

## Media Effects on Prosocial Behaviour



On the sheet that accompanies this are some research findings into the effect of the media on prosocial behaviour. Read through all of them and get a feel for what the evidence is telling you. Note down some initial conclusions, and we will share ideas. At the same time, identify any obvious flaws in the research (you may need to remind yourself of some of the main research issues in this general area).

### What To Do Next...

Choose three of the research studies that you feel can generate some useful commentary for the question:

**'Discuss the view that the media has an effect on prosocial behaviour'.**

Cut out those research studies, and glue them to a sheet of paper. Then write a commentary paragraph on each of them. Each commentary paragraph should address the following issues:

1. What the study shows. Use phrases like:
  - 'This study suggests that...because...'
  - 'This supports/challenges...because...'
  - 'One implication of this finding is...because...'
2. One criticism that modifies the conclusion that can be drawn. Use phrases like:
  - 'However...'
  - 'However, a problem with this finding is...'
  - 'This conclusion can be questioned in the light of...'
3. **If possible**, a counter-criticism that addresses the criticism you have made. Use phrases like:
  - 'On the other hand...'
  - 'In response to this...'
4. A conclusion that relates back to 'the view that...' Use phrases like:
  - 'In conclusion...'
  - 'To sum up...'

Eron et al (1983) selected a sample of 8-9 years olds who watched a significant amount of TV violence. They were split into two groups. One group was taught that (i) the violence on TV is unrealistic; (ii) that people don't really behave like that; and (iii) that children should not imitate violent acts and should seek other ways to resolve conflicts. The other group were used as controls. Follow-up observation indicated that the experimental group were less aggressive and behaved in more prosocial ways.

Stein & Friedrich (1972) showed groups of children either (i) aggressive, (ii) neutral or (iii) prosocial TV programmes over a period of four weeks. The 'prosocial' group later showed higher levels of helpfulness, co-operation and affection.

Baron (1979) showed a group of children an episode of 'The Waltons' that featured a prominent storyline about helping others. Compared to a control group, those who had watched the programme were more likely to help others when given the opportunity to do so.

Sprafkin & Rubinstein (1979) found a correlation between viewing habits and behaviour. Children who watched more pro-social programmes were rated as more prosocial at school.

Forge & Phemister (1987) found that nursery-age children exposed to pro-social programmes such as 'Sesame Street' were more likely than a comparison group to behave in altruistic and prosocial ways.