

Effects of tv on behaviour and attitudes of children

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



Children today spend more time watching television than on any other single leisure activity. In fact, studies have shown that the average child spends more time in front of the television than in school (Clarke and Kurte-Coastes, 1997). There are a variety of influences that children gain from watching too much television. The impact of violence on children is a major issue, as well as the impact of stereotypical views, such as sex roles. Health can also become a problem for children who spend excessive amounts of time in front of the television. There are, however, alternatives to these problems. Parent, schools and the governments need to take control and monitor children and television. After all, television was once used as an educational tool it has only recently become a babysitter. The effect of violence in television has been debated for many years. In a recent study, Strasburger and Donnerstein (1999), suggests that there is a positive correlation between violence viewed on television and aggressive behavior in children. The way television violence is portrayed encourages children to learn aggressive attitudes and behaviors. For example most violence on television is glamorized by using a good character that is likely to be perceived as role model to initiate violence. This gives children the impression that violence is justified, desirable, and painless. Violence on television also increases fear or gives children the wrong impression about the world. Many children have a hard time making distinctions about what is real and unreal. Therefore, they begin to believe that the television depicts violence in the real world. The bottom line is, children learn their attitudes about violence at a very young age, and once learned, the attitudes tend to be life-long (Strasburger and Donnerstein, 1999). Television also encourages stereotyped opinions on

topics such as sex roles. Research shows that children who spend more time watching television tend to think that both women and men have specified roles in the world (Kent and Moy, 1999). Television usually portrays women as passive and weak compared to men who are usually depicted as strong and dominant (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1997). This gives children a clear impression of what is expected of them in society. It insists that they too should act this way because it is, after all, what society views appropriate. Television even pushes children toward specific sex role using toys. Most toy commercials, for example, even insist that some toys are only for girls while others are only for boys. Children are very rarely encouraged to play with toys that are known to be for the opposite sex. For example, boys aren't aloud to play with dolls and girls aren't aloud to play with trucks. Television also emphasizes the importance of physical beauty. Stress is placed on looking a certain way, whether it is having the right clothing or being a certain weight. These are influences that children take very seriously considering that most children want to be the popular one in school. Take the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, for example, the female good rangers are viewed typically as beautiful and perfect. The female villains are typically viewed as repulsive and are teased. In most schools this is the kind of schoolyard harassment to which unpopular girls are subjected (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1997). Television also takes a major toll on a child's physical health. Obesity in children is rising and television is being credited in playing apart. One reason may be that children are spending less time on physical activities, such as, swimming and riding bikes (Vecchine, 1997). Evidence also shows that children like to snack while watching television, which can

add to the weight especially for those children who do not do much physical activity. Commercials on television also play a part in weight gain among children. Commercials tend to enhance a child's craving for the food products being advertised which persuades children to buy their food. In most cases the food advertised on television is high in calories and fat, which adds weight (Anonymous, 1999). Although television influences many children all over the world there are alternatives to the problem. Starting at home parents need to be aware of what their children are watching, as well as how many hours are spent watching television. More importantly parents need to take time to watch and discuss the programs with their children. (Victor Stasburger and Edward Donnerstein, 7). This allows for the children, especially the smaller ones who have a hard time differentiating reality from fiction, to make distinctions. Schools can also play a role in preventing the problem by accommodating children with media education. Schools need to redirect negative education into knowledgeable information. Just because a television program may not be educational does not mean a student cannot learn from it. A non-educational show can be turned into a learning tool that will teach children how to think critically by analyzing the program at hand. The federal government also plays an important role. They have already begun to help by passing the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which makes rating possible and V-chips a must. V-chips are now mandatory for television sets built starting September 1997. Both V-chips and ratings allow parents to safeguard their children against shows that they think are inappropriate for them to watch. Lastly the entertainment industry needs to examine their motives. What do they want to teach children? They need to take into

consideration the harm they may be causing children by airing a program with too much violence and profanity. During the so-called family hour (the hours between 8: 00pm and 9: 00pm), objectable material such as foul language, violent incidents and lewd references to sexual activity went up 75% (Bozell, 1999). According to Strasburger and Donnerstein (1999), children watch between 16-17 hours of television a week. Taking this into consideration, producers need to think about the impact it might have on children's future behaviors, after all, children are the future. Though much of the research has shown the downside to television there is an upside.

Television once upon a time was considered to be a great educator especially for those who were economically disadvantaged. In fact education was the main emphasis for the television show Sesame Street. It was suppose to teach intellectual skills and knowledge relevant to success in school. It brought a new level of teaching to those who otherwise wouldn't have necessarily gotten it before they entered preschool. Research even suggested that kids would remember more of their teaching from a video versus hearing it (Anderson, 1998). As previously stated, television can also be used by schools as learning tools to educate children to think critically. By analyzing programs such as Beavis and Butthead which tend to have no educational value whatsoever, children can walk away with a lesson and not a bad influence. In conclusion, television has taken away precious time that children can otherwise be reading, writing or exploring new things in their environment. Television is teaching our future children that violence is accepted and in some cases desirable. It influences children decisions about who they are and what they want to be. It has also taken a toll on physical

health of young children. Television was once an educator, but overtime is gradually ruining our youth. The bottom line is we need to educate our youth and redirect the negative influences of television into positive activities