

Developmental Trajectories of Defacements: a Longitudinal Study among Hackers in The Netherlands

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Studies examining the onset, persistence and cessation of offending greatly improved our understanding of the longitudinal patterns of criminality. These studies demonstrate that there is variability in the pathways and trajectories of offenders, though there is substantial versatility in offending over the life course. However, the vast majority of the literature related to offender careers has largely focused on traditional types of crime, while there is virtually no research to date considering the careers of those who engage in cybercrimes. This is the first study in which developmental trajectories are estimated for a large group of hackers. The data for this study consist of 50,332 web defacements performed by 3,642 hackers who targeted any website hosted in the Netherlands between 2010 and 2017. Using semi-parametric group-based trajectory analyses, five different groups of defacers were distinguished: two low-level offending groups, two medium-level offending group and one high chronic group. The smallest group of 33 high chronic defacers (0.9%) was responsible for almost half of all web defacements. Additionally, the motivations, methods and targeting practices of defacers differed based on the frequency with which they performed defacements generally.