

Background:

The research question in this quantitative second-order cultivation study is two-fold: first this paper studies the influence of watching television on the viewers' fear of illness. Secondly, this study focuses on the influence of three different TV exposure measures: the respondent's total weekly viewing volume, the genre exposure (exposure to medical drama) and the specific exposure to images concerning medical characters.

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 and attitudes. 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 ($\alpha=.96$). Three linear regression analyses were performed.

Findings:

Results of the regression analyses 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 to the respondents fear of illness. However, the exposure to medical drama and the exposure to specific images concerning medical characters are significant predictors of fear of illness in TV viewers (beta is respectively $\beta=.07$ and $\beta=.10$).