Reviewer's report

Title: Television viewing through ages 2-5 years and bullying involvement in early elementary school.

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Reviewer: Sarit Steinmetz

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This longitudinal study examined relations between television viewing through ages 2-5 years and bullying involvement in early elementary school, controlling for maternal socio-demographic characteristics and children’s own externalizing and internalizing problems.

Overall, this manuscript contains data that are relevant and interesting regarding the links between TV viewing trends over time and bullying, particularly in light of previous studies which have examined these links among older children, without controlling for maternal characteristics and child own psychological distress. Thus, the paper carries potential for deepening our understanding of the complex ways in which TV viewing may or may not predict bullying, victimization, or bullying/victimization.

The paper, as currently written, has several strengths: the research question is well defined and the methods appropriate (although not always and described, as detailed below); the data collection clearly took great effort and planning, and seems quite sound as the authors used child, parent and teacher reports; the writing overall acceptable, with the title and abstract accurately conveying what has been found.

However, before accepting the paper I believe some Major Compulsory Revisions need to be made (and they are stated generally as they are quite broad):

1. The introduction, discussion and conclusion are gravely missing theoretical background. Specifically, why would we expect TV viewing to increase the likelihood of victimization and/or bullying? Is it the content of the TV programs (Bandura and Dodge would be a good point to start)? Is it the lack of practice of social skills due to excessive viewing? Is it the passivity? No reference was made to theories on which the research questions is based, and the introduction merely lays out the methodological advantages (which are significant indeed) of the present research design over the previous studies.

2. Within this context (and although the data collection, as mentioned above, is impressive) not collecting data regarding the content of the programs viewed is a big flaw of the present study, as it has been shown that exposure to violent in the media increases the likelihood for aggression, while decreasing the likelihood for intervention (DeWall, Bushman, Anderson and all other authors looking at violent
video game playing and aggression serve as an important basis, and Willoughby et al.’s longitudinal study from 2012 is an important reference for this). For example, why would we expect viewing Dora and Diego would increase aggression and maybe in extreme cases bullying? (this program seems to be designed to increase prosocial behaviors). In contrast, a 3 year old exposed to their siblings’ cartoons (to include villains and equally aggressive heros) may indeed be in greater risk. This needs to be addressed much more in depth and clearly in the discussion, limitations, and future directions.

3. Another topic which requires much more detailed description and discussion is the finding regarding the externalizing and internalizing problems – they are not trivial! There are studies out there looking at depression, anxiety, etc., among bullies, victims and bully-victims (Brunstein-Klomek, Sourander and more). It is not for nothing that the univariate effects were no longer statistically significant once adjusted for internalizing and externalizing problems (in addition to maternal age, educational level, family income, child gender, and national origin). But what specifically is in these findings? And what can they tell us about the risks? These data seem to be by-and-large disregarded.

4. Some comments about the methods section:
- Was there any baseline information regarding temperament? Behavior problems in kindergarten or preschool?
- Daycare attendance was asked about at 1 year of age? No info for later daycare attendance (ages 2,3, or 4)?
- CBCL (internalizing and externalizing data) was collected from parents at age 5-6? Before the teachers’ and peers’ reports? Need to clarify the timeline in the procedure. This actually could require a section of its own – it is too important to be so late in the methods.

To sum – this is a study with great potential, but in need of a much more theoretically based introduction, and a more in-depth and thorough discussion. Should the authors agree to undertake the revisions required, I will be happy to review the new version.

Sincerely,

Reviewer

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.