

# Predicting which misbehaving teens may become troubled adults

February 10 2015, by Jared Wadley

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It's not surprising that teens involved in fighting, vandalism, theft and other bad behaviors often have problems later in life as adults.

But predicting which kids will continue to get into trouble with the law or have psychiatric or drug problems can be challenging if specific childhood behaviors and traits are evaluated separately, according to a

new University of Michigan study.

To determine which types of behaviors and traits overlap—which could improve the odds of predicting behavioral outcomes—researchers evaluated children's antisocial behavior based on the age they started the conduct, whether or not they lacked [empathy](#) and had shallow emotions, and the amount of aggression versus rule-breaking symptoms.

The study followed low-income urban males from infancy to age 20, and found that children who were antisocial before age 10 were likely to have aggressive symptoms, although not necessarily less empathy.

Starting antisocial behavior early in life, as well as the presence of serious aggression in the teen years, predicted early adulthood arrests and psychiatric disorders, such as [antisocial personality disorder](#), depression and [drug addiction](#). A lack of empathy only predicted adolescent arrests and later drug addiction.

"We found that any antisocial [behavior](#) in adolescence (results in) poorer outcomes in early adulthood, but that early-starting [antisocial behavior](#) and those with more aggressive symptoms had the worst outcomes," said Luke Hyde, U-M assistant professor of psychology and the study's lead author. "In fact the presence of even one serious aggressive symptom was one of the most predictive of poor outcomes at [age](#) 20."

The study's results can help parents and psychologists know who is most in need of treatment, Hyde said. It also allows them to understand that children with early emerging antisocial behaviors or serious aggression need help or may have a longer trajectory of problems as adults.

**More information:** "Early Starting, Aggressive, and/or Callous-Unemotional? Examining the Overlap and Predictive Utility of Antisocial Behavior Subtypes." *J Abnorm Psychol*. 2015 Jan 19.

[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25603360](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25603360)

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