

## **Kids Traumatized by TV Images**

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Violent television pictures have lasting psychological impact on youngsters.

Three-year-old Saman Ali wrapped his head in his father's scarf so that only his eyes showed. "I'm Zarqawi," he said, as he held a plastic Kalashnikov.

When his father tried to take away the scarf and the toy rifle, he started crying.

His cousin, two-year-old Zeri Abdullah, also familiar with the Jordanian militant who heads al-Qaeda's operations in Iraq, said "Zakawi, the man with the knife", mispronouncing Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's name.

Iraqi children are often exposed to images of graphic violence on TV news programmes and other shows that feature kidnappings, shootings, beheadings and the aftermath of explosions.

Experts say that these images are affecting the behaviour of children and could also have long-term consequences when they become adults.

Jamal Omer Tofiq, a psychiatrist, said the violence has two sorts of impact on children - they become quarrelsome, disobedient and use abusive language; and later in life they are prone to anger and violence.

"Children are vulnerable at this age and then the complexes [they acquire] affect them in adulthood," said Tofiq. "The current situation is very dangerous and has a big impact on children."

This year, thousands of children have already visited the Kazeewai Sera Education Centre in Sulaimaniyah, where kids can engage in art, sports and other therapeutic activities.

Dilsoz Mahmood, the manager of the facility, said one of her charges, who had watched a good deal of violence on television, made a statue of a male corpse during a sculpture session. This child also quarreled easily with other children and often acted naughty, Mahmood added.

Twana Wirya, a social worker at the centre, said another child, who had similarly seen a lot of violent images on the small screen, became mute and wouldn't have anything to do with other children.

"We are in a country where the most attractive pieces of news is an explosion, not an invention," said Mum Qani, who is in charge of the news segment at the party-controlled Patriotic Union of Kurdistan local television station. "We have no choice, as sometimes we are obliged to broadcast these images. But we try to do it in a way that minimises the impact."

Apart from the images of real acts of violence, many of the best-selling DVDs contain scenes of fighting, killings and other violence.

"Undoubtedly, many of our children will turn out to be violent people," said Tofiq.

Rebaz Mahmood is an IWPR trainee in Sulaimaniyah.

**Location:** Iraqi Kurdistan

Iraq

**Focus:** Iraq

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