

**PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIEWING
TELEVISED VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN**

by

Brenda L. Lawton-Oliphant

has been approved

July 1997

**A Master's Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

Master of Arts

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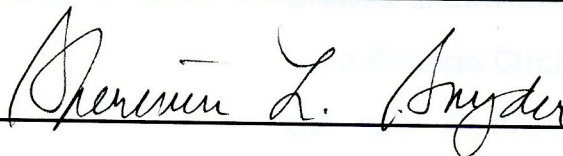
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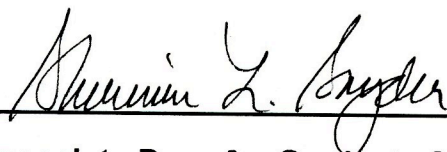
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ABSTRACT

The research question addressed in this study was: what are parents' perceptions of the relationship between television's depiction of violence, and aggressive behavior in their children.

A review of literature published on the subject of televised violence and its relationship to aggressive behavior in children viewers and other studies conducted revealed that there is quantitative evidence to substantiate the position that television programming's depiction of violence has a negative affect on younger viewers. Numerous studies have shown that when children watch violence, it increases their aggressive behavior and blunts their emotional responses. Research also indicated that the degree of effect ranges from moderate to strong, depending on the age, amount of hours spent viewing, and types of programs viewed.

In this study, a survey instrument was designed to measure parents' perceptions of the relationship between viewing televised violence and aggressive behavior in their children. The survey instrument was distributed to a representative cross-section of pay grades at an Air Force Base in the southwestern United States. Of 100 survey instruments distributed, 32 were returned. Descriptive statistics indicated that parents' perception is that televised violence does contribute to aggressive behavior in their children.

The majority of those who responded (65%) indicated that their perception is that violence depicted on television has a negative effect on their children.

Additionally, nearly 68% said that controlling the types of programs viewed by their children does have a positive effect aggressive behavior in their children. Finally, 67% of the parents who responded believed that children do not learn non-violent behavior from programs they watch. These findings indicate that parents' perceive that televised violence does contribute to aggressive behavior in their children if they are allowed to watch. However, the degree of effect ranged from moderate to strong.

Most respondents (almost 91%) indicated that they control the types of programs viewed by their children based upon the perception that control decreases or inhibits the development of aggressiveness in their children. These parents were aware of the program content their children watched and could clarify the messages interpreted by their children as they watched.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Young children develop the foundation of attitudes and skills for interacting with others in the social world. Levin and Carlsson-Paige (1996) offer some insight regarding child development and the socialization process:

They can learn the many skills and values involved in relating positively to others; they can learn to control their aggressive impulses when angry, to use words instead of fists to express feelings and needs, and to care about the needs and feelings of others. They build a repertoire of skills through a process of construction in which new learnings build on earlier ones. Children take what they have seen and try it out in their play and interactions with others. If children see a lot of violence, it sets the course of learning in the direction of violence by contributing to the base on which new ideas are built. (p. 19)

This study examines the issues surrounding television's impact on aggressiveness in children.

Children are the segment of society most susceptible to manipulation or influence by mass media. A UCLA TV Violence Monitoring Project reviewed research by Cline, Croft, and Courier and found, "...the more violent television a child watches, the more that child tends to have favorable attitudes toward aggressive behavior" (UCLA Violence Monitoring Project, 1996, p. 6). Many counseling settings involve children who have displayed violence and antisocial

behavior. This study may assist in identifying whether TV watching of violence contributes to aggressive behavior of children and provide some insight into the most appropriate counseling techniques to use with children who engage in aggressive or violent behavior.

Development of the Problem

The psychology and behavior of television audiences differs from that of an audience of other media forms. Composed principally of individuals in the privacy of their own homes, television audiences tend to feel a close personal association with the speaker or performer. Since broadcasting is influential in the public domain, it is held to be invested with a moral as well as a legal responsibility to serve public interests congruent with their first commitment, which is to entertain. As offered by Minow and Lamay (1995),

...the Federal Communications Act of 1934 gives broadcasters free and exclusive use of broadcast channels on condition that they serve the public interest, convenience and necessity. Because the act did not define what the public interest meant, Congress, the courts and the FCC have spent 60 frustrating years struggling to figure it out. The public interest meant and still means what we should constantly ask: What can television do for our country, for the common good, for the American people? Most important...the public interest requires us to ask what we can do for our children. (p. 70)

A question is: Should broadcasters be more sensitive to public sentiment and political opinion than other forms of public expression? According to Chidley (1996), "In its nearly 60-year history, television has been blamed for a host of societal ills..." (p. 36). He further states: "But the issue of TV's effects is not only about what is on, but also about the interaction of the medium and its viewers--how they watch it and what they take from it" (p. 36).

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, television programs were stringently regulated by the Federal Communications Commission. Censorship regulations were strictly enforced. According to Clark (1995), "...early TV shows were known for their blandness on matters of sex, language, and politics" (p. 1031). This resulted in programs largely consisting of variety shows, westerns, and situation comedies. Programs such as Ozzie and Harriet, I Love Lucy, Leave It To Beaver, Ed Sullivan, and Lawrence Welk dominated prime time viewing. These programs were light comedy and depicted families in a variety of non-controversial situations. For example, I Love Lucy devoted seven episodes in 1952 to Lucy's giving birth to Little Ricky without once uttering the word "pregnant" (Clark, 1995, p. 1031). The show normally ended in the application of some acceptable moral and ethical values to resolve the situation.

These situation comedies were viewed as a reflection of the average American household. During this period, the family structure was seen as the father being the financial provider and the mother as the homemaker. Both parents worked to instill strong moral and ethical values in their children and families spent quality time together. Parents freely let their children watch these programs because they were seen as socially and morally wholesome.

By 1960, children were spending more time with television than they were with radio, comic books, babysitters or even playmates. As television became a staple of the American home, concern grew over what effect the medium might have on children. (UCLA TV Violence Monitoring Project, 1996, p. 2)

In the late 1960s, television programs began to expand and change as did society. As society began to reflect a more liberal attitude and philosophy, the media followed. Clark (1995) offers, "1960s cultural revolution brings new

sexual frankness and graphic violence to TV and movies" (p. 1027).

Television today contains programs which graphically depict violence, sex, antisocial behavior, and materialism. These types of programs are being viewed by a much younger audience.

Many psychologists say that TV violence can lead to heightened aggression... Other research suggests that children who watch a lot of violence can become desensitized to real-world violence, and less empathetic to the pain and suffering of others. (Chidley, 1996 p. 37)

Television's depiction of violence affects and influences children's views of sex, violence, and race. The implication appears to be that television could be a significant factor in shaping the values and behavior patterns of young viewers. A key issue is parental knowledge of this problem and taking action to circumvent the negative effects of what children watch on television.

Need for the Study

The information provided in this study may be useful to parents, broadcast and cable television networks, legislators, and advertisers in developing, sponsoring, and selecting appropriate programs for younger viewers. In a 10-year longitudinal study (Television Violence and Child Aggression: A Follow-up Study), Monroe Lefkowitz and his associates found that:

The more violence an 8-year-old boy watched, the more aggressive his behavior would be at age 8 and at age 18. The link between his television viewing at 8 and his aggressive behavior at 18 was even stronger than the link between his television watching at 8 and his aggressive behavior at 8. (UCLA TV Violence Monitoring Project, 1996, p. 4)

There may be some implications which would be beneficial in the counseling setting particularly with those children who are in the juvenile justice system for

committing violent acts against others. According to Wendy Joseph, a psychologist at the University of Winnipeg who compiled a survey of TV violence research for Canadian Heritage, "...male children are more likely to be affected by TV violence than girls, and children who have been abused are more sensitive to televised aggression--and tend to watch more of it" (Cited in Chidley, 1996, p. 38). The public is concerned about the effects of television violence and it is important to know what science and research says about it in order to have some idea of what to do about it, either individually or collectively.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine parents' perceptions of the relationship between children viewing violence on television and the aggressive behavior in their children.

Research Question

What are parents' perceptions of the relationship between television's depiction of violence, and aggressive behavior in their children?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter examines published literature on previous studies which explore the relationship between television programs depicting violence and the development of aggressive behavior in children viewers, the effects on children who watch television without supervision, and how companies' use television to advertise and the effects of these ads on children. It reviews crime, both nationally and locally, as it relates to age, criminal population, class structure, family influence, and gang participation. Finally, it explores literature on delinquency/adolescent crimes relationship and television viewing habits.

Television's Appeal

Television reaches more people than any other form of mass media and has increasingly become the most available and least expensive form of family entertainment. A.C. Nielson Company, the audience measurement service, reported that "as of July 1990, 92 million American homes have television sets" (Taishoff, Jessell, & Jackson, 1991, p. 360). Numerous studies have sought to determine the effects of television on children. Young viewers are highly impressionable and extremely susceptible to ideologies presented on television. Rice (1992) states,

Dozens of studies have shown that children who watch violent programs-even cartoons-are likelier to engage in aggressive behavior, such as pushing and shoving, and to choose violent solutions to conflicts with peers. (p. 60)

The types of programs coming into American homes has changed drastically over the last several decades. In response to the growing audience and diversification in the taste of that audience, programs reflect changes in what is offered the viewing public.

As the form of media that reaches the largest audience on a daily basis and for longer periods of time, television has the largest influence and effect. Public opinion, behavior, political views, controversial issues and even buying habits of the public at large are all susceptible to manipulation by the mass media. Through its programming and advertising, television affects every aspect of the lives of the public. Hoffner (1996) offers,

Television plays a significant role in the socialization of American children...much evidence shows that viewers learn from positive and negative televised role models, and acquire norms and standards of conduct. (p. 389)

Under the pseudonym of action or adventure programs, televised violence has increasingly dominated media broadcasts on all major networks. These programs are "coming into American homes now more than at any time in the history of the medium." (Purgarie, 1992, p. 24). What impact could more frequently televised violence have on viewers? As further stated by Hoffner,

Identification with selected characters is one outcome of television viewing that is believed to mediate the socialization process. Identification...refers to the process by which a viewer shares a character's perspective and vicariously participates in his/her experiences during the program. This process extends to the desire to be like or behave in ways similar to the character. (1996, p. 390)

Crime Demographics

In June 1991, violent crimes nationwide increased by 10% during the first

half of the year according to FBI figures (Rutherford, 1991, p. 144). Statistics in 22 industrial nations showed that American men ages 15 through 24 were murdered at a rate 73 times higher than Austrians, 44 times higher than Japanese, and 22 times higher than Germans (Rutherford, 1991, p. 144). FBI records for 1990 show that from 1983 to 1987, arrests of individuals under 18 for murder was up 22%, aggravated assault up 18%, and rape up 14% (Chappell, 1990, p. 161). In what may be viewed as a response to the rise in violent crimes committed by adolescents, the U.S. Supreme Court, in June 1990, ruled that states were entitled to execute persons as young as 16 years old and those who are mentally retarded (Rutherford, 1990, p. 164).

As cited in Crime and Punishment,

Most crime statistics in the U.S. indicate a higher rate for blacks than for whites over a wide range of offenses. Other alleged explanations... are that in the U.S., the vicious circle of discrimination, lower wages, and more unemployment of blacks and other minorities forces them into less desirable jobs. Because of segregation, the quality of black education is generally inferior, which leads directly to lack of job opportunity. Still others suggest that because blacks have been forced to live in cultural ghettos, they have built up patterns of child rearing and moral teachings of their own. The use of physical punishment is extensive in teaching children right from wrong so that certain violent ways of behaving are learned at an early age (1986, p. 852).

Of particular note is the fact that the vast majority of crimes committed by blacks are against other blacks. In a study of homicide in Philadelphia, only six percent were found to be cross-racial (Crime and Punishment, 1986, p. 852).

Statistics on apprehended and punished offenders probably overrate the relationship between economic conditions and crime because the poor are more likely to be arrested, are less able to raise bail, and may be assisted by

inexperienced lawyers. As a general statement, it may be said that economic conditions and poverty have not been found to be the critical factor in the cause of criminal and deviant behavior. Studies have shown that crimes such as robbery and other property offenses do increase when there is a large amount of unemployment and that crime also increases during periods of economic prosperity (Crime and Punishment, 1986, p. 852).

Social scientists argue that the family is the primary agent for the social control of conduct. Specific variables that have been found to have some relation to delinquency are a higher proportion of working mothers, irregular employment, and lack of adequate child supervision. Family structure and values may influence an individual's tendency toward criminality in a variety of ways. Family disorganization resulting from desertion, death of a parent or other important family figure, and extreme tension preceding divorce is often a significant factor (Crime and Punishment, 1986).

A higher proportion of delinquents as compared to nondelinquents are found to be illegitimate and studies indicate that the backgrounds of habitual criminals frequently include an abnormal amount of parental discord. Multiple-problem families, which are usually very large and headed by parents of low intelligence, poor health, and low and irregular incomes are also frequently held to generate criminal behavior (Crime and Punishment, 1986, p. 853).

Many parents no longer take the time to read to children, to help them with their homework, go to athletic events, or volunteer at the school where their children attend, and their children most often return to empty homes (Lays, 1991, p. 23). Their activities are unsupervised and they can basically do as they please. What is of interest is that the worst types of problem families do not often produce the most serious types of criminals. The question that remains

unanswered is, why do some members of a family become criminals while others do not?

"Some modern theorists argue that the role played by family in transmitting the rules and values of society is becoming less and less meaningful" (Crime and Punishment, 1986, p. 853). As society grows more complex, people become more alienated from one another and formal agencies are taking over the responsibilities that were traditionally entrusted to the family. Further, the enormous effect of the mass media in conveying values to both children and adults, often in a conflicting and indiscriminate pattern, may tend to slant responsibility away from the parents as the prime transmitter of values (Crime and Punishment, 1986, p. 853).

Gangs

Gangs are common among both delinquents and nondelinquents, though delinquents tend more often to be members of gangs. Two types of gangs predominately affecting adolescents have evolved. They are criminal gangs, existing in slum areas in which there is a strong tradition of crime, so that adult criminals serve as models for the gang members. The other type of gang are called conflict gangs, commonly existing in new urban housing developments where a criminal tradition has not yet arisen. These members use other adolescents as their role models. They are more likely to act out their frustration in acts of violence and vandalism (Crime and Punishment, 1986, p. 857).

Some evidence suggests that the explanation of gang delinquency does not lie in forces outside the group, but rather, within it in the typical striving for status by adolescent gang members within the group. In other words, peer group

status is valued very highly. Membership in the gang is believed to provide much needed satisfaction that cannot be obtained elsewhere in society's established institutions. Membership offers rewards of status recognition and excitement. It also brings about the development of an adolescent subculture with values and interests more and more removed from and in conflict with those of the rest of society (Crime and Punishment, 1986, p. 857).

Crime Rates and Statistics

Statistics for the U.S. shows a significantly high rate of crime in urban areas as compared to rural areas. The reasons frequently suggested to explain this are that rural communities tend to be more homogeneous in moral behavior patterns, are more closely knit because of tradition, and that rural communities are less complex in organization which enables the church and the school to exert the necessary control (Crime and Punishment, 1986, p. 852).

In Arizona, Governor Fife Symington proposed more severe measures for juvenile criminals to eliminate young offenders' nonchalant attitude toward the legal system. In response to the rise in youth crimes, Symington said "it is more important to make young people responsible for their actions than it is to rehabilitate them" (Pitzel, 1992, p. A-1). The City of Phoenix has led the state in imposing restrictions on juveniles' possession of firearms in an effort to curb the rise in crimes committed by children using guns.

Of particular note is the fact that violent crimes committed by teens has become a problem. A Seattle, Washington Police Chief states,

We've seen teen violence that is much different from 10 years ago. Then, when someone was called out to school, they would have been dealing with a fistfight. Now, when someone calls someone out, he may have to have a gun to back him up. (Bayles, 1992, p. A-11)

The dichotomy is that at a time when a decrease in the number of young males should translate into a decrease in violent crimes, just the opposite is happening. Bayles stated that there are "fewer teenagers, yet more are doing violent crimes, including murder" (1992, p. A-11).

Television and Children

"Because...of its intimate relationship to its audience...it is therefore held to be invested with a moral as well as a legal responsibility to serve the public interest and must remain more sensitive to public sentiment and political opinion than most other forms of public expression" (Broadcaster and the Public, 1986, p. 217). Additionally, broadcasters have specific legal responsibilities on obscenity issues, particularly because the programs are readily accessible to minors. For example, in 1978, the Supreme Court ruled that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) does have the right to police indecent broadcasts. The FCC began using this ruling to set forth its definition of indecency, which cover "language that describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards of the broadcast medium, sexual or excretory activities or organs at times of day when there is a reasonable risk that children may be in the audience" (Clark, 1991, p. 18). However, Crossen (1991) asserted that, "Network censors and the FCC are supposed to keep things under control, but the FCC's indecency rule is so vague that enforcement is virtually impossible" (p. 100).

Television programming has been sympathetic to a number of issues such as environmental concerns and less favorable depictions of smokers. However, program producers have not shown the same regard or concern about violence,

sex, and greed displayed in broadcasting. Comedies and other programs intended primarily for the young adult viewer did gain new emphasis in prime-time and even more so on Saturday mornings when the audience is predominately children. An American Psychological Association (APA) task force reported that "the average child witnesses 8,000 TV murders by the time he leaves elementary school" (Whitman, 1992, p. 35). In 1968, Professor George Gerbner of the University of Pennsylvania, conducted a content analysis of entertainment programs on television for a federal government media task force. From this analysis, the task force concluded in regard to violence portrayed on broadcast television that:

...violence was shown as a useful means of resolving problems and achieving goals. Viewers learned from television that conflicts are best resolved through the use of violence. There was a notable absence of alternative means of conflict resolution, such as debate, cooperation and compromise (UCLA TV Violence Monitoring Project, 1996, p.3).

Immediate gratification is also treated with reverence on television through a barrage of commercials. The APA task force also reported that children see roughly 20,000 commercials a year. Sex (implicit) also receives a great deal of airtime. The American Family Association estimated that "over 10,000 sexual incidents were displayed over three networks in 1991. The ratio sexual intercourse between unmarried partners to married partners was 14 to 1" (Whitman, 1992, p. 36). The problem becomes more clearly focused based upon the frequency of viewing programs by children.

According to Dr. Daniel Anderson, Professor of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, "children spend an average of 15 to 20 hours a week in front of the television" (Rice, 1992, p. 62). He also asserts that research shows that

the average American child watches three hours of TV a day; sees 5,000 hours by first grade, and 19,000 hours by the end of high school; views between 20,000 to 40,000 commercials a year; witnesses 14,000 sexual references and thousands of acts of violence. Research further revealed that children spend four times as many hours watching television as doing homework and spend as much or more time in front of the TV each year as they spend in school. These figures paint a somewhat grim picture of television's effect on the youth in American society. Yet, what is the extent to which television actually effects a child's view of the world? John Condry, Professor of Human Development, Cornell University states, "It's very hard to separate what kids pick up about the world from television and what they pick up from the world itself" (Rice, 1992, p. 50). Other views include those of John Wright, coordinator for the Center for Research on the Influences of Television on Children at the University of Kansas who says, "TV itself is not to blame. It's the use we make of it that's to blame" (Rice, 1992, p. 50). According to Bill Cosby (1991), "parents must use both the positive and negative aspects of television to educate children and to uphold the best in social and family traditions" (p. 92). William F. Allman (1993) asserts that: "Research shows that not all kinds of violent depictions are equally harmful, not everyone is affected in the same ways and, ironically, the most influential displays of violence may be those that reinforce the moral message of right over wrong" (p. 50). Most studies, however, do not support that presumption. In fact, field studies suggest that violent TV may lead to more combative behavior in children.

Children are not able to comprehend the reality of what they see on television. They fail to understand that real life is not the same as depicted on

the screen. The good guys do not always win and people do not get seriously injured or killed, then completely recover or be resurrected in 30 minutes or a couple of hours. The National Association for the Education of the Young contends that "preschoolers are particularly vulnerable to the negative influences of the media because they are not yet fully able to distinguish fantasy from reality. Their grasp of underlying motives for behavior and subtleties of moral conflict are not yet well developed" (Katz, 1991, p. 113).

In 1991, during the Bush Administration, a piece of censorship legislation became law without the President's signature. The measure, which was supported by teachers, unions, religious orders, health care professionals, the National Association of Broadcasters and Peggy Charren's Action for Children's Television, directed the FCC "to assess the effects of a television station's programming on children before renewing its broadcast license" (Hazlett, 1991, p. 58). The legislation also limited the amount of advertising permissible on children's' shows to 10.5 minutes per hour on weekends and 12 minutes per hour on weekdays (Hazlett, 1991, p. 58).

Viewing can also have a profound effect on how children play. Violence-related toys advertised on TV result in imitative rather than imaginative play. Children tend to use the toys in the same manner they observed on television. Some research suggests that children apply the observed behavior on TV to their real-life situations. Other commercials have an identifiable impact. Particularly beer commercials and those that say if one has a headache, can't sleep, or are overweight, take a pill. The messages received may be that alcohol consumption is necessary to have fun and live the glamorous life and drugs can solve any problem.

Of the many methods employed to study television's effects on children, some used control groups and exposed those groups to a specified number of hours to various types of programs, then observed reactions. Yet, the common method used throughout was a survey instrument. In this method, a questionnaire is developed for use. A Likert type attitude scale is derived directly from the ideological content of various television programs. S.H. Lovibond of the University of Adelaide used such a scale which he called a "Children's F Scale or CF Scale" (1967, p. 91). It was found to satisfy conventional requirements of reliability, internal consistency, and relative absence of bias. Two separate studies were conducted simultaneously where scores on the scale were related to measures of exposure to mass media stressing crime and violence in one study; while the other study stressed moral influences.

The results concluded that in the first study, children were influenced in the direction of acceptance of the ideology. Yet, exposure to constructive moral influences subtracted from the effects of the media. The study also explored the relationship between weekly hours of television viewing and CF scale scores. This study revealed that there was a progressive increase in CF scale scores with increases in viewing hours. The preferred programs were categorized according to whether or not they emphasized crime and violence. Lovibond (1967) found a tendency to prefer crime and violence programs were associated with high CF scale scores and high rates of viewing.

This study reasonably concluded from the results that the ideas, attitudes, and values expressed in the CF scale possessed sufficient coherence to constitute an ideological system in the attitude structure of children, and that the

CF scale is capable of measuring acceptance of this ideology reliably. Both studies identified above strongly suggest that there was a relationship between exposure to crime and violence media and endorsement of an ideology which makes the use of force the essential content of human relationships. However, it is unlikely that this is a simple one-way causal relationship. Yet, Roberts and Bachen (1981) determined from review of other research, as well as their own that,

...efforts to review and integrate an almost bewildering array of studies using different methodologies, testing different hypotheses, focusing on different age groups, and producing what often seems to be conflicting results, continue to appear. However, the general consensus seems to be that there is a positive, causal relationship between viewing televised violence and subsequent aggressive behavior. (p. 342)

The UCLA TV Violence Monitoring Project (1996) also reported that, "While skeptics remain, most social scientists find the evidence from so many studies compelling. Taken together, the many different studies point to a statistically significant connection between watching violence on television and behaving aggressively" (p. 7) They further point out that in 1992, the American Psychological Association issued a report entitled Big World, Small Screen: The Role of Television in American Society. This report concluded that:

The accumulated research clearly demonstrates a correlation between viewing violence and aggressive behavior. Children and adults who watch a large number of aggressive programs also tend to hold attitudes and values that favor the use of violence (UCLA Violence Monitoring Project, 1996, p. 7).

Summary

There have been as many studies on television's effects on children as there are explanations of those effects, whether real or perceived. These various

studies do reflect similarity in the results achieved. Most of them say that although violence and sex as depicted on television may not directly in itself cause reciprocal behavior in children, it does have some impact. However, there is strong evidence that there is a causal relationship between television program viewing habits and aggressive behavior in children. As Wood, Wong, and Chachere (1991) concluded, "...media violence enhances children's and adolescents' aggression in interaction with strangers, classmates, and friends" (p. 380). Two facts remain clear: (1) children are committing more crimes and (2) television continues to depict violence, sex, and material gratification.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine parents' perceptions of the relationship between their children viewing violence on television and aggressive behavior in their children. The research question addressed in this study was: what are parents' perceptions of the relationship between their children viewing violence on television and aggressive behavior in their children?

Research Design

This study utilized the descriptive research design. Descriptive research is a method used to describe systematically the facts and characteristics of a given population or area of interest. Its central focus is to examine facts about people, their opinions, and attitudes. "Its purpose is not to give value to sets of relationships between events, but simply to draw attention to the degree two events or phenomena are related" (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, p. 61).

The specific method used in this study was a survey in which parents responded to statements about the viewing habits of their children. This study focused on parents' opinions in regard to the degree to which the depiction of violence on television and aggressive behavior in their children are related.

Population and Sample

The participants were parents with children who resided in military family housing. A total of 100 surveys were distributed throughout military family housing. This represented approximately 11% of the total of 900 families residing in military family housing. Out of the 100 surveys which were distributed, a total of 32 were returned.

A cluster sampling process was used to identify the participants of the study. This process involved subdividing the Air Force base population by pay grade clusters. Pay grades enlisted E-3 through E-5; E-6 through E-7; E8 through E-9, and officer O-3 through O-6 were selected. These pay grades are reflective of typical households on any Air Force base with approximately 900 family housing residences and also with children ranging in ages from infant to 19 years old. The surveys were distributed in groups of 25 to individuals in each of the four pay grade groups or clusters (i.e. 25 to the E-3 through E-5 group, 25 to the E-6 through E-7 group, etc.). This process provided a sample which was representative of the base population in terms of socio-economic characteristics.

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that the sample in this study will be representative of any community of comparable size and whose children have the same viewing habits. It is further assumed that the parents were honest in responding to the survey questions.

A limitation is the sample size. The results of this study may not necessarily be representative of the larger population of all parents with children who view televised violence.

Instrumentation

A Likert Scale format was used to measure the respondents' level of agreement or disagreement with the items on the instrument. The content of the instrument was developed through discussion with parents about their concerns and questions they had about violence depicted on television, viewing habits of their children and any behavior changes observed or perceived by the parents (Appendix B contains a copy of the instrument) . The items on the survey instrument were developed independently of the material reviewed in the literature review.

Survey items 1 through 3 provided demographic information which included the number and ages of the respondents' children, and the number of hours per day the children watch television. Item 4 regarding children acting out the roles of characters they see on television was asked to see if parents identified behaviors in their children resembling those of characters depicted on television

Item 5 specifically addressed the issue of parents' perception of the effect that violence depicted on television has had on the aggressive behavior in their children. Both items 4 and 5 are related in that if children act out roles of television characters and those characters display aggressive behaviors, then it may be logical to assume that their children viewers will also display aggressive behaviors.

Item 6 specifically addressed the types of aggressive behavior displayed by the children of the respondents. Items 7 and 8 focused on whether or not parents exercised supervision over the types of program their children watch and whether those programs which their children were allowed to watch depicted violence. Items 9 and 10 addressed the parents' belief as to whether or not

control of what their children viewed on television had a positive effect on aggressive behavior in their children and if exposure to negative role models increased aggressive behavior in their children.

Parents' attention on when their children watch television was the focus of item 11. If children primarily watch television programs during prime time, they may be exposed to more programs containing displays of violence and aggressive behaviors than at other times. This item also relates to items 4 and 5 regarding acting out roles and aggressive behavior seen on television.

Item 12, Violence as depicted on television has a negative effect on children viewers., specifically focuses on the parents' perceptions of the impact viewing television programs containing violence and aggressive behavior has on their children. However, item 13 addressed the issue of whether parents perceive that their children learn non-violent behavior from the television programs they watch.

Procedure

A pre-test was conducted by distributing a total of 12 surveys (three in each cluster group), along with instructions for the respondents to write down any questions which they felt should have been on the survey along with any comments on the wording, readability, and understandability of the instrument.

After the pretest of the survey was accomplished, changes were made to improve the instrument which resulted in the survey instrument as shown in Appendix B. A cover letter was attached to each survey describing the purpose of the study and identifying criteria for participation (parents with children between the ages of 3 through 17 living in the household) (Appendix A).

Parents were requested to complete and return the survey within five days of receiving it.

Distribution of the instrument was made easier since the pay grades and names of the occupants were prominently displayed outside each residence. This assured distribution of an equal number of instruments to each cluster group. The instruments were hand-delivered and additional explanation of the study was provided so that respondents clearly understood. Parents were also asked to be as candid as possible and provide an accurate assessment of their perception by circling the number corresponding to the response most closely to their own perception.

Method of Analysis

A frequency distribution was computed for all items on the survey. Based upon the frequency of occurrences of each response selection, the data was then broken down into percentages of the distribution for each item. In item 3, the frequency distribution was constructed by equal class intervals which were used to identify the number of hours, by group, that the majority of the children in this study watched television. Means and standard deviations were computed for all scaled response items on the instrument.

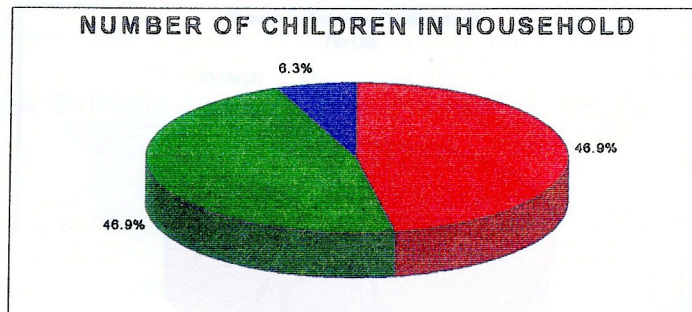
CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Demographic Description

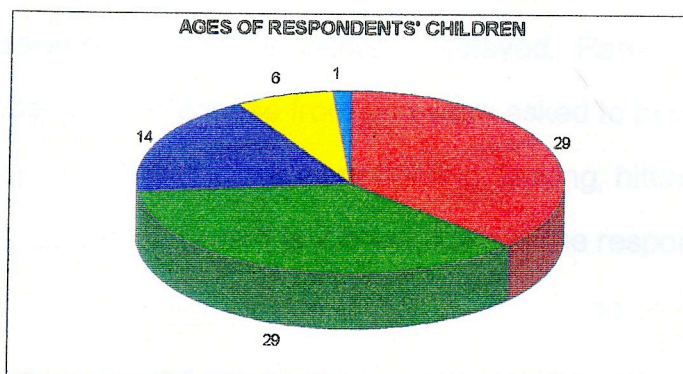
Of the 100 surveys mailed out, 32 were returned and usable for a response rate of 32%. However, one respondent did not return the second page of the survey instrument; therefore, there are 31 responses to items 8 through 13. Each respective pay grade grouping at the Air Force Base, which was the population of interest, was represented within the group of 32. Ten percent of the respondents were single parent families. Those families with two children comprised 70% of the respondents. All parents were employed in diverse segments from military police to squadron commanders. There was a total of 64 children in the families who responded. Figure 1 shows that 46.9% of the families had 3 children, 46.9% had 2 children, and 6.3% had only one child. Figure 2 is a graphic representation of the breakdown of the age groups of the children in this study.

Figure 1



GREEN - 15 FAMILIES W/3 CHILDREN; RED - 15 FAMILIES W/2 CHILDREN; BLUE - 2 FAMILIES W/1 CHILD

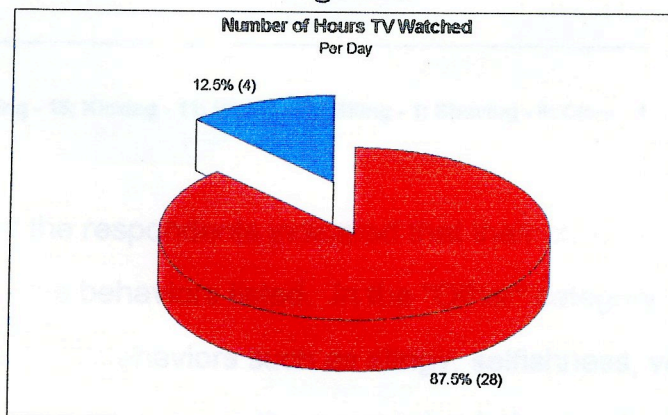
Figure 2



GREEN - AGES 1 - 5; RED - AGES 6 - 10; BLUE - AGES 11 - 15; YELLOW - AGES 16 - 20; AQUA - AGES 21 +

Item 3 asked parents to circle the group of hours which includes the number of hours per day their children watch television. There were four groups to choose from: 1 - 5 hours; 6 - 10 hours; 11 - 15 hours; and >15 hours. Figure 3 shows the percentage of hours watched representing the 1 - 5 hours and 6 - 10 hours groups. On this item, 28 respondents indicated that their children watch between 1 - 5 hours of television per day, while 4 respondents indicated 6 - 10 hours per day. There were no respondents who indicated their children were in or beyond the 11 - 15 hours per day group.

Figure 3

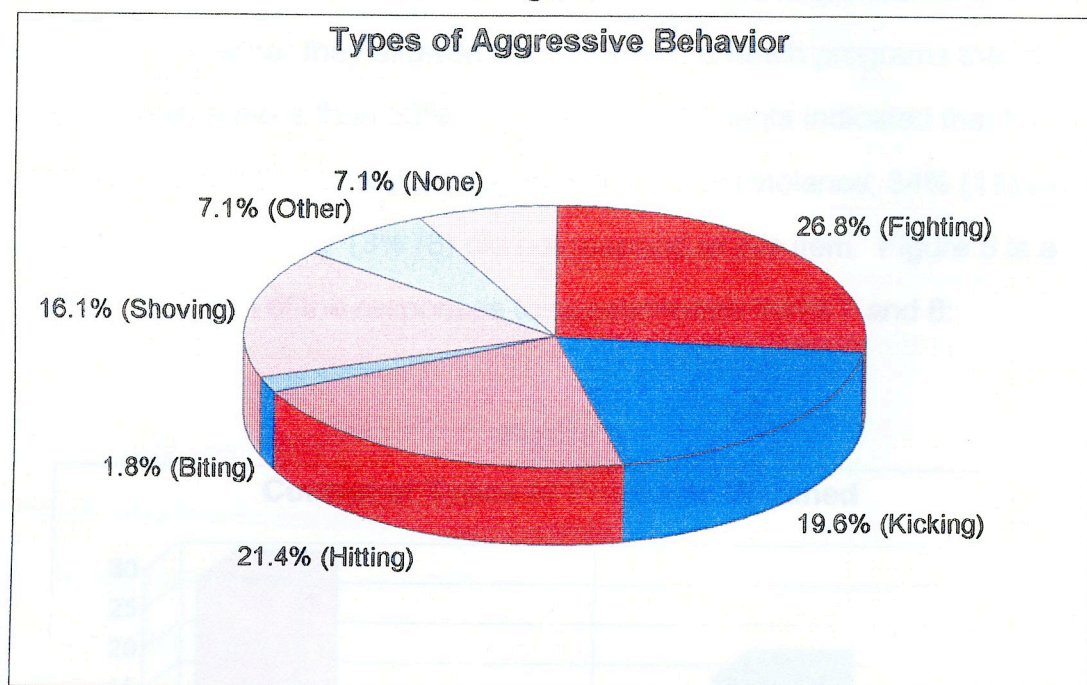


Red = 1 - 5 hours per day; Blue = 6 - 10 hours per day

Findings

Item number six on the questionnaire asked the parents to identify the type(s) of aggressive behavior their children displayed. Parents were given several types of behavior to choose from and were asked to place a check mark beside all that applied. The choices were fighting, kicking, hitting, biting, shoving, other, and none. Figure 4 is a breakdown of the responses to this item.

Figure 4



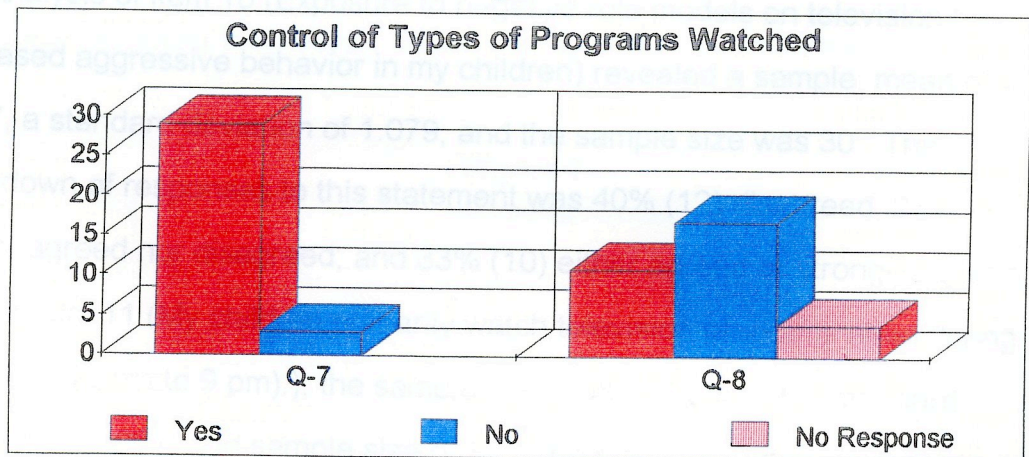
Fighting - 15; Kicking - 11; Hitting - 12; Biting - 1; Shoving - 9; Other - 4; None - 4

Four (13%) of the respondents indicated that their children did not display any of the aggressive behaviors listed. In the "Other" category, four (13%) respondents described behaviors such as stingy, selfishness, verbal/shouting match, and discipline problems as the aggressive behavior displayed. The other

respondents (24 or 75%) indicated that their children displayed one or more of the aggressive behaviors as indicated in the chart above.

Item number 7 required respondents to answer Yes or No as to whether they control or regulate the types of programs their children watch. Three respondents (9.3%) indicated they do not control or regulate the types of programs their children watch, while 29 (90.7%) said they do. The next item, number 8, related directly to item number 7 in that a yes response in item 7 also necessitated a response to number 8. The item asked respondents who circled yes in item 7 whether they allowed their children to watch programs that depict violence. A little more than 53% (17) of the respondents indicated that they do not allow their children to watch programs that depict violence; 34% (11) circled yes; while the remaining 13% (8) did not respond to this item. Figure 5 is a graphical depiction of the responses to questionnaire items 7 and 8:

Figure 5



On questionnaire item 4, (My children act out the roles of characters they see on television), the sample mean was 3.5; and the standard deviation of the

sample was 1.045; and the sample size was 32. Figure 6 shows the responses to the survey statement. Over 55% of the participants indicated that their children act roles of characters they see on television.

On statement 5 (Violence depicted on television has increased the aggressive behavior in my children) the sample mean was 3, the standard deviation was 1.077 and the sample size was 31. Participants were split in their response in that 38% disagreed or strongly disagreed, 34% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, and 28% agreed or strongly agreed.

"Controlling the types of programs viewed has a positive effect on aggressive behavior in my children" was statement number 9 on the survey. For this statement, the sample mean was 3.709 with a standard deviation of .973; and a sample size of 30 (one of the surveys returned had no responses to statements 9 through 13). Approximately 67% (21) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

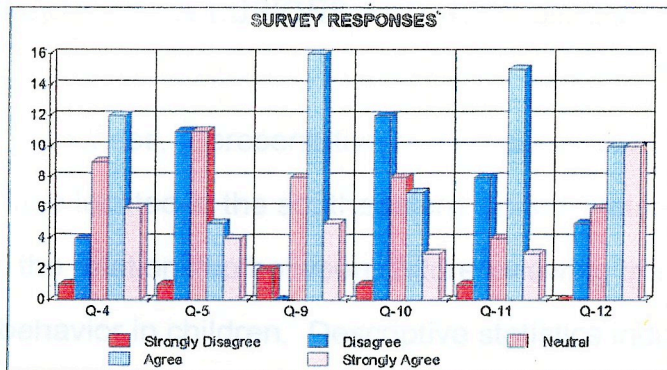
Analysis of item 10 (Exposure to negative role models on television has increased aggressive behavior in my children) revealed a sample mean of 2.967, a standard deviation of 1.079, and the sample size was 30. The breakdown of responses to this statement was 40% (12) disagreed, 27% (8) neither agreed nor disagreed; and 33% (10) either agreed or strongly agreed.

For item 11 (My children primarily watch television programs aired during prime time (6 pm to 9 pm).), the sample mean was 3.355, with a standard deviation of 1.081; and sample size of 30. The majority of the respondents, 60% (18) either agreed or strongly agreed that their children watch television primarily during prime time.

The results from item 12 (Violence as depicted on television has a negative effect on children viewers.) were a sample mean of 3.806, standard

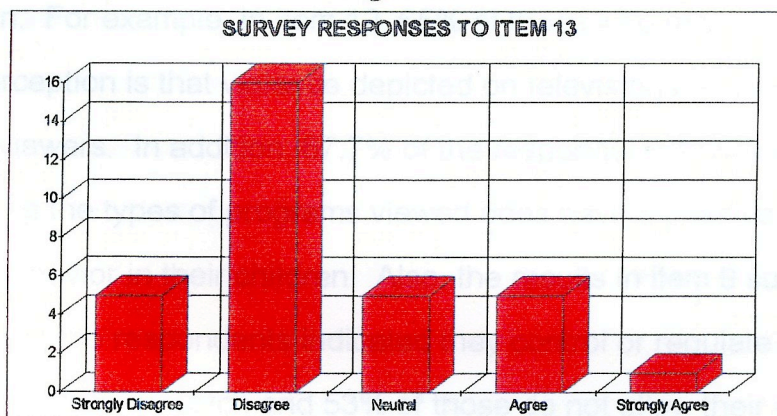
deviation of 1.077, and a sample size again of 30. Here, the majority (two-thirds of the respondents) indicated either agreement or strong agreement with this statement. Figure 6 is a graphical display of the responses to items above:

Figure 6



In the final item (My children learn non-violent behavior from the television programs they watch.), the sample mean was 2.354 with a standard deviation of 1.018 and the sample size was 30. To this statement, 67% of the respondents indicated either disagreement or strong disagreement with this statement. This suggested that parents believed that children do not learn non-violent behavior from the programs they watch. Figure 7 shows how parents responded to item 13.

Figure 7



CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

A total of 32 responses, representative of a cross-section of the pay grades at an Air Force Base located in the southeastern United States were received from a survey on the relationship between children viewing televised violence and aggressive behavior in children. Descriptive statistics indicated that parents' perception is that televised violence does contribute to aggressive behavior in their children. This study revealed that there may indeed be a relationship between violence on television which is viewed by children and subsequent behavioral patterns and aggressiveness in these children.

Conclusions

Analysis of the primary data indicated that parents' perception is that television's depiction of violence does have an effect on aggressive behavior in their children. For example, in item 12, 65% of those who responded indicated that their perception is that violence depicted on television has a negative effect on children viewers. In addition, 67.7% of the respondents indicated in item 9 that controlling the types of programs viewed does have a positive effect on aggressive behavior in their children. Also, the results in item 9 supports item 7 where 90.7% of the respondents indicated they control or regulate the types of programs their children watch and 53% of those do not allow their children to watch programs that depict violence. Finally, based upon the results of the

responses to item 13 on the survey instrument used in this study, the majority of parents (67%) believed that children do not learn non-violent behavior from the programs they watch. Thus, the conclusion in this study that it is parents' perception that televised violence viewed by their children does have an effect on aggressive behavior in those children.

As described in the literature review, Roberts and Bachen (1981, p. 342) believe, based on their own and others' research, that there is a positive, causal relationship between viewing television violence and subsequent aggressive behavior. The literature review conducted during this study resulted in the same consensus.

However, several factors also act as co-catalysts, based upon review of other research efforts. Children do not grow up in a vacuum. Other variables come into play such as environment, individual propensity for aggressive behavior regardless of exposure to television violence, and peer acceptance. This study strongly supports the position that the effects of violence on television increases aggressive behavior in younger viewers as perceived by parents. The fact that most respondents controlled the types of programs viewed by their children indicated that controlling the types of programs viewed decreases the aggressiveness or inhibits aggression from occurring in younger viewers.

The degree of effect resulting from the violence-filled programming varied in this study. The effects ranged from none at all to a variety of aggressive behaviors as identified in survey item 6. As in other more elaborate studies, the degree of effect in this study ranged from moderate to strong.

Most parents in this study were aware of the program content their children were watching and could then circumvent the effects of the messages being

interpreted and processed in the minds of their children. The socialization process begins in the home. If parents do not take that responsibility for teaching their children and leave it to other devices, then this, along with other studies regarding the effects of television on children's development of aggression will be taught from what they see depicted on television.

A combination of the overwhelming majority of studies address the important issue of this research. All illustrate the existence of a relationship between media exposure and aggression in children.

Recommendations

The government, television networks, sponsors, and parents must do their individual parts to rid television of negative portrayals which affects children. The industry solution of a warning label that says: "Due to some violent content, parental discretion advised", clearly falls short of what needs to be done. The following recommendations would strongly encourage socially responsible behavior in television programming.

- a. Conduct a Federal Communications Commission mediated conference to establish broadcasting guidelines and standards regarding depictions of violence. Once established, impose large fines and strict sanctions against those networks that are in violation. During the Bush administration, the FCC was authorized to deny renewal of broadcast licenses based on assessment of the effect of television on children. The indecency rule must be clearly identified and the FCC and network censors must be held accountable for enforcement. Therefore, the mediated conference would serve to clearly define the standards and ensure mutual understanding by all involved.

b. The large corporate advertisers should withhold their support of networks that broadcast violent programs. The threat of monetary loss gets attention quickly.

c. Networks, by far, have a great impact. They determine the programming to be aired. Economically, the networks can dictate what is produced out of Hollywood. By rejecting programs that graphically depict violence, they force program creators and producers to create and produce programs suitable for the entire family.

d. The viewing public is the single most important factor in the equation. It is the viewing public which has the power to change the trend in television programming. Leonard Nimoy pointed out that: "...if many entertainment producers are not reaching high enough and have fallen into predictable and highly questionable formulas, there has been a failure on the part of many entertainment consumers as well" (Koshelnyk, 1991, p. 93). Thus, viewers must demand more socially responsible programming. Sponsors will get the message quickly when viewers boycott their businesses for sponsoring network programs which broadcast violence-filled programs. The common denominator is that sponsors, networks, and those who make the various programs are all in business to make a profit. When the viewing public uses that purchasing power by not purchasing, a metamorphosis will occur in television programming.

This study would have been more conclusive if the number of responses to the survey had been greater. As with any study utilizing quantitative statistical analysis, the smaller the sample, the less representative of the population, and thus the greater the margin for error. Other than the low response, no other barriers or limitations occurred which were not anticipated.

A suitable focus for this study could have been the role viewing violent programming has played in the developed patterns of juvenile delinquents. Some type of incentive to encourage a reply from those asked to participate in the survey would likely have resulted in more individuals responding.

One question surfaced which may be an interesting subject for further research. What affect does broadcasting professional sports and glamorization of well-known athletes have on the ambition, drive, goals, and motivation of younger viewers? Professional sports and college sports in this country is big business. Athletes are demanding and getting enormous salaries. The opportunity may be available to all, yet the number selected per capita is extremely low. Even those with excellent athletic ability are not making it in professional sports. How does this portrayal of the super successful athlete shape the attitudes and behavior of children in striving to achieve economically, educationally, and professionally? Are children hanging their hopes on a future as an athlete with a multi-million dollar contract and leading the glamorous lifestyle? This would be a very interesting area for further study.

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APPENDIX A

Survey Cover Letter

Brenda L. Lawton-Oliphant
1863 Papago Circle
Glendale, AZ 85309

Dear

My name is Brenda Lawton-Oliphant and I am a graduate student at Ottawa University. I am currently working towards a Master of Counseling degree. As a part of the requirements of the degree, a research project must be completed. The research project I am involved in is the relationship between televised violence and aggressive behavior in children.

You can be of great assistance to me. If you have children between the ages of 3 through 17 living at home, please complete the attached survey and return it to me in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. I would appreciate it very much if you could return the completed survey to me within five (5) days of receipt. It should take no more than 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey. Thank you for your cooperation and assistance in conducting this survey and completing the project.

Sincerely,

BRENDA L. LAWTON-OLIPHANT

APPENDIX B

Survey Instrument

SURVEY ON THE EFFECTS OF TELEVISED VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN VIEWERS

This survey is being conducted to determine the effects of television's depiction of violence on children viewers. Please complete the questions below by circling the response which most closely expresses your feelings. Thank you.

PLEASE CIRCLE THE APPROPRIATE NUMBER BELOW.

1. How many children do you have?

1 2 3 4 5 or more

2. What is the age(s) of your children? _____

3. Overall, how many hours per day do your children watch television?

1 - 5 6 - 10 11 - 15 More than 15

PLEASE CIRCLE THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE NUMBER.

4. My children act out the roles of characters they see on television.

**STRONGLY
DISAGREE**

1

DISAGREE

2

NEUTRAL

3

AGREE

4

**STRONGLY
AGREE**

5

5. Violence depicted on television has increased the aggressive behavior in my children.

**STRONGLY
DISAGREE**

1

DISAGREE

2

NEUTRAL

3

AGREE

4

**STRONGLY
AGREE**

5

6. What type(s) of aggressive behavior does your children display?
(please check all that apply)

fighting_____ kicking_____ hitting_____ biting_____ shoving_____

other_____ (Identify) none_____

7. I control or regulate the types of programs my children watch.

Yes No

8. If yes, do you allow your children to watch programs that depict violence?

Yes No

9. Controlling the types of programs viewed has a positive effect on aggressive behavior in my children.

STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5

10. Exposure to negative role models on television has increased aggressive behavior in my children.

STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5

11. My children primarily watch television programs aired during prime time (6pm to 9pm).

STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5

12. Violence as depicted on television has a negative effect on children viewers.

STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5

13. My children learn non-violent behavior from the television programs they watch.

STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5

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