International Journal of Criminal Justice

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JOURNAL DESCRIPTION

The primary research areas of the journal are change of human behaviors, community response, and social system in the field of criminal law, criminology, criminal justice and psychology. We welcome research contributions that achieve: (a) improving knowledge and understanding of the etiology and trends of crime (b) utilizing theoretical frameworks and research methodologies in evaluation of criminal legislations and policies in different jurisdictions and (c) undertaking analysis and research on enacting and amending the criminal codes and legislations in response to changing or evolving crime trends with an eye towards improving the effectiveness of the judicial system and criminal policies.

International Journal of Criminal Justice

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Editorial Message

Jisun Choi, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief
International Journal of Criminal Justice

Dear IJCJ Readers,

It is with great pleasure that we present to you the special issue of the International Journal of Criminal Justice dedicated to the topic of 'desistance from crime.' As the Editor-in-Chief, I am thrilled to introduce this compilation of insightful articles that delve into the multifaceted dimensions of 'why people stop offending.'

While scholars have primarily focused on studying the reasons for committing crimes, in today's rapidly evolving societies, it is imperative for academic journals to pioneer discussions on crucial topics, exploring various dimensions such as desistance from crimes. This special issue exemplifies our commitment to fostering dialogue and advancing knowledge in the criminal justice field.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the special issue editor and authors for their dedication and scholarly rigor in crafting these outstanding pieces. Firstly, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Farrall, the special issue editor, for his consideration and hard work throughout the process of this IJCJ special issue. Furthermore, additional thanks go to Dr. Bax, Dr. McNeill, Dr. Schinkel, and Dr. Gray for their valuable contributions to the issue. Their expertise and commitment to excellence have undoubtedly enriched the quality of this special issue.

As you peruse the pages of this special issue, I encourage you to engage deeply with the ideas presented and to consider their implications for theory, research, and practice. It is my hope that this collection will inspire further inquiry and stimulate meaningful dialogue on 'what we have missed' in the criminal justice area.

Once again, I extend my warmest welcome to this special issue on Desistance. May it serve as a catalyst for new discoveries, collaborations, and advancements in our field.

Introduction: IJCJ Special Issue on Desistance

Stephen Farrall
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For me, and my own biases in research interests need to be borne in mind, criminological is always at its most interesting when issues pertaining to those people who commit crime are the focal point. Indeed, when we look back at to some of the 'starting points' of criminology, both as an empirical subject and as a theoretical endeavour, the reasons why some people start to offend and others do not are there as a key research question. This preoccupation can be traced back to Lombroso's studies, and is still detectable in terms of theorising and studies today. The focus on why people started to offend really took off, however, during the 1950s and 1960s, with numerous longitudinal studies in the USA and other countries being commenced at various points during those decades. As we now know, and in large part due to those studies, many of the boys and girls recruited into those studies in the 1950s and 1960s, if they had started to offend, were starting to cease offending in the 1980s and 1990s. At that point, the research focus changed subtly but importantly; the attention to processes and theories of onset gave way to thinking about desistance from crime. There were a few papers which touched on this topic published in the 1980s, but the real boost came in the mid-1990s with the publication of Sampson and Laub's *Crime in the Making* (1993). From that point onwards the focus was on desistance from crime. At one point in the late-1990s I attended the British Society of Criminology's annual conference. At some sort of reception at that conference, a much older and wiser professor of criminology asked me what I was studying. I told him that I was studying 'why people stop offending'. '*What?!?*' he replied, totally aghast at this suggestion. When I repeated what I'd said, he looked at me as if I was mad,

made some small talk for a few moments and wandered off to find someone less crazy to speak to. Shortly after this point, and due to the pioneering work of Sampson and Laub, we see key studies on desistance as a *standalone topic*, legitimate as a topic *outside* of studies of onset and persistence, starting to emerge. I used to keep all of the studies I could find of desistance from crime in a series of box files. To start with, these numbered only a few box files containing maybe 20-30 studies, mainly from the US, and often to be found in obscure journals. (Maybe that much older and wiser criminology professor had a point after all!). I gave up this habit of collating all of the papers I could find on desistance around the early-2000s when keeping on top of the sheer volume of papers in this field started to become impossible. From then onwards, the number of articles, book chapters, edited collections and entire books on desistance mushroomed. Shadd Maruna's *Making Good* (2001) and my own *Rethinking What Works with Offenders* (2002) were two examples of early forays into this field, but these were just the outriders in a whole new subgenre of criminological research, namely desistance studies.

Since the end of the 'side-lining' of studies of why people stopped offending, criminological research has become much more attuned to the diversity of experience in terms of all aspects of our studies. Studies of desistance have been no different in this respect. The original focal point of many studies of desistance were on those people who 'produced' what we may now call 'volume crime'. Hence pioneering studies of desistance talked only of 'desistance', rather than 'desistance by sex offenders' … 'by females' … 'by white collar offenders' … 'by ethnic group' … 'by former-prison inmates' … 'by former gang-members' and so on. At first, this might be seen as further evidence that academics are fond of finding out 'more and more about less and less' (in other words, a search for the precise causal processes for everything to the nth degree). But this would be to ignore that there is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to explaining social phenomena. Studies of everything which a social scientist would wish to study need to recognise (if not immediately incorporate into their research design and theorising) variations by gender, by age, by ethnicity, by geographic location, or by historical period. That there are now studies of desistance from crime which are attuned to issues of gender, ethnicity, offence type and country/criminal

justice system makes our evidence stronger, even if this comes at a cost of appearing to be more fragmented at times.

This collection grew out of a series of online and face to face seminars funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council, as part of their International Networking Grants programme.[1] Three papers are presented herein. In the first, Trent Bax of Ewha Women's University, Seoul, South Korea further reports on his exploration of the lives and life-courses of 35 former methamphetamine users in New Zealand and their physical, mental and spiritual health. In keeping with many other studies, Bax finds that many ceased using these drugs without formal or professional support from treatment services. One aspect of desistance studies which has received increasing attention relates to what might be thought of as different phases of desistance. In an article in 2002, Maruna and Farrall suggested that desistance might have a primary element (where simply not offending was common), and a secondary element (at which point identities and roles might become disrupted and the individual ceasing to offend starts to recognise and adapt to this change). This motivated McNeill (2016) to propose that there was then a third phase of desistance (in which changes in the desisting individual's sense of belonging were encountered). In their paper, the second in this collection, Fergus McNeill and Marguerite Schinkel seek to elaborate this concept (referred to widely as tertiary - or relational – desistance) and in so doing set an agenda for further research on this concept. Also building on the original ideas of Maruna and Farrall (2002), is the third and final paper in this collection. Emily Gray and Stephen Farrall, using data from a cohort study born in 1970 and followed up into their early-40s (in 2012) explore is there is phase which might be thought of as 'quaternary desistance' – the point at which those formerly engaged in offending are objectively and subjectively similar to those who never offended. The evidence is intriguing.

What this collection shows, I hope, is that there is still much to be learnt

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1   *Economic and Social Research Council*, "Social Policy Support For Families in the UK and South Korea: To What Extent Does Family Support Create Inclusive Growth and Social Cohesion?", ES/W010712/1, (Dr Sung-Hee Lee, PI, Sun-Hee Baek, Seoul Theological University Social Welfare, Mrs Bak-Ne IM, Chung-Ang University, Alexander Nunn University of Derby, Dr J. Yoon Irons, University of Derby, and Stephen Farrall). February 2022 – July 2023.

about why people cease offending. Studies of desistance have not, at least not widely, delved into the topics which Bax does in his studies of former methamphetamine users and suggest to us new avenues to pursue. The papers focusing on tertiary and quaternary desistance suggest that the desistance 'journey' may be broken down into smaller elements, even if the precise staging of these remains unclear. Certainly, we have come a long way since the first steps into charting desistance were taken in the 1950s and 1960s … it would appear that there is still much more to learn and appreciate.

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People seeking wellness: The physical, mental, spiritual and family health of people in Aotearoa-New Zealand who desisted from methamphetamine use

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Abstract

This paper utilizes Mason Durie's Te Whare Tapa Whā Māori-based framework of well-being to analyse 35 former methamphetamine users physical, mental, spiritual and family health. Despite extensive poly-drug use and adversity across multiple life domains, the in-depth interviews reveal two-thirds experienced either minor or no problematic physical health issues, while for almost half extensive poly-drug use exerted only minimal negative impact on their physical health. By contrast, three-quarters consistently or periodically suffered serious mental and/or emotional distress. Such distress—especially depression, emotional pain, stress or anxiety—contributed to drug use for all but three interviewees. This qualitative life-course analysis of 'people seeking wellness' (Tāngata whaiora) shows mental distress and frequent methamphetamine use can be a recoverable physical and mental health disruption. Post-methamphetamine use, interviewees' mental health and life satisfaction were, on average, the highest they have been.

Keywords: Methamphetamine Use; Aotearoa-New Zealand; Mental Health; Physical Health; Spiritual Health; Desistance.

Introduction

In Aotearoa-New Zealand, the Misuse of Drugs Act (1975) classifies drugs according to the risk of harm they pose to the people using them. Methamphetamine is classified a 'Class A' controlled drug as it has been determined to pose a 'very high' level of risk of harm. An individual caught in possession of a Class A drug can face up to 6 months in prison and/or a $1,000 fine. Manufacture or supply of a Class A drug can result in life imprisonment (Misuse of Drugs Act, 1975). Methamphetamine use in Aotearoa-New Zealand is closely connected to criminal activity, which can harm community cohesion. For example, survey results indicate between one-third and one-half of frequent drug users purchase methamphetamine from a gang member or gang associate (Wilkins et al., 2017). In 2007, police concluded three-quarters of all illegal manufacturing laboratories were connected to organised criminal groups (Policy Advisory Group, 2009), while in 2017 the Police Association claimed methamphetamine to be the biggest driver of crime in eleven of the twelve police districts (Clayton, 2017). Thus, there is widespread public concern about the manufacture, sale and use of methamphetamine.

According to the 2018 report of the Aotearoa-New Zealand government inquiry into mental health and addiction (Paterson, et al. 2018), one-in-five citizens experience mental health and addiction challenges at any given time. Additionally, over 70% attending addiction services have co-existing mental health distresses. The report's *wellness manifesto* advocates a paradigm shift from "big psychiatry" to "big community" (ibid: 97). This requires shifting focus toward physical, mental, spiritual, social and cultural well-being for all and community-based solutions for those requiring assistance. Citizens also implored the inquiry to treat addiction as primarily a health issue, and not a criminal justice issue driven by harmful and ineffective 'tough on drugs' policies (which have led to gang control of drug supplies). This holistic approach views mental distress and addiction not as a biomedical-based mental health *deficit*, but as a recoverable physical, mental, social and/or spiritual health *disruption*. "Every day," the authors wrote, "people recover from distress, overcome addictions and find strength in their lives" (ibid: 67).

The report promoted the term *people seeking wellness* (Tāngata whaiora), which is defined as "people who experience mental health or addiction challenges and who are seeking wellness or recovery of self" (ibid: 22). The report also advocated use of Mason Durie's (1985) Māori-based holistic model of well-being. Durie's Te Whare Tapa Whā framework uses the symbol of the Māori meeting house (wharenui) to illustrate four dimensions of well-being: (1) *physical health* (taha tinana), (2) *mental health* (taha hinengaro), (3) *spiritual health* (taha wairua), and (4) *family health* (taha whānau). This quadripartite bio-psycho-spiritual-family framework approximates Engel's (1977) tripartite bio-psycho-social model. Engel's critique of the biomedical model for denying the psychological, behavioural and social dimensions of illness led to behavioural medicine, which recognises body-and-mind are interconnected and that conceptualising in terms of wholeness is vital to a full understanding of illness and health. This perspective also recognises the human body is self-healing because it has a "built-in ability to regulate itself as a whole to maintain internal balance and order" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990: 155). Hence why health means "whole" and healing means "making whole" or the restoration of integrity and balance (Weil, 1995: 5).

Following this holistic perspective, this paper analyses the physical, mental, spiritual and family health of a group of people in Aotearoa-New Zealand seeking wellness who formerly used methamphetamine. Doing so takes into account their overall life-course circumstances, challenges and/or traumas; as opposed to matching individuals to a diagnostic label. This research therefore adds to extant knowledge by offering a unique holistic qualitative life course-based analysis. [1] Only by better understanding the interconnected circumstances, contexts and consequences of methamphetamine use can we adequately allocate resources, plan health services, provide suitable interventions and improve treatment coverage. (Wallace et al., 2009).

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1   Approved by 'Ewha Womans University Institutional Review Board', at Ewha Womans University. IRB#: 158-6.

What do we know about methamphetamine's effects?

Methamphetamine temporarily increases energy, self-confidence, euphoria and invincibility (Sommers et al. 2006; Sheridan et al. 2009; Ohler, 2016). Subsequent bingeing behaviour can impact physical health and mental functioning, especially sleep deprivation, weight loss, paranoia, anxiety, depression and hallucinations (Sommers et al. 2006; Butler et al. 2010). Specifically, the greater the quantity and frequency of methamphetamine use the greater the likelihood of "methamphetamine-associated psychosis" (Arunogiri et al. 2018: 526; McKetin et al. 2006; Ding et al. 2014). There is, however, "compelling evidence" methamphetamine use directly induces a "psychotic state" because symptoms can occur one hour after administration and abate relatively quickly following discontinuation (McKetin, 2018: 1524). This indicates "methamphetamine-induced psychosis" is a "transient state" for most users (McKetin, 2018: 1525; McKetin et al. 2013). Since methamphetamine initially provides a "feeling of mastery and power" (Sommers et al., 2006: 1473), use has been linked to increased aggression (Brecht et al., 2004; McKetin et al., 2014; Zweben et al., 2004). Although frequent use may be a risk factor for aggression (Homer et al., 2008), Sommers et al. (2006: 1476) found two-thirds of respondents did not commit methamphetamine-related violence. Likewise, a survey of frequent methamphetamine users in Aotearoa-New Zealand found 13% committed a violent crime in the past six months (Wilkins, et al., 2015). And whilst a study examining the 'drug-crime nexus' found regular users of methamphetamine tend to have a more extensive criminal history, they are not more prone to committing violent crimes (Gizzi and Gerkin, 2010).

Whether negative consequences are 'induced by' or 'associated with' methamphetamine use, research has nevertheless found a "significant number" of methamphetamine users experience "limited or no serious social, psychological, or physical dysfunction" (Sommers et al. 2006: 1476). Additionally, there is no "single, uniform career path" methamphetamine users follow, meaning "progression from controlled use to addiction" is not inevitable (ibid).

Users of methamphetamine have stated they initially used the stimulant

to assist with emotional stress or depression, with increased use subsequently contributing to increased depression, psychological turmoil or emotional pain (Boeri et al. 2009). It is unsurprising use is higher amongst those with mood disorders because drug addiction is commonly a "symptom of emotional disease" (Vaillant, 2012: 296). For example, Ministry of Health data (2014; 2016; 2019) shows approximately 1% of Aotearoa-New Zealand adults used methamphetamine in the previous 12-months, whereas 36% arrested for a criminal offense in 2015 used in the prior 12-months (Johnson, 2018). The elevated prevalence rate of substance use among prisoners correlates with their elevated rates of mental distress (Brinded et al., 2001).

According to Ministry of Health data, four-in-ten Aotearoa-New Zealanders meet the "criteria" for a mental disorder at some point in their life-course (Oakley Browne, 2006: 867), while 15-20% have "ever been" diagnosed with a mood and/or an anxiety disorder (Ministry of Health, 2008, 2012, 2014b; Lee et al. 2017). Yet at any given time, almost 80% of Aotearoa-New Zealand adults "have no or very low psychological distress" (Ministry of Health, 2008: 207). For those in psychological distress there is a high frequency of comorbidity, with six-in-ten disorders occurring in people with two or more disorders (Scott et al. 2006). For example, of those with a substance abuse disorder almost half also experience an anxiety disorder (ibid). Mental-and-physical comorbidity has also been observed. Those with a mental disorder are more likely to have a chronic physical condition than the general population, while those with a chronic physical condition are more likely to have a mental disorder (Beautrais et al. 2006). This indicates a bidirectional relationship between mental and physical distress (Cohen and Rodriguez, 1995; Seligman, 2011).

Extensive evidence demonstrates experiencing traumatic events such as childhood, sexual or domestic abuse can lead to adverse mental health effects (e.g. depression, anxiety, substance abuse) (Cusack et al. 2004; Brown et al. 2005). Exposure to adverse childhood experiences may increase the risk for methamphetamine onset, severity of dependence (Messina et al. 2008) and methamphetamine-associated psychosis (Ding et al. 2014). Research into adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have established a robust link between

exposure to childhood adversity and higher rates of mental distress and
addiction (Dube et al. 2003; Anda et al. 2006). Prior analysis by the author of
interviewees' family environment (Bax, 2021a) discovered they had
encountered almost five adverse childhood experiences on average, and that
almost three-quarters had encountered four or more ACEs. Further analysis
(Bax, 2021b; 2021c) discovered commonly shared adverse experiences
hindered educational, employment, marital and parenting success and
contributed to poly-drug use.

The aforementioned government inquiry considers addiction to be a
counterproductive coping mechanism to ACEs. Thus the "best medium- to
long-term investment" in well-being lies in preventing childhood exposure to
adversity and building resilience (Paterson, et al. 2018: 50). Nevertheless, the
'Harvard Study of Adult Development' shows an adverse childhood is
"neither destiny nor doom" (Vaillant, 2012: 52). The 75-year-old study found
childhood trauma decreases in importance over time, while positive childhood
experiences endure. Vaillant (2012: 52) concluded it is the child's "total
experience"—not any particular trauma—which exerts the clearest influence
on adult psychopathology. Vaillant also argued mental illness is better
understood as "reaction patterns to stress" and the outward expression of
"inward struggles to adapt to life" (ibid: 369). Since most mental health issues
"reflect ongoing adaptive processes" then recovery typically occurs as
adaptive styles mature (ibid: 369). For example, about 90% of drug addictions
begin in adolescence and most end by age thirty (Szalavitz, 2016). These
maturing adaptive styles are "natural healing processes" that continue well
into middle life (Vaillant, 2012, 370). For example, the majority of this study's
interviewees desisted from methamphetamine use without participation in
professional treatment or rehabilitation.

Methods

By integrating personal, social and environmental factors, the life-course
method analyses changes in relationships and behavior as people twist along
the pathway of life and how, in turn, such changes affect behaviours such as

drug use patterns (Hser et al. 2007). The life-course approach recognises both the mutual influence of person and social context over time and the bi-directional nature of relationships (Giele and Elder, 1998). The life-course method thus offers an expanded framework that allows researchers to account for the trajectories, transitions and turning points that characterize the life-course of methamphetamine users (Hser et al. 2007; Teruya and Hser, 2010). A life-course approach seeks to obtain data on: *human agency* (health, well-being, meaning and satisfaction); *linked lives* (relationships); *timing* (event histories); and *location* (social, cultural and historical context) (Giele and Elder, 1998).

Despite memory recall issues, a retrospective person-based life-history narrative approach is valuable for understanding the processes of frequent drug use over multiple phases and domains of the life-course (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Boeri and Whalen, 2009). Life histories also reveal in the drug user's own words the personal-situational context of their behaviour, thereby revealing the interconnections between life events and situations (Laub and Sampson, 2003). Table 1 shows the data acquired for this research:

Table 1. Data Source.

N	Primary Data (obtained via snowballing method)
35	In-depth semi-structured *interviews* with former methamphetamine users (100 hours of recorded data)
6	In-depth *interviews* with mother, partner, ex-partner of former methamphetamine users (10 hours of recorded data)
	Supplementary Data (obtained via online methamphetamine support group)
7	Transcribed *testimonies* of former methamphetamine users (7 hours of video data)
18	Transcribed *live online chats* with former methamphetamine users (20 hours of video data)
66	**Approximately 1,000,000 words of transcribed empirical data**

In this paper, only data from the 41 interviews is used; a number comparable to qualitative studies of methamphetamine users by Joe (1996), Halkitis et al. (2005), Lende et al. (2007), Boeri, et al. (2009) and Carbone-

Lopez et al (2012), and twice as many as a comparative study on methamphetamine users in Aotearoa-New Zealand (Sheridan et al. 2009). The 35 semi-structured interviews were divided into: 1. *Life in Review*, and 2. *Methamphetamine Use*. In Part 1, interviewees reviewed their life from beginning to present, including the domains of family, school, friendship, work, romantic relationships, marriage, parenting, mental and physical health and spirituality. Interviews focused on the significant relationships, experiences and events in each life domain to understand the trajectories, role transitions and turning points in their life. Participants also revealed their drug use history, and at the end of each life domain were asked whether that domain has influenced their drug use and, reciprocally, whether drug use impacted on that life domain. Part 2 focused specifically on their methamphetamine use, including onset, progression, control, impact, desistance and life post-methamphetamine use. Interviewees also completed a 'Life Satisfaction Chart' (Clausen, 1993). On average, each interview lasted approximately three hours. Contact with interviewees was initially made with five former methamphetamine users known to the author. A snowballing method was employed to locate 22 other interviewees, while 14 were found through advertisements posted on two online methamphetamine support groups.

Interviewees were born between 1962 and 1995 (with half born in the 1970s), and 43-years-old on average. 54% are male, 46% female, 74% European/Pākehā and 26% Māori (the general population is 49%, 51%, 70% and 16.5% respectively). Interviewees have lived throughout all of Aotearoa-New Zealand's provinces in various villages, towns and cities. To qualify as a former frequent methamphetamine user, participants had to have used methamphetamine for at least six consecutive months, but had not used for at least 12-months. On average, interviewees were methamphetamine users for seven-and-a-half-years and ceased being a methamphetamine user seven-years prior to the interview at age 36. All interviewees were poly-drug users with extensive experience using various legal and illegal substances, especially alcohol, cannabis, nicotine, amphetamine, cocaine, LSD, psilocybin and ecstasy.

Results

Physical Health

Less than a quarter of interviewees have encountered serious physical health issues throughout their life-course. Only three have encountered long-term physical health issues (a spine defect, a brain injury, sinusitis), while five encountered short or medium-term issues (e.g. poisoning, cancer, fibromyalgia). Of the three who encountered a serious physical health issue post-methamphetamine use, methamphetamine had a direct contribution in only one case (it contributed to worsening life-long sinusitis). Half the interviewees have encountered either moderate or minor physical health issues (e.g. asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia), with most occurring during childhood or adolescence. Of the four who developed a physical health issue post-methamphetamine use, none can be clearly and directly attributed to prior methamphetamine use. Despite extensive poly-drug use, a quarter have led mostly physically healthy lives. Interviewee-11 (female, 48) has "*always been really healthy*" despite being a "*really heavy*" binge drinker for seven years, a "*very heavy*" cannabis user for 30-years, and "*constantly*" smoking-then-injecting methamphetamine for 7 years. Interviewee-13 (male, 47) has "*never had a health ailment*" despite 25 years of daily cannabis use and 8 years of methamphetamine use. And Interviewee-25 (male, 41) has "*always been fit and healthy*" despite 22-years of regular ecstasy, cocaine and methamphetamine use.

Altogether, two-thirds have encountered either minor or no physical health issues, which is comparable to 2009-2014 Aotearoa-New Zealand-based survey data which shows 65% of frequent methamphetamine user's physical health was self-rated excellent, very good or good (Wilkins et al. 2015). Female interviewees were more likely to have suffered serious or moderate physical health issues. As Table 2. shows, there was a very gradual decrease in physical health from childhood until adulthood, then a further decrease in adulthood due mostly to the effects of drug use. Since desisting from methamphetamine, however, interviewees' physical health has slightly improved—despite their prior drug-induced lifestyle and the natural aging

effect on physical health.[2]

Table 2. Physical and mental health and life satisfaction over the life-course.

physical health vs. mental health vs. life satisfaction (averages)
(1-2 = very poor; 2-4 = poor; 4-6 = fair; 6-8 = good; 8-10 = excellent)

Legend:
- physical health - average
- physical health - males
- physical health - females
- mental health - average
- mental health - males
- mental health - females
- life satisfaction
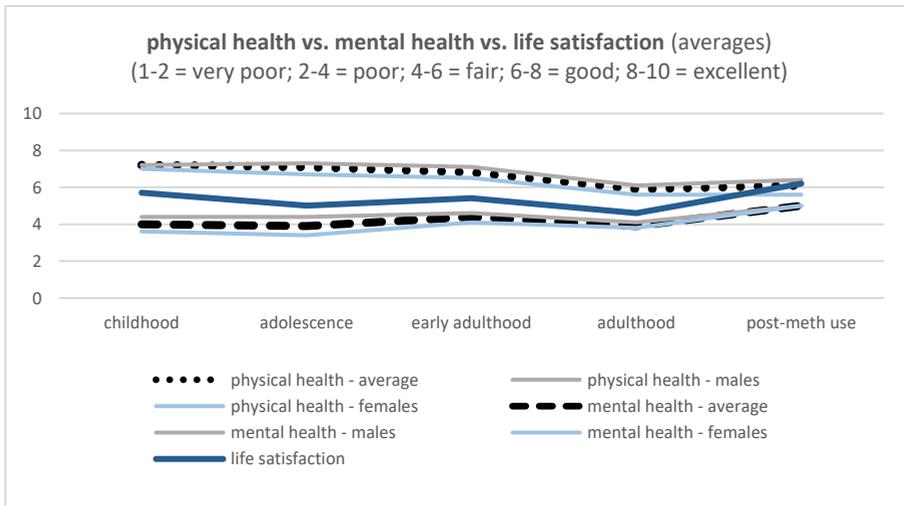
Mental health

Overall, female interviewees' mental health remained lower than their male counterparts until the post-methamphetamine period (see Table 2). One-third of interviewees have previously been diagnosed with a mental illness. For ten of the twelve the main distress was depression. The same number were prescribed medication for a mental illness; again, ten of the twelve prescriptions were antidepressants. Ten interviewees also sought professional assistance to help manage anxiety, sexual abuse, parental neglect, low self-esteem, approval seeking behaviour, an eating disorder, suicidal ideation/ attempts and severe LSD-induced psychosis. An additional seven clearly suffered serious mental health distress, yet were never diagnosed with a

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2   The author divided the life course into five periods; childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, adulthood and post- methamphetamine use. For each period, physical and mental health was subjectively rated on a scale of 1 to 10 (see Table 2. for scale). Life satisfaction is the average from the Life Satisfaction Charts interviewees 1-35 completed.

mental illness. For example, Interviewee-1 (male, 56) has had life-long depression-like symptoms, regular suicide ideation, and always needed drugs to "*feel good*." Likewise, Interviewee-16 (male, 46) has suffered "*severe anxiety*" his "*whole life*," felt "*a little bit depressed most of the time*" and has "*never really felt good about*" himself.

Table 3. Mental health over the life course.

MENTAL HEALTH OVER THE LIFE COURSE

- consistently good mental health
- encountered mild or moderate mental health distresses
- encountered medium-term serious mental health distresses
- periodically suffered mental health distress
- consistently suffered from mental health distress
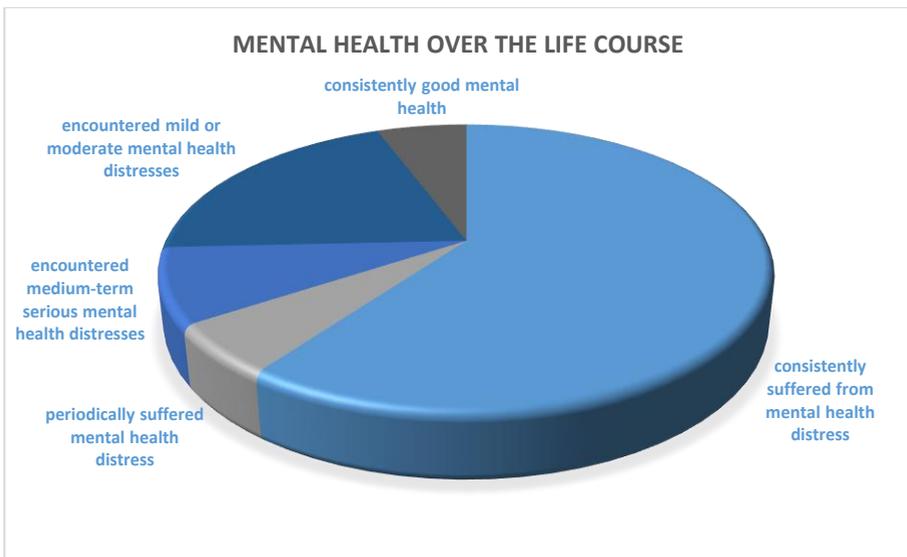
As Table 3. shows, almost two-thirds have consistently suffered mental and/or emotional distress. As Table 4. shows, of the thirteen various mental health distresses identified the most common were: (a) depression, (b) traumatic stressor experiences, (c) self-image/self-hate issues, (d) emotional complexity, and (e) childhood abandonment issues. For example, Interviewee-10 (female, 48) is a self-described "*empath*" who was "*badly bullied*" at primary school and felt like an "*outsider*" at home and "*a deep sense of not belonging*." During adolescence she was "*more emotionally complex*" than her peers, resulting in adolescence "*being really painful emotionally*." Between 15 and 20 she had "*low self-esteem*" from "*massive body image issues*," resulting in "*full-blown bulimia*" at 21. Then at 24 her life "*went*

downhill" after her father passed away. She then discovered heroin, "*which was the only thing that ever numbed the pain*."

Table 4. Mental and emotional distresses.
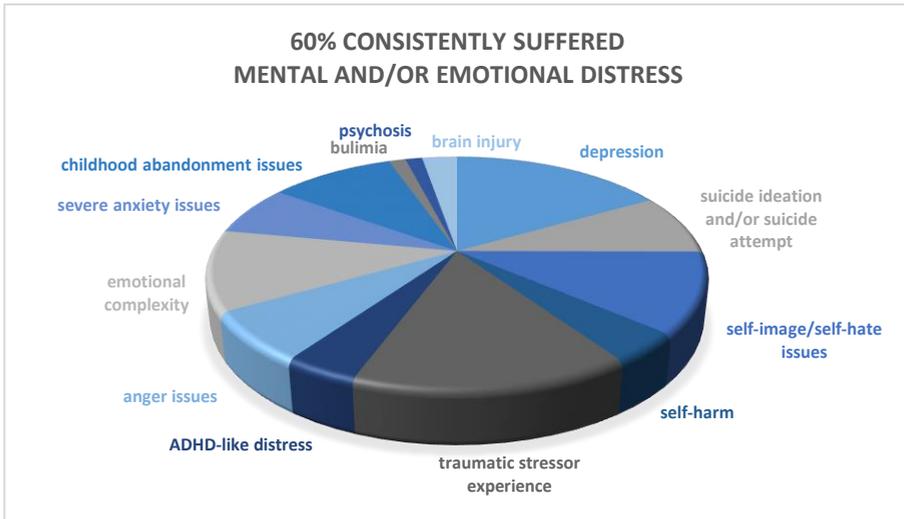
An additional five interviewees either periodically suffered from a mental health distress or encountered medium-term serious mental health issues. For example, Interviewee-27 (male, 39) believes "*most of*" his mental health issues stem from his parent's divorce at age 7. Then bullying victimization between 8 and 12 adversely affected his self-esteem and self-image. Then at 21 his "*mental health went out the door*" after his dream of becoming a professional athlete ended abruptly – "*and that was when the problems [with methamphetamine] started*."

At the low end of the continuum, seven interviewees encountered mild or moderate mental health distresses (e.g. short-term depression, separation anxiety, low self-esteem). Thus only Interviewees 13 (male, 47) and 22 (male, 43) said they consistently experienced relatively good mental health over their life course—despite 25 and 28 years of cannabis use and 8 and 20 years of methamphetamine use respectively. Interviewee-22 believes his mental health

"*has been good all the way through.*" He doesn't "*get down or depressed*" and "*never had bad thoughts towards*" himself. Importantly, these two men are part of six who encountered none or one adverse childhood experience (and five of the six encountered no or only minor mental health issues). By contrast, the twenty-one who consistently suffered mental health issues encountered 5.7 ACEs on average.

Table 5. Main contributors to mental distress.
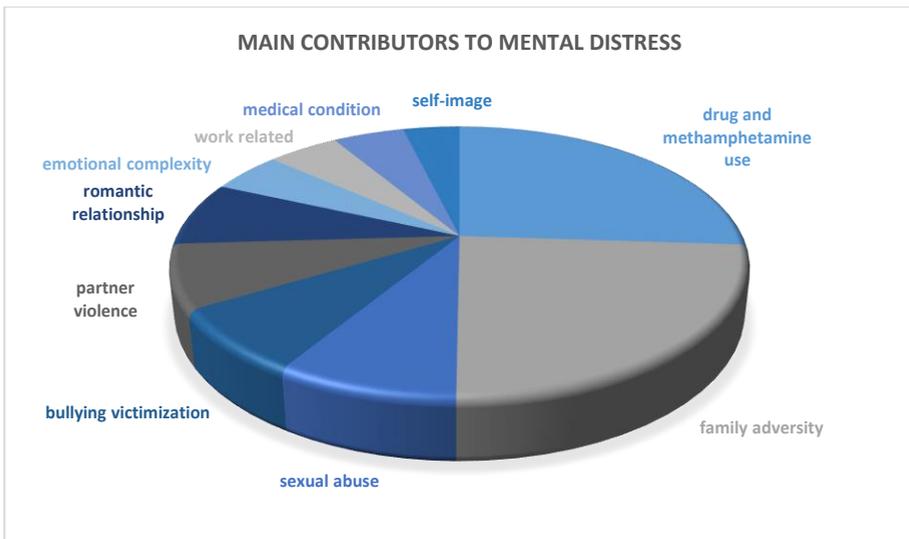
As Table 5. shows, analysis discovered ten main contributors to interviewees' mental distress. On average, each experienced three of these contributing factors. For approximately three-quarters, the adverse effects of drug and methamphetamine use and family adversity contributed to their mental and emotional distress. For one-quarter, sexual abuse, bullying victimization, partner violence and/or adversity within a romantic relationship contributed to their mental and emotional distress.

Did physical and mental health influence drug use?

Physical health distresses contributed to drug use for less than one-quarter. Methamphetamine, alcohol, cannabis and/or heroin was used to manage overwork, stress, tiredness, lack of motivation, a physical injury, back pain or insomnia. Interviewee-18 (male, 45), for example, used cannabis to "*numb the pain*" from physical manual labour and used methamphetamine —which he and his co-workers called "*medicine*"—to manage tiredness and overwork.

By sharp contrast, mental health distresses contributed to drug use for all but three interviewees. The most common mental health concerns were: depression, emotional pain, stress or anxiety, and being in an abusive relationship. Additionally, low self-esteem, parental neglect and grief also contributed to drug use. Over half believed they were "*self-medicating*" a mental health issue. They were using drugs to either "*get rid of emotions*," "*escape from reality*," "*suppress everything*," "*hide the hurt*" or "*block out trauma and pain*." Drugs were also used to "*shut everyone off*" or "*as a way of dealing with grief*" and "*distortions of thinking*." They desired to use drugs when feeling "*low*," "*miserable*," "*depressed*," "*hurt*," "*lost*," "*mental pain*" or "*lack of self-worth*." Drugs were also used when they weren't "*in a good psychological state*" or "*didn't feel good about*" themselves. The drugs' effects would consequently make them feel "*really good about*" themselves, "*so good*," "*fantastic,*" "*a happier person*," "*sedated*," or "*relaxed*." Simply, drug use provided partial relief from emotional pain or temporary pleasure as they strived to adapt to adversity (Maté, 2008).

The term 'self-medication' is, however, misleading because not every reason for self-administering their drug(s) of choice can be considered a medical condition or disease (Alexander, 2008). A more accurate term may be '*self-mediation*.' They were mediating on behalf of the body's naturally resilient, self-regulating and self-healing system, which due to adversity, stress, demand, pressure, uncertainty and/or toxicity had become 'imbalanced' or at worst 'dysregulated' (i.e. they had difficulty managing and maintaining typical emotional responses) (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Even though evolutionary necessity has imbued the body with innate mechanisms of self-healing to

counteract the forces that create injury and illness, the capacity of the self-healing system to restore balance can occasionally be exceeded by the forces of imbalance (Weil, 1995). From this perspective, self-mediation is a means of adapting to adversity. However, this adaptive method will not lead to healing or 'becoming whole' (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Firstly, toxic overload diminishes innate healing responses. Secondly, self-mediation—as a type of 'self-treatment'—may partially facilitate healing or remove obstacles to it, but treatment and healing are different. As Weil (1995: 138) stated, "treatment originates outside you; healing comes from within."

Did drug use influence physical and mental health?

Surprisingly, analysis shows that for almost half their methamphetamine and drug use exerted minimal long-term impact on physical health. Current physical health was typically considered "*good*," "*pretty good*" or "*really good*," and they feel "*fit, healthy*" or "*lucky*." A few noted their "*lung capacity*" is "*fine*" or "*really good*." Interviewee-25 (male, 41) has "*never been sick*" and "*never been to the doctors*." Interviewee-23 (male, 43) has undergone "*a lot*" of medical tests post-methamphetamine use, and all test results "*have come back top-notch*." Interviewees 15 (male, 46) and 5 (female, 50) believe they are "*one of the lucky ones*" for having "*no serious side-effects*" from long-term methamphetamine use, but emerging relatively unscathed physically is more the norm than the exception for these former users. Regarding the way drug use impacted physical health *whilst* using methamphetamine, methamphetamine-and-drug use mainly impacted on productivity, physiological functioning, sleep, diet, sexual behaviour and skin quality.

Productivity

For over half, methamphetamine initially increased motivation, productivity and efficiency, but continued use eventually decreased motivation, productivity and/or efficiency. In general, methamphetamine was a "*tool*," a "*medicine*," a "*motivator drug*" or a "*performance enhancer*" that initially put them "*in such a good mood*" and made them feel like a "*bullet-

proof machine." Consequently, they were able to "*go longer, go harder and get more done*." In Aotearoa-New Zealand this process is commonly referred to as being "*out the gate.*" Whilst in this over-stimulated "*buzz*" mode they are thinking about "*the things that you can achieve and the projects that you might do*." But while they are "*making plans*" in their minds, in reality "*none of them are coming to fruition*" because when they "*comedown*" either "*the motivation has gone*" or they have "*moved on to something else*."

Physiological functioning

For over half, drug use impacted upon physiological functioning. This included: (a) developing a "*smoker's cough*," (b) reduced "*liver function*," lung capacity or memory recall, (c) increased blood pressure or cholesterol level, (d) aggravation of asthma or sinusitis, and (e) "*damage*" to teeth. For some, physical fitness decreased because they "*stopped exercising*." A few expressed concern methamphetamine may have "*fried my brain*." When first in recovery, Interviewee-11 (female, 48) had a "*problem tripping over words*," but this issue resolved itself relatively quickly. Post-methamphetamine use, Interviewee-20 (male, 44) had to naturally "*heal*" from the "*neurological*" impact drugs had on the "*receivers and receptors*" in his brain (whilst regular exercise "*healed*" his lungs). Interviewee-24 (female, 42) was told methamphetamine "*burns holes in your brain*," but "*doesn't feel slower*" neurologically. Likewise, Interviewee-17 (male, 46) was told methamphetamine burns out "*brain receptors*," but believes his "*brain is still wiring*" normally.

Sleep deprivation

In 1929, chemist Gordon Alles was the first person to prepare then self-administer amphetamine, which resulted in a "sleepless night" (Rasmussen, 2008: 6). Like Alles, the direct physiological effects of methamphetamine caused all interviewees to experience sleep deprivation. Typically, after two nights without sleep they could "*feel it*" because their "*mental state was not right*." Then after being awake for three nights they felt "*wired*," "*on edge*," "*frayed*" or "*fried*." And by the fourth day they would be "*fucking tripping*." However, the length of time without "*proper*" sleep varied greatly. A few

never missed more than two nights before they "*needed*" sleep, while others stayed awake for four days before their mind "*unravelled*" and their body started "*closing down*." At the extreme of the continuum, Interviewee-22 (male, 43) would "*regularly stay up for two weeks*." When he finally "*crashed*" he could "*crash for 3 days*" and "*then get back on it*." Likewise, Interviewee-31 (female, 34) "*would go 3 weeks without sleeping*," and then "*sleep for 4 days.*" After three or four days without sleep they typically started hallucinating, which began by "*catching a glimpse of something*" out of the corner of their eye and ended in seeing "*shadow people*." For at least five interviewees, entering this "*enlightened state*" was a key attraction to being "*out the gate*." When their body was "*wiped out and depleted*" they would receive a final "*squirt of inspiration*" or experience "*lightbulb moments*." As Interviewee-20 (male, 44) put it: "*At the darkest hour you will have the brightest moments*."

Diet and weight

For at least two-thirds, methamphetamine use impacted upon diet and weight. Because methamphetamine suppresses appetite (Rasmussen, 2008), many "*lost more and more weight*." As a result, they looked "*rundown*" or "*unwell*," or at worst "*gaunt*" or "*very skinny*." Many would "*force*" themselves to eat because they "*knew*" they "*should be putting stuff*" in their body. But this often consisted of "*shitty food*" such as "*junk food,*" "*milkshakes*," "*chocolate*" and "*cupcakes*." Even though Interviewee-32 (male, 31) believes methamphetamine "*eats away at you from the inside out*," weight loss was not inevitable. For example, Interviewee-20 (male, 44) said methamphetamine made him "*fat and lazy*." When on a "*binge*" he was "*sitting around for hours doing nothing but talking shit*," and when coming-down was a "*poor eater*" who "*didn't want to exercise*." Likewise, Interviewees 22 (male, 42) and 23 (male, 43) "*never lost any weight*." And interviewee-15 (male, 46) worked hard to conceal his use, so was "*always eating even though I didn't want to*." In "*trying to hide*" his use he became "*a chameleon hiding in reality*."

Sexual behaviour

Despite interviewees' not being specifically asked about sexual conduct, almost half revealed the way methamphetamine influenced sexual behaviour. For at least a quarter, "*the sexual component*" was an important part of their attraction to methamphetamine. Whilst "*buzzing*" they enjoyed "*great*" or "*fantastic*" sex, sometimes "*all night long*." However, Interviewee-11 (female, 48) believes methamphetamine brought out the "*worst sexual depravities*" within her (such as attending "*swinging sex parties*" with her husband). And for Interviewee-6 (male, 50) the "*psychological binding*" established between methamphetamine and sex means he finds it difficult "*to be sexually aroused without meth*." Nevertheless, at least four interviewees had little interest in sex because all they wanted to do was "*get fried*" and "*smoke as much*" as possible.

Skin complications

Whilst not all interviewees were asked about methamphetamine's effects on skin, only five mentioned an adverse reaction (such as "*sores*" or "*scabs*" from picking). Yet even more said they neither scratched their skin nor developed sores. Unlike the 'faces of meth' campaign (https://facesofmeth.us), it cannot be determined physiologically let alone at face value who is or is not a frequent methamphetamine user. In fact, at least half successfully concealed their methamphetamine use for an extended period of time from their family, children, friends and/or co-workers. For Interviewee-8 (female, 49), successful concealment from co-workers required becoming "*a really good actress*." Seven interviewees managed to conceal their methamphetamine use from their intimate partner, most for many years. For example, Interviewee-15's partner said she "*had no idea*" she had been living with a frequent methamphetamine user for over three years.

Impact on mental health

Regarding the way drug use impacted on mental health, drug use (but especially methamphetamine) firstly exerted a positive effect then increased depression, paranoia, anxiety and isolation.

Temporary positive effect

For at least three-quarters, methamphetamine exerted a temporary positive effect on mental health. In the beginning, methamphetamine use was "*amazing*" and "*exhilarating*" because the "*mental clarity*" it provided was "*unbelievable.*" The effect was "*like an awakening*" that made them feel "*alive*," "*bullet-proof*" and "*really good*" about themselves. As a result, they felt more "*open*," "*free*" and "*friendly.*" Methamphetamine was called a "*truth serum*" because it made them "*very talkative*" and "*honest.*" Some believe methamphetamine "*really opened*" them up "*spiritually*" because it "*pushed*" them "*deep into soul searching*" by prompting them to "*analyse*" their (adverse) life history. Inteviewee-4 (female, 51) would sit for "*hours thinking and regressing*" and "*going through each part of my life and finding out more and more about myself.*" But she realised "*it doesn't take long*" for methamphetamine to "*turn on you*" and "*drag you down.*" She believes methamphetamine firstly makes you feel like "*you are just the best thing ever*" but "*then it is telling you, 'Now look at you, you fucking loser'.*" For Interviewee-7 (female, 49), methamphetamine initially "*took all my problems away*," but slowly "*created its own set of problems*" (e.g. imprisonment). Likewise, Interviewee-2's wife said methamphetamine was "*definitely not*" the solution to his psychological distress because he ended up in a "*massive black hole*" of "*depression*" after losing his business whilst trying to quit.

Depression

Half experienced depression-like states during or after drug use. For most, drugs were initially used to help "*combat depression*," but continued use eventually "*accentuated*" their depression. Specifically, the methamphetamine binge-then-comedown caused "*mood swings*" that were "*like a two-ton pendulum, where the highs are just fantastic but coming down was almost unconscious on the couch.*" At worst, they felt like their "*soul had gone*," which made them feel "*depressed*," "*miserable*," "*a sense of impending doom*" and experience "*self-loathing*" and "*suicidal thoughts.*"

Isolating behaviour

Closely coupled to methamphetamine-induced depression is the tendency to become "*more distant*" and "*isolated*" from people. They became "*more withdrawn from family and everything*" as continued use made them "*lose trust in people*" and become more "*socially anxious,*" "*suspicious*" and "*introverted.*" "*Not wanting to engage*" with non-methamphetamine users meant they would "*push people away*." Consequently, they ended up "*locking*" themselves away in their "*own little bubble*" with a small group of fellow users. Nevertheless, Interviewee-28 (male, 38) "*would always be out and about doing stuff.*"

Paranoia

Such "*hermit*"-like behaviour is closely connected to the paranoid thinking that is common to methamphetamine use (Connell, 1968; Sommers et al. 2006; McKetin, 2018). Almost three-quarters experienced paranoia, which included thinking family members "*were all against*" them or "*they were being watched*" by police. In this "*heightened state of consciousness*," they could hear the "*slightest noise outside*" or were "*thinking that people were trying to get in*." Interviewee-17 (male, 46) said methamphetamine "*makes you think everything is a conspiracy*" and "*everything is watching you.*" Yet when probed further, some admitted such paranoia was partially justified. For example, Interviewee-11 (female, 48) was paranoid "*a lot*" about the police discovering her husband was a "*meth cook.*" Yet the police did discover his manufacturing lab and both were imprisoned. Likewise, Interviewee-34 (male, 29) became "*more and more paranoid about getting caught*" for dealing GHB, and thought his phone was "*tapped.*" Yet after his friend was imprisoned he discovered "*the police had both phones and all the text messages.*" Interviewee-25 (male, 41) was paranoid about getting caught by his wife, which he agreed was "*pretty rational*" because he was caught. By contrast, Interviewee-32 (male, 31) did not experience paranoia because he "*didn't give anyone a reason to be after me.*" Likewise, Interviewee-22 (male, 43) used his "*strong mind*" to override his paranoia and hallucinations.

Anxiety

Closely coupled to methamphetamine-induced paranoia is an increase in anxiety, which was mentioned by over half. Interviewee-4 (female, 51) believes anxiety "*is just what the drug does*" to users. Increased anxiety was also attributed to the "*whole enhancement of it all*," wherein "*adrenaline-fueled*" emotions produce "*excitement and drama*" that causes life to operate at a "*faster pace*." For Interviewee-10 (female, 48), "*all this action*" made life "*seem so fucking frantic*," resulting in her feeling she had "*no control*" over these "*overwhelming*" effects. [3] For some, methamphetamine merely "*heightened*" their "*drug-induced*" anxiety, while others suffered "*horrible anxiety*" and were "*anxious all the time*." Due to feeling like "*living on edge all the time*," they could never be "*relaxed or at peace*." Instead, they would be "*over-thinking shit*" and "*turning molehills into mountains*," or "*up and down everywhere*" unable to "*focus on anything*." Nevertheless, methamphetamine had a psychological calming effect on Interviewees 33 (female, 31) and 35 (male, 23), who could "*just sit there*" without moving "*for days*" playing video games. This indicates they were self-mediating undiagnosed ADHD (Interviewee-35 believes he "*probably*" has ADHD). Likewise, Interviewee-24 (female, 42) developed a physical "*knot of anxiety*" in the side of her torso following her partner's death by suicide, but after onset "*the knot disappeared*" and "*all of a sudden I felt like myself again*" (temporarily).

Physical violence

During WWII, American, British, German and Japanese military forces dispensed amphetamine to soldiers because of its subjective mood-altering effects. Amphetamine's consciousness raising properties increased soldiers' "fighting spirits" (Rasmussen, 2008: 82). Likewise, Sommers et al. (2006: 1476) initially stated methamphetamine use "heightens the risk for violence," but because two-thirds of respondents did not commit violence concluded "violence is not an inevitable outcome" of even chronic methamphetamine

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3   Research by Sommers et al. (2006: 1475) found the most common language respondents used to describe their behavior when on methamphetamine was "loss of control."

use. [4] This is because the complex interaction between personality and environmental factors exert a powerful influence on methamphetamine-related violent outcomes. Like longitudinal research in Aotearoa-New Zealand which found "most" methamphetamine users "did not engage in violence" (Foulds et al. 2020: 5), only six interviewees admitted to methamphetamine-associated physical violence (on either their young children or partner). Yet they disagree that methamphetamine "*causes*" violence, instead they believe methamphetamine "*heightens*" or "*amplifies*" underlying "*anger issues*." Thus, Interviewee-2's wife said "*he was always so kind*" to her whilst using because he was the kind of person who would never "*purposely try to hurt*" her. Likewise, Interviewee-13 (male, 47) said he "*would never hit*" his wife or "*go out and start a fight*" because he has "*strong morals and ethics*."

Permanent character change

As highlighted above, methamphetamine use induces or is associated with a myriad of transitory changes to interviewees' character and behaviour. Interviewee-4 (female, 51) believes methamphetamine makes "*people change*" because they "*lose touch*" with their "*normal self*." Thus when Interviewee-24 (female, 42) "*looked in the mirror*" she "*couldn't see me*"; instead, she thought she "*was somebody else*." Some "*lost*" their "*morals*" as the "*good angel*" on their "*shoulder got quieter*" while the "*bad angel got louder,*" resulting in them "*doing things*" they weren't "*proud of*." For example, Interviewee-7 (female, 49) became a "*really bad parent*" because all she "*cared about was meth*." Nevertheless, others stayed morally "*true*" to themselves because they are the "*kind of person*" who would never "*steal or take from people*." Whilst Interviewee-31 (female, 34) believes methamphetamine users "*are never the same after meth,*" the majority do not display clear signs methamphetamine use has permanently changed them physically, psychologically or characterologically. Many believe they are "*the same person*" they were before onset and that their "*core never changed*"; instead, "*it was just*

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4   Likewise, a comparison between 'regular meth users' and 'non-meth drug users' found no difference regarding a history of violent crimes (Gizzi and Gerkin, 2010).

suppressed" during use. While Interviewee-19 (female, 45) believes she is "*three-quarters of the way*" back to achieving "*wholeness*," it took Interviewee-20 (male, 44) 3-years "*to come right*." And Interviewee-11 (female, 48) experienced "*no ill effects*" from seven years of constant methamphetamine use, and thus "*can honestly say it is definitely recoverable*." This self-report data is supported by psychopharmacological research, which found that despite long-term high dose methamphetamine use participants' neurocognitive performance (motor function, explicit memory, executive function and working memory) is either slightly lower or no different than controls. Thus the authors' concluded "the magnitude of the differences was small and may not have major functional significance" (Johanson et al., 2006).

Spiritual health

Interviewees were asked to reveal their religious or spiritual beliefs and involvement. For two-thirds, neither their family nor school exposed them to organised religion. However, half experienced involvement in a Christian organisation for part of their life. Only three interviewees have been involved in a religious organisation post-methamphetamine use. Nevertheless, one-third consider themselves to have been a "*spiritual person*" most if not all their life, while another seven have been "*into spiritualty*" for part or most of their adulthood. This includes being a "*solitary eclectic witch*," an "*empath*," a "*healer*," or a person with "*intuition*" or a "*spiritual connection*" who believes a *higher power* is "*guiding*" and "*protecting*" them. Some believe(d) in "*karma*," others in New Age spiritualism (e.g. paganism, "*numerology*," "*yin-yang*" dualism, "*working with crystals*"), while Interviewee-8 (female, 49) stems "*from a line of women who can talk to the dead*."   Half may be considered predominantly a "*realist*" who believes in "*science*" and "*evolution*," despite also holding some spiritual belief. As Interviewee-13 (male, 47) put it: "*I just need to see something to believe in something*." The females are more spiritual, the males more realist.

Drug use had no influence on the religious or spiritual beliefs for almost two-thirds. Nevertheless, methamphetamine, ecstasy, psychedelics or cannabis did help increase religious faith or spiritual belief for one-third. Drugs "*pulled*

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down barriers" and "*opened the mind,*" which allowed interviewees to be "*more in touch*" with their spirituality and feelings, experience "*oneness with people*" or "*good connections with things.*" However, Interviewee-11 (female, 48) found methamphetamine to be "*soul destroying.*" Even though she "*always held on*" to her "*connection with God*" she felt "*spiritually dead*" inside. This was because she "*lived in a really dark place*" surrounded by "*dark people.*"

For about one-third of interviewees, religion or spiritualty helped to decrease drug use and/or maintain the state of desistance. A body of research has shown a higher level of spirituality correlates with less mental distress, less substance abuse, and greater well-being (Seligman, 2011). Religious or spiritual involvement and belief varied for these 13 interviewees.

For five interviewees, formal participation in AA-based 12-step philosophy aided desistance. Interviewee-8 (female, 49) initially completed a 3-month live-in rehabilitation program, then participated in "*many aftercare programs,*" including AA meetings. For her, seeking "*spiritual*" guidance from Jesus or deceased relatives has been "*very helpful toward my recovery,*" because '*it helps to take the load off in stressful times when I am not sure what the answer is.*" Interviewee-11 (female, 48) "*wanted to get clean so badly*" she would pray to God to "*help relieve me from my addiction.*" Being sent to prison on methamphetamine-related charges "*felt like it was God sent*" because she was introduced to Narcotics Anonymous (NA). At NA she "*immediately found something that clicked,*" and knew if she "*worked my program,*" she "*could stay clean for the rest of my life.*" For interviewee-10 (female, 48), desisting from methamphetamine use was "*a by-product*" of quitting heroin, her "*drug of choice.*" With assistance from NA, she considers quitting heroin to have been a "*miracle*" because she "*prayed to God and he took away my obsession.*" She was fully committed to NA for five-years as she finally found "*my tribe,*" or a place of belonging. Interviewee-15 (male, 46) successfully completed a 30-day AA program, which made him believe "*there is something higher than me.*" Instead of God, he chose the ocean as his higher power—because it cannot be controlled—and surfing as a form of meditation. Whilst attending the program he participated in meditation sessions, but within three-months was attaining more psychological benefit

from walks in nature and surfing. As he said, "*As time went on I just got more out of going forward, instead of sitting there with my eyes closed*."

For four interviewees, religious belief and/or participation in a formal religious organization aided desistance. Throughout his methamphetamine use, interviewee-34 (male, 29) "*always maintained an Anglican conviction*," and after hitting "*rock bottom*" his Christian faith played such an important part that "*I don't think I would have got clean without God*." For interviewee-14 (male, 47), becoming a committed member of a Pentecostal church helped maintain the state of desistance for about three-years (until dissolution of his marriage precipitated another period of use). And at the end of her methamphetamine use interviewee-29 (female, 38) felt let-down and cheated by the people around her. Despite not being Christian she fell to her knees and "*asked the Lord to take it all away*." She then "*woke up the next day and never touched the stuff again*." She subsequently joined a Church group because she "*wanted to belong to somewhere that wasn't into drugs*," and was, instead, "*into something really good*."

The remaining four interviewees drew upon their spiritual faith for assistance. Interviewee-32 (male, 31) believes his grandfather's spirit is watching over him, which acts as a deterrent because if he were to "*make the wrong move*" he would receive some kind of karmic retribution. For interviewee-28 (male, 38), "*dabbling*" in new age spiritualism "*played a part in taking me in a different direction*" away from methamphetamine use. Likewise, interviewee-35 (male, 23) experienced a spiritual epiphany when he unexpectedly encountered estranged relatives when visiting a *marae* (a traditional meeting place for Māori communities). His paternal aunties then showed him pictures of his ancestors hanging on the walls and told him he was "*a direct descendant to that marae*." Following this "*turning point*" experience he "*decided I wanted to be clean*." Finally, interviewee-4 (female, 51) believes her spiritual faith helped her end her methamphetamine use, because it allowed her to conceptualize her use as a positive personal growth experience. Despite the negative effects, her experience with methamphetamine was ultimately "*a good thing*" that "*needed*" to happen to help improve her life and marriage.

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Discussion and conclusion

Despite extensive poly-drug use and consistently encountering adversity across multiple life domains, two-thirds of interviewees have—like the general population—experienced either minor or no serious physical health issues throughout their life-course. As a result, physical health issues only weakly influenced their drug use. Yet in sharp contrast to the general population, three-quarters either consistently or periodically suffered serious mental and/or emotional distress. Thus mental distress—especially depression, emotional pain, stress or anxiety—contributed to drug use for all but three interviewees. Their drug use provided partial relief from emotional pain or temporary pleasure as they strived to adapt to adversity. Their drug of choice was utilized to 'mediate' on behalf of an imbalanced or dysregulated naturally self-healing system that had difficulty managing and maintaining typical emotional responses. Against extant knowledge, this research shows a weak bidirectional relationship between physical and mental health. Whilst the trajectories follow a similar path over the life-course (see Table 2), interviewees' physical health has been significantly higher than their mental health.

In line with extant knowledge, methamphetamine use initially increased motivation, productivity, energy, self-confidence, a sense of well-being and a feeling of euphoria. Continued use then impacted negatively on productivity, physiological functioning, sleep and diet and increased depression, paranoia, anxiety and isolation. This expectant process appears to align with a popular narrative about methamphetamine use in Aotearoa-New Zealand, which a journalist summarised in this way: "*Try the drug even once, and you're addicted for ever, hurtling down an unstoppable spiral of despair and destruction*" (Donovan, 2020). However, for almost half extensive methamphetamine and drug use exerted only minimal negative impact on their physical health following desistance. Post-methamphetamine use, in only one case has methamphetamine clearly had a direct contribution on physical health. Thus emerging from methamphetamine use relatively unscathed physically was unexpectedly common for this group of former frequent users. Also contrary to this popular narrative, only a small minority admitted to

methamphetamine-related aggression. More generally, the majority do not display clear signs that methamphetamine use has permanently changed their character. However, an average age of 43 indicates it is too early to make judgments about the long-term effects of methamphetamine use. Since this analysis is based on interviewees' self-assessment, then a full medical examination would obviously provide more robust evidence of their physical health.

It should be noted, however, the main effects on physical and mental health analysed only represent effects that appeared during the course of the interview. Since interviewees did not reveal every detail relating to their methamphetamine use, these effects are likely to be more common than reported. But while this analysis indicates common physical and mental effects, there is no "single, uniform career path" (Sommers et al. 2006: 1476) users follow. Except for sleep deprivation, for every main effect methamphetamine exerted on physical or mental health multiple counter-examples exist. In reality, distress and healing is always a unique and personal experience because each individual has to face their own particular life circumstances and cope with them as best they can (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

The human species has evolved through hundreds of thousands of years of adversity and trauma. The most common response to adversity is resilience—after a period of mental distress there is typically a return to the previous level of functioning (Seligman, 2011). Moreover, the phenomenon of 'post-traumatic growth' indicates trauma can set the stage for renewed growth (ibid). Positive psychology has shown positive mental health is not merely the absence of mental distress, but rather the presence of positive emotion, engagement, meaning, good relationships and accomplishment—what Seligman (2011: 183) terms human "flourishing." This life-course analysis of *people seeking wellness* shows that mental distress and frequent drug-and-methamphetamine use can be a recoverable physical and mental health disruption. Post-methamphetamine use, interviewees physical and mental health and overall life satisfaction have improved (see Table 2). At the time of the interview, interviewees' mental health and life satisfaction were, on average, the highest they have been.

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This relative flourishing is not due to formal religious involvement because only three have been involved in a religious organisation post-methamphetamine use, while half are predominately realists. Nevertheless, for one-third spiritualty in some form did help to cease methamphetamine use and/or helps maintain the state of desistance. As interviewee-11 (female, 48) said, "*the best thing I have got back since quitting meth is my connection with my higher self.*" The various spiritual experiences highlighted above show desistance is a process that is sometimes the product of a sudden, unplanned but positive event. Such *quantum change* or *transformational change* involves profound religious, spiritual or secular experiences that not only suddenly alter drug use patterns but also radically redefine self-perception, personal identity and interpersonal relationships. By contrast, the recovery process may also take the form of *incremental change* involving a more gradual time-encompassing reduction or cessation of methamphetamine use. In this process, events and circumstances lead the individual away from methamphetamine and the culture in which his or her methamphetamine use was nested. By utilizing internal and external resources, recovery can come from a surrender and transcendence of self or an assertion of self (or both) (White, 2007).

A prior analysis of the interviewees' romantic relationships and parenting (Bax, 2021c) found that for all but one of the parents parenting contributed to help decrease or desist from illegal drug use (especially methamphetamine). Their methamphetamine use exerted "*a huge impact on my children's lives*"; for example, eight of the mothers were either separated from, gave up, or lost custody of at least one child for an extended period of time. Thus realizing their children "*didn't deserve*" the unstable lifestyle that comes with long-term high-dose methamphetamine use, and desiring to be a "*more productive parent*" and a "*good influence,*" helped contribute to desistance. Since their children's wellbeing provides a strong motivation to maintain the state of desistance, some or all their children are now receiving appropriate parenting as their more stable post-methamphetamine lives enables them to fulfil their conventional role-related behaviour. As the aforementioned 2018 government inquiry into mental health and addiction stated, relationships with family members "give lives meaning and provide a potential path back to wholeness" (Paterson et al., 2018: p. 46).

Importantly, 22-of-the-35 interviewees desisted from methamphetamine use without professional treatment or rehabilitation, thereby adding to the already extensive evidence of "natural recovery" from frequent drug use (Granfield and Cloud, 1999). As Granfield and Cloud (1999) show, recovery from addiction can occur when individuals develop a renewed stake in conventional life, invest in prosocial relationships, and avoid drug users and the situations and cues associated with drug use. In fact, Aotearoa-New Zealand citizens told the 2018 government inquiry that mental and social wellbeing is a function of: good physical health, healthy relationships with family and community, meaningful work and a strong connection to land, culture and history. As the inquiry's report concluded, "mental wellbeing is most likely when we are safe and secure and feel connected, valued, worthy, accepted for who we are, and hopeful for the future" (Paterson, et al., 2018: 82).

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Tertiary or relational desistance: contested belonging

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Abstract

In this paper, we aim to review and elaborate the concept of tertiary (or relational) desistance and to set an agenda for further research on how and with what consequences criminalised people experience, or fail to experience, belonging. Borrowing the language of migration scholars, we suggest that both crime and punishment produce an array of problems associated with 'contested belonging' (Davis, Ghorashi and Smets, 2018). The ongoing development and increasing application of the concepts of tertiary and relational desistance has helped to expose the importance of analysing these problems, and of seeking solutions to them. While criminological work in this area remains at a comparatively early stage, it already seems obvious that we can neither properly understand nor effectively support desistance without carefully attending to questions of belonging.

Keywords: Desistance, Punishment, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, Belonging

Introduction

In this paper, we aim to review and elaborate the concept of tertiary (or relational) desistance. That concept highlights the role of recognition by others and of the development of 'belonging' in the processes by which people move away from offending and towards social integration.

The contribution of this paper rests mainly in setting an agenda for further research on how and with what consequences criminalised people experience, or fail to experience, belonging. Borrowing the language of migration scholars, we suggest that both crime and punishment produce an array of problems associated with 'contested belonging' (Davis, Ghorashi and Smets, 2018). The ongoing development and increasing application of the concepts of tertiary and relational desistance has helped to expose the importance of analysing these problems, and of seeking solutions to them. While criminological work in this area remains at a comparatively early stage, it already seems obvious that we can neither properly understand nor effectively support desistance without carefully attending to questions of belonging.

We begin, in the next section, by elaborating the emergence of the idea of tertiary desistance, rooting it in earlier work that drew a distinction between primary and secondary desistance. We also discuss Nugent and Schinkel's (2016) clarification and refinement of these terms as act, identity and relational desistance. Next, we review a range of empirical studies that have employed the concept of tertiary desistance in making sense of research findings in different settings and with different populations. Our intention here is not to provide a comprehensive review of empirical evidence about the importance (or not) of tertiary desistance but rather to use these studies to help us elaborate and clarify the concept. We then proceed to discuss findings from and analyses of our own research (conducted independently of each other) which, we think, offer further important clues about the struggle for belonging and its place in desistance processes. In our concluding discussion, we draw these threads together and consider the implications for the development of the concept of tertiary or relational desistance, and for how we might further

explore the importance and experience of belonging for people who have been criminalised.

The three forms of desistance

Twenty years ago, drawing on the work of Lemert (1948), Maruna and Farrall (2004) were the first to draw an important distinction between primary and secondary desistance: the former relates merely to behaviour, the latter implies a related shift in identity. They posited that shifts in identity and self-concept matter in securing longer-term, sustained changes in behaviour as opposed to mere lulls in offending:

> '…secondary desistance [means]… the movement from the behavior of non-offending to the assumption of a role or identity of a non-offender or "changed person". In secondary desistance, crime not only stops, but "existing roles become disrupted" and a "reorganization based upon a new role or roles will occur" (Lemert 1951: 76)' (Maruna and Farrall, 2004: 175).

As they also noted, secondary desistance is likely to be especially important for people who have been heavily involved in crime and criminalisation, with all of the attendant implications for the internalisation of stigmatised identities.

Almost a decade ago, one of us went on to propose the concept of 'tertiary desistance' (McNeill, 2014; 2015), referring 'not just to shifts in behaviour or identity but to shifts in one's sense of belonging to a (moral and political) community' (McNeill, 2015: 201). The argument, based on a range of influential desistance studies (for example, Maruna, 2001; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Bottoms and Shapland, 2011; Weaver, 2013) was that:

> '…since identity is socially constructed and negotiated, securing long-term change depends on how one sees oneself, on

how one is seen by others (Maruna and Farrall, 2004) and on how one sees one's place in society. Putting it more simply, desistance is a social and political process as much as a personal one.' (McNeill, 2015: 201)

As this initial definition makes clear, questions of identity and of belonging (that is, questions of secondary and tertiary desistance) are intimately connected, in that both are fundamentally and profoundly connected to the nature of our social relationships (Weaver, 2015). Indeed, while those who study desistance from crime have differed in terms of the priority given to individual and structural aspects of the process, few seriously dispute the importance of social bonds, social capital and social relations in the process. Moreover, if we are at all interested in the outcomes of desistance processes, in securing long-term desistance, or in the question of *what people desist into*, then we must be concerned with *social* integration (see Kirkwood and McNeill, 2015).

Of course, this line of thinking has long been apparent in that sub-strand of desistance theories that stands in the control theory tradition, most notably Sampson and Laub's (1993) theory of informal social control which linked the development of desistance in early adulthood to age-related opportunities for attachment to social institutions (primarily via education, work and/or family formation).

Over the last decade or so, several desistance studies have also highlighted what happens when desistance is attempted in the absence of such attachments. For example, Bottoms (2013) argued that some people in the Sheffield study (of young adults involved in persistent offending) desisted through a form of extreme 'situational self-binding' and social isolation. Although this outcome was relatively rare in the Sheffield study, evidence from other studies might suggest that, for a significant sub-set of people attempting desistance, isolation (or detachment) and not integration (or attachment) is the outcome. For example, Calverley's (2009) exploration of ethnicity and desistance suggested that the Black and Dual Heritage men he

interviewed in the London borough where his study was located faced the greatest structural and cultural obstacles to desistance -- and that they tried to sustain desistance through self-isolation.

Nugent and Schinkel (2016) discussed similarly bleak findings from their (independent) studies of two quite different populations in Scotland. Whereas Schinkel had explored the experiences of adult men during and after serving long sentences, Nugent had examined the attempts of young people in trouble and at risk of detention. In both studies, participants aspired to a life beyond crime and criminalisation, and made efforts to secure it, but they suffered what Nugent and Schinkel (2016) termed 'the pains of desistance'; namely, isolation, the failure to achieve their goals, and resulting hopelessness. In light of these findings, they argued that structural and cultural barriers to desistance must be addressed (see also McNeill, 2016); otherwise promoting hope and supporting *personal* transformation may be nothing short of cruel.

This illustration from their paper drives home the point:

'[Kevin] struggled to name anyone he could rely on after he had left [the youth service]. He tried desperately to make something of himself and to prove to his family that he was worthy of a second chance. However, unable to get a job and being repeatedly confronted with his lack of education and prospects, his attempts at act-desistance in a relational vacuum eventually became too much for too little, and he cracked. By the final interview he had re-offended and had committed his most serious offence to date. His exasperation with his mere existence was exposed as he said the night of the offence he had had enough and went 'looking for a fight' and took his chance when he got it.

Interviewer: Is there anything you fear losing if you went to prison?

Kevin: Nothing.
Interviewer: Nothing?
Kevin: Nothing.' (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016: 578-9).

Nugent and Schinkel (2016) went on to develop an alternative conceptualisation of the three forms of desistance:

'[W]e propose using the terms 'act-desistance' for nonoffending, 'identity desistance' for the internalization of a non-offending identity and 'relational desistance' for recognition of change by others. We argue that this terminology describes and differentiates between the different aspects of desistance better than 'primary', 'secondary' and 'tertiary' desistance, as it does not suggest sequencing in time or importance'[1] (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016: 3).

They also differentiate between three sub-levels of relational (or tertiary) desistance; 'the micro-level refers to the individual's immediate social setting; the meso-level to their wider community and the macro-level to society as a whole' (p3). They found that, while some participants had access to tertiary desistance on the micro-level, through family members who believed in them, there was little hope of this on the meso- and macro-levels. Nugent and Schinkel (2016: 12) summed up their argument as follows: 'maintaining act desistance can lead to the pain of isolation, while the need to achieve identity desistance in the face of a lack of relational desistance or social capital leads to the pain of goal failure'. Crucially, Nugent and Schinkel (2016: 3) stress that although act desistance and identity desistance may often involve others, individuals can and do achieve both forms of desistance for themselves. By contrast, relational (or tertiary) desistance is, by definition, not in their hands; rather, it depends on social reaction to their change efforts. As McNeill (2015) had said initially of tertiary desistance, it is a social and a political process.

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1   It's worth noting that, while Maruna and Farrall (2004) did conceive of primary and secondary desistance as phases, they did not insist on a straightforwardly sequential relationship between them. They did lay particular stress on the importance of secondary desistance. With respect to tertiary desistance, McNeill (2014, 2015) described these as aspects and not as (sequential) stages of desistance.

Studies of tertiary or relational desistance

Since their introduction into the literature, the concepts of tertiary or relational desistance have been applied and developed in studies from a wide range of settings and with quite different populations.

Villeneuve, Dufour and Farrall (2020) draw on the findings of a scoping review on 'Assisted Desistance in Formal Settings' to argue that the notion of tertiary desistance may help us understand the criminal justice practice mechanisms that can help to sustain change efforts:

> 'Positive feedback in the form of staying committed, encouraging change, acknowledging successes, working with, seeing would-be desisters as 'citizens' (not offenders), all emerge as components of assisted desistance. Those components are consistent with the definition of tertiary desistance proposed by McNeill (2014, 2016). Such practices give desisters opportunities to feel like active members of society, and help them overcome obstacles to their social integration. Formal change agents can help would-be desisters rebuild meaningful intra- and inter-personal ties thus contributing to bridge the gaps between 'offenders' and wider society' (Villeneuve, et al., 2022: 96).

So, while professional helpers may not themselves be in a position to provide the belonging and social acceptance required for tertiary desistance, they may play an important role at the micro-level in supporting and sustaining change and in helping people move towards social integration.

In a Dutch study of 23 men's experiences of parole supervision, Doekhie, et al., (2018) arrived at somewhat similar conclusions. Eleven of the men interviewed reported receiving some form of recognition for their desistance efforts. While for 3 men this recognition came from family members or partners, for 8 men it came from their parole supervisor; and this recognition could be powerful. As one respondent reported:

'Isaac: She [PO] is the only person who believed in me. (..) She showed me she was not just a PO, but a person. And that's what is [important] to me, you know. You have to be able to forget your job sometimes and just experience it together with this person.

JD: What did she mean to you?

Isaac: She gave me confidence not to do stupid things. Because I will make it on my own, but it's hard to believe it yourself. You have a label, so relapsing is easy. Hanging in there is the hard part. And she motivated me 'don't blow it! Think about what you want and what you want is what you are going to do!' […] She says that the way I think [about myself], that is how I have to present myself in life, so I can move on' (Doekhie, et al., 2018: 509).

Here, as the authors note, the parole officer's recognition of Isaac's potential and of his efforts to change helps him to recognise and to trust himself to become the person he aspires to be, thereby also strengthening his identity desistance. Sadly, such positive experiences were not the norm: most parolees in the study experienced supervision as being mainly surveillance-oriented and not very helpful for desistance, but where officers like Isaac's were seen as 'mentors… [who] used their discretionary power to adjust conditions, creating space for trial and error' (Doekhie, et al., 2018: 491), their influence was notable.

Ugelvik (2022) also examines the role of correctional staff and others in supporting tertiary desistance, drawing on findings from the Oslo Re-Entry Study (ORES); a longitudinal qualitative project which follows 14 male participants, all of whom had been involved in repeated offending (mainly related to drugs and violence) and most of whom were in their 30s or 40s at first interview. They were purposively selected as 'critical cases', having been identified by correctional staff as people trying to make significant life changes. Most of the men had also spent years in prison; many had been in and out for a decade or more.

Ugelvik's (2022: 629) analysis focuses in particular on the 'transformative power of trust', particularly within the context of risk-oriented penal institutions that tend to construct people as untrustworthy. Drawing on several examples, he concludes that:

> 'mutual trust relationships in prisons may work as the foundation for what King (2013b) has described as 'early desistance narratives' and for what Hunter and Farrall (2018: 306) have called a 'testing ground' for the viability of a non-offending future self… The experience of being trusted can lead to hope and the belief that a better future is possible, post-release. Trust that is acted upon can therefore be seen as a practical and specific way for individuals to experience being recognized as fellow human beings, and not just as offenders. From such a perspective, trust can be an important part of the process leading to tertiary desistance' (Ugelvik, 2022: 635).

Here, trust can also be characterised as a key feature of relational desistance at the micro-level; and it also seems important in aiding the development of primary and secondary desistance. Drawing on Farrall, et al. (2014), Ugelvik (2022: 635) suggests that trusting relationships not just with professionals, but also with family, friends and (new) colleagues are built slowly through the desistance process in an active process of 'negotiation between desisters and their social environments'. This negotiation of trust stands in stark contrast to more common experiences of distrust and misrecognition. The potency of trust in supporting desistance may arise at least partly because criminalised people so rarely receive the recognition that trust confers.

Gålnander's (2020) Swedish respondents fared less well. His was a prospective longitudinal study that followed the desistance processes of 10 women, involving four interviews carried out over the course of two years (2016-2018). The women were aged between 23 and 53 and self-identified as being in the early stages of desistance at the outset of the study (notably unlike

Ugelvik's participants). All had long histories of involvement with street crime related to substance use issues. As Gålnander (2020: 1307) notes, '[a]ll ten women had spent decades as outsiders, segregated and excluded from mainstream society'. Most had grown up in poverty; many had been in the care of the state as children and/or had been imprisoned. They had little experience of education or employment. Most had post-traumatic stress disorders; in five cases this was related to repeated violent victimisation by intimate partners.

In other words, at the outset of the study, these women were a long way from experiencing a sense of belonging in mainstream society. As one woman put it: 'I feel like I don't even know how to be – I mean, what do they talk about, normal people?' (Gålnander, 2020: 1307). Yet, they were compelled to attempt to move in that direction, making stigma management a major concern. As Gålnander (2020: 1307) notes:

> 'With strained or even severed relations to their families, the women sought recognition primarily from acquaintances or strangers. As they started to approach mainstream society, they were actively aware of their need to cope with discreditable information about their pasts'.

One of the main ways the women tackled this problem was by keeping secrets; by avoiding discussions of their pasts. Such was the gendered stigmatisation that they had experienced (and that they feared) that they were unable to mobilise their recovery or desistance as an asset in finding a community in which they might be accepted or even celebrated as a 'wounded healer' (McNeill and Maruna, 2007).

Ultimately, Gålnander (2020: 1316) concludes that:

> '…anticipation of further stigma stemming from internalization of multidimensional stigma in relation to their pasts restricted or even prohibited some of the women from interacting with mainstream society… the women were

convinced that little to no good could come of displaying discreditable information when approaching conventional society. This made them avoid socializing, thereby isolating themselves from mainstream society.'

Gålnander's work helps us understand why and how the gendered (and therefore structural) dynamics of stigmatisation create major obstacles to even attempting (far less securing) belonging within a new community. For the women in his study, tertiary desistance seemed a remote prospect.

Rutter and Barr (2021) draw similar conclusions from a comparison of their two independent narrative studies of women's experiences of desistance in northern England. Rutter's (2019, 2020) study involved 13 women, aged between 18-58, attending a women's centre (run by a Community Rehabilitation Company then providing probation services) and focused on the role of relational networks in the women's desistance processes. Barr's (2019) research involved 16 criminalised women aged between 23-60 attending a similar centre. Through the comparison of their findings, Rutter and Barr (2021) argue that the stigmatisation of criminalised women as offenders as 'bad' women and 'bad' mothers *and* as victims meant that it was difficult for them to see themselves and be seen in any other way, limiting the extent to which they could achieve tertiary or relational desistance.

Barr and Hart (2022) take these arguments further, suggesting that 're/integration' into conventional society is often neither desirable nor possible for criminalised women. In particular, they contest the sometimes uncritical promotion of tertiary or relational desistance in ways which effectively responsibilize women (for changing themselves, their social relations and their lives) while denying them the structural support they need and deserve. They also criticise desistance scholars for failing to adequately critique the ways in which both imprisonment in particular and the criminal justice system more generally often frustrate and obstruct desistance (an important theme to which we return at some length in the next section).

Similar arguments about the importance of structural contexts emerge

from Gormally's (2015) research on Glaswegian youth gangs. She stresses how important it is for young people's 'retirement' from gang membership to be recognised by those around them, and for them to have access to other identities and roles within the local community. From her analysis of 37 interviews (15 with young people, 12 with community residents and the rest with staff in services or organisations engaging with the young people), she highlights how the macro-level of relational desistance is important in shaping people's journeys – arguing that policy makers should be careful not to label all groups of young people socializing together as 'gangs' and that there should be greater investment in youth services, intergenerational programmes and opportunities for education and employment. Giving people access to alternative sources of identity at a younger age might allow for earlier desistance from street fighting – the type of offending behaviour most associated with these gangs.

In a very different context and with a very different population, Fox (2015) describes what is possible in terms of community inclusion, even for acutely stigmatised people, when community members and criminal justice agencies are willing to be play an active part in creating the right conditions for reentry. Researching Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) in Vermont, USA, Fox interviewed 57 volunteers, 9 'reentry coordinators' and 20 'core-members'. Core members of CoSA are usually people still under supervision in the community, typically as part of sentences imposed for committing sexual offences. She found that volunteers, by being willing to help with practical needs, by providing feedback and by sharing their own struggles, were able to help the core members see themselves beyond their offence, thereby counteracting the punitive and negative messages that exist on the macro-level of society and that produce and reinforce stigmatised identities. As one core-member said:

> 'They kind of like helped me to see that there's more than just . . . the way that I see myself or the way that I see that the world sees me because it's not all there is' (Fox, 2015: 90).

Importantly, sharing moral space also led to accountability, rather than a risk-based focus on control, and there was a sense of self-fulfilling prophecy that core members could become a force for good in their communities.

This notion – of progressively enabling criminalized people to become community assets – also recurs in Albertson and Hall's (2019) study. They apply a social capital lens to tertiary desistance, examining how a project for military veterans in recovery from addictions allowed them to build relationships and have positive impacts beyond their immediate group. Twenty-three veterans aged between 33 and 70 took part in their study. While the basis for the project's work was building relationships with people in a similar situation, gradated opportunities built upon this foundation. For example, participants could become involved in reaching out to other agencies to give talks, in other forms of civic engagement, in volunteering with other groups and in representing the group at community events. They could also become involved in seeking to influence decision-making at a local and national level. These were all described as steps towards generativity (Maruna, 2001) and the restoration of the veterans' citizenship. In later work based on the same research (Albertson and Albertson 2023), similar steps towards developing greater social capital are mapped against the different levels of relational desistance (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016): from the micro (relationships between group members), to the meso (linking with other services and volunteering in the community) to the macro (input into regional and national service delivery decision making).

Taken together, these studies highlight a number of issues in relation to tertiary or relational desistance. In different ways, they reveal not just the complex relationships between identity change and social reaction, but also the dynamic interactions between micro-level acceptance and recognition, much rarer meso-level opportunities for and experiences of community engagement, and macro-level structures that either generate or, more commonly, frustrate these opportunities. Crucially, they also suggest how structure and agency interact in these processes, creating different relational possibilities for differently situated people (cf. Farrall and Bowling, 1999). For example, the women in Gålnander's (2020) study seem to have

internalised their gendered stigmatisation in a way that makes the building of new social relationships an inherently risky project and one from which they tend to shy away. In effect, they have been relationally disabled or incapacitated by the gendered violence they have experienced; not just interpersonal violence at the hands of men, but also the symbolic and systemic violence attendant on their criminalisation *as women*. The experiences of the men in Ugelvik's (2022) study, by contrast, are very differently gendered. Buoyed by the development of trusting relationships with correctional staff, they are prepared for and enabled to take on these relational risks (for example in seeking, securing and sustaining employment). Indeed, in many cases, they enjoy the rewards of disclosing a criminalised past: crucially, a past that others are willing to consign *to the past*. In Fox's (2015) study, even those convicted of sexual offences – a highly stigmatised and excluded group – find inside the structures of CoSA a safe space to negotiate both relational connection and the identity change that it enables, even within a wider social climate of hostility and rejection.

In sum, while all of these studies attest to the importance of recognition, trust, acceptance and belonging within processes of desistance, taken together, they also reveal just how diverse desisting people's experiences may be. Their prospects are shaped not just by their own personal and institutional histories but also by social structures and by cultural and community dynamics that play out very differently for different people in different contexts. It is also notable that many of the interventions and interactions discussed in these studies focus on the micro-level of recognition by other individuals, with attempts to intervene on the meso- and macro-level much less common.

With this in mind, in the next section of the paper, we turn to our own (independent) work in an effort to dig deeper into the possibilities and impossibilities of belonging for criminalised people; and into attempts to engage with the meso- and macro-level aspects of these processes.

The im/possibilities of belonging

The Lives Sentenced study (Schinkel)

The ESRC-funded 'Lives Sentenced' research, conducted by the second author, examined the experiences and perspectives of people who had received multiple sentences over a relatively long period (10 years for men, 5 years for women), including multiple short-term prison sentences. Between 2014 and 2019, 63 interviews were conducted with 37 individuals in three rounds, which were about two years apart. Most interviews took place in prison. While the participants did not see any of their short prison sentences as being very meaningful by themselves, looking back, the most common meaning given to their accumulation was as 'a waste of life'. A recent paper (Schinkel & Lives Sentenced participants, 2021) discusses how participants felt that they belonged in prison, highlighting how repeated imprisonment in fact counteracts the possibility of tertiary desistance.

The different elements at play were examined using Antonsich's (2010) theoretical lens on belonging. First, for some, the *feeling of belonging* in prison was immediate – those they were imprisoned with were very like them, which even made first-time imprisonment an enjoyable experience for some:

> I bounced in... bounced about like a Y[oung] O[ffender],
> took tae it like a duck to water. Bad. Didnae bother me at all.
> And it's got tae the point now where if I'm outside, I don't feel
> that I belong anywhere, but I feel like I belong here. (Eve)

As Eve noted herself, this feeling of being in her element -- taking to it 'like a duck to water' -- was, indeed, bad. It was certainly bad for her. Eve returned to prison again and again before dying from an overdose. But it also reflects badly on society in highlighting how excluded some people feel in society. For most of the participants, any sense of belonging in childhood and youth had been disrupted through frequent moves between places and caregivers, through being excluded from education and, in Eve's case, through

adoption and rejection by her adoptive mother.

In prison, the participants found that their fellow prisoners shared both similar histories and participation in similar cultures (Antonsich, 2010); they used similar language (including the term 'bouncing about') and shared backgrounds of disruption and trauma. But as Eve illustrated in the quote above, the second element in creating a sense of belonging in prison was *time*: when someone had spent more time in prison than outside over a period of years, their sense of belonging on the outside was eroded ('it's got to the point now where if I'm outside I don't feel that I belong anywhere').

They formed relationships and autobiographic memories (Antonsich, 2010) inside, while connections with people outside weakened and life experiences outside went unlived, which undermined their sense of belonging and of being 'home' (ibid) in any place outside the prison. Material belongings, like homes, clothes and other items, were also repeatedly lost to imprisonment, making life outside increasingly unrooted (or perhaps uprooted) in material terms.

These factors were exacerbated by institutionalisation. Adaptation to the prison regime made people feel ill-equipped to live independently in the community (Goffman, 1961; Haney, 2003). Antonsich (2010) notes that having the necessary resources at one's disposal to deal with *risks* in one's environment is a part of belonging; participants felt undermined in their ability to deal with the outside environment even in its everyday guise (e.g. dealing with bills, structuring their own time).

In relation to the im/possibilities of belonging and integration then, there is no neutral or equal starting point. For the participants in *Lives Sentenced*, a sense of not belonging in the outside world predated criminal justice involvement, even if that involvement exacerbated it. Sered (2020) has highlighted how the criminalised poor not only suffer from 'carceral citizenship' (Miller & Stuart, 2017), which means their rights (to benefits, accommodation, full citizenship) are curtailed for the rest of their lives, but also from *diminished citizenship*, where these rights (and the protection of the state) were never extended to them from the start.

The same is true of belonging. The *Lives Sentenced* participants overwhelmingly had never felt they belonged in society at large. Their sense of belonging in a place of punishment, which they entered at the behest of detached and remote authorities, without any say from the community of people already inside, pushed them further away rather than closer to the type of belonging that is part of, and goes beyond, tertiary desistance. This also highlights again how tertiary (or relational) desistance and secondary (or identity) desistance are inextricably linked; that is, in the interactions – for better or (in this case) worse – between recognition (or misrecognition) by others and how we see ourselves. Belonging cannot develop unless, to some extent at least, there is alignment between social recognition and self-recognition.

The Distant Voices project (McNeill)

The ESRC/AHRC-funded *Distant Voices: Coming Home* project, which between 2017 and 2021 was led by the first author. While it was not designed as a study of desistance, it is relevant here partly because it was motivated by an awareness, largely derived from desistance research, that cultural climates and social reaction play a key role in the success or failure of rehabilitation.

The project aimed to explore, understand and practice reintegration after state punishment (McNeill and Urie, 2020; Urie et al., 2017). Blurring the boundaries between practice, research, knowledge exchange and public engagement, the fieldwork involved 21 two- or three-day workshops which took place between July 2017 and July 2019[2]. Thirteen of these took place in Scottish prisons (one open and three closed institutions which, between them, held men and women and adults and young people) and eight in community settings in Glasgow and in Inverness. In these workshops (called 'Vox Sessions'), collaborative songwriting practices were used to support a range of differently situated people (all with experience of the criminal justice system) to explore questions of punishment and reintegration. In total, 153 people were supported to produce 150 original songs. Many of the songs (and

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2   For more extensive discussions of these workshop and the project design see (Urie et al., 2019; McNeill and Urie, 2020; Crockett Thomas et al., 2020).

aspects of the stories of their co-writers) were shared in a range of performances in settings that ranged from music festivals, to criminal justice sector events, to more intimate 'house gigs'. Songs were also broadcast on radio and the project was discussed in TV news programmes and in newspaper articles.

Importantly, *Distant Voices* was guided by a 'Core Group' of about 16 people with direct experience of the justice system as prisoners and/or supervisees, family members or practitioners, or from related academic, creative and/or community projects. Discussions within the Core Group informed the evolving design and conduct of the research, and the approach to analysis.

In two papers, the project team examined how and why songs written within the project acted as 'problem-solving devices'; attending both to the relational problems that punishment creates or exacerbates (Crockett Thomas et al, 2020) and to the problematic narratives that punishment imposes on its subjects, with significant and deleterious implications for how they see themselves (Crockett Thomas et al, 2021). In light of the preceding discussion, these papers might also be read as relevant to both the identity work and to the development of social relations discussed above.

However, noting certain similarities with the *Lives Sentenced* project, we focus here instead on a third paper from the project (McNeill et al, 2022) which discusses themes of time and temporality that emerged strongly in the project, revealing that reintegration is not just about finding places *to belong in* and people *to belong with*. Reintegration, particularly for those who have served longer prison sentences (and, on the analysis above, repeated prison sentences) also requires the negotiation of three temporal 'travails' or struggles. The first of these relates to 'desynchrony' between prison time and outside time and the challenges of 're-sychrony' that imprisonment and release therefore entail. Clearly, this echoes Eve's story and her experience. The second concerns the contestation of 'readiness' for progression and release, in which the prisoner's sense of who s/he is now (a changed person) may be at odds with the system's preoccupation with who s/he has been (an offender) and who s/he might be in the future (a re-offender). The third concerns 'enduring temporariness'; a term that refers to the precarity and vulnerability associated with the 'afterlife' of incarceration (Miller, 2021).

One workshop participant, Adam, had written a song about a fading rockstar, which included the lines:

'Looking in the mirror, I don't recognize the face
As the world keeps moving, I can't seem to keep my place'

While, at first sight, the content of the song seemed to bear little relation to Adam's situation as a relatively young man not long since released from a long prison sentence, in conversation, Adam made the connection in this way:

'…a lot of people come out, like myself, and I was happy for the first couple of days, like oh… result, I'm out, great, I'll go and see everybody, and after a couple of days I was lost. It was like everybody has moved on with their life, they've got families and stuff and I just felt I was in a stagnant position of just my life hasn't changed, I've not progressed as a person, everybody I know is different because obviously they've done different things, so I found that very hard and I'm still adjusting'.

Adam's sense of de-synchrony and of the enduring temporariness that it caused him was acute. About 15 months after writing the song, he died by suicide. As McNeill et al. (2022) note, while it is not possible to assess the extent to which the forms of temporal suffering articulated in their paper contributed to his death, there is no shortage of evidence that rates of suicide (and, more generally, of early death) in and after prison far exceed those in the general population (Armstrong and McGhee, 2019). It might be reasonable therefore to claim that tertiary desistance is, at least for some people like Eve and Adam, a matter of life and death. In the absence of recognition, trust, acceptance and belonging, it is not just desistance from crime that remains at risk. There is very much more at stake.

Fortunately, as well as vividly illustrating how challenging reintegration can be, the *Distant Voices* project also gathered a great deal of evidence about how a sense of community can be nurtured between diverse people, including those with substantial experience of the justice system. Indeed, the project's

learning about 'The Art of Bridging' is summed up in a six-part podcast series[3] (and in an accompanying set of interactive learning resources[4]) that begins with an investigation of the void created by criminalisation and penalisation before examining how relational bridges can be built across it.

Conclusion: Aspects and dynamics of belonging

The liminality experienced by many criminalised people, as they seek to shift not just their personal dispositions but also their social positions, has, of course, been noted by many other desistance scholars. Indeed, Deirdre Healy (2010, 2014) first coined the term 'liminal desistance' and David Honeywell (2019) has used it to explore 'stagnation' in desistance processes, drawing on his experiences of and research into the relationship between higher education and 'transformation of the self' by prisoners and ex-prisoners.

As Honeywell notes, 'transformation of the self' is a much broader (and deeper) concept than secondary or identity desistance. We would argue for similar reasons that 'belonging' is a much broader and deeper concept than tertiary or relational desistance. Studies in the adjacent field of immigration and asylum studies, like Antonsich's (2010), attest to its complexity. There, it has been argued, for example, that to be able to secure integration and belonging, asylum seekers need not just legal citizenship, but also safety and security, linguistic and cultural competence, and a range of social connections (Ager and Strang, 2004, 2008; see also Kirkwood and McNeill, 2015). But the evidence indicates that not only are they are often denied these foundational resources for integration, they are also often locked out of its 'means and markers': employment, education, health care and housing. Many remain in civic, temporal, and social limbo, until and unless they can secure 'settled status' (see, e.g., Bhatia and Canning, 2020).

Criminalised people may be in a different legal and social position to

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3   HYPERLINK "https://www.voxliminis.co.uk/the-art-of-bridging/"https://www.voxliminis.co.uk/the-art-of-bridging/ [accessed 26th January 2024]

4   https://www.voxliminis.co.uk/the-art-of-bridging-learning-resources/ [accessed 26th January 2024]

asylum seekers and other migrants, but they also endure what sociologists and anthropologists of migration have termed 'contested belonging'. As Davis et al. (2018) put it, '[b]elonging becomes a kind of Goffmanian stage where identities are performed and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are enacted' (p1-2). They note that belonging is both *multi-scalar* (meaning that contradictory positionings -- as included or excluded -- can co-exist in the same environment) and *multi-locational* (meaning that a person can identify with many different communities and identities at the same time). Whereas dominant discourses often promote simplistic (and nationalistic) sources and sites of belonging, our late-modern age is characterised by liquidity and fluidity (cf. Bauman, 2000). Rejecting the 'sedentary logic' of dominant discourses, migration scholars have come to recognise and to study 'emplacement practices' that evolve in pursuit of belonging. These are, in an important sense, 'practices of home-making' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 196). As we have already argued, feeling safe, stably located and in control of the direction of one's own life matter greatly in these processes. Indeed, safety, stability and control may matter more than any sense of historic rootedness in a place. With these insights in mind, Davis et al. (2018) go on to suggest an examination of three dimensions of belonging: belonging as *space*, as *practice*, and as *biography*.

There seems to us to be much to be gained from exploring multi-scalar and multi-dimensional aspects of belonging for criminalised people; in particular, from further exploration of their experiences of belonging (and non-belonging) in space, as practice and as biography, as well as in time. Reflecting on the criminological literature we have discussed in this paper, on our research experiences and our personal experiences, we would also suggest the value of exploring belonging from further angles, including as an *affective* state; one that involves feeling at ease with people, with a place, with a situation. Equally, we should consider the extent to which and circumstances in which belonging is also *elective*. Both the affective and the elective, and the temporal and dynamic, aspects of belonging may suggest an 'organic' quality, in the sense that it is something that occurs 'naturally'. But this perhaps obscures the reality that, even if it develops organically, it requires careful cultivation at times (cf. the discussion of Fox's [2015] paper). What does seem

clear is that belonging is also *effective*: for better or worse, its absence or presence has profound effects not just on our behaviour, but also on the quality and indeed even the survivability of our lives.

We might also explore different *depths, debts and durability of belonging*. In some contexts, we may feel that we belong, but are also aware that this may change relatively quickly. For example, we may feel we belong to our neighbourhood, having created strong bonds with our neighbours through looking after each other's children and being the first port of call in a practical or emotional crisis. But this may be a belonging of less depth than our family bonds, perhaps partly because it is dependent on place: when we move, it ends. For some, particularly those whose lives are more mobile, neighbourhood belonging may therefore be shallow; for others, it may be very deep. As we have seen, these varieties of depth and indebtedness may work in complex ways for people who have experienced imprisonment, producing greater or lesser *durability of belonging*. We summarise these various aspects and dynamics of belonging in Figure 1 below.
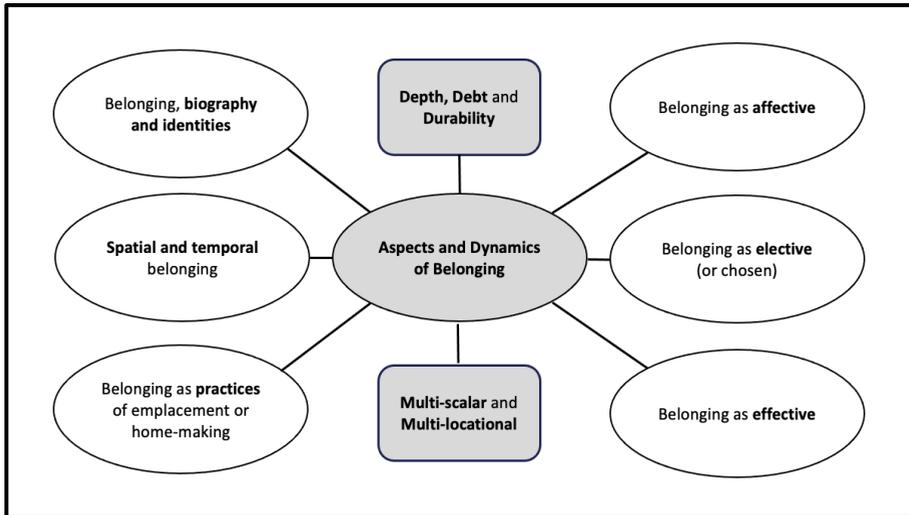

Figure 1: Aspects and dynamics of belonging

Of course, whatever else its dimensions, belonging is rarely completely symmetrical. When others think we belong and welcome us as if we do, this might make us feel like we do, however briefly. Conversely, and perhaps crucially for people who have been criminalised and penalised, the opposite of belonging is rejection from people who should accept you, like your family, perhaps because in their eyes you have broken those bonds. If they no longer want to know you, then there may be no route back to belonging with them. This is an experience of banishment rather than belonging.

Ultimately then, both crime and punishment pose obvious and complex relational challenges and, to borrow the language of migration scholars, produce an array of problems associated with 'contested belonging'. The development of the concepts of tertiary and relational desistance has, we hope, helped to expose the importance of analysing these problems, and of seeking solutions to them. While criminological work in this area remains at a comparatively early stage, it already seems obvious that we can neither properly understand nor effectively support desistance without attending to these questions.

Even this preliminary scoping out of how such scholarship might develop also makes clear that there is much more at stake here than desistance from crime. As with so much of the desistance literature, when we follow the lines of enquiry generated by our engagements with people's experiences of the process, we find that neither 'offending behaviour' nor its cessation can be understood without an analysis of its socio-structural, cultural and relational contexts, and that the harms occasioned by criminalisation and penalisation often require as much remediation as the harms occasioned by crime itself. Before we alienate people through punishment, we might first ask: Are we making future belonging more or less possible? And, if so, with what consequences?

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Life after crime and punishment?
Lifestyles changes and quaternary desistance

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Abstract

Studies of why people stop offending have been one of the considerable growth areas of criminology and life-course studies since the early-1990s. Initially the research focused on assessing the extent to which people who had offending *did* cease offending. Having established this, the field then sought to account for *why* and *how* they ceased. Of late, a new question has come to the fore: what sort of lifestyles develop for people after they have desisted? This question, in some respects, begs another about the legitimacy of asking or encouraging people to desist and, by implication, the promotion of academic studies which conceive of and represent desistance as a goal in and of itself. This paper's contribution to these debates is to assess the lives of people not *as* they desist or in the immediate aftermath of their desisting, but several years *after* they have stopped offending. Using longitudinal data from a nationally representative sample of British people born in 1970, this paper finds that, by their early 40s, the lifestyles of people who have desisted start to differ from those of people who have persisted in offending, and have started to take on some of the characteristics of non-offenders' lifestyles.

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I.   Introduction

Criminal careers research remains a key plank of criminological work around the world. Although the focus of research from the 1930s through to the 1960s was mainly on explaining why people started to offend or persisted in offending, since the mid- to late-1990s, the field has become pre-occupied with explaining why people cease and refrain from offending. Numerous theories of desistance have been put forward (see Gottfredson and Hirchi, 1990, Sampson and Laub, 1993, Moffitt, 1993, Maruna 2001, Giordano et al 2002, Bottoms et al 2004, Vaughan, 2007, Paternoster and Bushway, 2009 and Farrall et al 2014, for example). In the period since some of the initial forays into the field (such as by Blumstein et al 1985), studies of desistance have focused on *why* and *how* people desist. In terms of substantive findings, desistance has been found to be related to processes of internal change (whereby values and priorities consistent with offending are replaced with those more consistent with legal compliance; see, e.g., Vaughan 2007), often provoked by engagement with a drugs or alcohol key worker (Maruna, 2001), and sometimes progressed via a 'rebuilding' of the self in various ways and to varying extents (Maruna, 2001, Gadd and Farrall, 2004, Farrall, 2005). Researchers have found that desistance is often associated with engagement with key social institutions (such as marriage, family or employment; e.g., see Sampson and Laub, 1993). Evidence of the impact of the criminal justice system's potential role in promoting desistance is less clear, but any such impact would appear to take several years to emerge (Farrall et al 2014); in particular, periods of imprisonment seem most likely and most commonly to hinder rather than enable desistance (Burnett and Maruna, 2004). Desistance processes have also been found to be related to age, such that the age at which the process starts is crucial to its success (Uggen, 2000), and these processes also seem to vary by ethnicity (Calverley, 2013) and gender (Rodermond et al 2016). In some cases, leaving places associated with offending was a key part of the process (Osborn, 1980, Kirk, 2009). Desistance also appears to be related to increases in engagement in democratic institutions (Farrall et al, 2014), to entail an emotional trajectory (Farrall and Calverley, 2006) and, in some instances, to be associated with a change in religious values (Mohammed, 2019). Different economic, social and cultural arrangements

may act upon these processes such that they vary between countries and cultures (Segev, 2019, Calverley, 2013, Osterman, 2018). A range of policy and practice prescriptions have been developed, although the degree to which these can be or have been operationalised is contested, particularly within systems preoccupied with punishment and/or risk (McNeill, et al., 2012, Farrall 2021).

Despite the advances made by the above studies, there are still many issues on which opinion is divided or the knowledge base insufficiently developed. In this paper, we address one of these areas in which our collective knowledge is far from complete. This concerns the question of the sorts of lives which desisters lead after they have ceased to offend and, relatedly, of the extent to which they become fully integrated within society - socially, economically and politically. This paper seeks to put some flesh on to the bones of these concerns via the examination of the post-offending lives, life-courses and life-styles of people with histories of offending who were included in a nationally-representative sample of people born in 1970 and followed up into their early-40s. The paper starts by reviewing what we know about the lives of desisters *after* they have desisted, before outlining the dataset on which we rely. As well as introducing the dataset, we explore its limitations before presenting the results of our analyses. Having presented the findings, we discuss what they mean for our understanding of the lives of people in the first decade or so after they have desisted from offending.

What do we know about the lives of people who have offended?

The exploration of why people initially stop offending and then maintain crime-free lives has been a major part of criminological work since the turn of the 21st century. As well as numerous theories of desistance, developing knowledge about the precursors to desistance has been reported extensively. So, for example, we know that marriage, employment, child-rearing and developing a 'new' identity are all key factors in why many people cease offending (see Laub and Sampson, 2003, or Farrall, et al., 2014 for overviews). We also know that these processes can involve reconstructing narratives of

one's earlier life (Maruna, 2001), engaging in reflection and an 'internal conversation' (Vaughan, 2007), changes in daily routines (Farrall, et al., 2014), moving away from 'old haunts' (Osborn, 1980, Kirk 2009), shifting emotions (Farrall, et al., 2014, Nugent and Schinkel, 2016), and changes in the goals people desire (Maruna, 2001; Farrall, 2005). Several studies have pointed to the many obstacles that would-be desisters need to address and overcome in order to successfully desist (Burnett, 1992, Farrall, 2002). It is also clear that these efforts are often themselves fraught with risk and with material and emotional hardships (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016, Hunter and Farrall, 2018).

Initial studies of desistance from crime implicitly assumed that desisting was a 'good thing' for those so involved. After all, to desist from crime seemed likely to mean no more (or at least, reducing) contact with the criminal justice system, less fractured familial relationships, better employment chances and less risk of serious victimisation. However, as the field developed, scholars started to question what is 'was' that potential desisters were being invited to desist into or corralled towards. Was it automatically the case that ceasing to be involved in crime was associated with more positive life-courses, life experiences and lifestyles? For example, Nugent and Schinkel (2016) provided evidence from Scotland that processes of desistance were characterised by pains of isolation, experiences of goal failure and feelings of hopelessness. Similarly, Hunter and Farrall (2018) reported that some English desisters in their sample felt that their decision to refrain from offending in some instances provoked feelings of frustration and of having let others down (p299-301). De Giorgi (2017:93), using data from an ethnography of people released from Californian prisons back to one community in Oakland (a former industrial base in California) notes how the US criminal justice system now views 'successful' re-entry as the absence of any further offending, rather than the adoption of a meaningful and worthwhile life. However, for those De Giorgi spoke to, employment was hard to come by, violent victimisation a constant threat, housing was insecure and developing a stable lifestyle seemed almost impossible to achieve. As both Calverley (2013) and Appleton (2010) note, the post-offending lives of some members of society are characterised by loneliness and fraught with efforts to stay away from former associates and family members involved in crime (on which, see also Bottoms, 2006, on 'diachronic self-control').

Similarly, whilst Farrall and colleagues (2014:223-224) reported that desisters who had ceased offending for more than four years were less likely to be victimised, they found that those who had desisted for shorter periods had similar victimisation experiences to those still involved in persistent offending. It is hardly surprising, then, that some would-be desisters experience '"Fuck it" moments', throwing in the towel and giving up (Halsey et al, 2016). Whilst such emotions and the observations about them may be transitory and part of the process of change, they nevertheless raise the question of what happens to people and to their lives and life-courses after they have desisted.

However, it ought to be remembered that De Giorgi's ethnography studied recently released prisoners (in one of the world's most punitive criminal justice systems embedded in one of the world's most neo-liberal economies), and that the studies by Schinkel and Nugent, Farrall and colleagues, Calverley and Appleton all dealt with people *desisting*, rather than those who had *desisted* and may, in part, reflect the experiences of change. Change, it must be remembered, is never easy for individuals (see Ebaugh's account of her leaving the monastery where she had lived as a nun, or her examination of 'becoming an ex-', Ebaugh 1984, 1988). Similarly, the process of desistance might be likened to a process of delayed gratification; immediate rewards are postponed for greater anticipated rewards at a later date.

Leaving this point aside, these studies nevertheless raise the question of what it is which desisters are expected to desist 'into', how long it might take them to achieve such goals and the extent to which these are attainable? Do they ever attain the legal, social and economic status of other non-offending or never-offending citizens; or do their lives end up looking much like they had done previously (i.e., personally troubled and socially marginalised) but without the engagement in crime? Perhaps they are to be found somewhere between these poles. There are almost no studies of what happens to people in the years and decades *after* they have ceased offending. Most studies focus on those *desisting* or who have only recently *desisted*. This is the gap that we hope to begin the address in this paper.

II. Methods

Data and research strategy

The data we rely on here comes from the British Cohort Study (hereafter BSC70). All members of the cohort were born in one week of April 1970. In all, 16,135 babies were born and recruited into the BCS70 (98% of all births in that week). At the outset of the study, and at a time when the categorisation of ethnicity was rather crude, some 93% were categorised as 'UK European' or 'Other European' (which, in effect means 'white'), 1% as West Indian, 1.5% as Indian or Pakistani, and the remainder as either unknown or other.

The BCS70 allows us to explore the offending careers of cohort members and their subsequent life-course. In 1970, the babies' mothers were interviewed, providing some background data on them, with further interviews with mothers in 1975 and 1980. From 1980 onwards, the children were interviewed and questions relating to crime were first fielded. In 1986 the cohort was re-interviewed, and the questions on offending expanded to include contact with the police and convictions in court. These topics were revisited in 1996 when the cohort was 26, and again in 2000 when they were 30. The survey has regularly fielded questions on cohort members' social and economic circumstances (type of housing, neighbourhood characteristics, schooling and employment experiences, household composition, home leaving, homelessness, relationship formation, marriage and child-rearing, peer relations, and medical experiences), as well as social attitudes, political affiliation, alcohol consumption, and psychological wellbeing. In 2004, when the sample was aged 34, the ethnic composition was 97% white (British, Irish and 'other'), 0.5% Black British, 1% Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi, and the remainder were of dual heritage or other ethnicities.

In terms of the representativeness of the sample at age 34 (in 2004), when compared to the sample when they were recruited (in 1970), the sample retains a high degree of representativeness (see Table A1). For example, at birth, some 52% of the sample were male (and 48% female); at the follow-up in 2004 the gender balance had changed so that 46% were male and 54% female (in keeping with the common observation that males tend to be lost in

follow-up studies). In 1970, 82% of the sample were interviewed in England, 5% in Wales, 9% in Scotland and 4% in Northern Ireland. Fieldwork was not undertaken in Northern Ireland after the first round, meaning that the country at the time of interview in 2004 is biased toward the three countries which make up Britain. In terms of the overall countries of interview in 2004, of these 85% were undertaken in England, 6% in Wales and 10% in Scotland. These were equally spread across the three offending trajectories that we discuss below ('non-offenders', 'persisters' and 'desisters'). In terms of their father's social class, this too exhibited reasonable retention rates over time and by offending trajectory (see Table A1).

In order to classify respondents as 'desisters', 'persisters' and 'non-offenders', we relied on self-report data collected at ages 16, 30 and 34 (questions on offending were not asked in 1996, when the sample was 26, but at that point a decision was made to interview only 10% of the sample anyway). Although the cohort was asked a number of questions relating to their contact with the criminal justice system at each of these three points (namely, being 'moved on' by the police, being stopped and questioned by the police, being let off with just a warning, being arrested and taken to a police station, being formally cautioned at a police station, and being found guilty in a criminal court *since the previous interview*) we rely on the item relating to being arrested and taken to a police station. We do so since the items prior to this (being moved on, questioned or being let off) do not necessarily imply wrongdoing, whilst the items relating to being cautioned or found guilty at a court would exclude those who had offended but where there was insufficient evidence to secure a conviction. The item used ("Been arrested by a police officer and taken to a police station") captures those moments when a police officer had sufficient reason to arrest even if there was insufficient evidence to charge and convict.[1] There was a very high degree of association between being arrested and taken to a police station and being given a warning,

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1   This approach differs from more conventional ways of defining persistence and desistance (i.e. via conviction data), but is defensible given that self-reported data has advantages over officially-recorded data. One possible downside is that it risks importing biases linked to policing (such as, for example, greater arrests rates for some ethnic minority groups). However, as noted above, this is a sample which has very few minority respondents in it, and so such biases are unlikely to be present to any significant degree.

cautioned or convicted. For example, of those who reported being arrested and taken to a police station when aged between the age of 26 and 30 (reported at age 30 in 2000), some 67% were given a warning, 69% were formally cautioned and 52% were convicted. We recoded the data to form the following groups of responses:

Table 1: Frequency of persisters, desisters and non-offenders

Offending Career	Number	Percentage
Persistent Offenders (arrested at 16, 30 and 34, or at 16 and 34, or 30 and 34)	96	.5
Desisters (arrested at 16, but not 30 or 34, or arrested at 16 and 30 but not 34, or arrested at 30 but not 34).	1252	6.6
Non-Offenders (no arrests)	7522	39.6
Not seen enough to code	8561	45.0
System missing cases (no data)	1575	8.3
TOTAL	19006	100.0

Thus the 'persisters' group includes those who reported being arrested at least twice, with at least one of those arrests being reported at age 34, whereas the 'desisters' group includes those who reported arrests at 16 and/or 30 but not at 34. We use the terms non-offender, persister and desister hereafter simply for clarity, consistency and ease of reference; we do not intend to suggest that people themselves can or should be reduced to such labels.

There were a relatively small number of persisters (less than 100, or half a percentage point), and some 1,252 desisters (just over six percent), with 7,522 non-offenders (49.6%). It is important to note that there were 8,561 cohort members who could not be classified for some reason (for example, they may have been interviewed at only one age point), and some 1,575 for whom there was no data at all. Nevertheless, this dataset provides us with evidence about the lives of desisters in the first ten or so years after they have ceased to offend (up to the age of 42).

It is important not to overlook the limitations of the data available to us. The data relates to one cohort of people born in one week of 1970, and whilst there is nothing to suggest that this birth cohort is not a nationally representative sample, it could well be that for earlier or later birth cohorts these findings do not hold. Certainly, other analyses using this cohort and a cohort born 12 years *earlier* suggest some significant differences in their experiences as the UK economy changed from one of a high degree of state-ownership to one characterised by neo-liberal economic management (Farrall et al 2019). That said, given that neo-liberalism has become even more entrenched since the 1970s, the findings we present herein are likely to remain more or less the same for subsequent cohorts. Because the BCS70 surveys did not ask about engagement in crime after the cohort was aged 34 (in 2004), we are unable to assess the nature of their offending careers after this point. However, given that most people who start to offend will have started to desist by around this age, it is likely that there would have been little shifting from the persisters to the desisters group (or *vice versa*) and that most of the non-offenders would have remained in that category. Given also the numbers of both desisters and non-offenders, any changes in category membership would have had to be extremely large for the substantive findings to be invalidated. Finally, there is a large number of cases which we were unable to categorise. Some of these cases were simply cases which offended at one time-point (say at age 30), and which we were therefore incapable of categorising into out threefold classification. Others were lost to follow-up (cases living in Northern Ireland were not re-contacted after the first sweep for example) and others were individuals born in countries outside of the UK in the same week as the cohort and who were included in follow-up interviews. These cases might have joined the cohort after the questions on offending at age 16 were fielded and/or 'left' the cohort before the follow-ups at ages 30 and 34 (either because they left the UK or were just not as engaged with the cohort as those recruited at birth). Nevertheless, given the scarcity of studies of the lives of former-offenders in the decades after they have ceased offending, our paper still provides new insights into this phenomenon. Due to the fact that >95% of the sample are white, it is impossible to assess the extent to which ethnicity may interact with the processes we uncover.

Because the nature of this paper is exploratory, the research strategy which was employed involved what might be called 'basic' analyses relying on cross-tabulations of data and the comparison of means (via ANOVA tests). This enables us to appreciate the unique contribution, role or relationship of each variable *in absentia* of others. This however, does not mean that the insights which can be derived from these analyses are themselves 'basic', since it allows us the opportunity to assess the contours of any differences in the later life outcomes of desisters and persisters when compared to non-offenders. Since many studies of desistance have sampled from within the criminal justice system (e.g. Maruna 2001, Farrall 2002, Burnett 1992) few such studies have included non-offenders. Those studies which do contain representative samples of non-offenders (e.g. Graham and Bowling, 1994) were cross-sectional and hence longer-term follow data about the sample members was not available for analysis.

III. Results

Table 2 reports on 31 3x2 cross-tabulation tables, and reports the percentage of (for example) those who owned their own homes at age 34 by the three groups of offending career types. The N column reports the number of those cases who owned their own homes for all groups summed. The P value reports the Pearson Chi-Sq test of significance for that table.

One can see then that whilst 51% of those who were persistent offenders up to age 30 (in 2000) owned their own homes (or were buying them with a mortgage) when aged 34, this figure was higher for both non-offenders (78%) and desisters (66%). These figures had increased for all groups by about four percentage points when interviewed at age 38 (2008), although the desisters had experienced a slightly greater increase (of seven percentage points from 66% to 73%). In general, the persisters had the *lowest* rates of home ownership, employment, cohabiting and living with children at home, and the *highest* rates of claiming income support and divorce (although at age 38, rates of divorce were not statistically significantly different from one another). Receiving benefits is partly about child care (Child Benefit was universal at

Table 2: Summarising variables associated with offending career
(Socio-demographics)

Topic (age in brackets)	Persisters	Desisters	Non-Offenders	N	P Value
Owns own home (34)	51%	66%	78%	6334	.000
Owns own home (38)	55%	73%	82%	5691	.000
Owns own home (42)	53%	69%	83%	5634	.000
Employed (etc.) (34)	83%	92%	95%	7918	.000
Employed (etc.) (38)	83%	92%	96%	6757	.000
Employed (etc.) (42)	80%	91%	96%	6825	.000
Receiving Benefits (34)	56%	62%	63%	5225	.387
Receiving Benefits (38)	65%	67%	71%	5028	.010
Receiving Benefits (42)	67%	69%	72%	7193	.046
Claiming Income Support (34)	19%	16%	9%	3488	.000
Claiming Income Support (38)	23%	9%	7%	534	.000
Claiming Income Support (42)	5%	4%	2%	7193	.000
Single and never married (34)	77%	57%	46%	8356	.000
Single and never married (38)	52%	34%	24%	8427	.000
Single and never married (42)	48%	29%	21%	7185	.000
Divorced (34)	8%	6%	6%	471	.000
Divorced (38)	12%	13%	11%	817	.522
Divorced (42)	49%	29%	22%	1679	.000
Cohabiting (34)	60%	72%	76%	8343	.000
Cohabiting (38)	59%	76%	79%	5585	.000
Cohabiting (42)	56%	77%	79%	7195	.000
Children in household (34)	40%	57%	61%	8343	.000
Children in household (38)	63%	69%	73%	5161	.008
Children in household (42)	57%	71%	75%	7196	.000
Theft victim in past yr (34)	25%	14%	10%	857	.000
Violence victim in past yr (34)	19%	6%	3%	310	.000
Fraud victim in past yr (34)	13%	5%	4%	378	.000
Other victim in past yr (34)	17%	7%	5%	461	.000
Voted in 2001 GE (31)	47%	56%	66%	5351	.000
Voted in 2005 GE (35)	60%	67%	78%	4848	.000
Voted in 2010 GE (40)	56%	69%	78%	4918	.000
Died between 2005 and 2014	3%	1%	<1%	8856	.000

this stage), but is also about engagement with the State and the successful completion of an application for welfare assistance. Over time, some markers of social integration (such as home ownership, or employment) increased for all groups, but the persisters always lagged behind the desisters (who in turned lagged behind the non-offenders). The persisters also had the greatest levels of victimisation. Desisters were more engaged with democratic processes such as voting than were persisters, although less engaged than non-offenders. Generally speaking, desisters fell between the persisters and the non-offenders, although they tended to be closer to the non-offenders than they were the persisters on many measures. For example, at age 38, 83% of persisters were employed, compared to 92% of desisters and 95% of non-offenders. Interestingly, some 3% of persisters died between 2004 and 2014, whilst this was lower for desisters (1%) and non-offenders (.5%). No details as to the cause of death are available for analysis.

Table 3 compares these three groups again, this time for non-binary scores. The first column lists the variable and the age at which the data was collected (34, 38 or 42). The second, third and fourth columns provide the mean scores for, respectively, the persisters, the desisters and the non-offenders. The fifth column gives the score when the desisters' mean is subtracted from that of the persisters. The sixth subtracts the non-offenders' mean from the desisters', and the seventh subtracts the mean of the persisters from the mean of the non-offenders. These last three also have the p-value in brackets, with p-values below .05 being shaded for ease of identification.

Again, in keeping with Table 2, we find the desisters located 'between' the persisters and the non-offenders (see columns two to four in Table 3). For 24 of the 34 comparisons in Table 3, the arithmetic mean for the desisters is between those for the persisters and the non-offenders. That is, in itself, hardly surprising, since this group was once involved in crime, but appears to have given up offending. Further insights are to be found in the analyses of the differences between the three groups. Below we both outline the measurement of the variables in Table 3, and discuss our interpretation of these data.

Income and wealth

Assessments of personal finances (asked at ages 34, 38 and 42) ranged from 1 (living comfortably) to 5 (finding it difficult); so, lower scores indicate someone who is better-off. The average savings question at age 34 collected £ values (with several collection bins at £X5 and £X0 points, and ranged from £1 to £9,999. The median was £150. At age 42 the question was changed slightly to include investments as well, but was again recorded from £0 to £1m or more. The median was £3,000 at age 42. At age 38 total gross pay was coded from £21 to £745,000, with a median response of £1,998. At age 42, a similar question was fielded which referred to take homes in the last year. This was recorded from £0 to £500,000. The median response at age 42 was £19,000. The number of rooms in the house (asked at age 38) ranged from 1 to 12 ("or more").

Let us focus on the data in the fifth column of Table 3, for this compares the persisters' mean scores for their assessment of their management of their finances with those for the dersisters. In this first block of items, we see that, on the whole, desisters feel that they are managing their personal finances better than persisters, but not as well as non-offenders (column six), and in keeping with this, have more savings and investments than the persisters, but not as much as the non-offenders. However, looking at the mean differences between the groups (columns five to seven), we see that the desisters start to rate their management of their finances as similar to that of the persisters. The non-offenders, however, whilst over time felt that they were managing their finances slightly less well than they had in the past, did not decline to the same degree as the persisters. So, over time, differences which existed at the outset became larger, with the desisters starting to share more in common with the persisters with regards to the management of their finances.

Leaving aside their assessments of their finances, the more objective data (relating to their incomes at age 38 and 42, and their savings at age 34 and 42) suggest no real differences (in that the P values in columns five to seven are non-significant) except for the issue of savings at age 42 (at which point the desisters and the non-offenders have started to increase their savings and investments (possibly in housing, which appears to have been more

prevalent in these groups at these ages, see Table 2). Possibly in keeping with this is an increase in the N of rooms in their houses for the desisters and non-offenders relative to those of the persisters. These differences are consistent with the increase in children living in the homes of desisters and non-offenders relative to the homes of the persisters (see Table 2 again). This might also explain the unexpected finding that the desisters and non-offenders were more likely to be in receipt of welfare benefits than were the persisters (since Child Benefit would have been universal at that point in time, in 2008).

Life satisfaction

Satisfaction with life ranged from 0 to 10 (with higher scores equating with greater levels of life satisfaction). Satisfaction with one's current home was scored from 1 = very satisfied to 5 = very dissatisfied. Job satisfaction (asked at ages 34, 38 and 42) ranged from 1 = very satisfied to 5 = very dissatisfied (so lower scores indicate greater levels of satisfaction). The data here suggests that the desisters and non-offenders were more satisfied with their lives and homes than were the persisters. However, non-offenders still remained more satisfied than the desisters. There were no consistent differences in terms of job satisfaction – although the desisters reported being less satisfied than the non-offenders.

Table 3: Summarising variables associated with offending career (Self-assessments)

Topic (age)	Persisters' Mean Score	Desisters' Mean Score	Non-Offenders' Mean Score	Ps-Ds (P value)	Ds-N-Os (P value)	N-Os-Ps (P value)
Finances & Wealth						
Personal finances (34)	2.49	2.05	1.90	.435 (.002)	.155 (.000)	-.590 (.000)
Personal finances (38)	2.55	2.27	2.06	.272 (NS)	.215 (.000)	-.488 (.008)
Personal finances (42)	2.52	2.26	2.07	.263 (NS)	.184 (.000)	-.447 (.001)
Gross Pay (£) (38)	2,849	4,068	5,114	-1218 (NS)	-1046 (NS)	2265 (NS)
Take home Pay (£) (42)	42,418	26,946	28,841	15,471 (NS)	-1895 (NS)	-13,576 (NS)
Monthly Savings (£S) (34)	339	295	272	44 (NS)	22 (NS)	-66 (NS)
Total savings/investments (£) (42)	6,895	22,257	26,465	-15,362 (.000)	-4,208 (NS)	19,570 (.000)
N rooms in house (38)	4.32	4.82	5.15	-.501 (.035)	-.325 (.000)	.826 (.000)
Life Satisfaction						
Life Satisfaction (34)	6.45	7.14	7.52	-.697 (.008)	-.380 (.000)	1.076 (.000)
Satisfaction with home (42)	2.03	1.69	1.61	.334 (.035)	.083 (.011)	-.417 (.005)
Satisfaction with Job (34)	1.94	1.98	1.88	-.048 (NS)	.099 (.008)	-.051 (NS)
Satisfaction with Job (42)	1.91	2.02	1.91	-.110 (NS)	.118. (.002)	.009 (NS)
Mid-Life Health						
Assessment of Own Health (34)	2.26	2.02	1.93	.236 (NS)	.096 (.001)	-.331 (.004)
Assessment of Own Health (38)	2.85	2.41	2.21	.436 (.004)	.206 (.000)	-.641 (000)
Assessment of Own Health (42)	3.00	2.54	2.29	.457 (.006)	.253 (.000)	-.709 (.000)
Political Attitudes						
Interest in Politics (34)	2.65	2.72	2.70	-.071 (NS)	.019 (NS)	.052 (NS)
Interest in Politics (42)	2.73	2.67	2.68	.059 (NS)	-.013 (NS)	-.046 (NS)
Politicians Self-Interested (42)	2.40	2.48	2.71	-.077 (NS)	-.232 (.000)	.309 (.024)

Topic (age)	Persisters' Mean Score	Desisters' Mean Score	Non-Offenders' Mean Score	Ps-Ds (P value)	Ds-N-Os (P value)	N-Os-Ps (P value)
Pol Parties would not help me (42)	2.75	2.93	3.09	-.189 (NS)	-.153 (.000)	.342 (.042)
Pol Parties make no difference (42)	2.49	2.72	2.87	-.228 (NS)	-.147 (.001)	.375 (.025)
Tolerate ethnicities N'Bours (42)	2.18	2.23	1.97	-.052 (NS)	.262 (.000)	-.210 (NS)
Tolerate ethnicities Schools (42)	2.58	2.75	2.50	-.172 (NS)	.251 (.000)	-.079 (NS)
Support for Death Penalty (42)	2.17	2.20	2.54	-.028 (NS)	-.341 (.000)	.369 (NS)
Important to Obey Law (42)	2.98	2.87	2.62	.113 (NS)	.253 (.000)	-.366 (.018)
Fear of Crime						
Fear walking (34)	1.88	1.94	2.09	-.058 (NS)	-.157 (.000)	.2I6 (.023)
Caring Duties						
Hrs caring for parents (38)	3.22	3.02	3.20	.201 (NS)	-.174 (NS)	-.027 (NS)
Hrs caring for parents (42)	3.56	3.23	3.37	.331 (NS)	-.145 (NS)	-.186 (NS)
Life better with Kids (42)	2.45	2.70	2.95	-.243 (NS)	-.257 (.009)	.500 (.000)
Mid-Life Feelings						
Feeling optimistic of late (42)	2.87	3.25	3.37	-.376 (.004)	-.126 (.000)	.503 (.001)
Feeling good about myself (42)	3.07	3.40	3.42	-.331 (.017)	-.018 (NS)	.350 (.009)
Feeling close to other people (42)	3.03	3.54	3.70	-.511 (.001)	-.160 (.000)	.670 (.000)
Feeling confident (42)	3.22	3.50	3.47	-.279 (NS)	-.025 (NS)	.254 (NS)
Feeling loved (42)	3.34	3.89	4.04	-.555 (.001)	-.144 (.035)	.700 (.000)
The Wider Picture						
Economic Restructuring 1980s (42)	.0721	.0676	.0656	.004 (NS)	.001 (.049)	-.006 (.046)

Games-Howell tests. Ns typically around 5059 to 8356.

Health ratings

Assessments of one's own health ranged from 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor), and, again, lower scores indicated better health. This suggested decreases in health for all groups over time. However, the differences at the outset were magnified over time (see columns five to seven), and in keeping with the evidence about personal finances. Whilst all groups reported declining health over time, the pesisters started to differentiate themselves from the persisters (initially the differences were not statistically significant at age 34, but this changed at 38, and had grown by age 42). Although all groups saw declines in their health (by their own assessments), there was also evidence (columns five to seven) to suggest that the desisters' health declined *less* than that of the persisters, but *more* than that of the non-offenders. As such, the differences (identified here in the fifth to seventh columns) increased over time between groups.

Political attitudes

Interest in politics (asked at ages 34 and 42) ranged from 1 = very interested to 4 = not at all interested. The statements *politicians are mainly in politics for their own benefit; political parties make no difference; none of the political parties would do anything to benefit me; I would not mind if a family of another race moved in next door; I wouldn't mind if my child's school was mostly another race; for some crimes the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence; the law should be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong* were all coded 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Lower scores indicate greater degrees of tolerance of other ethnicities, but greater degrees of political cynicism. With regards to interest in politics, there were no differences between the three groups (although persisters became slightly less interested, but desisters and non-offenders became slightly more interested). The statements relating to political cynicism (*politicians are mainly in politics for their own benefit; political parties make no difference; none of the political parties would do anything to benefit me*) suggest that persisters are more cynical than desisters, who are themselves more cynical than non-offenders. However, given that these

differences are not statistically difference for the persisters and desisters, but they are for the desisters and non-offenders, the data suggest that the desisters remain as cynical as the persisters. The same trend is found when one considers tolerance of ethnic minorities and support for harsh punishment (where non-offenders remain most tolerant of ethnic minorities). There were also no differences between persisters and desisters in terms of their support for harsh punishment (here lower scores indicated greater degrees of support). Interestingly, when it came to political attitudes, there were very few differences between the persisters and the desisters (column five), but there were differences between both the desisters and the non-offenders.

Fear of crime

The fear of crime question was the 'safety' walking question (1 = very safe; 4 = very unsafe). Here there were no differences between the persisters and the desisters (the two groups of the three who felt safest), whilst non-offenders felt least safe of all (and statistically significantly more so than persisters or desisters).

Caring duties

Hours caring for parents each week was coded from 0 to 70 (for the data collected at age 38), and 0 to 168 (for that collected at age 42). The modal responses were 1 hour at both time points, but there was a distinct increase in the time spent looking after parents at age 42. The statement *people who never have children miss an important part of life* was coded 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree); so that lower scores indicate that having children is an important aspect of life. There were no differences in terms of the time spent looking after parents. When compared to both persisters and desisters, non-offenders were more likely to disagree with the statement that people without children had missed out on an important part of life; persisters and desisters both tended to agree with this statement more, but were not statistically different from one another.

Mid-life feelings

The statements *Over the last two weeks I've been feeling optimistic about the future; Over the last two weeks, I've been feeling good about myself; Over the last two weeks, I've been feelings close to other people; Over the last two weeks, I've been feelings confident* and *Over the last two weeks I've been feelings loved* were all coded on a scale from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time); so here higher scores indicate a more positive outlook. With the exception of the item about feeling more confident, taken as a whole, these items suggest that persisters tended to be least positive in terms of their outlook on life, whilst the desisters tended to be slightly less positive than the non-offenders.

The wider picture

In order to avoid overly-individualising our analyses, we incorporate a variable which captures the degree of economic restructuring experienced by the community in which each BSC70 cohort member was living when they were aged 16 (in 1986). Our measure of *Economic Change (1971-1981)* uses data from the 1971 and 1981 Censuses and is the sum of:

a) the proportion of the economically active population employed in mining in 1971, and

b) the proportion of economically active unemployed males in 1981.

These proportions were summed at the county-level, but appended to each cohort member. We chose this data since coal mining in 1971 was a good barometer of local industrial activity (since mining was co-located with steel production and processing in South Wales, South Yorkshire, Central Belt Scotland and Teesside, and ship-building (in and around Glasgow, in particular), and the maintenance of locomotives and railway distribution centres in Derby, Doncaster, Nottingham, Sheffield, York, and Central Belt Scotland)). In 1970 there were around 290,000 people (mainly men) working in 293 mines. By 1986, this had reduced to approximately 91,000 working in

110 mines.[2] By summing this with the percentage of unemployed males in the same areas in 1981, we created an area measure of heavily industrial at t1 (1971) and which at t2 (1981) had been eroded, leaving communities with high levels of unemployment 10 years later. This measure describes the economic trajectories of industrial areas over 10 years.

The analyses suggest that persisters and desisters tended to live in areas which had experienced greater levels of economic restructuring when they had been 16 years old (in keeping with the idea that economic adversity might drive some people towards engagement in crime), but that non-offenders tended not to have lived in such areas when aged 16 years old. The analysis of this variable suggests that there were no differences in terms of the levels of economic restructuring in the areas in which desisters and persisters lived (column five), but that there were between were desisters and non-offenders and between where persisters and non-offenders lived (see columns six and seven).

IV. Discussion

Let us start with an overview of the strengths and limitations of this paper. The dataset itself is almost unique globally in that it is a long-term follow-up of a nationally representative sample with good retention rates. However, the key limitation is the reliance on self-reported arrest data, which may be subject to various biases, including biases related to policing. The item we relied upon (see above) to create our groups nevertheless captures those moments when a police officer felt that he or she had sufficient reason to arrest an individual and take them to a police station. In the cases in which individuals were later released without charge, this may have been as a consequence of being given a warning or due to the Procurator Fiscal or Crown Prosecution Service deciding that securing a conviction was unlikely; just as arrest does not mean that offending has occurred, not being charged or convicted does not mean that no offending had occurred. While it is possible that biases in criminal justice processing at each stage may have exaggerated

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2   Our data comes from: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/historical-coal-data-coal-production-availability-and-consumption-1853-to-2011. Last accessed 23rd April 2020.

differences in offending between the three groups, we have had to work within the limitations of the dataset. More positively, the dataset has allowed us to do what no other studies have been able to do: to explore quantitatively the issues surrounding the lifestyles into which people desist and to compare the circumstances and life trajectories of those with different experiences of criminal justice involvement.

In many ways, the results reported above are not terribly surprising; the desisters are in the main 'located' between the persisters and the non-offenders. In terms of their offending trajectories, they 'started' as offenders (i.e., as similar to the persisters), but have started to move towards the non-offenders (in that at age 34, they were not engaged in criminal activities). The question then becomes 'in terms of their wider life circumstances and trajectories, who are they getting closer to, the persisters or the non-offenders?'. Figure 1 summaries the key messages from the above analyses with regards to this matter where the data enables analyses of trends.

Figure 1 confirms that the desisters remain, despite any shifts in the data over the eight years for which analyses are available (from ages 34 to 42), in the main the relative positions of these three groups remain unchanged. However, divorce rates remained much lower for the desisters and non-offenders, and these two groups also converged when it came to rates of cohabitation, rates of living with children and rates of voting.

Where does this leave us? Let us start by repeating that initial forays into the study of desistance assumed that desistance was *per se*, in and of itself, a 'good thing' for the desisters. The persisters and desisters, in many respects, started in objectively similarly socially and economically deprived social contexts (Table 3) in which the economic restructuring of the 1980s had both encouraged offending (Farrall et al 2020) and made finding work all the harder. But the desisters had improved their relative position by the age of 34 and were already more likely to have obtained some of the markers of success. These included home ownership, cohabiting, lasting marriages (assessed here by lower rates of being single/never married and divorce), child-rearing and better assessments of their health. Alongside this we see lower rates of victimisation, increases engagement in voting and decreased mortality. When

Topic	Desisters' Trends Over Time
Home Ownership	Increases for desisters, who remain consistently between persisters and non-offenders
Employment	Stable for desisters, who remain consistently between persisters and non-offenders
Receiving Benefits	Increases for desisters who remain consistently between persisters and non-offenders
Claiming Income Support	All converge to much lower rates; down by about a fifth
Single and Never Married	Decreases for desisters, who remain consistently between persisters and non-offenders
Divorced	All increase, but desisters and non-offenders by much lower rates
Cohabiting	Increases for desisters and non-offenders, who start to converge
Children in Household	All increase, but desisters and non-offenders start to converge
Voting	Increases for desisters, who grow slightly closer to non-offenders
Finances	Desisters remain consistently between persisters and non-offenders
Assessment of Health	All diverge, desisters remain consistently between persisters and non-offenders
Political Attitudes	No differences between the three groups

Figure 1: Summarising trends in desisters' life-course trajectories

compared to persisters, desisters were happier with their lives and homes, and felt more optimistic about the future, felt better about themselves, closer to others and more loved. However, they felt as (dis)satisfied with their jobs as persisters (Table 3). Given their origins in (generally) less advantageous social positions, the desisters could be considered to have done well to have improved their conditions as much as they have. This is not, of course, to justify the rampant levels of economic inequality which the UK has experienced since the 1970s (when this cohort was born), nor to exonerate the governments which have successively failed to address it, but rather to locate

the trajectories of both the desisters and the persisters in the wider social and economic contexts. Whilst it is true that the desisters did not achieve the conventional markers of 'life-success' to the same degree as the non-offenders, given their different starting points, this was unlikely ever to be the case. What these analyses suggest, however, is that in desisting from crime, they have *started* to enjoy many of the things which non-offenders take for granted (such as lower rates of victimisation and mortality, and greater rates of optimism).

Maruna and Farrall (2004) introduced the terms primary and secondary desistance to refer to 1) crime-free lulls in the lives of offenders and 2) changes in self-perception. To this McNeill (2016) added tertiary desistance to highlight the importance of recognition of change by others and of the development of an associated sense of belonging within a community. Though, as others have pointed out (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016), the relationship between the three types of desistance need not be sequential (for example, sometimes being welcomed into a new social group where offending is not normative might *trigger* a shift in identity and behaviour), perhaps it makes sense to suggest a fourth aspect to or stage of desistance; or better still its culmination in the point at which 'desisters' are no longer objectively (and perhaps subjectively) different from those who have never offended. We sketch this below in Figure 2.

Figure 2 suggests (based on the evidence above) that quaternary desistance is very hard to achieve; the desisters in the BSC70 sample were converging on the status and experiences of the non-offenders, but, even though they may have ceased offending (possibly as much as some eight or so years previously), they were not (yet) on an equal footing with them. This time-period is in line with a recent review of 'time to redemption' studies undertaken by Weaver (2018). The accomplishment of the quaternary stage of desistance might require desisters to move geographically to locations in which they were not previously known (and hence did not directly experience the recognition of change, as experienced in tertiary desistance, since no one knew of their past offending). This is supported by other studies based on qualitative data. Farrall, et al. (2014:191-192) report that the emotional trajectories of their desisters fell into five groups. The Early Hopes and

Starting to Break Away groups (both n=15) are similar to the Primary Desistance and Secondary Desistance categories above. The Becoming Accepted (n=18) and the Feeling Accepted (n=11) groups are perhaps closest to the Tertiary Desistance category. However, it is the smallest group (Acceptance Achieved, n=10) which is closest to the Quaternary Desistance category outlined above. Of those they studied, this last group of 10 represent just 14% of Farrall, et al.'s sample of desisters.

Forms of Desistance	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Quaternary
Aspects	Crime-free lulls; not always consciously motivated shifts in behaviour	Extended periods of non-offending; changes in self-perception and identity	Recognition of change by others and development of a sense of belonging	Assumption of 'ordinariness' by others; no recognition of change by others since no awareness of earlier offending
Frequency/ Ease of Accomplishment	Common; relatively easy	Common; requires desire to change	Takes longer to emerge; based on 'regained' trust	Much less commonly achieved; may need total reconfiguration of relationships and geographical relocation

Figure 2: Forms of desistance

Our analysis leads us to pose two very important questions: Firstly, *how might we re-imagine our society, communities and social and criminal justice systems to increase the proportion of people achieving quaternary desistance?* Secondly, *how might we help them achieve it more swiftly?* As we have already noted above, much has been written about how to rethink criminal justice through the lens of desistance research. But with respect to the operation of the justice system, one obvious part of the answer might be for

us to stop decelerating and stalling desistance through counter-productive processes of criminalisation and penalisation. Schinkel, Atkinson and Anderson (2019) have argued convincingly that the over-policing of 'well-kent faces' (i.e., of the 'usual suspects') derails desistance efforts. It might be that desistance from criminalisation matters as much as, or even more than, desistance from crime; indeed, it might be that the differences in outcomes between our three groups are as much about declining police and justice involvement as they are about changes in offending.

More broadly, many others have argued that the hostility and stigmatisation that would-be desisters encounter must be addressed if we are to clear the many other obstacles strewn on the pathway towards desistance (e.g., Burke, Collett and McNeill, 2018; Urie, et al., 2019). With this broader project of social and cultural change in mind, and drawing from dialogue among people with diverse forms of relevant expertise, Rubio Arnal (2021:235) has begun to outline the characteristics of a more re/integrative society:

> A re/integrative society would also require re/integrative communities and re/integrative citizens. As citizens and collectives, we should realise how our individual and collective reaction to people released produces and exacerbates certain adversities well beyond the sentence; consequences which, in some cases, are worse than the sentence itself. We need to realise that when stigmatising and discriminating against releasees [i.e. people released from prison], we are also hurting ourselves as individuals, as a community and as a society in two ways. Firstly, from a political-philosophical and axiological point, we are contributing to the creation of a dis-integrative environment in which people experience suffering. By creating a dis-integrative environment, we are constituting an unjust society. Secondly, from a more pragmatic view, citizens should understand that a hostile societal response to a potentially imprisonable act is criminogenic.

Rather than 'locking-down' the incapacitating, debilitating effects of

cumulative disadvantage, we urgently need to invest in creating opportunities and building people's capacities to live good lives. If we all want the benefits of swifter and more secure criminal desistance, then perhaps it is the state, its crime control agencies and the supposedly 'law-abiding' majority who may need to look to amend their attitudes and conduct.

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Table A1: Sample representativeness birth (1970) to age 34 (2004)

Gender		
At Birth (1970)		**At 34 (2004)**
Male	52%	46%
Female	48%	54%

Country of Interview				
	Birth	**Persisters**	**Desisters**	**Non-Offs**	**All (2004)**
England	82%	83%	85%	85%	85%
Wales	5%	6%	6%	6%	6%
Scotland	9%	10%	10%	10%	10%
N Ireland	4%	-	-	-	-

Father's Social Class				
	Birth	**Persisters**	**Desisters**	**Non-Offs**	**All (2004)**
I	5%	1%	4%	6%	6%
II	11%	6%	9%	13%	13%
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