

Popular crime shows may help reduce sexual assault

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A new study reveals viewers of "Law and Order" have a better grasp of sexual consent than viewers of other crime dramas such as "CSI" or "NCIS," suggesting that individuals who watch programs in which sexual predators are punished may avoid sexual predatory behavior in real life.

Published in the recent issue of the *Journal of Health Communication*, the study by The Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University shows a connection between how [sexual violence](#) is portrayed and how people view sexual consent.

"One of the marked differences between 'Law & Order' and other crime dramas is its focus on the criminals' trials," said lead researcher Stacey Hust. "Viewers of 'Law & Order' not only see the criminal act taking place, but they typically see the criminal punished for the crime. This judicial sentencing is rarely seen in other crime dramas."

The survey of 313 college freshmen explored the influence of watching the three most popular crime drama franchises: "Law & Order," "CSI" and "NCIS." Watching "Law & Order" was associated with [viewers'](#) increased intentions to adhere to expressions of sexual consent and to refuse unwanted sexual activity. In contrast, watching "CSI" was associated with decreased intentions to both ask a partner for consent and to adhere to a partner's consent decisions.

"The legal aspects of 'Law & Order' present opportunities to better address topics that other crime dramas might omit," said study co-author

Emily Garrigues Marett, instructor at Mississippi State University. "For example, the process of preparing a case for prosecution frequently requires establishing whether consent was present. This provides a valuable opportunity to clarify misperceptions around this issue."

Hust and her coauthors agree that the findings could make a significant contribution to the field of sexual assault prevention. The study suggests that crime dramas could be a useful tool for practitioners focused on preventing sexual assault.

"The results indicate that simply depicting the issue and its impact on the victim may not be enough to influence attitudes and behavior," Hust said. "Instead, sexual assault reduction messages should emphasize the rewards of practicing healthy sexual consent behavior."

More information: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0810730.2015.1018615

Provided by Washington State University

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