

Effects of Violence Shown in Media on Children: A Study of Parent's Perspective

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Abstract

Violence mediated programs play a decisive role in cultivating vicious attitudes among children which are damaging the actions of children and their ways of life. This research was designed to investigate the effects of the violent contents shown on media in changing the children's attitudes. The Researchers applied survey method by quantitatively analyzing the respondent's views about their children's habits of watching television and playing video games on computer by using Likert scale for getting an in-depth understanding of behavioral changing which are caused by violent based contents in media. Cultivation theory was applied for recognizing the effects of violent based TV contents on children by using bobo doll experiment. The population of the study was the mothers of those children between 4-12 years from district Gujrat. Total 100 mothers were selected as a sample by using stratified random sampling technique. The strata were made based on the status of women where half of the women were selected as the house wives and half of them were selected as working women. The results of this study show that the aggressive and violent based contents on television and video games have extremely negative effects on the attitudes of the children.

Keywords: violence, media, effects, children

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Introduction

In twentieth century, a major psychological and social change has been observed, and that change is because of emergence of mass media. Mass media including radio, television, movies, videos, video games, and computer networks are playing crucial roles in our daily lives. Mass media has huge impacts on our beliefs, behaviors and values. Television has become a main part of the almost every family activity. In several conditions, the prime focus of the living room or family room is the television set. Sometimes the furniture is arranged and designed in order to make feasibility to family member to have the central seat in the house for watching the television but not to encourage peer conversation. However, watching television is not always a family activity. For example, most of the families have more than one TV sets and some children do enjoying watching television in their private bed rooms. While watching television, sometimes, children are isolated from other activities or watching it alone. So it is possibility that they are exposed to various types of contents which may be violent and aggressive in nature. Television viewing may be a group activity as children, while playing with toys, holding discussions on the different activities, and have tea and dinner while watching TV. Some children do their homework while watching television. These all activities occur in the presence of television. So television has become the most important source of entertainment and information for children.

In 2002, Pakistani media gained freedom and many new channels emerged. These channel started many numbers of programs and news after half an hour. Now a day's Television set is main source of news and almost every house has one T.V set and some has two or more. Through Cable network more than 100 channels are being provided to its viewers. Variety of programs are being on-aired on these channels including news, cartoons, dramas, music, reality shows, crime shows, current affairs programs, documentaries, films, investigating shows, music shows, dance shows etc. Unfortunately, most of the T.V programs consist of violent contents which are affecting the behavior of children. Young children are not as mature as they can process information as adults can. Similarly, children do not have the experience or the ability to evaluate what they watch. Children cannot make difference between fantasy and reality. For example, children of the ages 5 and 10 may believe, whatever they watch on TV, is true and reality. When children watch TV for most of the time, they become more vulnerable to the negative effects of television. Children cannot make difference between fantasy and reality.

Much viewing of violence causes greater aggressiveness in children. Sometimes, watching a single violent program can increase aggressiveness. Children, who regularly expose to the shows having very realistic, frequently repeated, or unpunished violence, are more likely to imitate what they see. Moreover, often they experience to watch different programs like Dramas, shows, crime shows and news also, in this way they are exposed to a great deal of media violence. In an average, prime-time television programs contain 70% violence and of children's programs contain 93% violence. Similarly, prime-time programs have five violent acts in an hour, while children programs have 23 violent acts per hour between 1973-1995 (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1994).

Video game is a common form of entertaining activity of children, particularly for boys. Video games are mostly violent and every child like video games. Most of the children spend at least two hours per week playing video games (Funk, 1997). In their studies, they found that fourth grade boys spend 9.5 hours per week on video games. There are very serious and harmful effects of violence shown in television on children lives. It causes the children to adopt and accept more aggressive behavior towards others. After watching much violence in media, children start thinking in similar way. They may believe that violence is common in real world. This makes them fearful. After watching crime, violence and movies children imitate what they have watched being performed in the shows and films. The home computer games highly effect in changing the behavior of children. Children do aggressive acts in routines after playing video games at home computer (Silvern, 1987). Vicious based video games have most harmful effects in changing the behaviors of children as compare to the violent stuffs on TV (Sherry, 2001).

What is the effect of violent media on the behavior of children? Media has power to shape perception and understanding of people. Since the television was introduced, impact of TV on behaviors and attitude of children has become a major subject of research. Numerous studies have been conducted to see the impact of TV on social learning and environment of children. In children's television watching habits, there is found a huge consistency, across 23 countries. In electrified urban or rural areas, 93% of the school going children spends more than 50% of their free time in watching television (Groebel, 1998). For example, in 1998, a survey was conducted by Independent Television commission in England, in which they found that the amount of children who have TV set in their bedrooms is 46% and only 43% of parents forbid and avert their children from watching non suitable programs or contents. Another survey was conducted in England on parents whose results showed that parents believe that television has affected their children in many ways. Their lifestyle, their dressing, their behavior, their talking style has affected. It was showed that 61% of programs have violence and only

4% have an anti-violence theme. Violence in realistic settings was shown in 55% of programs, but only 16% showed long-term negative consequences and in 45% of programs the offender went unpunished. Of more concern, there was no criticism of or regret for the violence in 71% of scenes and 42% of the violence was associated with humor (Barbara, 1996).

Children learn the aggressive behavior from violence in media. They learn new ways of being aggressive after watching violent contents. Furthermore children are of view that it will bring reward if they become aggressive to others (Huesmann, 1986). Violence and cruel contents on TV have lower effects on children as compare to the violent games on computer (Anderson, 2001). Another important study, which was conducted in Canada, about the learning of children from TV, concluded that, children have become more aggressive after two years of coming TV in their town. (Joy & Zabrack, 1986).

The feelings of children, attitudes of children and behavior of children are affected by watching violent contents. Exposure to violence in media for long time is one of a number of factors which may result in children to be more aggressive and violent. Some children enjoy, and have much liking for viewing violent material. Viewing violence on television leads to create stress and fear in many children. Sometimes, children believe aggression as a effective and pleasing behavior after watching media violence. Children become fearful about the world. It may result in anxiety among children. There is also a chance that children will be desensitized towards real violence after too much exposure to violence on media.

Violent mediated programs are playing a crucial role in developing the negative personality of children and inducing more and more violent and aggressive behavior among the children. This study will help the parent that how to control children from watching violence in media and also, parent will be able to reshape the thinking of children that violent toys are only excited in games but not in real life. Parents can guide children to behave and play in the ways that don't have violence. This study will provide guideline for gatekeepers and agenda setters of media giants to consider the content and exaggerated presentation of violence with much attention. This study will encourage gatekeeper to bring change in the presentation style of contents.

Review of the Related Literature

Television is a big hindrance in the way of education. It steals times of children from doing other activities and affects the school going performance (Murray, 1993). It is a fearful phenomenon according to the

educationalist as they believe that reading habits of children may be displaced with television viewing and it may affect their school performance (Gunter, 1990). In London a group of boys between the ages of 12 and 17 was examined in a study. Its finding concluded that aggressive behavior is directly related with viewing aggressive contents on Television. Watching television violence and aggression are strongly connected with each other that's why watching television violence effect strongly. The children show aggressive behaviors when they become young adults and those who watch a steady amount of television violence, perceive it as reality, and identify with the aggressor (Bushman, 2001).

According to Social learning theory when children watch any content they try to copy this action whenever they find any reason to reproduce it (Dorr, 1986). Children behavior is shaped from television and they try to imitate what they watch. In the earlier years of life, Social behavior of humans is learned. These years are learning years (Passolunghi, 1974). Children may learn about themselves from different sources, about life, about how to behave in different situations, about how to deal with personal and family problems, and so on (Gunter, 1990).

Parents observed that their preschool going children were found doing many violent actions. These actions were done with their younger brother or sister (DeGaetano, 1990). In 2001, a 6 year old girl was killed by a 12 year old boy who was imitating the moves of professional wrestling. In Texas, a 17-year boy saw a stunt on MTV show and tried to copy the stunt. For this he set himself on fire. This type of situations is usually referred to as the "copycat effect" in which viewer try to do same action as they see. Ratio of copying is more in males as compared to females and ratio of copying is more in younger children than older. A study that was designed to find out whether children would be more likely to imitate aggressive behavior, seen in real life, than similar behavior seen on film or in cartoons. Groups of nursery schoolchildren were selected for observation and they were exposed to the same examples of behavior; one group saw them in the experimental room, second on film and third by means of projected cartoons. A control group saw none of these. Afterward, the children were given, the toys shown in demonstration, to play. Those Children who saw the aggressive behavior played significantly more aggressively than children who did not see the demonstrations. Those Children who saw the real-life aggressive models imitated the behavior more closely than children, who saw the cartoon, but there was no difference in imitative behavior between the children who had seen the live demonstration and those who had seen the film, nor did the three experimental groups differ significantly in total aggression. The results suggested that exposure to humans on film portraying aggression was the most influential in producing and shaping aggressive behavior (Goldstein, 1996).

The Bobo Doll Experiment

In this experiment, 24 preschool children were assigned to one of three conditions. One experimental group observed adult models playing aggressively with an inflatable plastic Bobo doll. Second group observed adult models playing non-aggressively with a Bobo doll and subjects in the control group had no exposure to the models. Half of the children in the experimental conditions observed same-sex models and half viewed models of the opposite sex. Subjects were assessed for the amount of imitative as well as non-imitative aggression performed in a new, generalized situation in the absence of the models (Bandura R. D., 1961). Results revealed that children exposed to aggressive models reproduced more aggressive behaviors resembling that of the models, and that their mean aggression scores were significantly higher than subjects in the nonaggressive and control groups. Furthermore, children in the aggressive condition exhibited significantly more partially imitative and non-imitative aggressive behavior and were generally less inhibited in their behavior than subjects in the nonaggressive condition. Finally, the extent to which children imitated the model was differentially influenced by the sex of the model, with boys showing more aggression as compared to girls following exposure to the male model.

Theoretical Framework

Media has become major source of information and also the major source of entertainment. People think that whatever the media presents is true. Cultivation theory is influential to study the effect of violent media on the behavior. How the violent media is changing the behavior of children and how it influences their grooming? To see the people's perception of reality, theory of cultivation is usually applied. Suppose if a child watches a lot of programs which contain violence and crimes, he will surely believe that there are many number of violence, crimes and criminals in city because he/she cannot make the difference between reality and fantasy. In the second half of 20th century, television has become a medium which proliferated very fast and cultivation theory is concerned with it. Other sources of entertainment, ideas, information has been monopolized and marginalized by Television (Tankard, 2001). The monopoly of television is resulted in cultivation of common world-wide view, common roles and common values among the viewers. After a long time of research programs, Gerbner and Gross developed the cultivation theory which essentially claimed "uniform and across-the-

board effects of television on all heavy viewers (Gerbner & Morgan, 2002). Later, they added the concepts of mainstreaming and resonance after revising the theory. There are also other factors which contribute in different perception. Viewers who watch too much violence and crimes on Television think that there is a huge amount of crime in society while other who spend less time on television have opposite perception about society (Tankard, 2001).

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was to understand the effects of violent mediated contents in changing the behavior of children.

Methodology

To understand the effects of violent mediated contents on the behaviors of children, survey method was employed for understanding the possible outcomes of these violent contents on the attitudes of children who watch these contents on TV. A well-structured questioner was designed to get responses from the selected sample by using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Due to lack of analytical approach of these children, researchers were unable to choose the children as the population of the study. For this purpose, researchers selected the mothers of those children whose children's age was under (4-12 years) from district Gujrat as the population. Total 110 mothers were selected as a sample size. However, the sample of this study was chosen by using stratified random sampling technique. The strata's made on the basis of the status of women through which half of the mothers were selected as the house wives and other half sample was selected as the working women. The mothers of those children who were illiterate and were unable to fill the questioner, were helped by the researchers by questioning and getting responses after instructing the method of likert scale. Researchers filled the questioners after getting the responses from the mothers. The responses of respondents were coded by using SPSS.

Results

Which type of activities mostly your children have in free time?

Table 1
Activities of Chidren During Free Time

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Watching television | 29 | 28.4 |
| Video games | 27 | 26.5 |
| Computer and Internet | 11 | 10.8 |
| Watching movies | 9 | 8.8 |
| Sports | 13 | 12.7 |
| Indoor Games | 13 | 12.7 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 |

This shows that 28.4% respondent said that their children watch television in free time, 26.5% said their children play video games, 10.8% said that their children use computer and Internet, 8.8% said that their children watch movies, 12.7% said that their children like to play sports and 12.7% said that their children use to play Indoor games. It is clear here that most of the children like to watch television and play video games.

Which type of video games your children like to play?

Table 2
Video Games Chidren Like to Play

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------|-----------|---------|
| Adventure | 16 | 15.7 |
| Racing | 18 | 17.6 |
| War games | 12 | 11.8 |
| Puzzle games | 7 | 6.9 |
| Fighting | 32 | 31.4 |
| Doll dress up | 12 | 11.8 |
| Cooking games | 5 | 4.9 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 |

This shows that 15.7% respondent said that their children like to play adventure games, 17.6% said that their children like to play racing games, 11.8% said that their children like to play war games, 6.9% said that their children like to play puzzle games, 31.4% said that their children like to play fighting games, 11.8% said that their children like to play doll dress up games and 4.9% said that their children like to play cooking games. From above data it is clear that majority of children like to play fighting games.

Table 3

Item wise Responses of Sample

| Questions | Likert Scale Responses (in Percentage) | | | | | Total |
|---|--|----------|---------|-------|----------------|-------|
| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | |
| Do you feel any vivid change in your children since they have been watching? | 7.8 | 10.8 | 12.7 | 49.0 | 19.6 | 100.0 |
| Do you think that your children have become more aggressive since watching? | 11.8 | 21.6 | 8.8 | 40.2 | 17.6 | 100.0 |
| Do you think your children imitate after watching? | 5.9 | 13.7 | 6.9 | 58.8 | 14.7 | 100.0 |
| Do you feel irritated by this behavior of your children? | 5.9 | 14.7 | 17.6 | 52.0 | 9.8 | 100.0 |
| Have you ever got any complaint from the tutor about your children aggressive behavior? | 4.9 | 26.5 | 45.1 | 16.7 | 6.9 | 100.0 |
| Do you think that these contents have changed your children's liking and disliking of toys? | 17.6 | 18.6 | 9.8 | 36.3 | 17.6 | 100.0 |
| Do you feel, these contents have damaged the personality of your children? | 11.8 | 20.6 | 15.7 | 36.3 | 15.7 | 100.0 |
| Do you think that violent contents responsible to develop negative factors in children? | 7.8 | 26.5 | 20.6 | 30.4 | 14.7 | 100.0 |
| Do you think that more exposure to violent contents cause more negative behavior in children? | 1.0 | 4.9 | 3.9 | 66.7 | 23.5 | 100.0 |

Analysis and Discussion

It is observed in this study that the viewers of these violent mediated contents have great effects on the behaviors and attitudes of children. Finding shows that a huge number of children spend huge time on Television and videogames. It is observed that great numbers of children like to play video games which involve fighting and on Television most of the children like to watch cartoons and wrestling. According to the results, children who are the viewers of these contents are interested in these programs because of the curious nature of the content. It is the element of suspense and thrill that grab the attention of children in these programs. Children of age 4-12years are in learning stage and they cannot make difference between reality and fantasy, so children use to copy what they watch. According to findings, majority of children watch television and use computer independently. When they use to watch TV independently, they may encounter several contents that could involve violence and other contents that may be harmful in several ways for children. Like if children are watching Television lonely, freely switch on different channels by watching movies, cartoons, wrestling, dramas etc. At the same time, the children who use computer independently try to play violence mediated video games which directly effect on the attitudes of children.

This study proves that “higher the exposure to violent mediated contents, greater the aggression in the behavior of children”. More than 90.2% respondents were agreeing that more exposure to violent mediated contents cause more negative behavior in children. It shows that the programs which children like to watch contain a large amount of violence. It has been seen that 33.3% children have become more aggressive after watching these programs. So it is observed that there is strong association between the exposures to violent mediated content and aggressive behavior in children. These findings endorsed the Eron’s study that children learn the ways of aggression by watching aggression. Children learn new ways of being aggressive and they come to believe that being aggressive is helpful to get everything. Children consider the violence and actions shown in media are real happening because children of young age cannot perceive the information as adult.

The results show that this violence mediated programs have great effects in changing the attitudes of children. A large number of respondents articulate that they get complains about the aggressive behaviour of their children from their tutor and other family members. More than 44.1% respondent said that they sometimes get complains

from tutor and teacher of their children and 45.1% respondents responded that they sometimes get complains from other family members and maid. More than 36.3% respondents were agreeing that these contents has changed the liking and disliking of their children about toys. However, 52% respondents were agreeing that violent mediated contents have damaged the personality of their children.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded that these violent contents of media have negative impact on the behaviour of the children. Children are becoming more and more aggressive after watching violent mediated contents. Most of the children watch TV and play videogames and most of the children like to watch wrestling and cartoons on TV and play fighting games. It has also been seen that that these programs contain huge amount of violence. Children use to imitate what they watch. Children's personality changes after watching violent programs. Liking and disliking of children towards toys also changes. It has been concluded that more the exposure to the violent mediated content affects the behaviour of children.

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