

I am not a regular viewer of TV serials. But criminal investigation interests me. Recently I was watching *Crime Patrol* on Sony TV. In that given episode, they showed a small school boy drinking phenyl in the bathroom to escape his violent father. I was shocked and started wondering, what will be the psychological effect on the child actor, who played that character.

This prompted me to contact Dr. Shilpa Aggarwal, who is a Child Psychologist with Nanavati Super Speciality Hospital. This resulted in a small tête-à-tête with her.

**Q. How healthy it is for kids to be models and actors other than in projects connected to their schools? (We are not talking about the effect it has on their studies.)**

A. It is difficult to make a sweeping statement as there are a lot of factors associated with the psychological effects in child actors and models. These factors can vary from the enthusiasm of the child and parent for the involvement, the amount of time the child is spending on the project, the total length of time for which the child is involved, the environment at work and the support provided by the parents. These factors are in addition to the other factors that are important in the upbringing of any child. The risk lies in the fact that although these child actors are overexposed in some respects to what the showbiz has to offer, they miss out on learning normal developmental tasks and interacting with children of their own age.

These children receive a lot of attention and are always reminded of how talented they are. It is easy for them to associate their self-worth to the level of popularity and the fear of losing it could be immense. This also means that when they are unable to achieve the same success as adults it could manifest itself in adjustment problems and reckless behaviours such as drug use.



Kids Acting in Crime Series

**Q. In programs like *Crime Patrol*, kids are often shown as victims or even perpetrators of crime. Can acting in these serials have any psychological effect on these kids?**

A. Enacting these scenes can have significant psychological effects on the child actors. Young minds find it easy to identify with some of the characters they are playing, becoming desensitized towards the violence they are portraying on screen and learning violence as a means to solve their problems. Besides, the children viewers with emotional and behavioural

problems, learning or impulse control problems find it easy to be influenced by these behaviours and imitate them.

Recently, I was horrified to see a child artist in one of the primetime serials trying to kill an adult (the protagonist) by locking her in the garage and lighting fire after pouring kerosene. Additionally, this child was watching the fire with callous disregard and later became a spectator to the attempts of the family members to save the protagonist.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Right Guidelines to regulate child participation in TV serials clearly states that- No child should be shown to be imbibing alcohol, smoking or using any other substance or shown to be indulging in any sort of anti-social activity and delinquent behaviour.

I am not sure if these guidelines are being followed at all.

**Q. How parents can bring up kids healthily – actors and otherwise- informing them of these crimes?**

A. There are various resources available through which the parents can teach their children about the violent crimes. These resources include self-help books, diverse materials that can be downloaded from the internet and participation in various programs designed to promote personal and community safety. Many schools are now organizing these educational events in which both parents and the children can participate. The parents should browse through any material they are using to educate their children, before using it for them. These activities should sensitize the kids towards victims of such crimes and shouldn't promote violence as a coping skill.