

# ROME OBSERVER

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## Increase in public violence effects children

Thomas Gallagher

Over the last several months we have focused on the increased amount of violence we are experiencing. A district wide committee has been discussing the reasons and the trend in schools. Although the answer is not simple, many of the causes are obvious.

Last week we saw professional basketball players fighting on the court. Some fans threw beer and food at players. The players went into the stands swinging their fists. During the same time frame, a legendary figure at South Carolina saw his last game coaching marred by a brawl among players from both teams. Finally, a group of professional football players were ejected for fighting before the game began. Children watch more television than ever before. Just as they've learned from Sesame Street, they learn behaviors from other programs. Frank Gallagher, the assistant director of education for Cable in the Classroom, states, "If parents and children are sitting and watching a television program together with violent content, and the parent says nothing, it's an implicit endorsement - whereas if a parent says something, it makes their values clear to the child."

According to a recent article in Education Week, "Researchers, in particular, say it is paramount that parents get involved in what their children are watching on television, because decades of research indicate that heavy exposure to television violence can lead children to think it is appropriate to act in the ways that violent TV characters do".



Advertisement



There is strong evidence that viewing violence leads to more aggressive behavior. Douglas Gentile, the director of research for the National Institute on Media and Family at Iowa State University, suggest that there are hundreds of factors that contribute to aggression, but television violence is a major one.

### School Talk

We have had incident after incident where students have injured others and couldn't understand the severity of the injury or why their actions were wrong. They have been programmed to believe that violence is acceptable. Just watch a sports program. "One problem with cartoon violence is that it has the same effect on the brain as realistic violence," according to John P. Murray, a professor of developmental psychology.

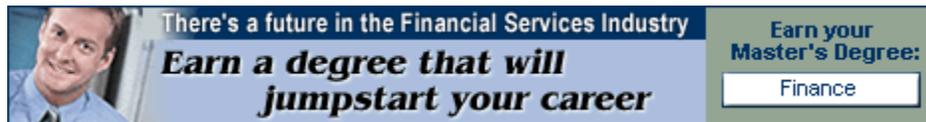
Murray has co-authored a book to be released in February that documents 50 years of research on the effect of television violence.

He states, "But there are not consequences to cartoon violence. Characters get shot with double-barreled shotguns and they get back up. It sets it in a humorous context with a laugh track and communicates to preschoolers that violence is funny and it's OK to do so."

Gentile conducted a study of 430 children in grades 3-5 over a period of three years. He found that children who watched heavy amounts of television with some violent content - roughly four hours a day were more violent at the end of the school year than at the beginning. He also found that these children had more likelihood of spreading rumors and performing worse academically.

It is estimated that the average child watches 23-28 hours of television a week. By the age of 18, the child will have witnessed 200,000 acts of TV violence including 40,000 murders. These acts are not limited to cartoons and fiction. Among the worse contributors are nightly television news programs.

Corrine Gregory, the founder of The Polite Child Inc. summarizes the feelings of many educators is worth repeating: "The sad thing about most television programs is that you are teaching these young impressionable kids that it's OK to be disrespectful, to tease, to taunt and to hurt other people - and it just gets worse from there. Kids will learn and repeat what they are exposed to, and it strongly affects their behavior."



The advertisement features a blue and green color scheme. On the left, there is a small photo of a smiling man in a light blue shirt. The text is arranged in a horizontal layout. The top line reads "There's a future in the Financial Services Industry" in white text on a dark blue background. Below this, the main headline "Earn a degree that will jumpstart your career" is written in a bold, italicized black font. To the right of the headline, the text "Earn your Master's Degree:" is displayed in blue. Below this, the word "Finance" is enclosed in a white rectangular box with a thin black border.

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