

The American Institute for the Advancement of Forensic Studies



Desistance from Crime

The study of desistance from crime examines why individuals exit their life of criminal offending. In relation to other fields of study in the arena of criminology, the body of knowledge is limited, yet growing. This makes it an exciting time for inquisitive criminal justice practitioners to learn of this fascinating school of thought. Currently, the field of Corrections embraces the Risk-Needs-Responsivity model as its modus operandi. Moreover, while the R-N-R model is anchored in the analysis of why individuals entered into a life of criminal behavior, the emerging desistance models explore and are grounded in how individuals exit said lifestyle.

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Fast Facts

- The term Desistance refers to the process of exiting from a life of crime.
- Desistance is a process and not a singular event, involving lapses and relapses.
- It is important to note that the absence of risk factors does not equate to the acquisition of desistance.
- There is no singular unifying theory of desistance, but rather several emerging theories of the phenomenon.
- The *Age-Graded Social Control Theory* focuses on the bond between an individual and society. Those having more social capital in adulthood, e.g. quality marriages and fulfilling employment, will be more likely to desist.¹
- Those who criminally offend can be classified as two types: *Adolescent-limited offenders* and *Life-course persistent offenders*.² This should be a consideration for those who supervise these populations.
- The *Theory of Cognitive Transformation* posits that, among other things, the desistance process involves the envisioning of an appealing conventional "Replacement Self".³
- Desistance appears to be related to both external/societal aspects of a person's life, as well as internal/psychological factors.⁴
- The traditional R-N-R model and the emerging strength-based desistance models are not in competition of each other, but rather opposite ends of a continuum, e.g. the process of crime acquisition versus crime cessation.⁵

References

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