

Get them some sleep, scientists say of young delinquents

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World Science staff

Juvenile delinquency among high school students may be partly linked to lack of sleep, researchers have found based on a new study.

Although a handful of past studies have suggested such a link could exist, little detailed information exists. The new analysis found that more serious forms of delinquency appear to become more common in relation to the severity of youngsters' sleep deficit.



Juvenile delinquency among high school students may be partly linked to lack of sleep, researchers have found based on a new study. (Photo courtesy Vera Kratochvil)

The study re-examined 15-year-old data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a federally funded project that surveyed adolescent health in the United States in relation to a variety of risky behaviors.

The survey sample used for the study on sleep and delinquency encompassed 14,382 high school students—half male, half female, 63.5 percent white.

Students who slept seven or fewer hours nightly reported “significantly more property delinquency,” such as vandalism or theft, than students who slept the recommended eight to 10 hours, the authors of the new study reported. The findings appear in the Oct. 10 issue of the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*.

Those who slept five or fewer hours per night, meanwhile, “reported significantly more violent delinquency,” wrote the researchers, Samantha Clinkinbeard and colleagues at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

“Lack of sleep has been linked to a wide range of negative developmental outcomes,” but “largely overlooked among researchers interested in adolescent delinquency,” the group wrote.

Although the study couldn't demonstrate that insufficient snoozing caused delinquency rather than, for example, the other way around, “the findings suggest that sleep is an important, and overlooked, dimension of delinquent behavior,” the researchers wrote. They argued that this aspect deserves further investigation.

The study didn't determine whether insomnia, home environment or other factors caused the sleep shortage possibly linked to delinquency. But a smaller study, published in last December's issue of the *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, found that “possible insomnia” predicted smoking, delinquency and drinking-and-driving among high schoolers.

“Sleep and other relevant health behaviors [should] be considered in the context of more comprehensive approaches to delinquency prevention and intervention,” Clinkinbeard and colleagues wrote.