

# Intervention reduces children's viewing of violent TV

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A team of Oregon State University researchers has successfully implemented a classroom-based intervention that reduces the amount of violent TV that children watch.

According to the researchers, whose findings will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, the result was an 18 percent reduction in violent TV viewing among first- through fourth-grade [children](#). That reduction was maintained eight months after concluding the [intervention](#).

Participating in the special classroom curriculum also significantly reduced the students' identification with superheroes compared to children in a control group.

Lawrence Rosenkoetter, retired professor in the Department of Psychology at Oregon State University, is the lead author of the study. The co-authors are Sharon Rosenkoetter and Alan Acock, both faculty members in the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at OSU.

This intervention was the second phase of a three-part study that the Rosenkoetters conducted over a four-year period. Their research was funded through \$850,000 in grants from the U.S. Department of Education and the Northwest Health Foundation.

Sharon Rosenkoetter noted that the large body of research pointing to

the impact of violent television on children shows a need to steer children to "healthier" viewing habits.

"We have a significant body of research now that shows that children who watch violent TV tend to be more violent, to overestimate the threat of crime, and to think that the world is a more dangerous place than it is," she said. "So if there is a connection between violent TV and [violent behavior](#) - and research shows that there is - then it is in society's interest to reduce the viewing of violence."

In the Rosenkoettters' first study, they found a reduction in viewing of violent shows by girls but not by boys in the intervention group. In the control group, neither gender changed its viewing habits. The second and newest study was much larger in scope. This time the researchers found an 18 percent reduction in viewing of violent television for both genders, while again members of the control group did not change their habits.

One of the most welcome aspects of this new phase of the study was that students also reported identifying less with violent superheroes and having more critical attitudes about violence on TV after the intervention, Sharon Rosenkoetter said. An aim of the curriculum was to reduce the identification with violent super heroes. The curriculum addressed this by emphasizing the "pretend" nature of the superheroes actions and touting "real" heroes such as student athletes, police officers, doctors and nurses, scientists, and others.

This classroom-based intervention included 496 children in 32 elementary classes. The children were interviewed by assistants prior to, immediately after, and eight months after the intervention to assess their specific viewing habits.

About 242 additional children were in the control group, which did not receive the intervention. These children did not alter their viewing

habits, nor was there a change in their acceptance of violent TV or their identification with violent superheroes.

The curriculum used in the intervention is called The REViEW Project Curriculum (Reducing Early Violence: Education Works). It was developed by the Rosenkoetters, colleagues, and students, drawing upon earlier work by leaders in this field. The curriculum is available online under Community Outreach at: [www.hhs.oregonstate.edu/hdfs/hdfs-research](http://www.hhs.oregonstate.edu/hdfs/hdfs-research)

According to Lawrence Rosenkoetter, the intervention focuses on supporting children to make better viewing choices, rather than telling them to turn off the TV entirely. The curriculum includes 28 lessons of 20-30 minutes each and is administered over a period of seven months. During the intervention, the project's teachers led highly interactive lessons that included clips from TV shows. They also brought in guest speakers to talk with the children. These speakers included a student athlete who described his time management plan and a police officer who told the children he never shot anyone or conducted a car chase but most of his job consists of talking to people and filling out paperwork.

Near the end of the intervention, the students made a TV show about what they had learned, and they showed this to a class of younger children.

"We did a follow-up eight months after the intervention, and our results held," Lawrence Rosenkoetter said. "These findings mean that we have been able to show that it is possible to guide kids to choose to watch less TV violence. That had not been demonstrated before."

The next part of the OSU team's research to be published involves their work in guiding classroom teachers, rather than project personnel, to administer the intervention. Lawrence Rosenkoetter said the findings

show that the regular classroom teachers are successful in using the curriculum.

"Getting children to watch less violent television is crucial," Lawrence Rosenkoetter said. "We compare it to the kids eating junk food versus eating healthy food that makes you grow strong. They really grasp that comparison. We tell them, there is junk TV and nutritious TV, and here is how you tell the difference."

Though the Rosenkoetters note that there is an increasing amount of good television programming for children as well as the bad selections, they both say they would love to see all children balance television viewing with other activities.

"We ask them questions like 'What could you do instead of sitting in front of the television set?' 'How might you help someone in your neighborhood?' 'Did you ever read the book that suggested that TV show?' " Sharon Rosenkoetter said. "The students come up with really creative answers, and it appears from the data that they are acting on those answers."

Source: Oregon State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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