

Life Course Criminology: Understanding Crime Across the Lifespan

Life course criminology. Criminal behavior across the lifespan, risk factors, and turning points.

Criminology Instructor: Neven Elson • 5 sections • 45 lessons • 18.00h total

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About this course

This course explores life course criminology and how criminal behavior develops and changes across the lifespan. You will learn about risk factors, turning points, and the longitudinal research that informs our understanding of criminal careers.

Course curriculum

Foundations and Core Concepts

- **What is Life Course Criminology? (12m)**
Define the field and its key questions. Learn how it differs from other criminology approaches and why the lifespan perspective matters.
- **The Age-Crime Curve Explained (18m)**
Understand the typical pattern of offending across ages. We'll analyze real data to see how crime peaks in late adolescence and what that tells us.
- **Key Theories: Moffitt's Dual Taxonomy (25m)**
A step-by-step guide to Moffitt's theory of life-course-persistent vs. adolescent-limited offenders. Includes a downloadable comparison worksheet.
- **Sampson and Laub's Life Course Theory (22m)**
Learn how turning points and social bonds influence criminal paths. We'll apply this framework to a case study analysis.
- **Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory (20m)**
Explore the role of self-control and how it develops early. This lesson includes a problem-solving session on assessing low self-control.
- **Defining Criminal Trajectories (15m)**
Learn the methods for mapping out different offending paths over time. You'll get a template for creating your own trajectory models.
- **Data Sources for Life Course Research (17m)**
Discover key datasets like the Cambridge Study and Dunedin Study. We'll show you how to access and interpret this longitudinal data.

Early Life and Risk Factors

- **Childhood Risk Factors: Family and Parenting (28m)**
Examine how family dynamics, parenting styles, and early adversity set the stage for later offending. Includes real-world case examples.
- **School and Peer Influences in Childhood (24m)**
Learn how school experiences and early peer groups shape criminal trajectories. We'll analyze a longitudinal study on school dropout and crime.
- **Neurodevelopment and Early Behavior Problems (30m)**
Understand the role of brain development and early conduct problems. This lesson includes a practical guide to identifying early warning signs.
- **The Impact of Poverty and Neighborhood (26m)**
Explore how socioeconomic status and community context affect crime pathways. You'll get a downloadable resource on neighborhood risk assessment.
- **Protective Factors in Childhood (19m)**
Discover what can buffer against risk. We'll look at resilience research and how to identify protective elements in case studies.

- **Childhood-Onset vs. Adolescent-Onset Offending (23m)**
Compare the characteristics and causes of early-starting versus later-starting offenders. Includes a problem-solving session on classification.
- **Intervention Timing: Why Childhood Matters (21m)**
Learn why early intervention is critical and what effective programs look like. We'll review evidence-based approaches.
- **Case Study: Analyzing a Lifelong Trajectory (32m)**
Apply all early life concepts to a detailed case study. You'll complete a step-by-step analysis using provided worksheets.

Adolescence and Young Adulthood

- **Peer Influence and Group Delinquency (27m)**
Understand the powerful role of peer groups in adolescent crime. We'll analyze real data on gang involvement and desistance.
- **School-to-Work Transition and Crime (25m)**
Learn how educational attainment and early employment affect criminal careers. Includes a downloadable template for tracking risk factors.
- **Romantic Relationships and Crime Desistance (22m)**
Explore how marriage and stable partnerships can lead to reduced offending. We'll examine longitudinal data on this turning point.
- **Substance Use and Criminal Trajectories (29m)**
Analyze the link between drug/alcohol use and crime patterns over time. This lesson includes a case study on addiction and recidivism.
- **The Role of Identity and Self-Concept (18m)**
How adolescents form identities that either support or discourage criminal behavior. We'll discuss practical assessment tools.
- **Legal System Contact and Its Effects (26m)**
Examine how early arrest or incarceration can shape later life paths. Includes a problem-solving session on system effects.
- **Desistance Processes in Young Adulthood (31m)**
Learn the steps and factors involved in quitting crime. You'll get a guide to identifying desistance triggers in real cases.
- **Comparing International Trajectories (23m)**
See how crime patterns differ across countries in young adulthood. We'll analyze data from multiple nations.
- **Practical Tools for Risk Assessment (14m)**
A hands-on lesson using tools like the Level of Service Inventory. Includes a downloadable assessment template.

Midlife and Later Adulthood

- **Stability and Change in Midlife Crime Patterns (24m)**
Understand why some offenders continue while others stop in their 30s and 40s. We'll review key research findings.

- **The Role of Employment and Economic Stability (28m)**
Learn how jobs and income affect criminal behavior later in life. Includes a case study on employment programs.
- **Family Roles and Responsibilities (22m)**
Explore how becoming a parent or caregiver influences crime. We'll analyze longitudinal data on family bonds.
- **Health, Aging, and Criminal Behavior (26m)**
Examine how physical and mental health issues affect crime in later life. This lesson includes a practical guide to health-crime links.
- **Late-Onset Offending: Why Some Start Later (25m)**
Investigate the rare cases of crime beginning in midlife or later. We'll look at triggers like job loss or divorce.
- **White-Collar Crime Across the Lifespan (30m)**
Analyze how economic crimes evolve from young to older adulthood. Includes a real case study analysis of corporate fraud.
- **Desistance in Later Life: Final Transitions (21m)**
Learn about the processes that lead to permanent quitting of crime in later years. You'll get a step-by-step desistance model.
- **Policy Implications for Midlife Interventions (19m)**
Discuss what programs work for older offenders. Includes a downloadable policy brief template.
- **Case Study: A Full Lifespan Analysis (35m)**
Walk through a complete life course analysis from childhood to old age. You'll complete a comprehensive worksheet.

Advanced Application and Implementation

- **Integrating Multiple Theories for Analysis (28m)**
Learn to combine life course theories for a richer understanding. Includes a problem-solving session on theory integration.
- **Longitudinal Research Methods (26m)**
A practical guide to designing and interpreting life course studies. You'll get a downloadable research plan template.
- **Predicting Criminal Trajectories (32m)**
Explore risk assessment tools and their limitations. We'll analyze a real prediction model case study.
- **Intervention Strategies Across the Lifespan (30m)**
Learn evidence-based programs for different life stages. Includes a guide to matching interventions to risk factors.
- **Policy Design for Life Course Approaches (25m)**
How to create policies that support positive trajectories. You'll draft a policy proposal using a provided template.
- **Ethical Considerations in Life Course Research (20m)**
Discuss privacy, labeling, and bias issues. Includes a real-world ethics case study analysis.

- **Using Data to Inform Practice (23m)**
A step-by-step guide to translating research into practice. Includes a downloadable toolkit for practitioners.
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons in Life Course Criminology (27m)**
Examine how life course patterns differ globally. We'll analyze data from diverse societies.
- **Future Directions in the Field (18m)**
Learn about emerging trends like neurocriminology and big data. Includes a discussion on future research needs.
- **Building a Career in Life Course Criminology (15m)**
Practical advice for students and professionals. You'll get a downloadable career planning worksheet.
- **Final Project: Analyze Your Own Case (40m)**
Apply all course concepts to a case of your choice. Includes a detailed rubric and peer review guidelines.
- **Course Wrap-Up and Next Steps (12m)**
Review key takeaways and plan your continued learning. You'll get a downloadable action plan template.

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