



International Journal of Home Science

ISSN: 2395-7476

IJHS 2023; 9(2): 209-214

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www.homesciencejournal.com

Received: 19-03-2023

Accepted: 05-05-2023

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Can media violence influence the aggressive behavior in children? A review paper

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Abstract

Children's aggression may be a sign of a variety of underlying issues. It is quite polymorphic and shared by a wide range of mental disorders, health issues, and life situations. This research aims to review a study to investigate the influence of media violence on aggressive behavior in children. With the widespread availability of various media platforms and the increasing exposure of children to violent content, understanding the potential effects of media violence is crucial. By synthesizing the findings from multiple experimental studies, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between media violence and aggressive behavior in children. The review will consider factors such as the type of media including television, video games and internet. The results of this study will contribute to evidence-based recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers regarding children's media consumption and the potential implications for aggressive behavior.

Keywords: Media violence, aggressive behavior, children, review paper, influence

Introduction

Children say and do all kinds of adorable things that make us smile. But occasionally, their continuous cries and temper tantrums drive us insane. Given that they have not yet learned the art of self-control, children occasionally have a tendency to snap. They frequently lack the communication skills necessary to calmly express themselves. According to textbook definitions, the entire problem is known as aggressive child behavior psychology. Most times, aggression is inadvertent. In fact, it's frequently how a youngster establishes himself. (Express, T., & Ersh, D. (2021, October 18) [15]. Aggressive behavior in children has garnered significant attention due to its potential long-term consequences for both individuals and society. In recent years, the influence of media violence on children's aggressive behavior has become a topic of great concern. With the proliferation of media platforms, including television, movies, video games, and online content, children are increasingly exposed to violent imagery. Understanding the relationship between media violence and aggressive behavior is essential for developing effective strategies to mitigate its potential negative effects. According to professional organizations, media violence poses a severe threat to public health because it encourages young people to act violently. The 1982 NIMH study supported this finding. The majority of scholars in the field of this study area they had come to the conclusion that media violence had a genuine, direct, and considerable impact on aggressive and violent behavior. S. Villani reviewed the study literature on the effects of media on children and adolescents that was published over the last ten years in 2001 and found the main impacts of media exposure include an increase in aggressive and violent behavior, an increase in high-risk behaviors including drinking and smoking, and an earlier initiation of sexual engagement. Although the most recent media forms have not been well explored, worry is justified given the logical progression of past studies on other media and the amount of time a typical youngster spends with more complex media. (Villani, S. (2001) [32].

The research done in 2023 by Gueron-Sela *et al.* helps us understand how people utilize media in an era of extraordinary social isolation and house lockdowns. Although there was an overall increase in media use and exposure during home lockdowns, there are no long-term relationships between media use and children's post-lockdown behavior, which suggests that media use may be temporarily meeting very important instrumental needs for parents and children before returning to more normal patterns after the crisis. (Gueron-Sela *et al.* 2023) [19].

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Previous research has yielded conflicting results regarding the impact of media violence on aggressive behavior in children. Some studies have suggested a positive association between exposure to media violence and increased aggression, while others have failed to establish a clear link. Theoretical frameworks, such as social learning theory and cultivation theory, provide valuable insights into the mechanisms through which media violence may influence children's aggressive behavior. Social learning theory posits that children may imitate aggressive behaviors they observe in the media, while cultivation theory suggests that repeated exposure to violence may shape children's perceptions of the world as a hostile and dangerous place, leading to aggressive tendencies.

The link between greater exposure to violent media and increased aggressive behavior is explained by a developmental hypothesis. It is suggested that a cumulative learning process during childhood is the main cause of the impact of media violence on individual variations in aggressiveness. To lessen the negative impacts of media violence on crime and delinquency, interventions should concentrate on the preadolescent years. Independent of other probable causative factors, childhood television viewing patterns are associated with adult crime. (Huesmann, L. R. (1986) [21]. The condition of pertinent research on media violence has also been discussed by a variety of professional organizations and federal authorities, including the American Psychological Association (Eron, Gentry, & Schlegel, 1994) [14] and the Federal Trade Commission. In fact, a Congressional Public Health Summit was conducted on July 26, 2000, and a Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children was released. This was done by six medical and public health professional organizations. According to this statement, "entertainment violence can increase aggressive attitudes, values, and behavior, especially in children." The study "overwhelmingly points to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children," according to the statement's conclusion (Joint Statement, 2000, p. 1) [23].

Finnish youngsters aged 5 to 6 were shown either violent or peaceful videos by Bjorkqvist (1985) [3]. The kids were later seen playing together in a room by two raters who had no idea what kind of movie the kids had viewed. Children who had just watched the violent video scored much higher on physical assault (striking other children, wrestling, etc.) as well as other forms of violence than those who had watched the peaceful film. The physical assault results had a sizable impact size ($r=.36$) and were highly significant ($p.001$).

Before playing a game of floor hockey in the classroom, 396 boys between the ages of seven and nine were randomly allocated to see either a violent or a peaceful movie by Josephson (1987) [24]. The number of times each boy physically attacked another kid throughout the game was counted by observers who had no idea which movie each boy had seen. The only verbal act covered by the measure was calling another player an offensive name. Physical attack was defined to include hitting, elbowing, or shoving another player to the ground, as well as tripping, kneeling, pulling hair, and other aggressive behaviors that would be punished in hockey. The fact that the hockey referees occasionally carried a particular cue from the violent movie (a walkie-talkie) brought another dimension to this investigation. The boys' memories of the movie they had earlier viewed are probably triggered by this specific cue. According to Josephson, seeing a violent movie and seeing the cue that goes along with it considerably increased the likelihood that aggressive boys

(those who scored above average on a test of aggression) would engage in assaultive behaviors ($p.05$) compared to watching any other film and cue combination. The effect size ($r=.25$) was modest.

Randomized studies often show that exposure to violent media can result in an instantaneous rise in aggressive thoughts and tolerance in both children and older teenagers. For instance, young children who had viewed a brief violent film clip were slower than their classmates who had watched a neutral video to ask an adult to intervene when they spotted two younger children fighting (Drabman & Thomas, 1974, 1975; Thomas & Drabman, 1975) [12, 13]. The one violent video seems to temporarily increase the kids' tolerance for aggressiveness. Similar findings were made by Malamuth and Check (1981) [27], who discovered that college men were more willing to physically assault women days after viewing violent sex visuals.

Effect of television

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on Public Education (2001) [2], children and adolescents who watch television may exhibit aggressive or violent behavior, use drugs or alcohol, engage in sexual activity, gain weight, have a bad self-image, or do worse in school. Media education is a successful strategy for reducing these potential issues, in addition to the television ratings system and the v-chip (an electrical device to restrict content). (American Academy of Pediatrics. Committee on Public Education (2001) [2].

According to a study done in Nigeria in 2022, preschoolers' behavior in nursery schools in Imo State is predicted by preschoolers' extensive television viewing habits. In particular, aggressive and attention-seeking actions in children were strongly predicted by parents' perceptions of their children's extensive television consumption. (Ugochukwu *et al.*, 2022) [31]. The following are the main consequences of watching violence on television and engaging in violent video games, according to a 1982 research by the National Institute of Mental Health in the United States: Children could lose their sensitivity to the misery and anguish of others, Children could be more wary of their surroundings and Children could act aggressively or harmfully towards others more frequently.

Not every community received television at the same time. Using this difference in scheduling, some academics have looked at how TV viewing affects aggressiveness in a culture (Joy, Kimball, & Zabrack, 1985) [25]. For instance, Centerwall (1989a, 1989b, 1992) [6, 7, 8] used time-series analyses to compare crime rates before and after the introduction of television in the United States, Canada, and South Africa (where television was only recently introduced). They used aggregated data on crime and media consumption. He came to the conclusion that the rise of television and the regular depiction of violent events enhances interpersonal violence in a culture. However, due to other factors that could have simultaneously impacted national crime rates, this data should be considered with care. Williams (1986) [34] discovered a rise in the degree of children's violence in one Canadian town after TV was introduced to it, even though two identical communities (without TV) exhibited no such increase. This is more persuasive evidence. However, even in this instance, it is important to proceed with care when drawing any conclusions since Williams measured the overall quantity of TV viewing rather than the level of media violence the children were exposed to. Last but not least, Hennigan *et al.*

(1982)^[20] found that theft rates increased greater in American cities with TV than in equivalent American cities without TV. Again, care must be taken in interpreting these findings because it is impossible to determine which component of TV may be at fault (for example, increased consumer wants fueled by ads may induce an increase in theft). The conclusion drawn from the other types of studies, that TV violence stimulates aggression in young viewers, is not contradicted by investigations into the relatively immediate effects of the invention of television, but these investigations also do not offer much evidence in support of this conclusion. In a 9-week nursery school session, ninety-three preschoolers saw one of three different kinds of television shows every day during the middle four weeks of the session. Throughout the whole nursery school session, observations of aggressive and prosocial interpersonal behavior as well as self-regulation in free play were made. The differences between the baseline period and the periods during and after exposure were used to evaluate the program's effectiveness. In contrast to those in the neutral condition, kids who watched the prosocial programs had higher levels of task persistence, rule adherence, and delay tolerance. Children who saw the aggressive programs exhibited a reduction in delay tolerance and rule obedience. Children from lower SES-status homes showed greater prosocial interpersonal behavior after exposure to the prosocial programme, but not higher-SES individuals. Behavior change was not consistently correlated with programme attentiveness or topic understanding. Baseline behavior was not predicted by viewing habits at home. (Friedrich, L. K., & Stein, A. H. (1973)^[17]

In the 1990s, two significant meta-analytic reviews were released. 28 research reports on children and adolescents exposed to media violence and afterwards seen in unrestricted social interactions were evaluated by Wood *et al.* (1991) in their study. According to the authors, being exposed to violent media results in more aggressive interactions with peers, friends, and strangers. This chapter was updated in 2007 to understand the meta-analytic synthesis of studies by Wood, Wong, and Chachere (1991)^[35] on media violence and violent behavior in unrestrained social environments. This finding was based in large part on the Wood *et al.* (1991) meta-analysis since the authors addressed the crucial issue of causation and also looked at the influence of media on routine social contact. According to research, there is a positive and negative relationship between media violence and aggressiveness, and any claim that media violence increases aggression must be supported by proof of causation. Experiments in which individuals were randomly assigned to observe or not witness media violence provide the strongest support for this claim. It is useful to take into account prior assessments of the research that looked at media-violence impacts since the significance of looking at unrestrained aggressive behavior is less evident.

A critical overview of the literature on the impact of media violence exposure, particularly exposure to violent pornography, on aggressive behavior is presented. Three things stand out: 1. In laboratory and field tests, exposure to violence is equally likely to have an impact on aggressive and nonaggressive antisocial behavior. 2. With the exception of the fact that illegitimate violence is more likely to result in punishment, the message learned from the media about when it is appropriate to use violence is not significantly different from the message gained from other sources. 3. Explanations that emphasize pro-violence socialization are incompatible with the reality that violent offenders frequently exhibit

versatility—they also commit nonviolent crimes. The media may draw attention to new types of violent behavior that viewers would not otherwise contemplate, which may have a minor but significant impact on some viewers' propensity for violent behavior. Consequently, researchers can say that exposure to violent television content probably does have a minor impact on violent behavior for certain viewers. This effect may be due to the media's ability to draw viewers' attention to previously unconsidered fresh kinds of violent behavior. (Felson, R. B. (1996)^[16].

The impact of children's exposure to aggressive and prosocial television role models in drama programming on their aggressive and prosocial behaviors was examined in longitudinal research. They could not discover any appreciable positive connections in The Netherlands between prosocial behavior and prosocial behavior as shown on television. However, there were positive connections between watching violent television and aggressiveness. When adjustments for the baseline levels of aggressiveness and intellect were made, this link almost entirely vanished. The social learning theory-based idea that watching violent television contributes to aggressive behavior was unsupported. Their results are further explored and contrasted with those from the other nations taking part in the global survey. (Wiegman, O., Kuttschreuter, M., & Baarda, B. (1992)^[33] Jonathan L. Freedman concurs that youngsters who watch more violent television tend to act more violently in real life. The presumptive artificiality of the laboratory tests is one of Freedman's arguments against laboratory evidence. Freedman said that he only intended to look at studies done in natural settings as justification for his rejection of laboratory trials. Since the very first studies on cinema violence, researchers have taken great care to avoid intrusive assessment because they are aware of the potential for demand effects. The inclusion of the S. Milgram and R. L. Shotland experiment testing the hypothesis that the representation of theft on television would inspire stealing in real-world scenarios is another illustration of Freedman's selective bias in favor of negative outcomes. (Huesmann,*et al.*, 2019)^[22]

Video games

The major age groups that play video games are kids and teens. The association between aggressiveness and violent video games is conceptualized using the General aggressiveness Model. This study looked at how four different media kinds affected both internal and external hostility. Between the four media types, analysis found no changes in behavioral aggressiveness or state rage. According to a regression study, those who are more impulsive, emotionally reactive, and frustrated by media content are more likely to experience a higher state of rage after being exposed to the media. The participants who were less upset by the media and who had greater trait anger levels exhibited more aggressive behavior. Future research and implications for media aggressiveness models are explored. Devilly, G. J., O'Donohue, R. P., & Brown, K. (2023)^[11].

Although little empirical study has looked at how virtual reality (VR) technology might affect young children's prosocial behavior, it can offer new chances to encourage prosocial learning. Two studies looked into the impact of VR prosocial games on preschoolers' prosocial behavior in natural environments. As potential mediators between the prosocial play in virtual reality and prosocial behavior in the real world, positive affect and a sense of competence were looked at.

Children in the pro-social game condition showed higher sharing and assisting behavior's than children in the violent, happy, or neutral conditions across studies. The impact of prosocial play in virtual reality on prosocial behavior was mediated by positive affect; the impact of competence was insignificant. (Shoshani, A. (2023) ^[29]).

In order to investigate the long-term impact of playing violent video games on teenagers, the current study employed a longitudinal methodology. 488 teenagers from the United States answered questions about video gaming, aggressiveness, and several risk and protective variables for aggression. In order to analyze physical aggressiveness over time and investigate the potential links between playing violent video games and violence on a personal level, mixture regression was used. The findings indicated that those who had more risk factors or who played violent video games more frequently were more likely to be aggressive, and that playing violent video games probably made people more aggressive when they already had other gaming issues or were men with little self-control. The design of programs aimed at reducing aggressive behavior in teenagers may be affected by the findings of this study. (Coyné, S. M., *et al.* 2023) ^[10].

Although pretend play is a developmentally normal activity, it can be dangerous if kids copy harmful role models like superheroes. This study looked at the connections between children's risk-taking and pretend play, as well as their sensitivity to superhero identification and imagination. Imagination susceptibility has no effect on risk-taking behavior, the results show, whereas superhero identification may have an effect on risk-taking behavior in this age range. Pretending to be a superhero may not instantly boost risk-taking behavior. (Morgan, C. H. (2023) ^[28]).

In a meta-analytic process based on longitudinal research, they looked at the age-dependent association between VVG intake and subsequent physically violent behavior. The impact of VVG on later physically violent behavior was shown to be substantial and meaningful ($r = .21$) in a random-effects meta-analysis involving 30 effect sizes from 21 trials. A substantial U-shaped age trajectory with a peak in early adolescence at the age of 14 was shown using polynomial regression. The fact that the year of data collection did not correspond to the extent of the effect supports the idea of basing game publishing age ratings on potentially harmful behavioral consequences. (Burkhardt, J., & Lenhard, W. (2022) ^[5]).

Video games may affect a person's social network in addition to the player themselves. The societal influence of video games may thus be far greater than previously thought. Importantly, contrary to what is occasionally implied in public discourse, the interpersonal implications of playing video games need not always be bad. Even efforts to enhance social interactions can employ prosocial video games. (Greitemeyer, T. (2022) ^[18]).

Internet

Online social media and social networks have become a cultural reality in the modern day thanks to the advancement of technology. Digital media is increasingly being used, and in the contemporary day where it is possible to experience both the actual world and the virtual world simultaneously, this presents a number of options. On the other hand, the rise in online time also comes with it negative situations like cyberbullying. A cyberattack with the intent to harass or humiliate someone is known as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is behavior that tries to elicit unpleasant feelings while disrupting the social relationships of people selected as

victims. In order to establish measures to stop and counter this attack, it is crucial to understand how cyberbullying happens. (Söyleyici, G. T., & Kalkan, A. (2023) ^[30]). The study discovered a correlation between greater rates of individual cyber violence and exposure to antisocial internet material and certain social norms. Parental practices-focused treatments may be successful in reducing the adoption of online aggression because they focus on the injunctive norm of parents, which has a substantial impact on the rate of change. Collective descriptive norms may strengthen how media exposure affects online hostility. (Bullo, A., & Schulz, P. J. (2022) ^[4]). Study conducted by Agbaria in 2021 ^[1] examined whether the relationship between Internet addiction and aggressiveness among a sample of 284 Israeli-Palestinian teenagers in grades 9 through 12 across 10 public schools in Israel was mediated by self-control and subjective well-being (measured by positive and negative affect). Both self-control and good affect, which function as protective variables, separately moderate the positive connection between Internet addiction and violent behavior. These findings may support intervention strategies that focus on essential skills by giving theoretic insight into personal traits that may increase a person's propensity for problematic behavior. (Agbaria, Q. (2021) ^[1]). Studying psychological elements and the causes of cybervictimization can help researchers come up with interventions and preventative methods for online violence. 273 young boys and girls, representing all age groups of both sexes, participated in the study, which was performed between the ages of 14 and 20. The study's findings indicate that cybervictimization in online gaming is a pressing issue since today's youth and young adults cannot live without technology, leaving them open to threats, intimidation, manipulation, and other forms of hostility online. (Makarova, E. A., & Makarova, E. L. (2019) ^[26]. (Zhang, Y., *et al.*, 2022) ^[36] stated that teen aggression during the COVID-19 epidemic was mostly caused by Internet addiction.

Methodology

This review will follow a systematic approach to identify and evaluate relevant experimental studies that investigate the influence of media violence on aggressive behavior in children. Comprehensive literature searches will be conducted across electronic databases, including PubMed, Google Scholar, and Research Gate, using appropriate keywords and inclusion criteria. Studies will be included if they meet specific criteria, such as employing experimental designs, assessing media violence exposure, measuring aggressive behavior, and including child participants.

Discussion and Implications

The findings of this review will provide valuable insights into the relationship between media violence and aggressive behavior in children. By synthesizing the results of various experimental studies, this research aims to establish a clearer understanding of the potential influence of media violence on children's aggression. The analysis will explore potential moderators, such as the type of media, duration of exposure, and age of the children, to uncover nuanced effects. Understanding these relationships will inform evidence-based recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers regarding media consumption guidelines and the implementation of media literacy programs. Moreover, this research may contribute to the development of intervention strategies aimed at minimizing the potential negative impact of media violence on children's aggressive behavior.

Conclusion

By conducting review of experimental studies, this research seeks to advance our understanding of the influence of media violence on aggressive behavior in children.

- Children and teenagers who watch television may act aggressively or violently, use drugs or alcohol, participate in sexual activity, acquire weight, have a negative self-image, or perform poorly in school. The rise of television and the constant presentation of violent events in popular culture increases interpersonal aggression. However, determining which TV component is at fault is impossible. There were, however, favorable associations between viewing violent media and aggression.
- Those who are more impulsive, emotionally reactive, and annoyed by media material are more likely to feel a higher state of fury after being exposed to media content, whereas those who are less disturbed by media and have higher trait anger levels display more violent behavior. Children in the pro-social game condition shared and assisted more than children in the violent, cheerful, or neutral settings. Those with greater risk characteristics or who played violent video games more regularly were more likely to be aggressive, and playing violent video games likely made people more aggressive if they already had other gaming disorders or were males with limited self-control. Although pretend play is a developmentally normal activity, it can be dangerous if kids copy harmful role models like superheroes.
- There is a link between online addiction and violent behavior. There is a link between higher rates of individual cyber violence and exposure to antisocial online content and specific societal norms.

The findings of this study will have significant implications for parents, educators, and policymakers in promoting healthier media consumption habits and mitigating potential negative consequences. Ultimately, the aim is to foster a safer and more positive media environment for children, promoting their healthy development and well-being.

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