

# Positive teacher relationships may reduce crime

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Young people who have a good relationship with their teacher in childhood are less likely to engage in anti-social behavior in adolescence, a study says.

Experts at the University of Edinburgh examined the experiences of 1483 young people who had a change of teacher between the ages of 9 and 10.

They identified pairs of young people with similar backgrounds and influences, but who reported different experiences of the teacher change. Each pair had one young person who had a relatively better relationship with their teacher and one who had a relatively worse relationship with their teacher but were otherwise highly similar.

Researchers then compared each pair's levels of delinquency and violence at three stages, at ages 13, 15 and 17. The analyses were carried out on 208 pairs at age 13, 235 pairs at age 15 and 194 pairs at age 17.

## **Data collection**

Data collected from when the children were 11 years old was used to assess their relationship with their teacher. At the three age stages, the participants also completed questionnaires that captured examples of aggressive and anti-social behavior such as stealing from home, shoplifting or vandalism.

Researchers found those with a better quality of teacher-student relationships at age 11 year reported fewer delinquent acts up to age 17 than those with worse teacher-student relationships.

The young people with a better relationship with their teacher also reported being less aggressive and violent at age 17.

## **Bonds with teachers**

Importantly, the findings were consistent, even when taking into account

a wide range of characteristics that affect behavior such as different types of parenting, a range of mental health issues and [aggressive behavior](#) before the change of teacher.

The study suggests that bonds that young people form with teachers during childhood, and the importance they place on these relationships, affects whether they may engage in delinquency and violence in adolescence, researchers say.

"By controlling for additional potential predictors of delinquency and violence in adolescence, we were able to provide some of the strongest evidence to date for a link between the quality of teacher-student relationships and later delinquency and violence. Perceiving the relationship in a positive way and feeling supported and understood by the [teacher](#) has the power to protect [young people](#) from engaging in rule-breaking behaviors such as delinquency and violence," said Dr Ingrid Osbuth.

Data were drawn from the first nine waves of the Social Development from Childhood to Adulthood - an ongoing longitudinal cohort study that began in 2004 led by the University of Zurich.

## Zurich study

The Zurich project examines the developmental dynamics involved in aggressive behavior and victimization during childhood and adolescence.

The study is published in the journal *Crime & Delinquency*.

**More information:** Ingrid Osbuth et al, Teacher-Student Relationships in Childhood as a Protective Factor against Adolescent Delinquency up to Age 17: A Propensity Score Matching Approach, *Crime & Delinquency* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/00111287211014153](https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287211014153)

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