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DEVELOPMENTAL CRIMINOLOGY AND THE CRIME DECLINE

*A Comparative Analysis of the
Criminal Careers of Two New South
Wales Birth Cohorts*

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Developmental Criminology and the Crime Decline

A Comparative Analysis of the Criminal Careers of Two New South Wales Birth Cohorts

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Abstract: Throughout the 1990s, many countries around the world experienced the beginnings of what would later become the most significant and protracted decline in crime ever recorded. Although not a universal experience, the so-called international crime-drop was an unpredicted and unprecedented event that now offers fertile ground for reflection on many of criminology's key theories and debates. Through the lens of developmental and life-course criminology, this Element compares the criminal offending trajectories of two Australian birth cohorts born ten years apart in 1984 and 1994. We find that the crime-drop was unlikely the result of any significant change in the prevalence or persistence of early onset and chronic offending, but the disproportionate disappearance of their low-rate, adolescent-onset peers. Despite decades of research that has prioritized interventions for minimizing chronic offending, it seems our greatest global crime prevention achievement to date was in reducing the prevalence of criminal offending in the general population.

Keywords: crime-drop, birth cohort, life-course criminology, developmental criminology, criminal careers, onset, chronicity, offending trajectories

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