

Article from the USA Today

Study: Children's viewing linked to TV violence

By the Associated Press

Both boys and girls who watch a lot of violence on television have a heightened risk of aggressive adult behavior including spouse abuse and criminal offenses, no matter how they act in childhood, a new study says.

While the results may not be surprising, experts say the study is important because it included hundreds of participants and showed the effect in females as well as males.

The participants were interviewed at ages 6 to 9 and again in their early 20s, making the study one of the few to follow children into adulthood to gauge the long-term effects of televised violence.

The findings are presented in the March issue of the journal *Developmental Psychology* by psychologists L. Rowell Huesmann and colleagues at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research.

Huesmann said televised violence suggests to young children that aggression is appropriate in some situations, especially when it is used by charismatic heroes. It also erodes a natural aversion to violence, he said.

He recommended that parents restrict viewing of violent TV and movies by young children and preteens as much as possible.

The analysis argued against the idea that aggressive children seek out TV violence, or that the findings were due to the participants' socioeconomic status or intelligence, or their parents' childrearing practices.

The study involved 329 adults who were initially surveyed as children in the late 1970s. Researchers interviewed them again as adults, along with their spouses or friends, and checked crime records.

As children, the participants were rated for exposure to televised violence after they chose eight favorite shows from 80 popular programs for their age group and indicated how often they watched them. The programs were assessed by researchers for amount of physical violence. Programs such as *Starsky and Hutch*, *The Six Million Dollar Man* and Roadrunner cartoons were deemed very violent.

As young adults, men in the study who had scored in the top 20% on childhood exposure were about twice as likely as other men to have pushed, grabbed or shoved their wives during an argument in the year preceding the interview. Women who had scored in the top 20% were about twice as likely as other women to have thrown something at their husbands.

For one or both sexes, these "high TV-violence viewers" were also more likely than other study participants in the previous 12 months to have shoved somebody in anger; punched, beaten or choked an adult, or committed a crime or a moving traffic violation.

Along with viewing of violent TV, the participants had been asked as children how much they identified with violent TV characters and how realistic they judged various violent TV shows to be.

Researchers found that high ratings on any of the three childhood measures predicted higher ratings of overall aggression in adulthood. It made no difference how aggressive the participants had been as children.

Dennis Wharton, spokesman for the National Association of Broadcasters, said not all studies find a relationship between TV viewing and violent behavior. "I think the jury is still out about whether there is a link," he said.

The American Psychological Association, however, has concluded that viewing violence on TV or other mass media does promote aggressive behavior, particularly in children. Other mental-health and medical groups have taken similar stands.

Joanne Cantor, professor emerita of communications at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said the new study was "a very strong addition to what I consider a large amount of data that points in the same direction."

Copyright 2003 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.