

Impact of Violence in Television and Movies on Human Behaviour

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: 20th February 2026 Accepted: 01st March 2026 Published: 07th March 2026	Violence in television programs and movies is widespread and has raised concerns among psychologists, educators, policymakers, and caregivers about its effects on human behaviour. This paper studies the relationship between exposure to screen violence and its impact on behaviour at different developmental stages, including childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Using theoretical perspectives, research studies, and media analyses, the study explains how repeated exposure to violent content can lead to increased aggression, emotional desensitization, fear, and acceptance of violence as normal. It also focuses on psychological processes such as observational learning, thinking patterns, and emotional control that influence these effects. The paper highlights factors like age, personality, family environment, and culture, which affect how individuals respond to violent media. By reviewing this research, the study shows the wider social impact of media violence and emphasizes the need for responsible media, education on media use, and proper regulations. It also points out gaps in current research and suggests areas for future study.
Keywords: <i>Violence, Human Behaviour</i>	

Plagiarism Check Report:

Date of Report: March 01, 2026

Similarity Index: 7%

Remarks: No significant matching text. All citations and matches are properly referenced. The manuscript is considered original.

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How to Cite: Jadhav, S. S. (2026). Impact of Violence in Television and Movies on Human Behaviour. *IIP: World Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IIPWJHSS)*, 2(I), 1093–1096.

➤ **Introduction:-**

One of the most significant transformations of the social environment during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been the widespread presence of television and movies in everyday life. These media occupy a central position in leisure, entertainment, and information consumption, particularly among children and adolescents. While television programs and films can offer educational and cultural value, the frequent depiction of violence in these media has become a major psychological and social concern.

Research accumulated over several decades indicates that repeated exposure to violent content in television and movies increases the risk of aggressive behaviour, paralleling the effects of experiencing real-life violence (Huesmann, 2007). Children and adolescents are especially vulnerable due to their developmental sensitivity, with adolescents sometimes showing reduced emotional responsiveness to violent portrayals, which can reinforce aggressive attitudes and behavioural patterns over time. Adults, although cognitively more mature, are not immune, as prolonged exposure can normalize violence and shape perceptions of social reality.

Despite extensive research demonstrating the psychological impact of violent media, much of the existing literature remains fragmented, often examining isolated age groups, specific outcomes, or single theoretical perspectives. The present study addresses this gap by integrating developmental stages, psychological mechanisms, moderating factors, and societal implications within a single analytical framework. By adopting this integrative approach, the study contributes a comprehensive and policy-relevant understanding of how violence in television and movies influences human behaviour across the lifespan.

Statement of the Problem:-

"To study the impact of violence in television and movies on human behaviour."

Objectives of the Study:-

1. To understand the concept and nature of media violence in television and movies.
2. To examine the effects of media violence on human behaviour across different developmental stages.

➤ **Methodology:**

This study uses a conceptual and descriptive research design based on secondary sources. Relevant information was collected from books, reports published by international organizations, and empirical studies related to media violence and human behaviour. The literature was carefully reviewed, analysed, and synthesized to identify recurring psychological patterns, theoretical explanations, and behavioural outcomes associated with exposure to violence in television and movies.

The study focuses on understanding the nature and forms of media violence, its effects on human behaviour across developmental stages, moderating factors, and societal implications. The information from the selected sources was organized to provide a clear and comprehensive overview, ensuring that conclusions are evidence based and relevant to education, parental guidance, and policy development.

1. Nature and Forms of Violence in Television and Movies.

Media violence is defined as the deliberate portrayal of behaviours intended to cause physical, psychological, or social harm within television programs and cinematic productions. Rather than a singular phenomenon, media violence manifests in diverse forms ranging from explicit physical acts to subtle symbolic representations each carrying distinct psychological implications.

1. Physical Violence:

This remains the most visible form, involving direct bodily harm such as hitting, kicking, choking, or weapon-based aggression. Scientific literature suggests that exposure to these portrayals correlates with heightened fear responses and vulnerability to clinical conditions, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

2. Psychological and Emotional Violence:

This involves the depiction of intimidation, humiliation, gaslighting, and coercive control. By showcasing emotional domination, media can inadvertently normalize maladaptive coping patterns and internalized distress in the viewer.

3. Sexual Violence and Objectification:

Media often includes coerced acts, harassment, and the dehumanization of bodies. Research indicates that frequent exposure, particularly without moral condemnation in the narrative, can prime aggressive sexual attitudes and reinforce harmful gender norms among youth (Anderson et al., 2024).

4. Symbolic Violence:

Operating subtly, this form uses narratives and language to marginalize or disempower specific social groups. It reinforces unequal power dynamics and social control (Murphy, 1994). Furthermore, the mode of presentation significantly influences audience interpretation:

Realistic Violence: Depicts authentic consequences and moral complexity, potentially serving a reflective function for the audience (Shaw, 2004).

Stylized/Aestheticized Violence: Exaggerates aggression for entertainment and spectacle, often detaching the act from real-world pain or legal consequences.

As emphasized by the World Health Organization, identifying these varied forms is crucial for developing targeted media literacy programs and regulatory frameworks that address the specific psychological risks associated with each type of content.

2. Behavioural Effects and Mechanisms of Television and Movie Violence on Human Behaviour.

Exposure to violence in television and movies has been consistently linked to measurable changes in human behaviour across the lifespan, with effects varying by developmental stage. Children are particularly vulnerable due to limited cognitive maturity and heightened susceptibility to observational learning. Drawing on Social Learning Theory proposed by Albert Bandura, children may imitate aggressive acts observed in media, especially when such behaviours are portrayed as rewarded or unpunished. Empirical evidence reviewed by the American Psychological Association indicates that repeated exposure to media violence can impair children's ability to distinguish fantasy from reality, increase impulsivity, and heighten fear responses. Longitudinal research by L. Rowell Huesmann and Leonard Eron further demonstrates that early exposure to televised violence predicts aggressive behaviour extending into adolescence and adulthood (American Psychological Association APA 2013).

Among adolescents, repeated exposure to media violence contributes to desensitization and the internalization of aggressive attitudes. This developmental period is characterized by identity formation and strong peer influence, making adolescents more likely to perceive violence as a normalized means of conflict resolution (Li, 2023). Cognitive Neoassociation Theory explains that violent imagery activates aggressive thoughts, memories, and hostile interpretations of social situations. Exposure to such content heightens negative emotions such as anger and frustration, increasing the likelihood of aggressive reactions when individuals encounter situational stressors.

In adulthood, the effects of media violence are often subtler but cumulative. Cultivation Theory, developed by George Gerbner, explains how prolonged exposure to televised violence shapes perceptions of reality, leading to the "mean world" belief that society is excessively dangerous. Continued exposure also reduces emotional sensitivity and empathy toward victims, facilitating moral disengagement and the normalization of violence. Large-scale reviews indicate a positive correlation between media violence and aggression across age groups, with effects comparable to other established public health risk factors (Laxmi, 2021). The World Health Organization emphasizes that these behavioural outcomes underscore the need for preventive strategies, media literacy, and responsible content regulation. (WHO, 2022)

3. Moderating Factors Influencing Media Violence Effects

The effects of media violence are not uniform across audiences; they are shaped by multiple moderating factors that influence susceptibility and behavioural outcomes.

Age and Developmental Stage

Age is a central determinant of vulnerability. Younger children have limited cognitive ability to distinguish mediated representations from real-life events, making them more prone to imitation and fear responses. Adolescents, by contrast, integrate violent media into their evolving identity and peer norms, which may reinforce aggressive attitudes and behaviors.

Personality Traits

Individual personality characteristics, particularly baseline aggressiveness, influence both the selective exposure to violent content and the susceptibility to aggression-related thoughts and behaviours. Those with higher baseline aggression are more likely to engage with violent media and adopt its behavioural scripts.

Family Environment

The family environment acts as either a protective buffer or a risk factor. Low parental monitoring, permissive attitudes toward violent media, and shared exposure heighten vulnerability. Conversely, active parental mediation, open discussions about media content, and guidance in interpreting violence reduce harmful effects.

Peer Influence

Peer groups increasingly shape behavioural responses, particularly during adolescence. Peer reinforcement of aggressive scripts can normalize violent conflict resolution and strengthen the internalization of aggressive attitudes.

Gender Differences

Gender moderates the impact of media violence. Males generally demonstrate higher engagement with violent content and are more likely to display aggressive responses, though females are not immune and may also experience emotional desensitization or internalized aggression.

Cultural Context

Cultural factors further influence how media violence is interpreted. Societal norms regarding violence, power, and morality shape perceptions, meaning that identical media content can elicit different behavioural and emotional responses in different cultural settings.

3. Societal Implications and Preventive Strategies

The societal impact of media violence necessitates comprehensive preventive strategies involving media producers, families, educational institutions, and policymakers. Television programs and movies, due to their wide reach and frequent exposure, significantly influence social attitudes and behavioural norms. Content creators have a responsibility to contextualize violent portrayals, avoid glamorization, and depict realistic consequences to mitigate harmful effects. Parents and educators play a critical protective role by guiding children's and adolescents' viewing choices, engaging in constructive discussions and modelling non-violent conflict resolution.

Media literacy education is increasingly essential, equipping young audiences to critically evaluate violent content, recognize fictionalization, and understand persuasive media techniques. At the societal level, regulatory measures such as age-appropriate content ratings, broadcast standards, and ethical guidelines are necessary to safeguard vulnerable populations. International organizations, including UNICEF (2017) and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), emphasize that reducing exposure to harmful media content, alongside education and regulation, is vital for promoting psychological well-being and preventing violence across society.

Conclusion:

The study shows that media violence in television and movies influences human behaviour differently across the lifespan. Children often imitate aggressive actions and experience fear, adolescents may become desensitized and adopt aggressive attitudes, and adults may normalize violence and perceive the world as more threatening. Media violence appears in physical, psychological, sexual, and symbolic forms, often embedded in entertainment. Understanding these developmental differences helps guide effective prevention and educational strategies, while promoting responsible media practices, parental guidance, and policy measures to reduce the negative social and psychological impact of violent content.

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