

Research Paper

Boredom, Sadism, and Psychological Distress: A Correlational Study among Violent Web Series/Movies Viewers

Samuel Rukshshan Thevapriyan¹, Nikita Vishal Kasabe^{2*}

ABSTRACT

OTT encourages watching marathons of shows. The “one more episode” syndrome was cited by many viewers. Binge-watching was being used as a coping mechanism during and post-lockdown. This study aimed to identify the role of Boredom, Sadism, and Psychological Distress among violent web series/movie viewers. The sample consisted of 118 participants (M=53, F=65) aged 18-25. The data was collected online from all over India. The Short Boredom Proneness Scale (SBPS; Struk et al., 2017), Comprehensive Assessment of Sadistic Tendencies (CAST-12; Buckels, 2021), and Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10; Kessler et al., 2003) were used to assess boredom, sadism, and psychological distress in the participants. The sampling method used was a random and convenience sampling method. The data were analyzed using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation test and Independent Sample T-test. The study found that there is a low positive correlation between boredom and sadism, a moderate positive correlation between boredom and psychological distress, and no significant correlation between sadism and psychological distress among violent web series/movie viewers. The study also indicates that there is no significant gender difference in boredom, however, there is a substantial difference in sadism and psychological distress. Women showed more boredom proneness and psychological distress and men showed more sadistic tendencies.

Keywords: *Boredom Proneness, Sadism, Psychological Distress, and Violent Web Series/Movie Viewers*

To see others suffer does one good, to make others suffer even more. Without cruelty there is no festival and in punishment, there is so much that is festive! —Nietzsche (1887/1967, p. 67). Most people react to violence with unpleasant physiological arousal and psychological pain, but desensitization, which is described as “a reduction in emotion-related physiological responsiveness to genuine violence” (Carnagey et al., 2007, p. 490), can blunt this “default” response. According to studies, repeated exposure to media violence causes desensitization (Plante et al., 2020). For example, playing 20 minutes of a violent (vs. nonviolent) computer game lessened physiological reactivity to video clips representing real violence, according to one study (Carnagey et al., 2007). Other research

¹Assistant Professor of Psychology, Department of Science, Christ Academy Institute for Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, India

²Student, M.Sc. Psychology, Christ Academy Institute for Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: September 19, 2023; Revision Received: September 27, 2023; Accepted: September 30, 2023

Boredom, Sadism, and Psychological Distress: A Correlational Study among Violent Web Series/Movies Viewers

has discovered that when seeing violent photographs, those with high (vs. low) exposure to video game violence (VGV) exhibit desensitization at the brain level (Bailey et al., 2011; Engelhardt et al., 2011). Furthermore, after playing a violent (vs. nonviolent) video game, even persons with modest VGV exposure develop brain desensitization (Allen, Ash, & Anderson, 2021).

“Humans have been getting bored for centuries if not millennia. Now there’s a whole field to study the sensation, at a time when it may be more rampant than ever”- Margaret Talbot (Talbot, 2020). According to a study, each of the characterizations represents a different component of boredom proneness, and they all recreate boredom proneness relationships with other variables (Tam et al., 2021).

Perceived incapacity to cope, changes in emotional status, discomfort, communication of distress, and injury were recognized as five defining characteristics of people living with psychological distress in a review of the literature (Ridner, 2004). Massé discovered that experiences of living with psychological discomfort could be represented in six main idioms based on interviews with 179 Quebecers: demoralization and pessimism towards the future, anguish, and tension, self-depreciation, social disengagement and isolation, somatization and retreat within oneself (Massé, 2000).

At the country level, considerable disparities in growth trends and commercial efforts hide the worldwide trend in OTT TV service growth (Park, 2017). According to a study, there was an increase in viewing times and the majority looked forward to movies being released on OTT at the same time as they were in theatres. People were also fine with viewing movies on Netflix instead of going to the theatres. The association between perceived stress and emotional distress was significantly and positively mediated by boredom proneness (Yan et al., 2021).

Sadism is rarely associated with anything other than sexual fetishes or criminal activity nowadays (Fedoroff, 2008; Knight, 1999; Nitschke, Osterheider, & Mokros, 2009). Take, for example, the popularity of violent films, vicious sports, and cruel computer games, not to mention police and military brutality. These ordinary acts of cruelty point to a sort of sadism known as subclinical sadism, or simply everyday sadism. In contrast to sadism's scarcity of research, psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism, collectively known as the "Dark Triad" of personality, have a plethora of empirical studies (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Psychological discomfort is characterized by symptoms of depression (e.g., loss of interest; sadness; hopelessness) and anxiety (e.g., restlessness; feeling tense) (Mirowsky and Ross 2002). These symptoms may be linked to bodily symptoms (such as sleeplessness, headaches, and a lack of energy) that differ by culture (Kleinman 1991, Kirmayer 1989). Additional criteria have been used to define psychological distress, although there is no consensus on these criteria. The stress-distress model, in particular, holds that exposure to a stressful event that threatens physical or mental health, the inability to cope effectively with this stressor, and the emotional turmoil that results from this ineffective coping are the defining features of psychological distress (Horwitz 2007; Ridner, 2004). They argue that psychological anguish goes away when the stressor is removed or when a person learns to cope effectively with it (Ridner 2004). Although there is ample evidence that stress has an effect on distress, adding stress to the definition of distress ignores the occurrence of discomfort in the absence of stress (Drapeau, Marchand, & Beaulieu-Prévost, 2012).

Boredom, Sadism, and Psychological Distress: A Correlational Study among Violent Web Series/Movies Viewers

This research gives evidence that there was a significant amount of increase in the OTT platform audience during the covid-19 outbreak. There was also boredom caused among people as there was a phase where all had to be isolated and there was a lockdown. The fear of covid led to psychological distress among people. It was difficult for everyone to give each other support as each one of us had to fight a battle. The increase in boredom increased psychological distress among people. Sleep schedules of individuals were ruined due to the lockdown, and eating and internet usage time increased causing distress. The current study focuses on the relationship between boredom, sadism, and psychological distress among violent web series/movie viewers.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of the study included measuring and finding the relationship between boredom, sadism, and psychological distress among violent web series/movie viewers. The study also assesses any gender differences.

Participants

The sample consisted of participants that were interested and regularly watched violent web series/movies. A sample of 118 was collected (M=53, F=65) from the age range of 21-30 was collected. The sample ranged in occupation from professional to unemployed. The sample was 11.01% professional, 7.62% semi-professional, 2.54% had arithmetic skill jobs, 0.84% unskilled workers, and 77.96% were unemployed. The participants were informed about their rights as a participant of confidentiality of the data and voluntary participation and were expected to either accept or decline to give their consent for participation.

Variables and Measures

The variables that were studied are boredom, sadism, and psychological distress. To measure boredom, an 8-item Short Boredom Proneness Scale (SBPS; Struk et al., 2015) was used. SBPS is a shorter version of the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS; Farmer and Sundberg, 1986) that measures boredom proneness. Response to the questions is on a 1-7 Likert scale where 1 represents "Strongly Disagree" and 7 represents "Strongly Agree". The scale is unidimensional in nature. The scale's Cronbach's alpha is 0.88, suggesting excellent internal consistency.

To measure sadistic personality, a 12-item Comprehensive Assessment of Sadistic Tendencies (CAST-12; Buckels, 2021) was used. It contains subscales for three distinct variants- Direct verbal sadism, Direct physical sadism, and Vicarious sadism. Response to the questions is on a 1-5 Likert scale where 1 represents "Strongly Disagree" and 5 represents "Strongly Agree". The scale's Cronbach's alpha is 0.87, direct verbal sadism's Cronbach's alpha is 0.77, direct physical sadism's Cronbach's alpha is 0.79, and vicarious sadism's Cronbach's alpha is 0.80, suggesting excellent internal consistency.

To measure psychological distress, a 10-item Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10; Kessler et al., 2003) was used. The test can be used as a quick screening tool to determine the severity of discomfort. The K10 scale consists of 10 questions, each with a five-level response scale, describing different emotional states, where 1 represents "None of the time", 2 represents "A little of the time", 3 represents "Some of the time", 4 represents "Most of the time", and 5 represents "All of the time". The scale's Cronbach's alpha is 0.93, suggesting excellent internal consistency.

Boredom, Sadism, and Psychological Distress: A Correlational Study among Violent Web Series/Movies Viewers

Data collection and analysis

A Google form was shared with the participants through LinkedIn using convenient and snowball random sampling. The Google form consisted of the informed consent form, socio-demographic data, and all three questionnaires. The responses were collected. Once the data was collected through a Google form, the scoring and interpretation were done according to the norms of the scales. The Shapiro-Wilks normality testing, Descriptive Statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, Independent sample t-test, Microsoft Excel, and SPSS v 20 were used for data analysis. The hypothesis was tested and a conclusion was drawn.

RESULTS

A list of genres was presented to the participants and was asked to select the genre they enjoyed, the responses included more than one genre. The responses included 52.54% action, 36.44% animation, 47.34% comedy, 61.86% crime, 46.61% drama, 16.94% experimental, 49.15% fantasy, 33.89% historical, 35.59% horror, 59.32 romance, 47.45% science fiction, 61.86% thriller, 21.18% western, and 11.86 other. 65.25% of participants responded that they enjoyed watching violent web series/movies, whereas 34.74% of participants responded that they do not enjoy watching violent web series/movies. The responses for hours a week of watching web series/movies by the participants were 2.54% watched 0 hours a week, 11.01% watched up to 1 hour a week, 22.03% watched for 2-4 hours a week, 36.44% watched for 5-7 hours a week, 10.16 watched for 8-10 hours a week, 7.62% watched for 11-15 hours a week, 4.23% watched for 16-20 hours a week, 4.23% watched for 21-30 hours a week, and 1.69% watched for 40+ hours a week. The responses of participants on the shows binge-watched in the past month were 26.27% watched none shows, 43.22% watched 1-2 shows, 25.42% watched 3-5 shows, 2.54% watched 6-10 shows, and 2.54% watched more than 10 shows. The response of the participants on hours of violent web series/movies enjoyed watching in a day was 79.66% watched for less than 3 hours and 20.33% watched for 3-16 hours.

Table 1: Shows the Correlation between Boredom and Sadism

Variable	n=118	Comprehensive Assessment of Sadistic Tendencies
	<u>Pearson Correlation</u>	0.205
Short Boredom Proneness Scale	P-value	0.013**

* $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$ (Significance)

The above table shows the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test results between the variables Boredom and Sadism indicate a low positive correlation and a significant relationship between boredom and sadism ($r=0.205$, $p=0.013$; $p < 0.05$). With these values, the alternative hypothesis was retained, that is, there is a low positive correlation between boredom and sadism among violent web series/movie viewers.

Table 2: Shows the Correlation between Boredom and Psychological Distress

Variable	n=118	Kessler Psychological Distress
	<u>Pearson Correlation</u>	0.656
Short Boredom Proneness Scale	P-value	0.000**

* $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$ (Significance)

Boredom, Sadism, and Psychological Distress: A Correlational Study among Violent Web Series/Movies Viewers

The above table shows the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test results between the variables Boredom and Psychological Distress indicate a moderate positive correlation and a significant relationship between boredom and psychological distress ($r=0.656$, $p=0.00$; $p<0.05$). With these values, the alternative hypothesis was retained, that is, there is a moderate positive correlation between boredom and psychological distress among violent web series/movie viewers.

Table 3: Shows the Correlation between Sadism and Psychological Distress

Variable	n=118	
	Pearson Correlation	
		Kessler Psychological Distress
		0.097
Comprehensive Assessment of Sadistic Tendencies	P-value	0.298

**p<0.01, **p<0.05 (Significance)*

The above table shows the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test results between the variables Sadism and Psychological Distress indicate that there is a low correlation and there is no significant correlation between sadism and psychological distress ($r=0.097$, $p=0.298$; $p<0.05$). With these values, the null hypothesis was retained, that is, there is no significant correlation between sadism and psychological distress among violent web series/movie viewers.

Table 4: Shows the Comparison of Dimensions of Boredom between Men and Women

Variable	Participants Group				t-value	P-value
	Men (n=53)		Women (n=65)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Short Boredom Proneness Scale	27.30	9.627	29.26	10.807	-1.029	0.306

**p<0.1, **p<0.05 (Significance)*

The above table shows the t-test analysis for boredom among Men and Women, the t-value was -1.029. The gender of Men ($M=27.30$, $SD=9.627$) and the gender of Women ($M=29.26$, $SD=10.807$) in the sample are significant to a 0.05 confidence level ($p=0.306$). Therefore $p>0.05$, the null hypothesis was retained which states that there is no significant gender difference in boredom among violent web series/movie viewers.

Table 5: Shows the Comparison of Dimensions of Sadism between Men and Women

Variable	Participants Group				t-value	P-value
	Men (n=53)		Women (n=65)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Short Boredom Proneness Scale	25.04	7.575	19.45	6.736	4.241	0.000

**p<0.1, **p<0.05 (Significance)*

The above table shows the t-test analysis for sadism among Men and Women, the t-value was 4.241. The gender of Men ($M=25.04$, $SD=7.57$) and the gender of Women ($M=19.45$, $SD=6.736$) in the sample is significant at a 0.05 confidence level ($p=0.000$). Therefore $p<0.05$, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, which states there is a significant gender difference in sadism among violent web series/movie viewers.

Boredom, Sadism, and Psychological Distress: A Correlational Study among Violent Web Series/Movies Viewers

Table 6: Shows the Comparison of Dimensions of Psychological Distress between Men and Women

Variable	Participants Group				t-value	P-value
	Men (n=53)		Women (n=65)			
Psychological Distress	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
	21.55	6.877	25.58	9.143	-2.659	0.009

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$ (Significance)

The above table shows the t-test analysis for psychological distress among Men and Women, the t-value was -2.659. The gender of Men (M=21.55, SD=6.877) and the gender of Women (M=25.58, SD=9.143) in the sample are significant at a 0.05 confidence level ($p=0.009$). Therefore $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, which states there is a significant gender difference in psychological distress among violent web series/movie viewers.

Implications of the Study

The results of the study were able to establish that the violent web series/movie viewing population between the ages of 18-25 years indicates that there is a correlation between boredom and sadism, sadism, and psychological distress among violent web series/movie viewers. The current study was not able to establish a significant correlation between sadism and psychological distress among violent web series/movie viewers.

The result of the study was able to establish that the violent web series/movie viewing population indicates that there is no significant gender difference in boredom. Although there is a significant gender difference found in sadism and psychological distress. Through the results, more boredom was observed in women than men, more sadism was observed in men than women, and more psychological distress was observed in women than men. The current study was not able to establish this with the current sample and this can be narrowed down to possible reasons such as unequal distribution of the sample overall and within the two groups, conducting the survey only through an online medium, and the effects of the pandemic and the lockdown.

This study found that the most preferred genres of movies enjoyed are comedy, crime, thriller, and romance. Also, it was found that most of the population enjoyed watching violent web series/movies, many participants watched violent web series/movies up to 5-7 hours a week, whereas in a day the participants watched violent web series/movies for less than 3 hours. The participants responded to having binge-watched 1-2 shows in the past month. Most of the participants in the study were unemployed which could be the reason for more hours of viewing time. A few responses given by the participants, when asked about their favorites, are- KGF, Money Heist, Stranger Things, Squid Game, All of Us are Dead, Mirzapur, Kashmir files, etc.

An important finding that was established in this study was the positive correlation between boredom and sadism, and boredom and psychological distress. Whilst these results are expected as an outcome of the usage of standardization of the tools, they imply a strong correlation between the variables, implying that the results could be different upon exploring the future with a truly representative sample of the Indian population. Hence this result can be considered an important addition to Indian psychology research as there is an extreme dearth of research in this area.

Boredom, Sadism, and Psychological Distress: A Correlational Study among Violent Web Series/Movies Viewers

Limitations of the Study

Despite all endeavours to carry out the research study scientifically and methodically, the research study has some inalienable limitations. These limitations primarily relate to issues of the method of conducting the questionnaires, and the emotional and physical changes owing to the post-global-wide lockdown during the pandemic. The study suffers from the following limitations: (a) Due to the only online conduction of the study, one can assume a lack of focused attention, interest, and dedication to respond, and there was no interaction with the participants relevant to the survey. (b) With the two years of long-term lockdown in the country, the emotional states of many people have been vulnerable to unforeseen and constantly changing circumstances due to the pandemic, which was not observed during the data collection as there was no interaction with the participants. (c) One of the scales used was the Comprehensive Assessment of Sadistic Tendencies (CAST-12; Buckels, 2021) which measures sadistic tendencies and the participants might tend to give a socially acceptable answer. (d) As the study was quantitative in nature the questionnaire consisted of self-report measures which measure their behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, or intentions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the aim of this study was to examine the relationship between boredom, sadism, and psychological distress among viewers of violent web series/movies, as well as any gender differences in these variables. According to the research, there is little evidence of a relationship between boredom and sadism or psychological suffering. Psychological discomfort and sadism did not significantly correlate with one another. The study also discovered no significant differences in boredom among viewers of violent movies and web series, but significant variations in sadism and psychological distress were reported. These findings underline the significance of taking into account any potential psychological harm that watching violent media may cause, particularly in terms of sadism and psychological distress. In order to offset any negative consequences of violent media consumption, more study is required to explore the underlying mechanisms that underlie these correlations and to create effective interventions.

REFERENCES

- Allen, J. J., Ash, S. M., & Anderson, C. A. (2021). Who finds media violence funny? Testing the effects of media violence exposure and dark personality traits. *Psychology of popular media*.
- Bailey, K., West, R., & Anderson, C. A. (2011). The association between chronic exposure to video game violence and affective picture processing: An ERP study. *Cognitive, Affective and Behavioral Neuroscience*, 11(2), 259–276. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13415-011-0029-y>.
- Buckels, E. E. (2021). Multifaceted assessment of sadistic tendencies. In P. K. Jonason (Ed.), *Shining light on the dark side of personality: Measurement properties and theoretical advances* (pp. 194–204). Hogrefe.
- Carnagey, N. L., Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2007). The effect of video game violence on physiological desensitization to real-life violence. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 43(3), 489–496.
- Drapeau, A., Marchand, A., & Beaulieu-Prévost, D. (2012). Epidemiology of psychological distress. *Mental illnesses-understanding, prediction and control*, 69(2), 105-106.
- Engelhardt, C. R., Bartholow, B. D., Kerr, G. T., & Bushman, B. J. (2011). This is your brain on violent video games: Neural desensitization to violence predicts increased

Boredom, Sadism, and Psychological Distress: A Correlational Study among Violent Web Series/Movies Viewers

- aggression following violent video game exposure. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47(5), 1033–1036. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.03.027>
- Farmer, R., & Sundberg, N. D. (1986). Boredom proneness: The development and correlates of a new scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 50, 4- 17.
- Fedoroff, J. P. (2008). Sadism, sadomasochism, sex, and violence. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 53, 637–646.
- Horwitz, A.V. 2007. "Distinguishing distress from disorder as psychological outcomes of stressful social arrangements." *Health no.* 11:273-289.
- Kessler RC, Barker PR, Colpe LJ, Epstein JF, Gfroerer JC, Hiripi E, et al. Screening for serious mental illness in the general population. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2003 Feb;60(2):184-9.
- Kirmayer, L.J. 1989. "Cultural variations in the response to psychiatric disorders and psychological distress." *Social Science and Medicine no.* 29:327-339.
- Kleinman, A. 1991. *Rethinking Psychiatry. From Cultural Category to Personal Experience*. New York: The Free Press.
- Knight, R. A. (1999). Validation of a typology for rapists. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 14, 303–329. doi:10.1177/088626099014003006.
- Massé R. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of psychological distress: methodological complementarity and ontological incommensurability. *Qual Health Res* 2000; 10: 411–23.
- Mirowsky, J., and C.E. Ross. 2002. "Selecting outcomes for the sociology of mental health: Issues of measurement and dimensionality." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior no.* 43:152-170.
- Nietzsche, F. (1967). *On the genealogy of morals: Second essay*. In W. Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale (Trans.), *On the genealogy of morals and ecce homo* (pp. 57–96). New York, NY: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1887).
- Nitschke, J., Osterheider, M., & Mokros, A. (2009). A cumulative scale of severe sexual sadism. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 21, 262–278. doi:10.1177/ 1079063209342074.
- Parikh, N. (2020). The emergence of OTT platforms during the pandemic and its future scope.
- Park, E. A. (2017). Why the networks can't beat Netflix: Speculations on the US OTT services market. *Digital Policy, Regulation and Governance*.
- Paulhus, D. L., & Williams, K. M. (2002). The Dark Triad of personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 36, 556–563. doi:10.1016/S0092-6566(02)00505-6.
- Plante, C., Anderson, C. A., Allen, J. J., Groves, C. L., & Gentile, D. A. (2020). *Game On! Sensible Answers about Video Games and Media Violence*. Zengen LLC Publishing.
- Ridner, S.H. 2004. "Psychological distress: concept analysis." *Journal of Advanced Nursing no.* 45:536-545.
- Struk, A., Carriere, J., James Allan Cheyne, & Danckert, J. (2015, October 15). *A Short Boredom Proneness Scale: Development and Psychometric Properties*. Research Gate; SAGE Publications.
- Talbot, M. (2020, August 20). What Does Boredom Do to Us—and for Us? *The New Yorker*; The New Yorker.
- Tam, K. Y., Van Tilburg, W. A., & Chan, C. S. (2021). What is boredom proneness? A comparison of three characterizations. *Journal of Personality*.

Boredom, Sadism, and Psychological Distress: A Correlational Study among Violent Web Series/Movies Viewers

Yan, L., Gan, Y., Ding, X., Wu, J., & Duan, H. (2021). The relationship between perceived stress and emotional distress during the COVID-19 outbreak: Effects of boredom proneness and coping style. *Journal of anxiety disorders*, 77, 102328.

Acknowledgment

First and foremost, I want to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Samuel Rukshshan Thevapriyan, who has been my mentor throughout this dissertation study and provided me with important guidance, ongoing support, and patience. My entire academic career and daily life have been inspired by their vast knowledge and real-world experience. Additionally, I want to thank my family for their love and support throughout the course of my study. Finally, I would want to express my sincere gratitude to every one of the respondents for taking the time to patiently answer my questionnaire.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Thevapriyan, S.R. & Kasabe, N.V. (2023). Boredom, Sadism, and Psychological Distress: A Correlational Study among Violent Web Series/Movies Viewers. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(3), 4364-4372. DIP:18.01.406.20231103, DOI:10.25215/1103.406