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The Effect Of Domestic Violence Films On The Youth: An Excursion Of Media Violence Theories and Persuasion Theories

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Abstract:

Several studies have been on the impact of media violence on aggressive and violent behavior. Researches on effect of media violence have proved that heavy exposure in films, videos, televisions and movies can increase the risk of behaving violently. This paper is an excursion of selected media violence theories -social learning theory, catharsis theory and cultivation theory, and Persuasion theories – Congruity theory, Symmetry theory and Cognitive Balance theory explaining the effect of domestic violence on the Nigerian youths, looking at the possibility of these theories at the short and long term effect of domestic violence on the youths, desensitization, heavy and non-heavy viewers, other factors and the positive effect of viewing these films. The study made do of both the primary and secondary sources in its methodology. The research work found that people has been exposed to so much violence that has negative effects on the society. Violence is now seen as everyday thing that needed to be curtailed or totally obliterated. The study concludes that few people act out of violence even with what they observed in the media. The media violence might desensitize some people while it might have effect on the others. The study agreed that factors like age, gender, parental and peer influence can also caused violence behaviour on the youths. The paper recommends the depiction of violence in the media and insists that there should be strict monitoring of policies on violence programmes in the media. Parents are also enjoined to be watchful of the kind of films their children view on the media .

1.Introduction

The mass media have great impact on our behaviour, shaping behaviours which include violent behaviours. Studies have shown that exposure to violence in television, movies, video games and the social media affect the masses particularly children and the youths. Some of the studies show that exposure to media violence can promote aggressive/violent behaviour in children and the youths and that such aggressiveness might be seen in the lives of those children/youths. Media violence looks at violence in the media, particularly television, video games and movies and its impact on the masses, especially children and adolescent. Media violence is defined by Huesmann and Taylor (2006), “as visual portrayals of acts of physical aggression by one human against another”. Media violence came about during the 1960’s, when there was a lot of violence in Europe, people were looking for the cause . The visuals concentrated on television, movies, and videos but today violence can be seen on the internet, people can watch YouTube; use the cell

phones and even the social media to view violence. Part of the violence the masses view can be the violence done at home, that is domestic violence. There are domestic violence films which can be viewed on the internet, television, videos, cell phones etc. Domestic violence according to Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System (2002) is seen as “the abuse and or assault of adolescents or adults with their intimate partners”. Domestic violence has become one of the world’s most disturbing problems and with it comes devastating effects. It is seen as an abusive act done to someone by his/her intimate partner. Humpherys and Mullender (n.d) states that, “domestic violence typically involves a pattern of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and intimidation which escalates in frequency and severity over time”. The effects of domestic violence on the youths can be seen psychologically and emotionally,

2.Methodology

The Researchers utilize a descriptive method and sourced from both the primary source – interview and secondary data source- Newspapers, Magazines , Libraries , Archives and other desk study.

3.Literature Review

3.1.Evaluation of Media Violence Theories And Persuasion Theories

This paper will look at three media violence theories – social learning theory, catharsis theory and cultivation theory and three persuasion theories –Cognitive Balance Theory, Symmetry Theory and Congruity Theory.

3.1.1.Social Learning Theory

This theory was propounded by Albert Bandura and suggests that individuals are likely to imitate what they see. For example, a child learning to brush her teeth is likely to watch an adult do it before she imitates or copies what the adult has done. He argued that children learn aggressive responses from observing others, either personally or through the media and the environment, and many individuals believe that aggression will produce reinforcements (Isom, 1998). Bandura used a Bobo doll experiment, where children watched a video of a doll being abused and some of them imitated the aggressive behavior. Isom (1998) citing Evans 1989 further states that, “Albert Bandura believed that aggression must explain three aspects: first, how aggressive patterns of behaviour are developed; second, what provokes people to behave aggressively; and third, what determines whether they are going to continue to resort to an aggressive behaviour pattern on future occasions”.

It therefore follows that children who watch where an intimate partner or a parent is abused might imitate what they see and start acting like that. As they watch the films where an intimate partner is being abused, there is the tendency that they will do away with the practiced norm and start acting what they view.

Some scholars who studied social learning theory criticized this theory and said that children/youth who associate with other violent/aggressive peers not necessarily their family members or friends might start acting like their friends thereby behaving aggressively. Reacting to this criticism, Ontario Ministry of Children & Youth Services (2010) citing Akers and Sellers, states that “development of delinquent attitudes and behaviour prior to association with deviant peers is not inconsistent with the theory because group associations still influence behaviour”.. McQuail (2010:491) explains that, “Bandura’s model posits four basic processes of social learning that occur in sequence: attention, retention, production and motivation”. McQuail explaining the four basic processes, says that the television programmes relevant to peoples’ lives draw their attention then they retain what they have learnt from the programmes adding them to the knowledge they have before, which will be seen in their behaviours, either negatively or positively, this will bring about reinforcement and reward inciting motivation (McQuail 2010:491)

Some of the assumptions are that the mass media are not the only source of social learning and that the influence of the mass media of the masses depends on other sources, which might be the parents, friends, teachers, and others. These assumptions mean that people cannot learn only from personal experiences but also from indirect sources. Ferguson (n.d) citing Freedman 2002 and Savage 2004 says that “results on social learning theory have been weak, inconsistent, and compromised by research methods.” In everyday occurrences, social learning theory is not that real in the sense that behaviour that is modelled from the media might not be successful in the real world. For example, a youth who tries to be violent (verbally, physically, sexually) to his mate due to his role model actor doing it to another in a domestic violence film might be arrested and punished by the school authorities or his parents. The outcome of the punishment will determine the youth’s attitude towards violence. Apart from real-life rewards and punishments, all individuals are different; the way a female might react to the film might be different from the way a male will react to the film. The female might tend to be depressed after watching the domestic violence film because culturally a woman does not (should not) act violently and the society might see it as a taboo, while a male will likely act out the violence viewed as a way of releasing the psychological feelings in him.

3.1.2.Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory talks about the impact the television makes on people, on the way they view the world. Ozer (2011) sees cultivation theory “as the random and unintentional learning, unconscious gaining of demographic realities of the television world by the viewers. In other words, the concept explains the contribution of television watching to global perception and social reality conceptualization of the viewers”. According to Miller(2002:269), “the notion of cultivation describes a long-term and cumulative impact of television on our views of reality. Cultivation theorists believe that television can create and maintain very basic sets of beliefs about the world and

that these influences are cumulative and long-lived ones". This indicates that the world view of the person who watches violence on the television does not change immediately, it is cumulative. Miller (2002) continues and states that, "cultivation theory talks about the long-term and cumulative consequences of exposure to an essentially repetitive and stable system of messages which do not happen immediately but is gradual, stable and continues". For McQuail (2010:495), "the central hypothesis of the research was that viewing television gradually leads to the adoption of beliefs about the nature of the social world which conform to the stereotyped, distorted and very selective view of reality as portrayed in a systematic way in television fiction and news". McQuail also opines that it involves learning, the construction of a view of social reality dependent on personal circumstances and experience (such as poverty, race or gender) and also in reference –group membership and also that it is an interactive process between messages and audiences (McQuail:495). Some of the critics of cultivation theory are of the opinion that it has limitations which are its concentration on television only and social construction's effect. Some also said that it has **weak and limited effects of cultivation**. Miller (2002:269) states that these scholars "noted the relatively small effects that were found in cultivation processes and the fact that these effects were further diminished when controlling for a number of relevant demographic variables".

Others talked about **mainstreaming**, that is the more a person spends watching television, the more he/she will adopt the predominant outlook of the world that is expressed on the medium. There is the issue of **resonance**, that is, viewers who have had real life experience of such issues viewed will be affected more. On the issue of **television and viewing**, scholars are of the opinion that with the advancement of technology (satellite, cable television etc.), new programmes are cropping up and viewers can use the station to watch and what to watch, so one might decide not to watch violent films. On the cultivation effect, scholars came up with first-order and second-order cultivation effects. First-order cultivation effect means that a heavy viewer will overestimate the likelihood of being the victim of the crime while explaining the second-order cultivation effect, scholars say that the heavy viewer will view the world as a mean and scary place to be (Miller, 2002:274).

3.1.3.Catharsis Theory

This theory is based on Aristotle's catharsis effect, then Seymour Feshbach. The catharsis theory explains that when people are exposed to violence in the media rather than behaving aggressively, they will be purged of their aggressive drive and reduce the likelihood of aggressive behaviour. Catharsis effect allows people to escape reality, people who view violent films are not aroused to behave violently or to practice what they have viewed. According to Ferguson (n.d), "media violence may provide an outlet or release for aggressive drives. As such, people who consume violent media would be expected to become less aggressive". Ferguson (n.d) states that in a recent study conducted by Oslon, Kutner and Warner in 2008 on catharsis theory, "they reported that adolescent boys commonly reported feeling calmer and less angry subsequent to violent video game play and used violent video games to reduce aggression". Ferguson's opinion on social learning and catharsis theory is that research evidence for the two is "so far weak to actually say categorically that children who view violence films will act aggressively or that they will not be affected by it thereby purging themselves of any show of emotion".

3.2.Persuasion Theories

3.2.1.Cognitive Balance Theory

The basis of this theory is that people tend to examine persuasive messages based on how the message fuse on fail to fit into their own cognitive (meaningful) patterns. A message that fit into receiver cognitive pattern facilitates a balance in his internal state while those ones that does not in consonance with this mechanism causes internal inconsistencies. In order to restore the internal balance, the receiver needs to change his attitude towards the issue or source. A receiver with a mild idea on the same topic, while a receiver who is abreast with a strong opinion on the issue is more to have a U-turn in his attitude towards the source. The proponent of the theory, Sandra Ball Rockeach also postulated that people tend to judge the values of persuasive messages according to how these messages blend into their personal cognitive zone or system of understanding. For instance, a nursing mother that listens to breastfeeding campaign on radio and television will be comfortable to change her attitude towards the fulfilment of the message. Whereas somebody who heard the message once or twice will be less familiar with the message of the campaign and probably indifferent to breast feeding . Therefore, in terms of familiarity, the first woman has cognitive balance towards the message of the campaign.

3.2.2.Symmetry Theory

The theory was postulated by Theodore Newcome in 1953. The theory assumes that likeness (Homophil) between source and receiver facilitates an agreement. They attempt to influence one another to bring about symmetry for balance. Moreover, when there is a divergent view between two persons, there is internal consistency for both of them particularly the receiver. Then pull towards symmetry beans and the strength of the effort depending on the level of likeness and the subsequent influence. That is an attempt to influence another person is a function attraction that one person has for another for attitude change to take place, a person must come into contact with information which differs from his present attitudes . The pull , however, encourages communication or interactive session that facilitates equilibrium or persuasion. The essence of symmetry theory is the tendency people (receivers) have to change or at least modify their opinion so as to be in accord with a valued source.

3.2.3. Congruity Theory

C. Osgood and P. Tannenbaum came up with the congruity theory in 1955. The theory is of the opinion that where a message results in internal consistency, the receiver may change his attitude to both the source and the message, not just one of them. It holds that when a change in evaluation occurs, it usually happened in the due action of increased congruity with the prevailing frame of reference which means that the individual tend to restore cognitive balance when two cognitions are in disagreement through a proportional change in each cognition. The main crux of the theory is that incongruity is said to be in existence when the attitudes towards the source and the object are similar and the assertion is negative or when they are similar and assertion is positive. In a nutshell, the theory helps to examine and determine the degree of congruence between two sides.

4. Differences And Similarities Between Media Violence Theories And Persuasion Theories

4.1. Differences

Media Violence Theories encompass both imitation and identification to show how people learn through observation in their environment, and this theory assumes that television violence shapes viewers images of reality and the cultivation theory can be seen to relate to it in the sense that the television can create and maintain very sets of beliefs about the world which are gradual and cumulative. Cultivation theory explains how a person's perception of the world is shaped and sometimes distorted by the media. Heavy viewers will perceive the world as not safe and will not trust the happenings in the world. This will make them to be more tolerant of violence and might lead to them having a catharsis effect, which happens when people are not affected by the violent movies they watch and thereby being purged of any emotions.

Persuasion theories concurred with the impeccable role of attitude, cognition and amiable relationship as a tool to bring about positive understanding of domestic violence film.. The theories agreed that consistency of actions and pressures on individuals for positive attitudinal response is always paramount in reducing the negative reactions of individuals regarding the domestic violence film. The theorists also believed in the individual thorough examination and evaluation of such domestic violence films in order to avert negativism on the part of individuals.

4.2. Similarities

The theories shared aggressive imitation of actions for positive response towards negative influence on the cumulative impact of television on the viewers. Furthermore, the Theorists opinionated that change does not immediate, it is cumulative with long term consequences of exposure to an essentially repetitive and stable system of messages which cannot happen immediately but gradual, stable and sometimes continuous.

4.3. Media Violence Theory, Persuasion Theory and Domestic Violence Films

Domestic violence film in Nigeria can trigger aggressive behaviours in the Nigerian youths. The Nigerian movie – ‘New Horizon’ talks about four women (Kate Henshaw, Rita Dominic, Uche Jombo, and Funke Akindele) who triumphed over domestic abuse. They met within a self-help group to help themselves and others, offering their shoulders for others to lean on. The youths might be aroused to imitate what they observe in this film and act out aggressively to their peers. Another film, ‘Crazy Love’ is a film by Tamar Aid Foundation, which talks about violence in intimate relationships and portrays that people lose their lives through the practice of violence at home. The amount of violence shown in this film might make the youths to start acting aggressively to others. Social learning theory encompasses both imitation and identification to show how people learn through observation in their environment. Child Welfare Information Gateway (2009) citing Brown and Bzostek, 2003 on the impact of domestic violence on children says that studies have shown that, “children in families experiencing domestic violence are more likely than other children to exhibit aggressive and antisocial behaviour and that males exposed to domestic violence as children are more likely to engage in domestic violence as adults”.

Some scholars see domestic violence in the form of a learned behaviour as presented by the persuasion theories and that it is modelled by individuals, institutions, and society which may influence children and adult and one of the things that might trigger domestic violence behaviours in people is when they live in a culture of violence, that is, exposure to violent movies or video games etc. (Office on Child Abuse and neglect, Children’s Bureau and Lien, 2003). National Center for Biotechnology Information, citing Bandura 1977 and Huesmann 1998 says that,

Humans begin imitating other individuals at a very early age, and young children learn many motor and social skills by observing the behavior of others. Social interactions shape the scripts for behaviour that children acquire, but Observational learning is a powerful mechanism for acquiring social scripts throughout childhood

National Center for Biotechnology Information (n.d) is also of the opinion that some of these scholars believe that “observational learning is probably the major psychological process underlying the effects of media violence on aggressive behaviour”. According to National Center for Biotechnology Information (n.d), a most recent and comprehensive meta-analysis of media violence was conducted by Paik and Comstock in 1994, they examined the effect sizes from 217 empirical studies on media violence and aggressive violent behavior published between 1957 and 1990 and the analysis shows that “brief exposure to violent dramatic presentations on television or in films causes short-term increases in the aggressive behavior of youths, including physically aggressive behavior”. This

shows that a youth who views these films above might tend to increase his/her aggressive tendencies and behaviours. According to Anderson, Berkowitz, Donnerstein, Huesmann, Johnson, Linz, Malamuth, and Wartella(2004), research on violent television and films, video games, and music reveals unequivocal evidence that media violence increases the likelihood of aggressive and violent behavior in both immediate and long-term contents, short-term exposure increases the likelihood of physically and verbally aggressive behavior, aggressive thoughts and aggressive emotions. Recent large-scale longitudinal studies provide converging evidence linking frequent exposure to violent media in childhood with aggression later in life, including physical assaults and spouse abuse

The effect can be long-term or short-term. The youth may not act aggressively now, but might start abusing his/her spouse in marriage because of what he/she has observed.

Both theories suggest that viewers of media violence will change their view of the world; they might be convinced that the society in general has become unfriendly and violent. Those watching domestic violence films might see it as how the world is and how every home is and ought to be which is different from the ideal marriage. They will conceive the idea that every marriage should have violence, be it verbally, physically, psychologically and sexually. The youths might likely exaggerate the incidence of crime in the ideal homes.

In the Nigerian movie cited, 'New Horizon' and 'Crazy Love', the youths watching this film might see it as a societal norm. The violent scenes in the films will leave an indelible picture on these youths and they will interpret the home as an unfriendly place. Some of them may not be aggressive but may start staying on their own at home. They will take it that a man has the right to beat his wife, same as a woman having the right to maltreat the husband.

5. Discussion Of Findings

- **Intervening factors**
Some factors might be responsible for aggressive behaviours seen among the youths, some of them might be demographic variables (such as, age of the youth, sex, religion etc), the environment, the background of the youth, that is the socio-economic status of the parents (low-class or high-class), friends (peer pressure) and parental influence etc.
- **Heavy and non-heavy viewers**
Heavy viewers might tend to behave aggressively than non-heavy viewers. This is because the more one watches violence, the more it becomes part of the person but when a youth views it once or twice; the person may not act aggressively and might take it to mean nothing. When one considers these theories and the happenings around, one might tend to conclude that only few people act out violence that they observed in the media. I therefore conclude that only few people act violently after observing violent films and it might likely be the heavy viewers.
- **Individual differences**
Because people react differently, the way someone who views violent film will react will be different from the same way another will react. When four people are put in a room to watch violent film, they will not react alike after watching the film. We believed that when their opinions and reactions are sampled, they will not be the same.
- **Desensitization**
The paper agreed to desensitization, because since people react differently, constant repetition of violence in the media might make some people less aggressive. They will not react to violence, for they will see it as the norm.
- **Positive reaction**
Youth who views constant violence in the media might tend to react positively. On the issue of domestic violence films, a youth might decide not to involve himself/herself in violent behaviour in his/her relationships.

6. Conclusion And Recommendation

Television violence and its effects on viewers has been an issue for many years. Some scholars (Huesmann and Moise) are of the opinion that media violence promote violent behavior in young people, that viewing habits of young people predicts subsequent aggression and also that exposure to violence leads to arousal, desensitization and acceptance. Some other scholars (Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lyle, Edwin Parker etc.) are of the opinion that for some children under some conditions, watching violent films might be harmful, for some under other conditions, beneficial and for most children under most conditions, it might be neither harmful or beneficial (Vivian, 1999: 401) while some scholars (Freedman etc) are of the opinion that media violence does not promote violent behavior in young people. That the results are inconsistent, unrealistic and inconclusive, and that young people know the difference between real and fiction. Vivian (1999:397) opines that "some experts however say that the negative effect of media-depicted violence is too often overstated and that media violence actually has a positive side". It therefore means that some people when they have viewed violent films might tend to act positively. A woman who is abused at home by her spouse and who has bottled up her emotions might decide to check an NGO on domestic violence or seek help from a counselor. George Gerbner theorizes that the media violence has negative effects on society. He calls it, "the mean-world syndrome", that people has been exposed to so much violence that they now see the real world as a mean place and can easily adapt to violence in the world. They may see violence as an everyday thing when we considered these theories and the happenings around, the paper concluded that only few people act out violence even with

what they observed in the media. Everybody does not react the same way. The media violence might desensitize some people while it might have effect on others, such factors like age, gender, parental and peer influence can also cause violent behaviours on the youths. The study advocates for control on the depiction of violence in the media, there should be strict and monitored policies on violent programmes in the media since some heavy viewers will be affected. Parents are enjoined to know what programme their children are viewing on the media, if possible they should watch with them explaining some of the issues to them, thereby educating them. This will make them to have positive parental influence on their children

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