

Media Influences: Research Issues



This activity will help you to:

- Understand the range of research techniques used when studying media influences*
- Identify the advantages and disadvantages of these research methodologies*
- Consider how these factors might affect the conclusions we can draw from research into media effects*

In order to conduct research into the possible effect of media sources on aggressive behaviour, it is necessary to be able to do two things:

1. Accurately measure exposure to aggressive media
2. Accurately measure aggressive behaviour

Each of the techniques used by researchers to measure exposure to different types of media has its problems.

Measuring Exposure

Technique	Potential Problems
Controlled viewing – the researchers take direct control of what the pps are able to watch.	
Electronic monitoring – a device connected to the TV records which programmes are watched by the pps.	
Concurrent self-report – pps keep a diary in which they record their viewing	
Retrospective self-report – pps are asked to recall which TV programmes they watched in the past	
Other-reports – other people (e.g. parents) report what the pps have been watching	

Measuring Aggression

If a researcher is to claim that exposure to violent media leads to increased aggression, they must be confident that they have measured aggression accurately and kept errors to a minimum.

Technique	Potential Problems
Lab-based measures – e.g. asking pps to give electric shocks to a confederate; higher or more shocks indicates higher aggression	
Observer ratings – pps are observed by researchers or others e.g. parents, peers and teachers) and then rated for their levels of aggressive behaviour	
Self-ratings – participants are asked to rate their own levels of aggression, possibly using a questionnaire or rating scale	
Criminal convictions – criminal records are checked to see if the pp has a prior conviction for a violent crime	

Research Methods and Designs

Researchers have adopted a range of different research approaches when investigating the relationship between media exposure & aggressive behaviour. Each has its advantages and disadvantages.

Research Design	Advantages	Disadvantages
Lab experiment (e.g. Berkowitz, 1967)		
Field experiment (e.g. Parke et al, 1977)		
Natural experiment (e.g. Charlton et al, 1999)		
Correlational design (e.g. Belson, 1978)		