



The Effect of Televised Media on Aggression Within Children

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ABSTRACT:

Children are the most susceptible victims to the dreadful violence portrayed through televised media. Television has a firm and strong influence on us due to its vast spread and it has the power to change an individual's lifestyle, beliefs, culture, and mindset. Research shows that children watching excessive television tend to imitate the violent behaviours that they see on shows and movies as they gullibly believe that whatever is portrayed on television is the right thing (Rajput & Kiran, 2013).

I have chosen to conduct a mixed-method research study in order to study the effect of aggression levels within children due to exposure of violent televised media. Through the study of previous literature, such as Dillon & Bushman (2017) and McLeod, Atkin, and Chaffe (1972) we understand that in the short-run children show aggressive behavioural tendencies. However, Nathanson (2001) contends this claim by showing that parental intervention and environmental factors also play a major role in influencing aggression levels within children. Therefore, this research paper will focus on the themes of influence of violent mass media and external environmental factors that affect the aggression within children.

This study will be divided into 2 parts: the first part is the qualitative aspect wherein through the means of observation, the children's aggression levels and behaviour will be noted. The second part will be the quantitative aspect wherein data will be collected on the frequency and aggression levels of the children. Also, through the means of interviews, questionnaires and surveys the background and environmental analysis will be conducted. Inferences and trends will be drawn from the data obtained. The results of this study show a clear link between high aggression levels in children and increased exposure of violent televised media. The environmental factors increase the credibility of the results derived from the research as it helps in justifying for anomalies and reduces biases.

Introduction:

The American Psychological Association task force report on television and American society says that when a child (who watches 2-4 hours of television per day on an average) passes elementary school, he would have experienced around 8000 murders and more than 100,000 various acts of violence on television (Smith, 1993). How can we remain calm and indifferent towards such a pressing problem which is destroying children's mental wellbeing?

The most prominent change in the 20th century is the discovery and gradual over-usage of electronic gadgets. Mass media sources-television, videos, video-games, and mobiles, seems to have taken up a central and vital role in our lives. They have both positive and negative effects and have affected our habits, behaviours, actions, and beliefs.

The meaning of violence in televised media is visual portrayals of acts of physical aggression by one human against another (Huesmann & Taylor, 2005). This topic is extremely important because studies show that children in the age range of 6-11 spend about 28 hours a week before the TV with 97% of it being live television and children in the age range of 8-18 spend 4.5 hours watching television on an average every day (RN & Bushman, 2019) (U.S. Department Of Health and Human Services, 2019). Due to this increased exposure to violent media, children start to accept violent actions as a way of life and solving problems. In movies like Avengers, Superman, Spiderman, Power Rangers, etc. heroes using violence as a means to resolve issues are glamorized and put on a pedestal. They encourage the carrying of weapons to be more powerful and overpowering the so-called "villain". This makes the child believe that violence is a justified method of achieving one's goals (AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS, 2009).

The National Television Violence study evaluated almost 10000 hours of broadcast programming from 1995 through 1997 and revealed that 61% of the programming portrayed interpersonal violence, much of it in a glamorized manner (AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS, 2009). Therefore, this essay will focus on the theme of influence of violent mass media that affects the aggression within children.

Rationale:

It is important to understand whether increased exposure to violent televised media is causing an increase in aggression levels within children. Therefore, the rationale for this research is:

Research question: To what extent does violence in the televised media increase aggression within children (6-12 years)?

Hypothesis: There is a strong correlation between violent televised media and aggression levels within children between 6 to 12 years.

Research Objective:

The objective of this study is to understand the relationship between exposure to violent televised media and its impact on aggression levels within children aged 6 to 12 years.

This research has tried to eliminate possible biases such as environmental factors to make the results more accurate and achieve and cause and effect relationship.

Review of Literature:

Dillon, & Bushman (2017) conducted a laboratory experiment where their aim was to investigate whether children seeing a movie portraying gun violence will play with a real gun for longer than children seeing the same movie not portraying gun violence. Their results showed that the median number of times the trigger was pulled among children who saw the movie containing guns was 2.8 compared with 0.01 among children who saw the movie not containing guns. The median number of seconds spent holding the gun among children who saw a movie containing guns was 53.1 compared with 11.1 among children who saw the movie not containing guns. One child pressed the gun to another child's temple and pulled the trigger and another pointed the gun out the window at people walking down the street (LoBue, 2018) (The JAMA Network Journals, 2019).

A similar experiment was conducted by Drabman and Thomas (1974). The aim was to test whether violence in televised media may make children, more tolerant of aggression and less likely to intervene in situations. Children were randomly put into 2 groups. The first group saw a cowboy film that had aggressive events. Subjects then watched the behaviour of 2 young children who were monitored via videotape. The children were playing quietly initially and then gradually became violent. They ended up physically fighting with each other and ended up destroying the videotape. The factor measured was the time participants took to find help after the children began fighting and whether the participant waited to get adult help before the children began to physically fight. Results showed that the group who saw the cowboy movie took longer to seek help than those who didn't see the movie. Subjects in the cowboy movie group were more tolerant towards the physical fight (American Psychological Association, 2019).

The use of a cross-sectional study by McLeod, Atkin, and Chaffe (1972) also supports the claim. The aim was to investigate the relationship between violence in televised media and aggressive tendencies within adolescents. For the procedure, they took a list of popular prime-time TV programs and asked 698 adolescents how frequently they seemed to watch them. They were also questioned about different aspects of their aggression and violent tendencies like physical fights or delinquency. For each of the programs, a score was assigned by independent raters on how violent it was. The violence score was then multiplied by each of the participant's frequency number. The participant's aggressiveness was then predicted through the scores derived by the researchers. The results showed that those children who watched programs with a high violence score reported more aggressive and violent tendencies (Busching, Allen, & Anderson, 2019).

Nathanson (2001) conducted a survey on parents and children to investigate the relation between parental intervention and mediation of violent televised media and aggressive tendencies caused due to this. 1323 participants were present and data was obtained through surveys conducted in homes and schools in communities in Iowa and Minnesota (Busching, Allen, & Anderson, 2019). Primary caregivers, teachers and parents also provided data about the child. The results showed that active and restrictive mediation and monitoring by the parent are both negatively related to aggression levels and violent inclinations within the child. On the other hand, co-viewing by the parent is positively related to aggression levels within the child (Gentile DA, et al., 2014).

Methodology and Design :

This study is conducted on children ranging between the **age groups of 6 to 12 years**. We will use **stratified random sampling** in order to ensure that our sample is diverse and well representative of the population. We will choose a **sample size of 300 children** to ensure that the results are accurate and we can draw trends.

This will be a **mixed-methods** design where the experiment will have 2 stages:

1. **Generation of qualitative data:** children will be broken down into 2 groups. The first group will be made to watch a violent film. Then both groups will be made to play together for a few hours and their behaviours will be observed for that duration.
2. **Generation of quantitative data:** Firstly, there will be surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and personality tests conducted for parents/teachers/helpers in order to understand the background, family, socio-economic status and environmental factors of the child. Secondly, the frequency of aggressive televised media watched by the child will be documented. Thirdly, through long-term observation (2-3 years) of the children, criteria for aggression levels will be assigned. There will be criteria assigned to monitor aggression levels such as verbal aggression (usage of swear words and shouting) and physical aggression (fighting, angry gestures)

Data Analysis:

The studies done in the Literature Review section are insufficient individually because of the presence of biases. In Dillon and Bushman (2017) and Drabman and Thomas (1974) the data derived is based solely on observations. Some of the signs can be missed out or misinterpreted. Additionally, the background information of the children has not been considered. Some of the children may be naturally aggressive which would cause them to pick fights and hence this cannot be attributed to televised media.

In studies such as McLeod, Atkin, and Chaffe (1972) and Nathanson (2001) the results were based on surveys and questions where in the subject could give incorrect information and hence the results are not accurate. Additionally, it is important to do a holistic background check and understand the personality of the participant before undertaking any study.

Nathanson (2001) shows how parental mediation helps in reducing aggression levels within children. Research has found that children with low-SES watch more television than high-SES children. There are several factors that affect the duration, the content viewed and the effects of the content viewed on televised media that lead to aggression within children. Parents can take several steps to prevent their children from being prey to the deadly sways of violent televised media content. They can hold discussions with their child where they discuss alternative substitutes to solve problems other than using violence or they can make sure that their child watches shows that are nonviolent. Friends, teacher or other important individuals can also help the child tackle this aggression. The nurturing of children affects their aggressiveness. This aspect has been successfully included in our research design. Through the medium of questionnaires, surveys, and interviews, the researcher is able to understand the child's relationship with parents/teachers and is able to get an understanding of the environment the child has been brought up in. This step is extremely important because it helps in eliminating confounding variables. For example, if the child has been brought up in a violent surrounding, then the aggression depicted by the child will be due to that environment, and not due to the televised media. Therefore, aggression can be moderated by controlling the content viewed and the duration of viewing of television. The origins of violent behavior are multifactorial and depend upon biological, cultural and social factors. Under biological factors aggressive traits could have been the influence of genetic factors. An international study published in the journal of Molecular Psychiatry has identified 40 genes related to aggressive behavior in humans and mice (University of Barcelona, 2019). Under social influences cultural backgrounds affect aggression levels because each individual is nurtured and brought up in a different manner. Their backgrounds do affect the way they react in certain situations and play a role in the amount of anger they emot. Therefore, this concept has high levels of internal validity due to the subjective nature of aggression and external factors. Furthermore, since aggression cannot be quantified, there is low construct validity and this decrease credibility studies carried out in this field (AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS, 2009).

Through our research, we also successfully test the impact of televised media on aggression levels of children both in the short, and long run. The quantitative method records the behaviour of the children during a span of 2 to 3 years and the qualitative method records the short-term effects of exposure to aggressive televised media. Additionally, we are reducing errors by performing 2 experiments in our research.

Potential biases could be the social desirability effect wherein the participant intentionally changes his/her behaviour when noticed that they are being observed. Also, the verbal answers derived from parents/teachers/helpers could be incorrect as they may be altered or inaccurately answered. The aggressiveness shown by the children could be misinterpreted or missed out on.

Findings:

- i. Children that were made to watch the violent film were considerably more violent than children who did not watch the film.
- ii. Children that watched the violent film showed signs of aggression, fighting, shouting etc. which interacting with the other children whereas, those who did not watch the film were considerably calmer
- iii. Children that scored higher during the observation period for aggression levels generally had a higher frequency of exposure to violent televised media.
- iv. There was a direct and positive relationship between children that had scored high during the observation period for aggression levels and those children that behaved aggressively while interacting with other children.
- v. Therefore, there was also a direct and positive relationship between children that had higher exposure to violent televised media and those children that behaved aggressively while interacting with other children.

The results obtained from the surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and personality tests conducted for parents/teachers/helpers in order to understand the background, family, socio-economic status and environmental factors of the child contributed to the results by helping the researcher understand the environment in which the child has grown up in. Anomalies such as children that showed high levels of aggression but low exposure to violent televised media were generally brought up in an extremely violent surrounding and those that showed high levels of violent televised media exposure but low levels of aggression generally had extremely nurturing parental support that ensured that the child behaved in a patient and calm manner. Therefore, it can be said that there is a strong correlation between violent televised media and aggression levels within children, thus making our hypothesis correct.

Conclusion :

The research question to what extent does violence in the televised media increase aggression within children (6-12 years)? is answered through the evaluation of the direct impact of televised media and effects of social environments on aggressiveness. Overall, parents should monitor, regulate, and mediate their children's level of violent televised media exposure and limit the duration to which they view such content. It is vital that they hold discussions with their children and influence their opinions formed due to media. They should advocate for media literacy, encourage well thought out content on television by producers and consequently a healthy and safer environment for children to enjoy the benefits of televised media. There is research arguing against televised media being a factor for aggression, however, further research is still to be done. Further, it is understood that because of addiction towards the television by young children and high levels of exposure, this media has taken up a centralized role in children's life's and seems to form their opinions, beliefs and attitudes. Important figures like parents and teachers seem to have been replaced by media which is now responsible for shaping our children's minds. Therefore, parents must take an active role in monitoring the content viewed by children as media is now playing a huge role in forming the mindset of the younger generation (AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS, 2009).

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