Characteristics of adolescent females with limited delinquency

Developmental challenges in relation to family, peers and education

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Abstract
Adolescence is a developmental period marked with several changes in a young person’s life. Most adolescents who commit crimes desist over time. Despite this, research has mainly focused on those with extensive and long-term delinquency, including mostly males. Young females with limited delinquency are thus an under-researched group. The overall aim of the thesis was to explore the characteristics of young females with limited delinquency, and relate these features to developmental aspects of adolescence. Further, the objective was to study potential challenges they experience, in connection to family, peers and school. All four studies were based on data from young females sentenced to youth service. Studies 1 and 2 include all (N=144) females convicted in a major city in Sweden during 2007–2012. The data collected through self-reports based on ADAD interviews at the beginning of youth service in Study 1 was further complemented and followed up in Study 2 with registry data on education and recidivism 24 months after starting their sentence. Studies 3 and 4 were based on in-depth interviews with nine adolescent females who started their sentence between 2012–2013 in one of two major cities in Sweden. The results confirmed the assumption that this group of offenders displayed limited delinquency. Their self-reports in Study 1 showed low involvement in crimes during twelve months prior to youth service, which was similar to the reporting of a reference group of females in general. Displaying limited delinquency was supported by registry data in Study 2, showing that the majority of the females did not reoffend within two years after being sentenced, as measured by suspicion and conviction rates. However, they did show high educational deficits. This was evident both by high levels of self-reported school problems in Study 1 and final grade point in compulsory and upper secondary school in Study 2. Their educational attainment was lower than adolescent females in general, irrespective of whether they reoffended or not. These findings suggest that although the females were limited in their delinquency, their low levels of education could still put them at risk for suboptimal development. In the interviews, participants ascribed particular importance to peers and family when describing their delinquency. The narratives illustrated how the process of delinquency as it concerned interpersonal relations involved mutually influential exchanges, both contributing to as well as being affected by the delinquency. As such, delinquency was, in Study 3, portrayed as a way to socialize, where delinquent peers were considered important for committing crimes, and pro-social peers for desisting. Likewise, family relations in Study 4 were given a prominent role in the entire process. Accordingly, delinquency was described as a consequence of the relations to the family, where these were negatively as well as positively affected by the crimes. The collective results indicate that committing crimes for the females may be viewed as part of normative development, in which the quest for independence and establishing ones’ identity can contribute to these behaviors. Practical implications for work with young female offenders are also discussed.

Keywords: female offenders, limited delinquency, adolescence, educational attainment, interpersonal relations, peers, family.
CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOLESCENT FEMALES WITH LIMITED DELINQUENCY

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To Skorpan and Nebo, without whom this thesis would have been completed in half the time, and with half the pleasure for all I am unable to give for all that you endure too much of and all the love between us in between
Abstract

Adolescence is a developmental period marked with several changes in a young person’s life. Most adolescents who commit crimes desist over time. Despite this, research has mainly focused on those with extensive and long-term delinquency, including mostly males. Young females with limited delinquency are thus an under-researched group. The overall aim of the thesis was to explore the characteristics of young females with limited delinquency, and relate these features to developmental aspects of adolescence. Further, the objective was to study potential challenges they experience, in connection to family, peers and school. All four studies were based on data from young females sentenced to youth service. Studies 1 and 2 include all (N=144) females convicted in a major city in Sweden during 2007–2012. The data collected through self-reports based on ADAD interviews at the beginning of youth service in Study 1 was further complemented and followed up in Study 2 with registry data on education and recidivism 24 months after starting their sentence. Studies 3 and 4 were based on in-depth interviews with nine adolescent females who started their sentence between 2012–2013 in one of two major cities in Sweden. The results confirmed the assumption that this group of offenders displayed limited delinquency. Their self-reports in Study 1 showed low involvement in crimes during twelve months prior to youth service, which was similar to the reporting of a reference group of females in general. Displaying limited delinquency was supported by registry data in Study 2, showing that the majority of the females did not reoffend within two years after being sentenced, as measured by suspicion and conviction rates. However, they did show high educational deficits. This was evident both by high levels of self-reported school problems in Study 1 and final grade point in compulsory and upper secondary school in Study 2. Their educational attainment was lower than adolescent females in general, irrespective of whether they reoffended or not. These findings suggest that although the females were limited in their delinquency, their low levels of education could still put them at risk for suboptimal development. In the interviews, participants ascribed particular importance to peers and family when describing their delinquency. The narratives illustrated how the process of delinquency as it concerned interpersonal relations involved mutually influential exchanges, both contributing to as well as being affected by the delinquency. As such, delinquency was, in Study 3, portrayed as a way to socialize, where delinquent peers were considered important for committing crimes, and pro-social peers for desisting. Likewise, family relations were in
Study 4 given a prominent role in the entire process. Accordingly, delinquency was described as a consequence of the relations to the family, where these were negatively as well as positively affected by the crimes. The collective results indicate that committing crimes for the females may be viewed as part of normative development, in which the quest for independence and establishing ones’ identity can contribute to these behaviors. Practical implications for work with young female offenders are also discussed.

*Keywords*: female offenders, limited delinquency, adolescence, educational attainment, interpersonal relations, peers, family
Svensk sammanfattning

stor betydelse i processen av att begå brott. Detta illustrerades bland annat genom att beskriva brottsligheten som en konsekvens av relationen till familjen, med särskild vikt på föräldrarna. Dessa relationer beskrevs också ha blivit påverkade av kriminaliteten, både på ett negativt men också positivt sätt. Resultaten diskuteras utifrån utvecklingspsykologiska perspektiv, där begå brott i vissa avseenden föreslås kunna ses som en del i normalutvecklingen under tonårstiden där strävan efter självständighet och identitetsskapande kan bidra till kriminella beteenden. Vidare diskuteras praktiska implikationer för socialtjänstens arbete med flickor dömda för brott.
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Introduction

There is increasing interest in the lives of young women, in science, as well as in media and society in general. Lately, young females have been portrayed as both the hope and concern of the future (Harris, 2004). This dual focus has, on the one hand, given attention to the resilience and achievement shown by adolescent females. Research has found evidence suggesting that young women of today are succeeding more than previous generations of women as well as their contemporary male peers, in regard to several aspects of life, education providing a well-documented example (Gill, Esson, & Yuen, 2016). This story of empowerment has, however, both in media and research, been matched by a narrative of youth at risk, highlighting concerns about young females engaging in escalated levels of juvenile delinquency and violent behavior (Pasko & Chesney-Lind, 2011; van Wormer, 2010).

Often when antisocial behaviors of young females have been studied, the focus has been on the comparatively small group with the most extensive problems, such as young females in gangs, or within secure care (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Belknap, Holsinger, & Dunn, 1997; Daly, 1992; Vogel, 2017, 2018; Wångby-Lundh, Klingstedt, Bergman, & Ferrer-Wreder, 2018). Less focus and attention have been directed toward the majority of adolescent females who commit crimes, but whose delinquency is limited and therefore leads to non-custodial sanctions. Although they represent the majority of female teenagers who engage in criminal acts, the emerging knowledge base on female delinquency is mostly limited to the small group with severe and/or persistent antisocial behavior. Even fewer studies have used a developmental approach, in which criminal behavior has been viewed as part of a relatively common, although not optimal, developmental stage during adolescence. The main focus of this thesis is to contribute to the knowledge about this group by studying young females sentenced to youth service, a penalty option reserved for young offenders who are assumed to be at low risk for extensive criminality or severe psychosocial problems. It is thus most likely that young females with limited behavioral problems are to be found within this sanction.

With the starting point that delinquency can be viewed as part of adolescent development, the four different studies aim to investigate, from various perspectives, how we can understand adolescence and criminality for these young offenders. In order to do so, the four studies explore different aspects of a sample of young females’ development in connection to their delinquency, mainly family, peers and school. These aspects of adolescence
have been chosen due to their general importance for healthy development during adolescence, as well as their strong connection to delinquent behavior that may occur during this particular period in life. The focus is thus on interpersonal features of the young females’ lives. This is done in order to gain a better understanding of the potential challenges these young women experience in their social surroundings. The purpose is thus to part from their criminality, gain knowledge about possible difficulties in other life areas, which could hinder long-term positive development. The findings also provide a basis for discussion on how to improve interventions for young females convicted to youth service.

In keeping with its developmental approach, the current thesis starts out with a short introduction to adolescence and typical identity development during this period. This is followed by a theoretical perspective on how delinquency can be viewed as part of development and different taxonomies for delinquent trajectories. Following this, I will speak more to female delinquency in particular and why it is important to study female offenders in their own right. Next, three aspects of adolescent development pertaining to family, peers and school, and their connection to delinquency, are elaborated on. Every section begins with a general description of these different areas for youths in general, followed by a description specifically pertaining to young females. Thereafter, the Swedish youth justice system with focus on youth service, and a theoretical framework regarding interventions for young offenders is presented. After this presentation of the theoretical and empirical background of the thesis, its aims are formulated, followed by summaries of the four separate studies. A general discussion concludes the thesis.
Adolescent development

Adolescence is a developmental period that has been referred to in several ways: youth, teenage years, the second decade of life, a period that bridges childhood and young adulthood, to mention a few. Several theorists have defined adolescence in different ways, accentuating a specific domain of development, and efforts to create a uniformly accepted definition has proved challenging (Arnett, 2000). Some have focused on the pronounced physical and biological changes that occur during this period (Dahl, 2004; Simmons, 2017; Warren, 1983), while others have studied the advancements in cognitive and perspective-taking capabilities (Steinberg, 2005). Other theories have attended to the social development that occurs during adolescence, with focus on interpersonal relationships (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). It should, however, be emphasized that aspects of development are interrelated and that changes in one is affected by, and affect, others. Ecological approaches to human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) focus on the multiple interactions between the developing person and different contexts of development where these processes occur, such as family, peers, school and neighborhoods. One notion of adolescence, common in most Western societies, is to regard it as a transformational time period preparing children for their upcoming lives as adults (Crone & Dahl, 2012). Viewed as such, adolescence is a critical period for the development and merging of behaviors, values, aspirations and attitudes, which can impact current and future options and outcomes.

Historically, adolescence was depicted as a period full of distinct emotions and behaviors, where philosophers, as well as authors of fiction characterized youths during this time as turbulent and trouble-ridden (Steinberg, 2010). Earlier discourses also rendered adolescence as a time of storm and stress due to inevitable biological factors (Hall, 1904). Contemporary research, however, has suggested that the “storm and stress” issue should be reconsidered in relation to adolescent normative development (Arnett, 1999). Present studies, while supporting the idea of heightened levels of problems in different life areas for many young people, emphasize that there are substantial cultural differences as well as individual differences within cultures (Larson, Wilson, & Rickman, 2009; Smetana et al., 2006). The extreme portrayal of adolescent storm and stress as universal and biological has thus been challenged, and modern-day empirical research has shown that this period can, in fact, be characterized by growth and thriving, for example, progression toward independence and discovering self-identity (Gutman, Peck, Malanchuk,
Sameroff, & Eccles, 2017; Rice & Dolgin, 2005). However, this developmental period is still regarded as a time of life that is more likely than others to involve difficulties, such as increased levels of risk behaviors (Arnett, 1999). These can manifest themselves in norm-breaking behaviors such as truancy, running away from home, using drugs, drinking alcohol and engaging in delinquency (Johnston, O’Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2011; Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, & Milne, 2002; Sweeten, Piquero, & Steinberg, 2013). Because delinquent and risky behaviors of different kinds, taken together, with measures of self-reports, are present in more than half of the youth population it has been suggested that they can be regarded as normative, although not optimal, behaviors during this period (Barbot & Hunter, 2012; Born, Cattelino, Gavray, & Glowacz, 2015; Brà, 2018b).

Many of the earlier studies about adolescence were conducted on samples of boys from Western societies. The understanding of adolescent development was therefore not always sufficient for young females or youths from other parts of the world (Larson et al., 2009; Smetana et al., 2006). This means that in order to understand how adolescence is experienced by young females, it is important to not only have knowledge about adolescence development in general, but to understand these seismic changes in young females’ development specifically. Because female development is unique, due to young women having gendered lives, gender/feminist theories are used, when appropriate, to understand how adolescence is shaped and developed specifically for young females. This is important, as these unique developmental changes can in themselves affect the delinquent behavior (Bottcher, 2001).

The formation of identity

In light of the many changes that take place when entering adolescence, youths begin to explore and make sense of their place in their social surroundings. Because young people are not passive recipients of their social environment, but rather active participants in it; they engage in not only a process of self-exploration and discovery, but also in creation of themselves. In the literature, this process is called the formation of identity and has been recognized as one of the major developmental tasks of adolescence (Barbot & Hunter, 2012; Kroger, 2003). According to Erikson (1968, 1980), identity development is the quest of understanding and finding one’s true self. According to his definition, identity can be described as the subjective experience of continuity and sameness, which is also recognized by significant people in a person’s life. Erikson’s concept of identity was thus psychosocial, in that identity is not only how we see or wish to see ourselves, but also how we are seen by others. Most importantly, how others see us affects the way we view ourselves. Based on Erikson’s theory, Marcia (1980) developed an identity model in order to empirically examine identity development among adolescents and young
adults. Accordingly, Marcia’s model (Kroger & Marcia, 2011) proposes two processes that underlie identity formation – exploration (e.g., has the person explored meaningful alternatives regarding some identity concerns) and commitment (e.g., has the person made a commitment). Each of these can be divided into being present or absent, creating four positions in identity status; Foreclosure, Diffusion, Moratorium and Achievement. Josselson (1996) later continued with this work, sampling female participants, and changed the names of these four groups to Guardians, Drifters, Searchers and Pathmakers (see Figure 1). As described below, the different identity statuses have been shown to be related to different levels of psychosocial maturity, which have been used to explain delinquency during adolescence.

![Identity Model](image.png)

**Figure 1.** Illustration of the identity model proposed by Marcia (1980) and Josselson (1996).

Contemporary research suggests that identity is a multidimensional construct that changes in a variety of contexts over the lifespan (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010). For example, the work of Josselson (1996), suggested that the four identity groups are not fixed, but are instead categories on a continuum. While some individuals remain in one category all the time, others may enter and exit different categories over time and in different arenas, in the face of, for example, new life events (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Waterman, 1999). Belsky (2010) also pointed to the fact that one person may identify belonging in one group in its interpersonal relationships, while at the same time be categorized in a different group in regards to career or religion. In sum, identity development seems to be an ongoing process, involving both changing and staying the same, in response and in relation to external expectations and possibilities.
It has been theorized that female identity development may occur primarily in interpersonal domains (Carlton-LaNey, & Andrews, 1998; Gilligan, 1982, 1987), where connectedness, rather than achievement, have been emphasized. For example, Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer (1990) suggested that attachment to others is central to young women’s identity development. Other feminist scholars have also pointed out that female identity and close interpersonal relationships are intertwined, where young women tend to define themselves through their relationships with others, which would lead to their intimate relationships having great meaning for their identity development (Sands, 1996). Identity is, however, not only influenced by gender, but also a number of other factors (e.g., culture, social positions) that all intersect. In that women as a group show great variations in all these aspects, acknowledging these differences and experiences in the development of identity is, although beyond the scope of this introduction, important (e.g., Josselson & Harway, 2012).

**Delinquency as part of adolescent development**

Most individuals who, at some point during their lifespan, commit crimes do so during their teenage years, where criminal acts are 10 times more common than in other periods of life (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983; Moffitt, 1993; Shulman, Steinberg, & Piquero, 2013). Both self-reported data and arrest statistics show that youths are the most criminally active age group. The adolescent years thus represent the developmental period of greatest risk for youth becoming involved in criminal activity (Piquero, Farrington, & Blumstein, 2003). In fact, one of the most robust findings within the delinquency research field is the age-crime curve (Elonheimo et al., 2014; Loeber, Jennings, Ahonen, Piquero, & Farrington, 2017a; Shulman et al., 2013; Wiecko, 2014). The curve illustrates the relationship between age and crime, where criminal involvement increases in adolescence, peaks in the late teens, and thereafter decreases in early adulthood. It has been argued that the shape of the age-crime distribution is the same for males and females (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983). Empirical evidence supports this notion at large (e.g., Landsheer & van Dijkum, 2005); however, there are some studies suggesting that females may peak earlier and that female offending rates decline more quickly and abruptly than male offending rates (see de Vogel & Nicholls, 2016 for a review). The early peak has been explained by the fact that young females enter puberty earlier and that this early maturation may yield several risks, including delinquency (Haynie, 2003).

Delinquent behavior during adolescence can, viewed from a developmental perspective, be regarded as resulting from the interaction between the normal developmental features of adolescents and the social influences (e.g., social mimicry) that youths experience during this time (Bonnie, Johnson, Chemers, & Schuck, 2013; Moffitt, 1993). This approach acknowledges that crimes
committed by adolescents occur in a distinct period of life, when heightened risky behaviors as well inadequate decision-making skills and the pursuit of thrills are common and can result in increases of illegal behavior (Bonnie et al., 2013; Steinberg, 2011). For example, it has been suggested that delinquent behaviors during adolescence evolve from a normative motivation to establish independence as well as to develop a personal identity (Barbot & Hunter, 2012; Moffitt, 1993). As identity formation has been suggested to be one of the key developmental tasks of adolescence, this process has been suggested to be related to various expressions of “storm and stress” including delinquency to the furthest degree (Barbot & Hunter, 2012). In line with this assumption, different identity statutes have been proposed to indicate different levels of psychosocial maturity, and been linked and related to delinquency and other problem behaviors (Grier, 2000). In the same way, it has been suggested that most young people who commit crimes desist from criminal behavior simply as a result of maturation, although the timing and trajectories of desistance may vary (Laub & Sampson, 2001). For example, the process of desistance from delinquency has been shown to be tied to the normative changes in peer relations, as the impact of delinquent peers on antisocial behavior decreases in the later years of adolescence, when individuals mature socially and emotionally (Monahan, Steinberg, & Cauffman, 2009). The identity process can also be used to understand the process of recidivism and desistance. For example, Massoglia and Uggen’s (2010) maturational theory of desistance has been proposed to offer an explanation as to how identity development is connected to the process of desistance. According to this theory, desistance in delinquents is part of the transition to adulthood, where identity development is one means by which this transition is achieved. Supposedly, changes in criminal activity may follow as a result of a successful adult transition, where the young person undertakes adult social roles and a mature identity irreconcilable with continued delinquency.

The observed rise in delinquent behavior and other antisocial behaviors during adolescence has led to a distinction between different groups of delinquent individuals who are considered to be taxonomically different. Observations regarding different pathways into and potentially out of delinquency have provided an empirical base for a theoretical distinction between adolescent-limited (AL) and life-course-persistent (LCP) trajectories of criminal behavior (Moffitt, 1993, 2017). In the literature, there is also a distinction made between early and late starters (Patterson & Yoerger, 1993), who most often coincide with the trajectories suggested by Moffitt. The early starters are suggested to have a different set of problems than those whose delinquency debut occurs during adolescence. The latter pattern is characterized by a later age of onset and a concentration of criminality in the adolescent years. For this group, the delinquent behavior is assumed to stem from the so-called maturity gap, which is defined as the difference between an adolescent’s level of biological maturity and their level of social maturity (Moffitt, 2006). For AL delinquents, delinquency is suggested to be a way to demonstrate autonomy from parents, win affiliation with peers and hasten social maturation. By contrast,
individuals fitting the LCP pattern have an early onset of antisocial behavior and a relatively stable level of criminal activity over their life course. Their offending is assumed to reflect the interaction between neuropsychological risk factors and growing up in a disadvantaged setting, such as inadequate and poor home environments and poor relations with peers and teachers (Piquero & Moffitt, 2005). This distinction suggests that the behaviors associated with norm-breaking and delinquency that first occur during adolescence are relatively normative and thus carry less risk as compared to problem behaviors that present themselves earlier in childhood. Since Moffitt’s description, accumulating evidence has shown that this dichotomy represents an oversimplification of delinquency and that there are, in fact, several additional trajectories, with four groups being the most prevalent finding (Jennings & Reingle, 2012). For example, non-normative groups such as adult-onset criminality, where offending begins in adulthood and continues, has been identified fairly regularly (Broidy et al., 2015; Cauffman, Monahan, & Thomas, 2015).
Female delinquency

Most studies on delinquency have been male-centered. This has often been explained by the lower crime rates for females in comparison to males, which is one of the most consistent and robust findings regarding delinquency (Lauritsen, Heimer, & Lynch, 2009). Although this is true for more serious and violent crimes, self-report studies have shown that adolescent males and females commit some offenses (e.g., status offenses, stealing/shoplifting) at equal rates (Loeber, Jennings, Ahonen, Piquero, & Farrington, 2017b). Furthermore, longitudinal studies show that the gender difference in crime rates is at its lowest point during adolescence (Moffitt, 2006; Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001).

Applying the taxonomy of different trajectories of offending to females, Moffitt et al. (2001) suggested that most females who commit crimes would most likely be adolescent-limited. However, other scholars have presented alternative trajectory models applying specifically to women, which do not match Moffitt’s original model. The vast majority of these studies show a delayed-onset pathway for females, which, in terms of most background factors and regarding negative outcomes, resembles the childhood-onset pathway in males, but with an age of onset during adolescence (Andersson & Levander, 2013; Oudekerk, Erbacher, & Reppucci, 2012; Tzoumakis, Lussier, & Corrado, 2012). These studies suggest that some female trajectories of juvenile delinquency, namely the most severe ones, tend to start in late adolescence, or even at the beginning of adulthood, and continue throughout adult life. The late initiation in delinquency for females, as compared to males, has been explained by the social control applied to females (Haynie, 2003).

The vast majority of young people, including adolescent females, who are convicted of a crime have not committed serious offenses and do not re-offend to a high degree (Brå, 2018a). In fact, summaries of longitudinal studies indicate that approximately one-third of adolescents who are arrested in their teens display arrest-records as adults, whereas two-thirds do not (Kazemian, Farrington, & Le Blanc, 2009; Piquero, Hawkins, & Kazemian, 2012). Despite this, the literature has focused on the small proportion of young offenders who commit more serious offenses and who continue their criminal behavior past their adolescence. A few attempts have been made to study individuals with limited criminal behavior, and results from these studies indicate that although these individuals do not show persistent criminality in adulthood, they do have
other difficulties in life (Nilsson & Estrada, 2009; Odgers et al., 2008). For example, longitudinal studies conducted on females with AL offending indicate adjustment problems across multiple dimensions in adulthood, including mental health, substance dependence and educational deficits (Moffitt et al., 2001; Odgers, et al., 2008; Roisman, Monahan, Campbell, Steinberg, & Cauffman, 2010). On the other hand, contradictory results do exist. For example, a longitudinal study on a Swedish sample of female offenders showed that the AL group was quite similar to the females in the non-criminal group after entering adulthood. Compared to those with persistent criminality, the females whose criminal activities had been limited to adolescence were more successful in school and were more able to execute what was needed to function well in their education and in interaction with peers (Andersson, Levander, Svensson, & Torstensson Levander, 2012, 2013).Given these inconclusive findings, there is an obvious need for more research regarding the risks and needs in other areas of life for this group of female delinquents.

Research conducted on justice-involved females has also shown that although females involved in the justice system are less likely than males to persist in criminal activity beyond adolescence (Cauffman et al., 2015; Lanctôt, 2015), they do exhibit other behavioral problems that can negatively affect their long-term development (Lanctôt, Cernkovich, & Giordano, 2007; Leve, Chamberlain, & Kim, 2015; Moretti, Odgers, Reppucci, & Catherine, 2011). Research has, however, mainly been focused on the specific needs and difficulties of female delinquents in secure care (i.e., Björk & J’son Knodt, 2003; Chesney-Lind, 2002; Simkins & Katz, 2002; Wångby-Lundh et al., 2018; see van Wormer, 2010 for a review). Justice-involved females who are considered low risk regarding recidivism and psychosocial problems have been given less attention. Some available studies relate to this particular group of young offenders and the results from these studies show that young offenders in the community have high levels of needs in a number of different life areas, such as education, social relationships and mental health, and that these needs are often unmet (Brown, Riley, Walrath, Leaf, & Valdez, 2008; Chitsabesan et al., 2006; McReynolds et al., 2008). One study, sampling only female offenders, found that young females in non-residential settings seem to experience the same type of needs as female delinquents in residential establishments (Patino, Ravoirra, & Wolf, 2006). However, more knowledge is still needed about the level and types of problems justice-involved females with limited delinquency may encounter, as most of existing studies have combined male and female samples, or taken place in North American settings, where there is a different juvenile justice system than in European countries and Sweden in particular.
Gender-neutral vs. gender-specific risk and protective factors

When working with young offenders in general and female delinquents in particular, it is important to identify risk factors to prevent the occurrence of problem behaviors. It is equally important to recognize positive factors that promote healthy development or moderate problem behaviors (Fraser, Galinsky, & Richman, 1999). How risk and protective factors should be defined have been a matter of debate. One assumption would be to regard them as the opposite ends of a continuum; however, scholars instead regard them as being distinctly different from each other (Sameroff & Gutman, 2004). Following this definition, it has also been suggested that it is important to distinguish between protective and promotive factors. According to this categorization, risk factors should be conceptualized as those factors that increase the likelihood of problematic development. The term protective should be used for those variables that counteract risks, while promotive factors are those that lead to a positive but non-interactive direct effect on risk variables (Sameroff, 1999).

It has been suggested that general theories of criminal behavior are sufficient to explain crime, irrespective of gender (e.g., Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Loeber & Farrington, 2000). In line with this, there is empirical support for general risk factors, which have been argued to be gender-neutral and include criminal history and criminal attitudes, antisocial peers, personality features (e.g., impulsivity), family dysfunction, substance abuse, educational difficulties and the inappropriate use of leisure time (Bonta & Andrews, 2016). In contrast, feminist scholars argue for specific and qualitatively different pathways and risk factors unique for female delinquents, where they suggest that females who commit more serious crimes have often experiences of childhood trauma and victimization as well as substance abuse and mental health problems (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013; Daly, 1992). Notably, some overlap among risk factors identified by both views do exists. Although gender-neutral scholars (Andrews & Bonta, 2010) do acknowledge female-specific risk factors, they argue that these factors (e.g., mental health problems) contribute to delinquency through gender-neutral risk factors (e.g., criminal involvement) and that treatment of gender-neutral risk factors would decrease those that are specific for women as well. The counter-argument from feminist scholars is that treating female needs should not be regarded as a means to other ends, but rather a priority in itself (Van Voorhis, 2012).

The need to study women on their own terms

The recent interest in female offending has been triggered by the sharp rise in female delinquency reported both in Sweden and internationally. Over the past few decades, arrest rates for young females have increased, while the arrests
of males have remained more stable (Bäckman, Estrada, Nilsson, & Shannon, 2014; Schwartz & Steffensmeier, 2012). Several factors have likely contributed to these changing statistics. An increase in arrest rates could be due to a shift in policies and practice of juvenile justice, as well as to an actual change in young females’ behavior – or perhaps both (Steffensmeier, Schwartz, Zhong, & Ackerman, 2005; Schwartz & Steffensmeier, 2012).

Numerous efforts have been made to establish the nature of the increase in female arrest rates (Brown, Chesney-Lind, & Stein, 2007; Goodkind, Wallace, Shook, Bachman, & O’Malley, 2009; Tracy, Kempf-Leonard, & Abromoske-James, 2009). Some researchers suggest that this change is the result of changes in public response and enforcement policies, rather than an actual change in the frequencies of crimes committed by young females (Steffensmeier & Schwartz, 2009).

A separate incentive for this upswing in interest is also due to feminist scholars and theories challenging researchers to examine young women in their own right, rather than simply comparing them to males (Andershed, 2013b; Crawford & Unger, 2000). Recent evidence for systematic societal gender biases has been highlighted, a bias that is encountered by young females in society in general, as well as within the juvenile justice system (Chesney-Lind, 2002, 2006). Often when female delinquency has been researched, it has been in relation to male delinquency. These studies have been of importance, for example, by showing similarities or differences in trajectories in and out of crime, as well as frequency or type of criminal activity (Loeber et al., 2017b).

Other studies have focused on risk factors leading up to delinquency, and suggested both gender-neutral as well as gender-specific pathways (Wong, Slotboom, & Bijleveld, 2010; Zahn et al., 2010). As some studies show differences in risk factors leading to crime and recidivism for males and females (Wong et al., 2010), more scholars have identified the importance of examining females separately from males, and to study female delinquents on their own terms (Andershed, 2013a). Just as important as the investigation of gender differences in delinquency is the unique study of the delinquent behavior of females. As argued by Andershed (2013b), comparisons between males and females on behavior patterns already known to be different may cause under- or over-estimation of behaviors and potential consequences. The more problematic results for one gender may minimize attentiveness to the other gender, leading to inaccurate conclusions regarding need for and type of interventions.

Although the work of feminist scholars (e.g., Chesney-Lind, 2002; Daly, 1992) is of great importance in understanding female delinquency, they have most often sampled young female offenders, showing large behavioral, psychological and social problems. The results from these studies may not always be applicable to the larger group of adolescent females, who engage in delinquency, but whose delinquency is limited and an expression of, although not an optimal, part of growing up. What has been missing, and still is scarce, is knowledge about the large group of female teenagers who commit crimes,
and where their criminality can be explained as part of their adolescent development. Thus, in contrast to previous studies, the present thesis is aimed at studying a group of delinquent females with limited criminality and psychosocial problems, who have been sentenced to a non-custodial sanction. This is a group that has remained understudied (Piquero, Diamond, Jennings, & Reingle, 2013).
The social aspects of adolescent development and its connection to delinquency

It has been suggested that interpersonal relationships (e.g., family and peers) are particularly important for young females as compared to males, because of the socialization of women into being relationally focused (Werner & Silbereisen, 2003). Research supports the importance of interpersonal relationships in females’ social development (Graves, 2007). In this theoretical overview, I will focus on the following interpersonal aspects of young females’ development in connection to their delinquency: family, peers and school. According to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory of child and youth development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), these areas are microsystems in which the individual is a part, where family is regarded as the primary microsystem for the majority of adolescents, closely followed by peer groups and school. Empirical research has also identified the same three aspects – family, peers and school – as important to healthy psychological development in adolescence (Smith, Faulk, & Sizer, 2016). At the same time, these factors are also strongly connected to the appearance of delinquency (Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). These areas have also been regarded as important when considering risk and/or protective factors from an ecological or psychosocial framework (Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2002). This part of the introduction begins thus by exploring how young females’ relationship to their family and peers stands and alters, followed by an exploration in important developmental processes in the school. Every section will also provide literature showing how these different aspects are related to criminal behavior.

Family

Family, and especially parents, are the first socializing influence, as well as security in a child’s life, and also continue to play an important role during adolescence in the development of behavioral and emotional regulation (Laursen & Bukowski, 1997; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). During this period of time, the adolescent–parent relationships go through several significant transformations. One such example has been described to include the movement away from family and toward peers, with the changing need for autonomy and independence. In favor of this developmental change, for autonomy, parents gradually have to reduce their control over their children
(Keijsers & Poulin, 2013). This quest was traditionally viewed as separation from parents (see, for example, McElhaney, Allen, Stephenson, & Hare, 2009 for a review). Contemporary work, however, regards this movement as an expansion rather than estrangement. For example, although there is a decrease in the amount of total time spent with parents, studies show that the amount of time spent talking with parents about interpersonal issues remain stable, especially for young females (Laursen & Collins, 2004; Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996). Parents are, in many ways, still the secure base to which young people return after exploration of the world outside the familial context (Peterson, 2005). In support of this notion, studies show that, in many ways, the relationship between young females and their parents, although conflict filled, improves during adolescence (Smetana, 2011). Also, moderate levels of conflict during adolescence is viewed as normative, and is shown to be associated with healthy development, compared to no or recurrent disagreements (Adams & Laursen, 2001). Research on different aspects of family emphasizes the role of parent–child interaction in regards to adolescent development and adjustment (Steinberg, 2001). One of the key aspects of healthy development has been shown to involve the quality of the interaction between the adult and the young person. This includes a combination of high responsiveness and sensitivity from parents to the adolescent’s needs, while at the same time expecting and demanding (warmly) ways that reinforce responsible behaviors (Steinberg, 2001). This type of parenting style is coherent with what has been recognized as authoritative parenting and is built on Baumrind’s (1991) parenting typology. Research on different parenting styles has shown an association between an authoritative approach and adolescent healthy development (Steinberg, 2001). A positive relationship with a pro-social adult during this period not only promotes healthy development, but also acts as protective factor against, for example, delinquent behavior (Laird, Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 2003). In contrast, different types of antisocial and risky behaviors have been linked to lack of parental supervision and or/emotional support, as well as harsh punishment practices (Murray & Farrington, 2010; see also Hoeve et al., 2009 for a review).

Family has been considered one of the most important explanatory models for how and why delinquency appears for young people in general, and specifically for young females (Kroneman, Loeber, Hipwell, & Koot, 2009; Kruttschnitt & Giordano, 2009). Family factors are, for example, prominent in several theoretical models that have been developed to explain why youth in general engage in delinquent acts, notably in life-course developmental theories (Moffitt, 1993; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 2017) and social control theories (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Social control theory emphasizes that close relationships between parents and their kin can keep adolescents from committing crimes (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Because adolescents do not want to jeopardize the strong bond they have with their parents and risk losing their approval and affection, they refrain from engaging in delinquent behavior. Social learning theorists also acknowledge the
importance of parents in conditioning, positive and negative reinforcement, modeling and imitation (Akers, 1992; Bandura, 1973; Burgess & Akers, 1966). Theories involving the family’s role in adolescence delinquency also stress that parental monitoring is important for restricting youths’ involvement in crime (e.g., Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). It has been argued that the likelihood of youth offending is reduced if parents actively monitor the actions and whereabouts of their children, communicate that delinquency is not acceptable and reward good behaviors as well as reprimand misbehaviors. However, whether parental monitoring effectively prevents problem behaviors has been a core issue in the scientific debate (Keijsers, 2016; Kerr, Stattin, & Burk, 2010; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). The research within the area of parental monitoring has developed toward a direction where not only parents affect their child, but also vice versa, emphasizing the reciprocal nature of interactions between the two (Kerr & Stattin, 2003). This also highlights adolescents’ agency in their own development (Kerr, Stattin, Biesecker, & Ferrer-Wreder, 2003).

Some researchers have argued that young females’ socializing to be more interpersonally oriented would hinder their involvement in crime (see Kruttschnitt & Giordano, 2009 for a discussion). According to this argument, because females spend more time on family relationships and are more monitored and restricted by their parents, they have fewer opportunities to offend. However, young females’ potential closeness to their family could also mean that potential deficits, disruptions or conflicts could have great negative impact on their behavior. Reports from longitudinal and cross-sectional studies suggest that different aspects of family are related and predictive of female delinquency. For example, familial criminality and drug use, experiencing parental abuse and inconsistent and harsh discipline have been shown to be risk factors for offending, while parental attachment and bonding serve as protective factors (for reviews see Hoeve, et al., 2009; Hubbard & Pratt, 2002; Pardini, Waller, & Hawes, 2015). This has been shown to be true for female, as well as male, delinquents.

Peers

The movement away from family is, in many ways, linked to an increase in the importance of peers during the same period. Although the importance of peers begins to rise in late childhood, it peaks during adolescence as more time is spent with peers and less with parents (Basow, 2006; Brown & Larson, 2009). Several developmental theories, including Erikson’s (1968) theory of identity development (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001), have underlined the importance of peers during adolescence. It has been shown that peer relationships are important sources of support, connection and intimacy for young people (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). These relationships also help adolescents in developing social skills and abilities, such as perspective
taking, interpersonal competence, and collaboration (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996). One of the main developmental goals during this period could be regarded as winning the acceptance of peers, which means that friends are vital for directing and constraining the adolescent’s behavior, which elevates the influence of peers (Steinberg, 2010).

Due to females being more interpersonally oriented, scholars have stressed the importance of friendship for young females specifically (McGloin & Dipietro, 2013). Social relationships have been suggested to have great influence on several aspects of young females’ lives. For example, studies have found that peers are important sources of loyalty, intimacy and trust (Reynolds & Repetti, 2006), as well as interpersonal capability (Rose & Rudolph, 2006) for young females.

Deviant peers have been recognized as a crucial risk factor for delinquency. The impact of peers seems to play a particular role in criminal behavior that first appears during adolescence (Piquero et al., 2013; Steinberg, 2009). Due to the strong incentive for peer acceptance among adolescents, delinquency is most likely to occur in the presence of peers (Launay & Dunbar, 2015). Different socialization theories, such as social learning and differential association theory, suggest that delinquent behavior is learned in three distinct ways: through exposure to criminal models whose behavior is mimicked, through positive reinforcement of delinquency and through teaching of delinquency promoting beliefs (Akers, 1998; Matsueda, 2001). There is ample empirical support that having delinquent peers is a clear risk factor for being drawn into juvenile delinquency (McGloin & Dipietro, 2013; Warr, 2002) where deviant peers both expose youths to criminal activities, as well as encourage such behavior (Brauer & De Coster, 2015; Haynie, 2002; Warr, 2002; Wike, Miller, Winn, & Taylor, 2013; Worthen, 2012). However, the impact of peers has been shown to be less strong and to gradually disappear in the later years of adolescence as individuals become increasingly more resistant to peer influence due to maturation (Monahan et al., 2009). Meta analyses of the predictors of juvenile delinquency have found that delinquent peers are a major risk factor for young people (Wong et al., 2010), and having a deviant peer group has been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of female delinquency (Hubbard & Pratt, 2002), even when parents, school and other interpersonal factors are controlled for (Pleydon & Schner, 2001).

School

School is considered a context that influences adolescents’ socioemotional and behavioral development in different ways (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Given that young people spend a great proportion of their free time in school and extracurricular activities, school has been regarded to have several development-promoting features. Empirical studies within different fields
have established a connection between educational attainment and overall life chances for individuals (Buchmann & Hannum, 2001; Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2011). These studies have pointed to how school achievement contributes to further competences as well as behaviors, expectations and ambitions (e.g., Little, Akin-Little, & Lloyd, 2013; Payne, Welch, & Payne, 2015). For example, studies have found that school contributes to autonomous decision making and critical thinking, which have been shown to contribute to healthy development (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004). School is also of great importance, as it is where adolescents acquire basic educational and occupational skills, allowing them to function in the workplace (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Gambone & Connell, 2004). The context of school is also an important arena for socialization, influencing many aspects of adolescent development (Wigfield, Byrnes, & Eccles, 2006). Schools are where most adolescents interact with other adults outside of their family, as well as with their peers, participate in extracurricular activities, and learn how to accommodate institutional culture (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). During adolescence, a number of different decisions regarding one's education and future ought to be considered and taken, which can potentially influence the outcome of the future life to a significant degree. For youths in general, but young women in particular, academic success has become the key to future wellbeing (Gill et al., 2016).

The associations between academic achievement and later life outcomes are well documented, internationally, as well as in Sweden (Buchmann & Hannum, 2001; Forsman, Brännström, Vinnerljung, & Hjern, 2016). While stressing the importance of education for positive development, there is also consistent evidence supporting an association between poor school performance and different problem behaviors (Gottfredson, 2001). This body of work has established a strong relationship between educational failure and antisocial behavior, with an emphasis on criminal involvement (Ford & Schroeder, 2011). There are several theoretical reasons as to why and how poor academic performance is connected to delinquent behavior (Felson, Staff, Farkas, Ulmer, & Osgood, 2006; Hirschfield, 2017). For example, schools have been proposed to serve as a protective factor, as, on the most basic level, they help keep young people occupied and limit their access to opportunities of crime (Hayden, 2011). They also promote pro-social values and provide adolescents with social context and inclusion (Hayden & Martin, 2011; Li, 2011). Education and connectedness to school also brings a sense of belonging, as well as achievement, which in themselves are protective factors (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). School engagement can also discourage criminal behavior, which would otherwise jeopardize young people’s educational goals and potential. Although different theories offer different viewpoints of the connection between school and delinquency, the question of cause and effect still remains a matter of debate (Felson et al., 2006; Hirschfield, 2017; Hoffmann, Erickson, & Spence, 2013).
The majority of studies investigating the connection and relation between education and delinquency have sampled more serious young offenders, mostly including men. The scarce research available regarding female offenders, have sampled detained or incarcerated females. These studies show that large numbers of female detainees have a history of academic failure, where they, for example, have been suspended or expelled at least once, completed fewer grades compared to non-delinquent peers and, to a higher degree, are in need of special education (Acoca, 2000; Blomberg, Bales, Mann, Piquero, & Berk, 2011; Lederman, Dakof, Larrea, & Li, 2004). Research conducted on AL samples of female offenders show somewhat inconsistent results. Some studies have suggested lower academic performance, higher dropout rates and overall worse educational outcomes for these females compared to non-delinquent females (Moffitt, 2006). Yet others show a different pattern, mainly that AL females perform as well in school as non-delinquent females (Andersson, Levander, & Torstensson Levander, 2013). Cross-sectional studies, conducted on justice-involved females who are not incarcerated, have found that young female offenders in the community display high levels of needs in a number of different life areas, including education, and that these needs are often unmet (Brown et al., 2008; McReynolds et al., 2008).
Applications of justice versus providing welfare for young offenders

Retribution, deterrence and rehabilitation are three key considerations in regards to the sentencing of an individual who has been convicted for committing a crime (Young, Greer, & Church, 2017). A common, although not uncomplicated, question concerning how to view and treat young offenders has been whether focus should be the application of justice, that is, choosing a penalty option corresponding to the seriousness of the crime committed, or providing for their welfare, i.e. offering support corresponding to the needs of the young offender (Goldson, 2002). Young offenders have typically been treated differently from adult offenders, with the principle of rehabilitation given the greatest weight, although this has differed between countries and over time. This is based on the notion that young offenders are not merely guilty of a crime, but also have unmet needs that often are strongly associated with their criminal behavior. During the last couple of decades, there has been a trend in Western countries to move away from a welfare-oriented approach, toward a more punitive treatment (Young et al., 2017). In parallel and in contrast to this trend, research has focused on developmental theories as a base for improving interventions that best can reduce recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). It has been argued that emphasis on the justice approach has in many ways been promoted at the expanse of welfare considerations (Steinberg, 2009).

Viewing the appearance of criminal behavior as the outcome of interaction between the individual, interpersonal (e.g., family and peers) and community-based (e.g., neighborhood and schools) factors is becoming more and more common, not the least in choices relating to the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders. Although this view has influenced available rehabilitation models (e.g., the Risk–Need–Responsivity model) which provide a coherent theoretical framework for effective rehabilitation (Andrews & Bonta, 2010), some concerns for their limitations regarding female offending have been raised (Van Damme, Fortune, Vandevelde, & Vanderplasschen, 2017). Despite the benefits of the risk–need model, it may not be effective in treating female offenders, as these most often focus on criminogenic risk factors that have a direct impact on recidivism rates. Because research regarding offender risk for recidivism for females is rarer compared to studies of male offenders, we may not know enough about the specific risk of female offending. Also, as noncriminogenic risks (e.g., victimization) have been shown to be at the core...
of female serious offending, and scholars highlight the additional importance of these in order to prevent female delinquency, only addressing criminogenic needs is questionable. In addition, as most young females convicted of a crime do not re-offend, the high focus on reducing recidivism may not be well suited for this group of offenders. Thus, the suggestions have been that interventions should not only focus on reducing the risk of recidivism, but also focus on increasing wellbeing in general. In line with this, Ward and Brown (2004) have proposed another model, the Good Lives Model, which they suggest offers a more comprehensive framework to guide the assessment and rehabilitation of female offenders than those most often used (i.e., the Risk–Need–Responsivity model). It essentially focuses on enhancing wellbeing and life quality as determined by an individual’s basic needs. Instead of solely focusing on criminogenic needs, the authors suggested that rehabilitation should identify challenges that prevent all offenders from living well-adjusted and fulfilling lives and equip them with the tools needed to do so. In their view, the Good Lives Model offers an alternative, yet complementary, approach to the rehabilitation of delinquent female adolescents, by adopting a dual focus: striving for the fulfillment of individuals’ basic human needs in addition to reducing their risk of re-offending (Van Damme et al., 2017).

Youth justice in Sweden

While the trend in Swedish policy and practice regarding young offenders shows a shift toward an increase in punitive strategies, the Swedish youth justice system is still considered to rest on an overall rehabilitative service approach (Hollander & Tärnfalk, 2007; Shannon, Bäckman, Estrada, & Nilsson, 2014). This is based on the notion that youths who commit crimes, are not solely criminals who need to be punished, but also young people in need of support. It is, for example, the social welfare agencies that have the primary responsibility for young people involved in criminality. Also, there are special penalties, reserved for young offenders aged 15–17, which apply in some cases up to 21 years of age. These are, to a large extent, based on the principle of rehabilitation (Jansson, 2004). However, there is lack of knowledge of the needs and risks of convicted offenders, in particular young females (Ginner Hau, 2010). Also, the knowledge of different rehabilitative measures taken with young offenders on a national level is scarce (Ginner Hau, 2010; Ginner Hau & Smedler, 2011). The focus of the present thesis is to improve the knowledge about a group of adolescent females with limited delinquency by studying a sample of young female offenders sentenced to youth service (“ungdomstjänst”).

After changes within the Swedish youth justice system in 2007, several new sanctions for young offenders were introduced. One of these was youth service, which became an independent sentence, that could be assigned alone or in combination with youth care (ungdomsvård). While youth care is
reserved for those assessed to have “special care needs,” and thus be in need of more intense interventions, youths sentenced solely to youth service are deemed to be without any apparent history of severe antisocial behavior and who have limited “special care needs,” (Brå, 2011). What exactly constitutes a “special care need” is not clearly defined (Holmberg, 2013), but factors such as substance abuse problems, extensive criminal history, high risk for continued offending and mental health problems are examples given (Swedish Government, 2006). Risk or need is here referred to both the type and level of delinquency (e.g., minor offenses, the likelihood of re-offending, as well as criminal history), as well as the young person’s psychosocial situation. It is thus most likely that young females with limited delinquency are to be found within youth service. Since the reform in 2007, youth service is one of the most common sanctions for young people between ages 15 and 17 (Brå, 2011; Brå, 2018a). During 2017, youth service was the main sanction given in 1,440 verdicts (Brå, 2018a). Approximately 300 females are sentenced to youth service each year. Similar to community service for adults, the youth service sanction requires the offender to be engaged in unpaid work. The number of hours one is sentenced to may vary between 20 and 150. Although youth service is preferred for those regarded as having no or little need for interventions, it is also intended to have a rehabilitative function, consisting of a so-called advocacy program (Swedish Government, 2006). While the unpaid work part is intended to give the youth an opportunity to work off their sentences while getting familiar with a work place, the advocacy program is intended to help the youth reflect upon her or his situation and find strategies to avoid future recidivism. Although the advocacy programs are employed under a collective name, there is little consensus regarding the content of the advocacy programs or how they should be carried out. They also differ between different municipalities. In the city where the present group of female offenders have completed their youth service, the intent is mainly focused on addressing criminal behavior and criminality as a life style, enhancing impulse control and reducing recidivism (Zamora, 2011).

There is no systematic documentation available on young offenders sentenced to youth service in Sweden or internationally, and in particular, there are no available studies regarding the female population of this group (Söderholm Carpelan et al., 2008). The focus of this thesis is, however, not the measure itself, but rather young females and potential developmental challenges in different life areas connected to their delinquency. This seems a reasonable starting point for further discussions on the measures taken with this group.
General aim

Female offenders who do not exhibit pronounced behavioral problems are understudied, yet the scarce research available indicates that they may be at risk of sub-optimal development. The overall aim of the present thesis was to explore the characteristics of adolescent female offenders without pronounced psychosocial problems, and to relate these to developmental aspects of adolescence. Further, the objective was to study potential unmet risks and needs they might experience in relation to their delinquent behavior that could hinder positive development. The purpose was therefore to investigate different interpersonal aspects of their life, e.g., family, peers and school, in connection to their delinquency.

Aims of the studies

Study 1 aimed to provide a basic description of all young females sentenced to youth service in Stockholm, Sweden during 2007–2012 by studying their level of problems using self-reports on delinquency, drug and alcohol use, school, social relations, family and psychological problems. Further, the aim was to compare how the accumulation of problems in different life areas related to females in residential care and to a reference group of females without known adjustment problems, respectively. Study 2 was a 24-month registry-based follow-up to Study 1, which focused on the females’ educational attainment and recidivism and how these factors may be related. Furthermore, the aim was to study how self-reports from Study 1 regarding delinquency, school problems and school satisfaction related to educational attainment and recidivism. The aim of Studies 3 and 4 was to explore young female offenders’ own perspectives through in-depth interviews. The overall objective was to study their way of thinking about the crimes they had committed and what they, from their own viewpoint, might need in order to avoid future criminality. This was done by interviewing nine Swedish female adolescents who started their referral to youth service in Stockholm and Gothenburg during October 2012 and February 2013. Study 3 investigated the young females’ views of how their delinquency is connected to their social relationships (i.e., peers and romantic partners). And finally, Study 4 concerned the females’ own understanding of the role of their family in connection to their delinquent behavior.
Method

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods

The present thesis includes a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Using a combination of both types of methods has become more common in research in general, and in psychological research specifically (e.g., Carlsson, 2015; Carlsson, Wångqvist, & Frisén, 2016; Larsson, Pettersson, Skoog, & Eriksson, 2016). The challenge, and the reward, of combining a qualitative and a quantitative approach is the potential to reach a greater understanding of the subject investigated. When one combines qualitative and quantitative approaches, different methods can be used in different stages of the research procedure. For more details of how best to mix and combine both approaches, and common strategies used, see Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010). In the present thesis, qualitative and quantitative data and methods for analysis are used in parallel to each other. The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches allows for exploration of the overall aim from different perspectives, with different measures and at different time points. The quantitative part, consisting of structured self-reports and registry data, contributes by describing the allocation of problems in different life areas for the group at large. These data also allow for comparisons, both with other groups of young females and within the group, as well as over time. The combination of register data with self-reports has many advantages. These sources complement and support each other and offer opportunities to evaluate the research questions with different measures and at different time points. The qualitative part of the thesis gives voice to the young females themselves, conveying their own perspective on their delinquency and total life situation. In contrast to the problem-oriented approach of the quantitative methods, the qualitative approach can be viewed as more process-oriented. This perspective is important, as it not only provides knowledge about the different developmental problems and opportunities in connection to their delinquency, but also offers the young females’ own views on these topics. This is of great importance in practical work with the young females, as understanding and having insight of one’s own behavior is of great importance in preventive work with juvenile delinquency.
Participants

All four studies were based on data (e.g., self-reports, registry data and interviews) from young females sentenced to youth service. Studies 1 and 2 included all adolescent females (N=144) who were convicted of a crime and sentenced to youth service in 2007–2012 in Stockholm, Sweden (15.4 % of all youths sentenced to youth service during this period in Stockholm, of whom the rest were male). Of these, six females were excluded, since they were assigned to youth care in combination with youth service. The final sample consisted of 138 young females aged 15 to 20 years (M = 16.8; SD = 1.0) at the time of assignment to youth service.

The sample in Studies 3 and 4 included nine adolescent females who were convicted of a crime and sentenced to youth service and started their sentence between October 2012 and February 2013 in Stockholm and Gothenburg, Sweden. In 2012, around 300 female adolescents were assigned to youth service in Sweden, of which an estimation is made that 15–30 girls were sentenced in the three major cities (Brå, 2013). Of these, all females enrolled in youth service programs during October 2012 and February 2013 in Stockholm and Gothenburg were given written information about the study through social workers, who were responsible for the implementation of sentence. One person was considered by the social worker unfit to take part due to mental health issues and was therefore not asked to participate. Three females initially showed interest in participating by leaving their contact-information to the social workers, but declined to participate when contacted by the researcher. The nine participants ranged in age from 15 to 21 years old when interviewed, but were 15–17 when they committed the crime.

Material

The material in Study 1 was collected with the Swedish version of the Adolescent Drug Abuse Diagnosis (ADAD) instrument (Hermodsson, & Carpelan, 2004). In accordance with social service practices in Stockholm, all youths sentenced to youth service were asked to participate in this structured interview at the start of the referral, with the aim of improving the accuracy of the chosen interventions during 2007–2012. The ADAD interview is a multidimensional evaluation instrument that provides information on the youth’s current situation and various problems that she or he may encounter. It is designed as a structured interview containing 150 items and sub-items and provides information regarding different problem areas: medical, school, employment, social, family, psychological, legal, alcohol and drugs (see Table 1). It contains mainly fixed-response alternatives, which are dichotomous (yes/no) or on a categorical or ordinal scale. Both the interviewer and the adolescent are asked to specify an estimate of the amount of help needed in each problem area. The youths are also asked to express their level of concern
over their problems in each area (Friedman & Utada, 1989). For the problem areas medical, school, family and psychological problems, a problem checklist is provided, asking yes/no questions in order to estimate the problem level in each of these four areas. Items regarding school, social relations, family, psychological problems, delinquent behavior and alcohol and drug use were used in Study 1. All items used included only youth-reported scores, compromised in some areas of several single items (e.g., peers), whereas other areas also included a checklist constructed from several items (i.e., school, family and psychological problems). The school checklist consisted of 16 dichotomous questions measuring school problems (e.g., having difficulties with math/reading, truancy) ($\alpha = .81$), the family checklist consisted of 18 dichotomous questions for each parent respectively (e.g., hard time understanding you, too strict) ($\alpha = .88$, for mother; $\alpha = .87$, for father), and the psychological problems checklist consisted of 41 dichotomous questions (e.g., anxious, thoughts of suicide, feelings of worthlessness) ($\alpha = .93$).

The interview was originally developed in the United States (Friedman & Utada, 1989) for use with adolescent drug abuse clients, and has multiple functions: assignment of clients to the most appropriate treatment setting, individualized treatment planning, treatment evaluation and research. The Swedish translation of ADAD was done by Söderholm Carpelan, Hermodsson, and Öberg (1997). The changes that were made when adjusting the interview to Swedish conditions were created in consultation with the instrument developers. The Swedish edition of the interview was pilot tested during the translation process. The original scales have been validated (Friedman & Utada, 1989) and the Swedish and the international versions are considered to have satisfactory psychometric qualities (Börjesson, 2011; Börjesson & Ybrandt, 2012; Chinet, Plancherel, Bolognini, Holzer, & Halfon, 2005; Innala & Shannon, 2007; Ybrandt, Börjesson, & Armelius, 2008). The ADAD is currently in widespread practical use in the US, Australia and various European countries.
Table 1. The nine problem areas examined in the ADAD interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life area</th>
<th>Example of content covering each life area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>Relates to the possible need for medical treatment and provides information on potential chronic problems and medication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Features items that provide information about education, current school state and possible school problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Includes questions about work experience and current work situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>The items concern relationships with peers and friends, as well romantic relationships and how leisure time is spent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Items relating to the quality of the adolescent’s family relations and problems. Responses provide information on family conflicts, as well as the quality of relationship with each parent, respectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Includes questions relating to psychological and emotional reactions and symptoms, and information about times in treatment or counseling in outpatient or inpatient care for emotional and/or psychological problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Involvement in 18 various crime types during the past 12 months, as well as in the last three months, in addition to the age of onset for each separate offense category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>Includes questions on alcohol debut, consumption habits and potential alcohol-related problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>Items relating to current frequency of drug use, extent of current multiple substance use and several items on the social context of their use.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study 2 is a follow-up study and includes registry data. Data were extracted from Swedish administrative registries collected and maintained by Statistics Sweden (see Table 2). Information on registered criminality was collected from the conviction and suspicion records kept by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet). The data include information on number of suspicions, crime type and date of the crime. For the convictions, information regarding numbers of convictions, number of crimes within a single conviction, as well as the sentence ruled by the court was gathered. Information about whether the female adolescents had been
placed outside the home was obtained from National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) and National Board of Institutional Care (Statens instituitionsstyrelse). These variables held information about reason for placement, type of placement and time in placement. School-related variables were collected from the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket). Information about final school grade at the end of compulsory school were obtained, as well as final school grade at the end of upper secondary school. Information about eligibility to apply for upper secondary education and higher education was also collected. The Swedish 10-digit personal code number (personnummer) assigned to all Swedish residents enabled data to be linked from the registers with the help of the Statistics Sweden. Study 2 also included the females’ self-reported data at the start of youth service measured by the ADAD. These consisted of self-reported school problems based on a check list of 16 dichotomous questions measuring school-related problems (α = .81), a scale compromised of school satisfaction measuring to what degree (not at all, a little, somewhat, to a great extent), whether the females self-reported to enjoy school in compulsory school (α = .73) and a scale measuring delinquency (α = .33) composed of information showing whether during the previous 12 months the females had engaged in any of the 23 separate offense categories listed, and if so, how many times per crime.

Table 2. Official data included in Study 2 and the registry from which the information was collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registry</th>
<th>Type of information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>Final school grade at the end of compulsory education&lt;br&gt;Eligibility to apply for upper secondary education&lt;br&gt;Final school grade at the end of upper secondary school&lt;br&gt;Eligibility to apply for higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish National Agency for Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criminality</strong></td>
<td>Suspection record, including number of suspicisons, crime type and date of the crime reported&lt;br&gt;Conviction records, including numbers of convictions, number of crimes within a single conviction, the sentence ruled by the court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Placement</strong></td>
<td>Placement outside the home, including reason for placement, type of placement and time in placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Board of Health and Welfare and National Board of Institutional Care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data used in Study 3 and 4 were based on interview data. A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on a literature review relating to female delinquency, and consisted of open-ended questions, discussed and generated by myself and my supervisor and cowriter of the studies. The questions essentially addressed four central topics: (1) the young females’ own views of their delinquency; (2) their views of their sentence; (3) their views of the pathway leading to their delinquent behavior; and (4) their views of the future. Each interview began by asking for background details about the participants (such as age, where they are from, their living situation), and ended by asking the participants if they had any questions or if they wanted to add something. Although these topics were to be covered, interviews were conducted in a manner that was sensitive to the interviewee and her narrative, allowing for prompts and exploration of topics that rose spontaneously. No specific questions regarding peers or family were part of the interview guide. However, as these topics spontaneously rose in all interviews, follow-up questions regarding both these areas were asked, although they differed slightly between participants. One pilot interview was conducted with the first participant recruited, and the pilot interview allowed the interviewer to become comfortable with the interview protocol and address any concerns regarding content, themes and questions asked. No major revisions were made, and the pilot interview was therefore included in the analysis. Interviews took place in private rooms provided by the social workers or private rooms in local libraries. I conducted, audio recorded and transcribed verbatim all interviews, which lasted about 40–70 minutes. Contextual information, such as silence and pauses in conversation, as well as nonverbal sounds (e.g., laughs, sighs) were included in the transcriptions, but nonlinguistic observations (e.g., facial expressions, body language and emotions) were not recorded. All of the participants’ names and personal information were changed or taken out of the transcriptions, as well as of the write-up of the studies. For their participation, the females were offered a gift voucher of 200 Swedish kronor.

Procedure

The self-reports used in Study 1 were gathered from the social services in Stockholm, Sweden, that were in charge of implementing youth service. The ADAD interviews were held by social workers at the start of the referral. Correct implementation of the ADAD interview requires the interviewer to be well-acquainted with the interview and its manual and to have undergone special training. The duration of the interview may vary from 45 to 90 minutes.

Data regarding educational attainment and recidivism in Study 2 was collected from different Swedish registries. Information about the young females’ registered criminality was collected from the conviction and suspicion records.
provided by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. The time-frame for the follow-up was set to 24 months after the time of the ADAD interview at the start of the referral to youth service. All registered criminality data until the year of 2013 were obtainable and collected. That means that for those who were sentenced to youth service and conducted their ADAD interview during 2012, only a 12-month follow-up on recidivism was available. Information about whether the females had been placed in or out of home care was obtained from the National Board of Health and Welfare and the National Board of Institutional Care. This included life-long information from the year the females were born up to 2012. School-related variables were collected from the Statistics Sweden and the Swedish National Agency for Education. Information about final grade in upper secondary school were available for those who were expected to have graduated from upper secondary school 2014 and earlier.

The data collection procedure for Studies 3 and 4 was as follows: meetings with representatives from the social workers responsible for the implementation of youth service in each city were held in connection with the starting point of the inclusion period. They were informed about the purpose of the study, ethical aspects and routines for data collection. Written information containing a brief background of the study and noting that the participant could be asked if she was interested in participating during the performance of her youth service, was sent out to all female who started youth service between October 2012 and February 2013. At the same time, their guardians were also informed about the study and invited to raise any questions or concerns they may have had.

At the first opportunity, after the sending of information, when the responsible social worker met each female, the written information was provided one more time and the social worker ensured that each one had understood the content. At the same time, the young females were asked if they were interested in participating in the study and if so, to indicate the address/phone number, they wished to be contacted on. Those interested in participating were then contacted by me to schedule a time and place for an interview. At the interview occasion, the participants were given written information and full informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the interview. In accordance with the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans (2003:460), parental consent is not always required for youths who have attained the age of 15 in Sweden, provided that they can be considered mature enough to understand the implications of research participation and to decide for themselves. With approval from the Regional Ethics Board in Stockholm, the participants’ guardians were therefore not asked for consent. They were, however, informed about the study and invited to come to the researchers with any questions and/or concerns they might have had. None of the guardians, however, contacted the researchers.
Statistical analyses

The analytical strategy for Study 1 was to compare the youth service females’ self-reported problems in different life areas with two other groups: females in residential care ($N = 218$) and a reference group of female adolescents without known behavioral problems ($N = 603$). The data we used for comparison was collected and published by the National Board of Institutional Care (SiS) (Ybrandt & Nordqvist, 2015) in collaboration with the Department of Psychology, University of Umeå and the National Board of Health and Welfare. Because the comparison material from the residential and reference group was collected by Ybrandt and colleagues (2015), and reported on a group level, we did not have access to individual data. This limited our ability to conduct statistical analyses, as most of the data from the comparison groups was presented for each question separately. Therefore, statistical comparisons were used for the checklists available (regarding school, family and mental health), and other data was presented descriptively. As we were more interested in the distribution of individuals with regard to level of problems, rather than the mean average of problems of the entire group, frequency analyses seemed useful. Also, as the data are not normally distributed, non-parametric tests were considered to be more appropriate. The EXACON module from the statistical program SLEIPNER (Bergman & El-Khoury, 1998) was used and is a method for calculating the probability of an observed cell frequency that occurs beyond that which is expected by chance. This analysis produces an exact test of single cells in a contingency table. Scores observed significantly more often than expected are referred to as types (observed $>$ expected) and those observed less frequently than expected are referred to as antitypes (observed $<$ expected).

In Study 2, we followed up on the results from Study 1 with registry measures. Our strategy of analysis was as follows. First, we wanted to describe the rate of recidivism, operationalized as registered suspicions and convictions, respectively, within two years after the youth was sentenced to youth service. Next, we wanted to describe the educational attainment by reporting point grade average, as well as distribution of grades within the group, and to report the proportion who were eligible to apply to further education at two points in adolescence: end of compulsory school and end of upper secondary school. Furthermore, we compared these results with young females in general. We were also interested in the relationship between academic performance and recidivism, and so we compared grade average between the recidivist and those who did not re-offend. Finally, we sought to examine the relationship between self-reported school problems, self-reported school enjoyment and self-reported delinquency, collected in Study 1, with educational attainment and recidivism. Non-parametric analyses of variance including Mann-Whitney U-test and Kruskal-Wallis test, as well as Spearman’s correlations, were used.
Consensual Qualitative Research

The method for analyzing the interviews was Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR), (Hill et al., 2005; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). This method has previously been used in studying adolescents’ subjective view of their wellbeing (Diamond et al., 2011), in studies of different aspects of student experiences (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005), and in studies of juvenile delinquency (Sander, Sharkey, Olivarri, Tanigawa, & Mauseth, 2010; Sander et al., 2011; Wester, MacDonald, & Lewis, 2008). CQR adheres to both constructivist and postpositivist approaches. Although the method is primarily constructivist, paralleling Grounded theory (Glasser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1997), in many ways, it also contains postpositivist features. The analysis process is inductive and involves three central steps: (a) sorting data into domains; (b) creating core ideas used to capture the essence of what is said; (c) and cross-analysis in order to construct common themes across participants (Hill, 2012). Other fundamental features include (a) using several judges throughout the analysis processes to promote multiple viewpoints, (b) gaining consensus regarding the meaning and categorization of the data, through discussions between the team members until a final understanding and agreement is reached, and (c) using a minimum of one auditor to review the work of the judges to lessen the effects of groupthink. The research team was composed of five people, three judges and two auditors, all of whom had prior experience of working with similar research topics or had experience of working with young people with different types of psychological and/or behavioral problems.

The steps of CQR

Coding of Domains

The first step of the coding process included categorizing all the material from each participant relating to the same area, be that anything from a phrase to several sentences, into an appropriate domain. Each judge read three interviews independently and the then collectively came together and reached consensus about the placement of text into different domains and the naming of each domain. A domain list was created and the team members coded the remaining interviews according to this independently, and then met to reach consensus about the placement of text into different domains. No new domains emerged when coding the rest of the interviews.

Abstracting Core Ideas

The next step was to develop core ideas for every domain in each case. The process of creating core ideas meant reducing the text and capturing the main focus of what was being said, while remaining as close to the data as possible. This included changing pronouns to be consistent, and eliminating repetitions and other nonrelevant aspects of the interview. Each judge read the transcripts re-ordered by domains, and independently generated core ideas for each
domain, for each interview, before meeting as a team to determine consensus. This process was done for one interview and once a common understanding of the core idea process had been achieved, one of the judges wrote the core ideas for the remaining cases and the rest of the team reviewed them and came together to reach consensus.

Cross-Analysis
The two first steps of the coding process involved all of the material, while the last step of the coding process, the cross-analysis, was done solely on the domain that was the main focus of the present thesis, namely family and peers. Cross-analysis entailed defining patterns across cases in the domains mentioned above. The team began by individually looking for common themes in the core ideas of the interviewees. This was followed by the group coming together and going through all themes that had been created. After this step, a joint review of the material was done, and the core ideas were divided into meaningful units that only featured one separate idea. Then each member examined the core ideas from all cases for the domain and developed themes that best captured these core ideas. The research group then arrived at a consensus on the conceptual labels of the categories and the core ideas that belonged in each category.

Auditing
The material was sent to the two auditors at three points during the analysis process; (1) after interviews had been coded into domains; (2) after creating core ideas for each interview; (3) after the cross-analysis for the domains of peers and family. The judges met each time in person to discuss and go through the individually written feedback from the auditors, and reached consensus about how to incorporate the auditors’ suggestions. The feedback from the auditors included comments on whether the raw material was in the correct domain, whether important domains were overlooked, remarks on parts of statements that were not reflected in the core ideas or regarding material that was unintentionally omitted and the level of abstraction in the themes created.
Ethical considerations

The different studies and the projects in which they are a part have been approved by The Stockholm Regional Ethics Board in its entirety (2012/1259-31 and 2012/1294-31). Due to the sensitive nature of the material used in the thesis, a brief review of the ethical considerations made will be given. Delinquent females are, in many regards, an exposed group. Collecting data on them could, for that reason, be a major infringement. However, because that they are a vulnerable group, it is important to conduct further studies in order to gain knowledge how best to support them. The material used in Studies 1 and 2 is based on a group of offenders who had already completed their sentencing some years before the data collection started. For that reason, it would have been practically difficult, not to say impossible, to collect informed consent from all of them. Based on the scarce information available about this group of offenders, however, the potential knowledge of the studies was considered to outweigh the lack of informed consent. With that being said, measures have been taken to protect participants’ confidentiality by omitting all personal information in all the datafiles used for analyses. Codes have been used instead of personal security numbers when collecting the registry data so that there would have been no risk of identifying individuals. The code key was stored in a security cabinet to which only the responsible researchers have access. All participants in Studies 3 and 4 were given oral and written information on the general aim of the study, and written consent was gathered from all of them prior to the interviews. No personal information relating to the females, besides information they willingly shared themselves, was gathered. All identifying information was changed and/or omitted in the transcription, as well as in the writing up of the results. Information about being able to withdraw their consent at any time, and assurance that they were...
free to not answer questions they felt uncomfortable answering without consequences for their sentencing and contact with the social services were provided to the females and the social workers. This was important, as we wanted to make sure that females did not feel pressured or obligated to partake, since it was the social services workers who were responsible for carrying out the females’ sentencing who first informed them about the participation. In addition, the interviewer informed the females that anything they communicated in the interviews would be treated strictly confidentially and not passed on to the police or social services.
Results

Study 1: “Adolescent females with limited delinquency – At risk of school failure”

Criminal involvement and alcohol/drug use
The participants reported low and/or moderate involvement in criminal acts during the last 12 months prior to admittance to the youth service program. The crimes that they reported having been involved in, included, for the majority, the crime for which they had been convicted of. They also reported low levels of alcohol and drug use during the same time period. This pattern of low involvement in norm-breaking behavior was more similar, although somewhat higher, to that of a reference group of young females without any known adjustment problems than to a group of young females in residential care, who reported higher levels and more variations regarding criminal activities and drug and alcohol use.

School
The females reported a high accumulation of problems related to school, including failing in different ways, receiving different types of support and showing several school problems. For example, 30% of the females reported either having dropped out or never beginning upper secondary school, 20% reported being suspended at some point during their schooling and 28% reported being held back a class. In addition, 32% reported receiving special education and 14% stated that they had been given an adjusted study program. Their school situation and school problems differed distinctly from the reference group and was more aligned with the residential group. The youth service females, however, reported the same amount of school satisfaction as the reference group, that is they reported having liked school somewhat or to a great extent at all three stages: primary, middle and secondary school.

Based on a checklist composed of 16 different questions measuring school problems, more than half, (59%) of the females reported having six or more school-related problems compared to 82% for the residential and 32% for the reference group. Analyses of single cells in the cross-tabulations showed that a lower proportion of the youth service group reported having no or few school problems than statistically expected, while a higher proportion of the youth
service group reported having six or more problems in school than statistically expected. This trend was the same for the females in the residential group and reversed for the reference group of females.

Social relationships
Regarding social relationships such as peers and romantic partners, the majority of the young females reported that they never or seldom spend time with peers who commit crimes (94%) or take drugs (95%), while at the same time stated spending some or a lot of time with non-delinquent friends (81%). These numbers were in line with those of the reference group, who followed the same pattern, while differing from the residential group, who reported spending more time with peers who commit crimes and do drugs.

The youth service females reported some degree of exposure to different forms of abuse in their romantic relationships, where emotional abuse (18%) was the most common followed by physical (9%) and sexual abuse (2%). This pattern of abuse experience reflected that of the reporting of the reference group who showed similar numbers, but are lower than the residential group, who reported higher rates of physical and emotional abuse in their romantic relationships.

Family
In general, the youth service group’s accumulation of problems regarding mental health, alcohol and drug use and criminality in the family, was more similar to the reference group, although a higher proportion of the investigated group reported problems regarding their mother’s (15%) and father’s (10%) mental health, as well as having siblings who are involved in criminal activities (11%). The residential group showed greater accumulations of problems in all areas and for all family members.

As for abuse by a parental figure, the youth service group reported having experienced emotional violence (33%), physical violence (22%) and sexual abuse (3%) to varying degrees. These numbers were the same as the reference group, except for physical violence, which was more common in the youth service group. The overall pattern showed the youth service group’s accumulation of abuse-related problems to be in between the two comparison groups, where close to half of the residential group report having experienced both emotional and physical abuse by a parental figure.

When asked how they themselves view different aspects of their relationship to their mother and father, respectively, the youth service group reported having fewer problems with their family compared to both the residential and the reference group. Based on two different checklists composed of 18 different questions each that measured the number of problems in the
relationship with mother as well as father, 29% and 22% in the youth service group report having no problems with their mother or their father, respectively. These numbers differ from both comparison groups, where only a few percent report having no problems at all in the two latter groups. Analyses of single cells in the cross-tabulations showed that a higher proportion of the youth service group reported having no problems with their mother or father respectively than statistically expected, which is the opposite of both comparison groups. The results in the other cells are not entirely conclusive and no clear pattern for the youth service group was detected. The self-reports of different type of problems within the family showed, in other words, somewhat inconsistent results.

Mental health
Based on a checklist of 41 different psychological and emotional reactions, 8% in the youth service group report having none, compared to 2% of the residential group, and 12% of the reference group. Analyses of single cells in the cross-tabulations showed that the proportion of the females in the youth service group in each cell were as expected. The pattern for the residential group and the reference group was the opposite of each other, that is a lower proportion of the residential group reported having no or few psychological problems than statistically expected, while a higher proportion reported having eight or more problems than statistically expected. This trend was reversed for the reference group of females, and more similar to the reporting of the youth service group.

Study 2: “Adolescent females with limited delinquency – A follow-up on educational attainment and recidivism”

The results from Study 2 confirmed that the females, as expected, displayed limited delinquency, in that the majority did not re-offend within two years after being sentenced to youth service (70% had no registered suspicions, varying between 0-23, \( M=1.23, SD=3.45 \), and 86% had no registered convictions, varying between 0-5, \( M=0.22, SD=0.63 \)). Those who did re-offend showed low frequency in their criminality in the sense that most were only suspected and/or convicted of 1–2 crimes, of which most were minor offense (e.g., non-violent crimes). The females did, however, have significantly lower educational attainment than adolescent females in general, both at the end of compulsory and upper secondary school. The mean average grade at the end of compulsory school was 144 (\( SD=80.4, median=163 \)) for the investigated group, compared to young females in Stockholm who scored 237 (\( SD=66.5 \)) during 2007–2015, as well as all females in Sweden in total who scored 223 (\( SD=62.4 \)) during the same time period. The same pattern was
shown for final grade at the end of upper secondary school, where the investigated females had a mean average grade of 7.7 ($SD=6.5$, $median=10.0$), compared to females in Stockholm who scored 14.5 ($SD=3.3$) and females in Sweden in total 14.9 ($SD=3.6$). The results also showed that a low proportion of the youth service group was eligible to apply to upper secondary school and higher education. Of the investigated group, only 56% were eligible to apply to upper secondary education, compared to around 90% of females in Stockholm and Sweden. Twenty-three percent of the youth service females were eligible to apply to higher education after upper secondary school, compared to around 90% of females in Stockholm and Sweden. The collective results regarding the females’ educational attainment at these two points during adolescence implies that the majority are performing poorly (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Illustration of the educational attainment of the females at two points during adolescence.

The results also showed that those who reoffended did not differ significantly in grade point average at the end of compulsory or upper secondary school from those who did not re-offend. Both groups did, however, display significantly lower educational attainment than adolescent females in general.

Finally, using their self-reports from Study 1 to see whether their self-reports on delinquency, school problems and school satisfaction were related to their educational attainment and recidivism, we found only a significant relationship between self-reported school problems and final grade in upper
secondary school (\(r_s=-.293, n=69, p=.015\), two tailed). No significant differences were found between those who reoffended and those who did not regarding self-reports on delinquency, school problems and school satisfaction.

**Study 3: “Adolescent female offenders’ subjective experiences of how peers influence norm-breaking behavior”**

The results in Study 3 were based on the domain of Peers, as derived from nine interviews analyzed through the consensual coding process. This domain included statements concerning friends, romantic partners and same-age acquaintances, which resulted in five different themes from the cross-analysis (see Figure 4).

![Figure 4](image_url)  
*Figure 4.* The figure illustrates all five themes within the domain of Peers. The first theme, “Considering peers as fundamental part of life,” has two arrows pointing at the direction of delinquent as well as pro-social peers. This illustrates that the participants described having peers who both engage in delinquent behavior and who do not, and the importance of peers, whether delinquent or not. The three different themes, “Committing crime as a way to socialize,” “Collectively creating peer pressure and delinquent norms” and “Being both offender and victim in a delinquent context” illustrates that the participants describe being in a delinquent context where the norm-breaking behavior is described as a way to socialize and that this behavior often occurred in the unstructured hanging out with delinquent peers, where they
collectively create peer pressures and delinquent norms of how to behave. The arrow, which includes the theme “Being aware of the importance of pro-social peers and absence of delinquent peers in order to avoid future delinquency,” illustrates the relationship between delinquent peers and pro-social peers and how the absence of hanging out with delinquent peers is considered necessary to avoid delinquent behavior and that pro-social peers can help in that process.

Considering peers as a fundamental part of life
One theme involved descriptions of their peers both in relations to committing crimes, but also in general terms. These included both negative and positive aspects of their peer relationships where their friends and romantic partners were described as a fundamental part of their lives. For example, they all described having close, meaningful relationships with friends, where these relationships were regarded as being as important as their families. Peers were also described as being vital for the participant’s wellbeing. As such, they were described as being important people in their lives who they could confide in, talk to in times of need and those who they spent all their free time with. The importance of the peer group was also shown in descriptions of how they put their peers’ needs before their own in order to protect these friendships, even if it involved engaging in delinquent acts.

The negative aspects of their peer relationships included having conflicts, fighting, bickering and having verbal arguments, as well as being mad at each other for keeping secrets, or engaging in physical fights. For some, conflicts with peers went as far as resulting in the ending of the friendship. They also expressed feelings of distrust and/or loneliness relative to peers. In some cases, these two feelings were connected, while in other cases, the participants felt one or the other. Feelings of loneliness could also include not talking to friends about private matters, or feeling betrayed by one’s friends.

Being both offender and victim in a delinquent context
Another theme included descriptions of how the participants were part of a delinquent context. Being part of a delinquent context entailed having peers, partners, classmates or same-aged companions who engaged in different forms of norm-breaking behavior. Within these settings, they both observed peers engaging in norm-breaking behavior and participated themselves, thus being both witnesses, victims and offenders themselves in delinquent acts targeting other young people. Some participants had close friends or acquaintances who had committed and/or had been convicted of a crime. Others had friends who used drugs, ran away from home or displayed violent behavior. Some of the participants lived in areas where many youths of the same age engaged in delinquent behavior. This also included having current or former boyfriends with more comprehensive and more serious antisocial behavior. These behaviors were usually drug-related, where some of the participants’ boyfriends either sold or used drugs, but also included delinquent
behavior such as driving a car while under the influence of drugs and running away from the police. Descriptions of committing delinquent acts against other peers included stealing from friends, as well as hitting and fighting with peers. In addition to being part of a social context in which delinquency occurred and they themselves committed crimes against other friends, the participants also described being victims of some sort of serious abuse, by another person the same age, a friend or an acquaintance.

**Committing crimes as a way to socialize**

Yet another theme was how committing crimes was portrayed as a way to socialize, similar to other type of activities that they participated in with their peers. For example, engaging in norm-breaking behavior such as drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, taking drugs and committing crimes, was described to have a lot in common with other unstructured and pro-social activities that are typical of adolescents in general. The participants gave different reasons as to why their delinquency took place in the company of others. For example, committing crimes in the company of friends was described as contributing to a positive sense of belonging and comradery, and led to sharing experiences. Committing crimes, just as other pro-social activities, was seen as a fun, thrill-seeking escapade to do together. Other reinforcing qualities of committing crimes together with peers was feeling more secure in the company of others, and getting more confidence and courage to do things that they might have never done alone.

**Collectively creating peer pressure and delinquent norms**

The participants described both influencing and being influenced by friends and boyfriends when it came to their delinquency. Committing delinquent acts was the result of group dynamics, where the group members collectively created peer pressures and delinquent norms that serve as a frame of reference for how to behave in that particular group. Most of the female offenders described the individuals in the peer groups as equals and said that everyone together helped to create peer pressure against everyone in the group. Even if some of the participants felt afterwards that they had let others decide for them or had done things they did not really want to do, no one explicitly described being forced to behave or act in a certain way. The females described how sometimes it was not always clear who was pressuring whom and that they could influence each other to do things that perhaps no one really wanted to do in the first place. The delinquent behavior was also described as being directly influenced by seeing their friends engage in a certain behavior. Some of the participants emphasized that they had let friends or romantic partners decide for them, while others talked about the great influence their friends had over their own behavior.
Being aware of the importance of pro-social peers and the absence of delinquent peers in order to avoid future delinquency

In order to avoid future delinquent behavior, the participants described the importance of pro-social peers as well as the need to stop socializing with delinquent friends. They thus expressed and conveyed an awareness of the influence peers had on their own delinquent behavior, both delinquent and non-delinquent. For example, the participants said that avoiding delinquent peers and not letting them influence their own behavior, was one of the main factors that would help them avoid future delinquency. In order to do so, having access to meaningful and important relationships with peers outside the context of their delinquent activities was described to be crucial. For example, having non-delinquent peers who rejected their delinquent behavior, or making them choose between the two types of friends, was described to have a pro-social influence.

Study 4: “Adolescent female offenders’ subjective experiences of their families’ roles in relation to their delinquency”

The results in Study 4 were based on the domain of Family, as derived from nine interviews analyzed through the consensual coding process. This domain included statements concerning persons whom the participants described as parents, step parents, siblings or relatives. Based on content, the themes were divided into two groups: General themes, including four themes consisting of mere descriptive information of the females’ family and familial relationships independently of the participants’ delinquency and Delinquency-specific themes, including five themes that consisted of statements that specifically concerned the family’s role in the participant’s delinquency and vice versa. The latter were, in comparison to the general themes, higher in complexity of the narratives and therefore the focus when reviewing the results (see Table 3).

General themes

Positive and negative aspects of family relationships, independent of delinquency

One theme included description of the participants’ relation to their family, which showed great variation both between and within the participants, portraying both negative and positive aspects of these relationships. It included expressions of feeling well in the family and having a good relationship to parents and siblings. For example, participants talked about spending family time together at home, and sharing common interest with
their siblings. The negative aspects included descriptions of turbulent and conflict-laden relations, including bickering, arguing and fighting with family members, mostly parents. A common thread in all descriptions was that the relationships were described as being dynamic rather than static, often referring to how the relationship had been in contrast to how it was now.

Physical and/or psychological absence of the parents
This theme included descriptions of parents’ absence, ranging from an experienced lack of emotional and practical engagement to a total lack of contact. The latter was described as something that pertained to the past, or that there had never been any contact with a parent. When a specific parent was described as absent, it was almost exclusively the father.

Violence and abuse within the family
Although not constituting a prominent part of the data, mentions of violence and abuse within the family did occur. These included violent conflicts between siblings, as well as physical and emotional abuse from parents. Narratives also included verbal insults from family members.

Criminality and addiction within the family
Another general theme included narratives of minor criminality and alcohol/substance abuse in the immediate or extended family. As with violence, these statements were not prominent in the narratives, but mentioned. This was described both as ongoing and as part of the family history. These statements were not described in relation to the females’ own delinquency.

Delinquency-specific themes
Delinquency as a consequence of dissatisfaction in family relations
One delinquency-specific theme included descriptions of engaging in delinquent behavior as a consequence of qualities in the family relationship, mainly referring to the relationship with parents. Some of the statements expressed the explicit idea of using delinquency as a way to alter the relation to the parents. For example, committing crimes was described as a way to get attention from parents who were perceived as absent, or as consolation and as a way of compensating for a deficit in the parental relationship. Delinquency was also used as an expression or a desire for a higher degree of independence. For example, shoplifting or stealing was expressed as a way to state financial freedom from parents. Even when the females did attribute the crime to dissatisfaction in the family, no one directly blamed the families or held other family members responsible for their own criminal behavior.
Family reactions to delinquency

Another theme contained several aspects of how the participants had experienced their family’s reactions when they found out about the crime. This included reactions from both parents and siblings. When describing their family’s reaction, they talked about parents displaying different emotional reactions. For example, parents were described to react with anger and disapproval when finding out about the crime. Reactions also included sadness and disappointment, rather than anger. Parents were also described to react by being supportive, by condemning the crime, but showing understanding of the act. In some cases, parents reacted in both ways, while some reacted with either/or. The theme also included descriptions of a lack of reaction from the parent, including not talking about or mentioning the crime whatsoever, which made the females to question whether the parents were bothered or cared about the crime at all. Lack of reaction was also described as withdrawal, demonstrating how parents wanted to have nothing to do with the criminal behavior and the events following the crime.

Actions undertaken by the family in connection to delinquency

The experiences of how the family reacted in connection to the crime also included different sort of actions taken by the parents. One such was, for example, actively monitoring the females’ behavior more closely through restrictions and control. The participants also described actions in forms of parents forcing them to take drug tests and reporting to the police when the adolescent had run away from home, as well as demanding contact with a psychologist. There were also statements of being heavily questioned by the family, and that the family demanded answers about the adolescent’s behavior and promptly held the participant responsible for the delinquency. Another experience described was parents being actively involved through the legal process, and showing emotional and practical support.

Participants’ feelings about family actions and reactions

One theme in connection with the two themes mentioned above included statements of the adolescents’ own feelings toward their parents’ actions and reactions when finding out about the delinquency. This entailed feeling guilty and ashamed over their misconduct, as well as being embarrassed due to knowing they had done something wrong. Furthermore, feelings of being worried about letting the parents down were expressed. There are also expressions of feeling remorseful toward parents due to feeling that the misconduct had been a burden to them. It was also described as being difficult and distressing to see the parents angry, sad or disappointed, for example, during the trial, even if they expressed that they were appreciative to the practical and emotional support. The negative feelings described in connection with the parent’s actions and reactions to the crime, however, were not described as a hindering factor for committing new crimes.
Changes in the family relations after delinquency

This theme included statements attributing both positive and negative changes in the family relations in connection to the crime. A positive change described was that the occurrence of the crime had led to a closer relationship to the parent, by, for example, leading to them spending more time together. However, negative changes as a consequence of the crime were also described; mainly a decrease in trust, which the females experienced as leading to a higher degree of parental monitoring and increased boundaries. This entailed, for example, restrictions regarding choice of friends and time spent away from home.

The delinquency-specific themes were further evaluated and are illustrated in Table 3. Although not chronologically described in the interviews, these themes could be regarded sequentially in relation to the crime. As such, the theme *Delinquency as a consequence of dissatisfaction in the family relations* can be seen as a prologue to the crime, where family relations contributed to the occurrence of the crimes. The following themes: *Family reactions to delinquency; Actions undertaken by the family in connection to delinquency; Participants’ feelings about family actions and reactions*, all consisted of statements concerning what the participants described happened when their delinquency “entered the family.” And finally, the last theme, *Changes in the family relations after delinquency*, could be regarded as the epilogue of the delinquent behavior, where the delinquency had led to changes in family relations. These themes were all based on crucial points of what happened between the adolescent and her family, also divided into terms of proximity, transaction and distance. Proximity included aspects in the theme that conveyed closeness, or wish for closeness, in the relationships. In contrast, distance conveyed aspects in the themes where the adolescents and the family distanced themselves from one another. Finally, aspects in the themes that appeared as emotional turbulence, where females and their family affected one another were considered as transactions. These could be interpreted as going back and forth between the participants, as well as having a position between proximity and distance as this transactional process could potentially lead the relation in the direction of proximity, as well as in the direction of distance.
Table 3. Temporal positions of the themes and relational positions of the core aspects of the themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporal positions</th>
<th>Relational positions</th>
<th>Proximity</th>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior to the delinquency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquency enters the family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>After delinquency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquency as a consequence of dissatisfaction in the family relations</td>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>Conflicts</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family reactions to delinquency</td>
<td>Understanding Support</td>
<td>Anger Disappointment Sadness</td>
<td>Withdrawal Indifference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions undertaken by the family in connection to delinquency</td>
<td>Restriction Control Seeking professional help Reporting to police Accompaniment</td>
<td>Questioning Demanding answers Holding the adolescent responsible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ feelings about family actions reactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in the family relations after delinquency</td>
<td>Closer relationships Fewer conflicts More appreciation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Loss of trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

The objective of the present thesis was to explore the characteristics of the under-researched group of adolescent female offenders without pronounced behavioral problems. Further, the aim was to study the potential risks and needs these young females’ experience in their interpersonal relations, mainly school, peers and family, in connection to their delinquency. The following discussion starts by offering a summary of the general findings from the four studies and conclusions that can be drawn from these. Next, a basic description of the characteristics of the females is discussed, as well as the challenges they display, with focus on educational attainment. Thereafter, the results from the qualitative part of the thesis exploring the females’ own perspectives on their delinquency in connection to peers and family are elaborated on. The collective findings are then discussed in relation to developmental aspects of adolescence with emphasis on developmental theories about delinquency and identity. Finally, some implications of the findings for social workers within the youth service are discussed, and suggestions for future research are presented.

The general premise for the overall aim of the thesis was that the investigated females are a group of offenders with limited delinquency. The results from Studies 1 and 2 confirmed this assumption, both in regard to the amount and frequency of criminal behavior, as well as the type of crimes they have taken part in. Their self-reports in Study 1 showed that their reporting of involvement in delinquent behavior, as well as drug and alcohol use, 12 months prior to starting youth service was more in line with a reference group of females (i.e., moderate/low) than with a group of females in residential care (i.e., high). Their limited delinquency was also supported by the follow-up results in Study 2, which showed that the majority of the females did not re-offend within two years after being sentenced to youth service (70% had no new suspicions and 86% had no new convictions). The majority of the crimes they self-reported and were suspected and/or convicted of included minor offenses, e.g., non-violent crimes.

The area where the young females showed the most pronounced problems was in connection to school. According to their self-reports in Study 1, the young females had achieved poorly in school. For example, 30% of the females reported either having dropped out or never beginning upper secondary school. In addition, 20% reported being suspended at some point during their schooling and 28% reported being held back a class. Further, 32% reported...
receiving special education and 14% stated that they had been given adjusted study programs. More than half of the females, a higher proportion compared to the reference group, also reported having six or more school-related problems (e.g., trouble with reading/math, truancy, problems with teacher). However, they reported that they enjoyed school at all stages in compulsory school, to some or a high degree. The low level of educational attainment was confirmed by the official data in Study 2, based on the females’ grades at two time points during adolescence, i.e., at the end of compulsory school and at the end of upper secondary school, respectively. Their educational attainment was lower than adolescent females in general, both at the end of compulsory and upper secondary school. This was true for the group at large, irrespective of whether they reoffended or not. Based on their self-reports from Study 1 regarding delinquency, school problems and school satisfaction, we only found a significant relationship between self-reported school problems and educational attainment in upper secondary school, showing that higher levels of self-reported school problems were negatively correlated with grade points. This indicates that the females who reported the highest level of problems in compulsory school were also those with the lower grade point average in upper secondary school. This suggests that the females have a conception of their school functioning that is in line with their actual performance.

The qualitative part of the thesis, Studies 3 and 4, showed that when describing their delinquency, the females regarded their peers and family as being important in several ways. Peers were considered to be important in all aspects of the crime: the reasons leading up to it, the delinquent act in itself, as well as in desisting. As such, delinquency was described as a way to socialize with friends and delinquent peers and group dynamics were described as important factors contributing to their delinquent behavior. In the same way, having non-delinquent and pro-social peers were described to be important for desisting. The influence of peers was, however, not described as a unidirectional process; rather these dynamics were expressed as being a process that was created by all the members of the peer groups, including themselves. Likewise, familial relationships, almost exclusively synonymous with parents, were given a prominent role in the entire delinquency process. In the prologue of the crime, delinquency was described as a consequence of the relation to the family. However, no direct blame was put on the parents for their actions. When the delinquency entered the family, weight was given to the family’s actions and reactions to the crimes, where parents got angry, upset, sad, showed support, or a combination of these, or displayed a lack of reaction. In return, the females also described feelings of guilt, shame and remorse in response to their family’s actions and reactions. Yet, these feelings were not described as reasons for desisting from future delinquency. In the aftermath of the crime, the females described changes in the family relations as something that the crimes had caused, both in an immediate and in a longer-term perspective. For some, this was described as having a negative effect on the relationships, where for others it had brought them closer to their family. Although the females regarded that familial relationships had both contributed
Characteristics of the females – limited delinquency, and low educational attainment

Although they had been convicted of a crime, the moderate levels of delinquency and low levels of drug and alcohol use reported, together with the low rates of recidivism, suggest that the females’ involvement in delinquent acts is likely not to be a manifestation of a criminal lifestyle. Rather, as self-reports of low-frequency delinquency and risky behaviors of different kinds, taken together, are shown to be common among adolescent females in general, these behaviors may be regarded as normative, although not optimal, during this period of life (Born et al., 2015; Gutman et al., 2017; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Moffitt, 2006).

The results regarding social relations in Study 1 showed that the females reported spending the same amount of time with delinquent peers, as well as non-delinquent peers, as did the reference group. In addition, they reported having experienced abuse (emotional, physical and sexual) in their romantic relationships to the same degree as the reference females. Regarding mental health, based on a checklist of 41 different psychological and emotional reactions, the females’ self-reports were in line with the reporting of the reference group, i.e., low. These findings enhance the picture of this being a group of offenders whose convictions might be explained by a non-deviant increase in problematic behaviors during adolescence. Regarding their family situation, the results from Study 1 were not entirely conclusive. The results suggest a seeming contradiction in the description of their parents. On the one hand – compared to the reference group – they reported elevated problems regarding abuse from a parental figure, as well as parents having mental health problems. In contrast to these results, a higher proportion of the investigated females than the reference group reported having no problems in their relationships with their mother and father respectively. This discrepancy could be due to the females wanting, in some ways, to protect their parents, or idealizing them, hence under-reporting some negative aspects of their relationship to their parents. Or perhaps they do not view these as affecting their relationships negatively. Although these results should be interpreted with caution, they do indicate elevated, although perhaps not prominent, problems concerning family. This is particularly important because family problems such as physical abuse and mental health problems have been stressed in previous studies highlighting the importance of family dysfunction in connection to female delinquents who display more serious criminal behavior (Kroneman et al., 2009). Perhaps the quality of family relationships...
is an area that should also receive further attention among females with limited delinquency, such as in this sample.

Of the investigated life areas, the females showed most prominent problems regarding school. In Study 1, they reported different types of school problems and school failure, not only to a higher degree than the reference group, but in some cases also more in line with the reports of the residential group. In Study 2, the females showed lower educational attainment both in compulsory as well as upper secondary school, compared to females their age in general. This is in line with previous studies, indicating that delinquent females receiving non-residential measures have school-related problems (Patino et al., 2006). Delinquent females in general have also been shown to perform academically lower than their conventional peers (Siennick & Staff, 2008). What is noteworthy about our findings is that the low level of education found in our group of female delinquents is in line with findings from samples of female delinquents with more extensive behavioral problems (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Lowery, 2004; Henneberger, Oudekerk, Reppucci, & Odgers, 2014). For example, Henneberger et al. (2014) found that 62% of their sample of incarcerated females had an education level lower than upper secondary school. Although the youth service females differ from these samples of young offenders, in regard to level of delinquency, they seem to be similar in regards to their low levels of education. This finding is important, as previous research has mostly focused on the educational attainment of female offenders who display more persistent and/or extensive criminal behavior. We found no difference in educational attainment between those who reoffended and the non-recidivists. This could be due to matter of statistical power, and/or lack of incomplete follow-up data on the entire group. Nevertheless, it is striking that both groups displayed lower educational attainment compared to the average female adolescent regarding grade points both in compulsory school as well as upper secondary school.

Longitudinal studies of female cohorts who desist from delinquency post-adolescence have shown that they continue to display difficulties in other life areas, education being one of them (Moretti, et al., 2011; Odgers et al., 2008). The risks of exclusion and sub-optimal development following low or incomplete education during adolescence are well established (e.g., Tyler, Johnson, & Brownridge, 2008), where education in the later years of adolescence has been shown to be predictive of important transitions into adult life (Nilsson & Estrada, 2009). For example, academic success in upper secondary school leads to access to further studies as well as employment, not only in Sweden, but internationally as well (Ford & Schroeder, 2011; Xia, Fosco, & Feinberg, 2016). These studies have shown that it has become increasingly more difficult to establish oneself in the labor market if lacking a high school education. The high incidence of school failure in the present group is therefore troublesome. Not paying attention to these young females’ school situation is likely to affect their future quality of life. Although the majority of the females did not re-offend, their relatively low educational
attainment could still lead to other forms of exclusions and sub-optimal development as desistance from criminal behavior may not necessarily imply an escape from maladjustment in other areas of life (Lanctôt, 2015).

The females’ own perspectives – the importance of peers and family

The results from the qualitative part of the thesis showed that the females viewed their peers and family as being vital in connection to their delinquency. Although described as separate, both of these relationships were regarded as important in several ways for the processes leading up to their delinquent behavior, as well as for the aftermath of the crimes committed. The females made few connections between the role of their family and the role of their peers in their descriptions of their delinquency. These two types of relationships were portrayed as two distinct, yet parallel, worlds. It is possible that this, in fact, is not the case and that there are more connections and links between these two parts of the young participants’ lives. However, as described and interpreted by the females themselves, peers and family represented two different, although maybe equally important, parts of their lives, which, in different ways, are connected, influenced and affected by their delinquent behavior. This is a finding in itself and could perhaps be an illustration of the typical process of separation from parents and movement toward peers, due to the striving for independence common during this period of life.

The main findings from Study 3 showed that the females described friends and boyfriends to be of significance, both in their life in general, as well as in connection to their delinquency. In the interviews, peers were described as being important sources of intimacy and support, thus serving a positive function for the females. The closeness and significance ascribed to their peers, together with the more time spent with them, can be interpreted as part of typical development (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). The negative aspects of their peer relations that they described, for example, fighting, feeling betrayed and ending friendships, can in the same way be viewed as typical adolescent relationships, where conflicts and experiencing failure in connection to friends are common during this age (Brown, 2004).

The females regarded peers as an important factor in their delinquent behavior, both in connection to committing crimes, as well as in desisting. Accordingly, they described the importance of non-delinquent peers for avoiding future delinquency. Committing crime was described as a way to socialize, and something they did in the company of peers, much like any other pro-social activity. Engaging in delinquency in the company of friends was described as having many redeeming qualities, such as contributing to a positive sense of belonging and sharing experiences together. This is line with previous studies
(Bottrell, Armstrong, & France, 2010; Miller, Winn, Taylor, & Wiki, 2012) where delinquent activities have been described to fulfill the same meaningful qualities of social bonding and connection as other social recreations typical of teenagers. The different types of activities they mentioned engaging in with their friends, which most often involved unstructured ones, including delinquency, can be interpreted as trying to find themselves, what they like and discover what they want to do. The peer group can, in this regard, be considered as an arena to explore possible identity concerns and new social roles (Brown & Larson, 2009).

The females also described their delinquent behavior as a consequence of group dynamics, where friends and partners’ behaviors and attitudes influenced the females regarding their own delinquent behavior. This is in line with previous findings showing that peers both direct and influence youths’ behavior in different ways, and are thus an important contributing factor in young people’s delinquent behavior (Brauer & De Coster, 2015; McGloin & Dipietro, 2013; Warr, 2002; Wike et al., 2013). When describing the influence of peers and boyfriends, the females portrayed this process as the result of individuals, including themselves, collectively creating peer pressure and delinquent norms that served as a frame of reference for how to behave in that particular group. Although some females in hindsight expressed that they had behaved in ways they did not really want to or had let others decide for them, no explicit expressions of coercion were implied. This suggests that peer pressure is not always a one-directional process, but rather a reciprocal group procedure in which young people can be both recipients and producers of influence in the group at the same time. This is in accordance with Brown’s (2004) definition of peer pressure evident in most groups of adolescents. It is thus important not to mistake influence with coercion in regard to how delinquent peers influence a young person’s behavior.

The females’ description of their family showed that parents and siblings were also of importance, both in connection to their delinquency, as well as in their life in general. It was apparent that the participants valued their family and ascribed great significance to them. They, for example, expressed emotional needs for being close to, seen and liked by their parents, and that their parents’ response to these needs affected their wellbeing. They also described being close to siblings, where these sometimes were considered as close friends. While demonstrating that they, on the one hand, want to be close to their parents and strive to win their acceptance, they also described wanting to achieve autonomy and make decisions on their own. This ambivalence is part of one of the developmental goals during adolescents, which includes developing increasing autonomy while, at the same time, maintaining a strong sense of connection and a meaningful emotional bond with parents (Peterson, 2005; Steinberg, 2001). The aspects of the themes that were regarded to reflect expressions of either proximity or distance can be viewed as capturing the ambivalent qualities of this process. In the same way, the participants’ view of the role of their family in connection to their delinquency, can be interpreted
as an expression of the same process. For example, shoplifting or stealing the things they felt that they need or want, was for some described as an expression and statement of financial independence from their parents, while shoplifting for others was a way to get attention and be seen by parents. As such, the females are no different than typical adolescent females in their need for emotional closeness as well as desiring behavioral autonomy. The exception is that they, among other things, may be using delinquency to express these needs. In this view, taking part in delinquent acts can, for these females, be interpreted as part of their autonomy development (Chen, 2010). This finding points to the importance of supporting the females’ needs to be more autonomous in ways that are pro-social.

Another key aspect identified in the themes in Study 4 was regarded as conveying transactions. This was to illustrate the interactive process in which the adolescent and the family mutually influence each other, conceptualizing the family context as a reciprocal system (Kerr & Stattin, 2003). This was illustrated in how the females described their parents’ reactions to their children’s delinquency, which, in return, made the females feel a certain way. These transactions in connection to their delinquency were most often portrayed as something negative, where, for example, committing a crime created conflict with the parents and put friction in the relationship. For some, this had resulted in a negative effect on the relationships, for example, a decrease in trust. These conflicts and frictions can, however, be seen as normal and needed. The development of autonomy has been suggested to be dependent on the quality of the relationships between the adolescent and parents and on how parents and their teenagers negotiate conflicts and maintain their relationship (Moretti & Peled, 2004; Smetana, 2011). As such, conflicts between parents and adolescents can be regarded as a process through which the adolescent relationship transformation occurs. When children become adolescents, they want to make more decisions on their own and should be allowed certain autonomy to grow and develop a sense of self (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Most often, conflicts are necessary for this process, and depending on the context, even viewed as beneficial to healthy development (Adams & Laursen, 2001). To this point, there are some descriptions of how the turbulent period in connection to the delinquency had resulted in an improved relationship to parents, i.e., brought them closer than before. Despite talking about how the family relationships had both contributed to their offending as well as been affected by it, no one attributed any blame to their parents or spoke of their family as a factor that could help prevent future delinquency. This is contrasted to how they viewed peers in connection to their delinquency, giving weight to these relationships both for committing crimes, as well as desisting. This could be interpreted as the females lacking to view their parents, and in extension the adult world, as an opportunity to change their behavior.

Finally, although we did not specifically ask about peers and/or family, these two relationships were mentioned by all of the participants when describing
their delinquency in depth. In contrast, other topics that have been suggested as being important for the occurrence of delinquency, were mentioned only in periphery or not at all, such as the topic of school. Unpublished data from the interviews containing descriptions of the females talking about their school situation and view on their education later in life showed that they seldom talked about school in connection to their delinquency. Although some of the females described how some of their delinquency and/or norm-breaking behaviors took place within the context of school, they did not reflect further on the meaning of education for their delinquency. The little material available where the females described school or education at all, consisted merely of descriptive information, indicating that they did not see any connection between how school was going and their delinquent behavior. When they mentioned school, it was mainly to say that they were happy in their school situation, i.e., enrolled in a study program of interest, or in contrast to this, not enjoying school and dissatisfied with the program study of choice. They all, however, expressed an ambition to continue with higher education, where some had a positive view on their school situation, despite their delinquency, and others displayed some concerns. The females’ lack of mentioning school in connection to their delinquency is an important finding in itself. It shows that, when probed openly to describe their delinquency, they do not consider school, as opposed to peers and family, as important in connection to their criminal behavior. The reasons as to why that is, can only be speculative. Based on the quantitative part of the thesis, which shows low school performance for the group at large, this result, or lack of such, is, however, interesting and noteworthy. Especially as the females did express a will and wish to continue to higher education. A previous study on young offenders’ own views about their education in connection to their delinquency, showed that despite challenges and difficulties in their school experiences, they still expressed aspirations regarding their future and valued their education (Sander et al., 2010). In line with these results, Reed and Wexler (2014) found that young offenders do not necessarily lack interest in pursuing education, but rather are failing due to lack of support and a disconnection to the educational system (Reed & Wexler, 2014). Whether or not this is the case for the investigated group can only be speculated, as more research is needed to discover the reasons why they are failing.

**Delinquency and its connection to identity development**

A meta-analysis (Kroger et al., 2010) examining the developmental patterns of identity status changes during adolescence found that occurrence of moratoriums rose steadily up until the age of 19, followed by a firm decline thereafter. As most of the females were 15–17 when committing the crimes of which they were convicted, it can be assumed that they were, perhaps, in search of their identities during that time, what Josselson (1996) referred to as searchers. This stage of identity development is often described as a
challenging part of the process, where young people often are occupied with exploration and discovery sometime leading to crisis and internal conflicts (Erikson, 1968). For many, the search and exploration process will involve opposing parental and societal rules, which may lead to participating in delinquency. In fact, both delinquency and identity formation have been theoretically conceptualized to be developmentally linked during adolescence (e.g., Mercer, Crocetti, Branje, Van Lier, & Meeus, 2017). For example, Moffitt’s (1993) description of adolescence, with the challenges of the maturity gap and the need for autonomy and independence runs parallel to how Erikson (1980) described the adolescent being caught in a role ambiguity (i.e., psychosocial moratorium), trying to let go of childhood identifications while at the same time exploring new interest, beliefs and views in order to develop a new more adult personal identity. Delinquency could also be related more explicitly to identity development in that delinquent behaviors of different kinds can be used as a mean for identity exploration. The identity process can also be used to understand the process of recidivism and desistance. For example, the maturational theory of desistance proposed by Massoglia and Uggen (2010) can be used to provide a general understanding of the high level of desistance for the females. Applying the theory to the present findings, it can be presumed that those who managed to abstain from crime could have, perhaps, moved away from this stage and achieved a more mature self-view, while those who have not may still be in search (e.g., drifters). This theory has empirical support in studies that have found that a mature self-view plays a critical role in the process of desistance (Walters, 2018).

The process of maturation and identity achievement is one of reciprocal interaction between the individual and a social context that provides opportunities and possibilities for exploration. The interaction between the individual and context has been stressed in Erikson’s (1980) psychosocial theory of development, where these interactions have been given weight for the formation of identity (Kroger, 2015). Both Moffitt (1993) and Erikson (1980) emphasized how the balance between the young person and those surrounding the adolescent have bearing for the development of identify as well as occurrence of delinquency. This perspective can be used to understand for example the role the females ascribed to both peers and family in relation to their delinquency. If the adolescent’s social context is lacking in this respect, it will not promote such a development. The females’ descriptions of how their delinquency affected their parents’ actions and reactions, which, in turn, had affected their own feelings, indicates that there is a reciprocal influence in the adolescent–parent relationships, as suggested by previous scholars (Kerr & Stattin, 2003). Due to the ambivalence in the parent–child relationships expressed by the females in the interviews, in addition to the inconsistent results in the self-reports in Study 1 regarding parents, perhaps the females need help to understand these relational aspects and support to better appreciate what happens in this phase of life.
Implications

The rehabilitative part of youth service, i.e., the advocacy programs, most commonly used in the city where the females had completed their sentence (Zamora, 2011), as well as interventions for offenders in general (Andrews & Bonta, 2010) have largely focused on criminal behavior with the intent to reduce recidivism. As is evident from the present results, many of the females that the youth service come in contact with do not display extensive criminality, but rather display limited levels of delinquency, as well as low rates of re-offending. They do, however, show poor educational attainment and a need for support to complete their education. It is reasonable to assume that a large number of the young females within youth service are at risk for further exclusion. These findings suggest that perhaps the content of these programs is not suitable for the rehabilitation of these young offenders. Interventions aimed at this group may instead be less focused on criminal behavior and more focus should be put in helping the females through other sectors than the juvenile justice system, such as school. This is in line with previous suggestions that the youth justice system may not always be the best arena for supporting delinquent females, but that rather provisions within mainstream youth services would be a better approach in supporting their needs (Sharpe, 2010).

The low levels of re-offending suggest that applying the Risk–Need–Responsivity principle (Andrews & Bonta, 2010) may not be suitable for this group of offenders, as this principle would imply no or little need for interventions due to low risk of recidivism. However, using the Good Lives Model (Ward & Brown, 2004), and following its philosophy, it is important to support the females’ education, not just because it might be connected to rates of recidivism, which the results in Study 2 imply that it may not be, but because of the potential life-enhancing effects it could have in itself (van Damme et al., 2017). The results concerning educational failure, in line with previous findings, also point to the significance of not only following up on this group of offenders based on criminality. Instead, it may be equally important to look at other areas of life in answering how well female delinquents with limited delinquency are developing following their desistance (Lanctôt, 2015).

The qualitative findings suggest that taking part in delinquent acts, in some ways, from the females’ own perspectives fulfill the needs for autonomy, socializing and belonging. In line with previous qualitative studies, these results point to the importance of supporting these young adolescents to find pro-social contexts, behaviors and resources that meet their needs of expressing their independence, as well as their need for belonging and intimacy (Bottrell et al., 2010; Farrell, Thompson, & Mehari, 2017). One such action can be to guide the females in finding meaningful structured activities to take part in or help the young females to find other social contexts that fulfill these needs. Engaging young offenders in structured community resources has
been shown to promote positive peer affiliation and pro-social behavior, thus not only reducing delinquency, but also fostering positive development (Smith et al., 2016). This is also important, as the females mentioned few or, for some, no structured activities that they partook in. Finally, as the females, in many regards, view their peers, delinquent or not, as great sources of meaning where these relationships fulfill many developmental needs, it is important to acknowledge the positive feelings attributed to the peer group, and to provide other social contexts that fulfill the same type of needs. Because the females describe having access to non-delinquent peers besides their delinquent friends, practitioners could thus encourage the females to move closer to non-delinquent groups, which is more realistic and doable than developing a completely new network of friends.

Future research

The exploratory approach of the present thesis provides guidance and motivation for future research regarding this particular group. In order to draw definitive conclusions about the characteristics about female offenders with limited delinquency, further studies are needed. As school was the area of life where the females displayed the greatest problems, it is important to pay further attention to educational attainment and problems. For example, a follow-up study in young adulthood investigating how the females are doing in regard to further education and employment would be valuable. This is important, as previous research has suggested that female offenders’ academic development tends to be delayed compared with their non-delinquent peers (Beyer, 2001). Future research could also investigate the females’ own views and reflection over the role and relation of school to their delinquency more in depth. As enjoyment was high but performance low, further exploration of how these two factors are connected would also be of value.

Research studying young offenders has, for the most part, focused on problematic development. Although problematic outcomes of youth development in general have continued to dominate the field, this approach has been accompanied by an increase in positive youth development. This view does not only view positive development as lack of problem behaviors, but rather aims to understand the relation between individual strengths and recourses within their social contexts in order to promote thriving (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006; Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015). Future research could therefore apply this approach when studying the characteristics of female offenders. The present results indicate that the females do not only display problems, but also have certain strengths. One such example is that the females reported to enjoy school despite displaying low performance. This finding should be regarded as a potential strength, as it implies that school-related efforts are feasible for this group.
Another possible strength is the fact that the females self-reported in Study 1 to have access to non-delinquent peers in addition to friends who engage in norm-breaking behavior, which was also apparent in the interviews in Study 3. This is essential, as having access to non-delinquent peers can contribute to avoiding the kind of encapsulation effect Haynie (2002) described in interaction with solely delinquent peers. Further studies may thus focus not solely on the importance of delinquent peers in connection to female delinquency, but also the role of pro-social relations. Also, as delinquent behavior was described to occur within a peer context, encouraged by group dynamics within the young females’ circle of friends, it would be interesting to gain a more comprehensive understanding of these group dynamics. This could be accomplished by more closely studying how these unfold in the context of delinquent behavior. Perhaps this approach would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the influencing process described by the females, in which they were both recipients and producers of influence in the peer group.

Furthermore, as the results showed that the majority of the females did not re-offend, it would be of interest to further explore the reasons and mechanisms to their desisting. There are few studies that have looked at the pathways out of crime, especially in regards to female offenders (Goodson & Morash, 2017; Rodermond, Kruttschnitt, Slotboom, & Bijleveld, 2016), with emphasis on how identity development could offer an understanding of this process. It would therefore be relevant to conduct research relating to this topic, by examining if and how the females’ identity development is connected to their delinquency in the first place, but more importantly, in their pathways out of crime.

**Strengths and limitations**

There is a great need to address this study population and examine all available information about the characteristics of adolescent females with limited delinquency. The different studies shown here contribute to this need, which is the main contribution of the thesis. Another strength is that it includes a total population of all young females sentenced to youth service in a major city during a five-year period, thus including a large sample that otherwise would have been difficult to collect data on. Furthermore, the multi-method approach yields a more comprehensive view of the difficulties shown, compared to a single method. Despite the noted strengths and contributions, there are several limitations to the different studies that need to be addressed. One has to do with ADAD and the comparison material used in Study 1. ADAD was initially intended for a group of young people with more extensive problems, e.g., young addicts and young people with profound social problems. Given these issues, it is possible that the instrument does not adequately capture the problems within the present group. Also, as ADAD is a problem-oriented
instrument, it does not consider positive aspects of the youth’s lives or the resources young people have (Hermodsson, & Carpelan, 2004). The variations in response options, some dichotomous, others on an ordinal scale, led to difficulties in the analysis of data. Also, for some behaviors, only one single-item indicator was available. The use of a single item for one construct or behavior has its limitations, as this may not fully represent or capture the complex phenomena measured (i.e., have low content validity) and may lack a measure of internal-consistency reliability. The reliability for the delinquency scale in Study 2 was also low, which had to do with there being no or little variations in most of the items included, where most of the females reported only having committed shoplifting, which if deleted would have yielded in a Cronbach’s alpha of .64. The data used (Ybrandt & Nordqvist, 2015) for comparison is also limited in that we did not have access to individual data, instead only to what was available in the report. Also, some relevant information was not always specified (e.g., standard deviations for different checklists or frequencies divided by gender) by the authors, limiting our ability to perform statistical analyses. Another limitation of the comparison material was the high dropout rate in the reference group, which could have implications for the interpretation of data. Nevertheless, it is most likely that it is the less well-adjusted females who declined to participate, indicating an underestimation of problem severity for the reference group. However, this should not be regarded as a major limitation, as only very high scores for all dropouts would substantially change the results. It should also be noted that the data collection occurred in different settings for all three groups. The present study group and the group of residential females were interviewed in a personal meeting with staff members, whereas the reference group self-reported information via telephone interviews to a researcher. It is possible that the willingness and motivations of the females in the youth service group in sharing certain information was impacted by the setting. The two comparison groups also differed from the youth service group in that they covered a larger age range, which also could have had some implications for the results, mainly regarding school. However, as important these aspects are for consideration, they do not change the main results. Having these comparisons offers an opportunity to compare the uniqueness, or lack thereof, of the problems in different areas for the investigated females. Although having its limitations, ADAD and the comparison material offers a unique set of data for this group of offenders who are highly under-researched. The need to gain more knowledge about the characteristics of this group of offenders, we believe, overrides the shortcomings of ADAD and the comparison material available, as the alternative would have been to not conduct any studies at all.

A limitation pertaining to Study 2 is that we do not have complete follow-up data regarding recidivism for all individuals or information regarding school for those who completed upper secondary school 2015 and later. This means that only a sub-portion of the females could be included in the analysis regarding, for example, the relation between recidivism and education. Also, there are limitations to measuring rates of recidivism with registered
criminality only, as these are not ideal data and should be complemented by, for example, self-reported data. Both suspicion and conviction rates as measure for recidivism have problems with underestimation because an unknown number of offenses may go undetected, as these numbers do not account for all crimes committed. The use of self-reports can overcome the potential problems related to underestimation. However, these have their own limitations, such as poor recall, problems with participation and over- as well as under-reporting. And finally, the self-reports regarding delinquency, school problems and school satisfaction was gathered at the start of youth service and asked for retrospective information. It could be that school satisfaction, for example, had declined in upper secondary school and that those who were less satisfied with their school situation also had lower grades.

Both Studies 1 and 2 used non-parametric tests, which has both its advantages as well as disadvantages. The reason for choosing this method of analysis was mainly that the data used was not normally distributed, including people who could be considered outliers. Also, the items in ADAD were mostly on an ordinal and categorical scale. For these reasons, non-parametric analyses seemed more appropriate, despite that these have lower power compared to parametric approaches. This is important to take into consideration, as the lack of differences found in some cases, for example, in educational attainment between the recidivists and the non-recidivists could perhaps be due to matter of statistical power, where the smaller sample size in the reoffender group could have exacerbated this problem. Also, as multiple statistical comparisons were used, the risk of making a Type I error increases. The reason for not correcting for multiple comparisons (such as a Bonferroni correction) was the fear of losing power, which was already a problem from using non-parametric tests, as well as having a small sample sizes for some subgroups. We found it important to avoid making Type II errors and missing significant results, and decided to go with the solution chosen. Due to these limitations, more research is needed to validate and replicate the present findings in order to draw more conclusive conclusions and be able to further generalize the results.

Another limitation in regard to Study 3 and 4, was the difficulty in recruiting participants, leading to a small convenience sample used. One female enrolled in youth service during the inclusion period was regarded by the social service as unfit to take part and was therefore not asked to partake. Due to this being a group of offenders deemed to have limited special care needs, it can be presumed that they represent delinquent females with fewer behavioral problems and that the results may not be of relevance for female offenders with more severe antisocial behavior. Having used only data from participants living in major cities could have some implications on the findings. Including participants from smaller towns or female offenders living in the countryside may have yielded different results. The interview guide did not include questions relating specifically to family or peers, but rather consisted of general inquiries about the participants’ views of what had led them to their delinquent behavior. Therefore, questions relating specifically to family/peers
were not asked unless in forms of follow-up questions relating to topics raised by the participants themselves. However, one can also view the spontaneous focus on family and peers without any directions from the interviewer as a strength in that it shows that these areas of life are a major part of their delinquent behavior and what they themselves consider important when freely describing their delinquent behavior. The fact that the females, when asked freely about their delinquency, do not relate school to it is interesting, and a result in itself. However, due to lack of data we were not able to further investigate this area, which was shown to be one of the areas of great need in the quantitative material. Finally, one needs to consider potential reasons that may motivate the participants to present themselves in more positive terms by, for example, understating their delinquent behavior. However, from my point of view, they were all willing participants who were comfortable in sharing their stories.

Conclusions

There is a lack of knowledge concerning the characteristics of young female offenders without pronounced behavioral problems. The data collected through self-reports at the beginning of youth service was further complemented with a 24-month follow-up with registry data from registered criminality records, educational attainment records and social service records. In addition, in-depth interviews with females sentenced to youth service were held to explore the females’ own views of factors relating to their delinquency. Although being convicted of a crime, the young females displayed limited self-reported delinquency 12 months prior to starting their referral, and low rates of recidivism within two years after being sentenced. The area of life where they showed the greatest problems concerned their education, where the majority displayed low or incomplete grades from compulsory and upper secondary school, clearly below average for females their age. This suggests that although the females are limited in their delinquency, and do not re-offend to a high degree, their low levels of education could still put them at risk for sub-optimal development. According to the qualitative data, the females ascribed particular importance to peers and family when describing their delinquency. Peers were described to be an important factor for all aspects of the crime: the reasons leading up to the crimes and the act as such, as well as for continuing or desisting with delinquent behavior. As such, delinquent friends were described as promoting and influencing their delinquent behavior, while pro-social relationships, from their own perspective, appeared to have a protective influence in their desisting. As with peers, the family relations were given a prominent role in the entire delinquency process. Relations with parents were described as contributing to the occurrence of delinquency, and at the same time be affected by it. However, in contrast to how they viewed peers, their family was not directly blamed for their involvement in crime, nor did they view them as potential resources of
desistance. The narratives of the females illustrate that the process of delinquency in relation to peers and family involve dynamic and mutually influential exchanges, conveying these contexts as reciprocal systems where individuals equally affect and/or influence each other. Although portrayed as separate and contributing and being affected by the crimes in different ways, peers and family were described as being equally important to this process. As described by the females, some parts of their delinquency, in connection to their interpersonal relationships, can be viewed as part of typical development during adolescence.
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