For decades, behavioral scientists reported that watching a lot of violence on television leaves children prone to developing aggressive, even violent behaviors. Now they report more troubling news: Those aggressive tendencies seen as a child appear to carry over into adulthood.

Children who frequently watch violent television shows are more likely to behave aggressively as adults, hold aggressive attitudes, and be convicted of a crime, according to a 15-year study of adults whose television viewing habits as children were recorded in the 1970s.

Those interviewed included 329 young adults in their 20s who had been part of a group of children in a 1977 study of the effects of television violence.

The television shows they watched as children that were considered especially violent at the time – including roadrunner cartoons, “Starsky and Hutch,” and “The Six Million Dollar Man” – pale in comparison to many of the violent television programs available to children today.

The study, supported in part by the National Institute of Mental Health, was reported in Developmental Psychology, a journal of the American Psychological Association. It was conducted by two veteran investigators of television violence, L. Rowell Huesmann, Ph.D., and Leonard D. Eron, Ph.D., and their colleagues at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research.

Early Findings Of Harm
Evidence of the possible harm of watching too much violence on television dates to the mid-1960s.

Dr. Huesmann and Dr. Eron, for example, were among the first researchers to report that grade school children exposed to a steady dose of violent television programs tended to be the children who teachers and friends identified as the more aggressive in class.

Other characteristics among children, including their levels of patience and their willingness to follow rules, were also found to be influenced by the amount of television violence they were exposed to.

Among adults, a steady dose of violent television has been found to contribute to a diminished capacity to feel sympathy for victims.

And adults who are fed a strong dose of violence are more likely to develop an exaggerated sense of danger in the world around them.

Lasting Impact
As studies matured, Drs. Huesmann, Eron, and others began reporting evidence that hinted at a link between high levels of violence watched by children and the aggressive, violent, even criminal behavior they exhibited later as adults.

Their latest findings are based on surveys of adults who had been part of a 1977 study as young children, police and court records, and interviews with spouses and significant others.

Outcomes were measure by how many times they committed aggressive acts such as spousal abuse and physical aggression, and on records of criminal activities.

In every category, children who had viewed the most television violence were more aggressive as adults compared to

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VIOLENT TELEVISION’S LINGERING EFFECTS

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Among the women, those who watched the most TV violence as children were four times more likely to have punched or choked another adult.

This report was based on the following sources:


References

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