

Critically consider 2 research studies relating to media influences on antisocial behaviour.

Bandura conducted an experimental study, investigating the degree of imitated aggression. 66 nursery children of ages 3,4 and 5 years were divided into three groups where they all watched the same film of an adult kicking and punching a Bobo doll. The first group had no added ending, the second group saw the adult being rewarded with food and the third group saw the adult being warned. It was found that the children in groups one and two behaved more aggressively to the doll when allowed to play with one. This shows that television could have an affect on aggression as the children that watched the Bobo doll being beaten and either was rewarded or there were no consequences, were aggressive themselves.

The criticisms of this research include the lack of ecological validity. The children may never experience a situation in life where they are given a film of an action and allowed to replicate it. Children that do not have the opportunity to play with such toys may also take advantage of this situation and play more energetically. This is then interpreted as aggression. The 'learned' aggression may not be applied outside in life. It is also assumed that children that play aggressively would be aggressive to people. However, this may not happen as they recognise what is acceptable to toys and what is acceptable to people.

There may have also been demand characteristics of the children as they could have felt that they were required to beat up the Bobo doll as they were just show a film of this happening and so this is what the experimenters want to see. In general, the children's intelligence may have been underestimated.

Stein and Friedrich conducted a field experiment on 97 preschool children for 9 weeks. They were divided into three groups and were to watch either 12 half hour episodes of Batman and Superman cartoons (Antisocial content), 12 episodes of Mr Rogers Neighbourhood (Pro social content) or a neutral show e.g. sports. The first three weeks were used as a previewing baseline to study the children's behaviour before the experiment began. The children were then exposed to the conditions for four weeks. The two weeks following was dedicated to the observation of the effects on the children. The results were that more aggression was shown for the children that watched Batman and Superman cartoons and those that had watched Mr Rogers Neighbourhood were found to be more cooperative and sharing.

One of the main criticisms of this study includes the fact that as it was a field experiment, not all variables could be controlled, which may affect the results. For example, it could have been the type of children allocated in to the Batman group, which influenced them to act aggressively or even de-individuation occurred. This is where the children may feel that as they are in groups, it makes it harder for them to be identified, therefore act more freely.

In conclusion, these researches done can be of value to the effects of the media on antisocial behaviour but they both cannot be generalised as they were conducted on limited groups of people. Stein and Friedrich's used a sample of 97 preschool children which gives it more acknowledgement than Bandura's 66 sample of children anyway.

Stein and Friedrich's field study would be more creditable as it was done in a natural situation, which gives it ecological validity. Even though it has this advantage, many problems can follow such as the lack of control over variables. These can include the other types of television the children watch during the experiment or even the people they meet that could have contributed to their reported characters. It is unknown unfortunately how or whether or not the researcher handled these problems. Individual differences could also mean that the media more easily affects some children than others. The majority of these 'easily convinced' children could then co-incidentally be placed in one group e.g. the Anti-social condition.

As Bandura conducted the experiment in a laboratory, it does not fulfil the ecological validity principle but it also means that the conditions can be watched, moderated and confounding variables minimised. Under this criterion, Bandura's research could be more reliable than Stein and Friedrich's.

Nevertheless these studies only provide evidence for the short-term effects of the television programmes and not the long term.

