

Childhood and Adolescent Television Viewing and Antisocial Behavior in Early Adulthood.

Lindsay A. Robertson, Helena M. McAnally, and Robert J. Hancox, *Pediatrics*, February 18, 2013

Children and adolescents who watch a lot of television are more likely to manifest antisocial and criminal behavior when they become adults, according to a new University of Otago, New Zealand, study published online in the journal *Pediatrics*. The study followed a group of around 1,000 children born in the New Zealand city of Dunedin in 1972-73. Every two years between the ages of 5 and 15, they were asked how much television they watched. Those who watched more television were more likely to have a criminal conviction and were also more likely to have antisocial personality traits in adulthood.

Study co-author Associate Professor Bob Hancox of the University's Department of Preventive and Social Medicine says he and colleagues found that the risk of having a criminal conviction by early adulthood increased by about 30% with every hour that children spent watching TV on an average weeknight.

The study also found that watching more television in childhood was associated, in adulthood, with aggressive personality traits, an increased tendency to experience negative emotions, and an increased risk of antisocial personality disorder -- a psychiatric disorder characterized by persistent patterns of aggressive and antisocial behavior. The researchers found that the relationship between TV viewing and antisocial behavior was not explained by socio-economic status, aggressive or antisocial behavior in early childhood, or parenting factors.

A study co-author, L. Robertson, says it is not that children who were already antisocial watched more television. "Rather, children who watched a lot of television were likely to go on to manifest antisocial behavior and personality traits."

Other studies have suggested a link between television viewing and antisocial behavior, though very few have been able to demonstrate a cause-and-effect sequence. This is the first 'real-life' study that has asked about TV viewing throughout the whole childhood period, and has looked at a range of antisocial outcomes in adulthood. As an observational study, it cannot prove that watching too much television caused the antisocial outcomes, but the findings are consistent with most of the research and

provides further evidence that excessive television can have long-term consequences for behavior.

"Antisocial behavior is a major problem for society. While we're not saying that television causes all antisocial behavior, our findings do suggest that reducing TV viewing could go some way towards reducing rates of antisocial behavior in society," says Associate Professor Hancox.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children should watch no more than 1 to 2 hours of quality television programming each day. The researchers say their findings support the idea that parents should try to limit their children's television use. This research emerges from the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study. The Study is run by the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Research Unit, which is supported by the Health Research Council of New Zealand.

1. Lindsay A. Robertson, Helena M. McAnally, and Robert J. Hancox. **Childhood and Adolescent Television Viewing and Antisocial Behavior in Early Adulthood**. *Pediatrics*, February 18, 2013 DOI: [10.1542/peds.2012-1582](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2012-1582)

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<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2013/02/13/peds.2012-1582.full.pdf+html>