

APA review confirms link between playing violent video games and aggression

August 14 2015



Credit: Cristie Guevara/public domain

Violent video game play is linked to increased aggression in players but insufficient evidence exists about whether the link extends to criminal

violence or delinquency, according to a new American Psychological Association task force report.

"The research demonstrates a consistent relation between violent [video game](#) use and increases in aggressive behavior, aggressive cognitions and aggressive affect, and decreases in prosocial behavior, empathy and sensitivity to aggression," says the report of the APA Task Force on Violent Media. The task force's review is the first in this field to examine the breadth of studies included and to undertake multiple approaches to reviewing the literature.

"Scientists have investigated the use of [violent video](#) games for more than two decades but to date, there is very limited research addressing whether violent video games cause people to commit acts of criminal violence," said Mark Appelbaum, PhD, task force chair. "However, the link between violence in video games and increased aggression in players is one of the most studied and best established in the field."

"No single risk factor consistently leads a person to act aggressively or violently," the report states. "Rather, it is the accumulation of risk factors that tends to lead to aggressive or violent behavior. The research reviewed here demonstrates that violent video game use is one such risk factor."

In light of the task force's conclusions, APA has called on the industry to design video games that include increased parental control over the amount of violence the games contain. APA's Council of Representatives adopted a resolution at its meeting Aug. 7 in Toronto encouraging the Entertainment Software Rating Board to refine its video game rating system "to reflect the levels and characteristics of violence in games, in addition to the current global ratings." In addition, the resolution urges developers to design games that are appropriate to users' age and psychological development, and voices APA's support for more

research to address gaps in the knowledge about the effects of violent video game use.

The resolution replaces a 2005 resolution on the same topic.

The task force identified a number of limitations in the research that require further study. These include a general failure to look for any differences in outcomes between boys and girls who play [violent video games](#); a dearth of studies that have examined the effects of violent video game play on children younger than 10; and a lack of research that has examined the games' effects over the course of children's development.

"We know that there are numerous risk factors for aggressive behavior," Appelbaum said. "What researchers need to do now is conduct studies that look at the effects of video game play in people at risk for aggression or violence due to a combination of risk factors. For example, how do depression or delinquency interact with violent video game use?"

The [task force](#) conducted a comprehensive review of the research literature published between 2005 and 2013 focused on violent video game use. This included four meta-analyses that reviewed more than 150 research reports published before 2009. Task force members then conducted both a systematic evidence review and a quantitative review of the literature published between 2009 and 2013. (A systematic evidence review synthesizes all empirical evidence that meets pre-specified criteria to answer specific research questions - a standard approach to summarizing large bodies of research to explore a field of research.) This resulted in 170 articles, 31 of which met all of the most stringent screening criteria.

"While there is some variation among the individual studies, a strong and consistent general pattern has emerged from many years of research that

provides confidence in our general conclusions," Appelbaum said. "As with most areas of science, the picture presented by this [research](#) is more complex than is usually included in news coverage and other information prepared for the general public."

More information: See the [report](#) and [policy](#) here.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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