

Popular television shows inaccurately portray violent crime

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Researchers at Mayo Clinic compared two popular television shows, CSI and CSI: Miami, to actual U.S. homicide data, and discovered clear differences between media portrayals of violent deaths versus actual murders. This study complements previous research regarding media influences on public health perception. Mayo Clinic researchers present their findings today at the American Psychiatric Association annual meeting in San Francisco.

Previous studies have indicated television influences individual health behaviors and public health perceptions. Timothy Lineberry, M.D., a psychiatrist at Mayo Clinic, says "We make a lot of our decisions as a society based on information that we have, and television has been used to provide public health messages." Researchers chose to compare the crimes on CSI and CSI: Miami to real homicides because of the shows' combined audiences of more than 43 million viewers annually. They sought to determine how representative the portrayal of violent death crimes on the two series compared with data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) National Violent Death Reporting System.

When researchers compared the shows to the CDC data, they discovered the strongest misrepresentations were related to alcohol use, relationships, and race among perpetrators and victims. Previous studies of actual statistics have shown that both perpetrator and victim were often under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs when the crime occurred, differing from what the shows portrayed. Also, CSI and CSI: Miami were more likely to have described the victim and the attacker as

Caucasian, which is misrepresentative. Finally, according to the CDC data, homicide victims typically knew their assailant; however, the television series were more likely to have portrayed the perpetrator as a stranger. All of these findings were significantly different when compared to the data.

Dr. Lineberry says, "If we believe that there is a lack of association with alcohol, that strangers are more likely to attack, and that homicide doesn't represent particular groups of people, it's difficult to create [public health](#) interventions that the general public supports." Other authors contributing to this study included Christopher Janish and Melanie Buskirk, both from Mayo Medical School.

Source: Mayo Clinic ([news](#) : [web](#))

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