

In order to give television programs an objective numerical score measuring violence, NCTV counts the actual number of physically violent or hostile acts per hour committed with the intention of hurting another person. NCTV's numerical violence scores incorporate a weighting scale in order to give greater importance to violence with serious consequences such as an attempted murder, murder and rape and less significance to minor acts of violence.

Recent statistics released by NCTV show that the average number of acts of violence per hour during prime time on the three major American networks reached its peak in the winter season of 1985 with 14 acts of violence per hour, and has since decreased steadily to an average of eight acts of violence per hour recorded in the fall of 1992. While the figures show a decrease since 1985, the average for the fall of 1992 is still higher than it was at the beginning of NCTV's monitoring in 1980; six acts of violence per hour in 1980 compared to eight in 1992.³²

In its news release, NCTV highlights the trend towards a more intense and callous portrayal of television violence:

On the positive side, the three major broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) averaged 7.7 violent acts per hour in prime time, down from the 8.6 average registered last year. While the three major networks have made some improvement, the researchers say, violence levels are still significantly greater than the levels recorded in 1980, at the beginning of NCTV's monitoring project, and violence is portrayed in a much more intense and callous manner.³³

Based on the rating system used by NCTV (a violent program is defined as a program with a score of at least ten acts of violence per hour), 24% of all prime time programming hours during the fall 1992 season on the three major American networks were devoted to violent programs. Using the same rating system, the NCTV results indicate that 17% of the fall 1992 season prime time programs on these networks were violent.

In his comprehensive research report commissioned by Unesco, Professor George Gerbner, a leading international authority on television violence, summarized the research findings on television violence in children's programming:

Children's programmes on American television have always been saturated with violence. Children in 1984-85 were entertained with 27 violent incidents per hour (the third highest on record). The 19-year average for children's programmes was 21 violent acts per hour.³⁴

Other research has shown that cartoons produced in the U.S. contain on the average 41 violent acts per hour.³⁵ However, Amos Crawley, the only child (12 years of age) to be heard by the Committee, did not see it in the same way:

When it comes to violence on television, I think most kids know that it is make-believe. Sometimes the action is so unrealistic in Saturday morning cartoons like "Tom and Jerry" or even in films like "Batman", the violence is obviously a joke. In more realistic shows, the violence can often be boring so kids just change the channel, but in most cases I think there is a message. Usually the violence is used by the good guys in self-defence and, when it is action by the bad guys, they are usually very unsavoury characters, not the kind of people most of my friends want to be when they grow up.