

TELEVISION VIOLENCE AND KIDS' BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the televised violence on children and their exposure to television violence. Since children are very visual learners, they model both the positive and negative the behaviors they see. This paper also reviews the television violence effect on the child's youth, which can also affect his or her adulthood. Some psychologists and psychiatrists feel that continued exposure to such violence might unnaturally speed up the impact of the adult world on the child. This can force the child into a kind of premature maturity. Kids who watched the violent shows were more likely to strike out at playmates, argue, disobey authority and were less willing to wait for things than those children who watched non-violent programs.

INTRODUCTION

TV is violent! Guns, shootings, murders, hitting, punching, slapping, screaming, kicking, stabbing, explosions, car chases, car smashes, disasters and death are shown daily throughout TV programming. Most violence is not even in nightly news programs and nearly all of the violence on television is fake. TV presents violent acts through acting -- with fake guns and fake blood. For adults, televised violence is probably not a big deal. When a character is killed off a TV show one week, we know the same actor will reappear the next week on another show on a different network.

Televised violence has a profound effect on children. However, it's not difficult to find other "experts" who dismiss its effects, claiming that watching violent TV shows is no different than listening to fairy tales. These conflicting statements tend to make parents give up the TV battle with their children. As a developmental psychologist and a parent of three young children, I want to tell you what we already know regarding children's exposure to television violence. There is a great deal of research, which goes back over 20 years. This research has followed the lives of real children viewing real television. The message of this research is loud and clear: Exposure to media

violence causes children to behave more aggressively, both immediately and when they are older.

Those "experts" who say that media violence has no effect on children are ignoring the vast volumes of research in the same way as the "experts" who say that cigarette smoking does not cause cancer. Violence in the media is easily accessible to children. It occurs in cartoons, in news updates in family programs, in the news, in "cop shows", and in "blockbuster" movies screened at 8.30pm on TV. Many computer games feature violent themes. Trailers for forthcoming programs on TV often contain a collection of the most violent scenes. Parents often feel ambushed by these as they cannot be anticipated. Violence in the media is all pervasive, and difficult to avoid. Frequently the violence is glamorized, and violent solutions offer the way to be powerful.

Mostly the heroes are male, and the victims are female, showing who does the violence and to whom it's done. Violent media and products are actively marketed to children. Television will never show a main character lose an arm, leg or get killed on screen. In reality, with as much gunplay that appears on TV, main characters should also get shot.