

Impact of Media Violence on the Younger Generation

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Abstract:

Media violence can be defined as visual portrayals of acts of physical aggression by one human or human-like character against another. This definition has evolved as theories about the effects of media violence have evolved and represents an attempt to describe the kind of violent media presentation that is most likely to teach the viewer to be more violent. This article looks at how initially media involving violence was used to entertain people, but later moved on to also influencing people to carry out such acts of aggression on the real society. More recently, there has been an increase of such media in the form of movies, videogames, television shows, etc. which not only showcase such acts, but also encourage the viewer to behave in such a manner, which is substantiated by case studies. Violence in this context is not restricted to just physical, but can be expanded to mental & psychological aspects as well. The presentation also aims to look at how far do people exercise such acts in society and up to what extent. It finally draws a conclusion by including our viewpoints of whether such media is the primary influence on a subject, or whether it acts as a supplement to the already existing hostile behavior in viewers.

I. INTRODUCTION

Exposure to violence in media, including television, movies, music, and video games, represents a significant risk to the health of children and adolescents. Extensive research evidence indicates that media violence can contribute to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares, and fear of being harmed. Pediatricians should assess their patients' level of media exposure and intervene on media-related health risks. Pediatricians and other child health care providers can advocate for a safer media environment for children by encouraging media literacy, more thoughtful and proactive use of media by children and their parents, more responsible portrayal of violence by media producers, and more useful and effective media ratings. Office counseling has been shown to be effective.

There have been many studies conducted regarding the effects of viewing violence in the media, including how children are affected. Some studies have proven how the aggressive nature within in media violence can carry over into real world situations. In some situations the harm that was inflicted on others may have easily been prevented if the person or child had never been exposed to violence in the first place. Through various media outlets, our children are exposed to violent behaviors that are either ignored or rewarded. Depending upon the child, seeing these types of acts allowed without punishment can have a wide range of effects, including leading the child down a road to committing violent acts as a teen or adult.

II. SOURCES OF MEDIA INDUCING VIOLENCE

Exposure to violence in media, including television, movies, music, and video games, represents a significant risk to the health of children and adolescents. Extensive research evidence indicates that media violence can contribute to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares, and fear of being harmed. Pediatricians should assess their

patients' level of media exposure and intervene on media-related health risks. Pediatricians and other child health care providers can advocate for a safer media environment for children by encouraging media literacy, more thoughtful and proactive use of media by children and their parents, more responsible portrayal of violence by media producers, and more useful and effective media ratings. Office counseling has been shown to be effective.

Though it is not an excuse, violence in media can be a contributing factor to criminal acts and aggression toward others. Some reports state that if media violence were controlled a little bit more, there would be less shootings and acts of violent behavior. Others reports express what is seen in the media makes no difference in what happens in the real world. Regardless of if the media causes aggressive behavior or not, there are many outlets where children are exposed to unnecessary violence at a young age.

III. TELEVISION/INTERNET AND VIDEO VIOLENCE

Virtually since the dawn of television, parents, teachers, legislators and mental health professionals have wanted to understand the impact of television programs, particularly on children. Of special concern has been the portrayal of violence, particularly given psychologist Albert Bandura's work in the 1970s on social learning and the tendency of children to imitate what they see.

As a result of 15 years of "consistently disturbing" findings about the violent content of children's programs, the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior was formed in 1969 to assess the impact of violence on the attitudes, values and behavior of viewers. The resulting report and a follow-up report in 1982 by the National Institute of Mental Health identified these major effects of seeing violence on television:

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- ❖ Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others.
- ❖ Children may be more fearful of the world around them.
- ❖ Children may be more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others.

IV. VIDEO GAME VIOLENCE

- ❖ The advent of video games raised new questions about the potential impact of media violence, since the video game player is an active participant rather than merely a viewer. Ninety-seven percent of adolescents age 12-17 play video games — on a computer, on consoles such as the Wii, Playstation and Xbox, or on portable devices such as Gameboys, smartphones and tablets. A Pew Research Center survey in 2008 found that half of all teens reported playing a video game “yesterday,” and those who played every day typically did so for an hour or more.
- ❖ Many of the most popular video games, such as “Call of Duty” and “Grand Theft Auto,” are violent; however, as video game technology is relatively new, there are fewer empirical studies of video game violence than other forms of media violence. Still, several meta-analytic reviews have reported negative effects of exposure to violence in video games.

V. MAJOR EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE IN MEDIA

Violence in the media can cause adverse behavior among those who may already be prone to violent behavior. According to the American Psychological Association, the National Institute of Mental Health had identified the major effects of violence in the media back in 1982. These effects could include:

- Becoming insensitive to others’ pain and suffering
- Becoming more fearful of the world around us
- Becoming more aggressive in behavior
- Becoming more harmful to others
- Believing violent behavior is accepted by society
- Believing there are no consequences for violent behavior

The above effects can make an individual believe it is okay to be violent, justifying any actions he or she may take against others in society. When a person is desensitized to the impact violent actions have on others, it is more likely they will not realize consequences associated with such actions.

VI. PREVENTING STUDENTS FROM MEDIA EXPOSURE

Preventing kids from seeing media violence is one of the best way to help reduce the risks of them expressing violent behavior when they grow up. Though we cannot fully stop all of the violence shown throughout different media outlets, we can do everything possible to restrict our children’s exposure to it.

Following measures can prevent kids from being overexposed to violence in the media:

- Limit television to only one to two hours per day
- Watch television programming with the kids
- Be aware of what types of media your kids are being exposed to
- Sit down and explain the real life consequences of the violence they see
- Discuss how it is impossible to get away with such violent behavior in real life
- Teach kids conflict resolution versus using violence
- Discuss what they see and how it made them feel
- Explore alternatives to what they are already watching
- Speak with other parents to share media-related tips
- Share media tips with other parents

VII. LITERATURE REVIEWS

Research by psychologists L. Rowell Huesmann, Leonard Eron and others starting in the 1980s found that children who watched many hours of violence on television when they were in elementary school tended to show higher levels of aggressive behavior when they became teenagers. By observing these participants into adulthood, Huesmann and Eron found that the ones who had watched a lot of TV violence when they were 8 years old were more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for criminal acts as adults.

Interestingly, being aggressive as a child did not predict watching more violent TV as a teenager, suggesting that TV watching could be a cause rather than a consequence of aggressive behavior. However, later research by psychologists Douglas Gentile and Brad Bushman, among others, suggested that exposure to media violence is just one of several factors that can contribute to aggressive behavior.

Other research has found that exposure to media violence can desensitize people to violence in the real world and that, for some people, watching violence in the media becomes enjoyable and does not result in the anxious arousal that would be expected from seeing such imagery.

A 2010 review by psychologist Craig A. Anderson and others concluded that “the evidence strongly suggests that exposure to violent video games is a causal risk factor for increased aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, and aggressive affect and for decreased empathy and prosocial behavior.” Anderson’s earlier research showed that playing violent video games can increase a person’s aggressive thoughts, feelings and behavior both in laboratory settings and in daily life. “One major conclusion from this and other research on violent entertainment media is that content matters,” says Anderson.

Other researchers, including psychologist Christopher J. Ferguson, have challenged the position that video game violence harms children. While his own 2009 meta-analytic review reported results similar to Anderson’s, Ferguson contends that laboratory results have not translated into real world, meaningful effects. He also claims that much of there search into video game violence has failed to control for other variables such as mental health and family life, which may have impacted the results. His work has found that children

who are already at risk may be more likely to choose to play violent video games. According to Ferguson, these other risk factors, as opposed to the games, cause aggressive and violent behavior.

The American Psychological Association launched an analysis in 2013 of peer-reviewed research on the impact of media violence and is reviewing its policy statements in the area.

Back in 1994 Andrea Martinez at the University of Ottawa conducted a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on media violence for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). She concluded that the lack of consensus about media effects reflects three “grey areas” or constraints contained in the research itself. These grey areas still apply today.

First, media violence is notoriously hard to define and measure. Some experts who track violence in television programming, such as the late George Gerbner, defined violence as the act (or threat) of injuring or killing someone, independent of the method used or the surrounding context. As such, Gerber included cartoon violence in his data-set. But others, such as University of Laval professors Guy Paquette and Jacques de Guise, specifically excluded cartoon violence from their research because of its comical and unrealistic presentation. (How they would view some of the increasingly realistic violence in many of today’s cartoons aimed at teens – such as the gruesome injuries suffered by many of the characters on *South Park* and *Family Guy* – is an open question.)

Second, researchers disagree over the type of relationship the data supports. Some argue that exposure to media violence causes aggression. Others say that the two are associated, but that there is no causal connection (that both, for instance, may be caused by some third factor) while others say the data supports the conclusion that there is no relationship between the two at all.

Third, even those who agree that there is a connection between media violence and aggression disagree about how the one affects the other. Some say that the mechanism is a psychological one, rooted in the ways we learn. For example, L. Rowell Huesmann argues that children develop “cognitive scripts” that guide their own behaviour by imitating the actions of media heroes. As they watch violent shows, children learn to internalize scripts that use violence as an appropriate method of problem-solving.

In a study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2003 nearly half (47 per cent) of parents with children between the ages of four and six reported that their children had imitated aggressive behaviours from TV. However, it is interesting to note that children are more likely to mimic positive behaviours — 87 per cent of kids do so.

Kansas State University professor John Murray concluded in his research that “the most plausible interpretation of this pattern of correlations is that early preference for violent television programming and other media is one factor in the production of aggressive and antisocial behavior when the young boy becomes a young man.”

In 1998, Professors Singer, Slovak, Frierson and York surveyed 2,000 Ohio students in Grades three through eight.

They reported that the incidences of psychological trauma (including anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress) increased in proportion to the number of hours of television watched each day.

A 1999 survey of 500 Rhode Island parents led by Brown University professor Judith Owens revealed that the presence of a television in a child’s bedroom made it more likely that the child would suffer from sleep disturbances. Nine per cent of all the parents surveyed reported that their children had nightmares because of a television show at least once a week.

Tom Van der Voort studied 314 children ages nine through 12 in 1986. He found that although children can easily distinguish cartoons, westerns and spy thrillers from reality, they often confuse realistic programs with the real world. When they are unable to integrate the violence in these shows because they can’t follow the plot, they are much more likely to become anxious. This is particularly problematic because the children reported that they prefer realistic programs, which they equate with fun and excitement. Similar studies have since been conducted in the 90s with results corroborating Van der Voort’s findings.

As Jacques de Guise reported in 2002, the younger the child, the less likely he or she will be able to identify violent content as violence.

In 1994, researchers Fred Molitor and Ken Hirsch found that children are more likely to tolerate aggressive behaviour in the real world if they first watch TV shows or films that contain violent content.

George Gerbner conducted the longest running study of television violence. His seminal research suggests that heavy TV viewers tend to perceive the world in ways that are consistent with the images on TV. As viewers’ perceptions of the world come to conform to the depictions they see on TV, they become more passive, more anxious, and more fearful. Gerbner called this the “Mean World Syndrome.” Gerbner’s research found that those who watch greater amounts of television are more likely to:

- ❖ overestimate their risk of being victimized by crime
- ❖ believe their neighbourhoods are unsafe
- ❖ believe “fear of crime is a very serious personal problem”
- ❖ assume the crime rate is increasing, even when it is not

André Gosselin, Jacques de Guise and Guy Paquette decided to test Gerbner’s theory in the Canadian context in 1997. They surveyed 360 university students, and found that heavy television viewers are more likely to believe the world is a more dangerous place. However, they also found heavy viewers are not actually more likely to be more afraid.

A number of studies since then suggest that media is only one of a number of variables that put children at risk of aggressive behaviour. For example, a Norwegian study that included 20 at-risk teenaged boys found that the lack of parental rules regulating what the boys watched was a more significant predictor of aggressive behaviour than the amount of media violence they watched. It also indicated that exposure to real world violence, together with exposure to media violence, created an “overload” of violent events. Boys who experienced this overload were more likely to use violent media images to create and consolidate their identities as members of an anti-social and marginalized group.

On the other hand, researchers report that parental attitudes towards media violence can mitigate the impact it has on children. Huesmann and Bacharach conclude, "Family attitudes and social class are stronger determinants of attitudes toward aggression than is the amount of exposure to TV, which is nevertheless a significant but weaker predictor."

VIII. CONCLUSION

The media play a significant role in forming and influencing people's attitudes and behaviour. It is the essential role of the media in increasing society's awareness of, and response to, child abuse and neglect. Of particular note was the part played by news and features that reported on specific child abuse cases, research and intervention strategies. Such media attention to child abuse has, at times, positively influenced public, professional and political responses to the circumstances in which children and young people find themselves. Understanding media influences, and how to use the media constructively, may thus be an essential tool for those who advocate for children, young people, and their families (see Brawley 1995).

In addition to news stories, feature articles, and investigative journalism, sporadic mass media education and prevention campaigns are launched. These campaigns usually endeavour to broaden community knowledge of child abuse and neglect, to influence people's attitudes towards children and young people, and to change behaviours that contribute to, or precipitate, the problem of child abuse and neglect in our communities.

Lindsey (1994: 163) maintains that: 'Media has a central role in mediating information and forming public opinion. The media casts an eye on events that few of us directly experience and renders remote happenings observable and meaningful.'

IX. REFERENCES

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