**Price of crime for middle-aged**

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**A life of crime starts to damage offenders’ health once they reach their 40s, new research has shown.**

**A collaboration led by the Violence and Society Research Group has analysed the lifestyles of a group of inner city males from boyhood to middle age.**

**In their 20s and 30s, repeat offenders in the group were often fitter than their more law-abiding contemporaries.**

**Now that the group has reached 48, the situation is reversed.**

**High rate chronic offenders have the highest risk of being registered disabled and hospitalisation.**

The findings, published in the journal *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health,* demonstrate a clear link between offending and bad health.

The research team argues that repeat offending should be a public health issue as much as a criminal justice matter.

The Research Group, working with partners at the University of Texas. analysed data from 400 South London men.

The Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge supplied the data about the men, who have been studied since the age of eight in the early 1960s.

Previous studies showed that those with criminal convictions were less vulnerable to respiratory and other physical illness at the ages of 16-18 and 27-32.

Now the men have been interviewed again after reaching the age of 48.

High rate offenders who continue to offend into adulthood were more likely to have been hospitalised in the past five years than other groups, including non-offenders and those who had only offended in adolescence.

Registered disability was also much more likely among high rate offenders than the other groups.

The risk of hospitalisation was four times as great for the offending group and the risk of disability was 13 times higher.

The study also found that 13 of the 17 men who had died had a criminal conviction.

Professor Jonathan Shepherd, Director of the Violence and Society Research Group, said: "We have seen a complete reversal of earlier health patterns with this group.

At a younger age, offenders do seem to be healthier in many ways than non-offenders.

Once they reach their 40s it seems that the health consequences of their lifestyle catch up with them.

"The reasons for this poorer health are not clear. High-risk behaviour and lifestyle might increase the chances of accidents and injury, leading to hospitalisation and disability.

Alternatively, frequent contact with the courts and criminal justice system may increase access to and knowledge of the benefits system.

What is clear, however, is that those who continue to offend at a high rate as adults are at a higher risk of poor health than other groups, including those who offended as adolescents and then stopped.

"Our research shows that the cost of repeat offending is not just limited to the effects of criminal activity.

There are also substantial costs to the health and welfare services from this group of offenders.

There is an argument for the health, social and criminal justice agencies to work together to limit post-adolescent offending, reducing the risk of illness in later life and the cost to society."