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# TELEVISION IS DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH

It's time to put this notice on television programs and television advertising: "Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Television is Dangerous to Your Health." That's the same kind of health warning now required to be included on all cigarette advertising.

The new report issued by the National Institute of Mental Health entitled "Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties" gives massive documentation that television IS dangerous to your health in many ways. TV viewers could learn a lot by studying this report.

Television promotes drinking alcohol by showing heavy drinkers as "good, steady likable characters." TV prime time programming beams the falsehood to America that drinking is almost always "happy, sociable, and fun without indications of possible risks." One third of the characters on TV are drinkers, but only one percent have a drinking problem or are alcoholics.

This new government report provides the scientific evidence to prove that television programming about sex is even worse than ever alleged by the reform group called the "Coalition for Better TV." Here is the report's conclusion:

"On television, most sexual references, either verbal or implied by the action, are to extramarital sex; this occurs five times as often as references to sexual activity between married couples. References to prostitutes are next in frequency. A total of about 70 percent of references to sexual activity are to extramarital sex or to prostitution.

"Sex is commonly linked with violence. On dramatic and action shows, discussions of sex are often in the context of rape or other sex crimes. Erotic relationships are seldom seen as warm, loving, or stable."

Is it any wonder that those who learn about life from television, namely, children, get a warped and unhealthy view of sex and marriage? Their opinions and attitudes and values and preconceptions and biases are molded by television.

The report is emphatic that "the convergence of findings supports the conclusion of a causal relationship between televised violence and later aggressive behavior." The report constitutes a devastating indictment against network programming.

"Both prime time and children's weekend television are dominated by action, power, and danger. There is an average of 5 violent acts per hour on prime time and 18 acts per hour on children's weekend programs."

"Violence on television does lead to aggressive behavior by children and teenagers who watch the programs. This conclusion is based on laboratory experiments and on field studies. ... In magnitude, television violence is as strongly correlated with aggressive behavior as any other behavioral variable that has been measured."

"When children observe television characters who behave violently, they learn to be violent or aggressive themselves. ... Television is also said to mold children's attitudes which later may be translated into behavior. Children who watch a lot of violence on television may come to accept violence as normal behavior."

The report offers specific examples such as the real incident of a gang who burned a woman to death after a similar event occurred on a television show. In both the show and the real incident, the person was carrying a red gasoline can.

It's no wonder that the research shows that "people who are heavy viewers of television are more apt to think the world is violent than are light viewers. They also trust other people less and believe that the world is a 'mean and scary' place."

At the same time, the pain and suffering that follow violent acts and irreponsible behavior are seldom shown. Reckless driving, automobiles flying through the air, fires and explosions, do not seem to result in deaths and injuries.

In real life, automobiles are a leading cause of death and injuries to young people. Television would lead them to believe they can drive as fast and as recklessly as they want, and get only thrills and excitement but almost never any pain.

The John Hinkley trial has brought to public attention the effect of the violent movie Taxi Driver on a disturbed young man. How much longer do we have to wait for the public to rise up and demand an end to television programming that induces violent, reckless, adulterous, and alcoholic behavior?