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## Adolescent Television Viewing and Belief in Vampires

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## **Adolescent Television Viewing and Belief in Vampires**

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## **Summary**

A total of 1,133 13- to 15- year-old pupils in six secondary schools in South Wales were invited to complete questions concerning vampire belief and amount of television watching. Data demonstrated that belief in vampires was positively associated with higher levels of television watching

## **Introduction**

Strasburger and Donnerstein (1999) have documented the considerable attention given in recent years to the relationship between the media and adolescent behaviour. One branch of research has focused on the interface between religiosity and television viewing (Francis & Gibson, 1992, 1993). In particular recent qualitative research by Schofield-Clark (2003) has focused on the appropriation of television characters and scenarios into the often unconventional religious beliefs and value systems of adolescents. She notes how characters from programmes such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* are now providing adolescents with role models upon which to base their beliefs and values. The persistence of and increase in vampire belief, linked to the increased representation of vampires in the media, has been noted by many authors in qualitative studies of the vampire subculture, particularly in America (Ramsland, 1998; Guiley, 1991; Konstantinos, 1996, cf Keyworth, 2002). However, no published quantitative studies have sought to investigate the frequency of vampire beliefs outside that culture and assess its relationship with frequency of television viewing. This aim of this paper is to investigate the connection between television watching and vampire beliefs among a general sample of adolescents.

## **Method**

Questionnaires were distributed to 1,133 pupils in years 9 and 10 (13- to 15- year olds) in six English-medium secondary schools in South Wales. Of the 1,133 participants, 536 were male and 597 female; two thirds (66%) were in year 9, and one third (34%) in year 10.

As part of a larger survey, pupils completed two questions relating to belief in vampires, namely *I believe vampires exist* and *I believe the dead can harm you* measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from ‘agree strongly’ to ‘disagree strongly’. Participants also completed a question relating to the amount of television watching on one day in the previous week, measured on a five-point scale, ranging from ‘none’ to ‘four hours or more’.

Following the conceptualisation of Francis (1997), the sample was divided into two groups, distinguishing between low levels of television viewing (under four hours a day) and high levels of viewing (four hours or more a day). The Likert-type items were also dichotomised, combining the ‘agree strongly’ and ‘agree’ categories, and combining the ‘not certain’, ‘disagree’ and ‘disagree strongly’ categories. Using the SPSS statistical package, statistical significance was calculated on a 2X2 chi squared contingency table.

## **Results**

The data indicated that high frequency television watchers were significantly more likely to believe in vampires: 22% of those who watched four hours or more of television a day believed in the existence of vampires, compared to 11% of those who watched under four hours of television ( $\chi^2 = 23.4$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Those who watched more than four hours or more of television were also significantly more likely to believe that the dead can harm the living: 26% compared to 18% of those who watched under four hours ( $\chi^2 = 9.7$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

## Conclusion

Two main conclusions can be drawn from these results. First, the data demonstrate that adolescents who watch four hours or more of television in a day are significantly more likely to believe in the existence of vampires. Second, the data also demonstrate that those adolescents who watch four or more hours of television a day are significantly more likely to believe that the dead can harm you, a fundamental concept in vampire belief. The paper has demonstrated a clear link between television consumption and fantastical creatures, namely vampires. Further studies are now needed to confirm the link between frequency of television watching and the unconventional religious beliefs of adolescents.

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