

# EFFECT OF EXPOSURE TO MEDIA VIOLENCE ON AGGRESSION IN CHILDREN

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## Abstract

The last decade has witnessed profound changes on how children use the media and its violent content. On the other hand, there is an alarming boost in the antagonistic behavior of children and juvenile delinquency rates in India. The effect of media violence on aggressive behavior among children has become a serious emotional and psychological issue as well. This study aims to see the effect of media violence on the aggression level in children (6-12 yrs). The study was conducted on a sample of school going children  $N = 100$  (male and female) by administering the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire. The study follows Expost Facto Research Design to draw interface regarding relationship between the variables. To test the hypothesis Independent Sample t-test is applied. The difference between two groups is considered to be extremely statistically significant with the  $p$  Value less than 0.0001. Thus, proper intervention strategies must be employed by parents, teachers, counselors and media makers in order to minimize the effect of media violence on aggressive behaviors in children.

**Key words** – Media Violence, Aggression, Children

## INTRODUCTION

Children are exposed to television during in fancy; even before they develop the ability to recognize such content as fiction or media persuasion. Childhood is the most innocent, sensitive and significant period of any person's life. They believe what they see as true to reality. Unfortunately a typical child will witness more than 8000 murders and 100000 acts of violence through media before reaching the age of 18[1]. Childhood exposure to media violence envisages young adult aggressive behavior for both genders. Children model the aggressive television characters and perceive the media to be real. This belief leads to young adult aggression [2].

Social psychologists define **aggression** as 'Behavior that is intended to harm another individual who does not wish to be harmed' [3]. Extensive aggression in childhood pilots the way to loss of social network, troubled parent-child relationship, law violation/ legal trouble, self-harm, trouble with concentration and attention, troubled thinking,

impaired judgment, threatening behavior, trouble with language comprehension and reading, emotional trauma and depression.

Most researchers define media violence as depiction of acts of physical aggression by human or human-like character against another. Fictional or animated violence is still considered violence if it meets the above criteria.

In the present scenario on one hand there has been a significant increase in violent content in television shows and movies. The American Entertainment Software Ratings Board suggests that 52% of video games are violent, simulate gambling and use crude humour and offensive language [4]. While, on the other hand, there is evident amplification in imitation of violence, increased fear, desensitization to violence, short and long-term increase in aggressive behaviour and greater acceptance of violence by children. The National Crime Records Bureau reveals that from 2002 to 2012, there has been 143% increase in rapes, 87% increase in murders and 500% increase in kidnappings by minors in India.

Williams TM and other researchers compared the levels of aggression in the first and second graders from 2 Canadian towns, one with access to TV and one with no TV access. When the latter town finally received television, the hitting, biting and shoving levels of the children increased tremendously [5].

The General Affective Aggression Model which states that exposure to violent video games increase aggressive behaviour in both the short term (e.g., laboratory aggression) and the long term (e.g., delinquency) [6]. Heavy viewers tend to see the world as a more dangerous and fearful place. This is known as the 'mean world syndrome'. Viewing violence can also increase the fear of becoming a victim and a sense of mistrust of others [7]. Findings suggest that the amount of television viewing directly proportionate to the prevailing estimates of violence in society [8]. These theories empirically approve of the relationship between these two variables.

The current study investigates the grass root level i.e the low socio-economic strata of society in order to determine the factors leading to a violent and unsafe culture in India. In this research an Expost facto study is conducted on a sample of 100 school going children in India. Aggression levels of 2 groups of children having different levels of exposure to media violence are tested (Group 1- high exposure & Group 2 – No exposure) and compared using independent group t-test. Further the study suggests intervention strategies so as to minimize the effect of exposure to violence and break the accord between two variables; and sow a seed to develop a humane society.

**Hypothesis-** Media violence has no significant effect on aggression in children.

## METHOD

### Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select participants from the population. The sample consisted of 100 students in the age group of 6 to 12 years - both male and female from Angel's Paradise English School, Ahmedabad and Snehdhara (shelter home), Gwalior. The participants hailed from a low socio-economic status. Sampling was done after their respective teachers reported the children's level of exposure to various sources of media violence.

The participants were selected after following the given inclusion criteria-

- ✦ The participants must be physically and mentally fit.
- ✦ They shall fall under the age group of 6 to 12 years
- ✦ Participants shall have Indian nationality
- ✦ Purposive sampling into groups was done as per the levels of exposure to violence.
- ✦ The participants must be able to read and comprehend English.

## Research Design

This study follows Expost Facto Research Design wherein the participants have already been exposed to varying amount of the independent variable. BPAQ is administered on them to evaluate their levels of aggression.

## Tool Used

To test the hypothesis Buss Perry Aggression Questionnaire designed by Arnold Buss and Mark Perry was administered. The **internal consistency**  $\alpha = .89$ , **test-retest reliability** (nine weeks) for the subscales and total score ranged from  $\alpha = .72$  to  $\alpha = .80$ [9]. The questionnaire has 29 items using 5 point scale ranging from extremely uncharacteristic – 1 to extremely characteristic - 5. The two questions with the asterisk (9& 16) are reverse scored. The total score for Aggression is the sum of the factor scores .

**Table – 1: Norms of Buss Perry Aggression Questionnaire**

Scale	Range	Men	Women	Both
Physical aggression	9-45	24.3	17.9	21.0
Verbal aggression	5-25	15.2	13.5	14.3
Anger	7-35	17.0	16.7	16.8
Hostility	8-40	21.3	20.2	20.7
Total score	29-145	77.8	68.2	72.8

## Procedure

Group 1 was already exposed to different sources of media violence such as video games, cartoons, movies and songs prior to testing. Group 2 had the least amount of exposure to media violence. This was verified by their respective teachers. The Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire was administered while maintaining all precautions mentioned in the manual. A rapport was established with the kids . They were told to sit quietly and fill in the most apt response for each question and submit their response sheets.

## RESULT

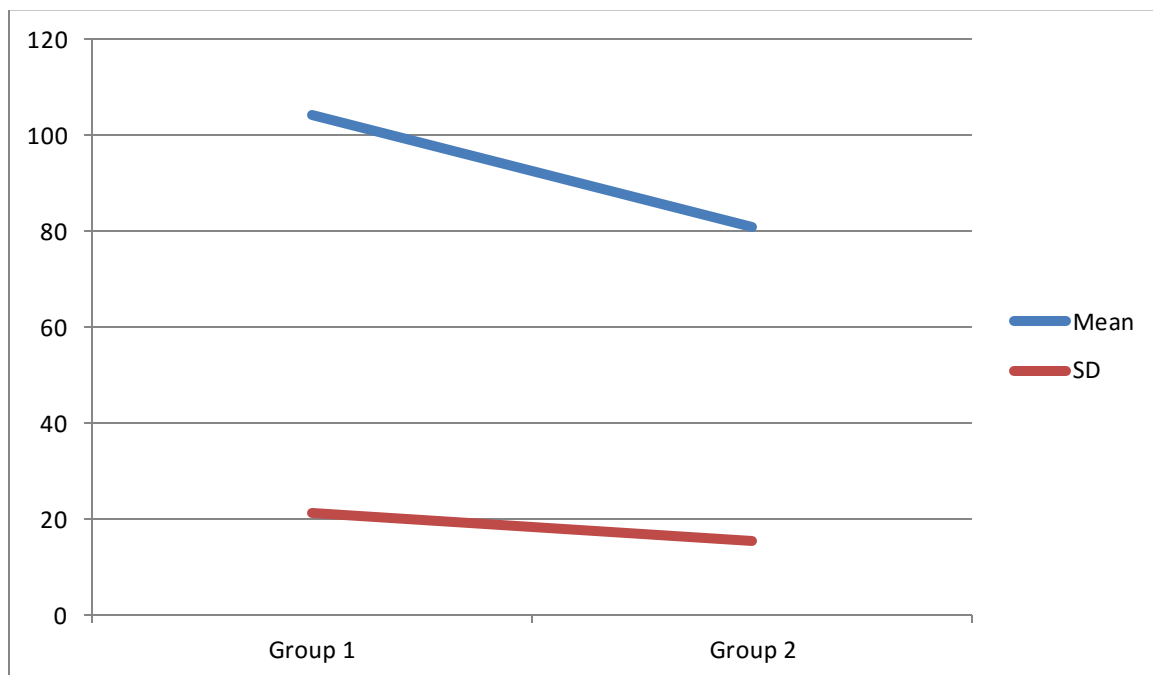
Independent t-test was applied to measure the effect of media violence on aggression in children. It revealed there is a significant difference between the two groups, group 1 (Mean = 104.36, SD=21.10)and group 2 (Mean = 80.88, SD=15.67). The mean difference between two groups is 23.48 with 95% confidence interval of this difference. The significant value is 0.0001 which is less than 0.05. Thus, the difference between two groups is extremely statistically significant.

**Table – 2: Intermediate Values**

Difference of Means	t value	Degree of freedom	Standard error of difference	p value
-23.48	6.3172	98	3.717	<0.0001

**Table – 3: Result**

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error of Mean	N
Group 1	104.36	21.10	2.98	50
Group 2	80.88	15.67	2.22	50



**Chart -1:** Comparison between Mean and SD of Group 1 and Group 2

## DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

According to the test findings the hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant effect of exposure to media violence on aggression levels in children. The significant value is 0.0001 which is less than 0.05. In the light of this value the hypothesis, 'there will be no significant effect of exposure to media violence on aggression in children', is rejected.

The study by Wood et al in 1991[10] also proved exposure to belligerent and destructive media significantly enhanced viewers' hostile behaviour. Various researches hold up the link between exposure to violence and symptoms of anxiety, depression and aggressive behaviour in school aged children. Pre-schoolers are more likely to have sleep disturbances, and less likely to have explored and play freely and to show motivation to master their environment. They often have difficulty paying attention and concentrating because they are distracted by intrusive thoughts. Overall functioning, attitudes, social competence and school performance are often affected negatively [11].

How we learn to imitate violence, Bandura (1986) argued that much of what you learn is learned vicariously through the media. According to his theory, there are four processes that must occur for vicarious learning to occur-

- a. *Attention* – People must attend to the salient and attractive behaviour being modelled. Clearly, media violence is very prevalent, exciting and salient and so it attracts attention.
- b. *Representational Process*- It involves mentally rehearsing the behaviour, thereby increasing the likelihood that it will be recalled at a later time.
- c. *Behavioural Production* – This focuses on how people learn to perform the behaviour they have observed.
- d. *Motivational Process* – People perform those behaviours that they are motivated to perform and believe have positive outcomes (reputation, heroism, etc).

According to social learning theory, viewers are more likely to act aggressively if they watch media violence, remember it, practice it and somehow motivated to perform the violent behaviours [12].

Research by Anderson and Dill establishes with the help of general affective aggression model that there exists a positive correlation between exposure to violent video games and aggressive behavior in both the short term (e.g., laboratory aggression) and the long term (e.g., delinquency) especially for people who are inherently aggressive and for men. The general aggression model states that-

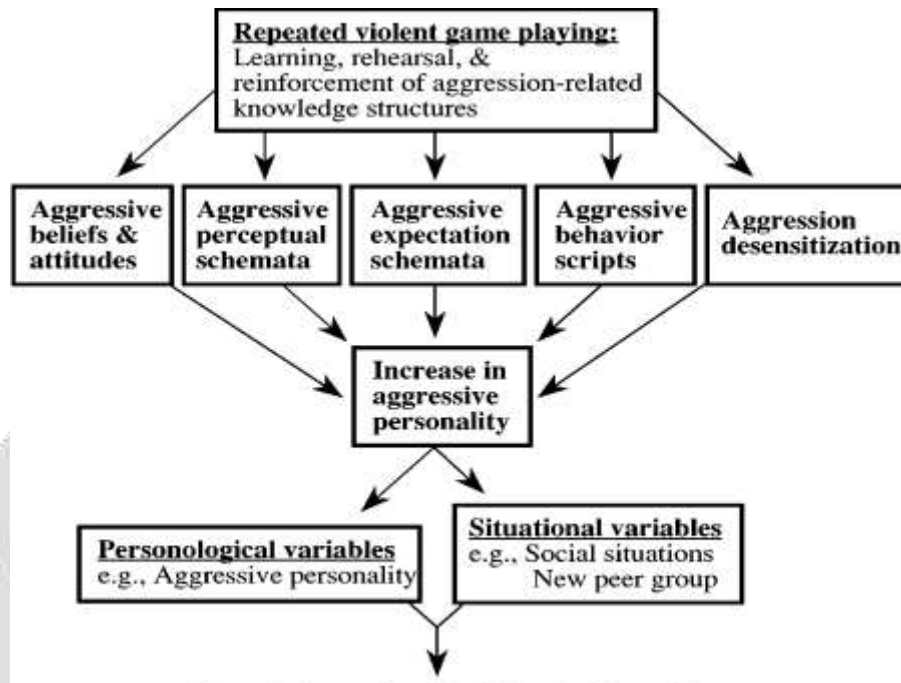


Fig-1:General Aggression Model by Anderson and Dill

In his book Media Literacy, W James Potter describes the following effects of exposure to media violence [13]-

Table-3: Immediate & Long-term effects from exposure to media violence

EFFECT	IMMEDIATE EFFECT	LONG-TERM EFFECT
<b>1. Behavioral</b>	a. Imitation b. Triggering Novel Behavior c. Disinhibition d. Attraction	a. Training Behavior
<b>2. Psychological</b>	a. Fight or Flight b. Excitation Transfer	c. Physiological habituation d. Narcotizing
<b>3. Emotional</b>	a. Temporary Fear	a. Desensitization b. Cultivation of Fear
<b>4. Attitudinal</b>	a. Immediate creation or change of attitude	a. Long-term reinforcement of attitude
<b>5. Cognitive</b>	a. Learning specific acts	a. Learning social norms

Children get desensitized when an emotional response is simulated repeatedly [14]. For instance, a six year old boy was wrestling a friend in an apartment in Florida. They took the fight into the balcony where he pushed his friend to



fall 10 stories to his death. Later, when the police arrived and started questioning, the boy was perfectly calm, ate pizza and watched cartoons as if nothing even happened.

The substance of the current study lies in the fact that we are living in a very vulnerable and hostile society. What is precisely shaping the young minds in this way? Investigations suggest media cannot be the only cause but certainly a risk factor in child development which is often ignored. With the contemporary lifestyle, media and technology has taken over a lion's share in a child's life. Thus, it is important to study its effects on the mental health of a child. It is necessary to look into the effects of media violence and apply techniques for intervention in this cause and effect relationship.

Children acknowledge and react to television at a very early age. By the age of three, children will readily imitate someone on television as accurately as they will imitate a live person [15]. They are incapable to evaluate or judge what they see rationally. But, kids are like wet mud; they can be molded and shaped at the right time through proper intervention. The following could be done so as to prevent the negative effects of media violence on children as reported by The Australian Psychological Society in 2000[16]-

- ✚ What can parents do-
  - Parents cannot fully control what their child is watching. But they can teach them what to think of violence in media and in real life. They can help their children understand and evaluate the viewed materials through family discussions.
  - Influence your child's lifestyle positively.
  - Replace the child's interest to activities based on innate intelligence or potential. For example- sports, dancing. Encourage him/her to invest their time in a more valuable and productive pursuit.
  - Encourage children to spend more quality time with friends and family.
- ✚ What can teachers do-
  - Professional seminars could be made widely available for teachers to enable them to increase the media literacy skills.
  - Teachers can persuade parents and children by drawing the attention to exciting, non-violent media and expressing their own enthusiasm over them.
- ✚ What can journalists and journalism instructors do
  - They must be aware of the intricacy of the issues and avoid excess violence portrayal unnecessarily.
  - Motivate practicing journalists to develop interesting, healthy and moralistic media for children.
- ✚ What can psychologists do
  - They can be observant in recognizing the ill effects of media in aggressive ideation particularly in children and adolescents.
  - They can stay updated with current researches and conduct more empirical research in derelict areas.
  - With the help of inventories such as Multiple Intelligence Inventory by Howard Gardener, child psychologists can evaluate the innate intelligence of a child and guide him in the right direction to utilize his time and energy productively.

The outcome of this study lies in the fact that it provides us with empirical proof of the relationship between the two variables and helps us in improvising for the betterment of future generations. Further, awareness should be spread amongst agents influencing child development such as parents, teachers, psychologists, media makers and government. Elaborative intervention strategies could be developed in order to minimize the effect of continuous contact to violence. Enacting the strategies effectively can devise us to take a tiny step towards a more humane society in the long-run.

Certain limitations of the current study can be as follows -

- A. The sample size only includes children from low-socio-economic strata of society. For better generalization the sample size must contain participants from different sects of society.
- B. Gender and racial factors were overlooked. Human behaviour is affected by many genetic factors which were not given appropriate consideration.

- C. The environment in which a child grows up has a great role in shaping the child's behaviour. Study of the environment from which these kids come was not made at all.

Some problems still remain unsolved. Further work can be done in the following fields-

- ✚ More tests such as Influence of Media Violence on Aggressive Behaviour Questionnaire (IMVABQ) could be applied for a more comprehensive study.
- ✚ Detailed intervention plans and strategies can be modulated. Effective researches can be conducted after applying such interventions.
- ✚ Further work can be done on developing theories on how media violence triggers aggression.
- ✚ Work could be done beyond the current age group (6-12 years) and a different socio-economic status.
- ✚ A research with controlled laboratory settings can also be done.

## CONCLUSION

The current research findings confirm that exposure to media violence leads to higher levels of aggression among children between the ages of 6-12. Thereby, the hypothesis 'media violence has no significant effect on aggression in children' is rejected. Further investigations encompassing the aforementioned limitations may lead to more accurate or generalized results.

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