

Television Violence and the Propensity for Violent Behaviour Among Youths in Tertiary Institutions in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between television violence and the propensity for violent behaviour among youths in tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. To facilitate this study, two specific objectives and one null hypothesis was postulated. The survey research design was adopted for the study. A 20 - item questionnaire was used in collecting data from a sample of 395 students in five tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. While the opinion of student leaders of these institutions were sought through a 10 - item interview schedule. A random sample drawn from the total population of 28,900 students from these institutions was determined through a mathematical process using the Yard's formula. Data collected through questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while chi-square analysis was used to test the null hypothesis postulated for the study. The data from the oral interviews which were recorded on tape were transcribed and interpreted manually by the researcher. A total of 390 questionnaires were returned representing 99% of the total copies of questionnaires administered. The study reveals that youths prefer movie/films to other television programme types; violent television programmes have negative influence on youths; youths who watch violent television programmes tend to see crime as an acceptable way of life. The study also reveals that there is a significant relationship between television violence and propensity for violent behaviour among youths in tertiary institutions.

1. Introduction

There have been series of media reports of unabated cases of violence among youths in tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Cult clashes among rival secret cult groups have left many persons; cult members, innocent students and workers dead or seriously wounded. Observable evidence shows increase incidents of armed robbery, rape, kidnapping and hired assassinations among students in these tertiary institutions. Newspapers have multiple examples of these incidents (Azuatalam and Olaniyi, 2009). The degree of violence among these students constitute a major problem that make the students fearful of school because of the kind of harassment they experience from their fellow students. When this kind of problem happens in tertiary institutions, it impedes the productivity of teachers and students performance and concentration. This problem is fast becoming a normal part of academic experience which Nigerian students must learn to either tolerate or join the violent group. This indeed has become a worrisome issue. Scholars and social commentators have often wondered why a young person would work seemingly hard to gain admission to a tertiary institution and then suddenly abandon his studies and get involve in cultism and other violent related criminal behaviour. Most scholars have suggested that the cause may be traced to the influence of hard drugs, poverty, family environment, peer pressure, political influence, etc (Severin and Tankard, 2001). However, since studies of notable scholars like Centrewall (1992), Perry (2002) and Dominick (1993) have shown that children and youths in particular often imitate what they see and watch on television, one may then ask: what is the effect of the television violence watch by the youths in Port Harcourt on their behaviour? This is the focus of this study.

Violence cuts across generations, it affects every segment of the society and it is particularly common among school-going youths and adolescent. Youth violence especially on campus is a serious problem for students in tertiary institutions and for which they receive limited help. Television violence could be classified as programmes that contain scenes and sequences of; murder, aggressive sexual acts, ritual killings, maiming, blood spilling, armed robbery, kidnapping, war, fighting, quarreling, shouting and the use of firearms and other dangerous weapons such as clubs, truncheons and base ball bats. Violent crimes on the other hand include criminal activities perpetrated by people who usually involve the use of physical force, dangerous weapons or firearms.

Empirical works of scholars in mass media have shown that children and youths in particular often imitate what they watch on a social medium as television. For instance, there have been serious concerns over the negative impact of television violence since 1920s when many critics argued that motion pictures had a negative influence on children and youths. These criticisms prompted the Payne Fund, a private philanthropic organization, to sponsor a series of 13 studies on aspects of movies' influence on children in 1928. After an examination of film content and impact on viewers' behaviour, it was recommended that the movies were potent sources of information, attitude and behaviour for the viewers including children and youths (Perry, 2002).

Joseph Klapper in 1960 summarized what was then known as the social impact of mass communication.

Differing from the opinions of many researchers before him, Klapper downplayed the potential harmful effects of the mass media. He concluded by saying that the mass media including television function most often to reinforce individuals existing attitude and predisposition. This view by Joseph Klapper which came to be known as the “minimal effect” position was influential in the development of a theory of media effects (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003, p.373).

However, in 1982, the United States National Institute of Mental Health issued a report on media violence dated 1983, titled “The Mental Health Report 1982”. The report offered this conclusion that violence on television does lead to aggressive behaviour by children and youths who participated in the laboratory experiment and field studies. Not all children become aggressive, of course, but the correlation between violence and aggression is positive. The report went further to say that in magnitude; television violence is as strongly correlated with aggressive behaviours as any other behavioural variable that has been measured. In addition, the recommendation of the study of the National Institute of Mental Health is that watching television induces more violence among viewers than other aggressive agents which according to Centrewall (1992), include poverty, alcohol, stress, frustration and drugs.

It is obvious that television is not a single causal agent of youths violence, the factors listed above are factors to be considered. However, violence in television unlike other agents are usually presented in an interesting and entertaining manner such that it is easier to imitate and copy by children and youths. That is why Huesmann Rowell (2008:15) in his contribution emphasized that not every child who watches a lot of violence on television or play a lot of violent games will grow up to be violent. But just as every cigarette increases the chance that someday a smoker will get lung cancer, every exposure to violence increases the chance that someday a child will behave more violently than he otherwise would. Earlier in 1959, the New York Department of Mental Health Hygiene researchers evaluated both television violence viewing and aggressive behaviour of 184 third grade boys. In a follow up study of the same group ten years later, they discovered an astonishing long term effect. Dr. Monroe Lefkowitz, the senior researcher of the team, concluded that regardless of whether the individual’s behaviour at age eight was combative or aggressive, if he watched high levels of television violence, he was likely to rank high in aggression ten years later.

These studies and scores of similar empirical studies of media researcher like Ehindaro (2010), Dosunmu (2007), and Gunter (2002) among others, make it clear that the relationship between television and anti-social behaviour is sufficiently proven to warrant immediate remedial action. Since young viewers in particular easily adopt and imitate what they see on a social medium as television, one wonders if the television violence on Nigerian television has any influence on the high level of youth criminality in tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine the relationship between watching violent content of Nigerian television programmes and the tendency toward violence among youths in tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine the relationship between watching violent TV programmes and tendency to apply violence among youths. And to ascertain the extent to which TV programmes influence the way youths who watch them view crime. It also aims at determining the relationship between TV programme preference and perception of crime among youths.

3. Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no relationship between television programme preference and perception of crime among youths in tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt. This hypothesis was tested using Chi-square.

4. Theoretical Framework

The complex nature of television violence and the behaviour associated with it, how this behaviour is learnt and reflected among youths in tertiary institutions indicate that one single theory cannot adequately account for a study on television violence and its relationship. Consequently, the theoretical framework for this study is a form of an eclectic theory of aggression which combines the biological and psychological origin of violence with social learning theory.

A combination of Berkowitz concept of violence and Bandura Social Learning Theory therefore, provide the theoretical framework for this study. According to Berkowitz (1963), people respond to violence and anger differently depending on their biological make up, family background and the impact of social learning. Whether the person actually engages in aggressive actions will depend in part on his or her learning history, interpretations of the event and individual way of responding to frustration. It also depends however, on the presence of aggression eliciting stimuli in the environment. Perpetrators may probably have history of cumulative social and psychological deprivation of which they respond through violence (Ehindaro, 2010).

Another component theory of aggression is the Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). This theory is also referred to as the "imitation or modeling theory" (Perry, 2002). In this theory, human beings adapt, learn and maintain behaviour patterns that have worked in the past even if they worked occasionally. This learning process begins in early childhood. Children develop many complex aggressive behaviours merely by watching their parents and significant others in their communities and school environment through modeling or imitation. A child and by extension the youth's aggressive behaviour pattern therefore is often acquired through the modeling or imitation of other people. Violence observed among youths in tertiary institutions is assumed to follow this pattern of behaviour that is learnt from others. According to Bandura when a child's imitative behaviour is reinforced or rewarded by praise and encouragement from significant models, the probability that the behaviour will occur in the future is increased. He identifies three major types of models; the family members, members of one's subculture and symbolic models provided by the media (Bandura, 1977). The imitation and modeling theory suggests that people learn aggressive behaviours from television and then go out and reproduce them. This might be especially true if viewers identify aggressive characters that are rewarded or not punished (Perry, 2002).

Bandura (1986) identified some contextual factors that can increase attention to television violence in a television programme. First is attractive perpetrator. Attractive perpetrators are more likely to be imitated and identified with by viewers especially the youths than the unattractive characters. Secondly, the extensiveness of the violence may also facilitate and heighten imitation. Repeated exposure to violent television fare functions as a form of cognitive rehearsal, thereby strengthening and reinforcing aggressive scripts stored in the memory. Indeed studies have shown that heavy viewing of violent scenes on television can have a significant impact on learning aggression through imitating others aggressive actions (Hoesmann, Eron, Berkowitz and Chaffee, 1992).

Bandura's imitation or modeling theory was adopted for this study, to provide a framework to understand how youths acquire violent behaviour by watching violent television programmes. This social learning theory suggests that people learn aggressive behaviour from television and then go out and reproduce what they watch.

5. Research Method

5.1 Procedure

Survey research design was used in this study. The population consisted students in tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The sample consisting 395 students selected from the total population of 28,900 students in five tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt was derived through a mathematical process called the Yard's Formula (Avwokeni, 2007). This formula is represented mathematically as: $n^1 = \frac{N}{1 + N (\ell)^2}$ Where

n = sample size, N = population, ℓ = level of significance (0.05).

Stratified random sampling was applied to determine the number of students that served as respondents in each institution. This was done in proportion to the number of students in each institution.

$$\text{Example, } \frac{\text{Number of students in school}}{\text{Total number of population}} \times \text{Total sample}$$

Through this proportional method, the numbers of respondents in various institutions were drawn as follows: 167, 114, 74, 21, and 19 respectively, totaling 395 respondents. To select respondents in each institution, a department was selected from each faculty. This was done alphabetically and randomly. Through this process, department whose alphabetical order comes first in the faculty was selected as a representative of that faculty. The total number of sample in each institution was divided accordingly by the number of selected departments. These respondents in each department were administered with copies of questionnaire without bias to gender or level and their responses analyzed.

Two research instruments were applied - questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire for the study was divided into two sections "A" and "B". Section A sought information about the respondent's personal data while section B sought information about the matter being investigated. Each respondent was expected to indicate the degree of his/her agreement or disagreement with the question. Also interview schedule was administered on ten student leaders in these institutions comprising presidents and secretaries (two from each institution). The research questions formulated for this research work were framed into ten interview questions which were administered as oral interview on these student leaders. The items were found to possess satisfactory internal reliability with value of 0.78. Students seated in class were given numbers before the administration of the copies of questionnaire. Student given number 1, was used as starting point followed by student with number 2 in that order to the last number of respondent. Data obtained using questionnaire were analyzed using the

descriptive statistics. Chi-square was used to test the hypotheses postulated for this study. Also data gathered through oral interview were transcribed and interpreted manually by the researcher.

5.2 Analysis of Data

Table 1 summarizes the responses on the relationship between watching violent TV programmes and tendency to apply violence, among youths. Table 1 shows a correlation of 0.47. This indicates that there exists a positive but moderate correlation between youths watching violent TV programmes and their tendency to apply violence in their day to day lives.

Table 2 is on influence of violent television programmes on youths. That is, how the youths who watch violent television programmes see crime. As shown in the table, 82% of the respondents were in agreement that youths who watch violent television programmes see crime as an acceptable way of life, 5% were undecided while 13% disagreed. This implies that youths who watch such television programmes see crime as acceptable way of life.

Also, as shown in table 3, the calculated X^2 value 46:61 is greater than the critical value 15.51. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there exists a significant relationship between violent television programme preferred by the youths and how they perceived crime.

Table 1: Summary of Responses on Relationship between Watching Violent Programmes and Tendency to Apply Violence among Youths.

Variable	Σx Σy	Σx^2 Σy	Σxy	df	r cal
TV Programmes	2499	17073	30045	388	0.47
Violence	4563	56137			

Table 2: Influence of Violent Television Programme on Youths.

Criterion	Agreed		Undecided		Disagreed		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Youths who watch violent TV programmes see crime as an acceptable way of life.	318	(82%)	20	(5%)	52	(13%)	390	(100%)

Table 3: Chi-square Analysis of Relationship between TV Programme Preference and Perception of Crime among Youths.

Variable	Agree	Not sure	No	Total N	df	x^2 cal	x^2 crit
Movies/films	129(107)	3(10)	56(81)	197	8	46.61	15.51
News	46 (46)	6 (4)	34 (36)	86			
Sports	26 (41)	4 (4)	46 (32)	76			
Documentaries	1 (4)	1 (0)	6 (3)	8			
Others	8 (12)	5 (1)	10 (5)	23			
Total	210	19	161	390			

The findings of the study indicate that there exist a significant relationship between the violent content of television programmes youths watch and the tendency of these youths to apply violence in their everyday life. This suggests that the more youths watch violent television programmes the more they tend to apply violence among themselves. This is in agreement with the Bandura's Social Learning Theory which states that people learn aggressive behaviour from television and then go out and reproduce them. This might be true especially if viewers identify aggressive behaviour that is not punished. This is also called the imitation or modeling theory of media violence. This finding also agrees with an incident reported in (Perry, 2002, pp. 221-222). October 6, 1977, a court in Miami, USA convicted 15years old Renald Zamora of murder of 82-years old Elimo Haggart. Zamora was also convicted of burglary and possession of firearms while committing the said crime. Zamora defence lawyer, Ellis Robin, argued that the young man was innocent of the crime because he suffered from temporary insanity linked to habitual exposure to television violence. According to him, Zamora regularly spent several hours daily watching extremely violent programmes on television, he became especially obsessed with the TV character Kojak and wanted to shave his head in imitation of the TV actor Telly Savalas. Supposedly, years of viewing had left the youth unable to distinguish, when he murdered the woman, between the fantasy world on television and reality.

It was shown also, that youths who watch violent television programmes see crime as an acceptable way of life. The results of the tested hypothesis postulated for this study indicate that the viewing of crime as an acceptable way of life was statistically significant. This is because the obtained X^2 values 46.61 is greater than the critical value 15.51. This implies that television violence desensitizes, toughens and hardens the youths to the extent that they no longer have fear for violence or consequences of violence. This corroborates the opinion of Huesman (2008), that exposure to violence on television increases the chances that someday a child will behave more violently than he otherwise would. According to him, just as every cigarette increases the chance that someday a smoker will get lung cancer, every exposure to violence increases the chances that someday a youth will behave more violently than he otherwise would. This is in conformity with the American psychological Association (2003) that people often behave differently after watching violent television programmes. Those who watched violent shows were more likely to strike out at playmates, argue, disobey authority and were less willing to wait for things than those who watch non-violent television programmes.

6. Findings

The study was conducted to investigate the relationship between television violence and the propensity for violent behaviour among youths in tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

To guide the study, two specific objectives and a null hypothesis were formulated to facilitate the study. Using the survey method with questionnaire and interview as instrument for data collection, the following findings emerged: Youths prefer movies/films to other television types such as sports, news, documentary, and others; Youths who watch violent television programmes tend to see crime as an acceptable way of life; the more youths watch, violent content of Nigerian television programmes the more they tend to apply violence in their social relations; most youths who watch violent television programmes often learn how to commit other violent acts.

The consequences impact negatively on the learning process and academic performance of these violent perpetrators. The youths and society members who are victims of violence are likely to experience problems such as depression, anxiety, injury, destruction of property and sometimes lost of life. It appears reasonable to conclude that violence on our television is becoming unhealthy and therefore requires an immediate attention of parents, school authorities, television producers, relevant government agencies and the society in general.

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