3 Articles on the Influence of TV

Subject: The influence of TV on children

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Study Ties Television Viewing to Aggression
Adults Affected As Well as Children

By Shankar Vedantam
Washington Post Staff Writer
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Teenagers and young adults who watch even as little as an hour of television a day are more likely to get into fights, commit assaults or engage in other types of violence later in life, according to a provocative new study.

The more television people watch, the more likely it appears that they will later become violent, an effect that researchers argued bolsters the case that it is television that causes the aggression.

The study tracked the impact of television on violence among more than 700 young people over 17 years. Previous studies have found an association between television violence and aggression. But this is the longest study to track the consequences of TV viewing of any kind and the first to show that adults are affected as surely as children, the researchers said. If the study had examined violent programming alone, the link would have been more dramatic, they said.

"The correlation between violent media and aggression is larger than the effect that wearing a condom has on decreasing the risk of HIV," said Brad Bushman, a professor of psychology at Iowa State University at Ames who wrote a commentary accompanying the study in today's issue of the journal Science. "It's larger than the correlation between exposure to lead and decreased IQ levels in kids. It's larger than the effects of exposure to asbestos. It's larger than the effect of secondhand smoke on cancer."

The findings renewed debate over whether media violence contributes to violent behavior.

Television and entertainment proponents said there was a long history of conflicting results on the issue. "The consensus is there is no consensus," said Dennis Wharton, a spokesman for the National Association ofe Broadcasters. The National Cable and Telecommunications Association said in a statement that it supports "responsible television viewing" and that its ratings system allows viewers to block violent programs.

Jonathan Freedman, a psychologist at the University of Toronto, said the study had failed to prove that television watching was the cause of the aggressiveness. "It has nothing to do with TV -- it has to do with lifestyle," he said. "People who watch more than three hours of TV are different than those who watch less than an hour."

The researchers said they tried to account for that possibility by statistically eliminating the effects of parental neglect, poverty, dangerous neighborhoods, a history of psychiatric disorder and other independent risk factors for aggression. Although all the participants were from upstate New York, the researchers said the group was broadly representative of the northeastern United States.

For the study, the researchers interviewed 707 teenagers about the amount of television they watched. In 1983, the average age of the group was 14. Eight years later, the scientists correlated the television statistics with police and FBI records of violence, and interviews with the participants.

Of the group that watched less than an hour of TV a day, 5.7 percent had committed a violent act that resulted in serious injury, such as a broken bone. Among those who watched one to three hours, 18.4 percent had been violent. Of those who watched more than three hours a day, the rate of aggression was 25.3 percent.

The researchers also re-interviewed the group about their television habits and followed up after another eight years. While 1.2 percent of the adults who watched less than one hour per day had committed a violent act, 10.8 percent of those who watched three or more hours had inflicted a bruise, scar or other assault. Men tended to be more likely to be violent than women.

The only definitive way to establish a causal link between television content and the violence would be to conduct an experiment where some people are randomly made to watch more TV for several years while others are made to watch less, the researchers said.

"To force people to watch a certain amount of TV for a lengthy period would not be permissible," said Jeffrey Johnson, a Columbia University clinical psychologist and the lead researcher. "It's analogous to research on cigarette smoking. . . . You couldn't force people to smoke a lot and see if they got cancer."

Nielsen Media Research reports the average American household has the television on for more than eight hours a day. Children and teens between 2 and 17 years old watch TV more than three hours per day. Adult men watch more than four hours, and adult women more than five.

Television violence may desensitize viewers, or depictions of violence without its real-life consequences may prompt viewers to assume that it is acceptable, the researchers speculated.

George Gerbner, who has done pioneering work on television violence and is dean emeritus of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, argued that the biggest consequence of TV violence was insecurity, not aggression.

Watching programs about violent crime on dark streets, for instance, does not turn people into muggers -- it makes them fear becoming victims. Even as
violent crime in American society has declined, he said, heavy television viewing was more likely to make the viewers believe they lived in an unsafe world.

"They may accept and even welcome repressive measures such as more jails, capital punishment, harsher sentences -- measures that have never reduced
crime but never fail to get votes -- if that promises to relieve their anxieties," he wrote. "That is the deeper dilemma of violence-laden television."

TV viewing raises risk teens may turn violent
More than hour daily worrisome, study says
By Michael Stroh
Sun Staff
Baltimore Sun

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One more bit of disturbing news for parents: Teens who watch more than one hour of television a day may be at greater risk of becoming violent adults.

That's the conclusion of the first long-term look at how the TV viewing habits of adolescents affect them later in life. The research was published today in the journal Science.

The 17-year study is only the second in the history of television research to follow viewers from youth to adulthood. As a result, scientists say it provides the most persuasive evidence yet of a link between television viewing and violent behavior.

The study, coming on the heels of new evidence that sex and violence on network television may be dropping, is likely to stoke the 50-year-old debate over what broadcasters should be allowed to show and how much television is healthy for children to watch.

"Our findings support the conclusion that parents shouldn't let their children watch television for more than an hour a day," says Jeffrey G. Johnson, a Columbia University psychiatrist and lead author of the study.

To determine the long-term effects of television on teens, Johnson and his colleagues followed more than 700 randomly selected Upstate New York youths from 1983 to 2000, interviewing them about their TV habits and whether they had ever gotten into fights or committed other aggressive acts.

They also separately asked each child's mother the same questions and drew upon criminal arrest data from state and federal law enforcement agencies.

Researchers found that the more television a teen watched, the more likely it would be that he or she would commit violent acts later in life. Fewer than 6 percent of teens who watched television less than one hour a day committed assaults, robberies or other violent acts as adults. But nearly 28 percent of kids who watched television three or more hours a day did.

Johnson said the link remained even after researchers statistically subtracted the effects of previous aggressive behavior, low family income, neighborhood violence, psychiatric disorders and poor parental education - all of which have been found to influence television viewing or violent behavior.

Men and women responded differently to heavy television watching.

In their teen-age years, boys were more likely than girls to become aggressive. But by age 22, that difference disappeared. Women who watched lots were more likely than men to get into fights or commit crimes by the time they were 30.

Because scientists didn't track the programs youths watched, scientists were unable to explain the gender differences. But they say they're probably caused by witnessing violence because other studies have shown 60 percent of television programs contain some form of it.

"You can't avoid it," says Leonard Eron, a social scientist at the University of Michigan.

It's far from the first time that questions have been raised about the effects of televised violence on children. The first congressional hearings on the subject occurred in 1952, only a few years after TV made its national debut.

One of the first scientific studies was conducted in 1956 by Alberta Siegel, a Stanford University psychologist who died last fall. She showed that 4-year-olds who watched rowdy Woody Woodpecker cartoons were far more likely to roughhouse afterward than peers who watched the more mellow Little Red Hen.

While hundreds of social science studies have been conducted on television's effects since Siegel's groundbreaking work, most have focused on children. By focusing on teen-agers and young adults, the Columbia study fills in a crucial piece in the puzzle, notes psychologist Craig Anderson of the Iowa State University in an accompanying article in Science.

Some social scientists were surprised that adolescents would be as susceptible to television violence as children.

"I had assumed that the older kids were, the less affected they would be," said Eron, whose pioneering research on television viewing and aggression began in the early 1960s. "It shows that the effects of television are quite pervasive."

While the scientific picture of television's effect on behavior may be growing clearer, what should be done about it remains as fuzzy as ever.

The National Association of Broadcasters points to new evidence that the amount of sex and violence on television is falling. A study released last week by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, an independent nonprofit media watchdog in Washington, found that the amount of sexual content on network TV shows fell by 29 percent from 1998 through last year while the amount of serious violence dropped by 17 percent.

But it's unclear whether the drop is due to a conscious effort by network broadcasters or accidental.

http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/front/la-032902tv.story

Adolescents' TV Watching Is Linked to Violent Behavior
Psychology: A 17-year study tracked 700 young people into their adult lives. Hours of viewing were correlated with acts of aggression.
By ROSIE MESTEL
Times Staff Writer

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Adolescents who watch more than one hour of television a day are more likely to commit aggressive and violent acts as adults, according to a 17-year study reported today in the journal Science.

The study, which tracked more than 700 adolescents into adulthood, found that young

people watching one to three hours of television daily were almost four times more likely to commit violent and aggressive acts later in life than those who watched less than an hour of TV a day.

Girls as well as boys exhibited increased aggression, according to the study, which was hailed by psychologists and social scientists as more evidence of TV's harmful effects.

"It's a very important study and has a great deal of credibility--it very niftily isolates television as a causal factor," said George Comstock, a researcher on media violence at Syracuse University in New York.

It is also the first study, Comstock said, to clearly link TV viewing among adolescents to later, adult violence.

Families Were Selected Randomly

The study authors, from Columbia University and Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York, used data from a wider-ranging survey of the behavior of children in 707 New York state families. The families had been selected randomly--not because their children had any behavior problems.

Over the study's 17 years, the children and their parents were periodically interviewed about TV habits, violence and aggression. Interviews began in 1983, when the children's average age was 14; follow-up interviews were conducted at average ages of 16, 22 and 30.

The scientists also examined state and FBI records in 2000 to find out if any of those in the study--who by then had reached an average age of 30--had been arrested or charged with a crime.

The authors found that 5.7% of those who reported watching less than one hour of TV a day as adolescents committed aggressive acts against others in subsequent years--either by their own admission, a parent's report or legal records. Those acts included threats, assaults, fights, robbery and using a weapon to commit a crime.

That figure rose to 22.5% of those who watched TV for one to three hours a day and to 28.8% of those who watched more than three hours daily.

The size of the effect was surprising, said lead author Jeffrey Johnson, assistant clinical professor of psychology in Columbia University's psychiatry department.

He and his coauthors, who conducted the study with federal funds, believe the findings help cement the link between TV and violence. The authors used statistics to rule out other possible causes, such as neglect, poverty and living in a violent neighborhood.

The study did not describe the kinds of programs children were watching, drawing criticism from Jonathan Freedman, a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto. He also said such studies don't clearly demonstrate that viewing programs is the cause of subsequent violence.

"To suggest that because you get this effect that watching two hours a day causes aggressiveness is going so far beyond the data it's shocking," Freedman said.

Critics Say Parents Can Monitor Viewing

The Motion Picture Assn. of America declined to comment on the report until staff members had a chance to read it. Association spokesman Rich Taylor said parents have the technology to easily control what their children watch.

"The V-chip puts a new level of control into a parent's hands, allowing them to determine and set the level of programming that they wish to allow in their home at any given time," he said.

Six major medical groups--including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the American Medical Assn.--have stated that they believe TV violence is a significant problem.

Fears about the negative influence of TV have been voiced almost since 1946, when TV broadcasting began in the United States. The study published today is the latest in a string of investigations aimed at figuring out the link.

One study in the early 1960s shocked the public by showing that children shown a TV program of adults beating a toy clown were more likely to repeat the behavior. Other studies similarly showed a rise in aggressive attitudes and behaviors after people watched violent programs. Subjects were more likely to fight in the playground or "punish" people with fake zaps of electricity.

Other studies have explored the relationship between violent programming and real-life, serious violence--and have also found smaller, although statistically significant, links.

The effects of such viewing pale, by comparison, with the effect of living in an abusive home or hanging out with delinquent peers.

But TV watching is far more prevalent, said Joanne Cantor, professor emeritus of the University of Wisconsin in Madison and a longtime media violence researcher.

"The implications for parents is that unfettered access to television is not good for your child," Cantor said. "It has these negative effects--which affect them personally in terms of feeling more hostile. And it looks like it affects other people too--through expression of that hostility in aggressive behavior towards others."

Responding to the study, National Assn. of Broadcasters spokesman Dennis Wharton said, "For every study of this sort that finds a correlation between TV violence and real life violence, there are studies that conclude just the opposite."

Freedman, meanwhile, said that finding a correlation between TV viewing and violence does not prove TV programs are to blame. Children who are naturally more aggressive may be drawn to watch more violent TV, he said.

While this may be true, Johnson countered, this study and others show that even-tempered children also became more aggressive after watching a lot of television.

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