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Presentation title: Childhood sleep problems at age 11 as a risk factor for crime at age 23:
Implications for desistance

Background. While cross-sectional research has documented a relationship between sleep problems and antisocial behavior, longitudinal research on sleep problems and antisocial personality disorder and crime is relatively sparse. We previously documented a relationship between daytime sleepiness at age 15 and crime at age 29 in English schoolboys. This new longitudinal study from Mauritius further tests the hypothesis that childhood sleep problems represent a risk factor for adult crime, controlling for childhood behavior problems.

Methods. 1,165 Indian and Creole boys and girls were assessed on sleep problems by their caregiver when aged 11 years. Outcome data consisted of age 11 parent-reported externalizing behavior problems, age 23 self-report crime and court convictions, and antisocial personality disorder assess in a clinical interview. Antisocial behavior was also assessed at age 8.

Results. Aggression/delinquent behavior at age 11 was positively associated with age 11 sleep problems ($p < .0001$). Sleep problems at 11 were also positively associated with age 23 criminal offending ($p = .02$) and antisocial personality disorder ($p = .002$). These effects remained after controlling for age 11 externalizing behavior problems ($p = .017$ respectively), although effect sizes were somewhat attenuated.

Conclusions. Results support the standing of childhood sleep problems as a significant risk factor for adult crime. It is hypothesized that disruption to the prefrontal-amygdala circuit may represent the mechanism-of-action explaining the sleep-crime relationship. If future experimental and brain imaging research can document a causal relationship between sleep problems and crime, simple sleep hygiene educational interventions could potentially facilitate desistance from crime in high-risk individuals.