General discussion (with a summary of key results)

The aim of this dissertation was to investigate how family-related transitions and family offending explain criminal offending. The research question has been examined by using data on three consecutive generations of the multigenerational Transfive study. For this study, we used demographic data from municipal administration records and conviction data from judicial databases, collected prospectively and followed up until December 2007.

This chapter first presents the key results from the previous four chapters, followed by a discussion. Second, the empirical and theoretical implications of the results are outlined, followed by a description of the strengths and limitations of this study. Third, an agenda for research follows. In the final paragraph, practical implications for policy are discussed.

6.1 Summary of key results

6.1.1 “All in the family?” Associations between sibling offending and offending risk

In the first study of this dissertation (Chapter 2), we investigated the extent to which sibling offending predicts individual offending, and the extent to which this relationship can be explained by family criminality as proxied by parental and grandparental offending. It was found that having at least one sibling who offended, as compared to having non-offending sibling(s) only, elevated the risk of offending. Remarkably, having no siblings at all also increased the risk of offending, compared to having non-offending siblings. This finding suggests that having non-offending siblings is, in this sample, a protective factor against offending. Next, we investigated the extent to which family criminality could explain the effect of sibling offending, as sibling similarity in offending may be caused by parental and grandparental offending putting all children at risk of offending. The results showed that having offending parents or an offending grandfather elevated the risk of offending but that this only partially accounted for the sibling similarity in offending.

The role of gender in the association between sibling offending and individual offending was also examined. The analyses showed that having offending brothers increased the risk of offending for both men and women. Having offending sisters did not significantly increase the risk of offending for men and women, although this may be attributed to a lack of statistical power. There were no significant differences in effects of having offending brothers or sisters. There were also no significant differences in effects on men and women.

Finally, we investigated the extent to which having offending siblings close in age (i.e., less than the median age difference), as well as having offending siblings not close in age (i.e., more than the median age difference), increased the risk of offending for individuals.
Notably, it was discovered that individuals were only at increased risk of offending when their offending sibling(s) were close in age. This finding could mean that siblings who are close in age are more similar in offending behaviour because of social learning. However, this finding could also point to a more similar exposure to risk factors in the social environment.

6.1.2 Teenage parenthood and offspring offending
In the third chapter, the association between teenage parenthood and offspring offending was studied. In this study, we examined the extent to which children of parents who had started childbearing before age 20 were at risk of offending, compared to children of parents who had started childbearing at a later age. In line with previous studies, it was found that children of mothers who had started childbearing before age 20 were at increased risk of offending. To build on previous research, this study also investigated effects of teenage fatherhood on offspring offending. The results showed that individuals were also at elevated risk of offending when their father had started childbearing before age 20, even after controlling for teenage motherhood, which is in contrast to earlier studies (Nagin & Tremblay, 2001; Thornberry, Pogarsky & Lizotte, 2008).

Next, we investigated the extent to which family criminality, measured by parental and grandparental offending, could explain the relationship between teenage parenthood and offspring offending. Although offending of the mother, father, and grandfather were all found to be risk factors for offending, they accounted only modestly for the teenage parenthood effect. Therefore, we concluded that family criminality does not explain the association between teenage parenthood and offspring offending. Furthermore, we investigated the extent to which divorce (as an indicator of family instability) and the number of children (as an indicator of limited resources) could account for the relationship between teenage parenthood and offspring offending. Both divorce and the number of children did not account for the teenage parenthood effect. From these findings, it appears that parental teenage childbearing in itself is associated with offspring offending.

6.1.3 ‘Man’s best possession’: Period effects in the association between marriage and offending
In the fourth chapter the association between marriage and offending was investigated. We examined the extent to which associations between marriage and offending differed for men who married in two time periods: 1930-1970 and 1971-2006. Between these two periods, power relations between men and women, laws concerning marriage and more specifically divorce, and the role and expectations of marriage changed. Based on these macro-differences, the association between marriage and offending may be different for these two marriage cohorts. More specifically, it is expected that spousal social control, which could act as a deterrent for offending behaviour, would be more at play for the more
recent marriage cohort, as spouses were in a stronger social position to exert social control in later periods. Therefore, the hypothesis is that stronger spousal social control for the more recent marriage cohort leads to a larger effect of marriage on offending. In support of this, it was found that only men from the more recent cohort were convicted less often while being married as compared to the period before marriage. Ever-married men were also less likely to offend than never-married cohort members.

A further investigation of the offending rates of men who married between 1971-2006 showed that their average offending rate started to decline about two years before marriage. This could point to another mechanism that explains the association between marriage and offending, namely identity change, from an irresponsible adolescent into a responsible adult, explaining both desistance from offending as well as entry into a romantic relationship. It could also point to a cohabitation or courtship effect as social control of the romantic partner likely not only starts after marriage, but already during cohabitation or in romantic relationships in general.

6.1.4 ‘For better or for worse’: Exploring the relationship between divorce and offending

In the fifth chapter, the relationship between legal divorce (from a first marriage) and offending behaviour was studied for men and women. In addition, we examined the extent to which a change in offending risk occurred before or after divorce. In this study, divorce was found to be related to offending, for both men and women. The analyses showed that the offending risk for individuals already increased in the last two years of marriage. This suggests that at the very least, legal divorce may not have been the only cause of offending.

Next, a number of moderating factors were examined. Being divorced, as compared to being married, was only associated with an elevated risk of offending when sample members had children below the age of 18 at the moment of divorce. This finding is not congruent with social control explanations: if the decrease in spousal social control is the mechanism behind the association between divorce and offending, we should also have found an effect for divorcees without children. Another finding was that divorce was not associated with offending when the individual divorced from a marital partner who was an offender. This could be interpreted as the adverse effects of divorce being compensated with a beneficial effect of no longer being exposed to an offending spouse. Another explanation is that in these cases the spouse was less likely to disapprove of offending and therefore less likely to exert social control, leading to no association between marital status and offending for these individuals. Two cohorts were compared: individuals who divorced up to 1970 and individuals who divorced after 1970. Although the sample size of the first cohort was small, the elevated risk of offending generally seemed to follow divorce in this cohort, while it was preceding it in the second cohort. Therefore, divorce leading to an increased risk of
offending is an explanation supported by the findings for the first cohort, but not for the second.

Finally, the analyses were repeated for property offences, violent offences, and other offences separately. This was done to investigate whether the effect of divorce on offending could be explained by financial hardship caused by divorce, which would then in turn increase the risk for property offences. Another possible mechanism is that spousal abuse leads to divorce, which would then be reflected in particularly violent offending. The results showed that the effect sizes of all offence types were comparable, which supports neither financial hardship nor spousal abuse explanations.

6.2 Main findings
The results from these four sub studies lead to a number of summary findings. Very few studies have investigated the transmission of criminal offending within families using a three-generation study that is not only investigating parent-offspring relationships, but also taking into account the role of offending grandparents. This dissertation applied such a three-generation design and showed that when any family member offends, the risk of offending for individuals increases. Offending of siblings, the father, the mother, and the grandfather all cumulatively put sample members at elevated risk of offending. If the father has offended, having a mother who offended adds additional risk; when parents have offended, having an offending sibling or grandfather also adds additional risk. This is a first new finding.

Second, this dissertation showed that especially exposure to deviant family members explains individual offending. In particular, offending by mothers during the childhood of their children led to a considerably increased risk of offending for those children. One reason for this may be that in the Netherlands in the twentieth century, mothers were generally the primary caretakers of children. As such, mothers would spend much more time with their children than fathers and would therefore be the most important socialising force in the children’s early lives. Next to this, individuals were especially found to be at elevated risk of offending when siblings close in age offended. Again, an explanation for this is exposure: children of similar ages likely spend more time together, engage in more similar activities, share friends, and are therefore of greater influence on each other.

Third, we found that teenage motherhood was related to criminal offending of offspring. Adding onto previous studies, early fatherhood was also shown to increase the risk of offspring offending, even when controlling for maternal teenage childbearing. This relationship was not spurious in insofar as it remained after controlling for family criminality, limited resources and family instability.
Fourth, both marriage and divorce were found to be associated with offending at the individual level. After men from recent birth cohorts married they offended less than when they were unmarried, and when men or women divorced they offended more than during marriage. Therefore, marriage appears to be protective against offending. Several findings, however, point to other mechanisms at play. To start with, men’s decreased offending already started well before marriages were concluded. In addition, for divorced individuals, an increase in offending already started in the last two years before divorce. This could mean that a supposed (end of) marriage effect is in fact a (end of) relationship effect as the formation and dissolution of a romantic relationship usually starts before legal marriage begins or ends. It is also possible that the relationship between marital status and offending is in fact spurious. For example, an identity change from an irresponsible adolescent into a responsible adult could explain both desistance from offending as well as entering a romantic relationship. In the case of divorce, external factors such as sudden unemployment or increasing drug abuse could cause both offending and divorce. There is also the possibility of reverse causation, as offending itself might put a marriage under pressure, resulting in divorce.

Finally, throughout this dissertation, the findings in general were remarkably ungendered. An association was found between offending and teenage parenthood for mothers as well as fathers. The association between family offending and individual offending was also not significantly different for men and women. Furthermore, while the association between marriage and offending was not investigated for women in this dissertation, the association between divorce and offending showed that men and women were both at elevated risk of offending after divorce. This dissertation’s findings therefore point to gender similarities in influences of family offending and family-related transitions.

6.3 Implications for theory
Some findings in this dissertation replicate earlier research. A large share of the findings is in line with existing research and theories. For example, our findings support a large body of earlier research that showed that children of offending parents are at elevated risk of offending themselves (e.g., Pogarsky, Lizotte & Thornberry, 2003; Nagin, Pogarsky & Farrington, 1997), and the negative association between marriage and offending is also widely supported by previous research (e.g., Bersani, Laub & Nieuwbeerta, 2009; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006) and fits with prevailing theoretical notions on social capital and social control. Some of the novel findings in this dissertation may have implications for theory, however.
6.3.1 Life course theory

Sampson and Laub (1993) developed the age-graded theory of informal social control, which acknowledges both static and dynamic causes of crime. One of the key elements of their theory is that crime partly results from weak or broken social ties, and that the relevant social ties vary by developmental stage. For children and adolescents, social ties to family, peers, and school are important. For adults, the relevant ties are related to romantic relationships and work. Over the life course, turning points can lead individuals to desist from offending. For example, marriage or obtaining employment can interrupt a criminal career by providing social ties and social control.

Several studies have found associations between marriage and desistance from offending. In this dissertation, both marriage and divorce were also found to be associated with a change in offending when the marriage concluded between 1970 and 2006. The fact that such a finding was not found for earlier cohorts supports the theory. However, changes in offending generally seemed to occur already well before the actual conclusion of marriage or divorce. Some other studies on Dutch and Norwegian samples have also found evidence for a reduction in offending before the conclusion of marriage (e.g., McGloin, Sullivan, Piquero, Blokland & Nieuwbeerta, 2011; Skardhamar, Monsbakken and Lyngstad, 2014). In itself, this is not entirely surprising as marriage and divorce are not exogenous events, they do not just happen to people but are the result of a process, initiated by choice. People decide that they want to live together and make decisions on marriage or cohabitation, generally conditional on societal status indicators such as employment, or marks of maturity. However, this does imply that changes in offending that have been interpreted previously as a marriage effect (or a cohabitation effect) may in fact be a courtship effect. Therefore, a romantic partner can already exert social control before the conclusion of marriage. Moreover, desistance from offending prior to marriage may be the result of conscious decisions made in preparation for adult roles. For emerging adults, finding a decent job, entering a serious relationship, and desisting from offending may all be choices an individual makes during early adulthood. Therefore, marriage and desistance from offending may both be the result of taking on such adult roles. Whatever may be the case, the findings in this dissertation demonstrate that theoretical models that incorporate only social control as an explanatory factor constitute likely an incomplete explanatory model for the association between marriage and offending. They insufficiently predict offending careers, and they are also inadequate because they likely give an overly simplistic explanatory model for people’s transitioning to and evolvement into the adult role of marriage.

To a certain extent, divorce can be seen as the reversal or mirror of marriage. In terms of social control, marriage marks a period of spousal social control and divorce marks a period where spousal social control ends. This implies that if it would be spousal social control that is preventing individuals from committing crimes, divorce would be associated with an
increase in offending. This is indeed what we found overall. However, we also saw that offending already started to decrease well before the actual divorce. This need not be in contrast with the social control explanation. According to Sampson and Laub (1993), there is already a reduction in the “good marriage effect” when the quality of marriage is shrinking. But there are other rivaling explanations. First, the finding that an increase in offending preceded divorce could also mean that it is in fact offending that causes divorce as a spouse who disapproves of offending may eventually decide to divorce when his or her romantic partner continues to offend. In addition, there may be confounders that cause both offending and divorce, such as losing a job or drug abuse. Therefore, the mechanism generating the elevated offending in the period before and after divorce may likely be much more intricate than a simple ‘off-switch’ of spousal control. Delving deeper into this, we argue that if the increase in offending preceding divorce were indicative of a decaying relationship and a reduction in social control by the spouse, then an increased risk of offending preceding divorce would be expected for divorced individuals regardless of the involvement of children. However, the results showed no increase in offending for divorced individuals without children. This is a valuable finding, as it shows that also the association between divorce and offending is likely not attributable to spousal control only.

Several explanations can be given for the finding that divorce is only associated with increased offending for couples with children. First, the presence of children may mean that divorced couples still have to deal with each other and their problems long after the divorce. If there were conflicts between married parents, these may continue after the divorce as both parents still have to deal with each other as a result of shared parental responsibilities. Furthermore, the involvement of children in divorces may lead to more stress: financial problems associated with divorce are generally more pressing when there are children present who need to be provided for, and (ex-) partners can or do not work full-time.

6.3.2 Intergenerational extensions
As mentioned earlier, numerous findings support the notion that social behaviour of family members puts individuals at risk of offending. Thornberry’s (2005) intergenerational extensions to the interactional theory of offending provides a theoretical framework for this notion. A key element of the interactional theory is that a combination of negative characteristics of the child and the parents’ inept parenting styles reinforce each other. An important element of the intergenerational extensions to this theory is a model for understanding the intergenerational transmission of risk. The model describes how certain risk factors and influences of one generation lead to a number of risk factors for the next generation and the one that follows that. Factors such as family adversity and ineffective parenting within a first generation (G1, our G3) lead to adolescent antisocial behaviours and disorderly transitions such as teenage parenthood for G2 (our G4). These in turn, and through several mediating factors such as ineffective parenting, lead to risk factors for
antisocial behaviour in G3 (our G5). Thornberry (2005) argues that, at the individual level, antisocial behaviour and prosocial bonds interact and shape the individuals’ behavioural trajectories toward or away from involvement in problem behaviours like offending. Thornberry recognises, next to parents and indirectly grandparents, the importance of peers in this context.

In line with the intergenerational extensions to Thornberry’s (2005) theory, this dissertation showed that parental offending and teenage parenthood are associated with offspring offending. In addition, offending of grandfathers was also found to be related to individual offending. This is not in line with Thornberry’s theory, as that theory hypothesises that any impact of a grandparent is indirect, mediated by factors at the parent level. As we only assessed the association between offending by grandfathers and offspring offending, more research is needed to examine whether this association can to a larger extent be explained by exposure with, for example, grandchildren spending more time with an offending grandfather being at greater risk to become offenders themselves.

Next to these intergenerational family influences, our findings show that siblings impact on offspring offending risk. Thornberry (2005) acknowledged peer influences in his theory by stating that antisocial youth often spend time with deviant peers, and that those peer associations are likely to cause a further increase in antisocial behaviour. However, the role of siblings is not explicitly developed in his theory. Our findings suggest that, in addition to parental offending, sibling offending is an important factor for individual offending. The finding that sibling offending has the largest effect when siblings are close in age may again be interpreted as exposure or a learning effect as siblings close in age likely spend more time together, may play or hang out together, or may be part of the same group of friends. Future research could investigate whether siblings influence each other in the same way in which peers do. While siblings may of course be regarded as a particular kind of peer, they do differ from peers in important regards. Peers can be chosen (and bonds broken) but for siblings there are no such selection effects, and ties are generally stronger and lasting. Our results therefore indicate that the interactional theory could be extended by explicitly incorporating sibling influences, separately from peer influences.

6.3.3 Gender
As mentioned above, the results in this dissertation remained remarkably ungendered. This is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, men and women assumed relatively traditional gender roles in the Netherlands in the studied periods, particularly in this low SES cohort. Second, family-related transitions are often in themselves gender constrained. For example, women can only have children up to a certain age. Finally, on average, men offend far more often than women. Despite these gender differences, the results in this dissertation do not show any significant gender differences. For the time being this study does not show a need
for a gendered theory on the role of family-related transitions and family offending in explaining offending.

6.4 Strengths and limitations

In this dissertation, data of the Transfive study were used in order to study the relationship between family-related transitions and offending. The Transfive dataset contains registered information about these transitions and offending of sample members of five generations. The intergenerational design of the dataset provides a number of unique advantages for studying the association between family-related transitions and offending. These are the strengths of this study. Of course, like with almost any research design, there are also a number of limitations.

6.4.1 Strengths

One of the major strengths of the Transfive study is the intergenerational design that includes prospective data about individuals in five generations and almost 200 families over an extensive period of time. This makes it possible to follow individuals up well into adulthood or even old age, incorporating offending well beyond the adolescent offending peak. For this dissertation, data were used from the 3rd, 4th and 5th generations. Therefore, this dissertation includes data over a period of almost 100 years, which allows making comparisons over large periods of time without any methodological differences. This is an important advantage as other studies in life-course criminology often have a limited follow-up period, making it hard to investigate offending in later periods in life when individuals possibly have been married or divorced for several years. Second, the Transfive data allow us to study not only individuals and their parents, but also the complete wider-than-nuclear family.

A third advantage of this study is the availability of precise and complete demographic records and judicial documentation about offending of all individuals in the Netherlands from the three investigated generations. This means there is consistent, objective, and precise information over a long period of time, undistorted by memory, social desirability effects, or loss to follow-up.

Fourth, the high-risk nature of the sample makes it possible to find effects that may otherwise have stayed undetected in a sample with a lower prevalence of offending. Low incidence of offending would lead to low statistical power, which makes it hard to find any significant effects. Lastly, an important strength of this dissertation is the inclusion, in most chapters, of both men and women as sample members, while many past studies only focused on men.
6.4.2 Limitations

Those characteristics of the Transfive study design that are advantageous in comparison with those from other designs in many cases also mark its limitations. For example, the high-risk nature of the sample is a limitation in addition to being a strength. All sample members from generations 3, 4, and 5 are descendants of 198 boys who were placed in a reform school for various reasons, such as delinquency, poverty, or abuse by parents. Therefore, they constitute a high-risk sample that is therefore not representative of the total Dutch population. Because the dataset only included families that resided in the Netherlands already for generations, the non-native part of Dutch society is underrepresented. Also, sample members are often members of the lower social classes. Therefore, this sample could differ from a more average sample in a number of ways. For example, the sample members may have less financial resources to deal with the consequences of life events such as teenage childbearing or divorce. This could cause more financial strain and stress, which in turn increase the likelihood of offending. However, there are also reasons why certain associations could be expected to be weaker within this sample. Due to the high-risk nature of the sample, romantic partners are relatively often involved in offending or have disadvantaged backgrounds. As a result, marrying these individuals may be less beneficial than for more average citizens, as sample members might be less of a positive influence during marriage. This could lead to weaker negative associations between marriage and offending. For the same reasons, divorce may to a lesser extent be associated with increased offending. In line with this reasoning, our results showed that divorce was not associated with offending when individuals had divorced from a criminal spouse. Although it is important to bear in mind the results are likely influenced by the nature of the sample, replication of other studies in this dissertation have shown resemblance with results of other Dutch samples and often even with samples from other countries.

A second limitation is that, in measuring offending as the dependent variable, no distinction was made between different life stages (e.g., adolescence, adulthood), or between different types of offending. This means that, apart from a number of additional analyses we conducted to test specific explanations, no distinction could be made between, for example, adolescence-limited offenders and persistent offenders, or between violent and property offenders. However, it was not an option to make such distinctions, due to a lack of statistical power.

A third limitation concerns the use of register data. Because only register data was available, no self-report data was present about, for example, environmental factors (interactions at school, work, or with friends) that may have played a role in the investigated associations. In the chapters that focused on the relationship between offending and marriage and divorce, this has largely been overcome by using fixed effects analyses that control for possible time-stable confounders. However, even in those studies, more qualitative measures such as the
quality and development of relationships would have benefited our understanding of the mechanisms underlying the results.

Fourth, the use of registered crime data has limitations. One such limitation is that registered crime data is only a derivative of criminal behaviour, while criminological theories are about actual criminal behaviour. The use of registered crime data leads to an underrepresentation of certain criminal behaviours, often demonstrated in the private atmosphere, such as domestic violence. Furthermore, there is the possibility of official bias (Besemer, Farrington & Bijleveld, 2013); associations between offending of family members will be overstated if the police focused their attention on specific families and therefore more often registered criminal behaviour in those families than in others. This could partly explain similarity in registered offending among family members.

Finally, a possible limitation from the use of registered crime data is the fact that the number of registered crimes in the Netherlands fluctuated strongly during the twentieth century. In particular, the sharp rise in registered crimes in the 1960s and 1970s meant that, for our sample, the chance of being registered as an offender greatly increased in those decades. Regardless of whether part of that rise is due to an actual rise in offending, this does mean that the G3 and G4 had a lower chance of being registered as offenders in adolescence and early adulthood as compared to G5. In other words, registration for offenders from G3 and G4 was likely more rare than G5, and if they were registered with the authorities, this may have been an indication of greater deviance than for those from G5. It does imply that some caution is warranted in interpretation of the findings, particularly over multiple generations.

6.5 Agenda for research
The quantitative analyses in this dissertation have been useful in identifying statistically significant relationships such as between life-course transitions and offending. The register data and official crime data gave us objective and complete measures over a long period. However, qualitative research, or at least more qualitative measures, is now needed to investigate what specific mechanisms account for these relationships. While we were able to assess exactly to the date when people got married and divorced, we have no indication of the quality of relationships, of people's well-being, health, or issues with mental illness or addiction. Incorporating such measures could be done on the micro-, meso-, and macro-level.

6.5.1 Micro-level
At the individual level, incorporating measures on the subjects of physical and mental well-being and attitudes would help in explaining criminal careers and their relationship with family factors. For example, incorporating more direct indicators of self-control could help
explain the extent to which this self-control may explain the relationship between teenage parenthood and offspring offending. Furthermore, by incorporating measures about an individual’s attitudes regarding romantic relationships and marriage, it is possible to investigate the relationship between marriage and desistance from offending more profoundly. Measures of relationship quality and spousal disapproving of offending, and their variation over the course of married years, are examples of other measures that would be vital to understand the association between divorce and offending. Finally, by investigating internal identity changes, such as from an irresponsible delinquent adolescent to a responsible adult, the role of such an identity change in explaining the relationship between marriage and offending could be investigated.

6.5.2 Meso-level
At the meso-level, in particular the family level, future research would benefit from incorporating measures of factors such as poverty, parenting and family interactions. In particular, this dissertation proposed that exposure to offending family members may be of key importance in explaining intergenerational and intragenerational transmission of offending. However, the used data did not provide direct measures of exposure. Using more direct measures of exposure, such as time spent with family members or the extent of witnessing criminal behaviour of family members, would make it possible to investigate the extent to which associations in offending between family members can be traced back to a direct influence of family members on each other. Parenting measures would be needed in order to see whether or not young parents were able to raise their children as effectively as other parents. Family poverty and neighbourhood disadvantage are important contextual measures to better help explain sibling similarity in offending.

6.5.3 Macro-level
We showed that the relationship between marriage and offending is different for different marriage cohorts. The results of a few earlier studies also pointed in that direction (Bersani et al., 2009; Godfrey et al., 2007). Furthermore, our results indicated a more direct relationship between divorce and offending for divorces that concluded before 1970. We noted that this could be due to the fact that divorces were more rare and carried more stigma back then, resulting in more direct negative consequences of divorce, such as offending. All in all, effects may be context-dependent as the cultural meaning and social and legal context of transitions such as marriage, divorce, and childbearing are different between places and over time. Investigating these effects while incorporating macro-differences systematically will improve our knowledge of the extent to which the relationship between these transitions and offending is specific to certain cultural circumstances.

Special attention is warranted for marriage. Marriage has become less prevalent over the years in the Netherlands as it has become increasingly normal for romantic partners to
cohabit without getting married. Therefore, research on recent cohorts should now also focus on cohabitation. With constellations within which children are raised become more and more varied, more research is also needed to investigate differences between subgroups in the relationships between family-related transitions and offending. Such subgroups are individuals with children and individuals without children, and single parent and dual parent households. Future research would need to focus on such subgroups, also for better understanding the underlying processes leading to offending and desistance from offending.

6.6 Policy and practical implications
This dissertation has shown that when it comes to explaining criminal careers, family matters. Although parental offending is definitely not a guarantee for offspring offending, in some families criminal offending is transmitted from parents to children for generations. This has been recognised by policy makers, who are often searching for successful interventions. However, not all findings from this dissertation easily lend themselves for practical interventions. While it is, for example, feasible to guide individuals out of unemployment, fostering people’s romantic relationships lends itself less easily for policy interventions.

One finding that may have practical implications is the finding that children of both teenage mothers and teenage fathers were at elevated risk of offending. In our studies, a significant relationship between teenage parenthood and offspring offending remained after controlling for factors such as parental offending, family size and parental divorce. All in all, for the time being we must therefore assume that there is an effect of teenage parenthood on the risk for offspring to offend. Given that past studies have shown other negative outcomes for offspring of teenage parenthood (Jaffee et al., 2001), policies to minimise the prevalence of teenage parenthood for women as well as for men and support for those who do experience teenage parenthood, are recommended.

Another finding with practical implications is the finding that individuals are at elevated risk of offending when they have a close relative who offended. Offending of siblings, parents and grandfathers were all, over and above each other, associated with an increased risk of offending. Therefore, when multiple family members show criminal behaviour, those families could be monitored by child protective services and agencies in order to investigate the extent to which the family situation is problematic and an intervention is needed to stop the family “cycle” of offending. For example, early family/parent training programs have been found to be associated with a reduction in behaviour problems among young children, as well as a reduction in delinquency and crime in later adolescence and adulthood (Piquero, Farrington, Welsh, Tremblay & Jennings, 2009).
6.7 References


