

"The Impact of Electronic Media Contents on Aggressive Behavior of Children: A Critical Study"

Mr. SHAHID IQBAL,

Research Scholar, Dept. of Psychology, L. N. Mithila University, Darbhanga

Abstract

The media has a troubling ability to affect multiple facets of the safe growth of children adversely, including violent emotions, attitudes and social alienation. Children who perceive in the media that people show a particular violent behaviour, such as kicking, are more likely to immediately perform the same aggressive behaviour. Media abuse affects public health as well as it leads to an rise in violence and hostility in the real world. We also recently found that television abuse and violent video games have had a very negative effect on children and their actions on a regular basis. Several empirical data has accumulated that shows that tv, film, video games, mobile phones, and internet exposure to aggression raises the likelihood of violent activity on the part of the audience just as growing up in an atmosphere rife with actual violence raises the risk of violent behaviour. This empirical data is objectively analysed in the present analysis, and the theoretical hypothesis is elaborated to understand why exposure to aggression has adverse consequences both in the short and long term. Finally, to estimate how serious a hazard it can be considered, the scale of the 'media violence impact' is contrasted with several other well-known threats to society.

The present study focuses on the relationship between media violence and its effects on children's aggressive behavior which they portray by observing violent material directly or indirectly. This study is based on several other studies conducted in the same or related fields.

Keywords: Aggression, Behaviour, Children, Media, Violence

INTRODUCTION

The media has a troubling ability to affect multiple facets of the safe growth of children adversely, including violent emotions, attitudes and social alienation. Children who perceive in the media that people show a particular violent behaviour, such as kicking, are more likely to immediately perform the same aggressive behaviour. Exposure to media violence has been positively related to subsequent aggressive behaviour, ideas, arousal, and anger. The impacts of the mass media have been shown to be far-reaching and potentially dangerous in affecting children and adolescents' health-related habits, many of which are not yet sophisticated enough to differentiate imagination from reality, particularly where it is portrayed as "real life." In comparison, time spent with the media decreases the amount of time available to perform other more positive activities.

Aggressive behaviour rarely results from a single cause; rather, several factors that converge over time lead to such behaviour. The impact of the violent news media is thus best used as one of the many possible variables affecting the likelihood of conflict and hostility. Most youth who are aggressive and engage in some forms of antisocial behaviour do not go on to become violent teens and adults. However, research has shown that a significant

percentage of aggressive children are likely to grow up to be aggressive adults, and that adolescents and adults who are seriously violent are often very aggressive and even violent as children. Aggressive behaviour while they were younger was the greatest single indicator of abusive behaviour in older teens, young adults, and even middle-aged adults. Thus, anything that promotes aggressive behavior in young children statistically is a risk factor for violent behavior in adults as well.

Review of Literature

Aggressive action refers to an act by most researchers that is meant to harm or irritate another individual. Aggression may be non-verbal or physical. This encompasses many examples of actions that do not appear to match the generally understood definition of "abuse." Aggressive behaviour is used to characterise these more extreme instances of physical attack that have a substantial chance of the victim being severely hurt. Ray from India reported that children having exposure to violence through media had poorer school performance and its impact on their psychosocial adjustments was detrimental. Another study from India showed that vivid display of violence through media (9/11 terrorist attack) caused stress in adolescents. Yama described that some of the fears, tensions, bad dreams and tendencies towards delinquencies of children are a result of frequent and a regular exposure to murder-mystery movies, and stories filled with violence and torture that children view on TV and movies. Association between TV viewing and suicidal behavior has also been reported from India. Both content exposure and screen time of media had independent detrimental associations with school performance in children and adolescents.

Bickham investigated the relationship between TV viewing time, content, context, and peer integration. As children spend more total time watching TV, they spend a significantly shorter amount of time with friends as compared to those who don't. Thus, viewing television causes poor peer relationships and thereby increases the risk for social isolation, anxiety disorder, agoraphobia, and antisocial behavior, including aggression and gang involvement. While TV may isolate children, the reverse causal direction is also plausible – lonely children may turn to TV for entertainment and companionship. Children who are marginalized by their peers use TV to escape the stresses of their lives and meet their social needs. Conversely, children who are socially integrated spend less time watching TV. Thus, it can be argued that it is social isolation that motivates excessive media use. Overall, it is most likely that both effects occur – children who watch more TV become more socially isolated, which leads them to spend more time watching TV. While TV viewing is often perceived as an isolating activity, it frequently occurs in the company of friends. It is important to consider content whenever investigating the relationships between media use and behaviors. Violent television viewing may influence younger children to be more antisocial; resulting in their becoming socially isolated which, in turn, attracts them to more violent media.

Violence in Television, Films, and Video Games

The fact that most research has focused on violence in fictional television and film and video games on the impact of media violence on aggressive behaviour is not surprising given the prominence of violent content in these media and the prominence of these media in the lives of children.

Children spend an average of three to four hours a day watching TV in the United States, and the best results have found that about 60% of programming contain certain abuse, and over 40% of those contain heavy abuse. Kids often spend a rising amount of time playing video games, most of which entail violence. In 83 per cent of homes with youth, video game units are now present. Children spent 49 minutes per day playing video games in 2004, and 52 percent of children aged 8-18 years play video games on any given day. For 8-10 year-olds, video games consumption increases during middle childhood for an average of 65 minutes a day and decreases to 33 minutes a day for 15-18 year-olds. And most of these games are violent; 94 percent of games rated as acceptable for teenagers (by the video game industry) are defined as featuring action, and independent researchers' scores show that the actual percentage could be even higher. No published study has quantified the violence in games rated 'M' for mature—presumably, these are even more likely to be violent.

The strongest aggregate estimates of the impact of media violence are given by meta-analyses that average the impact found in many studies. Those of Paik and Comstock and Anderson and Bushman are two especially

noteworthy meta-analyses. The meta-analysis of Paik and Comstock focused on violent television and films, while the meta-analysis of Anderson and Bushman focused on violent video games.

Short-Term Effects of Exposure to Media Violence

Most theorists would now agree that the short term effects of exposure to media violence are mostly due to 1) priming processes, 2) arousal processes, and 3) the immediate mimicking of specific behaviors.

Priming is the method by which spreading activation from the locus representing an external observed stimulus in the neural network of the brain excites another brain node representing a cognition, emotion, or behaviour. The external stimulus can be inherently linked to a cognition, e.g., the sight of a gun is inherently linked to the concept of aggression, or the external stimulus can be something inherently neutral like a particular ethnic group (e.g., African-American) that has become linked in the past to certain beliefs or behaviors (e.g., welfare). The primed concepts make behaviors linked to them more likely. When media violence primes aggressive concepts, aggression is more likely.

To the extent that mass media presentations arouse the observer, aggressive behavior may also become more likely in the short run for two possible reasons -- excitation transfer and general arousal. First, a subsequent stimulus that arouses an emotion (e.g. a provocation arousing anger) may be perceived as more severe than it is because some of the emotional response stimulated by the media presentation is miss-attributed as due to the provocation transfer. For example, immediately following an exciting media presentation, such excitation transfer could cause more aggressive responses to provocation. Alternatively, the increased general arousal stimulated by the media presentation may simply reach such a peak that inhibition of inappropriate responses is diminished, and dominant learned responses are displayed in social problem solving, e.g. direct instrumental aggression.

The third short term process, imitation of specific behaviors, can be viewed as a special case of the more general long-term process of observational learning. In recent years evidence has accumulated that human and primate young have an innate tendency to mimic whomever they observe. Observation of specific social behaviours around them increases the likelihood of children behaving exactly that way. Specifically, as children observe violent behavior, they are prone to mimic it. The neural mechanism by which this occurs is not fully known, although it seems possible that a significant function is played by "mirror neurons," which fire when either an action is detected or when the same action is carried out.

Long-term Effects of Exposure to Media Violence

Long term content effects, on the other hand, seem to be due to 1) more lasting observational learning of cognitions and behaviors (i.e., imitation of behaviors), and 2) activation and desensitization of emotional processes.

The social behaviour of an individual is to a great extent controlled, according to generally accepted social cognitive models, by the interplay of the present situation with the emotional state of the person, their environment schemes, their moral convictions about what is appropriate, and the social behaviour scripts they have learned. Children encode social scripts in memory to direct actions by families, friends, culture, and mass media observation during early, middle, and late childhood. Observed habits are often imitated even after they are observed. Children's social cognitive schemes about the world around them are also elaborated during this time. For instance, extensive violence observation has been shown to bias children's world schemes towards attributing hostility to the actions of others. In fact, such attributions raise the risk of children acting violently. As children continue to mature, normative beliefs are crystallised about what social behaviours are appropriate and begin to act as philtres to limit inappropriate social behaviours. Such normative attitudes are partially impacted by the observation by children of the actions of those around them, particularly those observed in the news media.

The long-term socialisation impact of the mainstream media are also more likely to escalate by the way feelings are influenced by the news media and video games. Repeated exposure to television or video games that are emotionally triggered may lead to some normal emotional reactions. This mechanism is called "desensitisation." In relation to a

single violent or gory scene, negative feelings experienced unconsciously by audiences decrease in severity after several exposures. For example, increased heart rates, perspiration, and self-reports of discomfort often accompany exposure to blood and gore. However, with repeated exposures, this negative emotional response habituates, and the child becomes “desensitized.” The child can then think about and plan proactive aggressive acts without experiencing negative affect.

Another theoretical argument is important. Observational learning and desensitisation do not take place independently of other processes of learning. Children are constantly being conditioned and strengthened to behave in certain ways, and during media interactions, this learning can occur. For example, because players of violent video games are not just observers but also “active” participants in violent actions, and are generally reinforced for using violence to gain desired goals, the effects on stimulating long-term increases in violent behavior should be even greater for video games than for TV, movies, or internet displays of violence. At the same time, because some video games are played together by social groups (e.g., multi-person games) and because individual games may often be played together by peers, more complex social conditioning processes may be involved that have not yet been empirically examined. These effects, including effects of selection and involvement, need to be explored.

Moderators of Media Violence Effects

Obviously, at all times, not all witnesses of abuse are similarly influenced by what they witness. Research has found that the influence of media violence on children is moderated by the presentation's situational characteristics, including how much it receives and sustains interest, the viewer's personal characteristics, including their violent predispositions, and characteristics of the physical and human background in which children are subjected to violence.

In terms of the features of the storey, depicting violence as rational and showing incentives (or at least not punishments) for violence increases the impact of media violence, particularly in the long term, on stimulating hostility. As with audience characteristics that focus on the plot's expectations, those audiences who interpret the violence as saying more about life as it actually is and who associate more with the victim of the violence are often stimulated in the long run toward violent actions. Taken together, these facts suggest that violent actions by inspirational heroes, who feel justified and praised, are the most likely violent acts to raise the hostility of the spectator.

A number of researchers have shown that the only one can be influenced, regardless of the storyline, by spectators or game players who are already violent. Surely this is not true. While the most aggressive young adult may be the already aggressive child who watches or plays a lot of violent media, the study shows that even initially unaggressive children are made more aggressive by watching media violence. Long-term effects seem to be stronger for younger children, but short-term effects may appear stronger for older children, if anything, because aggressive scripts must already be learned in order to be primed by violent displays. Although the results for females seemed weaker 40 years ago, today they seem similarly strong. Finally, it does not appear to shield a child from being affected by possessing a high IQ.

Mediators of Media Violence Effects

Most researchers believe that the long-term effects of media violence depend on the long-term alteration of social cognitions that control social behaviour. To identify all the mediators, more research needs to be completed, but it seems clear that they include normative beliefs about what kinds of social behaviours are OK, global schemes that lead to hostile or non-hostile attributions to other intentions, and social scripts that control social behaviour automatically once they are well learned.

Conclusion

Almost every day, most kids witness some form of media violence, whether on the news, in a cartoon, on the Internet, in a TV show or in a movie. Such exposures can result in negative psychological effects, whether short-term or long-term, including increased aggressive behaviour and a decreased level of excitement about violent acts.

New longitudinal studies with larger samples are needed to estimate accurately how much habitual childhood exposure to media violence increases the risk for extreme violence.

Finally, in India, there are limited studies on the impact of the media on children's health, especially new media items, and on interventions to improve the role of the media; a better evidence base is needed. However, studies conducted abroad provide significant evidence of the role of the media in initiating child aggression, which simply leads to cultural variations, and the results may not be entirely similar. Robust, prospective, experimental, population-based effectiveness trials are needed. Better studies of how they watch and how viewing habits can be improved are necessary. Such solution-oriented research is the key to advancing public health. We should focus attention on a strategy that uses media to help young people avoid behaviors that reduce their well-being and increase behaviors that promote it.

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