

URI professor warns: TV viewing likely to make you fear sickness

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Watching television and its heavy dose of medical content in news and drama can lead to more concern about personal health and reduce a person's satisfaction with life according to a new study out of the University of Rhode Island.

The study, authored by Yinjiao Ye, assistant professor of communications studies found that TV viewing affects people's awareness of health-risks and whether they believe they can protect their own health. People develop these perceptions because TV viewing leads them to believe they have a greater likelihood of being victimized by health-risks as well as a strong belief in the severity of those risks. The research was published in the September issue of the journal *Mass Communication and Society*.

Millions watch medical shows such as Grey's Anatomy, House, and E.R. Evidence has shown that the mass media are powerful in disseminating health knowledge and changing health attitudes and behaviors through such programming. Such knowledge, however, may lead people to think they are more likely to suffer from the maladies presented on TV.

Given that people are predisposed to seek life satisfaction and the benefits of life satisfaction on health and longevity, high doses of [television viewing](#) may prevent people from achieving that goal. Of course, life dissatisfaction may be a reason why people watch television to start with, but television is not the best solution according to this and other studies. Other leisure activities such as socializing and exercise may actually be better options.

Since most people learn important information about health risks from the mass media, there is clearly a double-edged-sword effect at work here. As people become more knowledgeable, they enjoy life less. But ignorance, at least of TV's presentations of medical information, is closer to

bliss.

These findings extend previous research that TV viewing can also cause people to be less satisfied with their lives because it makes them more materialistic and causes them to overestimate other people's possessions compared to their own. Now getting sick and not being able to do much about it can be added as a second cause of life dissatisfaction.

In her study, the URI professor surveyed 274 students in the College of Communications at the University of Alabama about their [TV viewing](#) and [life satisfaction](#). The students were not told the purpose of the survey.

The surveyed students ranged in age from 18 to 31, a youthful group associated with good health and vitality. "While this surveyed group shows dissatisfaction, I suspect that if I surveyed a more general population the dissatisfaction would be even higher," says the researcher.

Provided by University of Rhode Island

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