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PRESS RELEASE

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**Children's Perceptions of Their Parents' Antisocial Behavior
May Lead Them To Be Antisocial**

Children who grow up in antisocial families are more likely to be antisocial themselves. Much of the research into why this is so has focused on parents' behavior. A new study finds that the way children perceive their parents' behavior provides clues as to why children of antisocial parents may grow up to be antisocial.

The study, conducted by researchers at the University of California, Davis, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, appears in the January/February 2007 issue of the journal *Child Development*. The research was funded in part by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the National Institute of Mental Health.

In an effort to determine how antisocial behavior in one generation is transmitted to the next, researchers looked at 430 adolescents and their biological parents across the children's high school years. Specifically, the study examined the adolescents' level of antisocial behavior, the level of such behavior in parents, and the teens' general perceptions of their parents' behavior. Antisocial behavior was defined in terms of substance use, recklessness and breaking laws, arguments and conflicts with others, and lying. The study examined if the effect of parents' antisocial behavior on the teens' antisocial behavior could be explained by the teens' perceptions of their parents as antisocial, as well as by disrupted parenting practices, such as poor monitoring, hostility, and harsh and inconsistent discipline.

The researchers concluded that the children learned antisocial behavior by observing and interpreting their parents' antisocial behavior. Parents' behavior provides children with a model for their own behavior, and children's perception that a parent is antisocial may be a key component in choosing and validating their own behaviors, giving children permission to engage in this type of behavior. For the teenagers in this study, the recognition of antisocial behavior in their parents played an important role in increasing their risk for similar conduct; in fact, it played more of a role than the teens' assessment of their parents' parenting abilities.

Furthermore, the findings were the same for the effect of both fathers' and mothers' antisocial behavior and parenting on the development and growth of boys' and girls' antisocial behavior. A notable finding was that the strongest influence on a child's antisocial behavior in the 12th grade was that child's own level of behavior in 9th grade. This indicates that there is stability in antisocial behavior through adolescence, and that the processes reported in this study are well under way by the 9th grade.

"These findings suggest that focusing on how children perceive mom and dad's behavior and the origin of these perceptions could facilitate family-centered interventions designed to reduce the risk for problem behavior," according to Shannon J. Dogan, the study's lead author and a research assistant at the University of California, Davis. "Further, identifying antisocial parents would assist in early identification of at-risk families. Interventions

that reduce parental antisocial behavior and improve parenting practices should also reduce levels of problem behavior among teens.”

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 78, Issue 1, *Cognitive and Parenting Pathways in the Transmission of Antisocial Behavior from Parents to Adolescents*, by Dogan, SJ, and Conger, RD (University of California, Davis), Kim, KJ (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University), and Masyn, KE (University of California, Davis). Copyright 2007 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.