

Exposure to Crime Reporting: Predictor of Perceived Stress and Mood among Young Adults of Lahore

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to evaluate the young adults' exposure to crime news as predictor of perceived stress and mood. This is hypothesized that there is likely to be the significant association in exposure of crime news and perceived stress and mood of views. The measures for collecting data included Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale and Patient Health Questionnaire (mood scale). The sample for the current research was comprised of 180 young adults (Students= 90, teachers= 90) aged between 18 to 35 years from Lahore city. The data was analyzed through SPSS version 22. Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyze the relationship between exposure to crime news, perceived stress and mood of respondents. To examine the difference Independent Sample t test was used to do gender and occupation based comparisons in terms stress and mood. The findings revealed that there is direct correlation between exposure to crime news and mood of the young adults.

Keywords: *Crime Reporting, Perceived Stress, Mood, Young Adults Lahore.*

Crime attracts the attention of everyone in society and mass media cover crimes for sake of information and entertainment, thus the coined term 'infotainment' (Surette, 1998; Dowler, Fleming & Muzzatti, 2006). As day by day crime is increasing in society so crime news reporting also increasing in media with double pace. Crime news stories come at fourth number in order of coverage by electronic and print media after sports, general interest and commerce, which is an over-representation of the actual amount of crime occurring in society. A research study suggests that newspapers give over 50% coverage to crime stories and this is the major factors which makes the public to believe that crime is on the rise (Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, 2011).

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News stories about crimes, punishment that are reported by any media are called crime news, in the simplest of term, crime news is event oriented and focuses on specific – usually some typical- criminal incidents rather than on crime trends or on wider debates around caused or prevention policy (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2001). Crime is referred to breaking of rules or laws for which some governing power can ultimately order assurance. Different societies may have different definitions of crime however, every crime violates the law, but not every violation of the law is referred as a crime. Contemporary societies usually view crimes as offences against the nation or the state (Huma, 2015).

Pakistani media has given a rise to coverage of crime stories like robbery, dacoits, rape cases, kidnapping etc. “Previously, news of this nature was never covered by the radio and the television in their news bulletins. English language newspapers, too, hardly accommodated stories pertaining to such crimes” (“New Trends in Pakistani Media”, 2010).

Different types of crime news are being covered by the media but its impact on the audience is need to be understood (Er, 2012). Crime reports are fixed commodity and public take interest in the violent crimes. And in this way to gain the public interest and demand media distorts the image and facts about the crime (Dowler et al. 2006).

Media only tells us about the crime not punishment which creates fear and stress among the public. In electronic and print media major part of news stories consist on violent and criminal acts. Media’s violent content include drug, murder, fraud, terrorism, honor killing, rape etc. Media crime reporting portray the image that society is full of crime. It seems nothing good is happening in country. News media play a role of watch dog in the society but information only from the official sources lemmatizes this role regarding crime news coverage (Beale, 2006).

Previously many studies (Huma, 2015; Naz, Asif & Zafar, 2015; Bhatti & Hassan, 2014) have been done by psychologist, medical professionals on effects of media content on the viewers. This research is unique as it has taken a step further ahead by including media studies and has focused on possible outcomes of crime-news coverage by media channels on perceived stress and mood of the viewers.

Stress

State of mental tension and worry caused by problems in your life and work, stress is something that causes strong feelings of worry or anxiety. Stress as a very destructive emotional experience escorted by imaginable and predictable biochemical, physiological, cognitive, and behavioral changes that can be directed either to the way of changing the stressful happening or adjusting to its effects (Patnaik, 2014). Erin O’Brien describes in his article that exaggerated headlines of crime news create fear, stress and anxiety among the adults and children. They develop their ideas according to news broadcasted by the media (Brien, n.d.). Linda Heath found in a content analysis of newspapers in 26 cities that residents

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were more fearful and stressed in cities where papers have more local crimes stories which were sensationalized or random (Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003). This fear and stress is created among the audience by continuously feeding the crime news stories and develop the thinking of the public that they can also become the victim. A significant relationship exists between the consumption of media and stress or fear of crime. This is the reason that fear of crime and moral panic are significant part of media criminology research (Er, 2012).

Mood

Mood is a conscious state of mind or predominant feelings that arises after any specific event. Moods differ from emotions, feelings or affects in that they are less specific, less intense, and less likely to be triggered by a particular stimulus or event (Luomala & Laaksonen, 2000). For a very long time it has been observed that the emotional content of films and TV programs cause to disturb the psychological health of the consumer. It directly affects your mood, and your mood affects your thinking and behavior. And this exposure to crime news affects in interpreting the events of life (Davey, 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Huma (2015) conducted a survey research to explore the negative effects of crime news coverage on the youth of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Her findings revealed that after watching crime news people have developed an insecure and perilous feeling about the society and people around them. They avoid interacting with strangers and are careful to move around and have developed concern about their families. It was concluded that females are much more effected by the impact of crime news than males.

Naz, Asif and Zafar (2015) conducted a qualitative study on the youth of Lahore, Pakistan to check the impact of news channels on youth. They divided their respondents in two groups one who watch whole news bulletin and one group who only listen headlines of news. They concluded that spending more time watching crime news daily has negative effect on minds of viewers. They have complained about stress, anxiety, frustration, nightmarish and fear of demise. As, the interviewees stated,

“by watching news channels’ negative horrible events and pictures, they started to have the feeling of fear, distress and even fearful dreams about horrible events. This means that the more the media exposure, the more the stressful news and the more the stress in personal life” (p.590).

Respondents also stated that watching crime news negatively effects their moods and they start behaving aggressively.

Bhatti and Hassan (2014) conducted a research study on “Psychological effects of TV News Violence on youth” and they found that violent news effect youth psychologically. These news stories create fear and threat among them and depressed them. They found that people sometimes avoid news because violence news upsets their moods, they suggested that media

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should adopt any other way for dissemination of violence base news content, because showing more violent content are dangerous for viewers. It directly affects the psyche of viewers.

Davey (2012) states a study on the “psychological effects of viewing negative news items”, three different news bulletins—entirely positive, entirely negative, emotionally neutral—of 14 min duration were constructed. These bulletins were shown to three different groups of people. Those who watched negative news bulletin were reported significantly sadder and anxious after watching this bulletin than those who watch other type of news bulletins. And negative news bulletins consist of crimes news.

Riddle, Potter, Metzger, Nabi, and Linz, (2011) concluded their experimental study that exposure to more crime magnified respondents’ estimate about crime exist in real world and it made them worried and fearful. They also indicated gender differences in retention of descriptions.

Custers and Van den Bulck (2011) examined the relationship between viewing crime news and fearing crime. There appear to be different types of fear, as well as perception of risk. Viewing TV news may be considered an audience stimulus for responses, but so, too, are direct, personal experiences. Newhagen and Reeves (2006) conducted a study on relationship of television negative news and the memory of TV News viewers. Their findings were people remember the negative info more than the positive. Negative visuals remembered more than voice and voice more than text. Even people remember few negative scenes their entire life. It has impact on their memory and cognitive process.

Rational of the study

Crime is covered in a sensational way by Pakistani media. Even most of the news bulletins start with crime news which give a negative impact on the viewers’ mind. Media channels tend to repeat those crime stories whole day. Pakistani media not only covers crime stories in news in fact, special programs on crime reporting are also on aired. The reason of studying crime news as predictor of perceived stress and mood is to analyze the effects of crime news reports on the mood and stress level of young adults of Lahore.

Statement of the Problem

Now a days Pakistani media channels give more coverage to crime news as compared to previous time period (“New Trends in Pakistani Media”, 2010). Crime news stories are coved in a sensational way. All this exposure to crime news increases the feelings of worry fear and mistrust among the viewers Riddle, Potter, Metzger, Nabi, & Linz, 2011). This study aims to explore the young adults’ exposure to crime reporting as predictor of perceived stress and mood.

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Objectives of the study

Following are the objectives of current research:

- To examine young adults' exposure to crime reporting as predictor of perceived stress & mood.
- To document the viewers' perceptions regarding crime news.
- To document young adults' consumption pattern of crime news.
- To examine whether the difference in young adults' gender have any influence on perceiving stress and mood of crime news.
- To find the difference on the basis of occupation in perceived stress and mood as the result exposure to crime based news.

Hypotheses of the study

- H1: There is likely to be the significant association in exposure of crime based news and perceived stress and mood of viewers.
- H2: There is likely to be the significant difference in perceived stress of professionals vs students as the result of exposure to crime based news.
- H3: There is likely to be the significant difference in perceived mood of professionals vs students as the result of exposure to crime based news.
- H4: There are likely to be gender difference in perceived stress and mood as the result exposure to crime based news.

Theoretical Framework

This research comes under cultivation theory as cultivation theory is frequently applied to publics 'acuties of reality. For example, if any one watches more crime shows would believe that there is a lot of violent crime in the city in which he lives. This skewed world is called a "mediated reality". The theory has divided the audience in two categories heavy viewers and light viewers. According to this theory heavy viewers will be more influenced than light viewers and that the cumulative effect of television is to create an artificial world that heavy viewers come to see as reality. This theory is relevant to the present study as this study is designed to find out the crime news watching habits of young adults. Then the influence of that exposure on the mood and stress level of young adults is also measured.

METHOD

Research design

The research was laid out through cross-sectional survey research design.

Sampling strategy

Current research was executed through convenient sampling.

Sample

The sample size for the current research is 180, comprised of students (90) & teachers (90) aged between 18 to 35 years. The data sought from one private university of Lahore. The minimal educational criteria was inter so respondents could read and comprehend the questionnaire.

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Inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria is as follow: (a) both males and females students, (b) both males and females teachers (c) Students and teachers of mass communication and social sciences.

Exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria is as follow: (a) males and females aged below 18 years, (b) males and females aged above 35 years, (c) students and teachers other than mass communication and social sciences and (d) males and females who are neither university students nor teachers.

Measures

1. Demographic information sheet

In order to access the covariate a demographic elements of the participants, a demographic sheet was developed (appendix 1).

2. Scale for exposure to crime news

In order to investigate the respondents' exposure to crime news a scale for exposure to crime news was devised. The items of scale included frequency of watching, level of interest, time spent etc. (appendix 1).

3. Scale for sources of crime news

To get the information of the sources which respondents use to know about crime news this scale was developed and the items of this scale included print media, electronic media, social media and interpersonal channels like family and friends.

4. Questionnaire for personal impact of crime new

In order to measure the personal impact of crime news on respondents this scale was devised. Opinion of respondents was asked about crime news as source of information, awareness, panic, insecurity, fear etc.

5. Scale for measuring stress

In order to measure the stress among the respondents after watching crime news Cohen Perceived Stress scale was used in which respondents were asked about being nervous, stressed, upset, unable to control important things of their life after watching crime news (appendix 1).

6. Scale for measuring mood

In order to investigate the effects of crime news on mood of the respondents Patient Health Questionnaire was used in which respondents were asked about effects of watching crime news on their interest or pleasure in doing things, feeling down, depressed, or hopeless, trouble falling or staying asleep etc. (appendix 1).

Procedure

The permission and authority letter was sought from Board of Advance Studies. The data was accessed after the formal permission was granted by concerned authorities. The research topic was introduced to the participant one by one and data was collected from individual administration of questionnaire. All ethical guidelines were fulfilled the participant were ensured about anonymity and confidentiality. It was also ascertained that research participant

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could withdraw from the research anytime if he/she feel uncomfortable. The average time consumed in completing the questionnaire was 10 to 15 minutes.

Statistical Analysis

The data was analyzed by using SPSS version 22. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the data. Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyze the relationship between Exposure to crime news, perceived stress and mood. Independent samples t test were used to examine the gender differences & occupation differences in terms stress and mood.

RESULTS

Characteristics of the Sample

The sample of the study belongs to the students and faculty members of private university. Total 200 questionnaires were distributed and out of that 180 would selected remaining were discarded due to incomplete or improper responses.

Table 1. Frequency Table of Demographic

Variable	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Age of Respondent		
18 – 26 years	104	57.7%
27 – 35 years	76	42.3%
Gender		
Male	90	50.0%
Female	90	50.0%
Education		
Undergraduate	21	11.7%
Graduate	31	17.2%
Post Graduate	98	54.4%
Occupation		
Student	90	50.0%
Teacher	90	50.0%
Marital Status		
Married	55	30.6%
Unmarried	97	53.9%
Committed	28	15.6%
Family Setup		
Joint Family	92	51.1%
Nuclear Family	88	48.9%

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Table 1 shows all the demographic characteristics of respondents. In the sample of the current study equal representation is given to both genders and occupations (student and teacher). Majority of respondents (57.7%) belong to 18-26 years of age. Education of 54.4% respondents is post-graduation, while graduates are 17.2% and 11.7% respondents' education is under graduation. Majority of respondents (53.9%) are unmarried while 30.6% are married and 15.6% are committed. 51.1% respondents have joint family setup and 48.9% have nuclear family setup.

Firstly, scale items responses were computed. Secondly descriptive and inferential statistics were executed. Results of the study highlight that that exposure to crime news has significant correlation with the mood of the respondents. While there is no correlation between exposure to crime news and stress level of young adults (Table 2).

Table 2: Correlations between Exposure to Crime News and Perceived Stress & Mood

	Exposure to Crime News	Stress	Mood
Pearson Correlation	1	-.042	.529**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.577	.000
N	180	180	180

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

However independent sample t-test found no significant difference in perceived stress of students and professionals. Both groups receive almost same stress from exposure to crime news (Table 3).

Table 3: Perceived Stress of Students and Professionals after Exposure to Crime News

	Students (n=90)		Professionals (n=90)			95% CI		Cohen' s d	
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	LL		UL
Perceived Stress	20.36	2.99	20.78	2.986	-.946	.345	-1.30	.458	.14

Note: CI= confidence interval; LL: lower limit; UL= upper limit M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Findings indicate significant difference in mood of students and professionals as a result of exposure to crime news. Professionals' mood effected more by the exposure to crime news as compare to students' mood (Table 4).

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Table 4: Perceived Mood of Students and Professionals after Exposure to Crime News

	Students (n=90)		Professionals (n=90)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen' <i>s d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Perceived Mood	14.23	4.74	16.76	6.34	-3.02	.003	-4.16	-.875	.45

Note: CI= confidence interval; LL: lower limit; UL= upper limit M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Findings of independent sample t-test shows no significant gender differences perceived stress and mood of young adults as a result of exposure to crime news (Table 5).

Table 5: Gender Difference in Perceived Stress and Mood of Young adults

	Males (n=90)		Females (n=90)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen' <i>s d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Perceived Stress	20.43	2.88	20.70	3.10	-.597	.551	-1.14	.615	.09
Perceived Mood	15.12	4.58	15.87	6.68	.872	.384	-2.42	.941	.13

Note: CI= confidence interval; LL: lower limit; UL= upper limit M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

DISCUSSION

Media is an important source of information, education, entertainment and awareness for any society. Pakistani media is going through its infant stage as it has got freedom recently. So to capture the audience it covers more and more stories without knowing the outcomes. All major media channels give hourly news bulletin and majority of news being covered in Pakistani media are related to crimes. Too much coverage of crime news has an impact on the mind and psyche of viewers.

Present study found that young adults of Pakistan watch crime news to get information awareness of the crimes happening around them. This exposure to crime news have a significant effect on the moods of the young adults but it doesn't have significant correlation with perceived stress of young adults(table 2). It is also in line with the findings that Violence news upsets the moods of viewers that is why sometimes people avoid news (Bhatti & Hassan, 2014). And emotional content of TV directly affects your mood, and your mood

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affect your thinking and behavior. And this exposure to crime news affects in interpreting the events of life (Davey, 2012).

Results of the study show no significant difference among perceived stress and mood of professionals and students (table 3& 4). Thus H2 and H3 of the study 'there is likely to be the significant difference in perceived stress of professionals vs students as the result of exposure to crime based news' & 'there is likely to be the significant difference in perceived mood of professionals' vs students as the result of exposure to crime based news' are not supported. And findings also refuted the results of the researches claiming a significant relationship exist between the consumption of media, stress, mood and fear of crime (Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003; Davey, 2012; Er, 2012; Bhatti & Hassan, 2014; Naz, Asif & Zafar, 2015).

Gender based comparison has showed no significant differences among the perceived stress and mood of young adults as a result of exposure to crime news (table 5). This situation has disapproved one more hypothesis of the study which was there are likely to be gender difference in perceived mood as the result exposure to crime based news. This research showed contradiction with previous research findings that females are much more effected by the impact of crime news than males (Huma, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Present study concluded that young adults of Pakistan watch crime news, and this news give them information and awareness about different crimes. But this exposure to crime news have significant effect on the moods of young adults they feel hopeless, depressed, less interested, and less motivated as a result of watching crime news. However, there is a need to formulate policy regarding coverage of crime news in Pakistani media channels.

LIMITATIONS

Although this study has found strong correlation among exposure to crime news and mood change of young adults, yet it has few limitations. First of all, data was collected from students and professionals of one university through convenient sampling, so the results cannot be generalized to uneducated and less educated young adults of rural areas of Pakistan.

SUGGESTIONS

Future research should explore the relationship of exposure to crime news and fear of crime and insecurity among educated & uneducated young adults of Pakistan. Furthermore, effects of crime news on perceived stress and mood of young adults living in rural areas can also be studied.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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