

## 1 in 3 children at risk: Lead exposure in childhood linked to committing crimes as adults, correlation study claims

The more lead that people are exposed to in childhood or in the uterus, [the more likely they are to engage in criminal behaviour](#) as teenagers or adults, according to a review of 17 studies.

“The evidence shows an excess risk for criminal behaviour years later,” says [Maria Jose Talayero](#) at the George Washington University in Washington DC.

Lead exposure has fallen in many countries, mainly due to the removal of lead additives from petrol (gasoline). However, there is no safe level – [any amount of exposure is thought to be harmful](#).

It is estimated that [1 in 3 children globally](#) have blood lead levels above 5 micrograms per decilitre, which can result in [decreased intelligence](#), behavioural difficulties and learning problems. The effects are irreversible.

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The decline in lead exposure in many countries correlates with a fall in crime levels, leading to suggestions that [exposure to the metal increases criminal behaviour](#). But establishing this requires “bottom-up” studies that directly measure individuals’ lead exposure and look for links with criminal behaviour.

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A few found no links between lead exposure and delinquency. One found a link between exposure and antisocial behaviour, but not arrests. But most did find links between exposure to lead and later arrests or delinquent or aggressive behaviour.

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