with ex-inmates that may be cautious and suspicious toward authorities. CRIS has activity centers, where members can meet other ex-convicts, and receive advice and help concerning housing, work and education. Activity centers are open at day time. In the evenings CRIS organizes leisure time activities and sports. There is also someone on call on a phone around the clock to provide mentoring when needed.

Besides volunteer peer support, CRIS also co-operates with several authorities, such as Criminal Sanctions Agencies and municipal social and healthcare services. CRIS provides non-institutional rehabilitation programs (such as “5 hour drug rehabilitation program”), supported housing, employment services (work and training try-outs), and community service placements and support programs for people doing community sanctions. CRIS has also launched “Enabling the Labour Market Integration” -projects in two cities in order to help ex-offenders to find employment by providing rehabilitation services, and guidance and help with job seeking, for example by introducing possible employers. Funding for CRIS comes mainly from the RAY-house, a Finnish

lottery trust that grants funding for non-governmental health and social welfare organizations (www.ray.fi, accessed 28.1.2013). Also municipalities and the state buy services from CRIS.

Youth work at CRIS is targeted at 15-25 year old young adults with history of crime and substance abuse. Youth work aims at integrating marginalized youth back into the society, based on same values as work with adult members: honesty, abstinence from substances, fellowship and solidarity. Youth work has also interventional goals, as it aims to prevent juveniles at risk from marginalization and drifting to a criminal career and prison cycle.

There are two cornerstones in CRIS youth work: 1) individual support provided by mentors and 2) a new, positive social environment at the activity center and leisure time activities. CRIS has joint activities for juvenile offenders with Criminal Sanctions Agencies, social services and other youth work organizations. Individual support is provided by CRIS mentors. The idea of mentoring is to walk beside the juvenile and build a trusting relationship. What many juveniles seem to need, is time and support when the wish to change one's life course arises. The mentor helps, for example, in mapping out education and work options, running errands with officials and learning to manage everyday life (being somewhere at a fixed time, paying rent etc.). It is easier for many juveniles from troublesome backgrounds to trust someone who they see as an equal than, for example, to trust officials. The activity center works as a positive social environment, where juveniles can spend time together with mentors and other peers. CRIS also provides leisure time activities, such as sports and camps. This alternative way to spend time in a pro-social environment aims at increasing social capital of the young offenders.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Narratology and understanding human experience

Aiming to understand the dynamic process of desistance of juveniles, this study takes part in scientific conversation of juvenile delinquency and desistance. Crime causation in adolescence and adulthood has been widely explored, but there is a shortage of empirical research of the cessation of criminal behaviour (e.g., Farrall & Bowling, 1999; Laub & Sampson, 2001). Quantitative studies have presented protective and risk factors of criminal behavior, but there is still a need for understanding causal relationships and how these factors can lead an offender out of delinquency (Massoglia & Uggen 2007, 101). As Mulvey and colleagues (2010, 471) argue,

...understanding the process of desistance rests on future investigations of the more dynamic processes that link change in particular aspects of these adolescents' lives and involvement in antisocial activity....There is obviously much work to be done in identifying powerful and robust protective factors that vary among serious adolescent offenders, and that also are implicated in the desistance process.

To understand juvenile desistance process means to understand the experience of juvenile desisters. In this study I aim to understand what they see as important factors in changing offending to desistance and what supports this change. My research questions are:

- What kind of turning points from offending to desistance can be found in the narratives of juveniles with history of persistent offending?
- What kind of factors they perceive to have enhanced desistance?

Since it is inadequate and problematic to measure experience in numbers (Pinnegar & Daynes 2007, 30), I lean on narrative approach to gain knowledge on juvenile desistance process (Kvale 2007, 21). Through stories, it is possible to get closer to actual life events and underlying processes (Elliot 2005, 17–26). Instead of the positivist epistemology that has been dominating the research field of criminology, I adopt the postmodern and constructivist epistemology. It emphasizes local knowledge, subjectivity and reality as experienced by human (Kvale 2007, 21) and human knowledge as a complex net of stories that is in constant change due to new experiences, interaction with other people and culture (Heikkinen 2001, 119).

When using stories as source of information, an underlying assumption is that a narrative is an expression of participant's internal comprehension of phenomena (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou 2008, 5), an inner story of experience (Squire 2008, 41). Narratives of desisters build subjective knowledge of the phenomenon of desistance, how they 'make sense' of it (Squire 2008, 43; Heikkinen 2001, 129–130). Through stories of juvenile desisters, I can get closer to understanding how they reflect their lives: how they build a continuum of happenings, what meanings they give to those happenings, and what causal relations they perceive (Elliot 2005, 17–26). As Massoglia and Uggen describe, narratives offer “rich detail about the process of desistance as it is experienced” and “individuals provide stirring subjective accounts of their movements away from crime in their own words” (2007, 91). Also as Maruna argues for the use of narratology in understanding desistance from crime,

(N)arrative theory explicitly tries to account for individual choices that appear to be far from 'rational'. Narrative theory emphasizes that human subjects, unlike their counterparts in the hard sciences, react differently to stimuli based on how events and constructs are 'perceived and interpreted ... in line with pre-existing and emerging goals'. (Maruna 1999.)

Narrative approach gives me insight on how subjects build a story of transformation from offending to desistance by giving meanings to different life events and how these events then have influenced following events (Heikkinen 2001, 129). Transformation as a story can be linked to the psychological concept of “schema”, which basically means that past experiences shape the way humans act and process information in the future (Pinnegar & Daynes 2007, 30). In terms of phenomenology, human experience links the past, present and future (Crites 1997 ref. Hänninen 2000, 24). This means that also the future, for example goals in life, influence how humans act in the present. A good example of this link between past, present and future and the functioning of schema is building social capital. It is a two-way process, where social capital is enabled in certain conditions and also enables certain things (Farrall 2004, 60–61). For example, a person might be very hesitant to apply for school or work, if in the past he has only had rejections or does not really see having an education to do him any good. But, if a desire of a certain profession is evoked, and there is someone (like a parent or social worker) to encourage him and help in the applying process, he might be more likely to apply. And if he is accepted, he might gain more self-confidence, social contacts and a feeling of belonging and succeeding that might help him in the future to achieve more things. This is what Laub and Sampson refer to when they argue that positive hooks can start the accumulation of more positive things (see chapter 2.2, this study). Schema and environment change the influence of different stimuli. Understanding better *how* and *why* different factors are

part of desistance process provide profounder knowledge of how, when, where and under what conditions desistance really is enhanced.

4.2 Generating data

My original idea was to interview ex-offenders aged 18-25 with a history of at least one court conviction at age 18-20 and at least 12 months of self-reported desistance. These limits were from a very organisational and legislative perspective. I was looking at juvenile offending from the viewpoint of a probation official and social worker, categorizing juvenile offenders according to convictions from courts and setting age-limits from legislation. I also wanted to have participants with a history of persistent offending, and thought that adolescents under 18 years would not fulfil this requirement. My reckoning changed as I visited CRIS Helsinki (more on CRIS, see section 3.3, this study) in December 2012 to search for potential interviewees. After having a good discussion about my study there with a project manager, I realised that these limits were very restraining, because there are many juvenile offenders who have heavy criminal backgrounds but may have no court convictions. What I also realised was that a criminal career can actually start as early as the age of 12. This means that already a 16 year old can have a pretty severe criminal history. I decided to abandon my pre-set limits, and to interview people with self-reported persistent criminal behaviour anywhere at the age range from 15 to early twenties. These age limits rely purely on the fact that criminal responsibility starts at the age of 15 in Finland (the Criminal Code of Finland). Participants could be of any age at the time of the interview, but desistance had to be started before age 25.

Another idea that I also ended up abandoning was that the most recent self-reported offence would have to be committed at least 12 months before interviews. If I was doing a quantitative research aiming to predict future offending and desistance, I probably would have used the 12 month limit, because it is a good predictor of stability of desistance. For example Lancaster and his colleagues (2011) found in their study that those juvenile delinquents who reoffend, 80 percent did so within one year after an intervention, whereas the same percentage was 50 percent within 6 months. But, aiming to understand the *process* of desistance, I decided to abandon also this 12 month limit and work with what I realized to be fitter for the purpose of this study, which is a sample of juvenile offenders with desistance duration ranging from a few months to more than ten years. This way I

found myself able to cover narratives at a very early stage of desistance and also narratives of desistance after several years of living a conventional lifestyle.

I contacted interviewees via CRIS Helsinki and Criminal Sanctions Office Tampere. I visited CRIS Helsinki and Criminal Sanctions Office Tampere in December 2012 to enquire if the workers in those offices knew any suitable clients they could ask to participate in my study. Contacting workers was easy because of my past working experience in the Criminal Sanctions Office and volunteer work experience at CRIS. I distributed hand-outs with information about the study to the offices to give to potential participants. Potential participants then informed their worker of their willingness to participate, and I received their contact information from these workers. I did not apply for formal research permissions, because I had no information about any of the interviewees before they had accepted to participate. Contacting potential interviewees via workers of CRIS and Criminal Sanctions Agency turned out to be vitally important, because without the juvenile offenders being persuaded by their mentor or supervisor, I probably would have gotten no interviews. This is because many people with offending histories seem to find it difficult to trust anyone they do not know, and thus are not likely to be willing to share personal information and tell about their criminal history, especially when a tape recorder is involved.

The interviews were conducted in January and February 2013 at CRIS Helsinki Activity Centre, at social work offices and at one participant's home in Southern Finland. Interviews lasted 30-70 minutes. I used open-ended interviews to give as much space as possible to the stories and themes that the participants wanted to bring to the interview. During the interviews I first asked the interviewees to roughly describe their offending history and then describe what had happened on the path from offending to desistance. I had an interview guide that I had put together with help of a researcher that is specialized on prisoner re-entry.⁵ I used the interview guide for clarifying questions only when needed and to ask interviewees' perceptions of certain areas of life that have been found to affect desistance in previous studies. Areas that I wanted to cover were offending history, contacts with officials, personal history (for example school, work, friends, family, activities, area of residence), substance abuse, perception of self, transformations in cognitions and future hopes and goals.

⁵ Dr. Ikponwosa O. Ekunwe is a Post-Doc Research Fellow at the University of Tampere. He is an expert on Finnish Criminal justice system from policing through incarceration.

Although using an interview guide, I wanted to avoid steering interviews too much by previous knowledge on the matter. I was pretty successful in providing the participants with the power to structure their stories (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005, 194–5) by keeping all interviews as open as possible and using questions like “how would you describe...” or “what do you think influenced...” instead of pre-set questions such as “how did your family support your desistance”. I was trying to keep my role as something like an assistant to the participants in telling and structuring their stories (Kvale 2007, 74).

At some points I had to use questions that required a short, easy response, especially in the beginning of the interviews, when “warming up” the conversation. Also, as some interviewees told me, the interview situation made some a bit nervous, which affected how far and deep participants were able to narrate their stories without researcher’s involvement. Some participants had never before really reflected and narrated their lives, which meant that the role of the interviewer was bigger in constructing their stories. For the most part, I have to admit, I was surprised and moved how openly and sincerely interviewees shared their personal experience with me. Discussing very sensitive topics with someone you meet for the first time makes anyone nervous and cautious, but interviewees genuinely shared their knowledge and experience with me, which I am very grateful of. The workers that had told the subjects about the confidentiality of the study played also an important role in pre-building trust with between me and the interviewees. It is also thanks to my own history as a social therapist at addiction’s clinic and as a parole supervisor that I was successful in conducting sensitive and informative interviews with juveniles with quite rough backgrounds.

4.3 Analysing narratives: moving from data to theory and from theory to data

I transcribed all interviews to a form where all names and places were deleted. I also decided on fading precise ages of interviewees to prevent identification. I refer to the interviewees only by “H” and a number (“H” comes from the Finnish word for interviewee, “haastateltava”) and to my-self as “P” (the initial of my first name). Transcriptions of interviews were 16-18 pages each, so all together I had about 130 pages material for the analysis. As interviews were conducted in Finnish, I translated the transcriptions into English. The spirit of the “street slang” used by participants is maintained as much as possible also in the translation of the interviews.

The method used for analysing the material is narrative analysis. Another option would have been to use thematic content analysis, but I decided on narrative analysis, because the interest is on how themes appear in the stories, what meanings they have, and how they change and build trajectories. (Squire 2008, 50.) To analyse experience-centred narratives, Squire advises to describe the narratives thematically, look for theories that would generally explain causalities in stories, and then test these theories in the stories. She calls this ‘going round in hermeneutic circles’, because the researcher moves not only between interviews, but also from data to theory and from theory to data. (2008, 50.) This was a very suitable method of analysis for this study. I color-coded the transcriptions according to themes and looked for commonalities and differences between narratives. From these similarities and differences I developed assumptions of causal relations and meanings of appearing themes, and then tested how these assumptions appear and explain causalities in different narratives.

Finding causalities proved out to be problematic, however, because many changes were described to take place at the same time and similar themes could have different meanings for interviewees. In the narratives of the juvenile offenders, subjective and social variables that affect desistance overlap, influence each other and change at the same time. In desistance and recidivism studies, variables are often divided according to these internal (subjective) and external (social) factors (LeBel et al. 2008, 13). Results of this study will be presented in another way. If analyzed according to the dichotomy of internal and external changes, an unwanted split would be created. As explained in chapter 2, human agency and social factors are interconnected. For researchers this creates the “chicken and egg” problem (as aptly described by LeBel et al. 2008), because it is very difficult to measure the temporal sequence of changes in internal and external factors. As interviewees describe,

H3: Well the alternatives were always there, I've always carried them with me but they've become clearer, they've been like unclear pictures but then when I had enough [of the criminal lifestyle], and having enough made the picture clearer. Then I had the answer in front of me, like when I knew, like metaphorically it's like I'm in a room, and I have like two doors, and when I get the feeling that I've had enough, the other door becomes visible and I realize that through that other door I can get away and the other door just continues in the same direction as before, so now I've opened the other door and turned a page in my life, so they are connected, like having enough caused me to wake up.

H5: I didn't really even think about how it changes, I just thought like, actually I didn't think about it at all. It just changes during the years, like you just notice that things are changing and then you notice that okay this was it, like let's try to live the normal life, but it's all these things happening at the same time.

Because of this complex interconnection of internal and external changes, my analysis is presented according to themes that rise from the interviews and that have influenced the desistance process both internally and externally. In the results, I explain causal relationships of themes more closely. The themes to be presented in the results chapter are as follows:

- The realization of the negative consequences of criminal lifestyle that starts the process of desistance
- Changes in own thinking that enhance desistance from crime
- Peer support encouraging a new lifestyle
- Effect of officials in desistance process
- Factors that challenge desistance

4.4 Ethical considerations

Critique of my choice of method could argue that experience can never be completely put into words (Andrews et al. 2008, 9), but as I have explained earlier, narrative approach can bring me at least somewhere close to understanding human experience. As a researcher, I have to trust the subjects to be truthful of their experience and to tell me what they find important. It is also possible that when people narrate their lives, they may follow certain cultural patterns that erase the individual nuances of experience (Hänninen 2000, 63). Besides individual experience, also culture influences the way we give meanings to different phenomena (ibid. 73). It therefore has to be recognized, that the cultures of the interviewer and interviewees affect the whole research process. This culture-connectedness, along with a small sample size and studying individual perceptions, decreases generalizability of the results of the study (Elliott 2005, 27). As Pinnegar and Daynes put it, "...what we know is embedded in a particular context" (2007, 7). This is why knowledge gained by narrative approach may be imperfect in terms of positivistic approach. However, in this study it does not decrease the study's validity, because it is the local, subjective and practical wisdom (Squire 2008, 45; Heikkinen 2001, 120–129) that I am aiming to comprehend. In addition, it could

be argued that because culture affects individual, also individual stories tell something about the culture where they are told (Elliott 2005, 28).

Viewed from positivist approach, the strong subjective role of the researcher might decrease reliability of this study. For example, how trustworthy the interviewees perceived me to be, definitely influenced how much personal information they were willing to share. The interview situations were also varying and interactive: like participants, also I brought “my history and worldview” to the research setting (Pinnegar & Daynes 2007, 14). As my own understanding of desistance through interviews and more reading increased, it shaped how I conducted interviews and analysed them. Even though using an interview guide, none of the interviews consisted of exactly same questions, because participants’ responses affected how the interviews proceeded (D’Cruz and Jones 2004, 112). To reduce the effect of my personal and theoretical perceptions in the interviews, I tried to be cautious not to lead interviewees into certain directions by my question setting or expressing strong approval or disapproval during interviews. However, interview research can never be fully controlled and repeatable and the subjectivity of the researcher can never be completely erased. But, as D’Cruz and Jones argue, subjectivity is always present in doing research. Even the most structured research is not free from researchers’ and participants’ subjectivity. (D’Cruz & Jones 2004, 110.) To increase the study’s reliability, I have tried to explicate the dynamic process (Pinnegar & Daynes 2007, 14) of my research in this report.

I have had a huge responsibility of holding the power of interpreting and sorting under themes what the interviewees have told. I have tried to be a “ghost writer” of the subjects’ stories (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005, 192– 3) to retain their voice and express their experience (Hänninen 200, 34). However, because I have to protect interviewees from being identified, I have had to erase some nuances of their individual experiences. Also due to the small amount of potential respondents, I have had to modify many parts of their stories, and fade names of places and participants’ ages. (Squire 2008, 51.)

I was pondering a long time if I should ask for guardian’s permission for interviewees under 18 to participate in the study, but came to the conclusion not to. I made this decision because the youngest participants were 16 years old, and one commonly used age limit when researcher does not necessarily need guardian’s permission is 15 (Nieminen 2010, 36). I also took into consideration the matureness of under-aged participants (Nieminen 2010, 37) and assessed them to be mature enough to decide on whether to take part in this study or not. As I assumed, many interviewees reported somewhat distant emotional closeness to parents, and told negative things

about their childhood. I believe my decision not to involve parents in this study provided full trust with respondents.

At the beginning of the interview session I went over with the interviewees that all information they provided was confidential and that they could not be identified in the final report. I also emphasized that I would not use any official registries and all information on their criminal history was based on self-reported offending. Because talking of past unlawful acts, I also clarified that no information would be passed on to the police, and that their offending history would be presented in a way that prevents identification.

One of my main concerns was not to cause too much distress to interviewees when asking about very personal experiences. I tried to be very careful, respectful and discreet when doing this. I highlighted in the beginning of the interview that it was completely fine to say if there was a question they did not want to answer. I also asked the participants in the end of the interviews how they felt and if there was anything they would like to discuss more after the interview. In general I got the impression that interviews were a bit tiring for participants, but that talking had felt good. With some I was very happy to hear that they were seeing a therapist on a regular basis, so I know they are receiving professional support with dealing with quite burdensome pasts. I also told all interviewees that they could contact me via email or phone if the interview caused oppressive thoughts, and I would talk about it with them or advise where to seek for help. I also told them that they could contact me if they had any questions or if there was something they wanted to add to their interview.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Life histories of the interviewees

All interviewees in this study were males⁶ aged 16-30. Four interviewees were in their teens and four were in their twenties. To map out the childhood and past life of participants, I interviewed them about their school and work history, family and upbringing, and also criminal history and use of substances.

Most interviewees described having had problems in concentrating in school, behaving disorderly in class, and being absent from school. Seven out of eight had nonetheless completed compulsory education, and the eighth interviewee was completing the last grade of compulsory education. Two had attended vocational school for some time after compulsory school, but had dropped out. Three were currently in vocational school and one had graduated from vocational school. One had started studying in upper secondary school after compulsory education, but had dropped out and was currently working at CRIS. One interviewee had completed the Finnish upper secondary school (lukio) and passed his baccalaureate (ylioppilastutkinto) and had also a vocational examination. All except the youngest interviewee had some work experience. At the time of the interview, all were attending school, working at CRIS or were unemployed but had small children at home to take care of.

Five interviewees were from divorce families. Seven reported that at least one of their parents was working. One interviewee's parents were in prison most of his childhood, so he grew up in a children's home. Four reported being physically disciplined by parents, one reported mental abuse and two reported having had really no discipline from parents at all as a child. Two reported that they were able to talk with their parents and receive support from them, and two reported that they did not want to receive any support from parents as adolescents, even though this support would have been available. Six interviewees reported having either emotionally distant relationship with parents or not being able to share their concerns and thoughts with parents when growing up.

All the men interviewed had history of persistent offending. I rely on self-reported information on their offending behavior, not official statistics or police reports. This is because a major amount of

⁶ No females were interviewed for this study, because I was not able to find any possible participants. Women are estimated to commit only about 20 % of juveniles' crimes (Elonheimo 2010). For more information on young women and crime in the Finnish context, see "Sopeutuvat tytöt? Sukupuoli, kontrolli ja rikokset" (1998) by Päivi Honkatukia.

the juveniles' acts that violate the law do not show in any official registers, and thus registers do not give a realistic picture of the patterns of offending behavior (Kivivuori 2006, 18). As illustrated in previous research, a significant amount of assaults and drug-related crimes do not show up in any police or court data (Babinski et al. 2001, 53). This is true especially among the interviewees of this study, as most were caught of only a minor fraction of their offences, and a few described having not been caught at all. However, it should be noted that self-report data on delinquent behavior does not provide a 100 percent accurate picture either, because self-report data relies on the memory of the narrator and also on what he perceives as unlawful behavior. For example, many of the interviewees in this study did not categorize smoking marijuana as a criminal act, but told about this behavior when talking about substance use.

Majority of interviewees had started offending at the age of 12 or 13, but one reported to have started offending already at the age of 10. The latest onset was at the age of 18, but yet the same person reported shoplifting in earlier age, though he did not perceive this as a crime. The shortest criminal career was 3 years and the longest 8 years. All together interviewees had about 40 years of offending and they had committed several types of crimes. All reported having committed "street crimes", such as violence crimes, larceny, and drug offences. A few reported also fraud, robberies, gun crimes, arson, painting graffiti and attempts of capital crime. One interviewee said that he had done "every possible crime a man can do", which suggests that he had also committed capital crime. Some interviewees indicated having had connections to organized crime, but this was a topic that was not discussed further because interviewees were clearly hesitant to talk about these connections. The frequency of offences was not discussed per se, but the interviews demonstrate it varies depending on social relationships, location of the offender and heaviness of substance abuse. Total abstinence from committing crimes varied from two months to more than ten years prior to the interview, the median being about one year. Interviewees often reported the desistance process to have started by wanting to change and attempting to decrease deliberate delinquent behavior at least a few months before the actual cessation of criminal behavior.

All interviewees in this study reported history of substance abuse. Three reported having a "lighter" history of marijuana and alcohol usage. Other five reported heavy use of harder drugs, such as amphetamine, heroin and opiates. Many described substance abuse and delinquent behavior to affect each other, but the impacts varied. Interviewees described that many of their crimes would not have taken place if not intoxicated, because intoxication was described to lower the threshold to commit crime because of increased impulsivity, aggressiveness and a decrease in the ability to

ponder about the consequences of their decisions. Most common was that interviewees linked inebriation with increased violent behavior.

H1: Like when I'm drunk I like to fight, but not when I'm sober.

H6: In shoplifting and thefts when younger it didn't really play a role but for example every of my batteries have happened when intoxicated.

Many had committed offences like selling drugs and crime against property to fund their own usage. As one interviewee described, drugs were the thing that pulled him to committing crimes.

H2: For me it's specifically drugs that create the need to crime and making money.

For some, crimes were not made intoxicated per se, but using drugs and doing crime were part of the same period of life, functioning as some sort of relief or escape from a non-pleasant reality.

H3: Drugs and crimes were never really directly connected, but still like fostered one another... Yeah, same stage of life.

As described in chapter 2.1, childhood antisocial behaviour, parent inconsistent discipline, having delinquent friends, alcohol and drug use, living in a high risk neighbourhood, having problems at school and not being attached to normative institutions of the society increase the risk for criminal behaviour in adolescence (e.g., Harrikari 2010; Wikström & Loeber, 2000; Stouthamer-Loeber et al. 2002). Interviewees of this study share many of these risk factors, only difference being that at the time of the interviews, all were attached to some education, peer support network or family life, and substance use had stopped completely or at least decreased substantially.

5.2 Turning towards desistance: repellent effect of criminal lifestyle

In this section I explicate how the realization of the negative aspects of criminal lifestyle is described to have started the process of desistance in the narratives of the interviewees. I call this the *repellent effect of criminal lifestyle*. Repellent means “causing intense displeasure, disgust, or resentment”⁷. For example constantly having to be afraid of violence, not being able to trust anyone and “hitting the bottom” –experiences with drugs repel juveniles from the criminal life. Repellent effect was described as the motivation to desist from crime in all interviews.

⁷ www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/repellent, accessed Feb 21st 2013.

For most, petty crimes and drugs came along at quite a young age, by one's own initiative or introduced by friends. Many interviewees described that they associated substance use with positive feelings in the beginning. Using drugs was like falling in love or getting relief to emotional distress. Many of interviewees reported also having dealt drugs, which had engendered in them feelings of prestige, importance and popularity among peers. In the words of one interviewee,

H2: You're the one people wait for and who gets called all the time, and when you enter the room, you bring the party. You're popular, you've got people talking to you, girls look at you like you're the lion of this place and they want you, and even older guys ask you to hang out with them 'cuz they think this guy's got potential...

The severity of deviant behavior was described to increase step by step. Violence came along for many reasons. As some described, violence was used as means to relieve inner distress. Dealing drugs also created pressure to act violently in order to secure the dealer's reputation as someone who should not be fooled around with. Violent crimes were also described to have been caused by impulsive rage at a particular situation, especially if intoxicated, and some interviewees also reported brawls between gangs or groups of friends. In the narratives, aggressiveness, violence and avoiding to show any sign of weakness seem to be quite common in the outlaw world. Questioning violent behavior started when interviewees started to perceive that there was too much pointless violence.

H5: Like what I still hear among my old friends is that it's the hottest hit to stab someone, a few of my friends were just sent to jail. One friend went to jail because he just wanted his name to be a little bigger, so he stabbed one guy in the lungs in a bar... and it wasn't long after that, like 2-3 months when another friend stabbed someone over something pointless... and another friend stabbed because he didn't get a cigarette at the mall. And just a while ago there was a little bigger brawl at the mall between my group of friends and [name of another group]...and I tried to separate them because everyone knew the next time when fighting with them they would have guns... and that all also started from a cigarette.

H1: Like for example, I can't take dealing hash anymore, like once when I went to [name of a suburb] to get some pot, and then X, I went to his house, it was his house, and there were other people... a fight started there at the house, and X stabbed someone pretty bad. I saw it and it didn't feel very good and I was like I can't take this

anymore... I wanna be like normal people and not like criminals. It doesn't get you anywhere.

The glory and excitement of the criminal lifestyle started to wear out also because of the negative consequences it brought to the interviewees them-selves. Being constantly threatened and having to be afraid of violence made some realize that it is not the world they want to live in. Some described also having felt of not being able to trust people anymore. Interviewees also started to realize that the lifestyle would very likely lead to either a very unhappy life or death, which was a turning point for many.

H7: I just couldn't manage the lifestyle anymore, you have to look over your shoulder all the time and be afraid of someone hurting you.

H5: When I was 16 my friend had a bit too much dope and went to try his luck there on the streets, so he met a little tougher guy, he was taken to hospital... and the next time I saw him was in the church. So he didn't really have very good luck at that. There were like many things why it wasn't so much fun anymore, when you start getting threatened and you owe money and even if you pay your debts you suddenly hear you owe something you really don't...

H2: The people I hung out with were so dangerous that any day anything could happen 'cuz we were stealing cars and messing around... And there were guns and stuff, not like anyone would have wanted to shoot me but then again why not, not like anyone really wanted to shoot me but someone could have accidentally, the people were so crazy, and in a way the police could have shot me, and all the car crashes when driving around fucked up... I actually started to get scared of that, I mean what the underworld at its worst and when talking about junkies' underworld, it was a goddamn hell.

H3: I just kinda realized, I think I was sobering up from benzos, I just realized that this just doesn't work out anymore like this, that I have exactly two options, it's either this or then some not so very rational choices, so it was just my own volition and want to live, 'cuz I have seen so many drug users and criminals around me, so I knew where it would lead to, so I was like I don't want it and I don't need it so fuck it, I'm done with this.

Like described in the last quotation, hitting the bottom⁸ -experiences with drugs were also described as a turning point toward desistance for many. The realization that substance abuse has more negative than positive outcomes has been noted in several studies as an important motive for quitting usage (e.g., Koski-Jännes *et al.* 1998, 50; McDowell & Spitz 1999, 121, 123). As substance abuse is connected to higher rates of offending and recidivism in both previous research (e.g., Harrikari 2010) and in the narratives of the young men in this study, my interviewees experiences support the idea that cessation of substance use can naturally enhance desistance. Next quotations illustrate how interviewees wore out to using drugs.

H6: I was just so addicted to opiates that I felt emotionally really bad, like you didn't enjoy junk anymore but you were, like it felt like you would die if you didn't get it today, I guess that's what started a self-pity that I just had to break away from that shit.

H2: Well it was, I think I had just turned 18. I kinda realized that I don't wanna be awake anymore. That I don't care if I die, that I just can't stand being awake, I just want to sleep and I was kinda thinking which time I would pass away when I press the plunger down, which time I would pass away...// Before leaving [for rehabilitation] I started to feel like that the year had already been like my life wasn't fun anymore, and the people I hung out with didn't have fun anymore, and I started to have problems with people and stuff, and I started to get pretty lonely. I had had no contact to normal adolescents, not for a while. And I didn't have anyone to count on and no real friends. I was just kinda, I started to be really sad and even junk didn't help me anymore, I just wanted to sleep, because life felt so bad.

H8: That's when I got a psychosis and I didn't really want to smoke [cannabis] anymore. I smoked about two years but I've tried during that, like I've quit every now and then and then continued, when I got psychosis I didn't really want to smoke but now last spring I had the worst [psychosis] and it was because of hash and speed I got it...// Many [of my friends] have quit [doing crime and drugs]. They had got the bad feeling and they were tired of the everyday life so they decided to quit.

⁸ The expression, "hitting the bottom", is used by the worldwide known fellowship AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) to describe the negative experience with substance abuse that enhances one's personal volition to quit using alcohol or drugs.

Negative aspects of criminal life and “hitting the bottom” -experiences with drugs were described to lead to cessation of substance abuse and change the thinking towards wanting something else from life. In the narratives this did not, however, cause an immediate change and cessation of all deviant behavior. The pathway out of crime is a longer process. Internal changes in offenders’ own thinking and a strong volition to change also require external support from peers and officials.

5.3 Cognitive changes

In this section I introduce what kind of changes in thinking that support desistance can be found in the narratives of the juveniles. Changes in thinking that support desistance are a strong volition to change, starting to care for one-self, and having a vision or hopes of the future. Even though these are internal changes, as opposed to external changes in for example living conditions, it is important to acknowledge that external factors can function as triggers to the internal change. As can be noticed in the narratives of the juveniles, many external factors have influenced their thinking, but also their thinking has influenced how external factors are perceived.

Five interviewees perceived one’s own willingness to stop offending as an important factor in determining who desists and who persist. This volition to change was described to arise from knowing that there is an alternative way to live one’s life that could be better than the criminal lifestyle.

P: How would you define what is the difference between someone who breaks from the world of substance abuse and crime and who doesn’t, like what is it in you that has helped you, for example, compared to some of your acquaintances?

H2: I’ve been thinking about this for several years

P: Haven’t figured out yet?

H2: Well, I don’t have a ready answer for you, I don’t know. Someone else might know, but what I do know is that there has to be a very strong volition that I’ve had enough and somebody has to react to it quickly.// It has to be reacted to on the very same day, because the person is still addicted and has to be taken away from it all. And what has influenced my case is that I come from a fairly good family, and like I know that there has to be something else than misery in life. Later on I’ve thought if

the good childhood kinda had an effect, like my granma's support and love, if it affected that I have a sense that life can't be like this hell. There has to be something else. Something like that.

For the interviewee behind the next capture, getting tired of substance use and offending created the volition to have something else in life, and he describes how alternative activities had to be available for change to take place in his case.

P: Do you think you would still continue on the previous path if you didn't have these alternative activities?

H3: Yea I probably would. If I had no knowledge of something better, how could I even consider doing something else if I didn't know about them? Like of course I would stay on the same track if I had no alternatives.

For some, the volition to change came from thinking about their parents and siblings. Many narrated that having better relationship with family has supported their desistance. This better relationship was also dependent on the parents' change, not only the subjects' change.

H3: We never really like sat down, like now we sit down as a family and talk about problems, only at an older age I've learned to talk with my mom about what's wrong but not before.// We definitely have a better relationship now with my mom.

Further, as the next interviewee describes, change has happened internally in his own thinking as he no longer wants to commit crimes, but it is also supported by external factors, in this case a change in his parents. He describes being very happy of starting to receive support from his parents, and concluded that it is very possible that his criminal career had never started had this support been there earlier.

H7: Maybe if I had more support from my family I would have never gone down this path. It was my childhood that pushed me a little to committing crimes. Now things are quite good that my family supports me and respects my decisions and helps me in this life.

The importance of one's own volition to change is portrayed well in the next quotation from one interview. For this interviewee, being sentenced to prison was what stopped his offending. At the time of the release, he explained that even though he wanted to desist, if he had returned to his old home town and to his old friends, offending and substance abuse would have very likely continued.

For him, external changes were extremely important in stopping his drug use and criminal behavior. But, he recognizes the important part his own thinking plays in the process of desisting. For this interviewee, rehabilitation program in prison and after release, going to NA, and having a family were the most important supporters of desistance, but he describes how those alone are not sufficient to secure abstinence of crime.

H6: Umh a disjunctive factor [between desisters and persisters] ... Dunno. I have so many friends that have been to prison and NA and some, like one old friend of mine was sober for eight years and had a family and a business and now he's in and out of prison and using drugs. That, I guess it's something in your mind, like a very strong volition or... I don't know, I guess it's your own volition.// Don't know what else it could be.

What many interviewees described as important factor in desistance is starting to care more of them-selves.

H3: I fell in love with my-self a bit, I started to care about my-self... // I used to live to other people but when I had the turning point I started to live for my-self.

H4: I've learned to love my-self, live through me, not through others. I've started to realize that. Last summer I've woken up like where ever, like in a hospital after being beaten up, being hit in the head with a bottle and all, and when I think about my life what it used to be... And I really sought for trouble like if someone beats me up and it hurts, it takes the emotional pain away, I can transfer the emotional pain to physical pain. I've broken three ribs, my toes, my arms, bottle in the forehead, and been kicked many times and other unnecessary shit, like why don't I just seek for professional help? I realized that now, I've asked for help and now I get it and take the help offered.

Interviewees also described personal factors such as resilience, strength of character, and belief in self-efficacy, experiences of success in desisting from crime or having people close to you feeling proud of you to enhance the changing process. Taking new roles, such as being a father or a grown man with a sense of responsibility, were described to keep one from offending for three interviewees older than 20 years.

P: How would you define who succeeds in making the life change and who stays on the criminal path?

H1: Someone who wants to try. I would say, like one night I was on the phone with my ex, I was talking with her and told her to start calming down and stuff, you're going to no good, and then she thought like 'I can't, I can't'. When you think that you can't, then you definitely can't.

Many described that the criminal lifestyle forces one to build a very tough appearance. For example if one is selling drugs, one has to create a reputation as someone who should not be messed around with, because that reputation is all one has as protection in an outlaw business. For four of the interviewees, acknowledging and accepting one's weaknesses and learning to show them and talk about them has been a step towards a more conventional lifestyle, as one no longer has to be the "king" of the hoods or show a tough face to everyone. Also giving up the want to revenge was a step away from criminal lifestyle for three interviewees.

H7: I used to be pretty broken, that I didn't really show any emotions or anything, but now I've started to show my feelings quite a lot to my family, but I still don't show my emotions to other people, I keep my role there, only the closest people know what I'm like when I show emotions, other people don't have to know that.

H2: And in a way [going to NA] changed me to be more honest and unselfish that I wouldn't be so self-centered and brought some humbleness to my ego, like since I was young I've gotten used to take care of my-self, so you kind of have to develop an ego, like a very aggressive thing that I always have to be emotionally above or like hold the power if we're interacting, like you don't control me, I control you. And I've given up revenge which has always been important to me that I have to take vengeance...

Learning to recognize ones feelings is also means of controlling ones behavior, which means for example better anger management.

H3: Yeah, I used to be violent.

P: Has that changed during the last year?

H3: Yeah, I still get those feelings, like feeling of anger but I can control them, I don't need to be physically abusive anymore...

Hopes and dreams of a future without crime rose as an important enhancer of desistance for six interviewees. Goals are something that were described as making one want to achieve and accomplish things, such as going to school or to sports practice, instead of for example hanging out

with friends. Also, the more one has built and achieved, the harder it becomes to risk all that by committing crimes (see chapter 5.5 for more on deterrence effect of sanctions). Many described that they wanted to lead a “normal” life and raise a family and have a job instead of being a “criminal”. However, while a vision of one’s future is an internal factor, interviewees also expressed the need of external support in form of feasible possibilities of fulfilling one’s goals in a way that one perceives as worthwhile. For interviewees, these feasible possibilities were for example having an education or doing certain sports that are perceived as meaningful. In their view, if not really knowing what one wants or not having these meaningful alternatives available, desistance was more unstable.

5.4 Importance of peer support: CRIS and NA

All of the young men interviewed had received peer support in some form, and all described it to be a supporting factor of the process of desistance. For six out of eight interviewees, peer support was perceived as a very important supporter of desisting from crime. All the men interviewed reported receiving support from ex-offenders: seven had received support from CRIS and one had been in correspondence with an imprisoned ex-offender. Two interviewees highlighted NA⁹ as a key supporter in recovery from addiction and this way also as an important supporter of desistance from crime. The factors of peer support that rise from interviews as enhancing desistance can be categorized under three themes:

- Mental support: a feeling of being truly understood and accepted
- Access to a new, feasible lifestyle through peer support network
- Peers as real life examples of recovery and change

As six interviews were collected via CRIS Helsinki, there could very well be an over emphasis on peer support due to an error of selection. However, I have to highlight that during interviews I never asked the interviewees directly about peer support. Its significance was something all brought to the interview by their initiative. Interviewees reported a feeling of being understood and accepted at CRIS and NA, because people there have similar experiences. Realizing that there are other people alike has helped the interviewees to commit to peer support groups and receive help from them. As

⁹ NA is for Narcotics Anonymous. It is a world-wide self-help, community-based society for people suffering from drug addiction. Concept is similar to Alcoholics Anonymous. In Finland, there are NA meetings held almost daily in bigger cities, and anyone suffering from addiction is welcome to meetings. See more information on NA in www.nasuomi.org.

interviewees describe, they feel that people with similar experiences understand what they are going through and know what they are talking about.

H2: I never felt like I belonged in the crowd. Then I found self-help groups, NA when I had turned 19 and then things started happening. When I understood that there are others and that way was the first time I felt relieved from my feeling, that my bad feeling really went away for a while. And there I got like examples of it and the kind of advice that I didn't need to question how to live this life, though I was the youngest one there...// And the mentor, he's the kind of person I can be completely honest with and I know he won't judge me. If somebody judges me once when I'm being honest, I will reject them immediately.

H3: I know dozens of examples of how peers have helped you and how people who understand you have helped you. That's why there could be no better place than this.

H8: Well social workers don't, to be honest, if you feel really bad from using dope, social workers don't know shit about it, well they know small things like in institutional care they give you a pill to make you calmer but after starting to go to CRIS and in [peer support] group, then when I had the psychosis, I understood that this is the right place for me, you know, all ex-junkies had it much worse that when they started talking I understood that fortunately I'm not the only one in this world...

As Jari Ihalainen, the Executive Manager of CRIS Tampere, argues, many people with offending background seem to be very reluctant towards any outside attempts to change, for example by officials. When guidance towards a new lifestyle comes from a peer with similar experiences, it is much easier to agree with them and accept this help, because they know what they are talking about because they are “professionals” by own experience. (Ihalainen 2011, 233.) This is why peer network has got the ability to work as informal social control, as is portrayed in next two quotations from interviews.

H3: CRIS has also been the one for me who shows where I'm going if things aren't like they are now, and I get support, help, same kind of people who understand, like this is my own little palace and world where I feel good.

...

H8: Like in the end I had to get a hold of things that new life starts now.

P: Was it you who took the hold or was it someone else?

H8: My mom, my brother, and me, and CRIS.

An important notion from Ihalainen also is that people with offending histories may want to separate themselves from the rest of the society (Ihalainen 2011, 229). This also stands out from some of the interviews of this study, as some of the interviewees described for example rejecting attitudes towards officials. I have also been told by workers at CRIS, and noticed myself during internships, that many people with difficulties in childhood and with offending background may find it hard to trust others and can be very suspicious toward officials, and by this way separate them-selves from the society.

One important aspect of peer support is that it is easily accessed. The next capture from one interview portrays the easy and fast access to the sphere of peer support and also the feeling of being accepted. The interviewee describes how he started going to CRIS after breaking up with his girlfriend. Earlier in life, a girlfriend had been the main factor to keep him away from crime and drugs, but this time he turned to CRIS for help. He felt there was no other option left for him, and that he didn't know where else to turn to, because he had been rejected from other places where he had sought for help. At the time of the interview, he had been going to CRIS for about three months, and during that time his drug usage had almost stopped completely by his own will.

H4: Yea it [relationship with a girl] fell apart. Then I started coming here immediately because I got the feeling...that I only have one option left, I've tried all other options. I've always walked by this place [CRIS activity center]. Last summer I tried to get help from the church but didn't get any, fuck you church, I had no hope in life and nothing before I walked through that [CRIS Activity center] door. I had all my papers with me and I thought am I good enough to this place either, I was so down, the only thing left would've been to hang my-self...// If I had to wait even two minutes without a reaction I would've walked away. This one worker said, 'Sit down boy, and have some coffee'. Since then I've been coming here.

P: So have you thought about it in your mind that what is it in CRIS

H4: Peer support

P: Peer support?

H4: You know, everyone has started from the same line, all want the same, nobody judges you and stuff. One gaze is enough (to judge), that some people look at me... And here, when they ask you a question and I give a straight answer, they say it once and not dwell on it. And this whole solidarity here that the support and it's safe to come here, like we're all fuckin' ex-cons. Or more or less, sometimes screwed things up but we all deserve a second chance, maybe a third, too. Like I never had those chances, or that's how I think. And it's really hard for me to ask for help. Nobody requires anything from you here. Or they require abstinence from drugs but of course I can't just quit using at once. But this has been a damn important place for me, I come here like 95 % of the days.

Seven of eight interviewees described CRIS or NA to be of importance in supporting the new lifestyle without crime and drugs. From CRIS and NA interviewees received friends that share similar experiences, a social network to belong to.

H6: Like you got friends and acquaintances from there...// Like it's probably a lot thanks to NA and the people there, when I hung out with them that I never got the label (of an addict)...like there I kinda thought of it like, well not actually but like that my strength is, that I was proud to say that I've been clean for three years and stuff.// And also CRIS has been there to support my abstinence from drugs. I never really hung out at CRIS really but I played football in their team and got sober friends from there and something to do with empty time, and tried to commit to something a little.

Realizing that there are people with similar experiences leads to the second important aspect of peer support: vivid examples of recovery that support the desisters' believing in their own success in making the life change. In the next quotation one interviewee describes how NA enhanced his belief in recovery.

H6: Like in the beginning I noticed that there are people here who've experienced same kind of things as me and lighter and heavier and everyone had like their own path but still could be very similar and then when I listened to them, there were some who had been clean for a long time, many years and all, some had the courage to be honest of their relapses and then sobering up again, and it was like, it really amazed me how people were so open and honest... It kinda gave belief in my own thing, hearing people's experience, and some had been in a much worse situation than me

and they were there, totally clean, it gave me so much belief... and it amazed me and I got a really good feeling.

Real life examples were not only about success stories, but also examples of what it really is like to live many years in and out of prison and doing drugs, what it really means to be incarcerated or what it is like to be severely addicted to narcotics. These examples were described as enhancing the movement away from criminal lifestyle. Some described that earlier they had even admired the criminal lifestyle, but real life examples at CRIS had shown that crime really does not pay off.

H5: Yeah, it was about a year ago when I started coming here and took part at camps and stuff...// I've become smarter because of that, like listening to these ex-cons here that I've been thinking about those things more closely.

5.5 The role of officials: rehabilitation and fear of punishment

P: Well how... what kind of influence it [child protective services] has had if we think about committing crimes, have social services had some kind of impact

H3: (Laughter)

As the previous quotation from one interview aptly portrays, an intriguing matter that rises from the narratives of the juveniles is that social services or corrections system seem to have had no impact or only minor impact on their offending behavior. In this section I introduce how interviewees perceived support and control from social services and the corrections system. From the perspective of the social services, this section is of great interest as it gives some insight to what the role of social services is or could be in dealing with juvenile offenders. It also illustrates what the role of deterrence effect of sanctions is among persistent juvenile offenders.

Six of the interviewees had been clients of child protection services for many years, but they did not perceive it to have been of any use in decreasing offending. Savolainen, Hinkkanen and Pekkarinen (2007) had similar results in their register study of more than two thousand under 15-year-old offenders in Helsinki. In their study they concluded that being within the sphere of authorities' support does not seem to be sufficient enough to prevent the drift to a criminal career for some juveniles. They speculate this to mirror the harsh social backgrounds and accumulated risk factors in childhood. (Savolainen, Hinkkanen & Pekkarinen 2007, 20.) Interviewees of my study described,

for example, that a social worker had visited their home occasionally or that they had been offered different therapies, but that had not affected their behavior. Four had been in custodial care for a short term because of crimes or substance abuse. This was described to have a short-term affect, but it wore off when returning back home.

H1: Well I calmed down for a bit but when my friends are what they are then... it didn't really help at all.

H8: The first time it vexed me going to institutional care but not at all after the third time.

However, half of the interviewees perceived interaction with a social worker or supervisor as good or influential at the point when they themselves were willing to receive help, and when the worker was perceived as understanding and supportive. An interesting observation here is that none of the under 20-year old interviewees mentioned interaction with any worker as influential. For the person behind next quotation, parole supervisor had been part of the reason he stopped committing crimes.

P: So was supervision useful to you?

H7: In the end yeah when X became my supervisor, then it was pretty useful

P: In what way, like what was different

H7: It was like, she understood me a lot better than the others... She visited us quite often, and when my brother died, we arranged my supervision contacts to once a week so she made sure I wouldn't do anything I would regret later and that's why we met once a week... She was the best parole supervisor I had, the others were like, they didn't want to put the effort to visit 'cuz they didn't really understand me... // my supervisor had a pretty big influence on why I stopped (committing crimes).

Also one interviewee that had been in prison described that although initially imprisonment was the factor to put a stop to his substance abuse and offending, eventually it was rehabilitation program in prison that supported his desistance. For him, rehabilitation after release and living in supported housing for several months were also important factors in desistance.

H6: Well, in prison my thinking kind of started to change, but then the biggest change happened in rehab, in drug rehab...

Fear of punishment did not really seem to affect the offending behavior of the interviewees of this study. Almost all interviewees reported that committing crimes did not cease or even lessen because of thinking about being caught or being punished. Many described that fear of getting caught was distressing, but the only affect it had was that it made one plan the crimes better to avoid getting caught.

H3: No, no. I've never had any fear of being caught or anything else that would have slowed me down or made me think. No, never had.

H2: Well it [fear of sanctions] never really affected desisting although it was pretty distressing at least in the beginning...

The deterrence effect of being caught started to influence desistance only after juveniles started to perceive that they had something to lose. This something could be for example losing something important one has achieved, such as a school place, or then being caught would complicate achieving one's dreams. Also caring about what could happen to one's family if one was caught of a crime made some think about the consequences more.

H2: And I was afraid of getting caught. I would have been kicked out of school if I got caught, that the police could catch someone and link me with that I've had like a kilo of speed in my backpack, that's a hell of a sentence there, for selling. That would be goodbye school and hello jail. It's when you are sober you can think these kinds of things through...

H1: I have a 10 year old little brother and I don't want him to end up in institutional care 'cuz I know he wouldn't survive there. Like that has helped me the most that my mom and dad have said that my little brother could be taken to custody [if the subject was caught of offending] and he won't manage there. It has helped me a lot. I'd probably be in jail if I didn't have a little brother.

As many described, the raise in interest in one's own well-being that enhances abstinence from crime also creates the deterrence effect of sanctions. If a person does not care about what happens to him, then there is no deterrence effect of corrections system either.

H7: I no longer want the consequences, like if now I went to beat up someone, I would think of the consequences, like before I wouldn't have cared at all, that no-one has the guts to rat me out, but today I think before I do anything.

P: Are the consequences you're thinking about like what could happen with officials?

H7: Yea and if I do something, there's a great chance they take away our kid, that like motivates me in staying straight 'cuz I don't want that.

Deterrence effect could also be created when seeing real life examples, such as older members at CRIS, of what it really is like to live on and off prison. Some had also incarcerated family members. Listening to experiences of ex-prisoners had made some interviewees understand how much they would lose if imprisoned.

H5: My dad has told me all the time [after he got released from prison] that you probably don't want the same kind of life like me, to do long time in prison, that you really are away from civilian life and you're inside four walls all the time in remand, where he had to be. Like you couldn't for one and a half years have anything to do with others, you just had to wait for the verdict....// You are really alone in remand.

P: Have you been like afraid of going to jail or like

H5: It's like I don't want to, like friends are important to me 'cuz they've supported me in everything...

5.6 Factors challenging desistance: neighborhood and strain

According to the narratives of the juveniles, desistance was challenged in an environment with certain people who increase the risk of offending, such as old friends that are still doing drugs. Also facing hardships that cause inner distress or financial difficulties, or if one was not really attached or motivated to any “conventional” activity, were described as challenges to desisting from crime.

All interviewees described that certain environments and people are a risk factor to recidivism and relapse. Meeting certain people could increase the risk to get into a fight, for example if some old conflicts had not been solved or if new ones were likely to emerge. Some neighborhoods were also described as a district where “trouble could walk up to you”, which meant that one could easily get into a brawl or have to meet people that could increase the temptation to use drugs. Especially when recovering from addiction, one should not be surrounded by addict friends *if* they are not supporting the desister's life change. When one's own willpower is still under construction and especially if

one is suffering from strain and withdrawal symptoms, the possibility to use drugs is a temptation that is very hard to overcome. Also especially for those interviewees that had a reputation as trustworthy dealers, addict friends were described to be very unsupportive of their change, as they did not want to lose their good dealer.

Usually how the interviewees survived these challenges was by “resigning” from people that may increase the risk of offending and by starting to spend more time with people who support the life change. Some had moved to another city or at least to another part of their home town to get away from trouble and temptations.

For five interviewees, experiencing some sort of strain was described to increase the risk of offending or even to have sometimes led back to crimes. Emotional distress, major disappointments, being let down by close people, death of a family member, breaking up with a girlfriend, receiving unfair or rejecting treatment when seeking for help or being physically or mentally abused are examples of causes for strain. Also financial difficulties increased the risk of committing crimes to earn money. To overcome the strain without going back to old habits meant that one needed a strong personal volition not to offend, belief in coping the situation, and support from family, friends or official services.

A personal volition not to offend anymore was also a protective factor of desistance in case of strain or pressure related to the environment. This strong volition was attached to future goals, for example a career or family, that could be wrecked if caught of a crime. If a person was not really motivated or attached to alternative activities and if he did not really have plans for the future, desistance was more unstable.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this Thesis I have sought to understand how juveniles with a history of several offences perceive the factors that initiate and enhance the process of desistance from crime. Open interviews were conducted with eight juveniles with a history of persistent offending, who were at the time of the interview desisting from crime. Narrative analysis was used to discover how the juveniles perceive causalities between internal and external changes that enhance desistance. As theoretical framework, I have presented the life course model (Sampson & Laub 1993) to portray how informal social control and social bonds affect offending behavior in different life stages. If juvenile is lacking these, distressing life events (e.g., Agnew 2012) and social learning (Akers 2000) can play a crucial role in enhancing deviant behavior.

The results of this study indicate that for the juveniles with a history of persistent offending, the initiator to desist crime is the offender's own volition to change that arises from the realization of the negative aspects of the criminal lifestyle. A sustainable desistance process requires also support from the environment and attachment to an alternative lifestyle (see also Laub & Sampson 2003), as well as many cognitive changes, such as an increasing interest in own well-being, belief in self-efficacy, positive goals in the future and learning to cope with distressing emotions (see also Maruna 2001). The perception of the juvenile offenders is that these supportive internal and external changes are intertwined, but they have to be preceded by one's personal volition to change before they can enhance desistance. These factors will be discussed more in the following.

Desistance as interplay of human agency and support from the environment

Structures are determined by individual choices, and in turn structures constrain, modify, and limit individual choices. Choices are always embedded in social structures.

(Laub & Sampson 2003, 282.)

The initial agent of the desistance process of the persistent juvenile offenders of this study was the repellent effect of criminal lifestyle. *Not wanting* to lead the lifestyle anymore was an internal change that made the juvenile offenders open for receiving support towards a crime-free life and considering alternative options. This volition rose from the realization and experience of the

multiple negative aspects of criminal lifestyle and substance abuse, such as the constant presence of violence, mistrust and being threatened, and experiencing situations where one is in danger of getting hurt, and starting to feel bad from using drugs. Seeing real life examples of what it really is like to live a criminal life in adulthood enhanced this negative perception. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that juveniles mature out of crime, but at least for the persistent offenders of this study, it was more about the aversion of the criminal lifestyle that triggered the volition to change. This finding indicates the crucial role of human agency in determining desistance.

However, the want to change is not enough to actually carry out the life change (Maruna 2001, 24). Recidivism studies have noticed that although most prisoners about to be released report that they do not want to continue offending anymore, more than half return to prison within a few years (e.g. Burnett 1992). For the interviewees of this study, for change to take place, also external support and changes were required. Factors that supported making the actual life change from criminality to desisting from crime were both internal and external and they worked in interaction: cognitive changes that support desistance were triggered and supported by external factors, whereas how the external factors were perceived, depended on the past experiences and future goals of the offender.

Laub and Sampson (1993; 2003) argue that social bonds and increasing social capital function as turning points towards desistance. For the subjects of this study, these were not really turning points, but very important supportive factors of desistance *after* the internal change in one's own volition. In the study of Sampson and Laub, marriage and job were the key enhancers of desistance (1993), while among the juveniles of this study, any kind of alternative and meaningful lifestyle instead of the offending could function as social support and informal social control. For some this was sports, for some an education or future career, for some attachment to peer support groups, for some music, being with a girlfriend, or starting a family. What was important was the *recognition* that life really could be something else than what it had been and that alternative lifestyle was perceived as both meaningful and achievable. Otherwise the offending behavior was more likely to continue. The perception that there were alternative lifestyles that one could achieve was also an important enhancer of building future dreams and goals. These meaningful future goals are essential, as they affected decision-making processes and had the power to help one push through difficulties that could have otherwise led back to offending.

Why were officials unable to stop the criminal career of these persistent offenders?

One of the interests to study juvenile offenders' perceptions on what causes and supports desistance was to understand better how official services and corrections could work to enhance desistance from crime. A very obvious discovery of this study is how little child welfare services were perceived to have any effect on offending behavior. The reason why this is so, is not so clear, however. One could argue that the reason is that too many risk factors have accumulated in the childhood of the offender before officials' intervention. This is at least what Savolainen, Hinkkanen and Pekkarinen found in their study of under 15-year old offenders in Finland: the continuance of criminal career was predicted more by factors related to life before any contact to social services than by the intensity and measures of the intervention (2007). Also one of the findings of Laub and Sampson was that a difficult history of the offender seemed to decrease his ability to take advantage of possible positive turning points in life (2003, 249).

One could also argue that the problem is in the functioning of social services. For example, the interviewees of this study reported that being placed in institutional care supported desistance only temporarily, as returning back home and to old friends usually meant continuation of offending. In other words, institutional care or imprisonment cut the individual off from his "natural" environment only for a limited amount of time. Institutionalization can function as an initiator to recovery, but does not provide long lasting support needed to sustain the recovery process (White 2009, 150). Also what came up in the interviews was the need for *immediate* support when the incentive to change arises, not just scheduled meetings and social workers' visitations. What comes to the interaction between the officials and the offender, the juveniles described that only help that was perceived as understanding and not judging was influential. The narratives of the juvenile offenders suggest that their life is so far from the world of common social workers, that in the eyes of the juveniles they cannot be perceived as the actors who could actually understand and help them. It is also very possible that juvenile offenders have some sort of stigma or label that affects how they are treated in the service system. Previous studies have shown that as people with criminal history may easily receive a negative label because of their wrongdoings, they often face scorn attitudes when seeking for help in the professional field (Kuussaari 2006; Juhila 2004, 24–28; Perälä 2007). Some of the juveniles of this study described that if they felt like they were being judged, they would reject the help immediately. This rejecting of services is also noted by Valokivi (2004). She argues that when given a negative label, lawbreakers are pushed to a position where they have two options: either to defend themselves against this label by using a very strong "voice" in the system, or then just to reject the help available. While breaking the law can already be seen as

an act of rejecting the society, also receiving negative label and being judged further enhances wanting separation from that society. (Valokivi 2004, 132–133.) This could push the juveniles even further into the margins.

As the initiator of the process of desistance was the offenders' own volition to change, it could also be that social services are unable to stop the criminal career as long as these persistent juveniles do not want to change. Some of the interviewees did actually describe that they used to idolize the mafia and *wanted* to be like criminals. Thus it is also important to understand what are the processes that lead to wanting to be an offender as well as what causes one to stop offending.

Driven by anger

Although this study is about desistance, understanding some mechanisms of crime causation is essential in order to understand stability of desistance. Based on the interviews of this study, a strong cause for crime and also a risk factor for desistance was personal sense of strain. Strain was caused by either distressing life events or negative actions by other people. Lacking informal social control and social bonds further worsened the effects of strain, as there were not enough “remedies” available to support the juveniles with coping with the strain or correct the wrongful behavior. As one interviewee said, whether one continues to offend or not depends much on the person's history. If you have a really harsh background, you get angry about all the bad things the world has put you through, and you want to take it back at other people because it makes you feel good to have vengeance. This is directly what is stated in strain theory (Agnew 1985; 2012): anger and frustration cause crime when individual is lacking the skills to cope with it with lawful means. For the juveniles of this study, causes of strain which also were usually factors related with increased risk of deviant behavior, were quite high in magnitude, such as losing a parent, being sexually or physically abused, parent's suicide attempt, being severely let down by other people or being mentally abused for a long period of time. This kind of strain combined with lacking the skills to cope with the distress, lacking future goals and lacking the belief in being able to survive the situation, and having the perception that there is nobody to help you, was very likely to lead to offending or drug use. As what another interviewee said: it feels bloody good to hit someone when you are feeling bad, it's almost like taking drugs.

One interviewee aptly encapsulated feeling distressing emotions and lacking the ability to cope with the strain in one phrase: “fuck this shit”.

H2: I was like fuck this shit, let's just see what happens... nothing really works out anymore, everything is fucked up, my life will never be anything and I feel so bad all the time, even when using drugs.

This is the feeling that arises when the juvenile is full of anger, disappointed to other people, does not care about consequences, does not perceive to be in control of his life and cannot foresee things getting any better, nor that there is anything or anyone to help him survive the situation or the distressing emotions. As Maruna states of the subjects in Liverpool Desistance Study, *the active offenders seem to lack hope and self-efficacy more than they lack shame* (Maruna 2001, 155). This is probably why starting to care for self and believing in self-efficacy were important internal changes that enhance desistance for the interviewees of this study. Also having future goals that one wants to and perceives he can achieve, learning to trust other people and also learning to receive support from them, and learning to recognize and deal with distressing emotions were important internal changes to support desistance. These are all factors that reverse the “fuck this shit” – feeling. These internal changes were triggered and supported by external factors of having alternative lifestyles available, achievable and recognized by the offender, and receiving support from family, peer support networks, and rehabilitative official services. Best remedy for strain and a protector of desistance thus seems to be a combination of informal social control, social support and social bonds that relieve the strain and also help the offender learn new ways of behaving and achieving things, and gradually build up something that one does not want to lose.

Peer support

White argues that in recovery from addiction, a long lasting supporting actor of the recovery process in an individual's own surroundings is important (2009, 146). In this study, peer support networks were described as one possible and accessible form of an alternative lifestyle, as they provide supportive and understanding social relationships and a concrete alternative instead of the old lifestyle. These “treatments” do not cut the individual off from the community. Vice versa, they have the ability to provide a new lifestyle and a social network, a shift from the old criminal and addiction lifestyle to a “culture of recovery” in the natural surroundings of the individual (White

2009, 148, 150). For the interviewees, peer support networks were also important surroundings for building self-esteem and experiencing success, which are vital cognitive changes that support desistance. CRIS and NA provide a safe environment to commit to something, be accepted instead of being judged, belong somewhere, accomplish something, be proud of one-self, and have others be proud of you, for example for being sober for even one day. This important role of peer support groups is also noted by Maruna (2001, 119–127).

Why did the interviewees seem to value peer support over official services? This could reflect problems of the service system, but also the juveniles' own rejecting attitudes and false perceptions of the service system. As one interviewee described, it took him a long time to understand that the officials at the Criminal Sanctions Agency and workers at an addiction's treatment clinic were there to help him. One had to learn to trust other people before being able to receive help, but one also had to learn how to look for that help. As peer support networks were trusted because of their expertise based on experience, it was easier for juveniles to turn to them than to official services. Peers could guide the juveniles in the service system and for example help in filling out applications, while also one learns new attitudes, communication skills and commitment in interaction with older peers (Schwartz & Sendor 1999, 1564). These skills also make interaction with officials easier. However, there seem to be some problems also in the service system. One reason why peer support was perceived as superior was that it was easily accessed, whereas official services may not be so. For example, in a report of ex-offenders' experiences with official services (Pekkola & Sundman 2006), one reported problem was that because the system is highly fractioned and specialized and there is no singular worker responsible for the client's case, the client himself has to be able to take responsibility for being active in seeking and "using" the right services. The problem in this is that many do not have the knowledge of how the system functions, and this prevents potential clients from using the services. (Ibid. 77–78.) Another study of drug addicts' experiences of official services has parallel results, as subjects perceived official services to be insufficient in supply. Availability of services was also perceived as inadequate because of requirements of total abstinence from drugs, or because the history of previous treatments affected what type of treatments one was able to receive. (Perälä 2007, 265.)

While CRIS and NA are not some miraculous curers of drug abuse and crime, according to results of this study and also several other studies, they are nonetheless important supporters in the process of desistance. Peer support networks provide support in the community of the offender. They provide social relationships and support that is easily accessed and long-lasting, alternative ways of living one's life, real life examples of making a life change, as well as a safe ground where one can

practice new behavior and have experiences of success and acceptance that enhance belief in self-efficacy. Peer support networks are thus important co-operators with the official service field, as they can respond to some of the needs of the client group that can strongly support desistance from crime, but cannot be necessarily met in the service system.

Research on crime: possibilities and limitations

Although only eight interviews were conducted for this research, there was saturation in the data. There were, however, also many individual nuances in the narratives that I was not able to include in the results because of their singular appearance or because of risk of identification of the participants. One limitation of this study is also that it consists of singular interviews. Follow-up interviews and participant observation for a longer period of time, and a larger sample size in different stages of desistance would provide more knowledge on the patterns of offending and desistance, risk factors and coping strategies, and different mechanisms that affect the volition to not offend anymore. However, this kind of research is difficult to carry out. To do ethnographic research of offenders, the researcher needs the full trust of the subjects. As a researcher, one is so “outside” from the world where these persistent offenders live in and also represents the “society” and officials, that it takes a long time and lots of patience for a researcher to achieve this trust. It is very likely that the juveniles interviewed for this study would not have trusted me enough to share their personal experience with me without first being persuaded by their supervisors and mentors. Without the “she’s okay, she can be trusted, be honest with her”, of the workers, my reliability would not have been guaranteed for the participants. In this, my own history of working at Criminal Sanctions Office and CRIS played a crucial role that I was even in the first place able to get the interviews. Because the workers already knew me, they were comfortable in assuring possible participants that they would be in safe hands.

What I realized when doing this research is how uninformative studies on recidivism rates are. When researching the effectiveness of corrections programs, one should not concentrate purely on rates of recidivism, but on *how* the individual experiences the process of change and *why* he wants to change (Maruna 2001, 112). As noted in my research, it was not being supervised in parole that enhanced desistance, but the *interaction with the supervisor* that was influential for one interviewee. For another interviewee, the supporter of desistance was not going to prison, but *being cut off from the old environment and learning problem solving skills* that made him not to re-offend. Qualitative

research of desistance process could assist overcoming “nothing works” -discourses on offender rehabilitation (Martinson 1974), and also direct corrections practices to focus on the factors that support desistance.

Conducting the interviews and listening to the juveniles’ narratives of their lives, I came to realize that also one important aspect of understanding patterns in criminal behavior is to understand the social environment and the culture of the offender. As mentioned, the subjects of this study were deterred from committing crimes by corrections system only after they were afraid of losing something. During the “street life”, however, *not* committing a crime might mean losing everything. For example, if dealing drugs, one has to create a certain threat so others are afraid of you, and this usually means using violence. You might also lose your friends if you don’t stand their ground in case they end up in a fight. Simply put: the street life has its own rules that are not alike to rest of the society, and people living in that reality seem to learn to live by these rules. The more these persistent offenders are marginalized from the rest of the society, the more they do *not have the option of not to follow the rules of criminal lifestyle*. To understand patterns of offending and desistance, the social context where the decision whether to offend or not is made in should also be explored.

Punishment or rehabilitation?

The socially constructed image of a “criminal” is interesting. We all have certain images of what criminals are like, and have a perception of what they deserve or how they should be treated. Even prisoners themselves have a perception of “real criminals” that, however, are some other people than they (Maruna 2001, 136–7). Maruna refers to this image people have of criminals as the stigma of the “bogeyman”. As long as offenders are believed to be evil, they will be separated from the society, even when their deviant behavior would have already stopped. (Maruna 2001, 4–5.) Also the concept ‘juvenile offender’ has very negative socially constructed associations, as already only the concept of ‘youth’ connotes to immaturity and rebellion (Muncie 2004, 3). Moreover, many people might have a very false understanding of the phenomenon of youth crime, as the picture painted in the media of juvenile offenders is to some extent very different from the reality, as noticed in research (Muncie 2004, 2, 11). In the UK for example, media creates false images of youth crime: about 65 percent of crime reports in newspapers are about violence crime, although violent crimes account for only 6 percent of recorded crime (Muncie 2004, 11). Also in Finland, a

singular homicide committed by an adolescent can lead to widespread fear and worry about youth violence and crime (Kivivuori 2006, 15), although offending behavior in general would not change. Statistics can also be misleading, as they do not reflect neutral rates of offending, but are affected by changes in legislation, surveillance and policing (Muncie 2004, 20). In Finland, for example, according to official statistics, violent acts among juveniles would seem to have increased, but when combined with information from self-reported offending, violence among juveniles seems to have been on a stable level or even decreased since the millennium (Kivivuori 2006, 50–53).

With the above, I do not want to defend the wrongful acts of juvenile offenders, but to give an example on how the “criminal” is constructed and how much this can influence the perceptions on how “they” should be treated. The problem with the bogeyman stigma is that it pushes offenders even further into the margins. As Jari Ihalainen from CRIS has noticed during his many years of experience with working with ex-offenders, marginalization and falling from official services worsens when society to some extent rejects people with history of offending and substance abuse (Ihalainen 2011, 229). Also Valokivi (2004) argues that the marginalizing negative label complicates creating an equal relationship between the official service system and the lawbreakers. This is a real problem when intervening with crime, as crime is strongly attached to questions of marginalization. Having the stigma or label can thus reinforce continuance of criminal behavior, as also the results of this study indicate for experiencing being rejected hinder desistance from crime.

If stripped from the association of “the evil bogeyman”, the structural causes and human decision making processes behind criminal behavior can be better understood and intervened. As Gendreau, Goggin, Cullen and Andrews argue, interventions to crime are not effective if the social and psychological factors are not taken into consideration. They underpin the importance of rehabilitative measures in corrections interventions, because they have the ability to enhance “pro-social learning, build social bonds, and reduce exposure to strains caused by blocked opportunities”. (Gendreau et al. 2000, 287–288.) The findings of this study also highlight the importance of rehabilitative interventions, such as affecting human agency by motivation enhancement therapy, cognitive-behavioral approaches and building self-efficacy, and also affecting external factors such as creating possibilities to really break away of the old lifestyle by having education and work possibilities and peer support within the community, and also supporting family relationships.

What comes to the deterrence effect of sanctions, it is noted in previous recidivism studies that imprisonment per se does not deter people from committing crimes (Burnett & Maruna 2004, 400). Hirschi and Gottfredson (1990) argue that this is because deterrence effect does not work for

persistent offenders because of their impulsivity or lack of social bonds. According to the interviews of this study, fear of sanctions did deter these persistent offenders from committing crime, but *only after the offenders perceived they had something to lose* and when they realized the actual meaning of being imprisoned, for example by hearing experiences from ex-offenders. The change came through learning and understanding of the real effect of the sanctions, not through a change in levels of impulsivity. Having social bonds, though, influences the deterrence effect among subjects in this study, because social bonds build something meaningful the offender does not want to risk losing. Before desisting, having nothing to lose is also connected to “fuck this shit” –feeling. Belief in self-efficacy and caring about oneself were important components of creating deterrence effect of sanctions. This is an interesting finding, because many times the magnitude of deterrence effect is related to the length of prison sentences, not to how much one perceives he has to lose in his “civilian” life. Nevertheless, according to findings of this study, fear of punishment does support desistance, because it was described as something that could deter interviewees from committing crimes. For example, if faced with financial difficulties or negative actions from others, crime could have paid on the short run, but on the long run one could have lost something that was perceived as more important, such as a future dream or one’s family. The argument of Sampson and Laub (1993; 2003) that attachment to family and work in adulthood decrease risk of offending could thus be partly also because of increased deterrence effect of sanctions.

I now return to my pondering from the very beginning of my thesis: to fight crime as a police officer or as a social worker? On the basis on what I have learned when doing this research, I would say that I am happy about my choice about choosing social work. This and previous research have shown that punishment by itself does not reduce crime. It can even lead to higher rates of recidivism. Corrections system working purely on basis of deterrence and punishment is equal to revenge, especially when lacking any scientific proof of being an effective measure in crime control. To really reduce levels of crime and recidivism, rehabilitative and re-integrative measures are essential. Because probation officers without social work training may not recognize the lawbreaker clients’ needs of rehabilitation services and also lack the skills of counseling (Peters 2011, 362), social work profession is needed in the corrections field.

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