

New study finds no link between movie, video game violence and societal violence

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Since the 1920s, scholars and politicians have blamed violence in movies and other media as a contributing factor to rising violence in society. Recently the responses to mass shootings in Aurora, CO and at Sandy Hook Elementary followed this theme as media consumption came into the equation. But can consumption of violent media really be a factor in real-world violence? A recent study published in the *Journal of Communication* by a researcher at Stetson University found that there were no associations between media violence consumption in society and societal violence.

Christopher Ferguson (Stetson University) published his findings in the *Journal of Communication*. Ferguson conducted two studies that raised the question if whether the incidence of [violence](#) in media correlates with actual violence rates in society. The first study looked at movie violence and homicide rates between 1920 and 2005. The second study looked at videogame violence consumption and its relationship to [youth violence](#) rates from 1996-2011. He found that societal consumption of media violence is not predictive of increased violence rates in society.

For the first study, independent raters evaluated the frequency and graphicness of violence in popular movies from 1920-2005. These were correlated to homicide rates for the same years. Overall, movie violence and homicide rates were not correlated. However, during the mid-20th century, movie violence and [homicide rates](#) did appear to correlate slightly, which may have led some to believe a larger trend was at play. That correlation reversed after 1990 so that movie violence became

correlated with fewer homicides. Prior to the 1940s, movie violence was similarly related to fewer homicides, not more.

In the second study on [video game](#) violence, the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) ratings were used to estimate the violent content of the most popular video games for the years 1996-2011. These estimates of societal video game violence consumption were correlated against federal data on youth violence rates during the same years. Violent video game consumption was strongly correlated with declines in youth violence. However, it was concluded that such a correlation is most likely due to chance and does not indicate video games caused the decline in youth violence.

Previous studies have focused on laboratory experiments and aggression as a response to movie and videogame violence, but this does not match well with real-life exposure. Other studies have indicated that, in the short term, the release of violent movies or video games is associated with declines in societal violence. However, no one has examined these trends long-term. Some scholars have argued that movies are becoming more violent, but none have examined whether this phenomenon is a concern for society. This study is the first to suggest that movie violence and [video game violence](#) consumption probably are increasing over time, but that there is little evidence that this has caused a problem for society.

"Society has a limited amount of resources and attention to devote to the problem of reducing crime. There is a risk that identifying the wrong problem, such as [media violence](#), may distract society from more pressing concerns such as poverty, education and vocational disparities and mental health," Ferguson said. "This research may help society focus on issues that really matter and avoid devoting unnecessary resources to the pursuit of moral agendas with little practical value."

More information: "Does Media Violence Predict Societal Violence?"

It Depends on What You Look at and When," by Christopher Ferguson;
Journal of Communication, 2014.

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