

# Television violence and how it affects our children? essay sample

[Media](#), [Television](#)



## Abstract

The effects of television violence on children's behavior are a reality according to previous researches on the matter. At the different stages of their growth children are exposed to television violence much of which are preventable if parents and the people of television industry will exercise proper discretion as toddlers were seen not to be attracted with the violence but the vivid features of production. Parents can limit their children's exposure to violence by restricting the amount and types of programs children watch, which is probably the most effective and common means of mediation for children of all ages and by different strategies that are specifically appropriate for children at different ages. It may be true that television violence does not explain all the causes of children's aggression. But the television industry should not make things worse to make these children more aggressive by not responsibly exposing children to unnecessary violence. Starting to act while children are young would do much to society. One way for the parents and the television industry to fulfill their noble roles is by preventing the effect of television violence on children by acting more responsibly.

## 1. Introduction

This paper seeks to discuss and analyze the reality of television violence and how it affects children. It will start first by knowing who are part of the word " children", will discuss the possibility and the manner of effects upon the children under the different stages of children's life. The paper hopes to end with a recommendation of what should be done by parents and television

industry to prevent the effects of such violence, children if indeed children are affected with television violence.

## 2. Analysis and Discussion

### 2. 1. Definition of a child

Wikipedia (2006) made the following definition:

A child (plural: children) is a young human. Precise definitions vary; the American Heritage Dictionary [2] This article discusses prepubescent minors.

Based on the above definition we therefore could include in all our discussion persons below 18 years of age as part of the children and our definition will also include infants and toddlers up to adolescents

### 2. 2 The reality of television violence based on researches.

Television violence does exist and their effects on children based on researches. Josephson, W. (1995) cited some of these to include “ imitation of violence and crime seen on television (copycat violence) (Bandura, 1965), reduced inhibitions against behaving aggressively (Bandura, 1973), the “ triggering” of impulsive acts of aggression (priming) (Josephson, 1987), and the displacing of activities, such as socializing with other children and interacting with adults, that would teach children non-violent ways to solve conflicts (Joy, Kimball and Zabrack, 1986).” Further, she said that television violence has also been found to have emotional effects on children and that children may become desensitized to real-life violence (Thomas, Horton and Lippincott, 1977), they may come to see the world as a mean and scary

place (Singer, Singer and Rapaczynski, 1984) or they may come to expect others to resort to physical violence to resolve conflicts (Leifer and Roberts, 1972). Furthermore, Josephson, (1995) said that although some early research (Feshback and Singer, 1971), suggested that televised violence might allow viewers to vent destructive impulses through fantasy instead of acting them out against real-life targets, later findings have not supported this so-called “catharsis” hypothesis.

Based on the above, the reality of violence does exist but we will just do is to understand the effects as these pass through different stages in life.

2. 3 Children passing through different stages watch and understand television in different ways

Josephson, W. (1995), aptly said: “At different ages, children watch and understand television in different ways, depending on the length of their attention span, the way in which they process information, the amount of mental effort they invest, and their own life experiences. These variables must all be examined to gain an understanding of how television violence affects children at different ages.” The author continued starting with the infants by saying: “Infants (children up to 18 months old) can pay attention to an operating television set for short periods of time, but such attention demands a great effort, and infants are usually more interested in their own daily activities. Even when they do direct their attention to the television, infants are likely missing most of what adults consider to be program content, experiencing it primarily as fragmented displays of light and sound,

which they are intermittently able to group into meaningful combinations such as recognizable human or animal characters.”

As to how the infants got affected by television violence, she said: “ No research has focused specifically on how violent content affects infants, but there is some evidence that infants can imitate behavior from television when that behavior is presented in a simple, uncluttered and instructional manner.”

#### 2. 4. When do children become full fledged viewers?

We know that infants grow and there must be a point on when could be viewed as full fledged viewers. What age would that be? Josephson, (1995), answered: “ Children do not become full-fledged “ viewers” until around the age of two-and-a-half. As toddlers, they begin to pay more attention to the television set when it is on, and they develop a limited ability to extract meaning from television content. They are likely to imitate what they see and hear on television.” Josephson, (1995) warned that the viewing patterns children establish as toddlers will influence their viewing habits throughout their lives. She also warned that since toddlers have a strong preference for cartoons and other programs that have characters that move fast, there is considerable likelihood that they will be exposed to large amounts of violence.

What do you think will happen when these children enter school? Josephson, (1995) said: “ At the preschool age (three to five years old), children begin watching television with an “ exploration” approach. They actively search

for meaning in the content, but are still especially attracted to vivid production features, such as rapid character movement, rapid changes of scene, and intense or unexpected sights and sounds.”

## 2. 5. How are they influenced by television?

Does this preschooler have attracted to television violence? Josephson, (1995), answered this question saying: “ Because television violence is accompanied by vivid production features, preschoolers are predisposed to seek out and pay attention to violence — particularly cartoon violence. It is not the violence itself that makes the cartoons attractive to preschoolers, but the accompanying vivid production features. With this preference for cartoons, preschoolers are being exposed to a large number of violent acts in their viewing day. Moreover, they are unlikely to be able to put the violence in context, since they are likely to miss any subtlety conveyed mitigating information. Preschoolers behave more aggressively than usual in their play after watching any high-action exciting television content, but especially after watching violent television.”

## 2. 6. Will there be change when children reach the elementary school age?

Josephson, (1995) said: “ Elementary school age (age’s six to eleven) is considered a critical period for understanding the effects of television on aggression. At this stage, children develop the attention span and cognitive ability to follow continuous plots, to make inferences about implicit content, and to recognize motivations and consequences to characters’ actions.

However, they are also investing increasingly less mental effort overall in

their viewing and it is mental effort that determines whether children will process television information deeply or merely react to it in an unfocused, superficial way.” The author continued saying:“ By age eight, children are more likely to be sensitive to important moderating influences of television content, and will not become more aggressive themselves if the violence they see is portrayed as evil, as causing human suffering, or as resulting in punishment or disapproval. However, they are especially likely to show increased aggression from watching violent television if they believe the violence reflects real life, if they identify with a violent hero (as boys often do), or if they engage in aggressive fantasies.”

What will happen to their tendencies to watch cartoon? Josephson, (1995) said: “ At ages 6 to 11, elementary school children still watch cartoons but also begin watching more adult or family-oriented programming than they did when they were younger. They also develop a surprising taste for horror movies, perhaps deliberately scaring themselves in an attempt to overcome their own fears. However, to the extent that they are desensitizing themselves to fear and violence, they are also very likely becoming more tolerant of violence in the real world.”

## 2. 7. How if they these children reach adolescence?

Josephson (1995) said: “ During adolescence (age 12 to 17), the middle school to high school years, children become capable of high levels of abstract thought and reasoning, although they rarely use these abilities when watching television, continuing to invest little mental effort. They

watch less television than they did when they were younger, and watch less with their families. Their interests at this age tend to revolve around independence, sex and romance, and they develop a preference for music videos, horror movies, and (boys particularly) pornographic videos, which deal with these topics, although usually in negative ways." The author continued: " Adolescents in middle school and high school are much more likely than younger children to doubt the reality of television content and much less likely to identify with television characters. The small percentages of those who continue to believe in the reality of television and to identify with its violent heroes are the ones likely to be more aggressive, especially if they continue to fantasize about aggressive-heroic themes."

Will the adolescent's high levels of abstract thought and reasoning have something to do susceptibility to violence will they now become more responsible? Josephson (1995) answered saying: " Their superior abstract reasoning abilities and their tendency at this age to challenge conventional authority make adolescents particularly susceptible to imitating some kinds of television violence, crime and portrayals of suicide. However, these imitative acts affect only a small percentage of adolescents."

## 2. 8. What are the parents' role under given situations?

Josephson, (1995), said: " In a world in which violent television is pervasive and children are susceptible to its effects, parents are the best mediators of their children's viewing." She advised that there are a number of ways under which " parents can limit their children's exposure to violence by



restricting the amount and types of programs children watch” which is probably the most effective and common means of mediation for children of all ages. She however cautioned by saying that there are also strategies that are specifically appropriate for children at different ages.

Josephson (1995) thus said: “ Under normal conditions, parents probably do not need to worry too much about their infants being negatively influenced by television, although they might want to limit their exposure to violence or other portrayals it might be dangerous for an infant to imitate.” She suggested that limiting exposure to this kind of TV content is especially wise with toddlers, who are even more prone to imitating what they see on television. According to the author, “ parents can take for toddlers is to examine and regulate their own viewing behavior, since toddlers are highly influenced by their parents’ viewing habits.” Further, the author said that parental mediation to reduce a preschooler’s aggression (as well as fears from what they see on television) can include viewing with the child, commenting on content, providing distraction or comfort if the child is frightened, and encouraging or discouraging behavior they see preschoolers imitating from television. (Paraphrasing made)

For older children the author suggested that it is more useful for parents to discuss, explain, and challenge television. “ By doing so, parents can help their children to interpret television material and overcome the effect televised violence has on their attitudes and behavior. Another positive effect of these strategies is that children invest more mental effort in their

watching, becoming more critical and analytical viewers,” Josephson (1995) said.

She also suggested that encouraging adolescents to express their opinions and to analyze and question television content is a parental strategy that has been found to reduce adolescents’ fears and aggressiveness, as well as to improve their critical approach to the medium. (Josephso, 1995)

(Paraphrasing made)

Are parents the only entities that should be made responsible? The next section assigns to other entities the big responsibility as protecting children from violence as seen in the next section.

## 2. 9. Responsibility of the Television Industry

Josephson (1995) said: “ There is an unfortunate lack of non-violent educational and entertaining programming specifically geared to children. It would not be a difficult challenge to come up with non-violent programming, since it is not the violence itself that attracts viewers. The television industry would do well to create programming specifically aimed at child audiences, taking into account the various approaches to watching television and the interests of each age group.” The author thus started with the toddlers by saying: “ Although toddlers do not understand a great deal of program content, creating educational programming using such features as animation, children’s or women’s voices on the sound track, and simplified movements and camera work will likely win them as loyal viewers. A habit of watching educational programs (as opposed to cartoons) will reduce their

exposure to violent content and make it more likely that they will watch and benefit from educational television later on, as preschoolers.” As for the preschoolers, the author said that effective programming would include the use of vivid production features and “ child-directed speech” (simple sentences spoken slowly, referring to objects that are actually being shown on the screen and with repetition). She explained that these features will improve their attention and understanding and can be used to highlight important features of program content, such as critical plot events.

For the elementary school-aged audience, which the Josephson (1995) has referred “ almost forgotten group” when it comes to targeted programming, she suggested such programming could easily avoid violence, since children at this age are still more attracted to variability and tempo than to violence. She thus argued that although boys, particularly, seek out male heroes who tend to be violent, it is actually the hero’s power (not the violence) that is the attraction. She further suggested that strong, yet positive, counter stereotypical television characters could be created to fit the bill, since these have proven to equally attract their interest, as effectively as violent heroes.

For adolescents, the author suggested that programming for adolescents should avoid promoting rape myths and portraying violent behavior that promises fun, “ kicks,” or instant notoriety. She explained that such programming might lessen the number of horror and pornographic videos that adolescents watch if television programming were provided that addresses their particular needs and interests. (Josephson, 1995)

(Paraphrasing made)

### Conclusion:

We have seen how children get affected by television violence. There is much that children could do. The parents and television industry bear much of the responsibility since they could do something to prevent the effect television violence on children.

It may be true that television violence does not explain all the causes of children's aggression. It may be similarly that some children are more likely to be affected by television violence than others by nature and likelihood is that these will be the same children who are more likely to be potentially more aggressive anyway. But the television industry should not make things worse to make these children more aggressive. Although only few children viewers may get affected their effect would be much more if they do become the aggressors of society cultured and made worse by television violence, which this paper suggests is preventable.

Starting to act while children are young would do much to society increasing violence. If parents and the television industry do fulfill a noble role in society what would they not start in preventing the effect of Television violence on children?

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