

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

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## KEY WORDS

television, antisocial behavior, media violence, longitudinal studies

## ABBREVIATION

SES—socioeconomic status

Ms Robertson, and Drs McNally, and Hancock conceptualized and designed this research, analyzed and interpreted the data, drafted the article, revised it critically for important intellectual content, and approved the final version.

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**COMPANION PAPERS:** Companions to this article can be found on pages 431 and 589, and online at [www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2012-1493](http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2012-1493) and [www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2012-3873](http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2012-3873)



**WHAT IS KNOWN ON THIS SUBJECT:** Many studies have identified an association between television viewing and antisocial behavior, although very few have been able to demonstrate a cause-and-effect sequence. The issue of whether excessive television viewing contributes to antisocial behavior remains controversial.



**WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS:** Excessive television viewing during childhood and adolescence was associated with objective and subjective measures of antisocial behavior in adulthood. These associations were not explained by preexisting antisocial tendencies or other potential confounders. Excessive television appears to have long-term psychosocial consequences.

## abstract



**OBJECTIVE:** To investigate whether excessive television viewing throughout childhood and adolescence is associated with increased antisocial behavior in early adulthood.

**METHODS:** We assessed a birth cohort of 1037 individuals born in Dunedin, New Zealand, in 1972–1973, at regular intervals from birth to age 26 years. We used regression analysis to investigate the associations between television viewing hours from ages 5 to 15 years and criminal convictions, violent convictions, diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder, and aggressive personality traits in early adulthood.

**RESULTS:** Young adults who had spent more time watching television during childhood and adolescence were significantly more likely to have a criminal conviction, a diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder, and more aggressive personality traits compared with those who viewed less television. The associations were statistically significant after controlling for sex IQ, socioeconomic status, previous antisocial behavior, and parental control. The associations were similar for both sexes, indicating that the relationship between television viewing and antisocial behavior is similar for male and female viewers.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Excessive television viewing in childhood and adolescence is associated with increased antisocial behavior in early adulthood. The findings are consistent with a causal association and support the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendation that children should watch no more than 1 to 2 hours of television each day. *Pediatrics* 2013;131:439–446

# Television And Antisocial Behavior

**Tony Charlton,Barrie Gunter,Andrew  
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