

Youth, crime, and the media

Law, Criminology



YOUTH, CRIME, & THE MEDIA The media plays a major role in creating the distorted images of our youth that we the public perceive. Most of these images emphasize problems like crime, drug use, and teen pregnancy. The skewed coverage in today's media results in the belief that youth crime is on the rise. Today's portrayal of teens in the media employ the same stereotypes that were once only openly applied to unpopular racial and ethnic groups. Although violent crime by youth was at its lowest point in the 25-year history of the National Crime Victimization Survey, 62% of poll respondents felt that juvenile crime was on the increase. The majority of this percentage stated that they received their information from the media. As for the drug use, over the last 12 years the statistics have fluctuated in fractions and is currently down according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. In the area of teen pregnancy, in a 1991 campaign to promote school-based clinics, the American Medical Association (AMA) and the National Associations of State Board of Education published a report that inflated the 280, 000 annual births to unmarried teenaged mothers into " half a million". People rely on the news media for accurate information and when it comes to crime, they only getting part of the story. This causes confusion rather than clarity by not getting the whole story. Across the nation, crime dropped by 20 percent from 1990 to 1998 while network television showed an 83 percent increase in crime news. During the same year homicide coverage on the network news increased significantly while actual homicides were down. According to the report, " Off Balance: Youth, Race, and the Crime in the News," the problem is not the inaccuracy of individual stories, but that the cumulative choices of what is included or not included in the news. The news

presents the public with a false picture of higher frequency and severity of crime than is actually true. The study found that homicide coverage on network news increased 473% from 1990 to 1998, while homicides decreased 32.9% during that time. While homicides committed by youth declined by 68% from 1993 to 1999, 62% of the public reported they believed youth crime was on the rise. Although 1950 youth crime statistics are too incomplete to compare, national reports show no increase in juvenile crime rates in at least two decades. Portrayals of teens in today's media images employ the same stereotypes that were only applied to unpopular racial and ethnic groups: violent, reckless, hyper-sexed, welfare-draining, obnoxious, ignorant, according to a report ran in the Washington Post. Like traditional stereotypes, the modern media teenager is an imprecise image, resulting from the dismal fictions promoted by official agencies and interest groups. In an environment in which fear of youth crime and real crime are so out of sync, the media must explore deeper, ask why, and seek a full answer. Youths seldom appear in the news, but when they do, they are undeservedly connected to crime or violence. In one review of more than 9,600 network and local TV stories, only nine were about teens being praised for positive works. The "Off Balance" study makes a few recommendations, which includes putting crime into context by providing relevant data on crime statistics, matching stories about youth and crime with stories about youth accomplishments, and conducting voluntary periodic audits of news subject matter and sharing the outcome with news consumers. The media can shape, further than coverage of a lone event, the way the public views a situation, a group of people, or an image. It can have an effect on how

people in influential positions think, from police officers to judges. One of the reasons for the overrepresentation is a consequence of people acting on stereotypes.

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