

Associations between violent video games, empathy, and prosocial behavior in emerging adulthood.

THE GIST: We studied the effects of violent video gaming in 780 emerging adults from four United States universities. We approached this study utilizing desensitization theory, or the theory that exposure to violence over time reduces people's adverse reactions to it. Playing violent video games correlates to decreased prosocial behavior in young people and has an association with decreased concern for people in bad or violent situations. Utilizing interviews, we assessed empathetic concern and prosocial behavior in addition to violent video game playtime within the last 12 months. We found that most girls played no violent video games and were also significantly more prosocial and empathetic than boys. Overall, playing violent video games predicted less prosocial behavior towards family but did not predict anything about friends or strangers. However, it did have an association with less empathetic concern towards strangers, but the effects were very weak.

THE TAKEAWAY: Despite not having a particularly strong effect, consuming violent video games seems to have a relationship with less prosocial behavior and lower empathy.