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October 16, 2016

Independent Study and Mentorship

Research Assessment #5

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Subject: Children, Adolescents, and Television

Source(s):

Bar-On, M. E., Broughton, D. D., Buttross, S., Corrigan, S., Gedissman, A., González De Rivas, M. R., ... Stone, J. (2001). *Children, adolescents, and television*. *Pediatrics*, *107*(2), 423-426. DOI: 10.1542/peds.107.2.423

Analysis:

This publication hones in on the possible negative health effects of television viewing on children and adolescents. Potential health effects can include violent and aggressive behavior, substance use, sexual activity, obesity, poor body image, and worsened school performance. The article suggests that there are approaches to reduce these problems in children and adolescents. The television ratings system and the v-chip, an electronic device to block programming, as well as media education are three important methods to control television viewing habits of children.

According to a Nielsen Media Research data report, the average child or adolescent in the United States watches an average of about 3 hours of television per day. This time spent in front of the television can serve as a barrier to more worthwhile and rewarding pursuits, including reading, exercising, or spending quality time with friends and family. In addition, children and adolescents can be especially sensitive to the messages conveyed through television shows, which serve to influence their perceptions and behaviors later on in life.

The recently completed 3-year National Television Violence Study found that nearly two thirds of all television programming contains violence, with children's shows containing the most violence. It also found that portrayals of violence are usually glamorized and that perpetrators of the crimes often go unpunished, which could set a false standard in children's minds. According to a recent content analysis by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, mainstream television programming contains large numbers of references to cigarettes, alcohol, and illicit drugs. These frequent references create familiarity for the children with these substances, so that they feel more obligated to try them out when presented in situations involving cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs.

To combat these growing issues, new television sets with screens that are 13 inches or greater all contain v-chips that enable parents to set individualized programming on each device to block out specific shows that could be inappropriate for their children to view. To block out television shows from access by their children, parents can utilize the television ratings system, which contains age and content descriptions that account for violence or drug references, sexual situations, suggestive content, and adult language or profanity. Besides these in-home methods, media education programs have been included in classroom learning plans beginning in elementary school in numerous

states across the United States. These programs, when implemented into the curriculum, teach children about the harmful effects of being exposed to violence and alcohol or drug references through television shows.

After reading through this article, I agree with all points that the authors make. Children and adolescents lose more than they gain through television viewing, and while it is fine to watch television occasionally as a way to relax, it should not become a regular habit that manifests itself into a distraction. Time spent in front of the television could be better used for productive tasks, such as exercising or reading a book.

The methods mentioned to combat the negative effects of television viewing are feasible options that are accessible to the everyday American household. In the years after this article was written, parental controls on TVs have become commonplace, and while v-chips are less widely-known, they would still be effective in reducing the amount of time children spend in front of the television.

Pediatricians today can ensure that children and adolescents spend less time in front of the television by encouraging them to pay attention during media education classes at school, by telling parents to remove any television sets from children's rooms, and by enforcing limits on the number of hours a child can watch television in a set period of time. Using these methods, the harmful effects of television watching will be reduced greatly and children and adolescents in America will be less affected by these consequences.