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CHILD DEVELOPMENT, AGGRESSION AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOR: CORRELATION WITH MEDIA CONSUMPTION

Ishaan Deepak Joshi¹

ABSTRACT

Forensic psychologists focus primarily on predicting violent acts and evaluating the risk variables linked to violent behaviour. Forensic psychology refers to utilizing psychological principles in the context of legal issues. The media, including cartoon programs, video games, and television programs, can contribute to the dissemination of violent content among individuals, especially younger generations. This research summarizes Clarks' 2009 article titled "*Cartoon Violence makes Children more Aggressive*". Its purpose is to establish a basis for examining how children's exposure to violent media content, including television, video games, music, and movies, may contribute to their acceptance of aggressive behaviour. This acceptance, in turn, can potentially lead to their engagement in unlawful activities.

KEYWORDS

Violent Behavior, Programming, Forensic Psychology, Child Development, Media, Gaming, Aggression, Stimuli.

INTRODUCTION

Clarks states that a 2008 study conducted by psychologists in the United States offers definitive scientific evidence of the correlation between children's exposure to television and their engagement in violent activity. During the psychologists' investigation, they administered an identical set of questions to a group of 95 young ladies, whose ages ranged from

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10 to 11.² An analysis was conducted on their TV episode choices, as well as the levels of violence, verbal aggressiveness, and indirect aggression depicted in the series. The questionnaire was disseminated to collect these data. Some of the programs that were examined were American Idol, Pokémon, Lost, Scooby-Doo, and Buffy the Vampire Slayer, among others.

The research findings indicate that television programs targeting children aged seven and upwards had much greater amounts of violent content compared to those intended for a broader audience. Furthermore, the survey revealed a frequency of 26 occurrences of aggressiveness per hour, whereas programs intended for the general audience had just five instances of hostility per hour, and shows considered unsuitable for individuals under the age of 14 had nine instances of violence per hour.³ The central argument of this study posits that the consumption of aggressive or violent media content serves as a catalyst for corresponding behaviour among all demographic subcategories.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE EMPIRICAL DATA ON THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE MEDIA AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

Considerable research has been conducted in the field of forensic psychology regarding the impact of exposure to violent media on the formation of aggressive behaviour, especially in young individuals. Most authorities in the field concur that "violent media" include various forms of entertainment, such as television shows, music, or video games, that have the potential to elicit feelings of shame in individuals, but the precise definition of the term may be susceptible to some degree of interpretation.⁴ The assertion that there is an undeniable correlation between exposure to violent media and aggressive behaviour in both

² Bartol, C., & Bartol, M. (2004). *Introduction to Forensic Psychology*. California: Sage.

³ Clarks, L. (2009). Cartoon violence 'makes children more aggressive. Web.

⁴ Ferguson, C. (2009). Media Violence Effects: Confirmed Truth or Just another X-File?. *Journal of forensic psychology practice*, 9(2), 103-126.

children and adults is strongly substantiated by empirical evidence from numerous researchers actively engaged in the field of forensic psychology. According to Anderson et al., the scientific discourse over the correlation between exposure to media violence and the escalation of aggressive behaviour is nearing its resolution.⁵

Nevertheless, certain scholars in the field hold a contrasting view, asserting that the empirical evidence regarding the correlation between violent media and audience involvement in criminal behaviour lacks sufficient quality and strength to justify the gravity of the study's conclusions.⁶

Nevertheless, the results of experiments examining the influence of violent media on the formation of aggressive behaviour in children, as well as the subsequent validation and rationalization of these behaviors, strongly support the claim that violent media is linked to criminal activities stemming from the aggressive behaviors that are developed.

The aforementioned findings are contained within the subsequent two phrases. A significant portion of research on the impact of violent media on aggressive behaviour focuses on the overall population. However, there is a subset of studies that explicitly investigates the impacts of media violence on different genders.

For example, Huesmann presents research indicating that the portrayal of violence on television, in movies, and in video games raises the likelihood of aggressive behaviour in both adults and young viewers, posing a significant risk to public health. His investigation provides visible evidence of this. Conversely, Macrae argues that scientists maintain that being exposed to violent media, such as watching violent

⁵ Bartholow, D., & Anderson, C. (2002). Effects of violent video games on aggressive behavior: Potential sex differences. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38(3), 283–290.

⁶ Schofield, J. (2007). Media violence is almost as bad as smoking. Web.

TV shows or playing violent video games, can lead to heightened aggression and subsequent violent actions in boys. When doing empirical data collection, it is imperative to obtain quantifiable data on the variables under investigation.

Measuring the magnitude of violence is a challenging undertaking, which is regrettable.⁷ Two discrete categories of research have been carried out to examine the potential connections between exposure to violent content in the media and the formation of aggressive inclinations in both children and adults. These investigations encompass both correlational and experimental methodologies simultaneously. Due to the ethical and practical difficulties associated with studying violence, the academic community has predominantly substituted the conventional notion of crime with the term aggression.

Consequently, the components that contribute to aggressive behaviors are also considered to have a strong association with the qualities that result in violence and, subsequently, criminal activity. In correlational study, attempts are made to quantify and describe aggressive behaviors, emotions, thoughts, and exposure to violent media, such as television shows, music, and video games. Instances of such media encompass.

The objective of the controlled experiment is to examine the correlation between different durations of exposure to violent media and an individual's inclination to display aggressive behaviour in the future, particularly towards other individuals. This can manifest not solely through behaviors such as physical punishment or assault, but also through thoughts and emotions directed against the victim.

Given this information, establishing a clear correlation between violent media and aggressive conduct is akin to establishing a direct link

⁷ Macrae, F. 2012. Violent films, video games and TV shows do make boys aggressive. Web.

between violent media and the involvement of mentally ill individuals in criminal activities. The psychological cognitive theories and social modelling theories offer an explanation for the correlation that may be established between media portrayals of criminal behaviour and the manifestation of violent behaviors in the general population. The comprehensive framework of aggression can elucidate this association. Aggressive conduct arises when specific environmental inputs trigger cognitive scripts, as stated by the paradigm. This is the operational mechanism of the paradigm.

Hence, it can be contended that the exposure to violent stimuli, such as those seen in violent video games and specific TV programs, including cartoons, might play a role in triggering aggressive behavioral patterns in younger individuals. The presence of violent content in video games and specific TV shows, especially cartoons, is the reason for this.

This claim is substantiated by supplementary evidence presented by Ferguson, indicating that as the level of exposure to violent stimuli increases, there is a corresponding increase in the formation of aggressive mental patterns, as well as a higher frequency of activation of these patterns when encountering potentially hostile contextual stimuli. Essentially, this demonstrates that being exposed to more violent stimuli is likely to lead to a predisposition to interpret unclear stimuli as hostile and to view damaging stimuli as intentional.

Although the situation does not warrant such a response, it incites people to react with hate against you. This paradigm is distinguished by its inherent passivity. Due to the impact of biological, familial, personality, and genetic traits, it is hypothesized that persons who are exposed to violent media are more susceptible to participating in violent acts and criminal behaviour compared to individuals who are not exposed to such media. This is the situation when comparing persons who are not exposed to such media. From this perspective, it is plausible to theorize

that individuals can initially lack the inclination to participate in acts of violence due to a lack of motivation. Conversely, individuals who are consistently exposed to violent information in the media ultimately acquire aggressive or violent tendencies.

This theory has been confirmed and endorsed by several academic inquiries. Clarks argues that young individuals are equally inclined to identify with and imitate specific fantasy characters, just as they do with varied cinema characters. This argument is particularly compelling when one considers that cartoon shows, such as Scooby-Doo, display a higher level of violence compared to other programming intended for family consumption. Bartholow and Anderson's research reveals that American children often spend an average of three to four hours each day watching television.

Moreover, a considerable portion of the time allocated by children and teenagers is devoted to engaging in video games, which often showcase a notable quantity of violent or otherwise unsettling material. The emergence of this new research is causing significant alarm, particularly considering the prevalence of video gaming consoles in 83% of families with children.⁸

A study conducted in 2004 revealed that children and adolescents spend an average of 49 minutes per day playing video games. Furthermore, a notable 52 percent of youngsters aged 8 to 18 engaged in video game activities on a daily basis. Academic research has revealed that children between the ages of 8 and 10 have a strong inclination towards playing video games, with an average daily playtime of 65 minutes.

Conversely, American teenagers aged 15 to 18 dedicate an average of 33 minutes per day engaging in video game-related activities. Remarkably,

⁸ Huesmann, R. (2007). The impact of electronic violence: scientific theory and research. *Journal of adolescent health*, 41(6), 6-13.

a significant proportion of these games can be recognized by the excessive levels of violence they exhibit. Specifically, Huesmann asserts that 94% of video games that receive a rating suitable for teenagers from the video game industry contain violent content. Furthermore, independent researchers, unrelated to Huesmann or the video game industry, suggest that the real percentage might be even greater.

Meta-analyses yield the most accurate estimations of the effects of violent media on aggressive behaviour in individuals. The investigation conducted by Paik and Comstock serves as a prime example of a meta-analysis study. The authors examined the impact sizes obtained from 217 research published from 1957 to 1990.

Following a thorough study of a set of randomized experiments, the researchers reached the definitive conclusion that the effect size was $r=0.38$, and the sample size amounted to $N=432$. N is the overall number of distinct trials, whereas r denotes the mean value of the effect size. N represents the total number of experiments. A comprehensive analysis of prior studies investigating the determinants of escalated aggressive conduct following exposure to violent media was conducted in order to authenticate their findings.

Consistent with previous research, this study revealed a mean correlation coefficient of 0.32, based on a sample size of $N=71$ people. Furthermore, the meta-analysis study included an assessment of numerous longitudinal and cross-sectional surveys conducted from 1957 to 1990. The researchers utilized a sample size of $N = 410$ in these surveys, and they determined that the average r -value was 0.19. Alternatively, a comparative analysis was conducted on studies that examined the impact of exposure to violent media on participants' levels of aggressive behaviour during physical confrontations.

When the value of N was set to 200, the previously calculated value of r , which was 0.19, was observed to remain constant. The average connection between exposure to violent media content and engaging in violent behaviour was shown to be 0.13. The results of multiple trials that have undergone meta-analysis are highly significant in determining the impact of media violence on the portrayal of violent behaviour and aggressive behaviour in humans. However, the "drawer effect" imposes certain constraints on the accuracy of these judgements. Nevertheless, it is feasible to circumvent this constraint by approximating the quantity of studies that yield 'null effects' of sufficient magnitude to impact the outcomes of a meta-analysis experiment.

Huesmann argues that, according to the study conducted by Paik and Comstock, there would have to be nearly 500,000 instances of insignificant effects hidden away in file cabinets in order to alter the overarching conclusion that there is a robust positive association between exposure to media violence and aggressive behaviour. Huesmann presents this thesis as a response to the discovery that there is a significant and direct relationship between being exposed to media violence and displaying aggressive behaviour.

The meta-analysis conducted by Paik and Comstock provides a dependable assessment of the correlation between media and criminal activity. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that individuals who are exposed to violent actions on television or in films are more prone to engaging in violent activities themselves following such exposure. In the conventional paradigm, individuals are chosen through random selection and exposed to either a violent or nonviolent short film or television programme, or provided with the choice to engage in either a violent or nonviolent computer game. Subsequently, their conduct is monitored while they are provided with the chance to exhibit aggressive inclinations.

The potential for such an encounter to lead to subsequent acts of violence exerts a more pronounced impact, especially on younger individuals such as children and teenagers. Regarding youngsters, a possible approach for displaying aggressive tendencies is for them to engage in play activities with other children that involve simulating conflicts. This provides children with the chance to cause physical harm to their peers by engaging in aggressive behaviour.

CONCLUSION

There are claims that various forms of media, including video games, television shows, movies, and animated cartoons, contribute to an increase in aggressive behaviour among young people and individuals in general. The issue at hand pertains to whether alternative forms of media provide perspectives that are comparable to these. Clarks has indicated that study on the impact of violent cartoon video games has shown that these games have similar effects on children's aggressive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors as violent television programming.

Concerning the empirical evidence regarding the correlation between media violence and aggressive behaviors in viewers, specifically in animated programs such as cartoons, one can argue that the media holds the belief that violence in animated programs has less significant consequences compared to violence in non-animated programs. The reason for this is that violence in animated programming is usually shown in a less realistic manner compared to non-animated programs.

It is plausible that this elucidates why the subsequent classification of television programs exhibits a diminished degree of violence in contrast to the preceding classification of television programming. Clarks' thesis about the link between media influence and aggressive behaviour and violence in youngsters allows for accurate conclusions and

generalizations when compared to the empirical evidence discussed before.

Hence, one could contend that if the media presents violence as a form of fantasy, it may incentivize young individuals to actively pursue additional violent content in order to participate in their gaming dreams. This is the notion proposed by the generic aggressiveness model. This kind of fantasy can have a very detrimental impact as it has the potential to influence viewers and players to partake in aggressive or violent actions, which are likely to be influenced by the violent concepts they have been exposed to in the media. This genre of fiction can also incite viewers to partake in aggressive or violent conduct.