

# Excessive TV in childhood linked to long-term antisocial behaviour

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Children and adolescents who watch a lot of television are more likely to manifest antisocial and criminal behaviour when they become adults, according to a new University of Otago, New Zealand, study published online in the US journal *Pediatrics*.

The study followed a group of around 1000 [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 characterised by persistent patterns of aggressive and antisocial behaviour.

The researchers found that the relationship between TV viewing and antisocial behaviour was not explained by socio-economic status,

aggressive or antisocial behaviour in early childhood, or parenting factors.

A study co-author, Lindsay 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 behaviour and personality traits."

Other studies have suggested a link between [television viewing](#) and antisocial behaviour, 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 behaviour.

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

Provided by University of Otago

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