

EARLY STEPS TOWARDS DESISTANCE FROM CRIME: SUBTLE
CHANGES IN THE NARRATIVE WEFT AND USEFULNESS OF
THE CONCEPT OF ASSISTED DESISTANCE (LESSONS FROM
QUEBEC'S TWO MAJOR RESEARCH PROJECTS)

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WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT YOUNG OFFENDERS ?

First, we know that a very small proportion of adolescents (5 to 10% according to studies) are responsible for the majority of violent offenses committed by adolescents (50 to 62% according to studies) -Snyder and Sickmund, 1999 ;

We also know that the majority of adolescents who commit crimes will desist from crime (stop committing crimes and no longer consider themselves a delinquent) during the first years of the transition to adulthood;

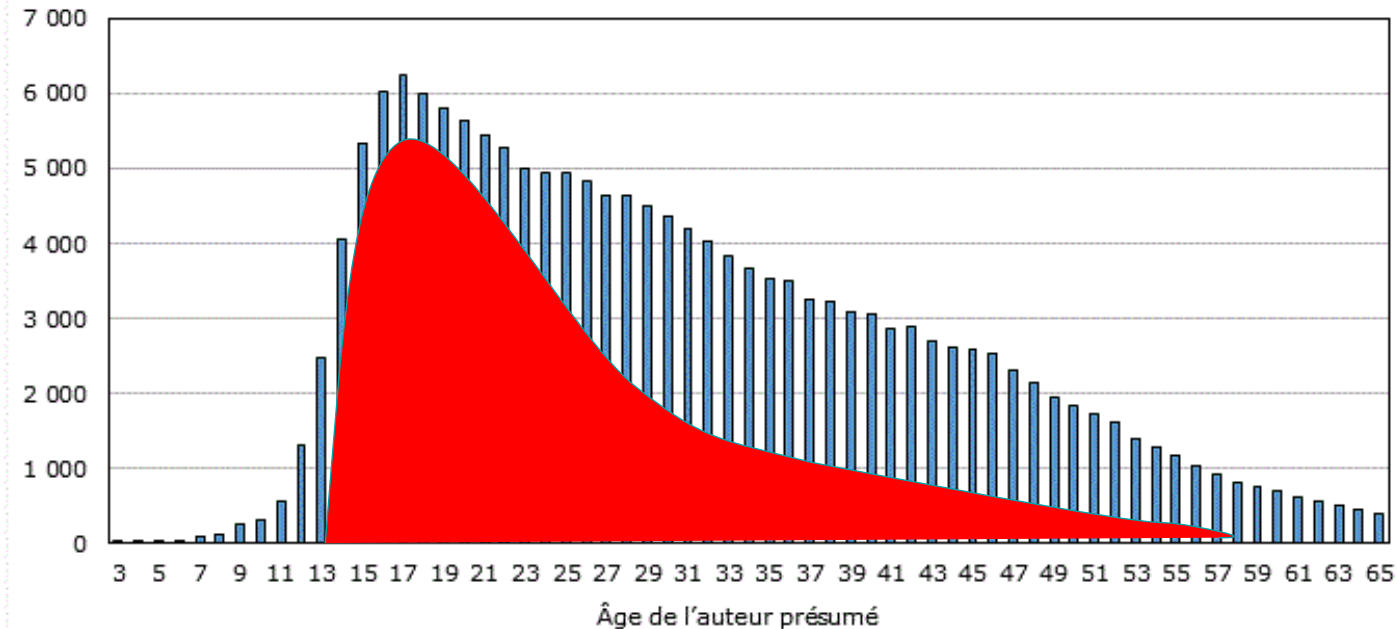
It is therefore a small proportion of individuals who will continue their "criminal career" after reaching 'adulthood' (at least from strictly age perspective);

While this may sound encouraging (why not just wait for them to mature?), it should be noted that each individual that persists in crime costs approximately \$1.3 to \$1.5 million in damage per decade -Snyder and Sickmund, 1999.

The lengthening of the adolescence period also seems to be a problem

Graphique 3
Taux d'auteurs présumés de crimes, selon l'âge de l'auteur présumé, 2014

taux pour
100 000 personnes



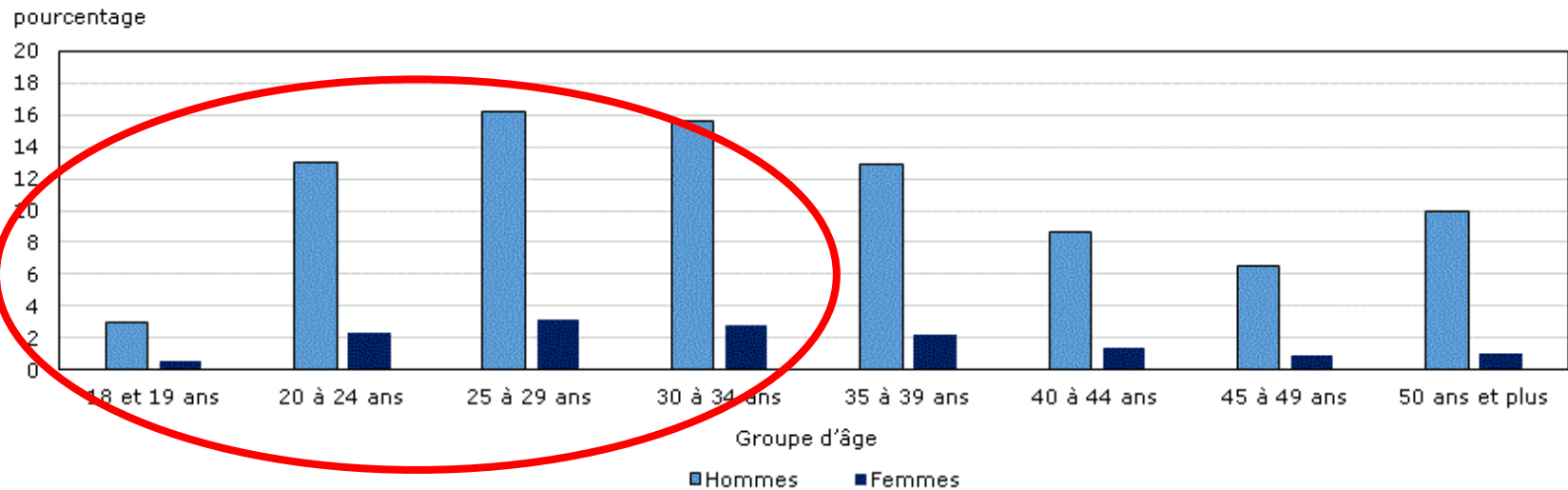
Note : Les taux représentent toutes les infractions au *Code criminel* (sauf les délits de la route). Les taux sont calculés pour 100 000 personnes à chaque âge. Les chiffres de population sont fondés sur des estimations au 1^{er} juillet fournies par la Division de la démographie de Statistique Canada. Les auteurs présumés âgés de moins de 12 ans ne peuvent être inculpés d'une infraction en vertu du *Code criminel*.

Source : Statistique Canada, Centre canadien de la statistique juridique, Programme de déclaration uniforme de la criminalité fondé sur l'affaire, 2014.

Even if we acknowledge that the transition to adulthood now occurs later in life, the legal age has not changed...

Approximately 50% of incarcerated people in Canada are young adults

Graphique 2
Admissions d'adultes à la détention dans un établissement provincial ou territorial, selon le groupe d'âge et le sexe, 2018-2019



Note : Des données supplémentaires sont offertes dans les tableaux 35-10-0015 et 35-10-0017 de Statistique Canada. L'âge représente l'âge de la personne au moment de l'admission. Les admissions aux fins des enquêtes du Centre canadien de la statistique juridique et de la sécurité des collectivités sont comptées chaque fois qu'une personne commence une période de surveillance quelconque dans un établissement correctionnel ou dans la collectivité. Ces données décrivent et mesurent le cheminement des personnes dans les services correctionnels au fil du temps. La même personne peut figurer plusieurs fois dans les comptes d'admissions. Cela se produit lorsqu'elle change de statut correctionnel (p. ex. de la détention provisoire à la détention après condamnation) ou lorsqu'elle réintègre le système plus tard au cours de la même année. Exclut les admissions d'adultes dont le sexe ou l'âge était inconnu.

Source : Statistique Canada, Centre canadien de la statistique juridique et de la sécurité des collectivités, Enquête sur les services correctionnels pour adultes, Enquête intégrée sur les services correctionnels et Enquête sur les services correctionnels canadiens.

AND OUR YOUNG ADULTS...

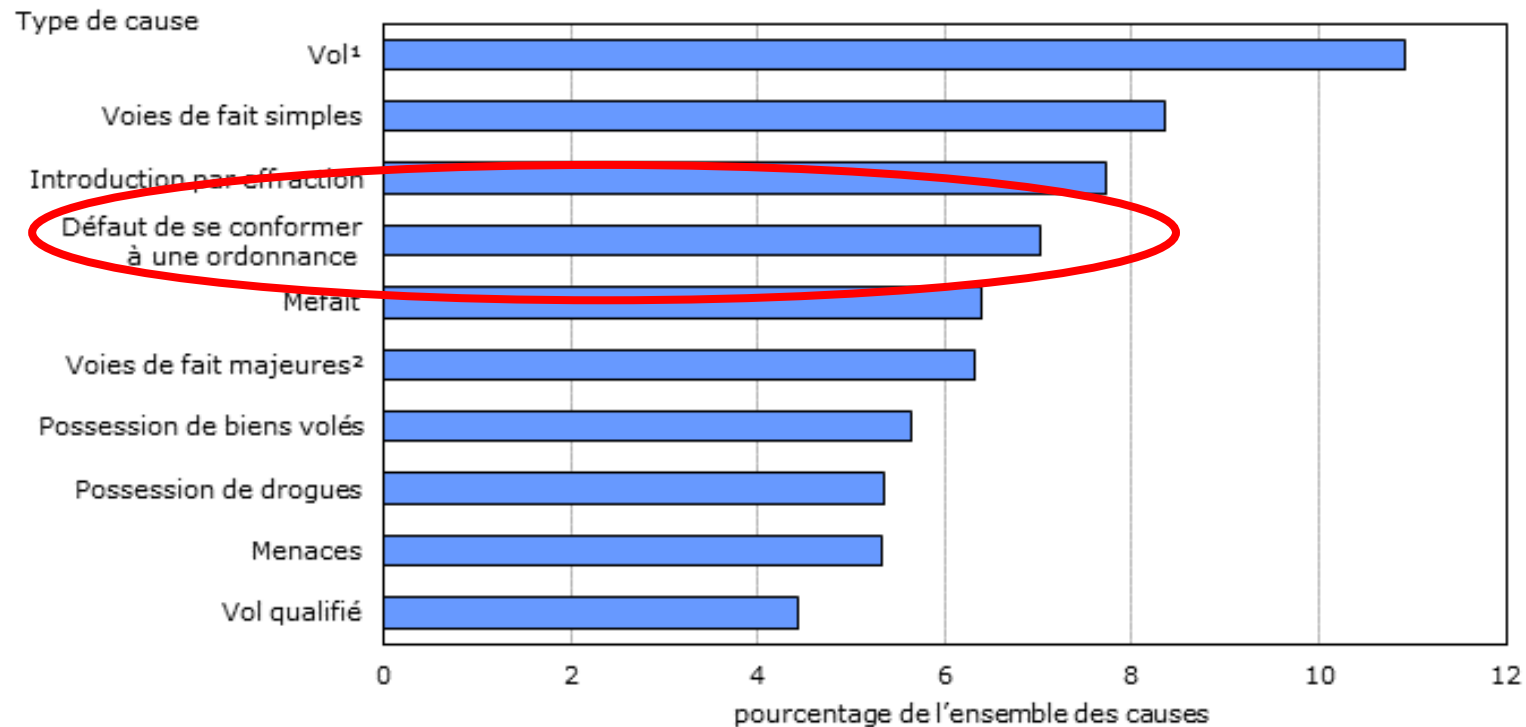
Variables sociodémographiques	Nombre de dossiers retenus	Nouveau contact avec les SCQ (avec ou sans condamnation) ¹²	Taux de récidive/reprise		
			Nouvelle condamnation	Nouvelle incarcération	Condamnation à une peine d'incarcération de 2 ans et plus
Ensemble des libérés	100 % (8 960)	60 % (5 415)	54 % (4 808)	42 % (3 755)	2 % (202)
Sexe					
Femmes	10 % (872)	59 % (518)	53 % (465)	39 % (338)	1 % (5)
Hommes	90 % (8 088)	61 % (4 897)	54 % (4 343)	42 % (3 417)	2 % (197)
Âge à l'admission					
18-24	19 % (1 720)	73 % (1 271)	65 % (1 125)	50 % (857)	3 % (51)
25-34	27 % (2 439)	64 % (1 551)	56 % (1 368)	44 % (1 071)	2 % (51)
35-44	26 % (2 358)	61 % (1 447)	55 % (1 290)	43 % (1 009)	2 % (46)
45 et +	27 % (2 443)	47 % (1 146)	42 % (1 025)	35 % (818)	2 % (54)
Origine					
Allochtone	94 % (8 436)	60 % (5 036)	53 % (4 455)	41 % (3 487)	2 % (192)
Autochtone ¹³	6 % (524)	72 % (379)	67 % (353)	51 % (268)	2 % (10)

Have the higher recidivism-reincarceration rate in the year following their reentry

- Lalande, P., P. Dolmaire et R. Lévesque (2018). *La récidive/reprise de la clientèle confiée aux Services correctionnels du Québec, cohortes 2010-2011*. Québec : Direction générale adjointe aux programmes, au conseil et à l'administration, Direction générale des services correctionnels, ministère de la Sécurité publique du Québec, 112 p.

WE ALSO HAVE A BACK-DOOR SENTENCING EFFECT (TRAVIS ET FISHER, 2005)

Graphique 2
Dix infractions fréquentes dans les causes réglées par les tribunaux de la jeunesse, Canada, 2014-2015



1. Comprend notamment le vol de plus de 5 000 \$, le vol de 5 000 \$ ou moins, et le vol de véhicules à moteur.

2. Comprend notamment les voies de fait armées (niveau 2) et les voies de fait graves (niveau 3).

Note : Une cause comprend une ou plusieurs accusations portées contre une personne ou une société qui ont été traitées par les tribunaux en même temps et qui ont fait l'objet d'une décision finale. Les causes qui comptent plus d'une accusation sont représentées par l'infraction la plus grave.

Source : Statistique Canada, Centre canadien de la statistique juridique, Enquête intégrée sur les tribunaux de juridiction criminelle.



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT YOUNG ADULTS IN CONFLICT WITH
LAW WANTING TO DESIST FROM CRIME?

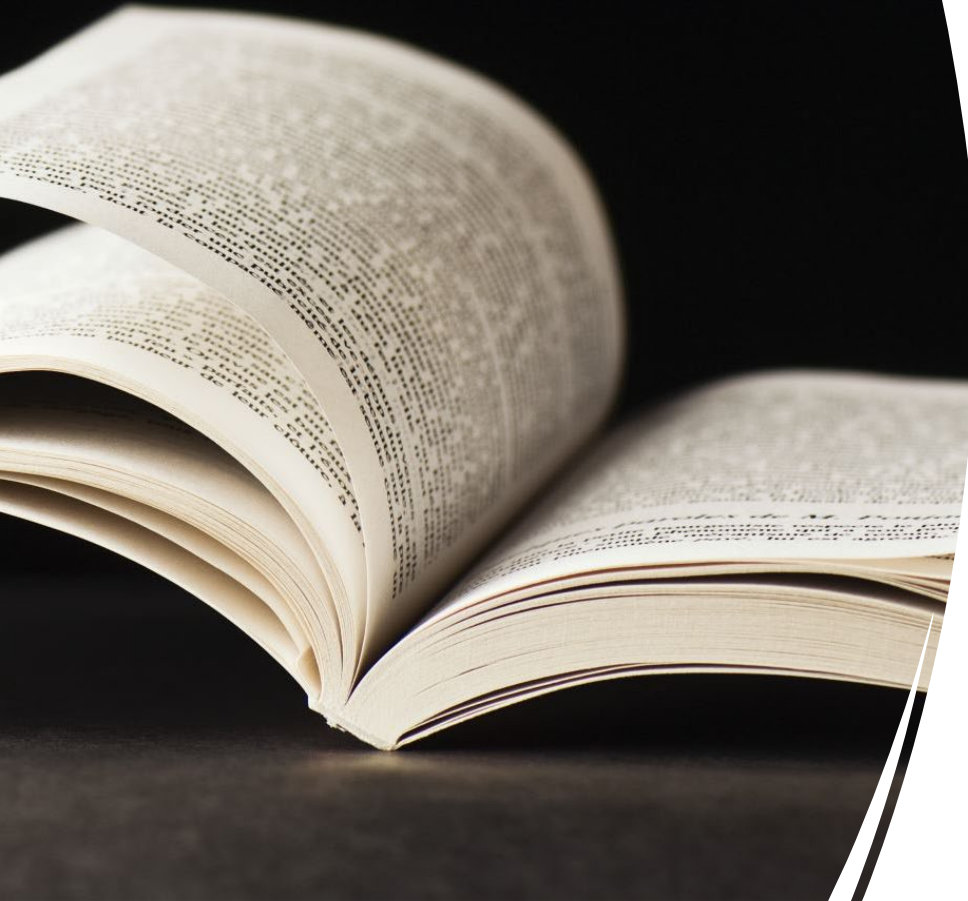
The image features a stack of books with an open book on top. The background is a blurred library. Floating around the books are various white mathematical symbols and icons, including plus signs, zeros, question marks, infinity symbols, and a hand holding a pen. The text "FIRST STUDY : TRANSCENDANCE" is overlaid on the open book.

FIRST STUDY : TRANSCENDANCE

THE NARRATIVE STORYLINE OF YOUNG ADULTS

Young adults who have experienced the judicial system (8 women (average age 28) and 20 men (average age 24) recounted their life as if it was a book, indicating what was the most difficult and the most positive, the turning points in their life, their vision of the future and, if applicable, the moments when they experienced an epiphany (McAdams, 1993);

Their stories allow us to understand why some cannot or do not want to desist from crime, how some manage to do so, but above all – how the transition between delinquency and desistance from crime is experienced.



THOSE WHO CAN'T DESIST

3 young women and 4 young men have life stories tinged with violence suffered within their family and then, in their romantic relationships;

Their life stories are incoherent, strewn with anachronisms and contradictions. It is as if several lives were lived in parallel. They are struggling with mental disorders that prevent them from seeing how they could live otherwise:

G41: "I'm afraid to be aggressive, even if I don't want to. It's like I have bubbles popping in my brain. I have a lot of that. I have a lot of prescribed pills. I started to hear voices in my head. It's weird. They give me medicine, and that's it...";

F36: "I am rendered aggressive, impulsive, extreme personality disorder. I don't know who I am. I don't even know what it is to take care of myself. Even the psychologists don't call me back, because I'm too aggressive."



THOSE WHO DO NOT WISH TO DESIST AT THE MOMENT

For 5 young men, crime has become an escape, a form of recognition, a social role, an income;
Their identity as an offender is fully assumed and they don't understand the social reaction towards them:

G36: "My little guy, the mother is trying to take away my access rights. But it won't work, because I've never abused a woman, I've never beaten a child. She says, "He commits crimes." Yes! I do commit crimes, but I come home at night! »;

For them, even the experience of incarceration is redefined in a positive way: "I am used to the other side, in the cage. Yesterday morning I was thinking how well I am in the cage. Silence, peace, not everyone talking";

In such a logic, it is unlikely that the sanctions will lead them to desist from crime



THOSE WHO DID IT

For 3 women and 3 men: crime is far behind;

For many, it is the fear of dying (overdose, suicide, homicide) that leads them to change their lives. For them, it is going back to school that becomes the lifeline to a better future (many turn to the helping relationship);

For others, it is really the experiences with other inmates through art therapy or even through the vocational training offered during incarceration that they will find meaning in their lives:

G43: "I looked for all the prerequisites to do my trade course. I also did therapy. It also brought me closer to my mother who came to see me every week (in prison). My girlfriend followed me here (name of another city). We have an apartment not far from here. I abandoned my circle of friends. I'm going to make another one..."

A small green seedling with several leaves is growing out of a crack in a dark, textured asphalt surface. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue and white.

THOSE IN BETWEEN

2 women and 8 men were in between when sharing their life stories;

For them, it is very difficult to use the help resources available to them:

G42: "It is difficult, because it means trusting the government again, like social services and all that. You know, I have a hard time with authority. So I have to start trusting authority again. They're not the bad guys. It was I who decided to become a bandit";

In addition to a fear of "others", during this critical stage, young people must manage to shed their identity as an offender:

G38: "When I was in my cage, I realized that all my life , I told myself that I was not going to be like my father. But in fact, I'm the same as him, even worse. That really hurt me, because I saw my father as a scum bag all my life " .

THOSE IN BETWEEN

Aspiring desisters, however, realize that they have to let go of their negative identity in order to continue their desistance process: "I'm starting to bend to the values of society, and I have to forget...";

But the way to get there eludes them:

G42: "I'm trying to set a new goal, to make a good future for myself later. So that's my goal: to build a future for myself!

F47: "I want a stable life, and then normalcy with my boyfriend, and then normal friends!" A life that makes sense, but what is it to be normal? I like the plan to return to society, but I still have trouble with it";

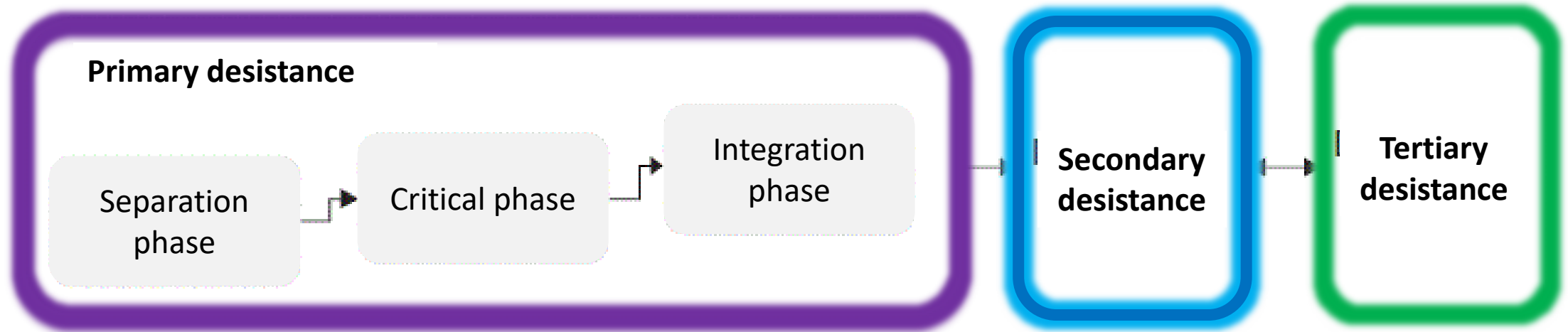
However, being in between is intolerable for most of them:

G34: "If I hadn't had that in my life, I would have had, I probably would have finished high school. I would have a great job. There... nothing at all! I want to prove that I'm not an asshole, that I can do things. I haven't always been a bad guy. But it's hard ".

THESE COMMENTS CONFIRM THAT DESISTANCE IS NOT EASY, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE PROCESS OF IDENTITY CHANGE IS NOT COMPLETED.

FIGURE 1

Desistance from crime



Adapted by Villeneuve, F-Dufour et Turcotte (2020)



SECOND STUDY : RÉ(SO) 16-35

A LARGE-SCALE RESEARCH PROJECT (QUAL)

146 young people aged 16 to 35 met for the first round of interviews (Dec. 2018–Jan. 2020);

Almost half participated in a second interview 21 months later (Nov. 2020– Feb. 2022);

An interview guide that focuses on their perceptions of the services received: on what was helpful and what was less so;

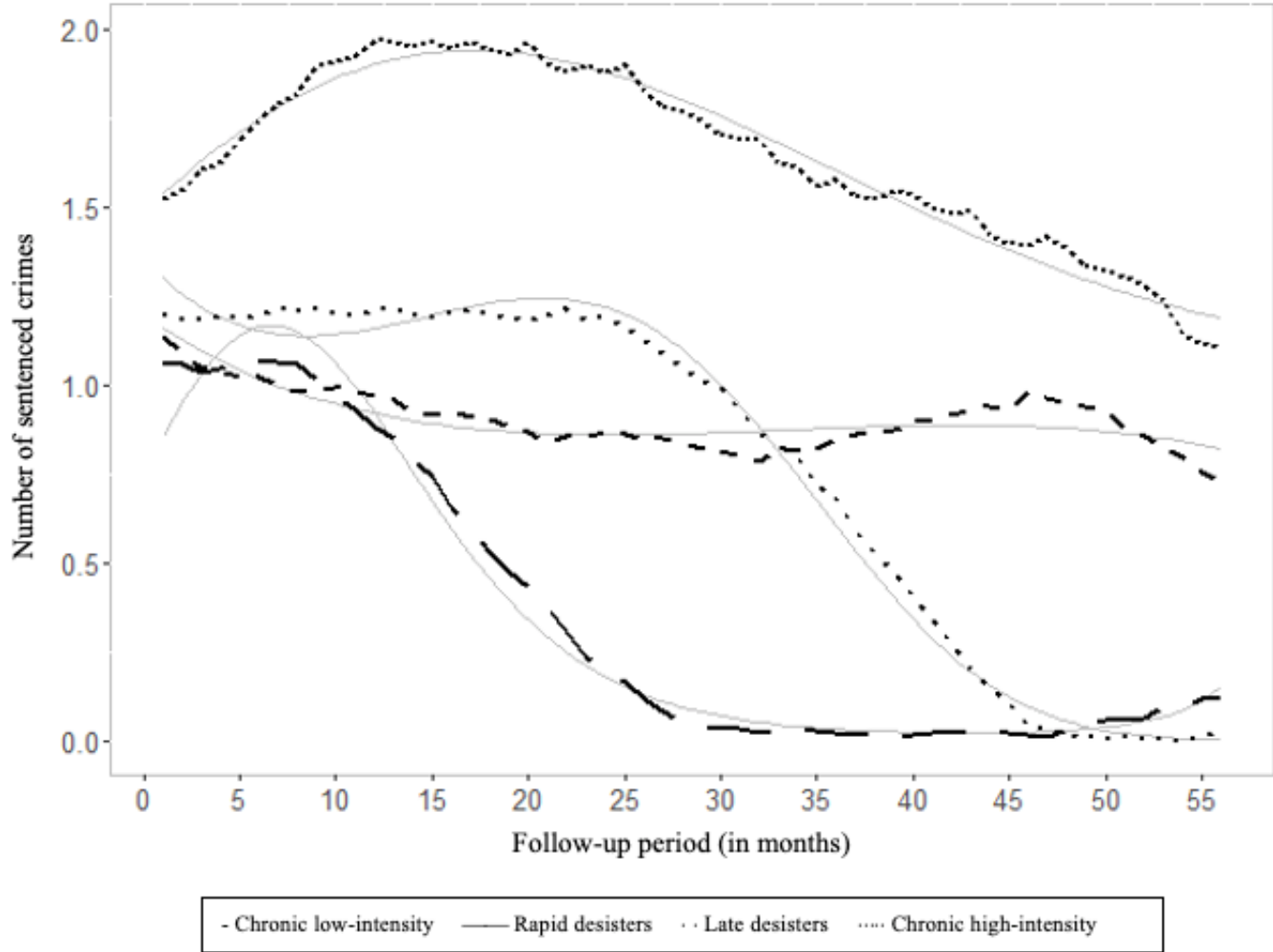
A LARGE-SCALE RESEARCH PROJECT (QUANT)

- 1588 young men (18–34) incarcerated for at least 6 months during 2010–2011 and followed for 5–years period
- Mean age 26,5 years
- 29,7% had prior as adults
- 24,1% as adolescents
- 61% had committed at least one violent crime
- They all completed the LSC/MI

FINDINGS (QUANT- SURVIVAL ANALYSIS)

- Recidivism rates over the 5-year span is 63,2% (reincarceration)
- Every increase of one point on alcohol/drug measure increase the risk of returning in prison by 6%
- Procriminal attitude increase by 8%
- Family/marital problems, increase it by 8%

FINDINGS (QUANT- TRAJ ANALYSIS)



TRAJECTORIES (QUANT)

1- Rapid desisters (17.3%)

Fewer priors. Serious crime. Desist in the two-year following their incarceration

2- Slow desisters (15.9%)

Less severe crimes but in a greater number. They are more likely to return to prison for breaching their conditions. They stray relatively active for 2 to 3 years and then desist.

3- Chronic low-intensity (52.9%)

They are more likely having to deal with addiction to alcohol or drugs. They are recognised guilty of fairly severe crimes (higher on severity index of the four groups) and they are fairly consistent throughout the follow-up (means of 5 crime per individual per year). They show no sign of slowing down

4- Chronic high-intensity (13.9%)

Compared to all other groups, they are recognised guilty of far more crimes (4X than rapid desisters and 2X than chronic low-intensity), but they are the lowest crimes on severity index. A higher proportion of this group are identifying themselves as Aboriginals (11%). We also find more person having antisocial traits, having trouble resolving problems, that are more likely opposing to authority figures or have additions to alcohol or drugs.

PROCESSES OF DESISTANCE (QUAL)

1- Converts

They resemble to chronic low and high. They invested themselves as being 'good criminal'. They need a lot of support to desist. Identity change is crucial in the process

2- Remorseful

They are closer to rapid and slow desisters. They never felt they were criminals (even if they were recognised guilty of fairly severe or numerous crimes). Their way out varies more, but mainly, they have to 'reconnect' with their 'selves' to desist

3- Rescued

They tend to have mental health problems (probably due to prior trauma?). It is difficult for them to find who they are. They do not see themselves as criminals nor as desisters. They are somewhat fairly stocked 'in-between'

CONCLUSION

- As showed quantitatively and qualitatively, young adults in conflict with the law need assistance in many spheres (family/marital, alcohol and drugs, procriminal attitudes and antisocial traits);
- Assisted desistance is a new concept (King, 2013; F-Dufour and coll., 2018) and the main objective of interventions is to (re)create a positive social identity through exploration of strength, sustaining life goals and building life skills;
- It is not a 'program' ;
- Instead, it is idiosyncratic and is more a 'intervention position' were mentoring, on-going support and unconditional acceptance is at the forefront in order to guide young adults to 'move on' and 'forget about the past'

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING. REFERENCES
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