

# DHR Bulletin –

## Impact of watching violent films

### Focus:

By looking through the recent DHR recommendation, it has been brought to light the importance of understanding the risk of increased aggression with watching violent films.

### Key Recommendations regarding the above:

- An extended knowledge of the links between watching violent films and increased aggression would enhance professional practice.
- An awareness of the links between Domestic Abuse, Violent films and increased aggression.

### Overview

Whilst completing research regarding the link between violent films and increased aggression, it became clear that there is a lack of both analysis and inquiry specific to violent films and aggression. Therefore, we decided to widen our research into the links between increased aggression and violent media, which would include films, video games and television shows.

There are many conflicting opinions amongst psychologists, academics, and psychiatrists when it comes to looking at the link between violent media and increased aggression. However, the Media Violence Commission of the International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA) has stated:

*“Over the past 50 years, a large number of studies conducted around the world have shown that watching violent television, watching violent films, or playing violent video games increases the likelihood for aggressive behaviour.”*

Through research and analysis, we have found the following findings regarding the links between violent media and increased aggression, however it is important to note that these have been conflicted.

### What is violent media?

Media violence includes all forms of mass communication that depict the threat to use force, the act of using force, or the consequences of the use of force against animate beings (including cartoon characters or other species as well as humans). There are many forms of media, including TV programs, movies, video games, comic books, and music. *Media Violence and Aggression (Social Psychology 2016)*

### Who have we contacted?

To explore this area of research, we have been in contact with multiple different professionals to get their point of view, including:

- ❖ Forensic Psychologists
- ❖ Online Safety Experts
- ❖ Stay Safe workers who work with children that watch violent media.



## Key Findings:

- ❖ 'Most reviews and meta-analyses have reported a strong relationship between media violence and the likelihood of aggressive behavior. Repeated exposure to media violence has been proposed to dampen aversive physiological responses of individuals, leading to a process of desensitization' (Chabbouh et al., 2023).
- ❖ 'Exposure to violent media can have several undesirable effects. One effect is that people who consume a lot of violent media become less sympathetic to victims of violence' (Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. 2002).
- ❖ 'People also perceive victims as injured less and display less empathy toward them after exposure to violent media' (Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. 2002).
- ❖ 'Violent media have also been shown to influence a wide range of other aspects of aggression, such as aggressive thoughts (Gentile et al.,2017), desensitization to violence (Fanti et al., 2009), or everyday sadism' (Greitemeyer & Sagioglou, 2017).
- ❖ A 2010 review by psychologist Craig A. Anderson and others concluded that 'the evidence strongly suggests that exposure to violent video games is a causal risk factor for increased aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, and aggressive affect and for decreased empathy and prosocial behavior' (Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. 2002).
- ❖ 'People who consume a lot of violent media are more likely to attend to hostile information and expect others to behave in a hostile manner. They may also interpret ambiguous situations in the worst possible light, assuming that the behavior of others reflects hostility rather than other, more positive traits such as assertiveness' (Huesmann, L.R. et al.2003)
- ❖ 'People who are characteristically aggressive seem to be more affected by violent media than are people who are not characteristically aggressive' (Huesmann, L.R. et al.2003)

**Delhove and Greitemeyer (2021)** completed a study regarding violent media use and aggression in 2021. They completed a longitudinal study using psychology students, measuring their media exposure, aggression and personality. This was completed over the course of a year. From this, they created the following hypothesis:

Violent Media Effect	Homophily	Social Influence
Individuals who consume more violent media report more aggression than those who consume little or no violent media.	Individuals are more likely to befriend others with similar media usage, personality, and behaviors.	Individuals whose friends consume relatively high levels of violent media report more aggression and perceive aggression as more normative, even when controlling for the level of the individuals' own consumption of violent media.

### Criticism

Research completed in this area however has been highly disputed, for various reasons. The study completed by Delhove and Greitemeyer (2021) found their hypothesis to be incorrect. They did not have a link between violent media and aggression, however there was an increased aggression with neutral media. Findings did support however the link between watching violent media and the perception of aggression being more acceptable.

Research in this area has also had the following criticisms:

- ❖ Research in this area has been recognized as controversial, as some believe that there is no link between violent media and aggression (Ferguson et al.,2020).
- ❖ It has been argued that experimental studies of violent games on aggression are plagued by publication bias (Hilgard et al., 2017).
- ❖ Some recent, pre-registered, experimental studies failed to find that playing violent video games increases aggression in the short term (Engelhardt et al.,2015; McCarthy et al.,2016)
- ❖ The relationship between trait aggression and violent media is complex, and these findings only represent trait differences at a single point in time (McCarthy et al., 2016)

### Conclusion

The above information provides professionals with an awareness of potential links between accessing violent media and aggression, at the same time as highlighting there is no conclusive insight into this being a causal link. This information and awareness will support professionals to consider a balanced approach to assessing individual behaviours and should be considered alongside other key information that is known about each individual as opposed to being used in isolation.

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