



## A STUDY OF IMPACT OF EXPOSURE TO VIOLENT MEDIA ON WELL-BEING AND ANXIETY AMONG PARENTS

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### Abstract :

*Mass media accounts for a major part of individual's everyday life. In the modern world, it is a form of recreation and socialization. Especially in today's world where people have restriction on activities due to the ongoing pandemic, media is an important source of entertainment for most of the people. News is an integral part of the mass media. Crime has been the principle genre in news media and now even crime reality shows have begun to captivate the audiences and continue to keep their attention. The audiences consume such media to an extent that they start internalizing the criminal and scary content that they get exposed to. It becomes difficult to balance between being informed and aware and to live in a continuum of consternation. The traumatizing yet realistic media content related to violence and fear has influence on its audience's perception and psyche in total as compared to fictional genre of programs. News and crime-based reality programs fabricate tremendous fear, and in many cases can even induce anxiety among people. Especially in today's world of insecurity arising out of the present pandemic scenario, people are worried about the present and future of themselves and their families. The present paper is a study of the impact of such violence and fear depicted in the news and crime-related media across the Indian television on the well-being and anxiety among parents. A small survey is conducted with 40 parents watching such news on daily basis to understand their own well-being and anxiety towards their children as a result of exposure to such media violence. Results show that exposure to violent news in the media has negative impact on general well-being of parents and also increases anxiety in them about the present and future of their children.*

**Key words:** *Violent media, general well-being, parental anxiety*

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### **Introduction :**

The easy availability of media at the tip of our fingers has made it effortless for us to access unlimited amount of information on a day to day basis. We frequently consume a vast amount of information which ranges from everyday



news, entertainment, sensational programs, daily soap, talk shows, reality shows, crime documentaries, and so on. The average media consumptions by Indians as recoded on 3rd April 2020, i.e., the 13th week of 2020 is 1.27 trillion minutes- the highest ever in a week. A report by BARC India and Neilson states that television and smartphone media consumption has increased to 43% in the 13th week of April. Since the dawn of electronic media such as television, and mobile phones, the impact of such media on individuals has been a topic of interest for the academicians and mental health professionals. Impact of violence in media on children have been a special concern among all, particularly after psychologist Albert Bandura's work on social learning, focusing on the learning by observation among children. However this effect of media is not limited to children, even adults can fall prey to such media. Media violence is the visual depiction of act of violence by one person on another. Crime related shows may be doing more harm than good. Dark genres such as crime, thriller, and horror successfully keep its audience hooked. However, there is a thin line between creating awareness among the audience and sensationalizing such topics of concern. Such concept is surely appreciated, but the negative side of it isn't taken into consideration. According to Psychologist Dr. Sanjoy Mukerji, in order to live a healthy life and in order to stay happy and contented, people have to focus more on the positive things than the negative ones. "Crime -reality shows bring an addiction and negativity to the people", he added. Crime has always been a topic that has been sensationalized since decades. Apparently, this has led to the questions like how this can shape people's perceptions of crime in general and how it can induce fright and moreover, how can such media induce several psychologically detrimental problems. Such media showcase graphics and narratives that have the capacity to create worry, induce fright and even traumatize people. Counselling Psychologist Rashi Laskari says, "Sensitive individuals, more so, children and elderly, are unable to see this reality as occasional, and start perceiving the world to be a bad place in general, which takes away their trust from the surroundings, making them experience intense negative emotions". This creates a fear among people to move around freely and they start viewing them as victims of such crimes absorbing the narratives as real and show negative changes in their behaviors, she added. In the late 1960s, violence in the media and its impairing effects on aggression in children was a topic of concern. However, little attention was given to the potential threat to the emotional wellbeing and how such media can induce anxiety among people.

The ever increasing news media coverage of violent incidents has made it difficult to balance between being informed and not being overwhelmed by the news that we are consuming. The constant consumption of sensational coverage, whether active or passive, can heighten the stress levels and trigger our flight or fight response. Exposure to such violent news media can become a major public problem. Research has stated the negative side of such portrayals. Consumption of such violent news and watching violent movies can lead to disturbed sleep and nightmares. The fright induced graphics and narrative imbedded into us by the professionals can be mentally and emotionally detrimental. The ways violence is portrayed in the news media, not only induce anxiety but also make the world seem hostile and crime-ridden. (Morgan and Shanahan 2010; Nabi and Riddle 2008). Constant exposure to media violence is detrimental as negative information impacts our brain in damaging ways. Consuming such media activates our sympathetic nervous system causing our body to release stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. Frequent



exposure to such stress response may cause physical symptoms such as fatigue and trouble sleeping. The deleterious effects of media violence on aggressive behavior are well documented (Anderson et al. 2003; Huesmann and Taylor 2006), but the effects of media violence on anxiety are studied less.

### **Review of Literature :**

The recent development in mass media has made media available easily for everyone. Moreover, there is a sudden growth in crime reenactment television programs which are successful in gathering large number of audience. News most often related to various aspects of crime form a major part of this media. This news keep the audience hooked up and also make them involved in it. This media constantly surround us, inform us and often misinform us (Gerbner and Gross, 1976). Not only this violence in media misinform us but it also induce anxiety in people. George Gerbner introduced the 'cultivation theory' in the 1960s to examine the influence of television on viewers. Gerbner and colleagues demonstrated how the crimes and violence shown on television are over emphasized as compared to what has actually happened or happens in the real world. The fear is induced through crime media especially when there is a belief that the media we consume is authentic and that everything that we are being exposed to through the television is the ultimate truth of the real world (Potter, 1986). According to Schneider, Gruman & Coutts (2005), Cultivation Theory states that "television operates as the prime socializing agent in today's world;" frequent consumption of violent media can in all probabilities control your perception of the world. However, there aren't enough studies to pinpoint whether excessive violent media consumption can cause dangerous perception of the world or if the dangerous perception of the world cause excessive violent media consumption. Meaning, it is still unknown, whether violent media is the 'cause' or the 'effect' of anxiety. Thus an individual dealing with anxiety toward his/ her outside environment may tend to spend more time at home thus more time watching television.

The findings of a study conducted by Callanan, V. J. (2012) states that media violence particularly, news media, produce fear in the individuals and heighten the perception of risk and fear of crime in individuals. Furthermore, a study by Derek Chdee and Jason Ditton (2005), maintains that there is lack of relationship between the crime demonstrated in media and the crime that actually transpire into real life. However, there is substantial amount of research on how crime media content distort the actuality of the crimes by unreasonably focusing on random violent crimes (Reiner 2007). In a study by Ashley Marie Nellis and Joanne Savage, perceived risk and fear of terrorism are associated with several media-related variables. It was observed that consuming terrorism-related news is indeed associated with perceived risk of terrorism to self and others and with fear for others, but not for self.

Not only media affect our perception of crime but also impacts the way we perceive day to day life events. Various studies propose that the public perceptions of problems and issues incorporate definitions, scenarios and language from news reports (Snow 1983; Altheide and Snow 1991; Comstock 1980; Bennett 1988; DeFleur and BallRokeach 1982). Gerbner and Gross (1976) and others have noted that fear is prevalent in our symbolic and effective environment. It is understood as real by most of us. There are many research that suggested that media effects might be limited to the individuals who literally pay attention when they watch violent news or other violent media. A study



by O'Keefe (1984), demonstrated the impact of attention to crime news on fear of crime. The findings supported the notion that attention to television news was actually related to feeling less safe walking alone in one's neighborhood at night, worrying about being burglarized, and being a victim of personal assault.

Finally, several researchers (Chiricos et al., 2000; Koomen, Visser, & Stapel, 2000; O'Keefe, 1984; Potter, 1986; Rubin, Perse, & Taylor, 1988; Sparks, 1992) suggest that perceived pragmatism of content or trustworthiness is likely to affect fear of crime, but experimental support is limited. Chiricos et al. (2000) suggested that the effects of exposure to the news media might be nullified if an individual is skeptical about the reliability of the account presented. Thus the present research focuses on the impact of violent media on well-being and anxiety among people. The current study thus aims to find the relation between exposure to media violence and general anxiety and well-being.

### **Aim :**

To study the impact of exposure to violent media on general well-being and anxiety among parents.

### **Objectives of the Study :**

1. To study the impact of exposure to violent media on parent's general well-being.
2. To study the impact of exposure to violent media on parent's anxiety about their children.

### **Hypotheses :**

1. More exposure to violent media causes negative impact on general well-being of parents.
2. More exposure to violent media causes increased anxiety among parents about their children's safety.

### **Operational Definition of variables :**

Independent variable

Exposure to violent news in the media

### **Dependent variable :**

1. Well-being of parents
2. Anxiety about children's safety

### **Methodology :**

#### **Sample :**

40 Parents in the age group of 40 to 60 years who watch violent media on daily basis are taken as sample. Both mothers and fathers are considered for the study.

#### **Tools Used :**

A self-developed questionnaire was used for the study. The questionnaire has 25 items. These items focus on parental anxiety about their children's safety and future. The items also focus on physical and mental well-being of the parents.


**Procedure :**

A small survey was conducted for studying the impact of being exposed to violent media on Parents' well-being and on the anxiety about children's safety.

**Statistical Analysis :**

Percentage method was used for analyzing the results of the survey.

**Results and Discussion :**

Considering the extent to which people expose themselves to the media and the impact of media on people in general, the present study focuses on finding the impact of exposure to particularly violent media in terms of violent news on parents with regards to their general well-being and anxiety about their children. According to the responses of parents recorded on the questionnaire, it was found that almost all of the respondents are exposed to violent news media, 51% consume media through social networking sites and remaining 49% consume through television. Of them, 59% are exposed to violent media often and 39% are exposed to such media sometimes. When asked about their reaction towards this kind of violent news, 66% of them confirmed that they feel disturbed and 30% said that they feel overwhelmed with such news.

Considering the impact of such violent media on their health, 44% of the parents said they have difficulty in concentration on day to day activities after consuming violent news, 30% said that the impact is so negative that they experience difficulty in sleeping. Such media also has an impact on people's mood, 35% of the parents confirmed that violent media negatively impacts their mood and they find it difficult to relax after listening such news, 22% admitted that they can't sit still and 66% responded that they feel annoyed and irritated when they get anxious while hearing such news. So overall the results show that exposure to violent news negatively impacts the general well-being of the respondents.

Exposure to such violent news also brings about anxiety in people regarding the safety of their children's present and future. Such exposure brings about worrisome thoughts about the well-being of their children in almost 88% of parents, especially when their children are away from home and when their children are on an outing. 45% of respondent parents perceive their children's problems are threatening and severe. When their children are unable to answer their calls, 71% of parents responded that they worry that something awful must have happened to their children. Hence 66% of parents said that they constantly intervene with the child to control the situations in the child's life. Around 59% of parents believe that strong emotions should be avoided by their children to be safe in outside world. 54% of parents said that they ask for constant reassurance from their children. All this anxiety about the children is often more after being exposed to the violent news regarding rape, murder, theft, etc. Thus overall it shows that constant exposure to violent news brings about anxiety in parents regarding their children's safety and well-being in spite of them being in much safer environment.

**Conclusion :**

The results of the study show that most of the respondents were exposed to violent media especially in form of news on regular basis and such exposure brought about disturbing and anxious thoughts in them regarding their own and





their children's well-being. The results validate both the hypothesis. Constant exposure to violent news negatively affects the general well-being of people and it induces anxiety about well-being and safety of their children in parents.

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### Cite This Article:

*\*Ms. Rina Pranay Patel And \*\*Ms. Reem Ismail Shaikh, (2022). A study of impact of exposure to Violent Media on well-being and anxiety among Parents, Aarhat Multidisciplinary International Education Research Journal, XI (II), 184-189*