

# Childhood Aggression: Fallout from Violent Movies Viewing

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## Abstract

The focus of this study was to examine the issue of childhood aggression as a result of violent movies being paraded on the television screens. The level of aggression shown by children particularly during their formative and educational years have been found to be associated to the volume and type of aggression and violence they see paraded on the television. The study sample consisted of 199 students drawn from a secondary school in Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State. Video films consisting of violent scenes were shown to the participants for a period of time after which they were examined for their level of aggression after watching the films. The results showed that participants who were exposed to viewing violent movie reported higher level of aggression than those who are exposed to non-violent movies ( $t = 3.593$ ,  $df = 197$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The result also showed that female participants reported a higher level of verbal aggression than their male counterparts ( $t = 0.002$   $df = 197$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The study opined that young children needs to be monitored in the selection of what they watch on television because they could be easily influenced or prone to imitating any action they observe on the screens.

**Keywords:** aggression, television, violence, influence, movies

## Introduction

One of the visible changes in our today's society and social environment in the twenty-first century is the presence and increased saturation of the mass media. In our society today, radio, television, movies, videos, video games and social network have assumed central roles in our daily lives. Whether we want to accept that or not, today's mass media are having significant impact on our values, beliefs, and behaviours. However, unfortunately, the consequences of mass media exposure have particularly detrimental effects on viewers and their behaviour, and in more specific terms, the children. Research evidences have accumulated over the years to suggest that exposure to violence on television as viewed by children in their formative years increases the risk of violent behavioural tendencies been exhibited as they grow older.

Children of this generation now live in a world where many of the experiences they have are developed and shaped through the screens. Children naturally are likely to feel some of their first fears as they watch a scary movie or television programme, begin to develop non-familial attachments or bonding with a favorite character on television either in a cartoon, soaps, movies, or documentaries. Sometimes they begin to feel empathic about certain characters they see on TV and report these scenes to their parents as though these characters were real, either not wanting them to die, or something bad happening to them.

Children develop – and quite very fast it must be added – their emotional and social capabilities through a complex process. They must acquire the norms, rules, and values that will enable them form connections and function in families, peer groups, and in the broader society to effectively participate in their culture. As each day go by, they learn in their relationships with parents, siblings, teachers, and friends. All of these form the agents of socialization with which the child comes in contact and these days electronic media in the form of television has added a great mix to the socialization process. Television programs, cartoons, movies, documentaries, and even the internet provide children the platform to understand and appreciate the world they live in, the norms and standards of conduct by watching social actors in fictional stories, all through the media.

## Childhood Aggression

One of the most debated and controversial issues in relation to the media are the amount of violence portrayed on a day to day basis. Throughout the past 20 years it seems that the amount of violence in the media has grown immensely. The National Coalition on Television Violence (1994) (NCTV) states that accidents, emotional displays, horseplay, slapstick, threats and sports activities are not included in their guideline as acts of violence. They also state that an average of 9.5 violent acts per hour appeared on prime time TV in 1989-90 and Saturday morning network programming featured 20 violent acts per hour in the same time. In addition, they state that by the age of 18, a typical child has witnessed estimate 200,000 acts of violence, including 25,000 murders. Violence in America seems to be part of the zeitgeist of the past few decades and the ceiling that it is regulated by, such as NC-17 or R ratings. They have yet to curb the amount of violence seen on primetime television or on the big screen throughout the country on any given night. The result of these violent movies seems to have a strong correlation with the amount of crime that has engulfed cities across America. Many groups, such as the NCTV are trying to do something about it because they believe that media literacy is very important to bringing about peace in our nation. It may not be the direct answer to this difficult question, but it may be a beginning to one.

Comstock and Lindsey (1975) also support Bandura arguments, they said” Children will learn from observing models on television as well as from observing the actions of live person..... what has been clearly demonstrated is that children can acquire aggressive ways of behaving from television and will exhibit these aggressive responses in a play behavior”

### **Statement of the Problem**

The opinion that television, video games and internet affects young people’s behavior is very well documented. Various findings have posited that media violence exposure increases subsequent physical aggression across development. In fact, recent media theorists have suggested that chronic and frequent exposure to violent media and aggressive depictions may influence the display of not only physical and verbal aggression but also relational aggression among young children (Gentile, Linder, & Walsh, 2003).

During the formative years of children, they may have meaningful stable interpersonal relationships. It is likely that young children may acquire coercive and aggressive behaviours from these significant relationships. It is also likely that they could learn, model and be reinforced for using relationally aggressive tactics via media exposure during the early childhood years. The converse is also predicted. That is, that young children who are exposed to prosocial models and educational media content will be more likely to model prosocial behaviors during interactions with peers concurrently and prospectively (Fisch, Truglio, & Cole, 1999). The issues are how much and how do violent movies contribute to aggressive behavior among young people?

This study therefore attempts to understand that in terms of amount of time spent watching television by young people, if it has an adverse effect on their reading ability and creativity as well as how they are able to develop and maintain proper and acceptable levels of social relationships because they live and move among people virtually for all of their time.

For the young school-age children, information is piece meal, with no or little comprehension of reality and no ability to exercise any critical evaluation skills. This is thought to increase the likelihood of imitation of television characters, and to cause the children’s to believe what they see (Berk, 1997). This is because children pay a great deal of attention to what they see and hear and they are naturally inclined to want to practice what they have watched without necessarily evaluating the dangers involved which would have been meticulously calculated if it was an adult.

### **Research Hypotheses**

- i.** Participants in group 1 that were exposed to viewing violent movies will report higher level of aggression than participants in group 2 who will be exposed to non-violent movies.
- ii.** Male participants that watched movies rated violence or non- violence will report higher level of physical aggression than female participants that will be exposed to movies rated violence or non- violence.
- iii.** Female participants exposed to movie rated violence or non-violence will report higher level of verbal aggression than male participant that will be exposed to movie rated violent or non- violent.
- iv.** Older students exposed to violent or non-violent movie likely to report higher level of violent or aggressive tendency than younger students who will be exposed to violent or non-violent movies.

### **Literature Review**

There have been many studies on the influence of violent movies viewing on “Childhood Aggression”.The first experiment that addressed this study “Childhood Aggression; Fallouts from violent movies viewing” was done in 1961and 1963 by a social theorist “Albert Bandura”. Bandura hoped that the experiments would prove that aggression can be explained, at least in part, by social learning theory. The Theory of Social Learning, state that behavior such as aggression is learned through observation and imitating others.

The experiments are important because they sparked many more studies on effects of watching violent movies on childhood aggression. Bandura suggested that people behave aggressively because they are imitating behaviour which they have seen modeled by other people or have learned vicariously from watching others. In a series of demonstrations, Bandura and others (Bandura and Walters; Bandura, Ross and Ross) showed that children were very quick to pick up aggressive styles of acting from watching a films, but did not necessarily show them immediately in their behaviours. However, they would produce these behaviours if they were put in a situation where it was advantageous for them to do so.

The influence of television effect on people has been documented in many newspapers and medical journals. One of the most popular debates of television’s effects arouse after John W. Hinckley’s attempt to assassinate President Reagan, which was linked by lawyers to watching the movies (Taxi Drive (Lande, 1993)). This is very merely one of the many cases of violent crime modeled after a movie scene.

In the United States America (U.S.A), the national television violence study (1996) found that of nearly 2,700 shows analyzed in a 20 week survey of 23 channels, 57% contained at least some violence. This study made some condemning observations about the way violence is presented in the United State America (U.S.A).

According to the content analysis, 47% of the violent acts show result in on observable harm to the victim. Only 16% of violent shows contained message about the long term negative repercussion of violence and in an astounding 73% of all violent scenes, the perpetrator went unpunished (Wilson et al, 1996). These figures, however, were based on some excessively strict guidelines. Unlike some earlier studies, violence in comedies was not considered as violent acts.

In the recent years, individuals have been exposed to immense amount of aggression. Survey shows that many Americans believe that there is too much violence on television (Bushman 1988). There is a drastic difference in the content of videos today as opposed to videos in the 60s. Much more gruesome and brutal scenes are shown today (Taylor, Peplau and Sears, 1997). In movies created forty years ago death scenes did not occur on screen, but off screen in a manner only suggestive of death.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Aggression is a construct that has attracted a considerable amount of attention from both psychologists and non-psychologist. In order to get a better understanding of the term “Aggression” it is important to discuss some theories on aggression which has been put forward by psychologist and non-psychologists.

### **Social Theories**

Most social theorists believe that some kind of arousal has to come before aggression. They fundamental causes is considered to have a significant learning elements, while some social theorists accept that there may be an instinctual component as well.

For example, Bandura (1977) suggested that people, behave aggressively because they learned vicariously from watching others (modeling). In a series of demonstrators, Bandura and others (Bandura and Walter; Bandura, Rose and Rose) showed that children were very quick to pick up aggressive style of acting from watching a film, but did not necessarily show them immediately in their behaviour. However, they would produce these behaviours if they were put in a situation where it was advantageous for them to do so.

### **Biological Model**

One of the popular explanations for aggression is that it is of imitate biological trait. Biological explanations for aggression have taken several different forms. Freud (1920) argue that, describe people has a negative, destructive energy, which when released produced aggression and other aspects of the “dark side” of human nature. He called the dark side energy “Thanatos”, while the positive energy was known as Libido. The apparent contradictions of human nature, how we can be affectionate and caring to some, yet vicious and cruel to others, were produced in friends theory by the conflicts of these two energies.

Lorenz (1950) also described aggression as a biological trait. In this case, an internal energy builds up within the individual and has to be released. If it is not released safely, in ritualized activities such as sports, then Lorenz argued, it will spill out in anti-social aggression.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

Multiple randomizations were adopted for this study. The independent variable was manipulated into two (2) levels (violent and non violent movies) which were measured on one dependent variable “Aggressive tendency”.

### **Participants**

Two hundred junior secondary school students participated in this research work. The participants were drawn from a selected junior secondary school in Ago Iwoye, Ogun State namely Muslim High School. The participants consisted of 107 (53.8%) female while 93 (46.8%) are male. This shows that majority of the participants are female. Distribution by age, 165 (82.9%) of the participants were between the age range of nine and fifteen, while 34 (17.1%) falls within the age limit of sixteen and twenty one. This implies that majority of the participants were adolescents and teenagers. Educational characteristics of the participants, 65(32.7%), 74(36.7%) and 60(30.7%) are in JSS3, JSS2, and JSS1 respectively. This shows that all the participants are in junior secondary schools with a larger percentage falling into JSS2 class. Distribution by religion, 99 (49.7%) of the participants belongs to the Christian religion, 94 (47.2%) are of Muslim decent while the rest could not be identified with a particular religious practices.

### **Sampling Technique**

Simple random sampling was carried out on the participants. The participants were given equal opportunity to participate in the study. Participants that picked YES from a little bowl containing YES and NO pieces of paper were selected to participate in the study and participants that picked NO did not participate in the study. Further, those that picked YES were split into two groups by using random sampling to avoid bias in the study. Those

that picked G1 (Group 1) were placed in Group one and those that G2 (Group 2) were placed in Group two, group one represent violent movie while group two represent non- violent movie. The participants consisted of two hundred (200) students.

### Instruments

Video containing violent scenes was “**Hotel Rwanda**” which was a battle between the Tutsi and Hutu tribe in 1992. The battle scene was bloody and violent. Men were brutalized before they were finally shot dead, women were raped by several soldiers before they are killed and the movie also portrayed mass killing of young children.

The non violent movie shown was “**One Three Hill**”. In this movie scene, no violence was exhibited in the characters. Both violent and non violent video clips were viewed for 10 minutes each.

Proceeding the video session, the participants filled out questionnaires, which measured the participant’s aggression levels. They were asked to rate each item on a Likert scale of one to five (“strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). The aggression scale used was Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire (1992), an aggressive scale designed Buss, A.H., and Perry, M.P. (1992). The questionnaire measured four (4) dimensions of aggression.

- i. *Physical Aggression*
- ii. *Verbal Aggression*
- iii. *Anger*
- iv. *Hostility*

The aggression questionnaire was formulated to accurately measure the different sub traits of aggression.

The questionnaire was made into two (2) sections, section A and section B.

The section A of the questionnaire was designed to measure socio- demographic information of each participant such as gender, age, level of education, and religion.

The section B contains the 29 items aggression scale by Buss and Perry (1992), but modified to 25 items to make it simple and understandable to the participants. The scale was developed to measure the level of aggression on 5 point Likert format of: extremely uncharacteristic modified to strongly disagree (1), moderately uncharacteristic modified to disagree (2), neutral modified to undecided (3), moderate characteristic modified to agree (4), extremely characteristic modified to strongly agree (5). The responses were modified to make it simple and understandable to the participants.

### Method of Data Analysis

The data collected in the course of this study was subjected to analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).Four hypotheses were tested in this study. Hypotheses one, two, three, and four were tested using “t”-test The choice of the statistical tests was informed by the manipulation of the independent variable into two levels (violent movie and non violent movie) which was measured on one dependent variable (aggressive tendency) and aggressive tendency can be categorized into four levels (Physical aggression, Verbal aggression, Anger, Hostility).

### Data Analysis

**Table 1: Socio-Demographics Analysis of Respondents**

| DEMOGRAPHIC DATA   | FREQUENCY | PERCENT |
|--------------------|-----------|---------|
| GENDER             |           |         |
| Male               | 92        | 46.2    |
| Female             | 107       | 53.8    |
| AGE                |           |         |
| 9-15               | 165       | 82.9    |
| 16-21              | 34        | 17.1    |
| LEVEL OF EDUCATION |           |         |
| JSS 1              | 60        | 30.7    |
| JSS 2              | 74        | 36.7    |
| JSS 3              | 65        | 32.7    |
| RELIGION           |           |         |
| Christianity       | 99        | 49.7    |
| Muslim             | 94        | 47.2    |
| Others             | 6         | 3.0     |

From Table 1 above, 107 (53.8%) of the respondents were female while 92 (46.8%) are male. This shows that majority of the respondents are female. The table above revealed that 165 (82.9%) of the surveyed respondent were between the age range of nine and fifteen, while 34 (17.1%) falls within the age limit of sixteen

and twenty one. This implies that majority of the respondent are adolescents and teenagers. The table above depicts the educational characteristics of the surveyed respondent. 65(32.7%), 74(36.7%) and 60(30.7%) are in JSS3, JSS2, and JSS1 respectively. This shows that all of the respondents are in junior secondary schools with a larger percentage falling into JSS2 class. Above table also show that 99 (49.7%) of the respondents belongs to the Christian religion, 94 (47.2%) are of Muslim decent while the rest could not be identified with a particular religious practices.

### Hypotheses Testing

*H1: Participants in group 1 that were exposed to viewing violent movies will report higher level of aggression than participants in group 2 who will be exposed to non-violent movies.*

Hypothesis one which stated that participants (GROUP ONE) that are exposed to viewing violent movie will report higher level of aggression than participants (GROUP TWO) who will be exposed to non violent movies was tested using t-test and the result is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: The difference between participants in group one and group two on aggression**

| Variable   | Groups    | N   | X     | SD    | DF  | T     | P     |
|------------|-----------|-----|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|
| Aggression | Group one | 99  | 67.22 | 17.16 | 197 | 3.593 | >0.05 |
|            | Group two | 100 | 70.07 | 16.74 |     |       |       |

Showing from Table 2, the hypothesis stating that participants (group one) that are exposed to viewing violent movie will report higher level of aggression than participants (group two) who are exposed to non-violent movies is accepted (**T= 3.593, DF= 197, P>0.05**). Therefore, hypothesis one is hereby accepted and this posits that exposure to violent television has a significant influence on the level of aggression a child can exhibit.

*H2: Male participants that watched movies rated violence or non- violence will report higher level of physical aggression than female participants that will be exposed to movies rated violence or non- violence.*

Hypothesis two which stated that male participants that watched movie rated violence or non- violence will report higher level of physical aggression than female participants that were exposed to movies rated violence or non- violence was tested using t-test and the result is presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: The difference between male and female on physical aggression**

| Variable            | Gender | N   | X     | SD   | DF  | T    | P     |
|---------------------|--------|-----|-------|------|-----|------|-------|
| Physical Aggression | Male   | 92  | 13.75 | 3.93 | 197 | 3.13 | >0.05 |
|                     | Female | 107 | 13.13 | 4.61 |     |      |       |

Showing from table 3, the hypothesis 2, stating that male participants that watched movie rated violence or non- violence will report higher level of physical aggression than female participants that watched movies rated violence or non- violence. It shows that male participant does not report higher level of physical aggression than female participants (**T= 3.13, DF=197, P>0.05**). Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

*H3: Female participants exposed to movie rated violence or non-violence will report higher level of verbal aggression than male participants that was exposed to movie rated violent or non-violence.*

Hypothesis three which stated that Female participants exposed to movie rated violence or non-violence will report higher level of verbal aggression than male participants that was exposed to movie rated violent or non-violence was subjected to t-test and the result is presented in Table 4 below:

**Table 4: The difference between male and female on verbal aggression:**

| Variable          | Gender | N   | X     | SD   | DF  | T     | P     |
|-------------------|--------|-----|-------|------|-----|-------|-------|
| Verbal Aggression | Female | 107 | 14.50 | 4.30 | 197 | 0.002 | <0.05 |
|                   | Male   | 92  | 14.23 | 4.18 |     |       |       |

Showing from table 4, the hypothesis 3 stating that female participants exposed to movie rated violence or non- violence will report higher level of verbal aggression than male participants that was exposed to movie rated violence or non- violence. The table depict that female participants reported higher than male participants (**T=0.002, DF=197, P<0.05**). Therefore, the hypothesis 3 is accepted.

*H4: Older students exposed to violent or non- violent movie are likely to report higher level of aggression than younger students who are exposed to violent or non- violent movies.*

Hypothesis four which stated that older students exposed to violent or non- violent movie are likely to report higher level of aggression than younger students who are exposed to violent or non- violent movies was tested using t-test and the result is presented in Table 5 below:

**Table 5: The difference between (Ages), older and younger students on aggression:**

| Variable   | Age   | N   | X     | SD    | DF  | T     | P     |
|------------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|
| Aggression | 16/21 | 35  | 71.03 | 11.63 | 197 | 0.563 | >0.05 |
|            | 9/15  | 164 | 69.37 | 16.10 |     |       |       |

Showing from table 5, the hypothesis 4, stating that older students exposed to violent or non- violent

movie are likely to report higher level of aggression than younger students who are exposed to violent or non violent movies. The result depict that older students did not report higher than younger students ( $T=0.563$ ,  $DF=197$ ,  $P>0.05$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis 4 is rejected.

### **Discussion**

This study investigated the influence of violent movies viewing on childhood aggression. Total number of 200 junior secondary school students participated in the study, while the percentage was within the range of 53.8% for female and 53.8% for male, and their age 82.9% for the age range of 9/15years and 17.1% for the age range from 16/21years, level of education, 30.7% for JSS1, 36.7% for JSS2 and 32.7% for JSS3 and lastly religion, 49.7% for Christianity, 47.2% for Muslim decent and 3.0% for others. This study was carried out in a selected Junior Secondary School within Ago-Iwoye; Ogun State. The researcher analyzed the investigated data by the use of t- test.

Hypothesis one, which stated that participants that are exposed to viewing violent movies will report higher level of aggression than participants who will be exposed to non- violent movies. The result of this study shows that there is significant difference in the level of aggression among participants who viewed violent movie and non- violent movie. In other words, violent movies has effect on childhood aggression .The result from this hypothesis supported previous study by Albert Bandura (1977) who suggested that people behave aggressively, they tends to imitate aggressive behaviours they have seen modeled by others or learned vicariously from violent movie viewing. Bandura and others (Bandura and Walter; Bandura, Ross and Ross) showed that children are very quick in picking up aggressive style of acting from watching movies, but do not show in their behaviour immediately.

Hypothesis two which stated that male participants that are exposed to movies rated violent or non-violent will report higher level of physical aggression than female participants that will be exposed to movies rated violent or non- violent. The result in this study depict that male participants did not show higher physical aggressive tendency than female participants exposed to violent or non- violent movies. Result of this study opposed previous study by Comstock and Lindsley (1975) children learn from observing models on television as well as from observing the actions of live person; what has been clearly demonstrated is that children can acquire aggressive way of behaving through viewing violent movies and exhibit these aggressive responses in play behaviours. In the previous study, male participants demonstrated significantly higher physical aggression than female participants. The reason why this hypothesis was rejected might be due to the fact that, the number of male participants was relatively small compare to the number of female participants. Males were ninety two (92) while females were one hundred and seven (107). The results might have been different if equal number of male and female participants were used.

Hypothesis three stated that female participants exposed to movie rated violent or non- violent will report higher level of verbal aggression than male participants that will be exposed to movie rated violent or non-violent. The result depicts that female participant's shows higher level of verbal aggression than male participants. The result from this hypothesis did not support the previous study by Day and Ghandour (1984) girls and boys were shown violent movies, after viewing the videos, play behaviour were observed. Girls did not show imitative aggression whereas boys are more affected than girls by video they view.

Hypothesis four stated that older students exposed to violent or non- violent movie are likely to report higher level of aggression than younger students who are exposed to violent or non- violent movie. Result from this hypothesis shows that older students did not report higher aggressive tendency than younger students that are exposed to violent or non- violent movie. The reason why this hypothesis was rejected might be due to the fact that, the number of older students was very small compare to the number of younger students. The older students were thirty five (35) while the younger students were one hundred and sixty four (164). The result could have been different if equal number of older students and younger students were used.

### **Conclusion**

The manipulation check used in this was successful in determining participants judgment if the video viewed contained violence or not. In this study age was found to have effect on aggressive tendency among younger students than older students. Apparently, age does play a role on childhood aggression that fallout of violent movies viewing. Though age is far from the only predicting factors of aggression, but it seems to be predictive of such behaviour. According to the result gotten from this study, viewing violent movie has an influence on aggressive behaviour.

### **Recommendation**

This study's results depict that violent movies has effect on childhood aggression and that age contribute if not in a large extent to how violent movies affect human behaviour. Knowledge of this study result will be effective in inhibiting high level of aggression among children, most especially female. Thus, the younger ones need to be

monitored in their selection of movies they intend to watch, because these younger students are found to be more aggressive in this study and it's because they are easily influenced or prone to imitating any action they observe. Hence parents, guardians, and care givers should give maximum attention to the content of movies their children intends to watch and they should be punished for behaving in an aggressive way.

### Limitation

The study of this nature was supposed to have been conducted across some educational level, ranging from nursery to Junior Secondary School students within Nigeria. But due to time and financial constraints it could not be possible, so the study was limited to a selected Junior Secondary School within Ogun State. Small sample size employed has limited statistical power. Use of a larger number of participants would have provided a stronger test of the hypotheses and more confidence in generalization of the findings.

Level of aggression after viewing only a ten minute video segment were examined, future studies may find a larger increase in aggression if the participants viewed a longer segment of each video.

This study was limited to collecting of data through questionnaires, aggression could also be determined through observation in a situation similar to Albert Bandura (1977). Which examined the social learning theory, Bandura found that children who viewed a demonstration of a child hitting and kicking the bobo doll later modeled or imitate the behaviour they observed. Instead of a bobo doll, participants could view a violent movie in which children will be the main actor to display their aggression (SPY KIDS) and later observe their behaviours through recording.

Another limitation was that the study was carried out in a controlled setting, perhaps if the participants were in their natural environment, their reactions to the same video might be different. Since the research was conducted in a room, the participants could have held back some of their true feelings, due to the fact that participants may thought they are been watched or judged according to their answers. In spite of all the constraints, the result could not be said to be irrelevant and it gives credence to the fact that there is big fallout on the exhibition of aggression by children as a result of watching violence on television.

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