

from the association's thousands of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and other professionals. "It's time for a call to arms," says Michael Rothenberg of the University of Washington medical school. "We need a concerted effort toward major program revisions that are more stimulating and less violent."

Antiviolence advocates use a wealth of study results to back up their pleas. Some of the latest findings, presented at the meeting, come from the seventh year of a study of second to tenth graders by the University of Minnesota's Institute of Child Development. Since 1970, some 5,000 youngsters have participated in the laboratory study by undergoing tests of attitude and cognition before and after viewing various commercial TV programs. The results so far indicate that while television can, and does, transmit physically violent acts on the screen, it does little to convey their meaning or consequences.

"TV producers argue that it's all right to show violence, if you also show the consequences," says Minnesota's Andrew Collins. "But we're seeing that the

kids do not connect the acts with the consequences." Questionnaire results also show that many of the children "often do not understand the context in which the violence occurred," Collins says. "They do not understand the feelings and motives of the characters."

Collins's work further shows that a child who does not understand the violence he sees is more likely to be aggressive than if he does understand the scene's consequences. (Such children, when placed in hypothetical situations where they could help or hurt someone, more often chose to hurt.)

A summary of other recent TV studies, presented by Harvard associate professor Aimee Leifer, also indicates that:

- Children do learn what they see.
- Frequent viewers of televised violence are more likely to remain passive bystanders to real-life violence.
- Such viewers are likely to over-estimate the prevalence of violence in society.
- The older a person is, the less influence TV violence has on his life. "But it looks as though [TV violence] does affect aggressive behavior," Leifer says. □

## Avant-garde parents: 'Traditional' infants

It's been about a decade since a faction of young Americans first decided to break away from the traditional marriage system. It started in the late 1960s with communal living, and subsequently focused on other types of unorthodox family styles such as unmarried "social contract" couples and single women who chose to have babies but not husbands. This trend, combined with a movement toward childless families and increased women's rights, has contributed to the recent U.S. Department of Labor estimate that only 7 percent of American families fit the traditional formula of a married father and nonworking mother, with two children.

But what of the children of these new generation families? Have their parents' rejection of tradition affected their development in American society? For the past four years, the Family Lifestyles Project of the University of California at Los Angeles's Neuropsychiatric Institute has been gathering data on 150 alternative families and comparing them to 50 traditional living groups. In the first such study of its kind, the children have been followed since the third trimester of pregnancy, and will be tracked until they are about five and one half years old.

Now that all 200 children have been studied through at least one year, the project released its first formal findings to that point last week at the American Orthopsychiatric Association's annual meeting in New York. With some admitted surprise, the researchers report almost no difference between children of traditional and various forms of nontraditional fami-

lies. Furthermore, they found that despite the philosophical differences among the parents, parental upbringing during the first year did not vary appreciably. Indeed, they discovered that in most cases, it was the child's presence that molded the parents' behavior.

However, preliminary data on the youngsters from 18 months to 3 years of age points to possible differences between groups as the child gets older.

The UCLA team is studying four types of living styles: communal, social contract, single mothers (by pre-choice, not divorce or separation) and standard, two-parent marriages. The living groups—50 in each category—were selected randomly from throughout California. However, for uniformity reasons, only parents from either middle or stable working class backgrounds were selected. "We were interested in persons who chose alternative lifestyles for ideological reasons," says Jerome Cohen, a project investigator from UCLA's School of Social Welfare.

Some half dozen tests and interviews were performed during the child's first year, but the key measurement was the Ainsworth "ABC" test designed by Mary Ainsworth at Johns Hopkins about 10 years ago. During the procedure, the child is placed in a room with its mother, and at various intervals, the mother departs, leaving the youngster either alone or with a stranger. If the child barely notices the mother's departure and continues to play independently, it is classified as an A type. If there is a "clearcut," but not exaggerated, separation anxiety, then the child is a B (Ainsworth identified this category as

the most normal). If the youngster becomes extremely upset, to the point where it bitterly shuns the mother upon her return, the child is a C, or poorly adjusted.

The researchers report absolutely no difference in the test results either between the alternative lifestyle children and the traditional youngsters or among any of the groups. In each category, about 15 percent of the youngsters were A, 77 percent were B and 8 percent were C. This was particularly unexpected, because the amount of time a mother normally spent with her child varied considerably between and among each of the categories. Neurological and intelligence tests also yielded few differences.

"What we found, at least in the first year, is that children can't simply fall into pigeonholes," Cohen says. "The [parents'] lifestyles can't really define the children during that period. In fact, it's the child that has more of an effect on the environment than vice-versa."

There were signs that it is the infant who alters the adult during the first year, no matter what the parents' ideological stance. Even in communal, and the supposedly egalitarian social-contract marriages, the mother was the primary caretaker of the child in 95 percent of the families. "We expected the father to play a larger role, particularly in the social-contract situations," says Bernice Eiduson, chief investigator of the project. "We imagined the fathers would be at home more." The results were similar in communal situations, even though the child was exposed to more adults. Also surprisingly, "the alternative mothers wanted to be at home more with the kids than did the traditional mothers," Cohen notes.

The researchers suggest that traditional mothers have been more affected by the women's movement because they already have the support of a family, and unlike the others in the study, had yet to break with accepted practices in some way. They also theorize that under the pressure of caring for the newborn, even the most radical of young women "tend to fall back on their middle-class experience." One-third of those in the study who started out in communes have moved out since and are now living in two-parent situations. There have also been changes in status of lesser percentages in the other groups.

The project, funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, is beginning to look at youngsters at 18 months and 3 years. More pronounced differences are expected to show up at those ages, "as the child begins to verbalize and symbolize," Cohen says. Preliminary indications already point to some possible differences among alternate lifestyle youngsters, primarily in the direction of more independence from the parents. "This may be something we'll see, but we don't want to say for sure yet," says one of the researchers. □