

## Researchers say too many children see extreme violence in movies

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In a paper published in the August issue of the journal *Pediatrics*, Dartmouth researchers document the alarming numbers of young adolescents age 10-14 who are exposed to graphic violence in movies rated R for violence. They found that these extremely violent movies were seen by an average of 12.5 percent of an estimated 22 million children age 10-14. One R-rated movie, *Scary Movie*, was seen by an estimated 10 million children, or about 48 percent of 10-14 year olds.

"Our data reveal a disturbingly high rate of exposure among 10-14 year olds nationally to extremely violent movies," says Keilah Worth, the lead author on the study and a post-doctoral fellow at Dartmouth Medical School and at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center's Norris Cotton Cancer Center. "In Britain, no adolescent would be admitted to these movies unless they were 18. The R rating in this country is clearly not preventing our young people from seeing them."

Many scientific studies have established the connection between exposure to media violence and aggression and violence in children. For example, playing video games can lead to changes in attitudes and behavior as well as desensitization to actual violence.

"We know so much about the harmful effects of exposure to violent media content, but how much exposure children actually get has been largely ignored. Now, we're learning more about the large numbers of kids seeing this material and who they are," says Worth.

For this assessment of exposure to violence in movies, the researchers used data from national telephone surveys of more than 6,500 adolescents age 10-14 in 2003. Out of 532 recent releases, the researchers chose to look at exposure to 40 of the most violent movies. The study also revealed some independent risk factors for exposure: boys, minorities, those with lower socioeconomic status, and those with lower academic performance were all more likely to see extremely violent movies. Black male adolescents were at particularly high risk of seeing these movies. For example, *Blade*, *Training Day*, and *Scary Movie* were seen by 37 percent, 27 percent, and 48 percent respectively of all the adolescents surveyed, compared to 82 percent, 81 percent, and 81 percent of black males.

"No expert in child development would advocate for subjecting children as young as 10 to this level of violence, yet the study shows that such exposure is commonplace in this country," says James Sargent, the senior scientist on this study and a professor of pediatrics at Dartmouth Medical School. "We should re-think the current movie rating system, which has been in place for 40 years, and was designed when kids could only see movies in theaters. Ratings need to be more prominent on all movies, whether they are seen in theaters or purchased in the store, and we need clearer messages to parents. Pediatricians and child advocates should instruct parents to strictly abide by the movie-age guidelines and to closely monitor movie viewing."

Source: Dartmouth College

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