

Study links adolescent bullies to criminal behavior later

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(Medical Xpress)—Adults who say they bullied others when they were adolescents may have a higher likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior later in life, according to new research from UT Dallas.

The study, which appeared in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, examined data gathered on a group of more than 400 men over the course of several decades.

"This is the largest long-term study of bullying behavior," said Dr. Nadine Connell, assistant professor of [criminology](#) and co-author of the paper. "This is important because it helps us gauge whether bullying is a risk factor for determining continued adverse behavior well into late-middle adulthood."

The authors looked at a data set of men in their mid-50s who had grown up with similar backgrounds in Britain. All came from comparable, working-class socio-economic backgrounds, typically from two-parent families.

Of those who reported that they bullied others as teenagers, nearly half went on to engage in some form of criminal behavior including theft, [burglary](#) and assault.

"We also found that these men were more likely to be [repeat offenders](#) and at a much higher rate," said Dr. Alex Piquero, Ashbel Smith Professor of Criminology at UT Dallas and co-author of the study along

with Dr. Nicole Leeper Piquero, professor of criminology and associate dean for graduate programs in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences.

Piquero and Connell also noted that those who reported bullying behavior did so at a time when bullying was not so widely publicized. This means that those who engaged in such behaviors were probably reporting the most frequent and most severe behaviors.

"These are likely very conservative estimates to begin with," Connell said. "So the correlation we found between [risk factors](#) for bullying and later criminal activity is compelling."

Both researchers noted that risk factors for bullying behavior, including individual and family circumstances, also predicted later criminal activity. Some of these risk factors included poor performance in school, impulsivity, poor parental supervision, family disruption, and dilapidated living conditions.

"From a policy perspective, if we can address some of these risk factors early and identify children who are at risk of bullying, we can ameliorate adverse outcomes that may occur much later in life," Piquero said.

Although much needed attention has been given to victims of bullying, this research indicates that early intervention on behalf of children who are at risk of exhibiting bullying behavior may also stem the tide of criminal behavior years down the road.

"We are finally at a point that we have scientific data we can point to that will help inform public policy in a meaningful way," Connell said. "Knowing that these kinds of correlations exist may help us develop methods of identifying and slowing the risk of [criminal behavior](#)."

More information: www.springer.com/psychology/child+%26+school+psychology/journal/10964

Provided by University of Texas at Dallas

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