

Researchers find crime drama viewers more likely to aid sexual assault victims

February 20 2013

(Medical Xpress)—Viewers of primetime crime dramas, like NCIS, CSI or Law & Order, are more inclined than non-viewers to see themselves intervening on behalf of the victim of a sexual assault, according to recent research at Washington State University.

Published in the *Journal of Health Communication*, the study suggests prime-time television may be a successful medium for educating the public about [sexual assault](#) and encouraging positive responses, according to Stacey Hust, associate professor of communication with the Edward R. Murrow College of Communications and lead researcher.

A once taboo topic on television, sexual assault has been depicted with increasing frequency in prime-time television programming in recent years, Hust said. Previous research indicates that crime dramas include nearly six violent acts per hour, about a tenth of which are related to sexual assault.

"Although content analyses have not established whether crime dramas portray individuals intervening in sexual assault, we knew from watching some of the programs that at least some episodes featured bystanders who intervened before the crime or who came forward to help after the crime was committed," Hust said. "We wanted to see if watching these programs was associated with bystander intervention.

To answer this question, she and her colleagues fielded a survey to college freshmen to examine the link between crime drama viewing and

intentions to intervene during a sexual assault. After controlling for previously identified factors known to influence intentions to intervene in sexual assault situations, the data indicated increased exposure to crime dramas was associated with increased intentions to intervene.

"Sexual assault is a particularly difficult problem to address with health communication campaigns, given adults' discomfort with discussing the topic," said second author Emily Garrigues Marett, a management faculty member at the College of Business at Mississippi State University. "This finding is exciting for [health communication](#) practitioners because it suggests that prime-time television may be a successful medium for educating the public on the issue and encouraging positive behaviors."

This study's findings are even more relevant, given the prevalence of sexual assault within the United States. According to U.S. Department of Justice figures, nearly 1 in 6 adult women and 1 in 30 adult men will experience sexual assault within their lifetime.

"Increasing bystander intervention is critical to sexual assault prevention efforts," Hust said. "Bystander intervention both creates an environment in which sexual assault is not tolerated and an environment supportive of victims—both of which are necessary to eliminate sexual assault."

Provided by Washington State University

Citation: Researchers find crime drama viewers more likely to aid sexual assault victims (2013, February 20) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-02-crime-drama-viewers-aid-sexual.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.