

Influence of aggressive media programs on student behaviour

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ABSTRACT

We aimed to study the influence of aggressive content in media on student behaviour. The study sample consisted of students with disciplinary problems from three secondary schools in Kulai District, Johor, Malaysia. A total of 127 students (92 Males and 35 Females) participated in the study. A set of questionnaires, divided into parts A and B, was used to collect data. Questions that have been stated to answer the questions. This questionnaire was adapted from the Attractive Media and The Effect on Audience Questionnaire developed by Heinichi, Molenda, Russel and Ely (1991). Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, Version 17.0 (SPSS). A pilot study was carried out initially. Main findings of our study were that: the influence of media programs with an aggressive content on students was moderate; and the effects on students' aggressive behaviour were also moderate. This study has important implications on the role of the media in re-evaluating the programs they broadcast for their aggressive content as such content can influence students to act aggressively.

Keywords: *Influence, Aggressive Media Programs, Student Behaviour*

Mass media (especially electronic media such as radio, television, e-mail, internet and so on) has changed the way humans think, interact, and gain information and entertainment. However, there are also many negative aspects to media, even more so, if misused and unregulated. Some such examples include depiction of very violent pictures and videos, data hacking, cybercrimes to name just a few. Mass media, and the internet, can even be a source of and a means for criminal activity among teenagers.

There is some consensus in the research community about the definition of aggressive behaviour. In general, aggressive behaviour can be defined as an act committed with the intent to injure oneself, another person, or the surrounding objects. Such aggressive behaviour must be accompanied by the intention to harm others and any act of aggression but not accompanied by the intent to harm others or objects is considered non-aggressive behaviour (Baron and Bryne, 1991).

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Received: March 30, 2020; Revision Received: May 15, 2020; Accepted: June 25, 2020

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In today's world, much of what is shown in media and watched the most has elements of violence and this has been suggested to play a role in contributing to an aggressive culture among adolescents (Mallick, 1996).

Eron (1982), in his study of violence in the media and its effects on students' aggressive behavior found that aggressive students are more likely to be influenced by violent scenes in the media than normal students. This, he said, was because students who have an aggressive attitude when they see violence, their aggressive behavior is easily triggered verbally and non-verbal. He further stated that aggressive students become more aggressive on watching violence because they are influenced by the models they watch.

Many studies have found that exposure to violent media in teenagers is perhaps why adolescents behave in an aggressive way. Pennel and Browne (1999), from their research, concluded that delinquent behaviour watched on television and video was a catalyst for increased aggressive behaviour in students. Violent portrayals in the media may also increase the stimuli and can cause one to lose control while in the real world (Anderson and Dill, 2000).

According to Orestes (2002), aggressive depictions in the media are major threats to the harmony of family life as they spread misunderstandings about sex, pornography, violence and extreme violence (deviating from cultural and religious norms). Orestes further noted the impact of irresponsible media on Asian adolescents to be: 20% of teenagers engaged in adultery, 24% watched pornography, 21% engaged in premarital sex and 35% were involved in crimes. All these place teenagers at a disadvantage and can lead to severe disciplinary problems in schools.

Dawi (2002) noted that movies, newspapers, magazines, novels, books, the internet, interactive media and television with violent content can cause problems in physical, verbal and non-verbal behavior, leading to antisocial and criminal acts among students. He reported that violent scenes and sexual acts watched can harden teenagers' minds. Furthermore, he said that the effects were perhaps most between the ages of 12 and 20, as they are easily influenced. This is also an age when children tend to use this information gathered from media in their day-to-day lives.

Students tend to imitate some of these actions and behaviours they watch and see (Ralph, 1999). This is made worse by the fact that often parents leave their children unattended and unsupervised in front of the television/internet, due to their own fatigue and work pressures (Rogers, 1980).

It is important to note in this context that formation of character in children can be influenced by what is viewed and easily found in the media. Hence it is possible that teenagers can use what they watch to learn new things and then practice it in their lives. Aggressive behaviour that is in line with adolescent instincts can be a key mechanism for the formation of adolescent attitudes and behaviours.

Adolescents are immature and their brains are still growing, so adolescence is a crucial phase in the formation of personality. Adolescents/high school students, if they are exposed to excessive violence can have trouble developing their identity (Ma'rof 2001). Adolescence is

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also a very susceptible time, hence the importance of protecting them from negative influences.

Aggressive behaviour among students in Malaysia has not been adequately studied. However, Samsudin (2001) noted that behavioural problems and aggression in students secondary to watching aggression in the media have long been prevalent in Malaysia. His research found that teenagers spend on average about 22 hours per week using media, and that they preferred the following content: violence, sensual, thrilling, war, murder, mystical and extreme sports. A particular effect of prolonged exposure to the media is that students try to mimic and perform violent scenes as seen in the media (Samsudin, 2001).

From the above discussion, it can be deduced that watching aggressive content on media (in any shape or form) can in turn make adolescents/high school students more aggressive in their own lives. Aggressive behavior among adolescent school children, particularly among those students in high schools who already have disciplinary problems is an important problem that should be addressed as a high priority. This should be addressed as early and as intensively as possible so as to not impact on students' academic and personal development. Various stake holders involved in imparting knowledge, managing these institutions and parents all need to work together to reduce aggression among adolescent school children.

Statement of the problem

Media plays an important role in the teaching and learning processes in schools. It also helps students access to vast sources of useful information. But media exposure can also have a downside - if it is misused it can have negative effects on the student's academic achievement and behaviour. As most of a student's exposure to media happens at home, parents have a crucial role in their children from being influenced by the media, especially negative and aggressive aspects/content.

The influence and effects of aggression depicted in the media on aggressive behaviour among high school students should be a matter of concern to school authorities, parents and the wider society. Bayley (1991) found that violent scenes presented to adolescent children prompted them to learn and practice violence and aggressive acts. He also noted that media was the main source of students learning about aggressive behaviour.

Baron and Bryne (1991) also demonstrated that watching aggressive programs resulted in increased tendency for acts of violence and other negative behaviours among adolescents. They went on to say that the media had great potential to change the attitudes and behaviour of young people as they are vulnerable. Similar findings were also noted by others: exposure to electronic and print media such as television, the internet, movies, magazines, newspapers and books can influence the aggressive behaviour of adolescents (Bushman and Heusman, 2001).

Our research explored various aspects of depiction of aggression in the media and its effects on school children: types of media that influence aggressive behaviour, the effects of media aggression on student behaviour, causes of students' interest in watching violence, attitudes of parents, and significant differences in academic achievement between Males and Females.

Research objectives

The specific objectives of this study were to identify:

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- a. To identify whether there are significant differences between the characteristics of media programs, the causes of aggressive media viewing and the effects of viewing media based on gender.
- b. To identify whether there was a relationship between the characteristics of media programs, the effects of aggressive media watching and parents' attitudes toward academic achievement.

Research questions

Based on the objectives stated, we tried to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between the characteristics of a media program, the causes of watching aggressive media and the effects of aggressive media by gender?
2. Is there a link between the characteristics of media programs, the effects of aggressive media watching and parents' attitudes toward academic achievement?

Hypotheses

- Ho₁: There is no significant difference between characteristics of media programs and gender.
- Ho₂: There is no significant difference between the sources of aggressive behaviour and gender-based media watching.
- Ho₃: There is no significant difference between the effects of aggression in the media and gender.
- Ho₄: There is no relationship between characteristics of media programs and academic achievement.
- Ho₅: There is no relationship between the effects of aggressive media and academic achievement.
- Ho₆: There is no relationship between parents' attitudes and academic achievement.

Research design

This was a descriptive study. Quantitative methods were used in this study. According to Majid (1998), research design is a specific technique and method for obtaining information needed to solve problems. Our study aimed to identify the influence of aggressive media and its effects on student behaviour. A set of questionnaires were used to collect data from participants. Questionnaires were distributed to selected respondents representing the population of secondary school students in Kulai District of Malaysia.

Sample of the Study

Webster (1985) stated that a sample is a subset of respondents selected from the larger population for the purpose of the study. Whereas, according to Portney and Walkin (1993), a sample is a subset of the population selected for study. The use of sample size according to Majid (1998) should be encouraged to exceed 30 units, as normal distribution is usually met when sample size exceeds 30 units and the increase in sample size is more representative of population and reduces sampling error.

According to Azizi (2007), sample size is important because it represents the strength of the results of the study. Respondents in this study were Males and Females. Around 127 been taken as sample which 92 were Males and the remaining 35 were Females. The mean score for respondents involved in this study were 15.3 years

Sampling method

Sample size determination for this study was based on the formula developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970):

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- S = $X^2 NP (1-P) \div d^2 (NP) + X^2 P (1-P)$ where
S = sample size
X² = Table of Squared Values for 1 degree of freedom at level of confidence required 0.05 (3.841)
N = population size
P = population ratio (estimated as 0.50 to give maximum sample size)
D = Degree of accuracy expressed as a ratio of 0.50
= $3.841 \times 150 \times 0.5 (1-0.5)$
 $0.05^2 \times (150-1) + 3.841 \times 0.5 (1-0.5)$
= 144
1.33
= 108.27 @ 108 sample people.

Instruments used in the Study

The instrument used in the study was a questionnaire. Questionnaires are the most effective way to obtain information from respondents (Tuckman, 1978), Cates (1980) argued that the use of questionnaire instruments was very effective when it was well-prepared and had consistent and reliable items. Questionnaire instruments are easy to administer, easy to distribute to respondents and easy to obtain accurate data. The construction of our study questionnaire was based on several assumptions proposed by Wolf (1988):

1. Respondents find it easy to read and understand the questionnaire items.
2. Respondents have sufficient knowledge or experience to answer the items in the questionnaire.
3. Respondents answer the questionnaire willingly and sincerely.

The instructions and questions given in the questionnaire were standard and similar to all the respondents surveyed. Respondents were able to respond better to standard question stimuli more effectively. This enhanced the accuracy and validity of the respondents' response to the questions asked. In this study, we used questionnaires based on a rating scale using a five point scale. The use of the five-point scale was for the following reasons:

1. Questionnaires are easier to administer once they are well built.
2. It is easier to get a lot of data.
3. The information obtained from respondents is easy to analyze.
4. Questionnaires save time, energy and costs.
5. Respondents are more likely and bold to respond to the aspect being studied.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 37 items that focused on aspects that researchers need to study based on the research questions that have been stated to answer the questions. This questionnaire was adapted from the Attractive Media and The Effect on Audience Questionnaire developed by Heinichi, Molenda, Russel and Ely (1991). The questionnaire was used for the purpose of looking at media programs that were attractive to students and for differences in attractiveness to watch media programs between male and female aggressive students. Likert scale was used to get feedback on aspects.

A pilot study

A pilot study is conducted before the questionnaires are used in the actual study. Pilot studies can help researchers obtain preliminary guidance on any part of the study that may be inaccurate or unsuccessful. According to Polit et al (2001), pilot studies refer to small or experimental versions of studies conducted in preparation for larger or major studies. It can

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also help the researcher identify any deficiencies in the research instrument and subsequently correct the weaknesses. The correlation strength of each variable can be classified based on a range of 0.0 to 1.0 Azizi *et al.* (2007)..

We conducted a pilot study to determine the validity and reliability of the study instruments. A total of twelve students from SMK Taman Universiti 2, Skudai were selected as a pilot study sample. On analysis of the data, we found the Cronbach's Alpha value to be 0.76. Therefore, it can be assumed that the validity and reliability of the questionnaire items are strong.

RESULTS

Table 1 : T-test Analysis to Show Significant Differences Some Characteristics of Aggressive Media Programs By Gender

Gender	N	Min	Difference Min	F	Standard deviation	t	Df	Sig.	Sig (2-Tailed)
Males	92	3.77	1.06	14.24	0.49	9.10	125	0.001	0.001
Females	35	2.70			0.80	7.40	44.14		

Significant at the 0.05 level of significance

From Table 1 , the mean values of the Characteristics of aggressive media programs watched by males were higher (M = 3.77, SD = 0.49) and (t = 9.10, DF = 125, two tailed p = 0.001) than females (M = 2.70, SD = 0.80). Based on t-tests it was found that the significance value was 0.001 (p = 0.001 < P = 0.05). This indicates that the null hypothesis was rejected, in other words, there was a significant difference in the characteristics of the aggressive media programs that were watched between males and females.

Table 2 : T-test Analysis to Show Significant Differences Among the Causes of Watching Aggressive Media by gender

Gender	N	Min	Difference Min	F	Standard deviation	t	Df	Sig.	(2-Tailed)
Man	92	3.57	1.0	2.59	0.61	7.61	125	0.11	0.001
Girl	35	2.57			0.78	6.84	44.14		

Significant at the 0.05 level of significance

Table 2 shows the available mean higher in Males (M = 3.57, SD = 0.61) (t = 7.61, DF = 125, two tailed p = 0.001) than Females (M = 2.57, SD = 0.78). Based on the t-tests we found that the mean value was 0.11 (p = 0.11 > P = 0.05), this indicates that the null hypothesis was rejected. In other words, there was no significant difference in the sources of aggressive media viewing between male and female students.

Table 3 : T-test Analysis to Show Significant Differences Among the Effects of Aggressive Media By Gender

Gender	N	Min	Difference Min	F	Standard deviation	t	Df	Sig.	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Males	92	3.21	1.49	0.097	0.74	9.83	125	0.76	0.001
Females	35	1.73			0.83	9.32	55.60		0.001

Significant at the 0.05 level of significance

We found (Table 3) higher means for men (M = 3.21, SD = 0.74) (t = 9.83, DF = 125, two tailed p = 0.001) than women (M = 1.73, SD = 0.83). Based on t-test it was found that the significance value was 0.76 (p = 0.76 > P = 0.05). This indicates that the null hypothesis was

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rejected. In other words, there was no significant difference in the effects of watching aggressive media between male and female students.

Table 4 : Correlation Analysis of Correlation Tests showing Relation Significance Among the Characteristics of Aggressive Media Programs Against Academic achievement

		Features of media programs	Achievements
Achievements	Pearson correlation	-0.056	1
	Significant (2-tailed)	0.534	
	N	125	125
features of media programs	Pearson correlation	1	-0.056
	Significant (2-tailed)		0.534
	N	127	125

Significant at the 0.05 level of significance

We found (Table 4) that the value of r is -0.056. This indicates that the relationship between academic achievement and the characteristics of an aggressive-looking media program is negative or inverse and that the strength of the relationship is weak. Mean value $P = 0.534 > 0.05$. The null hypothesis is accepted - there is no significant relationship between achievement and characteristics of aggressive media programs.

Table 5 : Correlation Analysis of Significant Tests showing Relation Significance Among The Effects Of Aggressive Media On Achievement Academic

		Media effects	Achievements
Achievements	Pearson correlation	-0.201	1
	Significant (2-tailed)	0.025	
	N	125	125
Media effects	Pearson correlation	1	-0.201
	Significant (2-tailed)		0.025
	N	127	125

Significant at the 0.05 level of significance

Table 5 shows that the value of r is -0.201. This indicates that the relationship between academic achievement and aggressive media effects is negative or inverse and that the relationship strength is weak. Mean value $P = 0.025 < 0.05$. The null hypothesis is rejected - there is a significant relationship between achievement and the effects of aggressive media.

Table 6 : Correlation Analysis of Significant Tests showing Relation Significance of Parental Attitude towards Academic Achievement

		Parental attitude	Achievements
Achievements	Pearson correlation	-0.044	1
	Significant (2-tailed)	0.625	
	N	125	125
Parental attitude	Pearson correlation	1	-0.044
	Significant (2-tailed)		0.625
	N	127	125

Significant at the 0.05 level of significance

As can be seen from Table 6, we found that the value of r was -0.044. This indicates that the relationship between academic achievement and parental attitude” is negative or inversely proportional and the relationship strength is very weak. Mean value $P = 0.625 > 0.05$. The null

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hypothesis is accepted - there is no significant relationship between academic achievement of students and parental attitude.

DISCUSSION

We found that most students were interested in watching programs that contained action and/or violence. This is consistent with the findings of Jordan (1996) who stated that most students regularly watch programs that contain conflict.

According to Dolf (1998), one of the main reasons for interest in watching aggressive media content is to see the characters in the show. Viewers are very quick to decide which characters they like and which ones they don't like, and there is a risk of the viewer modeling what he watches.

Our results show that the item with the highest mean value was "The whole family watched the new movie despite having an aggressive element" with a mean of 3.21 and a standard deviation of 1.56. This proves that parents didn't care about the aggressive content and they continued to watch programs with their children. This could mean that either parents had no control over what was watched by their children or they had difficulties in disciplining their children. The failure of parents in disciplining children is often seen as one of the contributing factors in deviant behaviour. Anti-social behaviour is the result of inadequate, inappropriate or discipline and control of children's behaviour (Jacobvitz et al, 1996). Most antisocial behaviours of adolescents also result from parental style and family management failures (Jacobvitz et al, 1996; Vuchinich, 1992).

The findings of our study are in line with Bandura's Social Learning Theory which states that the age and gender of the model play a role in coping behaviour. Female students are found to be more interested in information-based programs because they are suited to the character of their gender with less aggressive behaviour and are afraid to watch aggressive content directly. The male students, however, are more interested in media programs that reflect the reality of their existence because it is more in line with their more aggressive and bold character to watch violent scenes broadcast live through the media.

We also found that overall, there was no significant relationship between program characteristics and students' academic achievement. This is because even though students watch aggressive content; they may not be so influenced by what they see as it can affect their learning. Students watch just for fun, get rid of boredom and reduce stress in them. This is in accordance with Barrie and Jill's view (1990) that adolescents who are in a bad mood are more likely to watch aggressive programs to vent their feelings. Teenagers who have no negative feelings or are in a good mood are less likely to watch aggressive media.

To conclude, our findings point to the need to address this important issue of secondary school students watching aggressive content via different media. Such violence depicted in the media can result in children behaving aggressively. School authorities, parents, the education system as a whole and the media all have key roles to play in addressing this problem. We call for further debate on this topic.

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Acknowledgements

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: A H Yahaya, B Rathakrishnan, DK Z Pg Hj Tuah & S George (2020). Influence of aggressive media programs on student behaviour. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(2), 1-12. DIP:18.01.001/20200802, DOI:10.25215/0802.001