

'Broad consensus' that violent media increase child aggression

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Image credit: Openeducation

Majorities of media researchers, parents and pediatricians agree that exposure to violent media can increase aggression in children, according to a new national study.

The study found that 66 percent of [researchers](#), 67 percent of parents and 90 percent of pediatricians agree or strongly agree that violent video games can increase aggressive behavior among children.

Majorities of these groups also believed that children's aggressive behavior can be fueled by viewing [violent video](#) games, movies, TV

programs, and Internet sites. However, fewer than half agreed that violent comic books or literature would have such harmful effects on children.

"Some people claim there is no consensus about whether violent media can increase aggression in children, but this study shows that there is consensus," said Brad Bushman, lead author of the study and professor of communication and psychology at The Ohio State University.

"As in most areas of research, there is not complete agreement. But we found the overwhelming majority of media researchers, parents and pediatricians agree that violent media is harmful to children."

Bushman conducted the study with Carlos Cruz, a doctoral student at Ohio State, and Mario Gollwitzer, a professor at Philipps University Marburg in Germany. Their study appears online in the journal *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*.

Bushman noted that while 66 percent of researchers agreed or strongly agreed that [violent video games](#) increased aggression, only 17 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. The remaining 17 percent were undecided.

"That means that among researchers who have an opinion, eight out of 10 agree that [violent games](#) increase aggression," Bushman said. "That's hardly a controversy."

For the study, the researchers surveyed 371 media psychologists and communication scientists from three professional organizations; 92 members of the Council on Communication and Media of the American Academy of Pediatrics; and a nationally representative sample of 268 American parents.

In addition to the other findings, the study revealed that majorities of researchers, pediatricians and parents agreed that there is a causal relationship between exposure to violent media and [aggressive behavior](#).

There was considerable disagreement among the three groups as to whether media violence was a major factor in real-life violence. That finding is not surprising, Bushman said, but it underscores one of the important implications of this study.

"With the general consensus about the harmful effects of media violence, it may seem surprising that some people still question the effects of violent media on aggression," Bushman said. "One important reason is that people don't distinguish between aggression and violence."

Violent acts are rare, he said, and are caused by many factors acting together.

"You cannot predict a shooting rampage just based on exposure to violent media or any other single factor," Bushman said.

But the evidence is clear, he said, that exposure to violent media can predict less-serious forms of aggression.

Bushman said other forces driving the continued public debate on violent media effects include: journalists reporting violent media research in a way that increases uncertainty; media industries having a vested interest in keeping the public uncertain about the link between violent media and aggression; the motivation of violent media consumers to deny they are affected; and a few [media researchers](#) who repeatedly claim that [violent media](#) do not increase [aggression](#).

Provided by The Ohio State University

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