MEDIA VIOLENCE AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR OF NIGERIAN YOUTHS: INTERVENTION STRATEGIES.

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Abstract

This paper reviews the result of researches on the effects of media violence on youths and tries to relate these to the increased exhibition violence among Nigerian youths. These research results reveal unequivocal evidence that media violence increases the likelihood of the incidence of aggressive and violent behavior on both immediate and long term contexts. Longitudinal studies have provided converging evidence linking frequent exposure to violent media in child hood with aggressive later in life. Characteristics of viewers, social environments and media content, were identified as factors that influence the degree to which media violence affects aggression. Research findings further suggest that no one is wholly immune to the effects of media violence. Interactive media, such as video games and the internet, have been shown to be more potent in affecting individuals. Studies on the effects of violent video games have shown that they cause increases in aggressive thoughts, effect and behavior in physiological arousal. The paper concludes that youth violent behaviours seem to be increasing in form, as the violent content of media increases in form and diversity. The world has become a global village, so there is a need to monitor the media forms allowed into our nation, and to monitor what youths are exposed to. A lot of violent acts are in already taking place in our society, especially in institutions of higher learning, and youths are involved in most causes. It is time to take a serious look at youth violence and the enormous violent content and form of the Nigerian media. The paper recommends, among other things, that the mass media should be censored more seriously. Age limits should be clearly indicated on media programmes sold in the market. Parents, teachers and care givers and even youths should be educated on the harm done by consuming large doses of violent media content. Research should be done to investigate the relationship between media violence and the violent behaviour of Nigerian youths.

Introduction

In our social environments the radio, television, movies, videos, videos games, computer network and the internet have assumed central roles in our daily lives.

Children have access to and consume a variety of these different media forms, many of which have high levels of violent content. Most homes have television sets and next to sleeping, watching the television (TV) is the most frequent activity for children. Lomonaco, Kim, and Ottaviano (2010) assert that the average child in the United States spends four hours a day watching the television. The situation in Nigeria is not very different most children, between 5 and 20 years of age, spend over 6 hours a day using entertainment media (television, commercial and self recorded videos, movies, video games, print, radio, recorded music, computers and the internet (Roberts, Foctir and Rideout, 2005). In recent times, watching Nigerian movies, (African Magic) most of which have a high violent content, has become a popular pastime of many youths. The implication of this is that by the time the average child is 18 years old, he or she would have witnessed many acts of violence, including murders. Beresin (2009) found that up to 20 acts of violence per hour occur in children's programmes.

The high levels of violent content of the media forms correlate with youth violence. Internet websites, showing violence, (killing, shooting, fighting, etc) correlate with about 50% increase in reports of seriously violent behaviour (Lomonaco et al, 2010). The result of a recent study showed a psychological connection between watching violence media programmes and desensitization to violent video games (Caragey, Cray and Bushman, 2007).

TV sets are commonly present in bedrooms. The effect of having a TV set in a child's bedroom is that it increases their TV viewing time. It may also imply that parents will be less likely to monitor the content of what is watched, and might not be able to set consistent rules for media use. Also, such children might participate in fewer alternative activities, like reading, sports and games.

Violence is often considerable, even in programmes which are not advertised as violent. Overall, weapons appear on prime time TV on an average of about nine times each hour. Children's shows are particularly violent. TV violence even occurs in cartoons. These programmes are more likely to juxtapose violence with humour, and are less likely to show the long term consequences of violence.

Social Learning Theory and Violence Behaviour

Children learn by observing, imitating and adapting behaviours in his theory Bandura (1997) found that people learn through observation and that internal mental states are essential part of this process. A social model is required, and this allows one to cognitively process behaviour, encode what is observed, and store it in the memory for later imitation. The social model can be a parent, sibling, friend, teacher, or the mass media. To learn through observation someone must notice something someone else is doing, remember it or record it in their mind, and finally replicate the behaviour. The choice to continue exhibiting the behaviour depends on the outcome (positive or negative, reward etc). The only things that limit this type of learning are the intelligence level and the level of ability to copy the person well, that the learner possesses (Founier, 2013).

The enactment of aggression is largely based on the learning activation and application of aggression related knowledge structures stored in the memory. Violence media increase aggression by teaching observers how to aggress, by priming aggressive cognitions, by increasing arousal or by creating an aggressive affective state. Long time effects also involve learning processes. From infancy humans learn how to perceive, interpret, judge, and respond to events in the physical and social environments. Various types of knowledge structure for these tasks develop overtime. Each violent media episode is essentially one more learning trial. As these knowledge structures are rehearsed, they become more complex and efficient to change.

Violent Behaviour among Nigerian Youths

One of the greatest problems in Nigeria is the menace of youth violence and the causes include such variables as poverty, family psychopathology, child abuse, exposure to domestic and community violence, substance abuse and other psychiatric disorders. It has become more sophisticated, dangerous and murderous in propensity. They have greater access to firearms and explosives and have acquired more precision, skill, and have become desensitized through watching media violence and playing violent video games. Youths are often involved in the vanguard of violent conflicts in different parts of the nation and this has assumed a very serious dimension in recent years. Murder, robbery, rape, cult activities, ethno-religious military, kidnapping, vandalism, arson, etc have become very regular feature in our society.

Cult activities are still thriving in most Nigerian institutions of higher learning. Just in March, this year (2013), a arising hip-hop artist, Olariyan Damilola, was shot dead by suspected cult members, in an inter cult clash, (between a rival cult and the Buccaneers, to which he was believed to have belonged), in the Lagos State University, (Ige, 2013). At

about the same time, a fourth year student of Abia State University, Uturu, was reported to have died during a cult initiation.

Many youths are involved in political and electoral violence in different parts of Nigeria (Inokoba & Maliki, 2011). There are reports of militancy and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta area, Boko Hara in the North, Bakasse Boys and O'dua Youth Movement in the South West (Iwuama & Ekwe, 2012)

Impact of Media Violence

Young people are more susceptible to the harmful effect of exposure to violence because of the developmental stage of their brains (Boyd, 2013). The media seems to present a skewed context, in which media presents violence. In media portrayals, most of the violent acts are committed without remorse, criticism or penalty. The inappropriate presentation of violence leads to inappropriate expectations of youth with regard to true effect of violence. The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), (2013) asserts that the three major attitudes learned by watching media violence are aggression, desensitization and victimization.

There is consistent evidence that violent imagery in TV, film and video, and computer games have substantial short term effects on arousal, thoughts and emotions, increasing the likelihood of aggressive or fearful behaviour in younger children. Howwell (1987) asserts that the notion that violence in the media contributes to the development of aggressive behaviour has been supported by meta-analysis. Heusmann and Taylor (2006) have found that fictional television and film, violence do contribute to both a short term and a long term increase in aggression and violence in young viewers. TV violence also contributes to increased violence, particularly, in the form of imitative suicides and acts of aggression. The authors also found that video games are capable of producing an increase in aggression and violence in the short term. They found that the relationship between media violence and aggression, and real-world violence and aggression, is moderated by the nature of the media content and characteristics of the social influences on the individual exposed to that content. Such characteristic include the age, gender, and intelligence of viewers. Media content implies the characteristics of the aggressive perpetrator. Social environment include the cultural, environmental and situational variables.

Research evidence also indicates that media violence does not only contribute to aggressive behaviour but also to desensitization to violence, nightmares and fear of being harmed (Carnagey, Anderson and Bushman, 2006). Research findings associate exposure to media violence with a variety of physical and mental health problems for children and adolescents. Such problems include aggressive and violent behaviour, bullying, desensitization to violence, fear, depression, nightmares and sleep disturbances, and the strength between them has been found to be quite strong (Paik and Comstock, 1994).

Children and TV Violence
Children often see or hear the news many times a day through TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, and the internet. Seeing and hearing about local and world events, such as natural disasters, catastrophic events, and crime report may cause children to experience stress, anxiety, and fears. Some changes made on news, which have increased the potentials for children to experience negative effects, include the following:
- TV channels, internet services and sites report the news 24hours a day.
- TV channels broadcast live events as they unfold.
- Detailed and repetitive visual coverage of natural disasters and violent acts.

Nigerian Children watch an average of 3-4 hours of TV daily, and this has a powerful influence in developing their value system and shaping their behaviour. Studies of TV violence on children have found that children may become "immune" to the horror of violence, gradually accept violence as a way of life, imitate the violence they observe on TV and indentify with certain characters-victims and / or victimizers.

Children who view shows in which violence is very realistic, frequently repeated, or unpunished, are more likely to imitate what they see. Children with emotional, behavioural, learning or impulse control problems may be easily influenced by TV violent. While TV violence may not be the only cause of aggressive or violence behaviour, it has been found to be a significant factor

Several different psychological and physiological processes underline media-violence effects on aggressive attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and emotions (Hogan, 2005; Strasburger, Wilson and Jordan, 2009). Furthermore, because children, younger than 8 years cannot discriminate between fantasy and reality, they may be especially vulnerable to some of these learning processes, and may be more influenced by media violence. Research evidence also shows that even older adolescents and young adults are adversely affected by the consumption of media violence (Andersonm Gentile and Buckley, 2007; Johnson, Cohen, Smalles, Kassen and Brook, 2002). This demonstrates that the ability to discriminate between fantasy and reality does not inoculate one from the effects of media violence.

Video Games and Violence
In recent times, video games are increasingly played by Nigerian youths. Anderson and Dill (2000) reported that playing video games like Doar, Wolfenstain 30, or Mortal Combat, could increase a person's aggressive thoughts, feelings and behaviour, both in laboratory settings and in actual life. The researchers assert that violent video games may even be more harmful than violent television movies because they are interactive, very engrossing and require the player to identify with the aggressor. Anderson (2004) reports that an updated meta-analysis revealed that exposure to violent video games was significantly linked to increases in aggressive behaviour, aggressive cognition, aggressive affect and cardiovascular arousal, and to a decrease in helping behaviour. Causal and correlation studies revealed a linkage of video games to serious real world types of aggression.

For many in the general public, the problem of video game violence first emerged with school shootings by avid players of such games as the ones at West Paducah, Kentucky, 1997 and Littleton, Colorado, 1999 (Carey, 2013). More recent violent crimes, that have been linked to violent video games include the school shooting spree in Santec, California, (March 2001); school shootings in Wellsboro, Pennsylvania (June 2003), and Red Lion, Pensilvania (April 2003). Video games related violent crimes have also been reported in several other industrialised countries including Germany (April 2002) and Japan (2001) (Wikipedia, 2013).

In the wake of a recent mass shooting, Pidd (2012) reported the massacre of 76 people in Norway by 33 year old Anders Breivik. Breivik told the court that he trained for the massacre by practicing with the video game – "Call to Duty: Modern Warfare". He said he practised shooting by using a holographic aiming device on the war simulation game, which enabled him develop target acquisition. He appeared to be devoid of human sympathy when, in the presence of grieving parents and relations, he described his use of another video game- "War of Warcraft (WoW), as just a hobby and fantasy game. He confessed that he played (WoW), 16 hours a day over a period of one year. Another shooting spree involved 20 year old Adam Lanza, who killed 27 people including his mother, in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012. Edelman (2013) reported that detective while investigating the Newtown massacre, found video games worth thousands of dollars in Lanza's house. He used assault weapons to gun down 20 elementary school children, 6 educators and his mother.

According to Wilson (2012), the top ten most violent video games of all time include:
- *Call of duty: Modern warfare 2 (2010)*
- *Postal (1997)*
- *Mortal Combat (2011)*
- *Grand Theft Auto III (2001)*
- *Mad World (2009)*
- *Manhunt (2003)*
- *Splatter-house (2010)*
- *Soldier of Fortune (2000)*

- *God of War III (2010)*
- *Dead space (2008)*

Anderson and Bushman (2001) used modern meta-analytic techniques to combine the results of empirical studies of violent video games effects, on five types of outcome variables: aggressive behaviour, aggressive cognition, aggressive effect, helping behaviour, physiological arousal. They found significant effects of video games on each of the variables. They also found that exposure to violent video games increased aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, increased arousal and decreased helping behaviour. These effects appeared to be the same for males and females, for youths less than 18 years, as well as older ones.

Available research evidence is quite compelling that youths' exposure to media violence plays an important role in the etiology of violent behaviour (Department of Education and Skills, 2007). The line between reality and fiction seems blurred, and the consequences of these exposures are becoming evident. Recent studies have shown neurological adaptations and desensitization that lead to aggression and violence in real life. Media programmes especially, video games, have become the source of increasing pastime of many Nigerian youths and this may further increase violent behaviour among Nigerian youths.

Conclusion

Violence is not new to the Nigerian society, but in recent years it is become more sophisticated, dangerous and murderous in propensity. With greater access to firearms and explosives, the precision, skill and desensitization provided through video games and other video forms, the scope, sophistication and diversity of violent behaviours have serious consequences and serious implications on the mental health of children. Activities of groups like the Boko Haram, the use of weapons by university undergraduates in inter cult clashes and initiations, violent demonstrations and riots by youths, may just be paltry versions of the violent acts that youths can unleash as their exposure to media violence increases, with the continued diversification of violent media forms.

Research findings have shown that the effects of all media violence are negative, with violent video games having the worst effects. Media violence does make children aggressive and violent. Many parents provide their children with modern electronic gadgets/programmes, to keep them busy in their absence. Most of the children watch or use them on uncensored or monitored. Age limits are not often indicated on these programmes or gargets, to guide parents or care givers in the choice. It appears every media form is allowed into the Nigerian market. It seems there are no edicts in place to monitor the sale or use of various media forms.

Intervention Strategies

Unlike in the advanced countries of the world, there are little or no legislations that protect minors from violent media content in films, TV programmes and video games. These materials are accessible to and widely used by youths. Hence, the following strategies have been suggested to help check, reduce or eliminate the effects of media violence. Young people need to be taught how to monitor and regulate their media usage as follows:
- Restricted viewing: There should be an overall reduction of their exposure to media forms, and to the substitution of violent, with non violent media content.
- There should be critical viewing in terms of their promoting and understanding of the concept of media violence, its effect on users, and the mechanism by which violence is presented as acceptable, successful and detached from negative consequences (Moller and Krahe, 2006 – 2013)

The authors developed a school based programme as follows:
- Goals regarding media usage: Student monitored their personal media usage by keeping a diary where all media use is recorded
- Reducing exposure to media in general and to violent media stimuli in particular, and encouraging alternative activities
- Children should be taught how to identify violent media content and the effects of media violence.

Other intervention strategy includes the following:

Parents can protect children from excessive violence in the following ways:

- Pay attention to the programmes their children are watching and watch same with them.
- Set limits on the amount of time they spend with the TV; consider removing the TV set from a child's bed room.
- Point out that although the actor in a movie may not have been actually hurt or killed such violence in real life results in pain or death.
- Refuse to lets children see shows known to be violent, and change the channel or turn of the TV set, when offensive materials come on, with an explanation of what is wrong with the programme.
- Disapprove of the violent episodes in front of the children, stressing that such behaviour is not the best way to resolve the problem.
- To upset peer pressure among friends and class mates, contact other parents and agree to enforce similar rules about the length of time and type of programmes that children may watch.
- Look for signs that the news/programmes may have triggered fears or anxieties, such as, sleeplessness, fears, bedwetting, crying or talking about being afraid.

Parent should remember that it is important to talk to the child about what he/she has seen or heard. This allows the parent to lessen the potential negative effects of media violence, and to discuss their own ideas and values.

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