

Daily dose of violent video games has no long-term effect on adult aggression: study

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Credit: Cristie Guevara/public domain

Playing violent action adventure games for prolonged periods does not make adults more aggressive say researchers from the Max Planck

Institute for Human Development and the University Clinic Hamburg-Eppendorf in Germany. A new study led by Simone Kühn looked at the influence long-term violent video game play has on aggression levels, and compared this with playing a life simulation game or not playing a video game at all. The research is published in the Springer Nature journal *Molecular Psychiatry*.

Previous experimental studies have shown that a few minutes' worth of violent video game play can influence a person's levels of aggression and willingness to help others. There is however reason to believe that these effects were mostly the results of exposure to specific stimuli and subsequent priming that formed part of these studies.

The current research breaks new ground because it is the first study to investigate the effects of long-term violent video game play.

Seventy-seven participants were divided into three groups. The first group of 25 played the violent video game Grand Theft Auto V daily for two months. The second group of 24 played the simulation [game](#) The Sims 3 every day for two months, while the final group of 28 did not play any video games for two months.

Before and after the two-month period, Kühn and her team noted the participants' level of aggression and empathy, interpersonal competencies, impulsivity, anxiety, mood, and executive control. These characteristics were all determined using a battery of tests consisting of questionnaires and computerized behavioral assessments.

The researchers found no significant changes in any of the variables assessed, particularly not in the aggression levels over time in any of the three groups. Only three of the 208 statistical tests performed showed any significant changes that could allude to more [violent behavior](#), and these are explained through coincidence.

Two months after the participants stopped playing daily video games, there was still no difference in their aggression levels. This was also true for their measures of empathy, interpersonal competencies, impulsivity, anxiety, mood, and executive control.

"We did not find relevant negative effects in response to violent [video game playing](#)," explained Kühn. "The fact that we assessed multiple domains, not finding an effect in any of them, makes the present study the most comprehensive in the field."

The results provide strong evidence against the frequently debated negative effects of playing violent video games in adults. Kühn hopes it will provide a more realistic scientific perspective on the effects of violent [video](#) gaming in real life, and that similar studies will be done using children as participants.

"The American Psychological Association recently summarized the previous findings on [violent video games](#) as indicating that they pose a risk factor for adverse outcomes, including increased [aggression](#) and decreased empathy. The present findings of this study clearly contradict this conclusion," added Kühn.

More information: Simone Kühn et al, Does playing violent video games cause aggression? A longitudinal intervention study, *Molecular Psychiatry* (2018). [DOI: 10.1038/s41380-018-0031-7](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41380-018-0031-7)

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