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Criminal performance: a dynamic approach of criminal earnings

Previous studies on criminal career provide leads to explain regular involvement in activities where risk-taking is important. Several authors analysed the frequency of criminal acts to explain continuity and variations in offending. Over the years, the social control theory, which explains patterns of change in terms of variations in informal social control in local life circumstances, has dominated this field of study. On the other hand, few studies have focused monthly criminal earnings, which can be used as a measure of performance as well as impunity. The majority of studies on the subject limited their analyses on factors that explain the extent illicit income over a long period of time. This results in a rather static perspective that underestimates the delinquents' social context. The role of these factor is better highlighted through the use of a dynamic approach, one that considers the changes within and between individuals. In this presentation, we examine variations in monthly self-reported criminal earnings in a sample of 200 adult offenders interviewed in Canadian federal prisons during the three years prior to their current incarceration. Life events likely to affect such earnings are analyzed. These include performance in the conventional labour market (legal incomes), episodes of welfare or unemployment, episodes of surveillance or incarceration, commitment to primary ties (breaking up or building relationships with intimate partners), loosing or obtaining access to new criminal opportunities. Age of criminal onset, age at time of interview, personal traits (such as low self control dispositions) are viewed as fixed attributes. To control for such attributes, we rely on hierarchical linear modeling.