

Researchers link sleep deprivation with criminal behavior

November 22 2013, by Joann Adkins

Lack of sleep can contribute to delinquent behavior by adolescents, according to an FIU study published earlier this month.

Researchers have long believed self-control is a trait developed in childhood, influenced by genetics, socialization and other developmental factors. Yet a new study published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* suggests [sleep](#) deprivation can reduce self-control well after childhood and ultimately result in delinquent behavior among teenagers. In other words, [adolescents](#) who fail to get [restful sleep](#) on a regular basis are less able to effectively regulate their own behavior.

Criminal Justice researcher and lead author of the study Ryan C. Meldrum says low self-control is the link between lack of sleep and [delinquent behavior](#). Data on more than 800 teenagers were evaluated for the study.

"The harmful implications of [sleep deprivation](#) is a largely under-studied area in [criminal justice](#)," Meldrum said. "Sleep offers us the opportunity for recuperation and restoration, which is especially important for developmental processes in children and adolescents. But even though sleep occupies roughly a third of our time, we are only now beginning to understand its function and the role it plays in antisocial behavior."

While the study acknowledges a variety of factors can lead adolescents to commit crimes, the correlation between sleep and cognitive function definitely require further study, according to Meldrum.

"These findings are particularly instructive in their implications," Meldrum said. "Whereas some factors linked to low self-control and delinquency are largely immutable, the quantity and quality of sleep that adolescents get is something that parents are in an excellent position to influence."

A member of the American Society of Criminology and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, Meldrum focuses his research on juvenile delinquency, with particular attention given to peer associations and self-control during adolescence.

More information: "Sleep Deprivation, Low Self-Control, and Delinquency: A Test of the Strength Model of Self-Control." Ryan C. Meldrum, J. C. Barnes, Carter Hay. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, October 2013. [DOI: 10.1007/s10964-013-0024-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-013-0024-4)

Provided by Florida International University

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