

How do violent video games affect the behavior of children and young adolescent in Albania?

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Abstract

Video games, the violence they contain as well as their consequences on children and young adolescents are one of the problems that worry more society today. The number of young adolescents who prefer violence to debate over problem solving is growing.

Various studies have shown a significant impact of violent video games on violent behaviors of children and adolescents. This impact varies from country to country. Somewhere it is higher, somewhere is lower.

How much and in what ways, do violent video games affect the behavior of Albanian children and young adolescents? Do they encourage aggressive behavior or not in them? Important influences in mitigating the impact of these video games undoubtedly have parents, through the time and activities they develop with their children from an early age.

Keywords: Video games, violence, violent behavior, children, young adolescents, family.

Introduction

Aggressiveness in the attitudes and behaviors of adolescents has been at the center of numerous studies during the 20th and 21st century. Among the factors that influence and promote these behaviors is television, Internet, movies, etc. In recent years, attention has been paid to the impact that video games have on the formation of attitudes and behaviors in children and young adolescents.

Particular emphasis is being placed on violent video games. Some video games can help develop children's skills, but many of the concerns that have been raised about the negative effects of television on the behavior of children and young adolescents are also valid for excessive exposure to video games. Violent video games should not be encouraged because they have harmful effects on the mental development of children and young adolescents (Josephson WL, 1995; Thompson KM & Hanige K, 2001). However different studies have brought different results.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study includes a qualitative method, which includes direct observations, interviews and conversations with adolescents, teachers and parents about the impact of video games on the aggressive behavior of Albanian children and young adolescents.

Analysis of the problem

Numerous studies have been done on the impact of programs with episodes of violence on the aggressive behavior of children and young adolescents in different

countries of the world. Various studies have shown that not only TV programs and movies with violent episodes encourage aggressive behavior in young people, but these effects also appear to be present after exposure to other programs and media formats, including violent music (in particular through models that music promotes in its videos or lyrics), comic books or manga as well as violent video games (Anderson, Carnagey & Eubanks, 2003). The effects of violent video games are particularly troubling in people's attitudes towards victims of violence. The feeling of empathy requires you to put yourself in the victim's shoes, while violent video games encourage players to take the perspective of the author (Bushman & Anderson, 2002).

These video games have a greater effect on aggressive behavior than programs and movies with violent episodes on television. Watching a violent TV show or movie is a passive activity, while playing a violent or non-violent video game is an active role. Studies have shown that people learn best when they are actively involved. Viewers of violent shows may or may not identify themselves with violent characters, while players of violent video games are forced to identify themselves with violent characters. Any pleasure that comes from watching violent performances is indirect. The pleasure that comes from these video games is straightforward. The player gets points or moves on to the next level of the game by killing others. The player or players (because these games are frequently played in teams of two or more people) receive compliments from teammates, who congratulate them on how they executed the opponent in the game (Bushman & Anderson, 2002).

Youth exposure to violence is increasing due to video games, television, and other means of communication. It is quite scary to see that these video games or TV shows no longer describe violence as a negative attribute. In 2001, a summary of the 70 best-selling video games showed that 89% of them had violent content. Moreover, a 2006 study conducted at Indiana University School of Medicine found that children who played violent video games were more inclined to increased emotional arousal and decreased self-control.

Children in the United States spend over five hours a day consuming different types of media. The same situation is in the countries of Europe and Asia. Even children and young adolescent in Albania during the last 15 years spend a considerable amount of time playing various video games not only at home and on the phone, but also in Internet centers and special centers just for these games. Children try to repeat every word or gesture as in the movie or video game. When a child is watching an educational and entertaining program, the repetition of certain behaviors is positive, but the same cannot be said for video games that contain acts of violence. In this case the child perceives violence as a normal way of behaving. For him, a game is a model of the social world, where people act and think in a hostile way, and the more aggressive and cruel you are, the more success you have in life.

Ninety-seven percent of adolescents 12-17 play video games on a computer, Play station and Xbox, or on portable devices such as Gameboys, smartphones and tablets. A 2008 Pea Research Center survey found that 50% of teens indicated that they played video games on average more than an hour a day.

Many video games contain episodes of violence. A 2010 review by psychologist Craig A. Anderson and others concluded that "the results strongly suggest that exposure

to violent video games is a risk factor that leads to increased aggressive behavior, aggressive impact, decreased sensitivity and pro-social behavior" (Anderson, Ihori, Nobuko, Bushman, Rothstein, Shibuya, Swing, Sakamoto & Salem, 2010). A previous study of Anderson showed that violent video games can increase a person's aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behavior both in laboratory and in everyday life. "A key conclusion in these studies on violent entertainment media is that content matters," says Anderson (Anderson & Dill, 2000).

Other researchers, including psychologist Christopher J. Ferguson, have challenged the notion that violence in video games harms children. While reviewing his own 2009 study, which reported results similar to those of Anderson, Ferguson thinks laboratory results are not related to real life (Ferguson, 2011). He also thinks that much of the research on video game violence has failed to measure the impact of other factors, such as mental health and family life, which may have influenced the results. His study found that children who are already at risk may be more likely to choose to play violent video games. According to Ferguson, these other risk factors, compared to games, affect more aggressive behaviors.

The influence of the media on the behavior of children and young adolescents is a growing concern in our country as well. Sociologists and psychologists are concerned about the impact that the media have on their reactions and behaviors not only to their peers and parents, but also to themselves. More and more Albanian children and young adolescents are spending time near the small screens of tablets or mobile phones playing various video games with their peers. There are also those who play these games on TV screens at home. From different conversations with the young adolescents, they say that they like to play video games outside the home, respectively in the Internet centers that offer this service or in the video game centers. This is because, as they say, they are quieter there, no one bothers them and they can play as much as they want and express themselves freely.

A disturbing problem is the environment of the video game centers. A large part of them are located in the basements of palaces with dark lighting, which does not positively affect children and adolescents development. Even the environment of the development of activities encourages positive behaviors or not.

Parents are very concerned about the extra time their children spend playing these video games. They worry the most about the impact these games have on their children behavior and health. They say sometimes happens that children return home irritated and nervous and when asked what happened they answer nothing.

In an observation at an Internet center where a group of young teenagers were playing a violent video game, a boy addresses his teammate excitedly and loud: "did you see how I kill him?" and his teammate answered: Yes I saw it, fantastic, now it's my turn ". What was disturbing was the enthusiasm with which they expressed themselves and the satisfaction they felt in committing these violent acts. Also, in various conversations with young people, they say that these games help them relax and spend time with each other.

These data are disturbing because it is not uncommon for young adolescents to continue their dissatisfaction with the game outside accompanied by loud and violent tones. However, further studies need to be conducted on the extent to which violent

video games affect the behavior of young adolescents in Albania. What can be done to prevent or minimize the impact of these games on the behavior of children and young people?

Conclusions

As in many countries around the world, in Albania the impact of violent video games on the behavior of children and young adolescents is big. The attraction that children and young adolescent have towards these violent video games is very worrying for parents and institutions. Parents are role models for their children to follow from an early age. Often parents themselves unwittingly become an inappropriate role model for their children, through the movies and programs they watch. Not all video games are violent. There are also video games that are educational for young children, who help them in their development (Josephson WL, 1995; Thompson KM & Hanige K, 2001). It is precisely these games that parents should play with their children, and not violent video games. Even if children are attracted to video games, parents in collaboration with teachers and other actors have to explain to them, how to separate the fantasy from the reality, which are completely two different things. Education begins in childhood, continues into adolescence and youth. If children are helped to understand what is a right behavior and attitude from the wrong one, to distinguish reality from fantasy, then when they grow up, they can play with these games, but they will have little effect on their behavior.

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