

**The Bill Blackwood
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Ethics, Media Violence, and Juvenile Crime

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ABSTRACT

This administrative research paper illustrates issues with ethics, media violence, and juvenile crime and its procedures. The portrayal of violence is seen more on television than commercials. It is the media's portrayal of violence and acts of violence that has a direct link to the increase in juvenile crime. The media should have ethical obligations when portraying such violence, especially when the audience is so vulnerable to what they observe. Research, journals, surveys, statistics, and media guidelines are several resources that were used to substantiate the methodology of the paper. Through research, it is determined that media violence and juvenile crime are on the rise since the inception of new interactive entertainment. When the media exposes children to violence, they can develop a negative behavior and value system significantly shaped by this exposure.

The researcher discovered it is recommended that all law enforcement agencies examine the possibility that the media's portrayal of violence is imitated in some juvenile's life, and law enforcement agencies should ensure the juvenile understands that the media glamorizes violence for profits of entertainment. Once in the judicial system, counselors and others within this environment are in a better position to understand how the media influences the juvenile into committing violence. The research found that 25% of officers surveyed have been involved in certain incidents wherein this data affects an arrest of a juvenile offender. When the officers were asked if they feel that juvenile violence plays an important part of the affects of ethics in law enforcement, 25% of the officers surveyed, who have been the subject of a crime committed, replied yes.

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INTRODUCTION

This research paper will examine the importance of ethics, media violence, and juvenile crime in the field of law enforcement. Over the years, society has an ongoing debate regarding media violence. It is believed that excessive exposure to television violence causes aggressive behavior among children, which leads to crime and violence. Case studies have shown that children exposed to negative effects of media violence have increased violent behavior. Their sensitivity level for violence and to the victims has decreased, and this has increased their enthusiasm for more violence as seen in the entertainment industry and in real life (Cutler, 2004).

The media should accept some responsibility by limiting the amount of offensive material children are watching on television. Parents should be more aware of what their children view within the media. The purpose of this research is to examine the statistics in media violence with relation to juvenile crime rates. This paper will show the statistics on how the media provokes violence, aggressive behavior, and crime within society. It will also show how children are influenced by what is shown to them in the television programs and movies. Research further revealed that many children gain violent behaviors and apply them in their own lives after watching violent movies and video games.

The research of ethics, media violence, and juvenile crime focuses on whether or not children who are displaced from abuse or neglect are those who commit juvenile crimes. This subject is important to law enforcement because it assists police officers with logical arguments about media violence. In addition, law enforcement must be knowledgeable in the areas of psychology and sociology in order to examine the

amount of violence in the media and its effect on young people. According to a University of Maryland study, most children today have 40% less family time than children in the mid-sixties (Steyer, 2002).

The intended outcome of this research is to analyze the media's ethical obligation to restrict material pertaining to violence and its distribution on television (Cutler, 2004). This paper will provide statistical information pertaining to the rise of juvenile crimes as it relates to media violence. Law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because it will enlighten law enforcement officials to take a more proactive stance when dealing with children who are influenced by what they see on television, hear on the radio, or view in the movies. Law enforcement will realize that children have to be re-taught how to view the media and know what is real and what is staged.

The research conducted did not limit itself to focusing on television only; research also shows data referencing videos and video games. With the rapid evolution of cell phone technology, full-length movies and videos can be downloaded onto a cell phone or iPod. Eventually, a study will have to be conducted to include these other forms of media since the younger generation is the largest user of these products. In today's society, studies have been conducted that indicate children are watching television more than ever before. Children are viewing more media violence at a younger age and are using it as a first resort to conflict among their peers (Holder, 1999).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Through research, the role of ethics and media violence in society is examined. Research revealed the important role the media has in the psychological development

of children today and the correlation to juvenile crimes committed by today's youth when exposed to the different types of media violence. Levensque (2007) discussed research conducted in the last 40 years, which indicated that "...researchers conclude that exposure to media violence, especially violent television and even sometimes simply television, associates with aggression" (p. 57). The research conducted further revealed the aggressive behavior associated with the media at the time was more subtle than severe. This research also indicated the effects from the media exposure could be short and long-term. Those who had direct contact with the adolescent, such as family members, friends, and school personnel, readily observed the negative behavior exhibited by the adolescents.

Commentators for the American Academy Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Medical Association, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry attempted to downplay the results of research conducted by researchers. This was obvious when six leading professional organizations attested to the dangers of media violence by jointly agreeing, "At this time, well over 1000 studies ... point overwhelmingly to a casual connection between media violence and aggression in children" (American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, American Psychological Association, American Medical Association, American, Academy of Family Physicians & American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p.1).

Culter's (2004) research, after reviewing a report generated by The United States Senate Judiciary Committee in August 1999 that compiled testimony from the committee received from several experts in the medical and the media field, seemed to

indicate that 10% of the responsibility is due to television portraying violence among youths. Having youths enrolled in after school and extra-curricular activities could have prevented over 250 murders and 12,100 violent crimes, as reported in the 1997 National Television Violence Study (Woodard, 2005).

Research further suggested there are other factors that contribute to violent behavior committed by adolescents, such as belonging to a gang, drug use, accessibility to guns, poverty, and even racism. One of the most common denominators many of the researchers had was the amount of exposure to the media. All concluded that over the last three decades, the amount of exposure to the media has had an impact on their behavior. According to a three-year National Television Violence study that examined violence viewed on television, 6% of the programs showed violence (Woodward, 2005).

This is where the question of ethics in the media field comes into play. The research conducted on this topic was simple and easy to find. Top media executives were informed of the findings from the Senate Judiciary Committee because the media industry could be affected by the outcome. Since many journalists are taught their profession in many different ways, journalism ethics, for the most part, may be readily and well-defined through what is portrayed in television, and some may depict violence in the entertainment industry markets that glamorizes violence for children (Christians, Rotzoll, Fackler, Brittain McKee, & Woods, 2004). Being more economically profitable with viewership and advertisement space and being readily accessible to children and teenagers are just a few of the pressures taken on by the media industry and the reasoning for violence portrayed by them (Christians et al., 2004). The law seeks to

balance competing aims like ethics; however, in most countries, there are laws preventing the media from breaching another's person's rights by doing or saying certain things (Patterson & Wilkins, 2004).

METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct this research, this paper will utilize articles from journals, magazines, books, and statistical data. Statistical data will be gathered from the Senate Judiciary Committee, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the Department of Justice, and from a survey conducted of law enforcement agencies who deal with juvenile offenders. After gathering the data and reviewing the information, the researcher received a better understanding of what ethical role media violence has in relation to juvenile crime.

The articles will focus on the issues of ethics, media violence, and juvenile crime exhibited by the media and the aggressive behavior and the perceptions illustrated by television. The information will be extracted from case studies of the media's effect on children. Also, the author will illustrate that the effects of juvenile crime and learning processes of today has changed and most is now concerted through computers and modern technology. The media has taken a role of providing more detailed coverage of gruesome crime scenes and has incorporated these same details into games.

The author will take data collected during a survey of 20 officers who were or have participated in ethics issues, media violence amongst minors, and juvenile crime. The author will gather this data and attempt to make a comparison amongst the officer

viewpoints and determine the differences in the way these officers respond to issues where ethics, media violence, and juvenile crimes play a major role in the decisions they make.

In researching this topic, a survey was conducted involving officers from several local, state, and county police department who actively engage with today's youth from a law enforcement standpoint. The survey consisted of an officer from the first line, investigative, and administration view covering a number of different topics. Each officer was able to identify the importance of holding the media to equal, if not higher, standards when reporting crimes or violent incidents and whether or not the media should bear some responsibility. The amount of violence portrayed through the media may play a role in how a juvenile reacts when faced with a decision on whether or not to commit a crime. Finally, when dealing with juvenile offenders, law enforcement is faced with the dilemma of taking into consideration what a juvenile offender observes through the media and if it is relevant to the crime they commit.

Officers interviewed come from both genders and have a wide range of experience and ethnic backgrounds. Male and female officers and administrators were surveyed to gain a complete view or perspective on the subject. Upon compilation of the data, similarities between the officers were found. Officers who give daily presentations to children such as Gang Resistance Education Awareness Training (GREAT), Dare Awareness and Resistance Education (DARE), and officers who conduct the initial investigation into juvenile crimes consisted of the first group of officers that found them asking the basic questions. Those surveyed were asked one question

either by email, phone, or in person once the survey was completed. The question asked was in reference to years in law enforcement.

FINDINGS

The author conducted interviews with 20 officers who have been involved in certain incidents in which the use of data was necessary to effect an arrest of a juvenile offender. These same officers shared information received from juvenile offenders if the media played a role in the crime committed. By comparing the data from the surveys, articles, and interviews, this author hopes to pinpoint how to handle the outcome of difficult situations pertaining to juveniles and how to implement the reinforcement within their individual department. The research showed the differences in cultural opinions as viewed by many newspapers and magazines as well as radio and television talk shows illustrating differences in viewpoints.

Question 1 revealed the breakdown of the different groups. The largest group of officers surveyed (80%) were GREAT officers, DARE officers, or the initial contact officer. The other two remaining groups were comprised of follow up investigators (10%) and officers holding or assigned to an administrative role within the police organization (10%). Question 2 answers were an overwhelming 95% affirmative rate from all parties, which indicated the media should be held to a higher ethical standard. Question 3 asked about the responsibility the media has regarding what they show, and Question 4 referenced the role the media plays. Both questions had the highest response rate and indicated the same answers. The questions both had a 100% response rate, indicating the media should bear some responsibility and does play a role in crimes committed by juveniles who have observed violence through the media.

Question 5 was the question that was most divided. This question was a 60/40 split, with the majority saying law enforcement should not consider what a juvenile watches as justification for the crimes they commit. When years of law enforcement was factored in for the group, it had an average of 20.975 years. This was clear indicator that law enforcement officers who have been on the job longer believe crimes committed by juveniles are committed because decisions were made by the juvenile and not by what he observed through the media. The average years of law enforcement experience of the remaining 40% was 8.75 years. Officers who conducted follow-up investigations with juvenile offenders answered either supporting the first group of officers' answers or had a direct correlation to why juveniles committed the crimes.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, studies have shown that media violence has negative effects on children's behavior and their outlook on society in general. By imposing government supervision on media violence, parents will become more aware of the situation and this will, in turn, help deter children from viewing such violent shows. Children should not be continually exposed to violence in the media, and the government should take action to prevent this occurrence.

This research has examined the statistics in media violence in relation to juvenile crime rates. This paper showed the statistics on how media provokes violence, aggressive behavior, and crime within society. In addition, research has shown that children are influenced by what is in the television programs and movies, and many children have increased violent behaviors and apply these behaviors in their lives after

viewing violent movies and video games. The most preventive measure readily available to parents is to become an active participant in what a child watches and plays on television (Savage, 2004). Each parent needs to stay informed and involved with their child's friends and outside activities.

It is with great hope that officers will begin to discuss these issues in order to understand the importance of this research. This research brings awareness, especially in a democratic era, where public debate is determined by the common good in people. Each journalist, through the right of freedom of speech, has a personal choice in utilizing information and how it is portrayed within the media. The journalists are ethically responsible for deciding if a conflict, such as the protection of confidential news and sources, is viable for juveniles to view (Cantor, 2004).

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APPENDIX

Survey Questions

1. What role do you play when dealing with juvenile offenders?
 - a. Presenter (GREAT, DARE) or Initial Investigator (first officer on the scene)
 - b. Follow up investigator
 - c. Administrator
2. Do you think the media should be held to a higher ethical standard?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. Do think the media should bear some responsibility when reporting violence being committed?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Do you think the violence displayed through the media play a role with juveniles and the crimes committed by them?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Do you think that law enforcement should consider what juveniles are viewing today as justification for the crimes they commit?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No