**BBC**

**Repeat offenders appear to have worse health in middle-age**

A life of crime appears to damage offenders' health once they reach their 40s, new research suggests.

Researchers from Cardiff and Texas universities looked at data on 400 men who have been followed since childhood.

They found offenders were more likely to be hospitalised and were 13 times more likely to be disabled.

The researchers had earlier found better health in their late teens and late 20s among those who had offended when they were young.

The findings are published in the journal Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health.

The men are part of the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, which recruited them when they were aged eight or nine in 1961 and living in inner city south London.

They were then studied in their late teens and late 20s. In both these earlier assessments, those who had criminal convictions were less likely than their peers to have physical illnesses or to have been hospitalised, and they were often fitter than their more law-abiding contemporaries.

But this study, in which the men were interviewed again after reaching the age of 48, found those who had continued to offend were four times as likely to have been hospitalised in the past five years than other groups, including non-offenders and those who had only offended in adolescence.

Offenders were also found to have 13 times the risk of disability than the other groups.

And 13 of the 17 men who had died had a criminal conviction.

In the study group, 62% never offended, 24% had offended in their teens and just under 14% were chronic offenders.

Prof Jonathan Shepherd, director of the Violence and Society Research Group at Cardiff University, who led the research, said: "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.

"It could be that if they are in touch with probation officers, prison officers, they may have increased access to and knowledge of the benefits system.

"Or it could be to do with being in custody for a long time.

"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."

Prof Shepherd said this showed: "The cost of repeat offending is not just limited to the effects of criminal activity."

The researchers said the health, social and criminal justice agencies should work together to try to limit post-adolescent offending, reducing the risk of illness in later life and the cost to society.