



Impact of Media Violence on Children's Aggressive Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

Children today grow up in a world saturated with media use. Media has proved to be a very useful tool in the fields of education, arts, science, sports, and culture. Children and adolescents spend a considerable portion of their time watching television, movies, playing videogames and on the internet. Media violence poses a threat to public health as much as it leads to an increase in real-world violence and aggression. In recent times we have noticed that media violence and violent video games have had a very negative impact on children and their day to day behavior. 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

Media, children, Aggression, violence

All children are different; they exhibit different types of behavior. Parents often worry about whether their child's behavior is normal. It can be difficult to define normal or abnormal, since several factors such as child's age, developmental stage and personality must be taken into consideration. Two children of the same age may act drastically different in behavior in spite of raised by the same parents in the same environment. One child may be rambunctious and outgoing, while the other is shy and withdrawn. It doesn't mean that one behavior is more normal than the other. Certain behaviors such as temper tantrums are typical, especially for particular age groups: the Terrible Twos of toddlers; some can experience at 3 or 4 years old instead. However, they still have limited communication skills and may become frustrated when they cannot adequately express their wants and needs. A toddler may hit or throw a tantrum because he/she is frustrated, rather than showing true aggression.

Aggressive Behavior

Parents may become concerned over aggressive behavior if they view their child hitting another frequently. However, some behavior that is considered aggressive is actually normal. It is important to consider the circumstances. Young children typically act impulsively and such behavior may include hitting which should always be discouraged, it doesn't necessarily mean that the child is acting aggressively. A young child who is also an only child may refuse to share his toys or may grab a toy from another child during a play date. He may hit another child if that child takes his toy from him. He may act aggressively as a means of defending his belongings. Tweens and teens go through awkward stages in their lives and may act or speak aggressively as a coping mechanism. Not all aggressive behavior indicates a behavior disorder.

Disruptive Behavior

All children misbehave at times, and it is perfectly normal for a child to have an occasional outburst. However, repeated disruptive behaviors may signal a behavioral problem. Disruptive behaviors may include repeated tantrums, arguments, hostility toward parents or authority figures, and bullying behavior such as picking on small or younger children. It also includes causing or threatening harm to pets, other people or themselves. In older children and teens, early sexual activity, smoking, alcohol and drug use can be signs of a problem. Skipping school and lying may also indicate a behavioral problem. According to Medline Plus, if a child or teen has a pattern of

hostility, aggression or disruptive behaviors lasting six months or longer, the child may have a behavior disorder.

In this context, one of the notable changes in our social environment in the 20th century is the advent and saturation of mass media. In this new environment, radio, television, movies, videos, video games, and computer networks have assumed central roles in our daily lives. For better or for worse, the mass media are having an enormous impact on our values, beliefs, and behaviors. Unfortunately, the consequences of any mass media exposure has detrimental effects on viewers' and others' health. Research evidence has accumulated over many years that exposure to violence on television, video games internet etc. increases the risk of violent behavior on the viewer's part just as growing up in an environment filled with real violence increases the risk of violent behavior.

As we have seen that the media industry is showcasing every violent story in the society. This is having a negative impact on children's behavior. They are not only learning new ways of anti social behavior but also have become aggressive not only in schools but also at home with their friends and relatives. The contribution of media cannot be look down upon because media has played a significant role in development of children. The trend of media in the past few years has actually played a reversal role in childhood development. Children are considered as the future leaders and service providers of a nation as they have the potential to learn new things and come up with innovative ideas. But when these young minds are exposed to violence, hatred, religious disparities, exposure to violent video games and access to the internet which comprises of millions evidence of aggression and violence they might eventually get more inspired in negative outcomes and might come up with evil ideas for their benefits. This constant exposure to aggression not only hampers thinking and learning process but the personality development also.

While violence is not new to the human race, it is an increasing problem in modern society. We need only look at the recent school shootings and the escalating rate of youth homicides among urban adolescents. While the causes of youth violence are multifactorial and include such variables as poverty, family psychopathology, child abuse, exposure to domestic and community violence, substance abuse and other psychiatric disorders. The research literature is quite compelling that children's exposure to media violence plays an important role

in the etiology of violent behavior. While it is difficult to determine which children who have experienced televised violence are at greatest risk, there appears to be a strong correlation between media violence and aggressive behavior within vulnerable "at risk" segments of youth. In this article, the aim of this review is to consider the research evidence from a psychological perspective and to find out the impact of media violence on children's aggressive behavior.

There is consistent evidence that violent imagery in television, film, video, and computer games has substantial short-term effects on arousal, thoughts, and emotions, increasing the likelihood of aggressive behaviour in younger children, especially in boys. Concern on the part of the public and Congress about the harmful influence of media violence on children dates back to the 1950s and 1960s, and remains strong today. The legitimacy of that concern is corroborated by extensive scientific research that has accumulated over the past 40 years. Indeed, the conclusion that exposure to violent portrayals poses a risk of harmful effects on children has been reached by the many scientific and public health agencies and organizations in many countries.

These harmful effects are grouped into three primary categories: (1) children's learning of aggressive attitudes and behaviors; (2) desensitization, or an increased callousness towards victims of violence; & (3) increased or exaggerated fear of being victimized by violence. While all of these effects reflect adverse outcomes, it is the first core of public health concern about televised violence. The strong statistical relationship between children's exposure to violent portrayals and their subsequent aggressive behavior has been shown. There is no controversy in the medical, public health, and social science communities about the risk of harmful effects from children's exposure to media violence. Rather, there is strong consensus that exposure to media violence is a significant public health concern.

For many years media violence has been a hot topic concerning the influence over children and their aggressive behavior. In 1961, Bandura, Ross and Ross used children between ages 3 and 6 to test the extent to which film-mediated aggressive models influenced imitative behavior. 36 girls and 36 boys were divided into 3 experimental groups and 1 control group. Group 1 watched a live model, Group 2 watched a film version of the human model and group 3 watched a cartoon version of a cat and all become aggressive towards the Bobo doll. Each child watched the aggressive acts individually. Following the exposure to the models, all four groups of children were then individually placed in a room with an experimenter where they were exposed to a mildly frustrating situation to elicit aggression. Next the children were allowed to play freely in an adjoining room, which was full of toys, including the Bobo doll and the "weapons" that were used by the models. The researchers observed the children and noted that the children, who had been exposed to the aggressive behavior, whether real-life, on film or cartoon, exhibited nearly twice as much aggressive behavior as the control group. It was also found that boys exhibited more overall aggression than girls. The results of this experiment have contributed to ongoing debate on the extent of the effects of media violence on children.

The experiments are empirical approaches to test Bandura's social learning theory which claims that people learn through observing, imitating, and modeling. It shows that people not only learn by being rewarded or punished (behaviorism), but they can also learn from watching somebody else being rewarded or punished (observational learning). These experiments are important because they sparked many more studies on the effects of observational learning. It not only give us new data, but this data has practical implications, e.g. how children can be influenced from watching violent media. Violence in mass media (including music, film, video games and television) has come to public attention with virtually every new form of mass media entertainment. It has evoked con-

cerns about its potentially harmful effects on children, and researchers have produced a wealth of evidence of potential harm to children (Bushman & Cantor, 2003).

In the United States (US) over 80% of adolescents own at least one form of new media technology (e.g., cell phone, personal data assistant, computer for Internet access), and they are using this technology with increasing frequency to text and instant message, e-mail, blog, and access social networking websites. A national Kaiser Family Foundation (US) survey found that children aged 8 to 18 years had an average media usage time of 6 hours and 21 minutes daily. Total media exposure time for most of the children exceeded the time spent in all other activities except sleep. Although data from India is limited, a significant portion of our children also have considerable TV viewing per day i.e. >2 hours/day (Arya, 2004). The relationship between different forms of media violence and children's aggressive behavior can be explained as follows:

Television:

Over the past 30 years there has been extensive research on relationship between televised violence and violent behavior among young children. Longitudinal, cross-sectional, and experimental studies have all confirmed this correlation. Televised violence and the presence of television in American households have increased over the years. The United States is the largest consumer of television programming. In 1948, there were barely 100,000 television sets in US. In 1950, only 10% of American homes had a television. According to Carter & Strickland (1975), by 1973, 96% of homes had one or more television sets, and the average set was estimated to be turned on for more than six hours a day. It is estimated that there are more television sets in US than there are telephones, or even toilets (Bushman & Huesmann, 2001). Today, 99% of homes have a television.

Children born in U.S. have the potential of being exposed to television at almost the moment of birth, viewing television for the rest of their lives, and interacting regularly with other viewers of television (Abeles, 1980). Over half of all children have a television set in their bedrooms. This gives a greater opportunity for children to view programs without parental supervision. Studies reveal that children watch approximately 28 hours of television a week, more time than they spend in school. According to Carter and Strickland (1975), for most children, television occupies many more hours than school during their first sixteen years. In the 1990s, daily television viewing for children ages 6 to 18 has increased 70%. The average viewing time for elementary school students is 25 hours a week. By age five, the average child has received 6,000 hours of programming (Sanders, 1994). The typical American child will view more than 200,000 acts of violence, including more than 16,000 murders before age 18. Television programs display 812 violent acts per hour; children's programming, particularly cartoons, displays up to 20 violent acts hourly.

Association between TV viewing and suicidal behavior has also been reported from India (Geeta & Krishnakumar, 2005). Both content exposure and screen time of media had independent detrimental associations with school performance in children and adolescents. Ray and Malhi (2006) reported that children having exposure to violence through media had poorer school performance and its impact on their psychosocial adjustments was detrimental. Another study by Ray and Malhi (2005) showed that vivid display of violence through media (9/11 terrorist attack) caused stress in adolescents. Yama, et al. (2001) described that some of the fears, tensions, bad dreams and tendencies towards delinquencies of children are result of frequent and regular exposure to murder-mystery movies, and stories filled with violence and torture that children view on TV and movies.

An experiment at Pennsylvania State University had 100 nursery-age children watch one of three programs: a "Batman and Superman" cartoon, "Mr. Rogers' Neighbourhood" or

a neutral program, containing neither a positive or negative message. The children shown the aggressive cartoon subsequently became more physically active, breaking toys, getting into fights and playing roughly. In contrast, the kids in the Mr. Rogers' group were more likely to help the teacher and play more cooperatively. In other words, the study demonstrated that the violent cartoon had increased the destructive behaviour of the children.

Josephson (1987) randomly assigned 7 to 9 year-old boys to watch either a violent or a nonviolent film before they played a game of floor hockey in school. Observers who did not know what movie any boy had seen recorded the number of times each boy physically attacked another boy during the game. Physical attack was defined to include hitting, elbowing, or shoving another player to the floor, as well as tripping, kneeling, pulling hair, and other assaultive behaviors that would be penalized in hockey. He found that for aggressive boys (those who scored above average on a measure of aggressiveness), the combination of seeing a violent film and movie-associated cue stimulated significantly more assaultive behavior than any other combination of film and cue.

Bjorkqvist (1985) exposed 5 to 6 year-old children to either violent or nonviolent films. Two raters who did not know which type of film the youngsters had seen then observed the children playing together in a room. Compared with the children who had viewed the nonviolent film, those who had just watched the violent film were rated significantly much higher on physical assault (hitting other children, wrestling, etc.), as well as other types of aggression.

How does televised violence result in aggressive behavior? Some researchers have demonstrated that very young children will imitate aggressive acts on TV in their play with peers. Before age 4, children are unable to distinguish between fact and fantasy and may view violence as an ordinary occurrence. In general, violence on TV and in movies often conveys a model of conflict resolution. It is efficient, frequent, and inconsequential. Heroes are violent, and are rewarded for their behavior. They become role models for youth. It is "cool" to carry an automatic weapon and use it to knock off the "bad guys." The typical scenario of using violence for a righteous cause may translate in daily life into a justification for using violence. Hence, vulnerable youth who have been victimized may be tempted to use violent means to solve problems. Unfortunately, there are few models of nonviolent conflict resolution in the media. Additionally, children who watch televised violence are desensitized to it. They may come to see violence as a fact of life and lose their ability to empathize with both the victim and the victimizer. According to Huesmann & Eron (1986), because of the acceleration rate of violent crime with the entrance of television in most children's homes, it is not surprising that television has become the scapegoat. Of all the mass media, television violence has the greatest potential for both short-term and long-term effects upon children.

Video Games:

Violent video games have recently surpassed violent music videos and even violent TV as a matter of concern to parents and policymakers. There are several reasons for this. First, children are spending increasingly large amount of time playing video games. Second, a large portion of these games contain violence. Third, because the children playing these games are active participants rather than observers, they may be at increased risk of becoming aggressive themselves. The impact of exposure to violent video games has not been studied as extensively as the impact of exposure to TV or movie violence; however, on the whole, the results reported for video games are very similar to those obtained in the investigations of TV and movie violence (Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Anderson et al., in press).

In several studies, children were randomly assigned to play violent or nonviolent video games and then were observed. Most of these studies found that the violent game significantly

increased youths' aggressive behavior. For example, Irwin and Gross (1995) assessed physical aggression (e.g., hitting, shoving, pinching, pulling at clothes or hair, kicking) between boys who had just played either a violent or a nonviolent video game. Those who had played violent video game were more physically aggressive toward peers. Bartholow and Anderson (2002) found that college students who had played a violent game subsequently delivered more than two and a half times as many high-intensity punishments as those who played a nonviolent video game. The effect of the violent game was significant for both women and men.

Indeed, recent research shows that playing violent video games for as little as 10 min increases the player's automatic association of "self" with aggressive actions and traits (Uhlmann & Swanson, in press). In the same study, they also found that past history of exposure to violent video games was positively associated with aggressive views of the self. In a longitudinal study Ithori et al., (2003) studied 5th and 6th graders, measuring overall video-game exposure rather than violent video games. They reported that amount of exposure to video games was positively and significantly related to later levels of violent physical behavior.

There are other, new forms of violence to which children and adolescents are exposed. In one recent study, it was demonstrated that 15% of music videos contain interpersonal violence. Still another new source of violent exposure is access to the Internet. There is little data about incidence of violence on the Internet; however, there is concern about sites that may advocate violence, provide information on the creation of explosive devices, or reveal how to acquire firearms. We know that they are extensive and have a role-modeling capacity. Violent media can take many forms, ranging from television programming and movies to video games and other interactive activities. Previous studies examined a number of different media formats and focused on physical forms of aggression tend to be more common among boys while less is known of the impact of media violence on aggression in girls.

Media violence is exciting (arousing) for most youth. That is, it increases heart rate, the skin's conductance of electricity, and other physiological indicators of arousal. There is evidence that this arousal can increase aggression in two different ways. First, arousal can energize or strengthen whatever an individual's dominant action tendency happens to be at the time. Thus, if a person is provoked to aggress at the time increased arousal occurs (Geen & O'Neal, 1969). Second, if a person who is aroused misattributes his or her arousal to a provocation by someone else, the propensity to behave aggressively in response to that annoyance is increased (Zillmann, 1971, 1982). Thus, people tend to react more violently to provocations immediately after watching exciting movies than they do at other times. This kind of effect is usually short-lived, perhaps lasting only minutes.

Short-term and Long-term Effects of Violent Media on Aggression in Children and Adults were tested by Bushman & Huesmann (2001). They found that short-term effects were greater for adults and long-term effects were greater for children. A study carried out on Youth by Anderson et al. (2003) stated that research on violent television, films, video games, music and internet reveals unequivocal evidence that media violence increases the likelihood of aggressive and violent behavior in both immediate and long-term contexts. Short-term exposure increases the likelihood of physically and verbally aggressive behavior, aggressive thoughts, and aggressive emotions. Recent large-scale longitudinal studies provide evidence that frequent exposure to violent media in childhood has been positively related to subsequent aggressive behavior, ideas, arousal, and anger later in life, including physical assaults and spouse abuse. Additionally, there is a significant negative effect of exposure to violence on subsequent helping behavior.

A significant number of studies have shown that media violence has an effect on children's subsequent aggression (Ben-

sley & Eenwyk, 2001 and Wilson et al., 2002). Children are affected by violence in the media (Ling & Thomas, 1986; Murray 1995; Feshback & Singer, 1971). Children, who observe (in the media or in the environment around them) others exhibiting a specific aggressive behavior, are more likely to perform the same aggressive behavior immediately. Ling and Thomas (1986) conducted a study of children who were shown two videotapes of aggressive and non-aggressive play behavior. Only the children who viewed the aggressive video exhibited an increased amount of aggressive play. Hopf, et al. (2008) showed that the more frequently children view horror and violent films during childhood, and the more frequently they play violent electronic games at the beginning of adolescence, the higher will these students' violence and delinquency be at the age of 14.

Most of the studies examined the immediate causal effect of media violence on physical aggression. A great many studies have also examined the immediate effect of media violence on aggressive thoughts or emotions (Berkowitz, 1993; Geen, 2001; Rule & Ferguson, 1986). These studies are important to consider because research has shown that the risk of physically aggressive behavior against other people is increased among youth who believe that violence against others is acceptable (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997), in part because they believe that their targets are "bad" people and that punishing them is justified (Berkowitz, 1965; Berkowitz & Geen, 1967). Similarly, people who accept violence toward females (Byers & Eno, 1991; Lackie & de Man, 1997), who view others as being hostile (Dodge & Frame, 1982), who believe that retaliation is "honorable" (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996), who fantasize about violence (Rosenfeld et al., 1982), or who just simply think about violent words (Carver et al. 1983) also are at high risk for physical aggression against others. Typically, randomized experiments reveal that exposure to media violence can cause immediate increases in aggressive thoughts and tolerance for aggression in both children and older youth.

Repeated exposure to violent media results in less psychological arousal in the presence of violent acts, a phenomenon known as desensitization. In one experiment, college students who watched movies containing violent sexual acts viewed rape as less negative of a crime than students who watched neutral movies. Other research published in "Psychological Science in the Public Interest" supports this theory of desensitization, adding that children who even briefly witness violent programs experience less sympathy toward victims of violent acts and less anxiety towards real-world violence exposure. Nonetheless, it bears noting that frequent episodes of violent media could lead to increase in viewers' aggressive social encounters, which in turn can affect their self-images and the aggressiveness of their social environment. Infrequent exposure is not likely to produce lasting consequences, but parents, particularly need to be urged to protect their children against the kinds of repeated exposures with violent video games or immersion in violent TV programs.

Recent efforts to reduce the harmful effects of media violence on youth have taken various forms, including (a) attempting to reduce the amount of media violence and its accessibility to children (e.g., calls for media self-regulation and violence ratings), (b) encouraging and facilitating parental monitoring of children's media access (e.g., V-chip legislation), (c) educating parents and children about the potential dangers of media violence (e.g., media and empathy educational programs), and (d) changing children's thinking to reduce the chance that they will imitate the violence they see. Only a few of these approaches have received scientific study. The lack of formal research on interventions related to media violence is somewhat surprising, historically, much more attention has been paid to establishing the relationship between media violence and behavior.

Although it is clear that reducing exposure to media violence will reduce aggression and violence, the research literature

suggests that counter attitudinal and parental-mediation interventions are likely to yield beneficial effects. Recent research has found that the harmful effects of exposure to media violence can be reduced if parents guide their children and discuss the interpretation of media violence with their children. Studies have shown that when children watch a violent program with someone else present, they are less likely to express aggressive attitudes (Corder-Bolz, 1980) or to behave aggressively (Hicks, 1968) immediately after viewing the program if the other person makes negative comments about the violence.

Parents may play a vital role on impact of children's television viewing. Abrol, et al (1993) from India showed that a co-viewing adult (parents) can make television viewing an active process and can facilitate learning from it. Anuradha and Bharathi (2001) reported significant difference in children's amount of TV watching depending on the type of negative reinforcement and consequences exercised by the parents. The study also showed that parental disciplinary practices significantly affected children's academic achievement. So, parents need to be educated about the negative effects of media, but it is not clear how to target messages in such a way that parents will feel that they have the power to make changes within the home.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has recommended guidelines, revised recently, to address television violence (2009): 1) not allowing the bedroom to be a media center with TV, video games, and Internet access; 2) limiting media time to 1 to 2 hours of quality programming; 3) discouraging TV viewing for children younger than 2 years ; 4) talk openly about the nature, content and extent of viewing patterns together; 5) turning off the TV when no one is watching and during meals; and 6) being a good media role model; 7) watch programs with their children, enabling them to address any objectionable material seen; 8) make parents and schools "media literate," to understand the risks of exposure to violence and teach children how to interpret; 9) Schools and homes should teach children conflict resolution. The AAP also makes recommendations to the entertainment industry to avoid violent content that when violence is present, there are adequate warnings provided to the public.

No such guidelines exist in India. The Indian Academy of Pediatrics should take the lead in formulating and implementing the guidelines to help parents and children to develop healthy media using habits (Ray and Jat 2010).

Conclusion

Most children witness some form of media violence almost every day, whether on the news, in a cartoon, on the Internet, in a TV show or in a movie. These exposures, whether short-term or long-term, can result in negative psychological effects, including increased aggressive behaviour and a diminished level of excitement toward 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 effect of media, especially newer media items, on child health and about interventions to improve role of media, a better evidence base is needed. But studies conducted abroad provide significant evidence regarding the role of media in initiating aggression in children which simply lead to cultural variations and the findings might not be perfectly 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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