

# NEWS

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Killers and other violent characters appear less frequently on TV screens today than they did a few years ago. But nearly three-quarters of the programs aired still show violence. And the rate of victimization--a ratio of those who commit violent acts to those victimized--is up. Viewers are getting the message, highly overstated, that life is dangerous.

The findings are part of the sixth annual Violence Profile, released today (Monday, December 16) by George Gerbner and Larry Gross, professors at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications. The profile, a picture of the 1973-74 viewing season as compared to previous seasons, reveals evidence of a "television generation" and assesses the influence of several factors on TV's ability to cultivate exaggerated notions about violence and law enforcement.

The violence study, for which Gerbner and Gross are principal investigators, was begun in 1967 and is now part of a Cultural Indicators Study sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health.

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The project is tracking trends in television content and effects, in response to congressional and industry requests for reliable measures to guide discussion and policy.

In their most recent profile, compiled after monitoring in the fall of 1973, Gerbner and Gross report that the violence index--a figure tabulating incidence of violence--is lower. However, they note, "more important than sheer incidence is the nature and role that violence has taken on in the minds of viewers and in the life of society." The new results provide the clearest picture to date of relationships between television viewing and the extension of some viewer beliefs to the world of social reality.

The current profile reports the highest ratios of victimization in the seven-year study. For every 10 persons portrayed as violent last year, 14 were hurt or killed. Victims in cartoons numbered 17 for every 10 characters inflicting violence.

And the victims are disproportionately society's have-nots: female, old, lower class, foreign and nonwhite. The ratio of fatal victimization for women is especially brutal, with the seven-year totals showing 21 male killers for every 10 men killed, but only 10 female killers for every 15 women killed. Single women suffered from the worst killer-killed ratio. Lower-class women were the most victimized generally, with nonwhite and old women next in order.

Men fared better than women in all categories, but the gap narrowed slightly when those involved were married. "Men lose power in

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marriage, while women gain," Gerbner says, noting the anomaly from television's usual portrayal of sex roles.

"This pattern of victimization demonstrates a structure of social power and, as the research findings indicate, may cultivate an invidious sense of risk and fear," Gerbner and Gross report.

As part of the violence study, those interviewed were asked to estimate the possibility of encountering violence in their own lives, the proportion of crimes that are violent, and the number of people working in law enforcement--all questions to which television gives much different answers than those dictated by actual statistics. Heavy viewers responded significantly more with television's answers than did light viewers.

This "cultivation differential" showed up strongly among those under 30--the first generation to grow up with television. The young people showed significantly greater cultivation effects than did members of the last pre-television generation.

Women, too, showed a disproportionate effect, and young women were particularly vulnerable to television's lessons. While people with a college education in general expressed a somewhat different view, education provided no "antidote" for young women who watch television a lot. "Age and sex roles on television and in life combine to make young women the most impressionable and the least able to benefit from alternative cultural influences that affect other groups," the researchers report.

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Newspaper reading, too, was shown to cut into the television view of reality, but, again, primarily for light viewers. Higher newspaper readership, but not increased viewing of television news, corresponded with a lower cultivation differential. Among those who read newspapers equally, heavy television viewers are more likely to see life's dangers in exaggerated form than are light viewers.

Violence--defined as "the overt expression of physical force against self or other compelling action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually hurting or killing"--has throughout the seven-year study period ranked among the top five themes in general adult programming. For cartoons, it has remained the top-ranked theme. The researchers identified a total of 25 program themes.

In the fall of 1973, about half of the network schedule was devoted to "action programming", the source of most prime-time TV violence. "And the 'action' was moving closer to home in the form of an increasing number of crime shows," Gerbner reports.

Fewer of these shows, however, found their way into prime-time TV serials. While violence in 1973 occurred in 73 percent of the total programming--and in almost all cartoons--it was found in only 54 percent of adult prime-time TV plays, the result of network policy decisions. Such selective reductions caused the Gerbner-Gross violence index to drop from 181 in 1967 to 160 in 1973. The index is composed of five indicators, including such factors as percentage of shows containing violence, number of violent episodes per show, and percentage of leading characters involved in violence.

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The next annual report of the Violence Profile, including the 1974-75 television season, is expected to be completed in the summer of 1975.

Violence Profile No. 6 (Part I), a 44-page discussion of study results, is available from the investigators. The complete volume, including tabulations (Parts II and III), can be obtained from the same source by sending a check or money order for \$12.00 made out to the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania.

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