

## **Growing up with Media Violence and Psychological Trauma among Youth in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

In this digital age the impact of media can be observed in all walks of life. All media users are being influenced by one or another type of media, however the amount of effect and time may vary. One cannot deny the fact that the images that are being shown in the mainstream media are full of violence and conflict. With the latest multifaceted media platforms and their content, there is no escape from the violence, it is very much relevant in today's world to understand that how does such violent content affect the individuals, particularly the youth. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between exposure to violent media and psychological effects i.e. desensitization, aggressive behavior, sleep disturbance, and anxiety among youth. Survey was conducted at a national level from colleges and universities. The results demonstrated that exposure to violence has significant relationships with desensitization, aggressive behavior, sleep disturbance, and anxiety 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.

**Keywords:** Media violence, psychological trauma, Pakistani youth, digital media

### **Introduction**

Youth is considered to be the most important part of any society. On the other hand, in this digital technological age mass media (both traditional media and social media) have attained very crucial position in almost every demographic segment of the population. Hence, media uses and their potential effects on the youth, especially negative effects, is an area of greater importance. According to Pakistan's National Human Development Report 2017, 64 percent population of Pakistan was below 29 years of age, and 31 percent were in the age group of 15-29 and the report claims that even for the next three decades this trend of youthfulness of Pakistani population will continue (UNDP, 2017).

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Media effects related to the violence have always captivated social scientists, especially psychologists and significant studies have been conducted for many decades. Initially the studies were related to how violence in media affects children. However, with the passage of time youth and their use of media also interested many scholars. Most of the behavioral researches done in the past were specifically related to children's imitation of media violence and/ or its effects on their aggressive behavior and bullying. But in the broader context growing up with violence and developing the psychological problems were marginalized in this part of the world. Hence, it will be pertinent to understand this phenomenon as violence has become the integral part of media content.

In consideration, with the socialization role of media, one cannot neglect the concept of Violence. Media and Violence is the most widely researched area. According to Emanuel Tanay "Violence in the media has been increasing and reaching proportions that are dangerous. You turn on television and violence is there. You go to a movie and violence is there. Reality is distorted. If you live in a fictional world, then the fictional world becomes your reality" (Kaplan, 2012). According to the statistics, violence in media have increased substantially in recent years, and not only this it is more graphic, sexual and sadist in nature (Lyons, 2014). In 2012, two third of Hollywood movies were rated R, while the videogames were rated M, mean for mature audiences (Essential Facts, 2014). Younger generation are have more exposure to the media violence content than ever, children and adolescent spend more than seven hours of their day on entertainment, it is also indicated that by the time they will reach 70, almost 7 to 10 years of their life time will be spend watching television (The American Association of Family Physicians, 2016).

Violence media have significantly penetrated in media content, according to Heusmann (2007), approximately 60% of television program contain some kind of violence, and about 40% contain heavy violence. Along with this video games have become a household item about 83% of homes in United States include video game units, children age from 8 to 18 out of which 52% play video games, and 94% of the video games rated for teenagers have overwhelming violent content.

Many researchers indicate that there is correlation between viewing the media violence and aggressive behavior traits. Many researches indicate that there exists a relationship between the violent content and its effects on the individuals whether they are children or the adults. The subsequent link to aggression and media violence was highlighted by the Bushman and Anderson (2001), for the past fifty years there are substantial evidence that suggest a link between the media violence and aggression. What concern the parents and the social theorist in this regard is that the exposure to media violence let the younger generation to learn and acquire the new techniques and strategies for the aggressive behaviors (Goranson, 1970).

One of the other factors, which is important for the current study is to understand that how the violent media pertinently contributes to desensitization of the youth and creating fear among the individuals. Desensitization is the indifference towards the social phenomena caused by the repeated exposure to the violent content (Bushman & Huesmann 2012), summarized that the children who are exposed to the violent content in television and film and who play violent video games try to imitate the aggressive traits, and they are emotionally desensitized to violence and lose empathy. They also develop more hostile view of the world.

Violent content in the media and film make the individual “comfortably numb” about their surroundings, and desensitized the individuals towards pain and suffering (Bushman & Anderson, 2009). After exposure to the violent video games there is a decrease tendencies in children and adults to help others (Bushman & Anderson, 2009; Moilter, 1994). Desensitization at an early age due to the heavy exposure to the media violence leads to serious violent behavior and insensitivity in the late adolescence (Mrug et al, 2016). Habitual exposure to the media violence over the longer period of time will result in decrease emotional response among the individual and will significantly decreases the anxious arousal when exposed to the violent content (Karhe et al, 2011). Exposure to the violent media and film leads towards the attitude which endorse violence, and playing video games, and playing the violent video games result low empathy (Funk, 2004).

Even when the individuals are exposed to the media violence for shorter period of time even then it significantly reduces the psychological impact of violence among the individual thus creating desensitization among the individual for short term (Fanti, 2009). Children learn the aggressive cues, and long-term exposure to the violent content leads to desensitization, initially the highly violent content leads to the fear but overly exposure to the violent content diminishes the element of fear among the late adolescence (Smith and Donnerstein, 1998). Media violence creates fear among the children (Cantor, 2000)

Exposure to the media content among the adolescence is link with depressive symptoms especially among young men (Primack et al. 2009). Research studies indicate that individuals experience more anxiety while watching a violent movie content than those who are exposed to the nonviolent content (Mandan et al, 2014). Depiction of the media violence increases the violence among the individuals and their view the world as hostile and full of crime (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Nabi & Riddle, 2008).

There are many theoretical explanations for the study of media violence and what effect does it have on children and youth. It ranges from understanding aggressive traits to exposure. Many models have been study the effect of violent

exposure to aggressive behavior, fear and desensitization. To understand this aspect the current study is based on cultivation theory. This theory assumes that when the messages are presented constantly for longer period of time the individuals believe that the messages reflect the real world. "Research has shown that the exposure to heavy amounts of television can lead to overestimate amount of crime and victimization and conclude the world is a violent place" (Gentile, 2003).

### **Research method and results**

The research method employed in the current study was survey. Target population of the research was youth studying in universities who were users of internet, video games and viewers of television. However, survey population of the study was youth of Rawalpindi city who were studying in public sector universities. There are three public sector general universities in Rawalpindi. They are: Arid Agricultural University, Rawalpindi, Fatima Jinnah Women University, and Foundation University (Rawalpindi Campus). The researchers randomly selected Foundation University for the present study. And in the next stage they selected a sample size of 400 from students of different academic departments. Regarding the concerned variables, a questionnaire was developed which covered all the aspects of key variables. To make the research more feasible pretesting was conducted. Further, to assess the content validity of the instrument, it was critically evaluated by the major stakeholders.

Before conducting pretesting validity test was conducted from the following stakeholders:

- Parents: Two Families
- Two Psychologists

The researchers explored relationships between exposure to violent media (internet, television, and video games) and desensitization, aggressive behavior, sleep disturbance and anxiety. Each concept was operationalized through various empirical indicators. The researcher used 13, 12,11,11 and 11 empirical indicators for operationalization of "exposure to violent media" "desensitization", "aggressive behavior", "sleep disorder", and "anxiety" respectively.

The following table shows reliability analysis of the multi-item scales used for measuring the concepts of violent content, desensitization, aggressive behavior, sleep disturbance, and anxiety.

### **Table1: Cronbach Alpha coefficients for Internal reliability**

Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Exposure to Violent Content	13	.86
Desensitization	12	.81
Aggressive Behavior	11	.88
Sleep Disturbance	11	.79
Anxiety	11	.72

The alpha coefficient for the “exposure to violent media content” with 13 items is .86, which reflects the high internal consistency. Similarly, “desensitization” and “anxiety” with 12 items had cronbach alpha value of .81, whereas aggressive behavior, sleep disturbance and anxiety with 11 empirical indicators each had cronbach alpha values .88, .79 and .72 respectively.

### Results

The researchers found that exposure to violent media content has significant positive correlations with aggression ( $r = .309^{**}$ ,  $p = .0005$ ), sleep disorder ( $r = .288^{**}$ ,  $p = .0005$ ), anxiety ( $.326^{**}$ ,  $p = .0005$ ), and desensitization ( $.46^{**}$ ,  $p = .0005$ ).

**Table2: Correlation among variables**

		1	2	3	4	5
		1				
1.Expo to violent media content	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)					
2.Agression	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.309**	1			
3.Sleep disorder	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.288**	.557**	1		
4.Anxiety	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.326**	.494**	.682*	1	
5.desensitization	Pearson		.452**	.443*	.529**	1

Correlation	.46**	*		
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000

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

N=400

r1 (Relationship between exposure to violent media content and aggression) =

.309(\*\*)

p- .0005

r2 (Relationship between exposure to violent media content and sleep disorder =

.288(\*\*)

p-.0005

r3 (Relationship between exposure to violent media content and anxiety) = .326(\*\*)

p-.0005

r4 (Relationship between exposure to violent media content and desensitization) =

.465(\*\*)

p- .0005

The study also found (table3) that there was no significant difference between male and female respondents in terms of the potential aggression, sleep disorder, anxiety and desensitization caused by exposure to violent media content.

**Table3: Independent Samples Test for equality of means between male and female respondents**

	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Exposure to violent media	-2.355	398	.019	-1.92245	.81618
Aggression	.675	398	.500	.75922	1.12421
Sleep disorder	1.277	398	.202	1.01739	.79649
Anxiety	-.847	398	.398	-1.46754	1.73287

	-	398	.139	-	.87159
desensitization	1.481			1.29093	
n					

The study also investigated that whether respondents of different age groups have the same level of aggression, sleep disorder, anxiety and desensitization potentially caused by exposure to violent media content. Analysis of the data and the resultant values of Eta Squared and level of significance given in table4 indicate that there was no significant difference in means of the three different age categories of the respondents. However, one thing needs to be mentioned here that the difference between these three age categories was very little/modest. The lower age category was of age group of 16-18 years and the upper category comprised of 22-24years. Almost all of them were youth.

**Table 4: Measures of association between age groups and aggression, sleep disorder, anxiety and desensitization**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Eta Square</b>	<b>F value</b>	<b>p value</b>
Aggression * Age	.014	2.817	.061
Sleep disorder * Age	.007	1.355	.259
Anxiety * Age	.000	.005	.995
desensitization * Age	.012	2.430	.089

### **Conclusion**

The study examined psychological effects (desensitization, aggressive behavior, anxiety, and sleep disorder) of violent digital media content on university-going youth in Pakistan. It was found that there is a significant relationship between exposure to violence and desensitization, aggressive behavior, anxiety, and sleep disorder. The same effects were found in both male and female respondents. Similarly, no significant difference was found in means of the three different age categories in terms of these psychological effects of violent media content.

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