

Background:

The research question in this quantitative study is two-fold: first this paper studies the influence of watching television on the viewers' fear of illness. Second, this study focuses on the influence of the total viewing volume and the exposure to specific images concerning illness.

Methods:

Data was collected on 1275 Flemish adolescents using a longitudinal panel study. Included were questions on their overall and specific media use, health behaviour and health perceptions. An analysis on television content was used in order to link health related content to specific types of television programming. Fear of illness was questioned using a three item scale ($\alpha=.96$).

Findings:

Results of a regression analysis show that sex, age and the respondents' own health status are significant predictors of the fear of illness. The overall amount of television watched is not related. However, the exposure to specific images concerning medical characters is a significant predictor of fear of illness ($\beta=.10$).