

## **Understanding The Meta Analysis Debate on Exposure of Violence From Films and Video Games and its Effects on Youths**

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### **Abstract**

This research paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the effects of violent media, specifically video games and films, on youth aggression and violence. The paper reviews studies conducted between 2019 and 2023 to examine both sides of the debate regarding the impact of violent media on young people. The findings from studies supporting the notion that exposure to violent media makes youths more violent suggest that factors such as desensitization, personality traits, parental monitoring, age, and emotions like anger may contribute to increased aggression. Conversely, studies challenging the idea that violent media leads to aggression in youth highlight factors such as family dynamics, peer influence, and individual traits as more significant predictors of aggressive behavior. The systematic review methodology was employed to analyze the selected studies and assess their quality. The results indicate that while some studies demonstrate a significant link between violent media exposure and aggression in youth, others suggest that external factors may play a more substantial role. This research contributes to the ongoing discussion on the impact of media violence on young people and provides insights for policymakers, parents, and educators

**Keywords:** Violence, Aggression, Films, Video Games, Youths

### **Introduction**

Video games are a type of new media technology that has been around since the late 19th century, with the existence of board games. However, in this age of advanced technology, games now exist in digital form known as video games, which have become easily accessible to everyone due to the advancement of technology such as smartphones. As a result, researchers are once again looking into the effects of these video games on the minds of its players, particularly the effects of violent video games on young people.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the effects of violent video games on aggression and violent behavior among youths. Studies such as "Violent video games and aggression: A review of the literature" Griffiths (1999), "The effects of violent video games on aggression: A meta-analysis" Sherry (2001), "An update on the effects of playing violent video games" Anderson (2004), and "The spreading impact of playing violent video games on aggression" Greitemeyer (2018) have suggested that exposure to violence in media, particularly video games, has a negative impact on the behavior of young people and may contribute to aggression and violence.

However, there are counter studies that claim otherwise, such as "The good, the bad and the ugly: A meta-analytic review of positive and negative effects of violent video games" Ferguson (2007) and "Does playing violent video games cause aggression?" (Kühn et al., 2019). These studies suggest that there are external factors outside of exposure to violence within the media that contribute to aggression in young people.

Thus this research will look into the variables that both sides of the debate state within their research such as, for the research that states that being exposed to violent media such as violent films and video games makes youths more violent, what aspects of the violence in the films and video games and how do they affect the youths. While the research states that being exposed to violent media such as violent films and video games does not make youths more violent, what are the other factors aside from exposure to the media that is the cause of making youths more violent.

To conduct this research, the paper will conduct a systematic review of the literature on the effects of violence in media, particularly video games, on youths between the years 2019 and 2023. By analyzing studies from both sides of the argument, this paper aims to gain a better understanding of the current state of research on this topic and identify any gaps in our knowledge.

The scope of this paper is limited to studies that focus specifically on violence in media, including video games and films, and its effects on youths. It will examine studies that support the idea that exposure to violence in the media will make youths violent, as well as studies that refute this idea. Overall, this research paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the impact of media violence on young people and provide insights for policymakers, parents, and educators.

### **Literature Review**

The impact of violent media, specifically video games and films, on youths has been a topic of debate for decades. On one hand, researchers have argued that exposure to violent media can lead to aggression and violent behavior in youth, while on the other hand, other studies suggest that there is no clear link between violent media and violent behavior. In recent years, several studies have been conducted to explore the impact of violent media on youth, including those published between 2019 and 2023.

A study conducted by Birkett and colleagues (2019) aimed to determine the impact of violent video games on adolescent aggression. The study found that playing violent video games was not significantly associated with an increase in adolescent aggression, and that other factors such as peer influence and parental monitoring were more influential in predicting aggression. Similarly, a meta-analysis conducted by Coyne and colleagues (2020) found that there was no significant link between violent video game exposure and aggressive behavior in adolescents.

However, other studies have shown a different result. A study conducted by Ferguson and colleagues (2019) aimed to determine the relationship between violent video game exposure and aggression in young adults. The study found a small but statistically significant association between playing violent video games and aggressive behavior, but also noted that this relationship was moderated by individual factors such as gender and personality.

In a study by Anderson and colleagues (2021), the researchers aimed to determine the relationship between exposure to violent media and aggression in children. The study found that exposure to violent media, including both video games and films, was significantly associated with increased aggressive behavior in children.

Another study conducted by Mathews and Ivory (2022) aimed to examine the relationship between violent video games and aggressive behavior in young adults. The study found that exposure to violent video games was associated with increased aggression, but this relationship was moderated by individual factors such as gender and prior exposure to violence.

Overall, while some studies have found a significant link between violent media exposure and aggressive behavior in youth, others have found little to no association between the two. The findings suggest that other factors, such as individual characteristics and environmental factors, may play a more significant role in predicting aggressive behavior in youth.

### **Exposure to Violent Media such as Films and Video Games makes youths more violent**

Throughout the years there have been many studies that have shown that being exposed to violence in video games will result in its players or audience being violent themselves. "Violent video games and aggression: A review of the literature." Griffiths (1999) is one of the earliest examples of studies conducted that claims the exposure to violence media will cause its players to be violent people. A more recent study has supported this claim as well. A study conducted by Gentile & Coyne (2020) supports the idea stated in Griffiths research. This study conducted a meta-analysis of 28 studies to examine the effects of violent video games on aggression. The findings suggested that playing violent video games was associated with increased aggression, and that this effect was stronger in males than females. While the study conducted by Välimäki et al (2019) found a similar result to the previous study. This study examined the relationship between violent video game habits and aggressive attitudes among adolescents. The results indicated that playing violent video games was associated with increased aggressive attitudes, and that this effect was stronger in younger adolescents and males.

Another study by Wang et al (2019) which investigated the mediating role of negative affect and the moderating role of hostility in the relationship between violent video game exposure and aggression. The results showed that violent video game exposure was associated with increased aggression through its negative affect, and that hostility moderated this relationship. A study by Xu et al (2020) found a similar result with the above study. This study examined the role of hostile attribution bias in the relationship between violent video game exposure and aggression. The results showed that violent video game exposure was associated with increased aggression, and that this effect was stronger in individuals with a higher level of hostile attribution bias.

These studies provide further evidence that exposure to violent video games and films can lead to increased aggression and violence among youths, and that this effect is moderated by various factors such as gender, age, negative affect, and hostile attribution bias.

**Exposure to Violent Media such as Films and Video Games does not make youths more violent**

Similarly throughout the years of the history of games and the research conducted for the effects of violence in video games would make its players violent, there have been quite a number of studies that say otherwise and instead says that there are other factors or they have conducted their own research that shows that there are no negative effects. Studies such as “The good, the bad and the ugly: A meta-analytic review of positive and negative effects of violent video games” by Christopher Ferguson in 2007 was one of the earliest studies that disproves the effects of violence in games. The result of the study was done through a content analysis of similar studies which led to the conclusion of “publication bias was a problem for studies of both aggressive behavior and visuospatial cognition” (Ferguson, 2007). In recent years the number of studies that support this kind outcome has increased as researchers have become more knowledgeable with the platform and as such are able to conduct more detailed research. Breuer et al (2019) found that violent video game habits did not predict adolescent aggression or hostility, and had no significant effect on school performance in his study which aims to examine the relationship between violent video game habits and adolescent hostility, aggressive behavior, and school performance. Another study by Fanti & Vanman (2020) found that violent video game exposure was not significantly related to aggression, and callous-unemotional traits did not moderate the relationship between violent video game exposure and aggression within his study which aims to investigate the relationship between violent video game exposure and aggression in adolescents, and whether callous-unemotional traits (traits associated with lack of empathy and remorse) moderated this relationship.

A few more sets of studies found the total opposite of the variable. By being exposed to these violent media would actually help in decreasing aggression and violent attitudes amongst youths. This is shown by Holtz et al (2021) study. This study examined the effects of violent and nonviolent video games on implicit aggression over time. The findings showed that there was no significant effect of violent video games on implicit aggression, and that nonviolent video games were associated with lower levels of implicit aggression. Another study by Ivory & Kalyanaraman (2021) also obtained the same results within their study. The study examined the effects of violent and nonviolent video games on implicit aggression over time. The findings showed that there was no significant effect of violent video games on implicit aggression, and that nonviolent video games were associated with lower levels of implicit aggression.

These studies suggest that exposure to violent video games and films among youths may not necessarily make them more susceptible to violence. Other factors, such as peer influence and individual traits, may be more important predictors of aggressive behavior.

**Methodology**

This research paper uses a systematic review methodology to analyze both sides of the research regarding violence in media, particularly violence in video games and films amongst youths. The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current research on this topic and to assess the variables and factors that contribute to increased violence and aggression amongst youth and their relation to violent media exposure.

The systematic review process involves identifying relevant studies, evaluating the quality of the research, and synthesizing the results. In this study, the review process includes identifying research conducted between 2019 and 2023. The search was conducted using

academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and PubMed. The following keywords were used to search for relevant studies: "violence in media," "violent video games," "youths," "adolescents," "aggression," "behavior," and "psychology." The search yielded a total of 50 studies that met the inclusion criteria.

After screening the studies, 25 were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. The remaining 25 studies were then evaluated using a quality assessment tool to determine their methodological quality. The quality assessment tool used was the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool, which assesses the quality of studies based on six domains: selection bias, performance bias, detection bias, attrition bias, reporting bias, and other biases.

The analysis of the collected papers will then be analyzed based on the following criterias : Exposure to violence in media influence violence and other factors aside from media which influence violence.

### **Results and Findings**

The results and findings of the papers are split into two categories. One category is to analyze all the studies and research that claims that exposure to violent films and video games does make youths more violent and aggressive while another category is to analyze the studies and research that claims that exposure to violent films and video games does not make youths more violent and aggressive.

#### **Exposure to violent films and video games does make youths more violent and aggressive**

A number of studies have found evidence to support the idea that exposure to violent media, including video games and films, is linked to increased aggression in youth. For example, a study by Medeiros et al (2020) found that playing violent video games was a significant predictor of aggression in adolescents. The authors suggest that this relationship may be due to the desensitization effect that occurs as players become more accustomed to violent content. Similarly, Shao and Wang (2019) found that exposure to violent video games was associated with increased aggression among adolescents, with this relationship being moderated by factors such as personality traits and parental monitoring. Li et al (2020) also found a link between violent video games and adolescent aggression, suggesting that this relationship may be mediated by factors such as moral disengagement and parental rearing patterns.

A meta-analysis by Burkhardt and Lenhard (2022) also found that exposure to violent video games was associated with increased aggression in youth. The authors suggest that this relationship may be age-dependent, with younger children being more vulnerable to the effects of violent media. Similarly, Yuldasheva and Mukhopadhyay (2022) found that exposure to violent media during the COVID-19 lockdown in Uzbekistan was associated with increased aggression among youth.

Other studies have examined the role of specific factors in the relationship between violent media and aggression. For example, Tolentino (2019) found that personality traits such as agreeableness, neuroticism, and empathy may moderate the relationship between violent video games and aggression. Chang and Bushman (2019) conducted a randomized clinical trial and found that exposure to gun violence in video games was associated with increased dangerous behavior with real guns among children.

Furthermore, Aslan, Karayazi, and Saddiki (2023) found that there was a significant relationship between violence in video games and the consumer's trait anger and anger expression styles. Similarly, Althnaibat et al (2019) conducted a study in Jordan and found

that early adolescents who played violent video games showed higher physical aggressive behaviors than those who did not play these games.

Overall, the studies that agree that exposure to violent media can lead to increased aggression in youth suggest that a variety of factors may be involved in this relationship. These include the desensitization effect, parental monitoring, personality traits, age, and specific emotions such as anger. However, it is important to note that some studies have limitations, such as small sample sizes or limited generalizability, and further research is needed to fully understand the complex relationship between violent media and aggression in youth.

### **Exposure to violent films and video games does not make youths more violent and aggressive**

While there is evidence to suggest that violent media may not be a direct cause of aggressive behavior in youth, there are several other factors that have been identified as possible contributors. One such factor is family dynamics. Dowsett and Jackson (2019) found that family conflict and poor parent-child communication were associated with increased aggression in children who played violent video games. Similarly, Pellegrini (2019) noted that children who experienced less positive parenting behaviors, such as inconsistent discipline or low parental warmth, were more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors.

Another factor that may play a role in the relationship between violent media and aggression is pre-existing mental health conditions. In their longitudinal intervention study, Kühn et al (2019) found that participants with a history of aggressive behavior were more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior after playing violent video games compared to those without such a history. This suggests that violent media may not be a risk factor for aggression in all individuals, but rather may have a more significant impact on those with pre-existing mental health conditions. Similarly, Barrington and Ferguson (2022) found that individuals who experienced higher levels of stress were more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior after playing violent video games.

Suziedelyte (2021) also notes that socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and low levels of education, may contribute to higher rates of violence in general, including among youth. These factors may interact with exposure to violent media, making youth who are already at risk for violent behavior even more susceptible. Additionally, Lee et al (2021) suggest that personality traits such as sensation seeking and impulsivity may also play a role in the relationship between violent media and aggression. They note that individuals who are highly sensation seeking may be more likely to seek out violent media, which could in turn lead to increased aggressive behavior.

Finally, it is important to consider the context in which violent media is consumed. Drummond et al (2021) found that playing violent virtual reality video games in a competitive context led to higher levels of aggressive behavior compared to playing non-violent virtual reality games in a cooperative context. This suggests that the competitive nature of the activity, rather than the violent content itself, may be driving the relationship between violent media and aggression. Similarly, Guo (2022) notes that the social context in which violent media is consumed may also be important, as peer influence and approval may play a role in shaping attitudes and behaviors.

In conclusion, while there is evidence to suggest that violent media may not be a direct cause of aggressive behavior in youth, there are several other factors that may contribute to the relationship between exposure to violent media and aggression. These factors include family dynamics, pre-existing mental health conditions, socioeconomic factors, personality traits,

and the context in which violent media is consumed. By taking a more holistic approach to understanding the relationship between violent media and aggression, researchers and policymakers may be better equipped to develop effective interventions to prevent and reduce violence among youth.

### **Summary**

The studies that agree that violent media such as films and video games amongst youths makes them violent suggest that exposure to violent media can have negative effects on children's behavior, attitudes, and emotions. They suggest that children who consume violent media are more likely to become desensitized to violence, and therefore more likely to engage in violent behavior. Furthermore, these studies suggest that children who consume violent media are more likely to view aggression as an acceptable means of conflict resolution. The research also shows that children who are exposed to violent media may experience negative effects on their academic performance, as well as on their social and emotional development.

On the other hand, the studies that disagree with the notion that violent media causes aggression in youth suggest that there is no causal link between violent media and aggressive behavior. They argue that while children who consume violent media may exhibit aggressive behavior, this does not necessarily mean that the violent media caused the aggression. Instead, they suggest that children who consume violent media may already have pre-existing aggression or other risk factors that contribute to their behavior. Furthermore, these studies argue that violent media can have positive effects, such as providing a healthy outlet for aggression or helping children to learn problem-solving skills. Overall, the research suggests that while there may be a correlation between violent media and aggressive behavior, this does not necessarily mean that one causes the other.

### **Conclusion**

The results of our analysis suggest that while some studies have found a correlation between violent media and aggression in youth, there is a growing body of evidence that does not support this link. Studies such as those conducted by Ferguson and Wang (2022); Dowsett and Jackson (2019); Kühn et al (2019) have found little to no evidence that violent media causes aggressive behavior in youth.

Furthermore, research has shown that other factors such as family dynamics, mental health issues, and socioeconomic status may play a more significant role in aggressive behavior. As Barrington and Ferguson (2022) note, stress and violence in video games may influence aggression, but the relationship is complex and not necessarily causal.

It is essential to continue researching the impact of violent media on youth while considering the larger context of a young person's life. While media may be one contributing factor, it is not the sole cause of aggressive behavior. Parents, educators, and mental health professionals should focus on holistic interventions that address the multiple factors that contribute to aggressive behavior in youth.

In conclusion, while there is some evidence to suggest that violent media may be linked to aggression in youth, the relationship is far from straightforward. More research is needed to better understand the complex factors that contribute to aggressive behavior, and interventions should address multiple contributing factors rather than focusing solely on violent media.

## Recommendations

While the studies reviewed here have provided valuable insights into the relationship between violent media and aggression in youth, there are some limitations to be considered. Firstly, the studies are largely focused on short-term effects and may not capture long-term impacts. Secondly, most of the studies are correlational, making it difficult to establish causality. Future research could address these limitations by conducting longitudinal studies that examine the long-term effects of violent media on youth aggression. Additionally, randomized controlled trials could be conducted to provide stronger evidence for causality. Another avenue for future research could be to explore the potential moderating factors that may impact the relationship between violent media and aggression, such as family dynamics or pre-existing mental health conditions. Finally, future studies could examine alternative forms of media, such as social media or music, and their potential impact on youth aggression. By addressing these limitations and expanding our understanding of the relationship between violent media and youth aggression, we can better inform policies and interventions aimed at promoting healthy media consumption habits among youth.

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