

Violent video games not linked to aggression in adults with autism

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Adult playing video game

Following the 2012 shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, some in the media and the public speculated a link existed between autism spectrum disorder and violence and, in particular, that violent video games may cause gamers with autism to act violently. Now, a study from the University of Missouri has found evidence to contradict this speculation. It is the first study to test the effects of violent video games on aggression in adults with autism spectrum disorder.

"If [violent video games](#) caused adults with [autism spectrum disorder](#) to behave aggressively, we should have seen some evidence of this in our study, but we did not," said lead author Christopher Engelhardt, a postdoctoral fellow in the MU School of Health Professions and the MU Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders.

The MU researchers also found strong evidence that [violent video](#) games do not affect adults with autism spectrum disorder differently than typically developing adults.

"There are some caveats to our findings," Engelhardt said. "For example, we only exposed participants to violent or nonviolent games for 15 minutes before measuring their willingness to behave aggressively. This study, therefore, cannot speak to the potential long-term effects of violent-[video-game](#) exposure."

After playing one of two video games that differed only in the amount of violence present in the game, participants engaged in a task to measure aggression. In that task, participants were led to believe they were competing against another person in a trial to test their reaction times. If the participant won the trial, he or she could "blast" their opponent with a loud noise. The length and volume of that noise were determined by the participant, which allowed the researchers to measure aggression levels in the participants. More than 100 adults between the ages of 17 and 25, half with autism spectrum disorder and half typically developing, participated in the study.

More information: Manuscript osf.io/7b28v/

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