I AM YOUR FATHER

- A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FATHERHOOD
AS A POTENTIAL TURNING POINT

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Research in life-course criminology has been studying turning points away from criminality. There is although a limited amount of research that has been focusing on parenthood and especially on fatherhood as a potential turning point. The available studies show mixed results in this topic and the findings suggest that there are factors that can both form and restrict fatherhood as a potential turning point towards desistance. The aim for the present thesis is therefore to get a better understanding of fatherhood as a potential turning point from persistent offending and to examine the role and meaning of fatherhood in the criminal careers of Swedish former criminals. Qualitative method in the form of retrospective semi-structured interviews has been used to collect data and five former offenders that became fathers during their criminal career participated in the study. The data have been analysed with systematic text condensation and the results indicate that the men did not desist after becoming fathers. They did however have both intended and unintended breaks from criminality when their child was born, but the criminal lifestyle was their first choice and their children were put on the second place. Relationships to friends and in some cases to the mother of the child was a restricting factor for fatherhood to become a turning point. Another factor that restricted fatherhood from being a potential turning point was human agency. The men concluded that an offending father can not receive help from society if there is no will for the father to desist.

*Keywords*: desistance, fatherhood, life-course criminology, offending, semi-structured interviews, turning point.
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INTRODUCTION

What happens when you step your foot into fatherhood? Can this kind of a major life event turn an offender away from the criminal lifestyle? Turning points have been a key area of research within life-course criminology, but the empirical studies have mainly been focusing on transitions into marriage, employment and military service (Na, 2016). Parenthood could also be seen as a turning point away from criminality, but only a limited amount of research has been looking into this, and the focus has mainly been on motherhood (Ibid.). Consistent with the life-course perspective it could be argued however that, fatherhood could possibly work as a protective factor against further criminal behaviour and help to encourage psychological well-being for the fathers (Landers, Mitchell & Coates, 2015; Lemay, Cashman, Elfenbein, & Felice, 2010).

The relationship between the father and the child is of importance. Research show that the father-adolescent relationship is crucial when it comes to the children’s psychological well-being (Videon, 2005) and Hoeve, Dubas, Eichelsheim, van der Laan, Smeenk & Gerris (2009) suggest that poor paternal support is more strongly associated to delinquency than poor maternal support. This indicate that fathers do matter, and therefore it is of importance to focus research on fatherhood and how becoming a father affect the offender, this in getting a better understanding in how that important bond between the father and the child can be developed.

The current thesis will therefore focus on former male offenders that became fathers while still living the criminal lifestyle and retrospective semi-structured interviews have been used to get to hear the fathers’ stories and to get a better understanding if fatherhood can act as a turning point towards desistance.

Aim and research questions

Due to the limited research on fatherhoods’ effect on offending, especially in the Swedish context, this thesis strives to investigate this further. It is of importance to expand this knowledge to understand how and in what kind of way society can help offending fathers and thereby make their children get a good and safe upbringing.

The aim for this thesis is therefore to get a better understanding of fatherhood as a potential turning point from persistent offending and to examine the role and meaning of fatherhood in the criminal careers of Swedish former criminals. The three main research questions in the present thesis are thereby:

1. What kind of relationship can be detected between fatherhood and desistance?
2. In what kind of way does fatherhood have an impact on the offending men and the criminal careers?
3. What factors work to form or restrict fatherhood as a turning point?, and finally
4. How can society aid fathers to make use of fatherhood as a catalyst to possibly become a turning point?
BACKGROUND

This chapter will discuss what life-course criminology is and get a deeper understanding of the age-graded theory of informal social control by Sampson and Laub (1993). The chapter will also present previous research on the association between fatherhood and desistance and discuss factors that can both help and restrict fatherhood as a potential turning point.

Life-course criminology

Developmental and life-course criminology have a focus on the longitudinal patterning of antisocial and criminal behaviour over the life-course (Piquero, Farrington & Blumstein, 2007). It can be seen that the main issues in life-course criminology are: the development of criminal and antisocial behaviour, risk and protective factors at different ages, and the effects of different life events in the development of an individual’s life-course (Farrington, 2003; Piquero, Farrington & Blumstein, 2007). Research in life-course criminology strives to particularly document and explain within-individual changes in offending throughout the individual’s life (Farrington, 2005).

The criminal career paradigm is one of the four paradigms that is interlinked to developmental and life-course criminology (Farrington, 2003). When studying criminal careers, research has been looking at the individual’s involvement in criminal activity and the focus has mainly been on the dimensions of participation, frequency, specialisation, escalation, career length, and desistance (DeLisi & Piquero, 2011). Onset, persistence and desistance are factors that are linked to the career length and in life-course criminology researchers discuss the age-crime curve (Piquero, Farrington & Blumstein, 2007; Piquero & Benson, 2004). Onset of offending, which can be described as when an individual for the first time is involved in crime and delinquent behaviour, will for most individuals be in the mid teenage years, usually between the ages of 15-17 (Piquero & Benson, 2004). A small group of individuals start earlier and a few start later, but all in all onset of offending in street crime after the age of 25 is rare. The career length is predominantly short and is over by the time the youngster reach the age of 20. With the exception of a small group of offenders desistance, in other words when an individual step away from criminal activity, commonly occurs sometimes in the early twenties (Ibid.).

Within the life-course perspective and when studying within-individual changes different trajectories, transitions and turning points are essential. There are several trajectories or pathways in an individual’s life (e.g. married life, parenthood, delinquent behaviour) and trajectories can be seen as a path of development throughout a person’s life (Landers, Mitchell & Coates, 2015). A transition within a trajectory can be seen as a specific event, such as moving, getting a job or becoming a parent, and a turning point can be illustrated as a marked change of direction. Turning points have the ability to redirect and change the course an individual’s life was previously taking (Kuh, Ben-Shlomo, Lynch, Hallqvist & Power, 2003; Landers, Mitchell & Coates, 2015).

There is a bunch of different developmental theories and Sampson & Laub are one of the researchers that have developed a theory within the life-course criminology. Sampson & Laub did a follow-up study on Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck’s data, which consisted of 500 delinquent and 500 non-delinquent boys
Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Sampson & Laub, 2005) and in doing so developed their age-graded theory of informal social control.

**The age-graded theory of informal social control**

Sampson & Laub (1993) have been studying criminal behaviour over an individual’s life-course and they argue for the age-graded theory of informal social control to give explanation to both continuity and change in offending. Sampson and Laub do not believe in diverse pathways to criminal activity and they argue for social bonds to be the explaining mechanisms behind both persistent offending and desistance. This can be seen as that strong social bonds will reduce offending whereas, weak social bonds will increase delinquency (Piquero & Benson, 2004). Sampson & Laub (1993) discuss that onset of offending can be explained with structural background factors (e.g. low SES, family size, family disruption, residential mobility and ethnicity) and individual difference factors (e.g. difficult temperament, persistent tantrums and early conduct disorder), and they further illustrate that these risk factors have an embedded effect on antisocial behaviour and offending during childhood and the teenage years, this because of the factors’ effect on informal social control. Onset of offending can as a result be tracked to weak socialisation in early childhood (Piquero & Benson, 2004).

Sampson and Laub (1993) state that weak bonds to family, school and peers will make teenagers more likely to engage in criminal activity, hence when reaching adulthood the key factor for change in the criminal trajectory will be the social bonds. Delinquency during the early years in childhood is according to Sampson and Laub (1993) an aspect that can hinder the development of pro social bonds in adulthood. Therefore there will not be a change in the offending trajectory until some form of informal social control will surface in the individual’s life (Piquero & Benson, 2004).

Within-individual changes in offending and desistance are seen as a complex process (Carlsson, 2012). Turning points are a central element in Sampson and Laub’s (2005) theory, and they argue for turning points, such as a good marriage, employment, military service and residential change to work as a driving force and some sort of a hook towards the process of desistance from criminality (Ibid.). Turning points are fundamental elements in understanding change in criminal activity. Turning points open up the opportunity for a human being to (1) ‘knife off’ the past from the present, (2) invest in new relationships that will produce supervision in form of direct and indirect social control but also social support and growth, (3) new situations and therefore also new routine activities and (4) new conditions for the opportunity to identity transformation (Carlsson, 2012; Sampson & Laub, 2005). The individual’s own choice and will to desist is however important when it comes to turning points and the process towards desistance – human agency is therefore a crucial element in this process (Sampson & Laub, 2005).

An essential factor for the turning points to work is the sufficient time that the individual spends in the new direction (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Carlsson (2012) states that:
“A turning point thus constitutes a change in the life course, which, in turn, constitutes a change in the individual’s offending. It is not employment, marriage, military service, residential change or other changes in themselves that bring about desistance, but rather the way such changes under certain circumstances can bring about other changes, which are theoretically understood as central for the desistance processes to emerge.“ (Carlsson, 2012:3).

Laub & Sampson (2003) argue that desistance from criminality can be explained by a convergence of social controls, structured routine activities, and determined human agency. A factor that can however reduce the individual’s chance to desist from criminality is substance abuse (Ibid.). Substance abuse can make it more difficult to have solid social relationships and to hold on to a stable job and thereby it can reduce the informal social control in the individuals’ life (Nilsson, Estrada & Bäckman, 2014).

**Previous research on fatherhood as a potential turning point**

From a life-course perspective it could be argued that fatherhood could work as a possible turning point from an offending trajectory, but when looking at the limited research that has been focusing on fatherhood and desistance there is as discrepancy when it comes to fatherhood as a turning point. According to research there are different factors that can both help and restrict fatherhood from being a potential turning point. These factors are mainly timing of fatherhood, relationship to the mother of the child, if the father is residing with the child or not, financing problems combined with masculinity, and agency.

**Timing of fatherhood**

Timing of a specific event can have an impact on how an individual’s trajectories will progress. Elder has acknowledged five paradigmatic principles that have an influence on the human life-course and development and one of these is the principle of timing (Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson & Crosnoe, 2004). Elder (1998) argues that: “the developmental impact of a succession of life transitions or events is contingent on when they occur in a person’s life” (Elder, 1998:3). This means that the key aspect is when a transition or event appears – if it is early or late in relation to other individuals and normative expectations (Elder & Giele, 2009). The same kind of events or transitions can influence and have an effect on people in different ways depending on when they take place during the life-course. In other words, the implication and consequences of a particular event can change depending on different developmental stages (Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson & Crosnoe, 2004).

When looking from the view of the life-course perspective it can be discussed that a normative timing of different transitions are essential in forming successive trajectories of the life-course (Na, 2016). Na (2016) is stating that, “transitioning too early or too late to what is commonly viewed as a pro social institution may in fact generate or enhance later difficulties in successful social adaptation and development” (Na, 2016:183). An off-time transition can develop problems at later stages of the life-course. This can be seen when looking at research of teenage pregnancies – becoming a father in the teenage years can cause stress for the young father, this because he most likely has not finished his studies or have a job with a stable income to secure a good upbringing for his newborn. This kind of an off-time transition can make way for school dropouts, un-employment and
enhance the probabilities for an offending trajectory. (Kerr, Capaldi, Owen, Wiesner & Pears, 2011; Moloney, MacKenzie, Hunt & Joe-Laidler, 2009; Pirog-Good, 1996). The question is however – what about the young males that already have established an offending trajectory? Could an off-time transition to fatherhood trigger a turning point away from the criminal path?

Research shows mixed results in this question. Na (2016) found in his research that an off-time transition did not work as a turning point for serious male offenders in their teenage years. The adolescent fathers showed an increase in criminal activity, particularly in income-generating crimes. There was also an increased exposure to violence and to the association with antisocial peers and in how the young fathers got influenced by them (Ibid.). An off-time transition into fatherhood did not trigger or speed up the process towards desistance – it rather increased a risky lifestyle and time spent with antisocial peers. The young fathers were not ready for the responsibility that came with fatherhood (Ibid.). However, a study by Kerr et al. (2011) show that, fatherhood could serve as a potential turning point for teenage fathers. Kerr et al. (2011) were looking at changes in at-risk American men’s crime, arrest, tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use trajectories following fatherhood. Becoming a father had a positive impact on the male’s offending trajectories and there was a decrease in criminal activity as well as in tobacco and alcohol use. Although when it comes to arrest and marijuana use there was no support for alterations in these trajectories (Ibid.). In this study it can be seen that criminality was measured with self-reports and arrest was based on official records, and this may perhaps explain the different results between the offending and arrest trajectories (Ibid.). This study is also indicating that an on-time transition into fatherhood had a positive effect for the offending males. Kerr et al. (2011) state that the older the men were when facing a transition to become a father, the greater the decrease was in criminal activity and alcohol use.

What can be seen is that off-time transition into fatherhood can both increase and decrease offending, but an on-time transition into fatherhood can have a positive effect and thereby work as a turning point from persistent offending. This can be seen in the study by De Goede, Blokland, Nieuwbeerta (2011). De Goede, Blokland, Nieuwbeerta (2011) found that when becoming a parent for the first time, the likelihood of criminal activity was lower for older fathers in comparison with younger fathers. The results indicate as well that the younger the males were when entering fatherhood the higher the probability was for an offending behaviour (Ibid.). Na (2016) is also discussing the potential of on-time transitions and suggests that fatherhood in early adulthood has a transformative potential. Na (2016) did not find a statistically significant result when it comes to reduced criminal activity, but becoming a father in early adulthood decreased unstructured socialising with peers, which in that way also reduced exposure to violence. Becoming a father during early adulthood increased the male’s self-esteem and consideration of life goals (Ibid.). For the young adults, fatherhood resulted in changes in routine activities and in the males’ identity – these are important elements for a turning point according to Sampson & Laub (2005).

What can be seen is that the research above suggests that the timing of fatherhood can play a role when it comes to fatherhood as a turning point.
**Relationship to the mother of the child**

The relationship to the mother of the child is a crucial element for the young fathers and their offending trajectories. To have access to the child is of importance for the father and for fatherhood to possibly work as a turning point. The findings from a study by Savolainen (2009) suggest that fathers who were married or cohabiting with the mother of the child after the pregnancy had the greatest reduction in criminal behaviour. Theobald, Farrington & Piquero (2015) found that having a child had little effect on criminal activity and they argue that the relationship to the mother could be the key element in this case. Relapse into offending because of relationship difficulties and the mothers keeping the child away from the father is a returning problem (Ladlow & Neale, 2016; Parra-Cardona, Sharp & Wampler, 2008). In a study about fatherhood programs Dion, Zaveri & Holcomb (2015) show that only one-third of the fathers that had enrolled for the programs had a romantic relationship to the mother of their child and the men reported that co-parenting was a challenging task. Almost two-thirds of the fathers implied that at least one of their children’s mothers made it hard for the men to spend time with their child. The mothers served as gatekeepers to the children and were unwilling to share information and decisions regarding the children and prevented the men from fulfilling their role as a father (Ibid.).

For mothers to work as a gatekeeper can be justified in situations where domestic violence have been present (Dion, Zaveri & Holcomb, 2015), however in other cases it is of importance that the fathers have access to their children and can be an involved father in the children’s life. Herland, Hauge & Helgeland (2015) have done a qualitative study with men who have a delinquent past and in the study the men are telling about how they experience themselves as fathers today. Some of the fathers in the study pinpointed how a complicated relationship to the mother have become a barrier that makes it hard to be in contact with their child, and few of the fathers have had to put their own needs aside and decided to step away from the fight and settled with the fact to not see their children (Ibid.).

To have access to the child and to reside with their children are factors that can help the fathers to desist from their criminal trajectory. Theobald, Farrington & Piquero (2015) argue that men who reside with their first-born child for at least five years will show a larger decrease in offending than the fathers that are not living with their newborn. Landers, Mitchell & Coates (2015) have also been looking at fathers who reside with their children and their results imply that delinquent adolescents that did not live with their child had greater chances for future arrest than the fathers that were residing with their infant. When the delinquent teenagers were residing with their children they reported less criminal activity, such as marijuana use, hard drug use and drug distribution – this in comparison when they did not live with their children (Ibid.).

**Masculinity and financing problems**

There are age-specific norms of how masculinity and being a man is defined and how to successfully do masculinity in the diverse stages of the life-course (Carlsson, 2013a). Messerschmidt (1993) talks about “doing masculinity” and this concept can be seen to be historically and socially dependent. In today’s society masculinity can be seen as being independent and self-contained, being dominant, not hesitating to use violence when defending oneself or somebody else and being sexually active (Carlsson, 2013a). This kind of behaviour is rewarded and encouraged among males. But when an individual moves on in the life-course,
different ways of successfully doing masculinity become possible. The normative way of doing masculinity in the teenage years is for the youngster to rebel against the conventional institutions, but when growing up and when reaching adulthood masculinity is seen in a different light – the rebellion should settle down, get a job and start a family. Masculinity is here defined as the good parent, the provider, and the family man (Ibid.).

Masculinity can be a factor that can hinder fatherhood from being a turning point. Moloney et al. (2009) found in their study about gang members that the men were doing one kind of masculinity when being on the streets. The men were cool, had a rough image and offending were their life style. But when entering fatherhood a new concept of masculinity became present – the breadwinner, the protector and the teacher (Ibid.). Masculinity in the form of a breadwinner who supports the family, were however causing problems for the fathers. The men were motivated to desist from criminality and leave the offending trajectories following fatherhood, but because of their criminal records, low education and limited job experience they found it difficult to secure a stable legitimate job and therefore they instead relayed on selling drugs to support their children (Ibid.). Landers, Mitchell & Coates (2015) have also found similar findings in their study. They argue that residing with the mother and their child did not result in statistically significant reduction in all criminal activities. The residential status was not linked with lower assault crimes or drug sales (Ibid.). Masculinity causing problems is also present in the study by Na (2016). The results from this study are showing that becoming a father during the teenage years rather increases the offending, in particular the income-generating crimes. It could be assumed that these adolescents wanted to be the masculine father and support their children, they wanted to be the provider and in doing so assure respect – but the economic struggles were real and the young fathers had to choose illegitimate channels to be able to support their children (Ibid.).

The struggles to support one’s family with legal income and to be the masculine provider are persistent problems for the fathers that have a desire to desist from the offending trajectory (Ladlow & Neale, 2016; Neale & Davies, 2016). This can be linked to strain theory that states that delinquency is the result when individuals are incapable to reach their goals through legal channels (Agnew, 2012). The goal to be the masculine provider builds up an economic strain and thereby it can be argued that there is an increase in offending that is related to economic gains (Broidy & Agnew 1997).

Masculinity is posed as a negative factor, an element that makes it hard for the fathers to completely step away from their offending trajectories. Masculinity is related with the normative assumption that being a father equals having the breadwinner role and identity (Roy & Dyson, 2010; Neale & Davies, 2016). However in today’s society the mentality of the providing father and the caring mother have changed. This can be seen at least in the Scandinavian countries (Herland, Hauge & Helgeland, 2015; Plantin, Månsson, Kearney, 2000). The fathers in Sweden are seen to be as caring and emotionally committed such as the mothers (Plantin, Månsson, Kearney, 2000). If this kind of mentality that masculinity is not necessarily equivalent to the provider identity have influenced the offending males in Sweden is of interest to find out.
**Human agency**

A crucial element in the life-course perspective is the human condition of choice and individual will. The principle of agency is another principle of Elder’s five paradigmatic principles and it can be seen that “individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance” (Elder, 1998:4). Agency can be seen as a process where individuals put themselves into different roles and situations. Individuals are planful and make choices that bring them a chance to be in charge of their lives (Elder & Giele, 2009). What can be seen is that both children and adults are not passive human beings – instead they make choices and compromises based on the opportunities that are brought to them (Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson & Crosnoe, 2004). Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson & Crosnoe (2004) express that: “the planning and choice-making of individuals, within the particular limitations of their world, can have important consequences for future trajectories” (Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson & Crosnoe, 2004:11).

In Sampson and Laub’s age-graded theory of informal social, agency is an important element. Human agency can according to Sampson and Laub (2005) give explanation to both persistence in offending and desistance from criminal behaviour. Agency is a significant aspect when looking at the actions the individual is taking, and is fundamental in understanding the patterns of stability and change in offending over the individual’s life-course (Ibid.). Sampson and Laub (2005) argue for that reason that persistence in criminal activity is more than weak social bonds and desistance is more than strong bonds – the part of human agency plays a primary role and it can be seen that persistent offending or desistance is an active choice. Laub and Sampson (2003) stress also that the choices a person can take is implanted in the social structures. When looking at human agency and the process of desistance, a turning point can be seen as a lock, whereas agency is the key to open the lock – there has to be an individual will to desist from an offending trajectory (Laub & Sampson, 2003).

Research on fatherhood as a turning point is showing that becoming a father per se does not change an offending trajectory, there has to be a will to change within the human being for fatherhood to act as a potential turning point. Moloney et al. (2009) found in their study that entering fatherhood worked as a turning point for some of the gang members and this because of the will to change. Some of the gang members were telling that fatherhood was a driving force to change their lives and desist from criminal activity, because they wanted to be positive role models for their children. They wanted to get a legal job and get away from hanging out on the streets (Ibid.). With the help of agency some of the gang members were able to face fatherhood as a turning point, but this was not the case for all of the men. The incapability to support the family with legal income and cutting off the bonds to the friends and thereby change one’s routine activities, were the main obstacles for the fathers and their process towards desistance (Ibid.). There was a change in the gang members’ motivation and self-concept – there was a will to turn away from offending and to earn money through legal ways, but the circumstances to support the family with legal income were restricted (Ibid.). As Elder (1998) puts it – agency and the individual’s opportunity to make choices is embedded within given constraints and social circumstances. It can be seen that some of the gang members decided to step away from the streets and change their offending behaviours when becoming fathers,
but the social circumstances restricted however their opportunities to support their children by legal income.

The findings from Moloney et al. (2009) show that intermittency is a common pathway for offenders. Intermittency can be defined as a zigzag offending pattern and Piquero (2004) explains it as “a temporary abstinence from criminal activity during a particular period of time only to be followed by a resumption of criminal activity after a particular period of time” (Piquero, 2004:108). Carlsson (2013b) discusses two forms of intermittency – one form is when the delinquent for a period of time “takes a break”, “holds up” or “pauses” from the criminal behaviour but there is no real interest in desisting from offending. The second form can be seen as incomplete or unsuccessful efforts to desist from offending – in this form of intermittency the individual has a will to make changes in his life and to desist from the criminal lifestyle, but the offender does not succeed in doing so (Carlsson, 2013b). The second form of intermittency is present in the study by Moloney et al. (2009). Some of the gang members wanted to desist and become a family father, but their attempt in doing so was unsuccessful and they continued selling drugs to support their children and to keep up their masculinity.

A will to live and do the best for their children has been a hook for positive changes in many fathers’ lives (Dion, Zaveri & Holcomb, 2015). In a study by Parra-Cardona, Sharp & Wampler (2008) the fathers told that they wanted to be good fathers and change for their children – this by avoiding the risky lifestyle with delinquent behaviour and substance abuse. The fathers in the study had a will to change their mentality and attitude and thereby they changed their focus from themselves to their child (Ibid.). What can be seen is that it is not the biological factor of becoming a father that works as a turning point – it is the choice and agency to turn on the father role that makes becoming a father a turning point for some men (Edin, Nelson & Paranal, 2004; Moloney et al., 2009).

The mixed results above indicate that there are diverse factors that play a role for fatherhood to work as a turning point when an offender becomes a father. Different factors can both form and restrict the process towards desistance for the fathers. Zoutewelle-Terovan & Skardhamar (2016) discuss that instead of a turning point, parenthood could be considered as a dampening effect on criminal tendency – this would be of interest to see if it applies on fatherhood per se as well.

**METHODOLOGY**

The present thesis has focused on ex male offenders who became fathers during their criminal careers with the aim of listening to their stories of how they experienced fatherhood and whether or not becoming a father was seen as a turning point. The men’s own stories are the focal point and for that reason qualitative method has been used in this thesis. Turning points and desistance can be seen as a process and therefore it can be argued that this complexity of a process can best be captured by qualitative methods (Maruna, 2001).

**Qualitative method**

Qualitative method has mainly its focus on the micro level and thereby on the participant’s own words and the meaning of different events. This method seeks
to supply in-depth, comprehensive information about human beings and their behaviour, actions and interactions (Tewksbury, 2009). Qualitative method tries to capture patterns and themes – this to explain different kinds of complex processes of change overtime. It can be seen that quantitative method might not be able to entirely capture these kinds of underlying processes and mechanisms (Tewksbury, 2009; Teruya & Hser, 2010). Within this method the attention is on the participants and how they distinguish and interpret their social reality (Bryman, 2012).

Qualitative method is often criticised by quantitative researchers by implying that this method is overly subjective. Quantitative researchers argue that qualitative results are mainly based on the researcher’s unsystematic interpretations of what is important and noteworthy (Bryman, 2012). Generalisability is not the main focus in qualitative research (Tewksbury, 2009). The qualitative researcher tends to often have a strategically small sample and the focus is thereby not on generalising the results and this has raised some criticism from the quantitative researchers (Bryman, 2012). Despite of this critique qualitative method is the most suitable approach for the present thesis. Qualitative research is valuable when there is a desire to obtain in-depth descriptions of various life experiences (Parra-Cardona, Sharp & Wampler, 2008). This method is also useful when doing research with marginalised individuals and thereby the participants can feel that their voices are important (Ibid.). I want to let the former offenders express with their own words how they have experienced fatherhood and find patterns in their stories that can later be analysed.

**The interviews with the former male offenders**

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used as a data collection method in the present thesis. In a semi-structured interview the researcher still has some control over the interview and has prepared a list of topics and questions for the participants to answer and talk about (Denscombe, 2010). The researcher is prepared to be flexible and will let the participant talk freely about the different topics and questions. The focus is on the interviewee and his experiences (Ibid.). Before the interviews were conducted an interview guide was made (see appendix 1). To get inspiration to the interview guide I contacted Geoffrey Hunt, who is one of the authors of the study, *The path and promise of fatherhood for gang members* (Moloney et al. 2009). Hunt gave me the pilot version of their interview guide and this guide has been an inspiration for the themes and questions in the present thesis. In the interview guide the questions in black are questions taken from the received interview guide and questions in grey are questions made by the author. The open-ended questions in the interview guide begins with questions on what fatherhood means for the former offenders – what a good father is, and the interview guide is thereafter divided into different themes: how the men’s lives looked like before and during the pregnancy and after their child was born. The interview ended with questions about what kind of help the fathers were missing and how society could help offending fathers.

The key function in the interviews was the men and their fatherhood experiences. An important factor in the interviews is to not ask leading questions (Bryman, 2012) – the participants were able to talk freely about all the topics they brought up. Carlsson (2012) discusses that if the researcher will use direct questions he will probably “get what he asks for”. Therefore the participants were not directly asked if they saw fatherhood as a turning point from their offending trajectories.
However, some of the questions in the interview guide were more direct – this was to get the participants to talk about different feelings in different situations. Even though the interview guide consists of a lot of different questions, the guide was only used as a guide per se, the focus was on the participants’ stories and the men were allowed to freely talk about the different themes and questions whenever they touched on the subject in their stories. To establish trust and to make the participants relaxed to talk about their past, I tried to summarise what they were telling and in that way show the men that I was listening to their life stories. Without trust it is hard to get the participants to open up to the researcher (Carlsson, 2012).

The interviewer effect was also something that was reflected upon before the interviews were conducted. Research show that people will answer differently on interview questions depending on how they perceive the interviewer (Denscombe, 2010). The interviewers age, sex and ethnicity are factors that can have an effect on how much the participants are willing to tell and open up to the researcher. The identity of the researcher matters especially when the topics are of sensitive nature (Ibid.). Therefore I tried to be positive, polite and neutral during the interviews. Because I as a woman was interviewing men that were older than me, I think that they felt that I was not a threat and they felt comfortable in talking to me.

The interviews were retrospective in their nature and the men were interviewed once. The interviews were conducted in Swedish (hence, all presented citations in the results are translated to English by the author) and the length of the interviews ranged from 50 minutes to up to three hours. All interviews were tape-recorded after consent from the participants and later on transcribed. The men were asked to pick a place where they felt comfortable to do the interview and all five of them chose to be at the CRIS office space.

Procedure
After getting the ethical approval (reference number, HS 2017/löp nr 15 – see appendix 2) I contacted CRIS via email to find participants for the current thesis. CRIS stands for, Criminals’ return into society and is an organisation started by criminals and/or drug addicts and is aimed at former criminals and/or drug addicts. Their target group is former offenders and substance abusers that have decided to start a new life and want to get back into the conventional society (KRIS, 2017). CRIS offer housing and support for men that have stepped away from offending and want to get a life without drugs and criminality. The sampling method used in this study is therefore purposive sampling in form of snowball sampling. When using purposive sampling the researcher does not seek to pick participants on a random basis – the participants are selected because of their relevance for the research questions. Snowball sampling is thereby a sampling technique where the researcher finds an individual that can suggest other people to participate in the study, who can then suggest others and so on (Bryman, 2012).

Participants
To find participants for the thesis I was invited to visit CRIS’ office. I brought information letters about the study and consent forms with me to hand out to potential participants. The staff members at CRIS were kindly asked to contact people they knew were in my target group – Swedish former male offenders that became fathers during their criminal careers. During the visit I got to talk to some of the men that were willing to participate and we decided dates for the
interviews. A week later I went back to pick up the consent forms and during that visit I got to meet the rest of the men that were interested in taking part of the study. During this visit I tried to talk to all of the men, to make them feel relaxed and to make them get to know me a little bit – this in trying to establish trust and to make them feel comfortable in opening up to me with their stories. In the end seven former criminals were willing to take part in the study, but after three weeks, two of the men decided to drop out.

The men in the present thesis ranged in age from 37 to 58 years, with a mean age of 50 years. All of the men became fathers for the first time when they were over 21 and under 32 years. Three of the men became fathers when they were under the age of 25 years, and two of the men became fathers when they were over the age of 25 years. All of the men except from one father have two or more children and all of the children have been born during their father’s criminal career, except for one father who got his second child when he had desisted from criminality.

Five former offenders have thereby participated in the present thesis. Denscombe (2010) state that qualitative research is often associated with small research projects and having too many participants would make it hard to carry out a deep analysis. It can also be seen that qualitative studies within this research area have often around five to six participants (Ladlow & Neale, 2016; Parra-Cardona, Sharp & Wampler, 2008). The current thesis does not intend to generalise the results to a population. Bryman (2012) state that the results from a qualitative study are designed to be generalised to a theory instead of a population. With this thesis I thereby hope to find some knowledge and get a better understanding of how fatherhood influenced the lives of the interviewed ex-cons.

Validity and reliability
Validity and reliability are essential elements in assessing the quality of a study. When it comes to validity and reliability in qualitative research some researchers suggest that the value of the findings in a qualitative study should be assessed by the terms: trustworthiness and authenticity (Bryman, 2012).

Before the interviews were conducted I tried to get to know the participants and have a relaxed conversation with them, this to make them feel comfortable with me and to establish trust. Connelly (2016) states that prolonged engagement with participants is a technique to establish trustworthiness in a study. During the interviews it was noticed that the participants became emotional when talking about their past and it could be seen that they did open up and talked freely about their experiences of fatherhood during their criminal careers.

When conducting the interviews the participants got all the time needed to reflect upon their narratives and to make sure I had understood them correctly I summarised what they had said and asked if I had an accurate understanding of their stories. Malterud (2014) discusses that to ensure trustworthiness in a study it is important to get a correct understanding of the narratives and therefore the researcher should every now and then double check that he/she understands what the participant is telling. It also of importance to not use difficult words that can be interpreted in many different ways by the participants (Carlsson, 2012), therefore the fathers were never directly asked about turning points because of its vagueness as a term.
When the current thesis is finished the participants will get to take part of it and the data in the thesis will be presented with so called thick descriptions. This means that the reader will be able to take part of fractions of the interviews and in that way make his own judgements and interpretations of the conclusions (Bryman, 2012). The findings will also be related to results from previous research and an in depth description of how the research has been preformed is presented.

When it comes to authenticity Connelly (2016) writes that all the different viewpoints among the individuals that have been studied should be presented. In the current thesis it is mentioned in the findings if there are participants that have a different viewpoint or story to the particular topics.

**Ethical considerations**

The Ethics Council of the Faculty of Health and Society at Malmö University has reviewed the project plan, the information and consent letter and the interview guide together with the ethical considerations for the present thesis. The current thesis contains of personal data of criminal involvement and therefore it is seen as a study with sensitive content and thereby an ethical approval was needed for conducting the research. After receiving the approval from the Ethics Council some revisions were made and then the data collection started.

The present thesis has a focus on former criminals and how they have experienced fatherhood. It can be a struggle to find former criminals and to get them to open up about their lives and feelings. Harvey (2007) states that it is of importance to choose the most appropriated research method when collecting sensitive data. Therefore the current thesis uses semi-structured interviews as a data collection method and thereby gives the participants the opportunity to express their stories with their own words. To make the participant comfortable I tried to show respect and have a non-judgemental attitude to everything they were telling – my own personal opinions and norms were put aside.

The power-relation is also an ethical issue that the researcher has to reflect upon (Harvey, 2007). I tried to make the men feel important by telling how grateful I was for their participation and when conducting the interviews all the focus was on the men and their stories. I did not interrupt with questions when they were speaking and ensured that they could talk about what was important for them. Even though some of the participants started to talk about topics beyond the current thesis, I let them speak and then afterwards when they had finished with their stories I kindly tried to go back to the topic of the interview. Harvey (2007) discusses that it is important that the participants understand that if there are certain questions the participants do not want to talk about, they can just ignore it. Some of the men told that they did not feel comfortable talking about certain topics and I respected that and moved on to a different theme. The interviews ended with a debriefing to make the participants reflect about the interview and how it made them feel.

Before conducting the interviews the participants got to read an information letter and they did also get a chance to directly ask questions to me. In the information letter I briefly told about myself, the thesis, how the data will be gathered, how and why individuals have been selected, what a participation means, potential risks and how the participants can get access to the finished study. I also
mentioned that the participation is absolutely voluntary and that the participant can anytime choose to drop out off the study. The participants were additionally guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and the men who were interested in taking part of the study got to sign a written consent form.

Confidentiality is of importance and nobody except the researcher should be able to take part of the recorded interviews and the transcriptions (Johnson, 2004). The participants got information about my obligation to observe silence, and everything they told me stayed with me. The data have been stored on a flash memory drive, that only I have access to and the transcriptions, consent forms and any kind of notes have been stored safely. The data will only be used to answer the research questions and will immediately be deleted after examination of this thesis.

Anonymity is ensured by making up fake names for the participants and not revealing any kind of information that could be associated with the fathers. The participants can thereby not be identified in the finished thesis. Before conducting the interviews the risks and benefits of the study for the participants have been reflected upon. It can be seen that risks can be summarised as that the participants have to talk about their past, and therefore they might have to handle some emotional memories. But however as a benefit it can be good for the participants to talk about the past, to get a better understanding of how fatherhood have affected their lives and how they might can appreciate their lives with their children today. What can be seen is that when it comes to doing research with human beings it is the researcher’s responsibility to make certain that the study is of good quality and that it is morally acceptable (CODEX, 2017).

**Data Analysis**

The data in the form of the interviews have first been listened to and then transcribed. The transcriptions have then been checked with the recorded interviews to see that they match in information and in how the participants expressed themselves. The transcriptions have been read several times to find emerging themes and common topics. The data have been analysed with systematic text condensation, which is a cross-case method for thematic analysis (Malterud, 2012). This method consist of four different steps: “1) total impression – from chaos to themes; 2) identifying and sorting meaning units – from themes to codes; 3) condensation – from code to meaning; 4) synthesising – from condensation to descriptions and concepts” (Malterud, 2012:795).

In the first step the general broad picture is to strive for (Malterud, 2014). It is of importance to put your own pre-understanding and theoretical assumptions away in this stage to get to understand the participants correctly (Ibid.). In the first step I could find preliminary themes such as feelings of guilt, relations, financing, lies, not being there, and the individual will. In the second stage different code groups with different categories from the themes were made and in the third stage essential aspects of each code groups were looked at and illustrative quotations were found. In the last stage previous research and theories was looked at to find the best suitable descriptions of the data and the appeared themes were: intermittency, relations, drugs taking over the life, feelings of guilt, being financially there and agency. In table 1 on the next page the themes and the linked codes and categories from the analysis are presented.
Table 1. Themes and codes as a result from the analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes and categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intermittency</td>
<td>Taking a break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Were in prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unsuccessful attempts to desistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relations to the partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs taking over the life</td>
<td>Drugs were number one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of guilt</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being financially there</td>
<td>At least did something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buying yourself into the child’s life is wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>Will was not strong enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You can not receive help if you do not want help</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESULTS**

The present thesis has focused on former male offenders that became fathers during their criminal careers. In the stories of the five fathers different themes appeared and these themes are the context to how fatherhood has affected their lives and how it made them feel and act. The different themes and associated categories will be discussed in this chapter, but first some common features in the fathers’ stories will be mentioned.

The data from the interviews show that the time from when the men according to themselves desisted from criminality varied from only a month from when the interviewed were conducted to up to seven years. All of the men had substance abuse as a common feature in their offending trajectories and majority of the men told that all of their offending was connected in some kind of way to the drug abuse, that means that their criminality was drug related, except for one of the participants that had been sentenced for life and therefore spent 16 years in prison. Nilsson, Estrada & Bäckman (2014) discuss that substance abuse is a factor that is strongly linked with involvement in criminal activity and drugs especially are linked with convictions that are connected with handling of drugs and illegal ways to finance the drugs. In the current thesis drug use and other offending behaviours are integrated into the concept of a criminal lifestyle. Another common feature in the fathers stories were that none of them desisted from criminality after they entered fatherhood.
Intermittency
All of the fathers were having a break from their criminality in some sort of way during their criminal careers when they became fathers. Taking a break was present in Jose and Jack’s stories. Jose had never a break from offending, but he stopped with drugs for a while, although he instead took steroids. Jack again had a “real” break and was sober from drugs and did not engage in any criminal activity for three years after his both children were born. He described this period however as really stressful and he returned to the criminal lifestyle.

Two of the fathers were in prison when their girlfriends were expecting their first child and one of the fathers was incarcerated during the second pregnancy. When being incarcerated, the fathers were having a break from offending and drugs – this whether they wanted it or not. As Marcus put it: “I wasn’t abusing drugs when I got to know that I was going to be a dad, I was in prison so I was sober then”. This period of being sober ended immediately when Marcus got released from prison and he and his pregnant girlfriend were smoking hash every evening and when their child was three months old they both started using amphetamine again. When asked if there were any changes in his abuse and criminality after his child was born he said:

“No, there was a break maybe, but after it was action all over again, even though we became parents, you were thinking young, healthy – of course you shall not take drugs, but it was not like that, I was not ready yet, it took six years before I was finished, well I was not then either, but then I was having a break for seven years anyway”

Luka was also incarcerated during the first pregnancy and he was devoted to become a good family father, but his girlfriend found another man and this backfired all his plans. He described: “I was thinking never again will I end up in prison, I shall be a good family father and take care of my child and, so it was like a cold shower that I could not do that when she messed it up”. Luka decided to join the military after prison, but everything ended with him being caught up with drugs and offending again.

Three of the men had unsuccessful attempts to desistance. After his third child, Luka and his girlfriend wanted to step away from criminality and they went in for treatment for their substance abuse. The girlfriend could not handle the sobriety and this ended up in a break up and Luka was alone with their two children for three years. During these three years he got his license, had a car and was debt free. He told that it was hard to be alone with the children but he did everything for them. Slowly drugs and his offending behaviour came back and he ended up voluntary putting his children to foster care. It was his conscience that made him do it when he realised that he was using the children’s money to buy drugs – “I took their money, I took stuff away from them”. Marcus went also to treatment for his drug abuse and after that he lived sober and away from any kind of criminality for seven years. During these seven years he met a girl and they got a child together and they lived a “normal Swedish life” with work, day care, school and afterschool activities. He said:
“When I had been drug free for seven years I said – whatever happens in my life today, the drugs will never be an alternative. And because the criminality was a cause of drug abuse, I never said anything about offending, because the drugs caused my criminal activities. But after seven years and 15 days the drugs came up in my life again. I never believed I would do it again, but it happened anyway”

Lasse had decided to step away from using drugs and other criminal activities before his girlfriend became pregnant, but the pregnancy itself did also help him in this decision and his girlfriend supported him in this. He did still work illegal and got paid under the table, but drugs and criminality connected to the drug abuse was not an option anymore. When his child was born he did however relapse and he went back to drugs and all kind of criminality again. Lasse did not really know how to handle his relationship with his girlfriend after his son was born and he started drinking a lot. His brother was a member of the gang Bandidos, which meant that he started hanging out with these gang members, and one morning when he came home from partying his girlfriend decided to close the door and ended their relationship.

Relations
Friends were a factor in four of the participants’ stories. Friendships to antisocial friends were something safe to fall back to in stressful situations. When getting out of prison, when finding it hard to deal with the newborn child and the new family situation with the girlfriend, when facing a break up – falling back to the old habits with the old same friends felt safe. Jose told that his friends were his relatives and they were his family, he had no intentions to leave the criminal lifestyle and his friends. Marcus were also discussing how the criminal lifestyle took over his life after a break up with his girlfriend:

“I was thinking as I told you that it would be drug free and cosy in my apartment and the same day when I was sitting in my apartment I injected drugs into my body with the friends that helped me move – I was only thinking we would party a little bit, and then it would only be that night, but that became several months and I who was not supposed to take drugs in this apartment.”

Two of the fathers mentioned how important it is to change friends if you wanted to get out of the criminal lifestyle. Peer pressure was a present factor. The men became blind to this, they thought that they will just have some drugs one night, but it continued and became more frequent over time and as Jack put it:

“… the reason for my new sentence, it was that I had not cut the cord to my old friends, to my criminal friends and that resulted in that I ended up in prison again”

Other relations were the relations to the partner that were a struggle in two of the father’s stories. When Luka got his first child he was in prison. He was happy over the pregnancy and excited to become a father. During his incarceration his girlfriend did however find a new man and this was a big setback for Luka. His now ex-girlfriend had had problems with drugs as well and did not handle the situation with the newborn baby well, so she gave away the child to foster care. Luka went to do the military service after prison in another town and this was the
same place were his child ended up as well. He had decided that he wanted to
be there for his child and he spent every night with the baby. When his ex-
girlfriend found out about that, she took the baby away from the foster care and
disappeared. Luka could not handle this and he told that he went back to drugs
and criminality as a revenge to his ex partner and the society.

Lasse did not know how to handle the new situation when the newborn baby took
all of his girlfriend’s attention and time and he started drinking and hanging out
with his brother and the brother’s gang. This led to a relapse into drugs and
offending. The relationship to the partner changed when the child was born and
the girlfriend decided to call their relationship off. Opposite to Luka, he although
got to see his child and spend time with him:

“No I got to meet him, I did always buy things, new clothes, track suits, you
know those kind of small and cute ones, and shoes and stuff like that. So it was
hard for her to keep me out of it. I bought myself in, but I could see that she did
not like it that I was there and were active. I can understand that, I was good at
manipulating her”.

Drugs taking over the life
The men had entered fatherhood and had a newborn child but they found
themselves in a situation where they realised that drugs were number one in their
life. The fathers describe how the abuse and the cravings for drugs were stronger
than the love for their child. They talked about being egocentric and that they put
their self and their needs first, the children came on the second place. Some of the
fathers describe how they could not focus on anything else than how to get the
drugs and what to do to get to the situation when they got to inject the drug into
their body. As Marcus puts it:

“...and the drugs have been there, and then it has been the fact that I have not
been able to put my children first, the egoist in my drug abuse have taken over
and it has made me get everything I needed and wanted instead of the
children’s needs”.

One of the consequences of the drug abuse and criminality was that the men had
to lie for their loved ones and especially for their children, and this was something
they felt regret over. It was not only the case that they had to lie about what they
were doing, these lies affected their relationship with their children and the time
they could have been spending with them. Jack told how he took his daughter
horse riding one time, but he went missing the other ten times he was supposed to
take her:

“... I was not there, I had to call her and lie, because I was feeling sick. I had
to be out there to get my drugs, I had to be out and meet my friends, and do this
and that. Oh, can’t you ask your aunty to drive you? Well you get what I mean,
it is these kind of small things, that is really big for children, it will hurt them,
my love for them will be put in doubt – daddy, why are the drugs so damn
important, am I not important?”

Lying about what they were doing led also to isolation and the fathers were not
present. Being away from home and from their children was common. The people
they loved the most are the ones who they saw most seldom. Because of their
criminality it could be seen that they were fathers only on “halftime”, their partner or somebody else in the family had the overall responsibility for their children. Jose told that:

“No of course I was playing with my daughter, I’ve been alone with her for nine to ten months, before I was incarcerated, I did not even have a girlfriend back then, for half a year I was only with my daughter and was criminal. I was dealing drugs and hang out with my daughter, but she was a lot with her aunty. She took half of my time and I left my daughter with her every time I had to do something”.

Feelings of guilt
The absence from their children’s lives and putting drugs and criminality before their children, brought up feelings of guilt and anxiety for the fathers. Some of the fathers described it as a pain deep in the soul:

“the feeling of letting down your children, the separation from your children due to the drugs, it has been really hard and I have been crying when being in treatment”

The drugs could not even numb this feeling of guilt of not putting the children first in their life. Lasse described his anxiety as:

“But I could not overlook my little son. It does not matter how much drugs I took, I felt awful afterwards anyway. You know, I could be so out of this world, but tried to take more, on the edge of an overdose, but the anxiety for my son was still there”

Luka and Marcus did also explain how they in their mind were thinking about their children, but they were not there for them in real life. Feelings of guilt made them think about their children, but as Marcus stated:

“Even though my son has been in my mind every day, every day, every day, he can not however see and feel that. Me thinking about him, does not give him anything, he does not get anything out of it that I love him in my thoughts”.

Being financially there
The fathers were not good at being emotionally there for their children all the time, but being there financially made them feel that they at least did something. Giving money was seen as an emotional contact, a gesture in trying to cover up the absence in their child’s life.

“Exactly, I felt that I was such a great person when I gave them money, but in the end it meant nothing – zero. Getting money was not a problem for me, but I took it as that I am at least paying for me, and yea then I could just continue using my drugs, steal money and everything”

Marcus was the only one that said that he was not there economically for his children. This was not a problem for him, but he stated that of course he would had paid if he had the money – having children comes with a responsibility to take care and pay for their upbringing.
Two of the fathers were also discussing that *buying yourself into the child's life is wrong*. Jose and Lasse discuss that a good father is a person that is caring and gives the child time not money. A good father does not buy himself out of responsibilities.

**Agency**

Drugs and the connected criminality were number one in the fathers’ lives and all of them had a thought of wanting to quit and step away from the offending trajectory, but they could not do that – their *will was not strong enough*. The men could not live a life without the criminal lifestyle. Luka was asked if he wanted to step away from his criminal friends:

“I could not do it, I tried, but it was not enough – my will to do it was not strong enough to take care of it, so it was kind of a double, I wanted to use the drugs as well, I felt, I was still alone, I wanted to numb that feeling – sometimes that were more important than my children”.

Marcus discussed how important it is that the will to stop using drugs has to come from the inside.

“Once I was in a situation where I have been thinking like this; only if I get an apartment, only if I get a job, only if I get a girlfriend, only if I get a child – then I will never use drugs again. And this makes me wonder if I have been tired of the drugs or if I just have been living in a belief that I want to quit. Because today I can see that those things are not a solution to desistance. The solution is that you have to feel it here inside that you want to stop. You have to have a wish to quit, you can not just replace the drugs with something else, because then the craving for drugs will never leave your body”

It took years before the majority of the fathers desisted from criminality. Their children were adults when they decided to step away from their offending trajectories. Lasse is the only father that actually showed a strong will to step away from offending awhile after he entered fatherhood. After his child was born he relapsed and went back to both drugs and drug related criminality. During this period the criminal lifestyle was put on the first place and he was not present in his son’s life. He was sentenced to prison and during his incarceration the will to desist became a reality. “I could not shut it off, I could not stop thinking about him, it was not possible. So I really wanted to quit, I have never wanted that so much as then”. After a relapse back to the criminal lifestyle when his child was born and 14 months in prison he desisted from all criminality.

All of the fathers were also pointing out that *you can not receive help if you do not want help*. Society can not force help upon the offending fathers if they do not want it. If the fathers do not have a will to desist then the help is pointless.

**DISCUSSION**

Previous research show mixed results when looking at the relationship between fatherhood and desistance. A turning point can work as a hook towards the process of desistance, however it is of importance how much time an individual spend on the new course for the turning point to have an effect on the offending
trajectories (Laub & Sampson, 2003). According to Sampson and Laub (2005) turning points open up opportunities for an individual to step away from the past. The individual get to invest in new relationships and this will make the social bonds stronger and form both direct and indirect social control. The individual can with the help of a turning point face new routine activities and can thereby also transform the identity (Ibid.). It can be argued therefore that fatherhood could be seen as a turning point and the new little family could build up strong social bonds for the offender and therefore this could create supervision in form of social control. The father would get new routine activities, in other words he would not spend time with his friends on the streets surrounded with drugs and criminal activity – instead he would invest all his time into his newborn child and with the help of this he could possibly transform his identity from an offender to a family father. The present thesis show however that this was not the case – fatherhood did not work as a turning point towards the process of desistance for the offending fathers. The fathers did not stop with drugs and other criminal activities when their child was born, it can however be seen that they took unintended and intended breaks during their criminal career.

**Taking a break from criminal activities**

All of the fathers were over 21 years old when they became fathers for the first time. The fathers did not enter fatherhood during their teenage years and therefore the men’s fatherhood can be seen as more or less an on-time transition. Previous research shows positive results when it comes to men who became fathers during early adulthood (De Goede, Blokland, Nieuwbeerta, 2011; Kerr et al., 2011; Na, 2016). An on-time transition into fatherhood is seen to have a transformative potential (Na, 2016), and research is indicating that the normative timing of fatherhood could enhance its potential to be a turning point. The present thesis shows however opposite findings. The so to speak on-time transition into fatherhood did not have an effect on the offending men, but there were however few attempts in trying to desist from their offending trajectories.

Intermittency was detected in the men’s stories, in other words a temporary break (Piquero, 2004) was present in their criminal careers. Carlsson (2013b) talks about two forms of intermittency – one were the offender only takes a break, with no intentions in desisting and in the second form there is a will to make changes in the life-course and to desist from the criminal lifestyle, but the offender does not succeed in doing so. In the current thesis three of the men were showing serious attempts in trying to desist from criminality – there was a hint of agency in their attempts, but they did not succeed in this. They failed in their attempts and drugs and criminality oozed into their lives again – they could not resist their old lifestyle. Elder (1998) points out that agency and the individual’s opportunity to make choices works within given constraints and social circumstances. The social circumstances the men were surrounded by made it hard for them to desist. Drugs, friends and the criminal lifestyle felt safe to fall back to in stressful situations.

A zig-zag pattern of offending was present in all of the fathers stories. Even though all of the men did not show a serious attempt in trying to desist after entering fatherhood, it can be seen that the fathers had unintended breaks when they went to prison and intended breaks where they just wanted to try to have a “normal life” for awhile. Living a law-abiding lifestyle was however not an option and the fathers had to face the reality that drugs and the criminal lifestyle was the number one choice in their life – their children was put on the second place. After
becoming fathers they did however have their children in their minds. The fathers were having feelings of guilt and anxiety for only being a dad on half time and it can be seen that they were not emotionally there for their children. But paying money and giving the children what they wanted when it comes to material things made the fathers feel like they at least did something and this made it easier for them to continue with the criminal lifestyle.

**A different form of masculinity**

Previous research shows that masculinity can be a factor that can hinder fatherhood from being a turning point (Landers, Mitchell & Coates, 2015; Moloney et al., 2009; Na, 2016). Masculinity is usually related with the normative assumption that the father has the role as a breadwinner (Roy & Dyson, 2010). Findings from previous research show that offending fathers struggle to support one’s child by legal incomes and thereby are not able to desist from the criminal lifestyle (Ladlow & Neale, 2016). In the current thesis it can however be seen that money was not the problem, and the fathers did not have the need to be the “masculine providing dad”. Giving money made the fathers feel like they were a part of their child’s life, they covered up the absence with money and it made them feel less guilty about spending their time on the criminality instead of their children. Money was never a factor that made them feel stressed and the fathers did not feel like they as men had to be the breadwinner. The mentality of masculinity and the men as providers is an assumption that has at least in Sweden given way to a more equal approach to parenthood. The norm in today’s society is that both men and women are supposed to be the provider for the family (Plantin, Månsson, Kearney, 2000). This kind of mentality can be seen in the fathers’ stories, and as one of the participants discussed – if he would have had the money he would had supported his child, but he did not and it was not a problem for him.

**Restricting factors**

The relationships to friends and in some cases to the mother of their child, and also human agency played an essential role as restricting factors in the father’s stories. These factors held back the fathers from turning away from the offending trajectories. What can be seen in the present thesis is that all of the fathers had at least a small break from the drugs, even though all of the men did not express a serious attempt in trying to desist, but they decided to have at least a break in their drug abuse. It can however be seen that relationships and human agency worked as restricting factors and a process towards desistance could not begin.

**Relations to friends and to the mother of the child**

Friends were the fathers’ safe card. It was comfortable to hang out with the friends and it was an easier option to go back to the old friends than face the reality of desistance. Turning points can according to Sampson & Laub (2005) open up the opportunity to new situations and thereby new routine activities. In the men’s stories it can be seen that fatherhood did not bring new routine activities into their lives. The fathers did not invest much time into their new little family and thereby they had weak social bonds and a lack of informal social control in their lives. The fathers did not cut the bonds to their antisocial friends, they hang out with them, did drugs and lived the criminal lifestyle – there was not a change in their routine activities, they continued with their safe old habits. This can be related to the study by Moloney et al. (2009) that also found that cutting off the bonds to the friends and change one’s routine activities were one of the main obstacles for the fathers in their desistance process. Sampson & Laub (2005) point
out that a turning point can also give the possibility to identity transformation, but the men did not transform their identity – they continued with their main role as offenders and being a father was only a subordinated part of their identity.

Two of the fathers described problems with the relationship to the mother of their child. Relapse into offending because of relationship difficulties and the mothers keeping the child away from the father are problems that are a reality for many offending fathers (Ladlow & Neale, 2016; Parra-Cardona, Sharp & Wampler, 2008. One of the fathers in the present thesis did not get to see his newborn child when he got released from prison. The mother took away the child from foster care when she found out that he had been visiting and taking care of the newborn. This was a major setback for the father in his attempt towards desistance and he went back to the criminal lifestyle – this as a revenge to his ex girlfriend and how the society handled his situation. Another participant had a difficult time dealing with the relationship to his girlfriend when his child was born. He relapsed into taking drugs and offending and this made the girlfriend throw him out of the apartment. What can be seen in these stories is that the fathers social bonds were weak and there was a lack of informal social control and thereby they went back to their old routine activities.

**Human agency**

An individual’s own choice and will is of importance in the desistance process (Sampson & Laub, 2005). Human agency plays a vital role in individuals’ lives and persistent offending and desistance is an active choice that the individual will take (Ibid.). In the present thesis it was an active choice of the men to continue with the criminal lifestyle – their will to desist was not strong enough. Even though there were few attempts in trying to desist, it can be seen that their agency and will to desist was not there yet – their old habits won this fight. The fathers described how they could not live without the drugs and with the drugs came the offending to finance the drugs. Edin, Nelson & Paranal (2004) discuss that becoming a father per se does not work as a turning point; the choice to turn on the father role is crucial in the desistance process. This thesis shows that the fathers were not ready to completely change their identity from offenders to family fathers. It can be seen that the criminal lifestyle could not be replaced with a child, the will to desist has to be an active choice and therefore it can be seen that human agency was a restricting factor for fatherhood to become a turning point.

Turning points and desistance is not something that will happen overnight. Desistance can be seen as a complex process (Sampson & Laub, 2005; Carlsson, 2012). The fathers did not show a will and agency to desist after their children were born – they decided to step away from offending when their children had reached adulthood. Only one of the fathers showed purposeful human agency awhile after he had entered fatherhood. He relapsed back into the criminal lifestyle when his child was born. After he got sentenced to prison he showed a strong will to transform his identity to the father role and he completely stepped away from the offending trajectory. His agency was present and he made an active choice while incarcerated to desist from the criminal lifestyle. It did however take a relapse into offending before he realised that he wanted to put his child on the first place.
Substance abuse is a factor that according to Laub & Sampson (2003) can reduce an individual’s chance to desist from delinquency. In the present thesis it can be seen that drugs were a big part of the fathers’ lives. Their criminality was drug related, except for one of the participants that had also engaged in more serious crimes and had been sentenced for life. Because of the drugs taking over the fathers’ lives it can be argued that this factor made it even harder for fatherhood to work as a turning point. Nilsson, Estrada & Bäckman (2014) discuss that substance abuse can make it more difficult to have solid social relationships and to hold on to a stable job and thereby it can reduce the informal social control in the individual’s life. In the current thesis the fathers did not have stable social relations and there was a lack of informal social control in their lives and therefore they continued with their old routine activities that consisted of drugs and an offending lifestyle.

When it comes to substance abuse and fatherhood as a turning point research shows mixed results. Moloney et al. (2009) found that fatherhood made some of the gang members completely desist from their criminal lifestyle this including using drugs, and Landers, Mitchell & Coates (2015) discuss that fathers who were residing with their children had a reduction in criminal behaviour such as marijuana use, hard drug use and property crimes. Kerr et al. (2011) did however find that fatherhood did not stop the fathers from using marijuana. One of the key elements to desistance can however be seen as human agency (Sampson & Laub, 2005), if the men have a will to desist, then the substance abuse will not be a hindering factor, which can be seen in the mentioned studies above. But in the present thesis there was a lack of human agency and the fathers chose to continue with drugs and thereby with their criminal lifestyle.

The fathers in the current thesis were discussing that an offending individual can not receive help if the individual himself does not want help. Society can not force help upon the offending fathers if they do not want it. The offending fathers need to have a will to desist to be able to take part of the help that is offered to them. The focus has to thereby be on to motivate the fathers and to try to attract this will into their lives. There is a need to try to build up the motivation to be able to uncover the strength to find the will to desist and change the identity to a family father.

Limitations of the thesis
All studies come with limitations and the first limitation in the present thesis can be seen as that only five former male criminals participated in the research. To find participants to a sensitive study can be hard, but other studies in the same research area have also had only five to six participants (Ladlow & Neale, 2016; Parra-Cardona, Sharp & Wampler, 2008). Denscombe (2010) states that in qualitative research it is common to have a small sample, otherwise it would be hard to carry out the analysis. Another limitation is that the interviews were retrospective and the data collected is self-reported. Johnson (2004) discuss that the accuracy of memory recall can be a problem and the participants in a retrospective study can have problems remembering. Corman, Noonan, Reichman & Schwartz-Soicher (2011) discuss also that criminality that is self-reported can be biased. The current thesis did not however focus on the number of offences – the focus was on the fathers’ experiences after the birth of the child. A third limitation is that the topic of the present thesis is sensitive in its nature and this can according to Johnson (2004) cause problems with the willingness to open up
and talk about private experiences. The participants got however a chance to talk to me and get to know me before the interviews were conducted and I felt that they did not feel intimidated when talking to me and they were happy to participate. The fourth limitation is that it can be hard to make a distinction between substance abuse and other offending behaviours. In the current thesis both drug abuse and other criminal offences have been integrated into one concept – the criminal lifestyle.

Despite the above stated limitations does the present results indicate that fatherhood did not work as a turning point towards the process of desistance and the key factors that were restricting this process were the relationships to friends but also to the mother of the child and in addition it can be seen that human agency played a vital role as well.

CONCLUSION

The present thesis has been looking into fatherhood and desistance and the aim have been to get a better understanding of fatherhood as a potential turning point from persistent offending and to examine the role and meaning of fatherhood in the criminal careers of Swedish former criminals. It can be seen that fatherhood did not make the delinquent males step away from their offending trajectories, but they did however have both intended and unintended breaks from the criminal lifestyle after becoming fathers. Drugs and the criminal lifestyle were put on the first place and it can be seen that the fathers were not emotionally there for their children. This brought up feelings of guilt and therefore the fathers felt that they at least did something by being there financially for them. Paying money and buying stuff for the children made the fathers feel less guilty about living the criminal lifestyle.

Previous research show that there are different factors that can both form or restrict fatherhood from being a turning point and the present thesis suggest that relationships to friends and as well to the mother of the child can be a restricting factor. Falling back to the old habits with the same old friends felt safe and thereby human agency comes into the picture as a restricting factor as well. The fathers were not ready to completely change their identity from offenders to family fathers – their individual will to desist was not strong enough. The fathers did also point out that society can not help offending fathers if they do not have a will to step away from criminality. Therefore it is of importance to have a focus on how society can help to bring human agency and a will to desist into the offending fathers’ lives, but also on how to cut off the bonds to antisocial peers – this in trying to get delinquent fathers to desist and form the important bond between the child and the father.

The current thesis show that fatherhood did not work as a turning point towards the process of desistance, hence future research should look closer into this. It would be of interest to have a bigger sample in the Swedish context to see if some new tendencies could be detected. Zoutewelle-Terovan & Skardhamar (2016) discuss that parenthood could be considered as a dampening effect on criminal tendency and therefore it would be of interest to see both qualitative and quantitative research looking into this issue – if fatherhood does not work as a turning point, does it have a dampening effect?
REFERENCES


Appendix 1

Interview guide – fatherhood as a potential turning point*

- Tell me about yourself (age, occupation etc.)
- How did your criminality look like? (when started, why?)
- How old were you when you became a father for the first time?
- How many children do you have? (children before/after desisting?)
- If more than one child – do they have the same mother?
- How does the relation to the mother/s look like?

Fatherhood

- What is a good father? Can you describe what you think are the characteristics that make a man a good father?
- What are the most important things that a man must do in order to be a good father to his children?
- What are the challenges of being a good father?
- Tell me about your own father
  - What kind of role model has your father been to you?
  - Which of your father’s characteristics do you respect?
  - What are the characteristics that you have problems with?
  - How could your father have been a better father?
- Can you tell me about any other father figures in your life?
  - What did you learn from them about being a man and being a father?
- Tell me about the ways that you think you have and have not been a good father.
- What would you like to do better for your kids?
- Tell me about if there is something that is preventing you from fulfilling your role as a good father?

Fatherhood and criminality

During pregnancy

- How did you find out that you were going to be a father for the first time?
- How was your relation to the mother?
- How did you react to the pregnancy?
- Where there any changes in the relationship to the mother during the pregnancy? (in what way?)
- How involved were you during the pregnancy? (in what way?)
- In general, what changes occurred in your life as a result of the pregnancy? (e.g. friends, time with family, activities, criminality, places)
- Compare a typical day during this period to a typical day a year before the pregnancy.
- Did you begin to perceive things differently when your girlfriend became pregnant?
- Did your priorities changed? (how?)
  o What became important to you that were not a priority in the past?

After the pregnancy

- Where were you when your child was first born?
- What was going on in your daily life? (legal/illegal activities, job etc.)
- Tell me about your relationship with the mother of your child after your child was born.
- What were the living arrangements after your child was born?
- Did the mother want you to be involved in her and your child’s life? (tell me about that)
- Tell me about the contributions that you made in raising your child. (how involved? problems?)
- How have you supported your child financially and emotionally? (problems?)
- Tell me about the criminality after the pregnancy (changes? how? reactions from the mother of your child?)
- Tell me about your criminal friends after the pregnancy (changes?)
- Where there changes in who you spent time with and where? (activities, time with family?)
- Tell me about your use of drugs, alcohol and violence. (changes before and after the pregnancy?)

- Tell me about how your life style and activities have had an effect on your fatherhood.
- Have fatherhood been as you expected it to be? (explain!)
- How do you think fatherhood has changed you?
- What has been the most difficult thing about being a father?

If more than one child – differences? Have the other children made some changes in your life?

- What kind of help have you been missing?
  o What would you have needed to make fatherhood easier?
- Should society help criminal fathers in some kind of way? (how?)
- What kind of advice would you give to offending fathers?
- Something you want to add?

* The interview guide used in the current thesis were in Swedish, and the questions in black are from the pilot version of the interview guide from the study by Moloney et al. (2009) – some wordings have been changed in some questions but the content is the same, whereas the questions in grey are made by the author.*
Appendix 2

Malmö University/ Faculty of Health and Society
Ethics Council

STATEMENT
2017-02-17
HS 2017/löp nr 15

Title: “I am your father” – A qualitative study of fatherhood as a potential turning point.

Student: Nikolina Pitkäaho
Supervisor: Marie Väfors Fritz
Level: Degree project, Master’s program in Criminology

Description:
The study will investigate retrospective view concerning effects of fatherhood on criminal behavior in former criminals. The sample will consist of 6-8 male former criminals recruited from the organization KRIS. No formal inclusion criteria’s, as for instance fatherhood, is mentioned. The interview guide is based on a similar study in criminal gang members conducted by Moloney et al (2009).

Comments:
1. No formal confirmation on the cooperation with KRIS has been attached to the application.
2. The Faculty Ethics Council consider that the following changes should be made in the information letter: (a) information specifically describing why and how individuals has been selected should be added; information written from the view of the potential participant, describing what participation means should be added; (c) information on how participants could get access to results and were the essay will be published should be added; (d) the statement about impact of the present study should be deleted; (e) the formulation saying that the student strives for confidentially should be replaced with a statement saying that confidentiality will be guaranteed: (f) the vague formulation about other publication forms than a Master’s thesis should be deleted. The Faculty Ethics Council only handles student essays published as an essay at the faculty. If other intention than a Master’s thesis, a formal application should be sent to the regional board for ethical vetting.
3. The Faculty Ethics Council consider that the language used in both the information sheet and in the interview guide include grammar errors, and that these documents should be reviewed by a native Swedish speaking individual before data collection.
4. The application does not describe how data will be handled while preparing the essay, and what will happen to the data after the essay has been examined. The Faculty Ethics Council consider that all data should be handled in a way that always secure that only the student, the supervisor and the examiner have access to the data, and which also includes that collected data never should be handled on a computer with Internet-access. In addition should all data that has been collected be deleted immediately after examination of the final essay.

A confirmation about the cooperation with KRIS should be sent to the Faculty Ethics Council before data collection starts. Please send a copy to the following two addresses: claes.andersson@mah.se, etikradet@mah.se.
The Faculty Ethics Council consider that the other comments should be carefully reviewed by the student, and result in a careful revision of the project conducted by the student. This revision should then be carefully reviewed by the responsible supervisor before starting data collection. The student does not need to inform the Faculty Ethics Council about this revision.

Faculty Ethics Council, Faculty of Health and Society, Malmö University

Claes Andersson