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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A STUDY OF THE BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS FACED BY THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN WATCHING TELEVISION VIOLENCE AS RATED BY THEIR MOTHER

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ABSTRACT

Basic learning for children comes from both, experience and social learning or role modelling. Therefore, when children, especially young children, see violence on television, they have a difficult time differentiating between what is real and what is make-believe, and tend to emulate or copy what they are seeing. Children seeing excessive violence on TV are more likely to be argumentative, as they have dispensed with the slow caution of inhibitors. These children who watch media violence in abundance have different approach to solve their issues, rather than using more peaceful methods of conflict resolution are more likely to use aggressive strategies. They tend to be more reactive rather than proactive, relying on more knee jerk reaction to solve frustration and finally they appear to be more fearful of social relationship, which make them bite before they can be bitten. The present study is an attempt to investigate the relation between watching violence on TV and the behavioural problems of the primary schools going children as rated by their mothers. The sample consists total 120 children of Delhi NCR and Himachal Pradesh. Along with the personal data sheet, the behavioural check list prepared by K.Aradhana and V.V. Bharathi, (2000) were used. The result showed that viewing violence on TV caused many problems related to emotions, health, fear, aggressiveness, restlessness and even decline in their academic performance. It also showed that greater the time children watched violence on TV, greater was the intensity of their problem.

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INTRODUCTION

While violence is not new to the human race, it is an increasing problem in modern society. With greater access to firearms and explosives, the scope and efficiency of violent behaviour has had serious consequences. We need only look at recent school shootings (case happened in United States of America) and the escalating youth and children homicide, the whole act was a result of viewing TV violence and getting triggered with the same. Virtually since the dawn of TV, parents, educators and mental health professionals and legislators have been concerned more about the content of the TV Programs. The evidence for all this possible side effect has led to call for strict controls on depicting violence in TV programs. Up until the age seven or eight, children have great difficulty distinguishing fantasy from reality, and their ability to comprehend nuances of behaviour, motivation, or moral complexity is limited

This special vulnerability of children necessities increased vigilance to protect them from potentially negative influence. The debate over media violence has eluded definite answer over the question whether or not media violence actually causes real life violence? But increasingly it focuses on "culture of violence", and normalization of aggression and lack of empathy in our society. Researchers have come across three basic problems with respect of viewing violence on TV. Children become less sensitive to the pain and sufferings of others; they may become more fearful to the world around them; and they may be more likely to behave in an aggressive and harmful way towards others. Exposure to media violence leads children to see violence as a normal response to stress and as an acceptable mean of resolving conflict. The fifteen year of consistent research by the General Scientific Advisory Committee and the report of the National Institute of Mental Health (1982) have identified the major effect of TV violence on children. Other research findings on the relationship between media violence and the real world aggression showed that children who consume high levels of media violence were more likely to be aggressive in the real world also.

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Exposure to violence is associated with increased heartbeats, blood pressure and respiration rate. A study conducted by the Kaiser-family foundation in 2003 found out that nearly half of the parents with children between 4-6 years report that children imitated aggressive behaviour from T.V. Johnson's study in 2002 reported that children who watched one to three hours of TV each day (preferable violence programs) were more likely to be involved in assaults and fights than those who watched less TV and less violence. This is what Anna Freud and others called the premature experiencing of life, before they reach those stages in their real life. If children are exposed to violence, romance, social justice and other issues at an age, when these are not comprehensible to them. Such content may be counterproductive by giving children a distorted picture of social reality. Hence there is a need to look into these aspects by parents, educators and TV Broadcasting professionals.

Review of Literature: There are a number of studies that have linked the viewing of TV violence with aggressive behaviour. One of the earliest and most well-known studies was conducted by Bandura in 1963. He had a group of children view a TV video of a model who kicked and punished an inflated plastic doll. After the viewing, the children were placed in a playroom with other children who had not seen the video. Those that saw the video displayed significantly more aggressive behaviour than those who didn't. A second study (Liebert & Baron, 1972) confirmed Bandura's findings. This study investigated children's willingness to hurt other children after viewing aggressive TV programs. Two groups of children watched a different TV program, one of which had aggressive content and one of which was neutral. Those who saw the aggressive program (The Untouchables) were found to be more willing to hurt another child after viewing the program than those who watched the neutral program (a track race). Several other studies found that the same held true for viewing violent cartoons, and additionally that children were less likely to share their toys after viewing violent cartoons. One of the most convincing studies compared the incidence of aggressive behaviour among children both before and two years after TV was introduced into the Canadian community where they resided (Joy, Kimball, Zabrack, 1986; Williams, 1986). There was a significant increase in both physical and verbal aggression after two years of viewing TV. What's important about this study is that it was easier to isolate the variable being tested, which was the effect of TV, since television had never previously been available to these children.

Other studies have focused more on the question as to whether all children have the same reactions to TV violence. For a long time, it was believed that only certain types of children and adolescents were adversely affected by violent programming. These are termed high trait aggressive individuals, or those whose personalities are characterized by aggressive tendencies. These children seem to be aroused (or excited) by aggression. As such, they seek out aggressive television programming more than other children and are at the same time more prone to be adversely effected by viewing it. In fact, high aggression children view action and adventure TV programming four times as often as low aggression children (Singer & Singer, 1986). These same children have also been found to be more prone to aggressive behaviour toward other kids as a result of viewing televised

violence. Most researchers agree that aggressive children and adolescents are more prone to the negative effects of TV violence than those who are not aggressive. However, many studies such as the Canadian study show that all children are susceptible to harm from exposure to TV violence. Moreover, the harm is much greater for children who are preadolescent, especially those younger than eight years of age. This is because children younger than eight still may have some difficulty in separating fantasy from reality. Further, these children have not yet developed enough abstract thinking to be able to evaluate what they see and measure it against reality. They are more in what I call the "sponge" stage. That is, they tend to soak up what they are exposed to rather than analyze and evaluate their exposure and experience. One study was able to make an important link between heavy viewing of TV violence by 8-year-olds with serious criminal behaviour by the same group at the age of 30 (Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz & Walder, 1984). At the same time, this correlation did not hold true for 18-year-olds who preferred TV violence, i.e., and the 18-year-old group did not display any significant increase in aggressive behaviour resulting from viewing violent programming. This study verifies that younger children are likely to experience more profound negative effects from viewing TV violence, especially a steady diet of it, than are older teens who have some capacity for evaluating what they see and for distinguishing fantasy from reality.

The final finding has done to study the effects of chronic exposure to TV violence as opposed to the occasional viewing. According to a study conducted by Bushman (1998), it has been found that when we view violent programming, we store in memory a perceptual and cognitive representation of the event. That means we can draw it up in our thoughts, and also visually. Then when we are in a real situation that is similar to the memory we have stored (the violent vignette we saw on TV), that memory is activated and the memory or script becomes available to us. This fits in with the research on 8 year-old-boys. At a much later age, the violent vignettes they had stored in their memories were pulled up and activated when they were adults and influenced their behaviour. They were in fact more aggressive. Bushman's research takes this a step further. He believes that chronic exposure to TV violence results in chronic accessibility to these stored memories, which he calls "primed aggressive constructs." In other words, the more exposure to TV violence, and the younger the child, the more harm done.

Impact of Media Violence: Research has associated exposure to media violence with a variety of physical and mental health problems for children and adolescents, including aggressive and violent behaviour, bullying, and desensitization to violence, fear, depression, nightmares, and sleep disturbances. Consistent and significant associations between media exposure and increases in aggression and violence have been found in American and cross-cultural studies; in field experiments, laboratory experiments, cross-sectional studies, and longitudinal studies; and with children, adolescents, and young adults. The new Centre on Media and Child Health at Harvard lists more than 2000 research reports. The strength of the association between media violence and aggressive behaviour found in meta-analyses is greater than the association between calcium intake and bone mass, lead ingestion and lower IQ, and condom nonuser and

sexually acquired HIV infection, and is nearly as strong as the association between cigarette smoking and lung cancer—associations that clinicians accept and on which preventive medicine is based without question. Children are influenced by media—they learn by observing, imitating, and adopting behaviours. Several different psychological and physiologic processes underlie media-violence effects on aggressive attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and emotions, and these processes are well understood. Furthermore, because children younger than 8 years cannot discriminate between fantasy and reality, they may be especially vulnerable to some of these learning processes and may, thereby, be more influenced by media violence. However, even older adolescents and young adults are adversely affected by consumption of media violence, demonstrating that the ability to discriminate between fantasy and reality does not inoculate one from the effects of media violence.

Some research has indicated that the context in which media violence is portrayed and consumed can make the difference between learning about violence and learning to be violent. Plays such as *Macbeth* and films such as *Saving Private Ryan* treat violence as what it is—a human behaviour that causes suffering, loss, and sadness to victims and perpetrators. In this context, with helpful adult guidance on the real costs and consequences of violence, appropriately mature adolescent viewers can learn the danger and harm of violence by vicariously experiencing its outcomes. Unfortunately, most entertainment violence is used for immediate visceral thrills without portraying any human cost and is consumed by adolescents or children without adult guidance or discussion. Furthermore, even if realistic portrayals of harmful consequences of violence reduce the typical immediate short-term aggression-enhancement effect, there still exists the potential long-term harm of emotional desensitization to violent images. Other studies have shown that the more realistically violence is portrayed, the greater the likelihood that it will be tolerated and learned. Titillating violence in sexual contexts and comic violence are particularly dangerous, because they associate positive feelings with hurting others. One study of nearly 32000 teenagers in 8 different countries, for example, revealed that heavy television-viewing was associated with bullying.

In addition to modelling violent behaviour, entertainment media inflate the prevalence of violence in the world, cultivating in viewers the “mean-world” syndrome, a perception of the world as a dangerous place. Fear of being the victim of violence is a strong motivation for some young people to carry a weapon, to be more aggressive, and to “get them before they get me.” For some children, exposure to media violence can lead to anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, sleep disturbances and nightmares, and/or social isolation. Some have defended media violence as an outlet for vicariously releasing hostility in the safety of virtual reality. However, research that has tested this “catharsis hypothesis” revealed that after experiencing media violence, children and young adults behave more aggressively, not less. Numerous studies have shown that an insidious and potent effect of media violence is to desensitize all of us to real-life violence. Interactive media, such as video games and the Internet, are relatively new media forms with even greater potential for positive and negative effects on children's physical and mental health. Exposure online to violent scenes has been associated with increased aggressive

behaviour. Studies of these rapidly growing and ever-more-sophisticated types of media have indicated that the effects of child-initiated virtual violence may be even more profound than those of passive media such as television. In many games, the child or teenager is “embedded” in the game and uses a “joystick” (handheld controller) that enhances both the experience and the aggressive feelings. Three recent studies directly compared the effects of interactive (video games) and passive (television and movies) media violence on aggression and violence; in all 3 cases, the new interactive-media-violence effect was larger. Correlational and experimental studies have revealed that violent video games lead to increases in aggressive behaviour and aggressive thinking and decreases in prosocial behaviour. Recent longitudinal studies designed to isolate long-term violent video-game effects on American and Japanese school-aged children and adolescents have revealed that in as little as 3 months, high exposure to violent video games increased physical aggression. Other recent longitudinal studies in Germany and Finland have revealed similar effects across 2 years. On the other hand, there is also good evidence that prosocial video games can increase prosocial attitudes and behaviour.

Children learn best by observing behaviour and then trying it. The consequences of their behavioural attempts influence whether they repeat the behaviour. All violent media can teach specific violent behaviours, the circumstances when such behaviours seem appropriate and useful, and attitudes and beliefs about such behaviour. In this way, behavioural scripts are learned and stored in memory. Video games provide an ideal environment in which to learn violence and use many of the strategies that are most effective for learning. They place the player in the role of the aggressor and reward him or her for successful violent behaviour. Rather than merely observing only part of a violent interaction (such as occurs in television violence), video games allow the player to rehearse an entire behavioural script, from provocation, to choosing to respond violently, to resolution of the conflict. Children and adolescents want to play them repeatedly and for long periods of time to improve their scores and advance to higher levels. Repetition increases their effect. In addition, some youth demonstrate pathologic patterns of video-game play, similar to addictions, in which game play disrupts healthy functioning. Advances in the measurement of brain function have been applied to the study of media violence. Several studies have linked media-violence exposure to decreases in prefrontal cortex activity associated with executive control over impulsive behaviour.

TV Viewing and Poor School Performance: Only a handful of programs teach children important skills such as math, reading, science or problem solving. Most of the shows on television, including cartoons, are noneducational. More time spent watching these shows is linked with poorer school performance overall and decreased scores on standardized tests. This makes sense when you consider that more time spent in front of a television means less time spent on homework or having stimulating interactions with adults or other children. In addition, late-night TV watching tires kids out so that they can't pay attention in school. Also, television hands kids all the answers, promoting passive learning and short attention spans. As a result, kids have difficulty concentrating and working hard to solve a problem.

Objective of Study: The aim of the study is to find out the relation between the violence watched on TV and the behavioural problems of the primary school children, and the problem they face in their academics.

Hypotheses

- It is assumed that the primary school children who watched violence on TV have less behavioural problems.
- It is assumed that the primary school children who watched TV violence for 2-3 hours will face more behavioural problems.
- It is assumed that the primary school children who watched TV violence for more than 3 hours will face most of the behavioural problems.

METHODOLOGY

Sample: The sample for this study constituted total 120 children studying in fourth and fifth standard in the school. The sample included the mothers of these children too. **Procedure:** the personal data sheet was prepared to collect the information regarding the age, academic graph of the children. Random sampling method of collection of sample was applied in order to collect the sample. Rapport with the children was established first; afterwards they were interviewed at school. The behaviour check list was given to each mother and their academic record was also collected from their teachers.

Tools

- The personal data sheet including age, standard, address, duration of watching TV and their academic records from their teachers and mothers.
- The Behavioural Check list (2000) prepared by K. Anuradha and V.V. Bharathi was used. The behavioural check list consists of six groups out of which academic problems was selected and given for ratings. These are total 66 items while the academic items consists total 6 items (as mentioned in the result).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the present study are as follows:

The above table shows the relation between the total hours children watch TV violence and the problems faced by them. About 50% children who watch violence on TV actively avoids school while 75% avoided school when they watched violence for more than 3 hours. With an increase in the number of watching media violence the percentage of children avoiding school increases gradually. Those children who watch TV violence for 2 hours per day they tend to skip school less than those who watch more than 3 hours a day. Thus, it is clearly seen that there is an increase of children who tend to avoid school when they watch more TV. The difficulties related to the children with respect to studied are also prominent when it is related to media violence. From the table above it is clear that when the children watch TV for 2 hours a day they have difficulty in reading, about 62.50% percent children face problem in reading but when the

duration of watching violence increases to 2-3 hours a day and moreover increases to more than 3 hours a day the percentage of the children who has difficulty in reading increases to 65% and 72.5% respectively. Another important aspect for academics is writing skill; with respect to media violence the ability of writing also gets affected. As we can note from the above table we can easily conclude that when the number of hours increases from 2 hours to 2-3 hours and finally more than 3 hours the percentage of children who has difficulty in writing increases from 52.5% to 65% and finally up to 70% respectively. Thus we can see an increase in the percentage of children who watch TV for the maximum number of hours and face difficulty in writing.

Apart from reading and writing, mathematical ability (commonly known as arithmetic) plays an important role in academic graph of a student. Mathematically ability is as very important as reading and writing. Children who watch TV violence for less than 2 hours a day they have problem in arithmetic on an average count of 57.2% but as the viewing of TV violence increases the percentage of children who have problem in solving mathematics problem also increases to 70%, but we can see a gradual decline in the percentage of children who watch TV violence for more than 3 hours a day. Being attentive in classroom, and following what has been taught is an important aspect of learning in class. With the results of the behavioural check list it is clearly evident that children who watch TV for more hours they tend to lag behind others. That means class's overall performance has also been affected by the number of TV viewing and the influence of media violence that has been regularly watched on TV. Those who watch TV Violence for less than 2 hours a day their percentage is 60 on the result of 100, and consecutively 70% and 78.5% have been found lagging behind in class and they watch TV violence for 2-3 hours and more than 3 hours respectively. Thus we can say that there is a huge influence of TV violence in class performance of children.

When children study in class, the next task is to remember whatever they studied in class. All the three stages of memory are affected with reference to the number of hours TV violence has been viewed by the children. Results from the table shows that 62.5% of children watch TV less than 2 hours a day have fewer problems when compared to the two other groups which have 62.5% and 70% of children and the number of hours are 2-3 hours and more than 3 hours respectively. The three stages of memory starting from encoding, storage and retrieval have been influenced by the number of hours TV Violence has been watched. When a child encodes something they try to connect it with whatever notions they have in their mind and whatever they know about it, they store it accordingly and retrieve it later on, retrieval is a proof of recalling the things which you have stored in previous time and it has been clear from the result from the table that number of hours affect the remembering the subject matter that has been studied. This means that watching TV violence is associated with many behavioural and academic problems. The more the violence watched on TV, the more problems they faced and thereby it affects their academic performances. Heavy TV violence is significantly associated with children's later aggressiveness, restlessness, and even belied in frightening world. The American media shows heroes justifiable using violence as a means to resolve conflict.

Table No.1: The percentage of behavioural problems of children of elementary school with reference to the time they watched TV violence per day

Sr.	Behavioural Problems	Below 2 hrs./day (40)	Between 2-3 hrs./day (40)	Above 3 hrs./day (40)
1	Actively avoids school	50%	62.50%	75%
2	Has difficulty in reading	62.50%	65%	72.50%
3	Has difficulty in writing	52.50%	65%	70%
4	Has difficulty in arithmetic	57.50%	70%	65%
5	Lags behind in class-room	60%	70%	78.50%
6	Can not remember subject matter	62.50%	62.50%	70%

The American Academy of Paediatrics website suggests that prolonged exposure to this type of violence increases acceptance of violence as a means of solving problems. The 1995 to 1997 AAP National Television Study showed that 61 percent of programming “portrayed interpersonal violence, much of it in an entertaining or glamorized manner.” Children are drawn to such programming when the violent act seems surreal and the lack of consequence attractive. This result in getting desensitized towards others and other’s problems. Media violence is also resulting in depression in children.

This could be easily seen from vary many researches that have been done in the past. According to “Children, Adolescents, and Television,” 37 percent of parents reported their child being frightened or upset because of a television news story. While children are watching television, they are being bombarded 60 percent of the time with various images of violent acts. Viewing hour after hour of violence increases the likelihood that a child will see the world as a dark and sinister place. The American Academy of Pediatrics calls this the “mean world” syndrome.

“Fear of being the victim of violence is a strong motivation for some young people to carry a weapon, to be more aggressive,” claims the American Academy of Pediatrics website. Violence portrayed on television is shaping the attitudes and manners of society. “More than 3,500 research studies have examined the association between media violence and violent behaviour; all but 18 have shown a positive relationship,” states “Media Violence.” Repeated exposure to violence on television increases the likelihood of responding to others with violence. The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that, every year, more than 150,000 adolescents are arrested for violent crimes.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study suggest that watching violence on TV has an adverse effect on children. It affects their emotional social and even intellectual development. TV violence leads to fantasy and day-dreaming and directly plays a role creating behavioural problems not only in children but also affecting the youth too. Hence it is the time to look into these aspects especially by parents and the Broadcasting professionals and educators. The behavioural problems are not ‘disease’ but are the symptoms are related, to emotional disturbance and environmental maladjustment.

Recommendations for the parents

- they will be exposed to a certain amount of this type of programming even if they don't see it at home. So we must adjust ourselves to that reality and figure out what can be done in view of that. Suggestions are the following:
- Try and restrict television time to one or two hours per day, however, keep in mind that quantity is not as much an issue as quality. In other words, it's what is watched more than how much is watched that is most important.
- Preview ahead programs that your kids want to watch and make an informed decision as to whether they are appropriate or not.
- Substitute your children's favorite videos for network programming. Most kids like to watch favorite videos repeatedly.
- Frankly discuss any violent content with your children. Be sure that they have a firm grasp on the difference between fantasy and reality. Focus on the suffering caused by violence as opposed to messages that portray violence as acceptable. Research has found that one of the best ways of avoiding the negative effects of TV violence on children is to involve them in discussions about how children can be fooled or hurt by what they see on television.
- Encourage viewing of pro-social and educational TV programming. Some research suggests that viewing television programs that enhance learning, teach moral lessons, and model caring behavior (such as Mister Rogers' Neighborhood) can be a positive influence.
- Find alternatives to watching TV. Encourage reading, participation in sports or extracurricular activities, or simply more creative play that occurs when the TV is off
- Don't use television as a babysitter. This is sometimes hard, especially for working parents. It's quite tempting to sit kids in front of the TV so you can get dinner on the table, or attend to chores that need to be done, or even have a few moments to yourself. Be sure that the TV viewing is going to be a positive experience for your child no matter what the circumstances.
- Finally, and this is probably the most important one - you want to be sure that you have a close relationship with your child that is nurturing and caring. You must spend adequate positive time together. Also, take the time to teach the values you want them to internalize. Help them learn to solve problems and conflicts through nonviolent means and effective communication. Children who have strong attachments to their parents, and feel loved
- In trying to decide what steps to take to protect your children from the negative effects of TV violence, it is important to realize that in today's modern culture

and secure in those relationships, are much less likely to be negatively affected by television than those who feel isolated and neglected. Be sure that you are the primary influence in your child's development rather than the TV.

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