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Idaho Common Sense™



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Our children, violence, and murder

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What is happening to our children? Children with guns murdering children. Does this support the need for gun control, as advanced by the media and the politically correct, both with a fanciful capacity to not allow facts to interfere with their opinions?

But if the data shows guns are not the cause of violence, and gun control does not work, why then have we witnessed rises in all types of school violence during the last several decades, including bullying, non-gun violence and gun violence.

Maybe school violence has always been with us, just more publicized now than before. But the types of school violence we now see did not start until the late 1960s.

What happened that led to the rise in school violence? In 1972, the surgeon general offered a look at a possible cause, issuing a report on "The Impact of Television Violence." This was followed by a confirmatory article in the 1975 Journal of the American Medical Association.

Think about it. We do not allow cigarette advertising on television because of the risk to children, but we freely advertise murder. By age 12, the average child has witnessed over 8,000 murders and over 100,000 acts of violence on television. Does this desensitize children to violence? Can there be a link? Ask Nike, Toyota, Budweiser and others if television influences behavior.

An interesting analysis published in a 1992 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association offered a causal relationship between television and

escalating child violence. The authors first pointed out that younger children cannot distinguish fact from fantasy, "accepting the images on television as how the world really is." Moreover, as children get older, even though they learn to distinguish fact from fantasy, the "deepest impressions have already occurred."

The authors then analyzed television access and homicide rates in three countries—the United States that got television about 1945, Canada that got television about 1950, and South Africa that did not get television until 1975. The findings?

Comparing the United States to South Africa, the homicide rate in the United States doubled 10 to 15 years after introducing television, while the homicide rate remained stable in South Africa. Comparing Canada to South Africa yielded the same results.

Why 10 to 15 years? If homicide was mostly an adult crime and if television exerted its most negative influence on young children who could not distinguish fact from fantasy, it would take 10 to 15 years for those children to become young adults and commit murder.

Further, if the authors were correct, children would also behave differently throughout their growth years, throughout the 10 to 15 years after their introduction to television. And they did. Younger children who had been exposed to television had higher rates of bullying, followed by escalating non-gun violence in adolescence, culminating in rising homicide rates as they became young adults.

Television changed lessons in life. Roy Rogers and Trigger quickly gave way to violent cartoons along with Marshal Dillon and boot hill. Before television, if we hurt one of our friends while playing, our parents taught us it was wrong to hurt other people. But television brought different lessons to young children who blurred fantasy and reality; lessons on killing and murdering without anyone teaching them that hurting people was wrong. We parents did not think that was needed because we knew television was make-believe.

Ignoring data to the contrary, we continue the myth of blaming guns. Why? Maybe we do not like looking back, accepting responsibility for allowing our children near unlimited access to television violence. Maybe we feel guilty we have not had the courage to challenge the media greed that promotes violence for profit, while hiding behind the claim of defending free speech.

Although the research nicely explains rises in most types of school violence, it does not explain the advent of school mass murders. How did our youth learn about mass murdering, especially without remorse? Are there other contributing factors in school violence and school mass murders we need to explore?

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