

Effects of Television Violence on Behaviour of Children

Dr. Jiwanjot Kaur¹, Dr. Sarwan Singh^{2*}

ABSTRACT

Today is the world of technology, in which media is prominent. Powerful images, words and sounds are designed to win the minds and hearts of viewers. In modern era it is difficult rather impossible to keep children away from the media, as they are growing up in the media saturated environment, for them mass media is present everywhere at school, at home, at shopping malls, in vehicles etc. Television is the one of most commonly used type of mass media. Not only children but adolescents and adults are spending most of their time in watching television. Adults can use their vast experience and education to differentiate between the reel and real. But this is not the case with children. They easily come into the trap of fantasy and try to imitate what they see on television without considering its consequences. Hence, it ascertains that television impact the attitude, behaviour and opinion of children. This paper explores the role of television on the behaviour of children and also presents the suggestions to limit this effect.

Keywords: *Television Violence, Behaviour, Attitude*

In twentieth century the social environment is notably change with the advent and saturation of mass media. Now-a-days mass media is playing a powerful role in the modification of behaviour of people. Television is a powerful and most commonly used tool of mass media. Television is making a major contribution in lives of people as it is mostly a medium of enjoyment, education, social and psychological change process. It is an important tool for imparting information and knowledge for most people young or old, as most information is delivered to masses via innovative technology. In comparative to other innovations television is most accessible media for most of people, including young children, when television is most favourite form of media (Burton, 1994).

Television viewing is an important activity in modern times. It is now available in almost all households as subtle and all pervasive. Television viewing is an effective instrument those which people can build self-esteem solidarity and confidence, as well as contribute to overall development of their family and society. Television viewing behaviour includes the type of programs watched by individual, time spent on watching these programs and their impact on individual life. Not only young children rather adolescents and adults spend lot of their leisure time in watching television. But the effect of television violence and anti-social behaviour is more on children than adults (Bushman & Huesmann, 2001). No one can

¹Math Mistress, Govt. Girls Sen. Sec. School, Rayya (Amritsar)

²Lecturer (Political Science), Govt. Girls Sen. Sec. School, Rayya (Amritsar)

*Corresponding Author

Received: March 17, 2025; Revision Received: March 28, 2025; Accepted: March 31, 2025

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escape from its influence in one way or other. But the educated and uneducated people are living in different area influences by television viewing.

Moreover, this is the age where television is known just because of entertainment in comparison to early days when Doordarshan was the only channel of mass communication, information and education. Many realistic shows like Buniyad and HumLog were produced and telecast during 1980's. But after the onslaught of satellite and cable television, even the information has become entertainment on the small screen. A new genre television shows was introduced by many channels in which nothing was realistic, whatever is being shown in these shows is the manufactured and dramatized reality having violence and abusive language too.

From the past few decades, television violence had been increased rapidly it had noted that 58% of all television programmes contain violence (Seppa, 1997). Television violence is a visual portrayal of acts of physical aggression by one human against another. Television violence does not include the off-screen poisonings that might be implied. Not only television shows are violent but cartoons are turning into violent. Popeye, Flinstone, Scooby Doo, Batman, Spiderman, Chota Bhem etc, all are depicting animated violence to the children. When children come in the contact of these violent television shows and cartoons, they try to imitate them. Young children are more likely to show behavioural problems if they watch television violence often and for long period. This exhibits itself in aggression, hyperactive behaviour, concentration problems and disobedience. They try to rehearse the violent or aggressive problem-solving behaviour seen on television in their play and imitate that behaviour in real-life situations (Eron & Husemann, 1987) they are more willing to hurt other child (Condry, 1989). Emotional content of television programs affects the psychological health of child by directly affecting his mood which in turn affects many aspects of his thinking and behaviour. Extensive violence viewing leads to decreased sensitivity towards violence and greater willingness to tolerate increasing levels of violence in society (Iqbal et al., 2024). Children more frequently watch the horror and violent films during childhood they become more violent and delinquent in future (Hopf, et al., 2008).

Gerbner (1972) showed that television programs of children using violence excessively and this increased use of violence increased the aggression among viewers. Liebert and Baron (1972) conducted an experiment using real television programmes, in their experiment it was observed that the children who had seen the aggressive programme were significantly more aggressive than those who watched non-aggressive programme. Also, they showed more preference for playing with weapons and other aggressive toys than other children. Bogart (1980) found that from a group of 100 criminals, 22% confessed that they were trying to imitate the criminal techniques that they had seen on television. Huston, et al. (1992) reported that by the time the average child who watches television two to four hours daily, leaves elementary school has witnessed atleast 8000 murders and more than 1,00,000 other assorted acts of violence on television. Also, American Academy of Paediatrics in its policy statement on media violence (2009) said that extensive research evidences indicates that media violence can contribute to aggressive behaviour, desensitization to violence, nightmares and fear of being harmed. Violence on television can do three things. The first is making us more violent (Huesmann, 1986), the second is making less violent (Freshbach, 1972) and the third is having no effect at all (Freedman, 1984). But most of evidence had supported the first argument namely that television violence does increase our own violent behaviour.

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Apart from this, there is an impact on the language of the viewers, most children feel that by using abusive language or slang language that are in fashion and update with the new era style statement. But they are unaware of the fact that they are spoiling their original language and creating difficult conditions for them to survive in long run as such language could be accepted at school or college level only but not in family and profession life. It is also observed that not only in oral communication but in writing also, children are making use of slang language which is direct impact of television violence.

Objective

The main objective of this study is to explore the effects of television violence on the behaviour of children.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Robertson, et al. (2013) investigated the association of excessive television viewing throughout childhood and adolescence with increased anti-social behaviour in early adulthood. The study was conducted on 1047 individuals from birth to age 26. The results showed that the positive and significant correlation between television viewing hours and anti-social behaviour like criminal convictions, violent convictions, anti-social personality disorder and aggressive personality traits in early adulthood. Also, the association is found similar for both the gender.

Gerbner (2018) found that the long term exposure to television leads to the feeling of living in mean and gloomy world.

Ullah et al. (2020) found the significant relationship between exposures to violent media and psychological effects i.e. desensitization, aggressive behaviour, sleep disturbance and anxiety among youth. However, there was no significant influence of age and gender of the respondents in the relationships between exposure to violent media content and aggression, sleep disorder, anxiety and desensitization.

Guo (2022) found that the exposure to television violence develops short term effects like aggressive behaviour, increases anti-social behaviour and promotes violent desensitization. It also increases the long term impacts in exhibiting aggressive and violent behaviour.

Ibrahim (2023) studied how the television violence affects the behaviour of audience. Result indicated that the exposure to television violence is the main cause of aggressive and violent behaviour and also it is an important factor that contributes to more aggressive and violent behaviour.

Li (2023) studied the impact of media violence on child and adolescent aggression. Results indicated that all forms of media violence are associated positively with aggression in children and adolescents. Young children mostly display aggression through direct imitation whereas older adolescents develop desensitization and cognitive changes related to aggression.

Yan et al. (2023) studied the negative influence of violence graphic animations cartoon to children under age of 12. Result depicted that by viewing violent animations kids develop the violence in their behaviour.

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Aljeaid (2024) investigated the effect of media violence on children. The result indicated that media violence had negative effect on children. They become apathetic towards the suffering of others, become more fearful and aggressive towards other people. Also, the child becomes more aggressive and less sensitive towards the real world violence.

Ihunwo (2024) reviewed the effect of television violence on behaviour and development of children. The results of the study indicated that television violence had negative impact on behaviour and development of child, which hinders the cognitive development of child due to unobservant mind.

Kim (2024) reviewed 109 studies on media violence and aggression published from 2015 to 2022. Results exposed that media violence was associated with more aggression, cognition and behaviours. Positive relation between media violence and aggression was found across all demographic groups such as age, sex and race.

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Television violence affects the behaviour of children in several ways. Following are the main effects of television violence on the behaviour of children:

- 1. Aggression:** Research findings indicate that there is a positive and significant association between television violence and aggressive behaviour. Viewing violent content on television can lead to the aggression in the behaviour of child which changes his/her attitude and he/she starts favouring the use of aggression to solve daily problems or any conflicts. Children start believing that the aggression is the effective, courageous, socially accepted and rewarded, hence they get caught in aggression cycle. They become easily violent with their friends, toys, family members etc. They begin to lose their temper on very small and irrelevant things.
- 2. Criminal Mind:** Television violence develops criminal activities in the mind of child. Programs such as crime patrol, saavdhan India, CID etc. were designed to alert people against crime but it impacts inversely to some people by creating criminal plots in their mind. People try to portray the same criminal act to the real world which was seen by them on television. When children watch the episode of these kind of shows on television and they start thinking that this criminal attitude is acceptable in society. They begin planning and plotting. They do not feel guilty while hurting other child or person. The children who watch excess of violent programmes on television are more likely to do crime in future.
- 3. Blind Imitation:** Children usually imitate what they see but they are unable to differentiate reel and real life as their mind is not fully developed. They do not understand the manufactured reality that all the stunts that were shown performed by their superheroes on screen were actually done by stunt men under the proper guidance and safety measures. All that are shown on screen is not reality. Children try to imitate the stunts of their superheroes and get hurt, injured or even die.
- 4. Abusive Language:** Children get fascinated by the abusive or slang language that is used on screen. They think that they look more fashionable and courageous by using these kinds of words. Hence they start using this slang language as a style statement and threatened others by using these wrong words. They start disrespecting others by using abusive language. In this way unknowingly they start spoiling their original language which creates problem for their future life as this kind of language is not acceptable at professional and family life.
- 5. Perceived World as a Dangerous Place:** Viewing more violent content develops 'mean world syndrome' among children. Watching high proportion of violent

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content on television has been linked to increased fear about the world especially among children who identify themselves with victims of violence on television show. Child starts to escape from the real world and start perceiving it as a dangerous and mean place. He develops the feeling of fear of being harmed at any time and thinking himself as a victim. As a result, these children starts overthinking and overestimating the risk of violence directed towards them leading to an increase in distrustful and self-protective behaviours.

6. **Desensitization:** Television violence can desensitize children emotionally towards violent and aggressive behaviour in real world. They see fight, blood etc. normally and regularly on television. It makes them head-hearted towards other; they do not understand the pain of others. Not trying to help others in fact they hurt others and become tolerate to violence. They have very low level of stimulation when presented with violent act in real world. They have decreased tendency to help the victim of violence.
7. **Sleep Related Problems:** Television violence affects the sleep quality of children. They feel sleep disorders like sleep anxiety, night walking, nightmares, frightened in sleep, bed wetting, shortened sleep duration etc.
8. **Short-term and Long-term Effects:** Television violence impact the behaviour of children both in short-term and long-term. For example an early fear response developed from watching much violent content on television has long-term effect on anxiety, nightmares and other sleep disorders.
9. **Teaching that No Non-violent Solution:** Television violence can teach children that there is no non-violent solution to problems. It legitimizes the use of violence in real life. For example when children see violence is successful solution for problems of their screen hero then they start selecting violent option for solving their real life problems. They copy the behaviour of their hero to become more like him. Sometimes screen heroes have no physical problem when they are involved in violence. If child observe that violence does not hurt or upset the on screen characters, then child start believing that violence is an appropriate to solve daily problems.
10. **Suicide and Depression:** Sometimes the impact of television violence is much deeper. Slowly it becomes the cause of depression and suicide. Sometimes children see suicide news of film or television star or any other person on television; they also try to imitate same just for fun without considering its consequences. This can result into severe health issues or even death.
11. **Exaggerated form of Reality:** Television violence and actions performed are not real in fact these are created exaggerated. The stunts, actions are all not real and are created dramatically under the guidance of experts and by editing the scenes which is very far from reality. But children believe it all true as their minds are not fully developed.
12. **Stereotypes:** In various television shows, movies stereotypes are highlighted in which two races, families are fighting each other. These fights are shown to continue from generation to generation. By seeing such type of mentality children can adapt their values to fit the values of these stereotypes.
13. **Lifestyle Habits:** Lifestyle habits such as gambling, smoking, alcohol use, drugs and risk-taking may be promoted through television. The reason of violence is any of the above said. Child feels it is an acceptable way of life. He starts considering these activities cool and they constantly influence young minds to follow the same.
14. **Fluctuating Behavioural Moods:** When child is so much involved with the story and feel happy or sad according to the scenes. He feels helpless about not changing

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the situation of his/her hero. He becomes sad for heroes' miseries or feeling much excited in happy scene, also when hero fights and win over villain, so the change in behavioural mood is sure. Their life starts revolving around the characters of hero, heroine and villain as well as their attitude changes in relation to fake emotions or outstated fancy world.

15. **Soft Feelings:** Sometime in rare cases it is happen that when child sees violence on the television he starts having violence against poor or helpless. He starts developing soft corner and sympathy with them. He starts avoiding violence as a way of life and chooses non-violence as preferred mode.
16. **Anti-social Behaviour:** On watching anti-social behaviour depicted in the television violence, children also start behaving in that way. This behaviour continues in their coming stage of life. They harass and distress others by using drugs, street drinking, fireworks, noise, inappropriate use of vehicles etc.

Implications of the Study

This study suggests that there is a correlation between exposure to television and perceived behaviour. The results of the study should educate the public, parents, children, government officials and programmers. It also suggests that what could be done by parents, programmers and even criminologists to help further understand this subject. Awareness must be prevailed that media violence can affect any child from any family. It can also affect individual of any age, gender or social class. There needs to be some increased awareness of how television violence affects children and how can it is prevented.

Suggestions

- The use of media as an educational tool should not be rejected but much of commercial television currently lacks educational value or promotes violence. Instead, early childhood professionals should advocate for policy that eliminates violence and improves the educational value of media, and should use media constructively in their work with children. The standards should established to eliminate violent content during the hours children are likely to watch television and also control the degree to which violence is depicted so as to be perceived by children.
- Parents should monitor what their children are watching on television. They should check the quality and quantity of the television programmes to which their children are exposed. They should talk to their children about what they observe through television, to find out how children interpret what they see and help them to clarify misinterpretations. Parents should try to limit the duration that their child watches television and engage them in other activities.
- Teachers should have a responsibility to assist children in developing skills in non-violent conflict resolution, to assist children to become critical viewers of all forms of media, and to encourage the constructive use of the media for infusing positive social values. Teachers need to be aware of what is currently being broadcast to children and to inform parents about the impact of violent media on the development of children. Teachers can guide child about the appropriate ways to solve problems when he/she observes themes of television violence appear in child's play. Teachers should inform parents when negative or violent themes appear as a regular part of their child's play and support parents in their efforts to monitor the habit of television viewing of child.

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- Many media literacy programmes should have been developed and introduced into school curricula in an effort to encourage and develop critical viewing skills of child and more general media literacy. Such programmes appear to be effective in increasing awareness of children regarding many aspects of media and making them less susceptible to negative messages.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it is concluded that children watch television for a long time and they love to see television shows, movies, reality shows etc. But most of the acts have violent scenes, which affect the psychology or behaviour of children. The studies show that the violence on television changes the mood, habits, attitudes, beliefs and values of children. They imitate violence and adapt in their life. They show aggressive behaviour, fight with parents, friends and other family members. So, television violence negatively influences the behaviour of children that is the major tension for parents and teachers. Parents and teachers should adopt strong steps to stop violence among children. They should pay individual attention and discuss about the negative influence of television with children.

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Acknowledgment

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

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Kaur, J. & Singh, S. (2025). Effects of Television Violence on Behaviour of Children. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(1), 3028-3035. DIP:18.01.290.20251301, DOI:10.25215/1301.290