

Developmental Patterns of Religiosity in Relation to Criminal Trajectories among Serious Offenders across Adolescence and Young Adulthood

by

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Abstract

The knowledge about the relationship between changes in both religiosity and crime over time remains limited. This dissertation aims to add to the existing body of literature and fill the gaps in prior studies by examining the religiosity-crime relationship in a sample of adjudicated adolescents studied in the Pathways to Desistance Study, a seven-year longitudinal dataset. Using GBTMs and multiple-group GCMs, this dissertation identifies the distinctive trajectories of religious attendance, religious importance, and spirituality and their dynamic relationships with the change in different types of substance use and criminal behavior. Given the initial levels of substance use and criminal behavior, the results show that adolescents and young adults with higher religiosity are less likely to engage in substance use and criminal behavior than those less religious, regardless of dimensions of religiosity. With respect to changes in religiosity, not all trajectory groups of religious attendance, religious importance, and spirituality are significantly associated with each type of substance use and criminal behavior. For those significant dynamic relationships, the results generally indicate that gain in religiosity continues to attenuate the risk of substance use and criminal behavior; while loss in religiosity is associated with elevated odds of substance use and criminal behavior. In addition, the findings regarding these emerged relationships are consistent despite the confounding variables controlled. The results suggest that religiosity is an important variable in predicting the trajectory of substance use and criminal behavior from adolescence to young adulthood, which may serve as a protective factor assisting juvenile offenders to desist from crime. Strengthening, emphasizing, and reinforcing different elements of religiosity may increase the chances that religiosity may be a prosocial turning point in the lives of high rate offenders. Religiosity would be important for prevention of drug abuse and criminal behavior as well as rehabilitation from drug dependence and recidivism.