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## THE ONSET OF CRIMINAL CAREERS OF ORGANIZED CRIME OFFENDERS IN POLAND: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE AND CRIME

### ABSTRACT

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:**

The article analyses the influence of the age of organized crime offenders on the committed crimes. The members of organized criminal groups in Poland are taken into closer consideration. They constitute a small group of offenders (about 3%). The central research questions are: Which crimes are typical for the onset of the members of organized criminal groups in Poland? How old are the Polish members of organized criminal groups at the time of the onset of their criminal careers? Does the age of a person at the beginning of a criminal career influence the type of the first committed offence? Which circumstances in the respondents' opinion had an impact on the onset of a criminal career at the particular stage of their life?

#### **RESEARCH METHODS:**

In this particular study statistical analysis and legal methods (including formal legal method) were applied to approach the raised questions and to formulate conclusions. The study is based on the own research, where the research sample was to allow both qualitative and quantitative research.

**RESULTS:**

The own research confirmed that in Poland the onset of a criminal career of organized crime offenders is different from the onset of a criminal career of high-volume crime offenders. The motivation, circumstances of the onset of criminal activities, and the profile of criminal actions change and develop in accordance with the age. Findings suggest that the older was a criminal who was breaking the law for the first time, the more thoughtful and rational – at a given stage of life – was the choice.

**DISCUSSION:**

From the perspective of developmental criminology, the influence of the life-course on crime is one of the most important issues. The research results concerning the organized criminal offenders indicate that the analyses of criminal careers not only young but also experienced older offenders are very beneficial. The analysis of the criminal careers of organized crime offenders challenges the researchers in the sphere of life-course criminology. The European studies on criminal carriers of organized crime offenders emphasize also the necessity of research on the older offenders. Therefore, the age limit has been changed, and the interest of the life-course criminologists in the subject has been arisen.

**KEYWORDS:** *criminal career, organized crime, high-volume crime, criminal behavior, criminal activity*

## INTRODUCTION

Social aspects of criminal carriers seem to be important in the context of wider research on society and culture. Knowledge about criminal careers has increased significantly during the last decades (Rzeplińska, 2021, pp. 91-120; Klaus and Woźniakowska-Fajst, 2021, pp. 9-30). The research on criminal careers of adults in criminology is not as common as on the careers of juveniles or adolescents. In recent years, several influential studies have demonstrated the usefulness of the further research on mature offenders (Sheley, 2000, pp. 117 ff.; Kleemans, 2014, pp. 42 ff.). The examination of the offenders involved in high-volume crime dominates in the research achievements relating to criminal careers of adults. However, some projects concerning the criminal careers of persons involved in high-profit crime, particularly so-called white-collar criminals (Shover and Hochstetler, 2006; Weisburd et al., 2001;

Van Onna, 2018), and organized crime offenders are also fruitful areas of concern for criminal career researchers (Kleemans and Van de Bunt, 1999, Kleemans and De Poot, 2008; Van Koppen et al., 2010; Wang, 2013; Kleemans and Van Koppen, 2020; Savona et al., 2020; Francis et al., 2013; Campedelli et al., 2019). The research carried out on the mentioned target group shows that the careers of organized crime offenders are often different from high-volume crime offenders. Their life-course analyses generate a new perspective of consideration in the subject related literature (Van Koppen et al., 2010; Cullen , 2011, p. 310; Carlsson and Sarnecki, 2016).

Vere van Koppen, Christianne de Poot, and Arjan Blokland (2010) advanced the thesis that the organized crime offenders start their career much later than high-volume crime offenders. However, according to the authors, this is not only noticeable difference. Organized crime offenders were involved in more serious criminal activities rather than high-volume crime offenders.

From the perspective of life-course criminology, the emphasis on the late criminal career onset and, in some cases, a short sentence history, or even lack of punishment should be taken into closer considerations. There are two possibilities: the organized crime offenders start their career as adults and they commit some serious crimes at the beginning of their careers; or they act very skillfully in the criminal underworld, and they stay invisible to the law enforcement authorities for a long period of time. As far as their 'adult onset' is concerned, it is significant that the mechanism of engagement in the organized crime depends on four factors: social bounds, business relationship or professional contacts, leisure time activities, and life events, which bring some negative financial effects (Kleemans, 2014).

The age of organized crime offenders is the second interesting feature as far as their careers are concerned. The age of the group of the organized crime offenders diverge from the general population of offenders. Edward R. Kleemans and Christianne de Poot (2008, pp. 69-98) argue that there was not any person under 18 in the research group. The English data, where there was only 1% of respondents engaged in the organized crime under 18, is similar to the Dutch data (Francis et al., 2013).

Over-representativeness of the older criminals (Francis et al., 2013; Kleemans and De Poot, 2008) and a noticeable amount of offenders from

this group without a long sentence history is the second difference. It might be assumed, that the older offenders should be at the end of their criminal career, particularly due to the fact that they are married, bring up children, or have a job. The mentioned relations are not reflected in the organized crime.

The further interesting issue is that a great amount of organized crime offenders has short or very short 'official' criminal careers. According to Edward R. Kleemans and Christianne De Poot (2008), in the case of organized crime offenders a significant amount of offenders had their first contact with judiciary at the time when their criminal career should have finished. Some British research also reveals that as far as organized crime concerned, there is an untypical model of the curve concerning crime and sentences (Francis et al., 2013).

From the perspective of developmental criminology, the influence of the life-course on crime is one of the most important issues. Kleemans and De Poot argue that a crucial cause of the involvement into organized criminal activities was a critical economic situation of the future offenders. Some of them had lost their jobs, declared bankruptcy, or had been in doubts due to hazard or other addiction. Usually, very young and young people were not involved in the situations presented above. It may explain the adult onset or late onset offender syndrome in organized crime. Such a situation was explained by the respondents as dead-end, therefore, the involvement in profitable criminal activities was perceived as a remedy for their financial problems.

The research results concerning the organized criminal offenders indicate that the analyses of criminal careers not only young but also experienced older offenders are very beneficial. The analysis of the criminal careers of organized crime offenders challenges the researchers in the sphere of life-course criminology. The studies on criminal carriers of organized crime offenders emphasize also the necessity of research on the older offenders. Therefore, the age limit has been changed, and the interest of the life-course criminologists in the subject has been arisen.

The present study analyses the influence of the age of organized crime offenders on the committed crimes. The members of organized criminal groups in Poland are taken into closer consideration. They constitute a small group of offenders (about 3%). The central research questions are: Which crimes are typical for the onset of the members of organized criminal groups in Poland?

How old are the Polish members of organized criminal groups at the time of the onset of their criminal careers? Does the age of a person at the beginning of a criminal career influence the type of the first committed offence? Which circumstances in the respondents' opinion had an impact on the onset of a criminal career at the particular stage of their life?

At first, the course of research, the research methods, and the selected group of respondents are presented. In the further parts of the study, we focus on a deeper analysis of the onset of criminal careers of the respondents, taking into account the stage of their life, in which, according to the members of criminal groups, some circumstances had influenced the onset of their criminal careers. Unfortunately, the modest scope of the article does not allow for an exhaustive treatment of the subject, therefore offenders with the adult onset and late onset of criminal careers will be examined in depth.

## **ORGANIZED CRIME OFFENDERS IN POLAND (DATA AND METHODS OF RESEARCH)**

During the selection of the members of organized criminal groups in order to examine their criminal careers it was assumed that they would be perpetrators sentenced by a final court judgment according to Art. 258 §1 of Polish penal code, and/or Art. 258 §2 of Polish penal code, and/or Art. 258 §3 of Polish penal code (Journal of Law of the Republic of Poland, 1997, no. 88, pos. 553), who were sentenced to imprisonment, and at the time of the research, they stayed at selected prisons or detention centers in the period from October 2012 to December 2017. It was a formal criterion identifying the respondents, and distinguishing them from the other offenders taking part in crime.

During determination of the scope of time and the area of research, the possibility of contact with the convicts, and the need to cover a certain number of people were taken into account. It was assumed that the number of respondents should have enabled both basic statistical operations and qualitative research. Therefore, it was decided to cover all persons sentenced according to the final judicial ruling to imprisonment at the time when they stayed in

the place of its implementation. They should have been the persons who met the formal requirement of conviction according to Art. 258 of Polish penal code, and they agreed to participate in the project.

The organized crime as an area of criminal activity covers a wide range of types of activities, ranging from drug trafficking, and ending with more complex business frauds. The convicts, based on the adopted criterion, were therefore a very heterogeneous group that had to be systematized in some way. Following the example established in the doctrine and practice of law enforcement authorities, the criterion was the division into perpetrators of crimes of a criminal character, drug trafficking, business frauds, and multi-offence nature. The further step was the own project consisting in the series of interviews with the convicts. In the Polish penitentiary system, the convicts have their personal files, in which, for the purposes of their social rehabilitation during imprisonment, such important documents are collected in court proceedings as, e.g., criminal cards illustrating the history of previous convictions, court sentences with their justifications, forensic evidence, psychological and psychiatric opinions, or environmental interviews. Therefore, the penitentiary files of organized crime offenders were also the subject of analysis. It was supposed to gain the broader knowledge about the respondents, and to verify the data achieved during interviews.

In Poland, the members of organized crime groups are a small group of the convicts' population. They constitute about 3% of all convicts. Considering the fact that the research sample was to allow both qualitative and quantitative research (statistical operations), it was approved that the sample should have met the criteria of representativeness set for the quantitative research (the research presented in the article is a part of a wider research project presented in the monograph of Monika Kotowska, 2019. She examined 157 offenders from 16 detention centers. For further research see Kotowska, 2022a, pp. 331-347; Kotowska, 2022b, pp. 37-54).

As far as the quantitative testing is concerned, the needed size of a research sample depends on how high reliable and precise should be the estimation. Credibility is the probability that the estimate average value of the sample will be true. Accuracy is the distance between the estimated minimum size and the estimated maximum size. The credibility of the assessment might

be chosen by the researcher. In the research practice, credibility is chosen between 90% and 99,9%. In the conducted research, it was assumed that the confidence level will be 90% credibility, with 10% error allowed. To achieve such a quantity, the average number of imprisoned people meeting the research criteria in 2012-2016 has been determined (respectively: on the 31st of December, 2012 – it was 357 final convictions, on the 31st of December, 2013 – 385 final convictions, on the 31st of December, 2014 – 386 final convictions, on the 31st of December, 2015 – 362 final convictions, and on the 31st of December, 2016 – 375). With the arithmetic average of the specific period (373 final convictions of the members of organized criminal groups), the sample selection calculator determined that while maintaining the assumed 90% confidence limit, the research sample (the required number of people in the study) must have been 157 people. At the end of the carried research, each offender was given a number from B.1 (the first examined person) to B.157 (the 157th examined person). Therefore, the data was anonymous. The research was conducted personally from the 1st of October, 2012 up to the 30th of December, 2019.

## RESULTS

### THE BEGINNING OF A CRIMINAL PATH

At the beginning, we have tried to answer the question concerning the types of crimes typical for the onset of the members of organized criminal groups in Poland. As for the type of the first offense committed, the majority stated that it was not a serious criminal offense, most often the theft. Subsequently, the respondents declared that they began their criminal path with the business frauds (over 14% of respondents). Physical assault and mugging offenses (8,92% of respondents), robbery (7,01% of respondents), i.e. the acts of a significant aggression were mentioned less frequently.

**Table 1 The type of the first offence according to organized crime offenders**

	Categories of the first offence	The research sample		Criminal		Drug trade		Business frauds		Multi-offence	
		Number of the examined	%	Number of the examined	%	Number of the examined	%	Number of the examined	%	Number of the examined	%
1.	An economic offence	22	14,01	3	1,91	4	2,55	14	8,92	1	0,64
2.	Theft	48	30,57	19	12,10	12	7,64	9	5,73	8	5,10
3.	A car theft	9	5,73	2	1,27	0	0,00	2	1,27	5	3,18
4.	Burglary	8	5,10	3	1,91	0	0,00	1	0,64	4	2,55
5.	Short-term seizure of property	1	0,64	0	0,00	1	0,64	0	0,00	0	0,00
6.	Drug trade	16	10,19	1	0,64	10	6,37	2	1,27	3	1,91
7.	Fencing	5	3,18	2	1,27	0	0,00	0	0,00	3	1,91
9.	A physical assault	14	8,92	8	5,10	3	1,91	0	0,00	3	1,91
10.	Kidnaping	3	1,91	2	1,27	0	0,00	0	0,00	1	0,64
11.	Arm possession	1	0,64	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	1	0,64
12.	Armed robbery	11	7,01	3	1,91	4	2,55	0	0,00	4	2,55
13.	Breaking without entering	6	3,82	3	1,91	1	0,64	1	0,64	1	0,64
14.	Murder	1	0,64	0	0,00	1	0,64	0	0,00	0	0,00
15.	An offense against property	2	1,27	1	0,64	0	0,00	0	0,00	1	0,64
16.	No data	10	6,37	3	1,91	3	1,91	4	2,55	0	0,00
	Total	157	100,00	50	31,85	39	24,84	33	21,02	35	22,29

Source: the own research

However, in most cases, the type of committed crime was dependent on the stage of life in which the first violation occurred. From the perspective of criminal careers, it is interesting to look at human life, examining through the prism of the stages of its development. The developmental psychology



enlists the following phases in the life of an individual: the phase of childhood, adolescence, early maturity, late maturity, early adulthood, and late adulthood. In this study, in order to systematize the output of the research, the life cycles were shortened to four phases: 1) childhood – up to the age of 12; 2) adolescence – at the age of 13-17; 3) adulthood – at the age of 18-29; 4) maturity – over the age of 30.

It is generally accepted that the severity of crime is commensurate with human maturity. Therefore, young people commit crimes much more often than mature people. 66,24% of offenders from the research sample had already started their criminal careers up to the age of 17. The presented data shows that almost 50% of respondents violated the law for the first time as adolescents. It is significant that criminals and drug offenders dominated in this group.

**Table 2 The age of a criminal group offender at the time of the first offence**

	The age of the offender at the time of the first offence			Criminal		Drug trade		Business frauds		Multi-offense	
		Number of the examined	%	Number of the examined	%	Number of the examined	%	Number of the examined	%	Number of the examined	%
1.	The age of 0-12	26	16,56	12	7,64	6	3,82	4	2,55	4	2,55
2.	The age of 13-20	78	49,68	26	16,56	20	12,74	8	5,10	24	15,29
3.	The age of 21-29 lat	19	12,10	5	3,18	1	0,64	8	5,10	5	3,18
4.	The age of 30-39	12	7,64	3	1,91	4	2,55	4	2,55	1	0,64
5.	The age of over 40	7	4,46	0	0,00	4	2,55	2	1,27	1	0,64
6.	No data	15	9,55	4	2,55	4	2,55	7	4,46	0	0,00
	Total	157	100,00	50	31,85	39	24,84	33	21,02	35	22,29

Source: the own research

The majority of respondents declared the onset of their criminal career at the age of 13-20 (over 49%). However, the attention should be drawn to the age of the criminal initiation of the members of organized criminal groups. It is a significant number of respondents (almost 44%), who began their criminal path over the age of 21, which significantly exceeds the age of the onset of the careers of the high-volume crime offenders. The onset of a criminal career

of economic perpetrators is particularly late – only 12 out of 33 members of economic criminal groups committed their first offence under the age of 20.

The early onset of criminal activities up to the age of 12 often forecasts a long criminal career. From the perspective of the length and duration of criminal activities, the most important are risk factors occurring during childhood and early childhood, although the researchers emphasize that the significant risk factors appear very early, up to the age of 5 and during the first years of education (Morizot and Kazemian, 2015, p. 4). Such problems as hyperactivity, impulsiveness, aggression, and other behavioral problems which are identified at the age of 8, may predict involvement in criminal activeness at age of 30 (the research carried out on the group of 600 persons revealed that individuals who demonstrated aggressive behavior at the age of 8 also manifest such behavior at the age of 30; Gozubenli and Unal, 2014, pp. 2 ff.; Thornberry, 1987, pp. 863-891; Uggen, 2000, pp. 529-546). As far as organized crime offenders with the criminal onset at the age of 13-17 or earlier are concerned, we can identify their 'growing up' to the crimes. The involvement in an organized crime is the last stage of such a criminal path.

## **THE EXAMINED OFFENDERS WITH THE ADULT ONSET OF CRIMINAL CAREERS**

19 respondents started their criminal career at the age of 18-29 (12,0%). The business-frauds offenders were numerically the largest group – 8 persons (5,0%), followed by 5 criminals (3,18%) and 5 multi-criminal (3,18%) offenders. It was also 1 person who was involved in drug trade (0,64%). The onset of criminal career at the age of 21 or later is perceived by criminologists as the late onset. They also try to find out differences between the offenders with early-onset and late-onset of their criminal activities (Zara and Farrington, 2010, pp. 257-273; McGee and Farrington, 2010, pp. 530–549; Zara and Farrington, 2013, pp. 235–249). In this research study of criminal careers, it was assumed that the late criminal career can be considered when a perpetrator begins committing crimes at least at the age of 18. However, most perpetrators were closer to the upper than to the lower age limit adopted in the study. In the

analyzed group of perpetrators, there were only 2 respondents who declared the lower adopted limit (the age of 18) as the age of the first committed crime. 9 were at least 21 years old at the time of their first offence, 3 persons were 25 years old, 2 respondents – 26 years old, 1 person was 27 years old, and 1 person was 28 years old.

It is often assumed that the onset of adulthood is the moment, when an individual acquires economic independence, and thus is able to support himself. In many countries, a person becomes independent as an adult, he moves out, and becomes a financially independent entity. In Poland, due to the relatively high prices of renting apartments and some strict requirements in order to get a mortgage, the period of living with parents and the need to use their financial assistance is longer. In the case of perpetrators with a late onset of their criminal career, it was observed that as long as they were dependent on their parents (there were the families with less social problems than in the case of the criminals with the earlier onset of their criminal activities), the respondents submitted themselves to the requirements imposed by their parents and the restrictions resulting from the family life. In fact, this protected them from their criminal initiation. Such a situation is confirmed, e.g., by B.70 (he was the leader of an organized criminal group dealing with drug trafficking).

In the case of 'late careers', the onset of criminal activities was related to moving out of the family home and attempting to become financially independent. This situation might be illustrated by an excerpt from the interview with B.98 (as a member of a criminal group, he smuggled a significant amount of intoxicants, and put them on the market). B.98 started his criminal activities at the age of 21. The respondent claims that his parents were 'resourceful people'. They provided their children with a 'good life' and living conditions. They helped both sons, but they also argued that the boys had to study or to work in order to become independent. After high school, the respondent did not intend to continue his education. He professionally helped his father in a newly opened construction store. He also took up farming activities. B. 98 emphasizes that he saw that his parents worked very hard (as entrepreneurs and owners of large agricultural areas) in order to ensure their family a good standard of living. His older brother had similar reflections. When the brothers

got to know the people who earned 'easy money' on the drug trade, they joined a criminal group.

B.98 and his older brother decided that to start their 'adult' life, they would earn on the 'drug business'. Currently, they both are imprisoned. According to the penitentiary files, their parents also support the sons during the time of serving sentence. The respondent declares that problems with 'law' began in his life late, and nothing had forecasted that before. During the interview, the respondent assesses: *"I didn't want to live like my parents – slog during the week, a church on Sunday"*. The content of the files of this convict and, in particular, a fragment of the environmental interview proves that B. 98 *"did not cause educational problems, he was a good and polite boy. He didn't repeat any class, he achieved very good results at elementary school, good at high school (...)"*.

In the above context, the statement of B.61 also seems to be interesting (as a member of an organized criminal group, he committed crimes consisting in unjust extortion of the state tax refunds and tax evasion). During the interview, he assumed that the comparison of the standard of living and financial situation of his relatives to the income from the illegal sources determined the onset of his criminal career.

The story of the other offender with a late onset of a criminal career shows that for some members of organized criminal groups, taking the first job is not the factor which protects from crime. It can be even said that in many cases, the respondents were able to use the fact of having a job in such a way that it allowed them to remain unpunished for a long time. They led illegal activities under the cover of legal sources. B.134 is such an example (a recidivist acting in an organized criminal group. He was imprisoned for 5 years for skimming). After education and compulsory military service, the man began an independent life. He quickly realized that profit from crime is easier than a 'normal' work. At the same time, for the sake of appearances, he was earning some legal money. *"At the age of 23, I was married, I bought a building plot, I built a house, despite the fact that in 1983, in Poland was very hard"*.

It should be taken into account that 6 respondents with a late onset of a criminal career managed to obtain financial independence through legal work. However, due to some life events, they lost their motivation to earn legal money. B.109 is an example in this group (he was a leader of an organized

criminal group, which committed crimes consisting in unjust extortion of the state tax). At the time of research, the convict is 60 years old. For the first time he was sentenced to imprisonment at the age of 27, due to smuggling of clothes across the border of the Republic of Poland. The respondent mentions that it was in the 1980s. Before he started smuggling clothes, he worked professionally, but he quickly realized that *“even if I slogged away, nothing changed, except callous on my hands”*. B. 109 at first was sentenced to two years imprisonment. He claims that after the sentence he has not been undertaking any criminal activities for over twenty years. He got married, and spent 24 years with his wife. Their son was born, and they were living running their own business for many years. Their standard of living was good. In 1996, the respondent’s wife died. The adult son started an independent life. The respondent was not able to lead his life alone. He sold the stores, which he had been running together with his wife. He spent all nights at nightclubs and casinos, where he met the people dealing with some illegal businesses. In such circumstances, he began the stage of life related to the organized crime.

The analyzed group of respondents also includes perpetrators, whose onset of a criminal career is related to the opening of the borders of the Republic of Poland. This happened especially in the case of convicts involved in smuggling drugs across the borders, or the so-called ‘high-excite’ crime. The perpetrators argued that smuggling crime had been previously beyond the reach of many Polish criminals, but when the borders were opened, there was an opportunity to earn easy (secure in their perception) money. Therefore, they immediately decided to start cross-border criminal activities, even though they had never been involved in crime. The respondents emphasized that such crime seemed to be worth their attention, because they were not interested in the less profitable criminal activity. In some cases, their entire subsequent criminal career was related to cross-border crime. The respondent B. 131 illustrates such a situation (he was a member of a criminal group which smuggled cigarettes). He recalls during the interview: *“the onset of my criminal activities was in the 1990s. I was 21-22 years old. The borders had been opened. I went to Turkey to smuggle clothes. Nobody paid taxes (...). As an experienced person, I started to smuggle huge amounts of cigarettes from Russia to Poland (...). I also dealt with cars. I did not become discouraged even after the sentence”*.

Among the respondents with a late-onset of criminal career, we can identify a large group of people who owe their first contact with the judiciary to the participation in an organized criminal group. They are the first-time convicts, with the onset of their career in the structures of organized crime. They were tempted by the material benefits. In this group, there was not 'growing up' to crime, there was not also any 'evolution' of a criminal career.

The respondent B.21 is an example (he acted in an organized criminal group, he took part in drug trafficking, armed robberies, theft, swindle). At the age of 23, he committed his first crime. He recollects the earlier period of his life: *I grew up in Gdańsk. The district was not superior. My family home was normal, no alcohol or rows. I was attending school without playing truant (...). After school, I have worked 4 or 5 years in a factory*". Once, he was offered an additional earnings relating to the drug trafficking. Due to financial perks, he accepted the job and started his criminal activities with the organized criminal group.

B.131 also initiated his criminal career in an organized criminal group (smuggling cigarettes, the suspicion of drug trafficking across the borders). At the time of the interview, he was 46, and he was graduated from the vocational secondary school. He started his criminal career at the age of over 20. Currently, he is imprisoned for his criminal activities in an organized criminal group. He is of the opinion that: *"even when the Polish penal code did not forecast the penalization of organized crime, his group was called the 'local mafia'. From the very beginning, my criminal activities were connected with an organized crime (...). We were having parties, spending a lot of money. I've also started my own legal business, I've bought a video shop, and I've been thinking about buying a tenement"*.

The findings of David P. Farrington and Donald J. West are interesting. Their analysis embraced the persons who had their first judicial contact at the age of 24-32. They came to a conclusion that the activities, which led to the court case, were only one aspect of the wider anti-social syndrome and deviant behavior. In the perception of Farrington and West, the convicted at the age of over 21, in fact, did not differ from the people who have not been sentenced (Farrington and West, 1990, pp. 126-131). According to our research, the members of organized criminal groups with a late onset of their criminal career have behaved as any other people. They actually reminded normal

citizens rather than criminals with an early onset of a criminal career, who were less educated and they did not have any professional work experience. The respondents with a late onset of the criminal career were given a chance to organize (even partially) their normal life.

The biography of B.70 illustrates the career mentioned above (the offender was a leader of an organized crime group which dealt with drug trafficking, he produced a significant amount of a psychotropic substance in the form of amphetamine). First time he was sent to prison at the age of 59. However, it does not mean that he began committing crimes at such age, but it may indicate that he has not been disclosed for a long time. During the interview, the man says: *“I’ve been balancing on the verge of crime, or it depends on how we look at it. I’ve got involved into criminal activities since the 1980s. Now, it is 2015 (...). I’m imprisoned for the first time. Neither my wife nor son were interested in my work before. My son is studying. I have a decent child. I’ve set up my son’s life against the drugs (...). I’ve treated my criminal activities as a normal job (...). My family had a good life”*. In the reception of the offender, a stabilized family life and his common reason are the attributes which differs him from the recidivists or ordinary offenders. He was able to function in a normal society as well as among the people who led some criminal activities. The example of B.70 shows that the respondents with a late onset of their criminal career, comparing to those with the earlier onset of criminal activities, have been long invisible to the law enforcement authorities. They pretended that their income was the effect of some legal activities.

The analyzed organized crime offenders finished their education before the onset of their criminal career. As it is shown in the carried out interviews and partly in the files (interviews of probation officers, forensic opinions, psychological and penitentiary judgments), the adult onset offenders, unlike the criminals with the earlier onset of a criminal career, were students who did not cause any significant problems at school. However, none of the respondents was particularly interested in studying, and he did not have any special achievements in this respect. Most of the convicts in this group did not repeat class, and did not have any major behavior problems. Mostly, these respondents had a profession, had some experience in the field of work and acquired secondary or at least vocational education. It is significant that the

respondents from this group, unlike organized crime offenders with the earlier onset of a criminal career, have often declared positive patterns taken from the family home and during their childhood.

Criminal behavior is learned intensively thanks to interaction with the people at the beginning of a life path, however, analyzing the perpetrators with an adult onset, it can be argued that the influence of small social groups can also play an important part in the later criminal path. From this perspective, the general strain theory of Robert Agnew seems to be interesting. According to this, the crime occurs under the influence of some negative affective states arising out of negative contacts with other people of different socio-economic status. These states are caused by the constant analysis of the own (mainly material) situation and comparing it to the situation of other people. This causes a 'dissonance of growing aspirations and unchanging poverty'.

## **THE EXAMINED OFFENDERS WITH THE LATE ONSET OF CRIMINAL CAREERS**

The respondents with the late onset of their criminal activities constituted the older group of organized crime offenders. From the perspective of developmental criminology, it is the least examined and untypical group of perpetrators. Taking into account their age, they should have started their criminal career a long ago. In the research material, we have noticed 19 members of criminal groups with the mature onset of a criminal career. There were 12 offenders who initiated their criminal activities at the age of 30-39. 4 of them were involved in business frauds, 5 in drug trafficking, and 3 were criminal offenders. 7 persons started their criminal career at the age of 40 or later. The respondents did not have any problems with alcohol or drugs. Unlike the earlier onset offenders, the respondents with the late onset of a criminal career started their criminal activities joining an organized criminal group from the very beginning. Unlike the earlier onset perpetrators, they did not change the profile of their criminal activities. As far as the respondents with the late onset of their criminal career are concerned, we did not notice the phenomenon of 'growing up' to crime. It is significant that more than a half of the analyzed



group had a stable and legal income. Therefore, the motivation to crime was only of an economic character.

The perpetrators often perceived participation in an organized criminal group as a lucrative 'business' destined to create favorable opportunities to earn big money. From the perspective of their work, it was no chance to have such an income. In some cases, it was 'the last resort' to protect them from the expected bankruptcy. Some respondents perceived participation in an organized criminal group as last chance for the cash injection, after which they would return to their peaceful life. In some cases, disregarding the necessity of serving a prison sentence, they simply managed to achieve their goals. During the interviews, the convicts emphasized that the engagement in criminal activity at the older age gives confidence that there is little to lose. They already had a stable family life, or they were just divorced, their children were often independent. In their opinion, imprisonment was not able to change the stability of their lives.

Such a situation took place in the case of B.61 (as a member of an organized criminal group he committed crimes consisting in the extortion of tax refunds under false pretences, and tax evasion in the field of excise). His first crime – the extortion of tax refunds under false pretences – he committed at the age of 52. The man describes the circumstances of the organized criminal group's creation and his participation in it: *"someone had an idea to make money, he had contacts, he chose people like me who wanted to earn some extra money and have nothing to lose. I forged tax invoices, paid money, and cashed checks. I was arrested for the first time at the age of 56 (...). I've been living with my son, I don't have any plans for the future. I don't regret it, because I have 7 days of imprisonment for a fine which wasn't paid, and earned a lot of money. I had enough to help children. Unfortunately, now I am out of money to pay the fine, that's why I'm here"*.

Most respondents from this age group grew up in normally functioned families, thanks to which they have positive feelings concerning their childhood. As adolescents, they did not create serious upbringing problems and did not function in the group of the demoralized older colleagues, as it was in the case of the early onset careers. In adulthood, the respondents experienced long-term relationships, even if some of them failed. A 'model' example of

such an offender is B.141 (he was a leader of organized criminal group which organized human trafficking). He proudly assesses his life: *“I lived in the countryside (...). I had a sister one year younger. We lived in a detached house with my mother and daddy. Until today, my family is complete. My mother always worked (...). I could not complain about her care. My dad was employed at the furniture factory, like most people in my village. He was working at the factory for 25 years, until it was closed. I grew up in a place, where everyone knew, respected, and liked my family. We were a very peaceful family, parents had very good contact with each other, and it is the same today, they are still married. There were no pathologies, nobody from my close or distant family was in prison”*. After he got married, the respondent started a legal work in Poland, and then abroad. After he saved some money and returned to Poland, he tried to start a business together with his friend. In order to open a car workshop, the men rented a large room (garage) and equipped it with the necessary appliances for such activities. He sees the reason of his criminal career at the age of 30 in the failure of this business.

Similarly to the situation of B.141, the respondents from this category emphasized that the most part of their lives they had been able to support themselves and their families' lives working professionally. Their participation in an organized criminal group was caused by some turning points in their lives. The most often it was the loss of life savings as in the above case, or the loss of job. The same was in the case of B.73 (as a member of an organized criminal group, he was involved in drug trafficking). During the interview, he assumed that: *“I was over 40, and I wasn't able to find a job. It was getting worse. The first crime I've committed at the age of 43, because I needed money for my family. In my opinion, a lot of people (approximately 80%) wouldn't have done any crimes, if they had been able to maintain their families”*.

However, not all respondents in this group perceived their participation in an organized criminal group as a kind of necessity, which was caused by the lack of choice, and the need to get out of a difficult situation. Some of the respondents treated their criminal initiation as a life opportunity. The late onset of a criminal career in the presented above cases was based on the rational profit and loss account, but also on the social capital built by professional contacts of the respondent at the place of work. Friends or family links

were also taken into account. In this context, the story of two respondents is very interesting. The previous employees of the public service using their savings and personal contacts related to the performance of their official and criminal duties began a criminal career. One of the respondents, based on his professional contacts with the Customs Service and being conscious of the modus operandi of criminals involved in smuggling cigarettes, got involved in serious crime.

The second respondent B.128 (as a member of an organized criminal group, he broke into a fuel pipeline, and stole the fuel components) used to be the policeman. Both respondents did not cause educational problems. After graduating from the high school and passing the leaving-examination, they have started their professional life. They did not have any problems with the law up to the beginnings of a criminal career in organized crime structures. Respondents were guilty of committing crimes thanks to the contacts and skills acquired at work. The case of B.128 is particularly interesting: *“at first, I worked in the police on business frauds. Such criminal activities were punished very heavily. Someone who was a thief at his workplace, he also robbed his society of its money. Later, I was a community policeman. I got to know a lot of people. I knew who was who, and it was very precious later”*.

On the basis of the judicial justifications, it can be also noted that people with a late onset of a criminal career engaged their families into the criminal activities more often than those with the earlier onset of criminal activities. It may be influenced by the fact that younger perpetrators usually start their criminal path with a minor crime. Therefore, they need mainly smartness. Sometimes, they start from drug trafficking, because they are drug addicted themselves. In the case of adults, the beginning of their criminal path begins with the more complicated business frauds, in which more trusted people must be involved. If they deal with drug trafficking, the offenders must firstly invest their money and previously acquired life skills. Most people with the adult onset of a criminal career have already started a family, therefore the involvement in an organized crime takes often place with the consent and acceptance of close relatives.

Due to the fact that the perpetrators had trust in their family members, the analysis of the respondents' acts shows that their life partners or parents

have often assisted in the criminal practices. Family members or loved women have participated in the distribution of drugs, their package and storage in apartments. A similar situation occurred with the illegal goods from the so-called excise crime. For example, the convict kept untaxed cigarettes in the parents' house, while his common-law wife sold the cigarettes smuggled by her partner to several surrounding villages during her travel to work. From the perpetrators' perspective, the involvement of a close family in criminal practices appeared to be safe. They believed that their relatives, as unpunished people, they did not arouse the interest of law enforcement authorities. They also did not have any contact with other criminals, therefore, the illegal activities were undertaken in secret. The families of perpetrators financially benefited from the involvement of their relatives in the organized crime. Therefore, on the one hand, they were ready to protect the criminals, and on the other, they wanted to help them in order to maintain a lucrative source of the household budget.

The respondent B.124 is an example of the situation mentioned above (he was the leader of an organized criminal group which was involved in tax evasion in the field of excise, which aimed at committing tax offenses involving the import of cigarettes of various brands without being marked with Polish tax stamps, the purchase, storage, transport, and disposal of such cigarettes). The respondent and his father were convicted of participation in the same criminal group. According to the justification of the conviction, the respondent's father was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment. The court found that *"the father's role was to help his son (...), to buy cigarettes, especially in the Warmia and Mazury Voivodeship. He helped his son with the purchase of the car, in which the cigarettes were smuggled"*.

The respondents with the late onset of a criminal career did not identify themselves as 'criminals' but the 'honest citizens', who, for some reason, 'came a cropper'. Some of them perceived themselves as 'businessmen' who ran not fully legal business. From the perspective of their assessment, the respondents can be divided into two groups. The first group includes those for whom crime appeared as the only way to solve the life problems. The second group of perpetrators consists of those who assessed the organized crime as a good opportunity, which happened 'at a certain stage' of their life, and the profit it

generated meant that they decided to take advantage of it, which, according to the respondents, every person would do in their position. The perpetrators from both groups claimed that the crime was a short-lived episode in their lives, they do not regret it, and they would do the same once more.

## CONCLUSION

The own research confirmed that the onset of a criminal career of organized crime offenders is different from the onset of a criminal career of high-volume crime offenders. Almost a quarter of all respondents started their criminal career at least at the age of 18. A half of these respondents committed their first crime at age 30 or later. The onset of criminal activities of 7 persons from this group took place over the age of 40. Regardless of the age of their criminal initiation, all respondents have had some previous contacts with the criminal environment, even if (as it was in the case of the late onset offenders), they have not been developing and preserving them for many years.

According to the conducted research, it can be also assumed that the respondents showed some differences depending on the onset of their criminal career. The motivation, circumstances of the onset of criminal activities, and the profile of criminal actions change and develop in accordance with the age. The youngest group of perpetrators who started their criminal path during childhood (at the age over 12) perceived their criminal initiation in the context of the desire for an adventure, a remedy for boredom, a way to impress colleagues. The older offenders appreciated the value of money got on crime. They spent money on alcohol, drugs, clothes, and gadgets, which they could not afford due to the financial situation of their parents. It is significant that the criminal activities initiated in this age group have already had considerable reserves of aggression. This aggression was associated by the respondents with the adolescence. A lot of respondents struggled with family problems, such as domestic violence or their parent's alcoholism, and they were overwhelmed by them. In the perception of respondents, the most traumatic experience was the situation when the mother fell into alcoholism, because it was accepted in their environment that it was the woman who had to look after children,

and give them the sense of stability and safety. According to the offenders, the mother under the influence of alcohol was not able to fulfill the tasks. In this group, some respondents declared that as teenagers they have already been financially independent thanks to the committed crimes, and some of them participated in the household budget in this way. Therefore, they were even proud of themselves.

In the case of the first two age groups, the criminal activities were 'evolving' and becoming 'mature' in parallel with the age of offenders. From the perspective of the representatives of this age group, the most important factor of the criminal initiation were family-related problems. The respondents were not able to resolve them on their own. The examined offenders from the third and fourth age groups are perpetrators who, in addition to their criminal experience, in contrast to the previous two age groups, had also some professional experience. Some of them were able to combine, even for a long time, their professional work with criminal activities. In the opinion of respondents, the fact of having a job allowed them to remain unpunished for a longer time because it gave the appearance of living thanks to the legal sources. According to the carried out interviews, those who started their criminal activity at older age considered their choice to be rational and well-thought-out at a given stage of their life.

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