

The Impact of Violent Media on Aggressive Behavior

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Abstract. In contemporary society, advancements in technology and the proliferation of online social media have provided numerous channels for accessing video and gaming content. Despite these developments, the depiction of violence in videos and games remains a contentious issue due to its potential aggressive impact on users. The relationship between exposure to violent media and subsequent aggressive behavior is multifaceted, involving both internal factors (such as perceived aggression, trait anger, violent emotions, and implicit aggression) and external factors (including cultural differences, age of exposure, proximity to real-life violence, domestic violence, and life setbacks). Internal factors significantly influence how individuals process and react to violent media, potentially reinforcing aggressive tendencies. External factors further moderate these effects, with cultural context and early exposure playing crucial roles in shaping long-term behavior. To address the aggression stemming from violent media, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. This includes monitoring and regulating young individuals' media consumption, implementing media literacy programs, providing robust support systems for those facing domestic violence or significant life setbacks, and therapeutic interventions such as cognitive-behavioral therapy. Moreover, promoting cooperative gaming environments and culturally tailored interventions can enhance the effectiveness of these strategies. Ultimately, a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between internal predispositions and external influences is crucial for mitigating the negative societal impacts of violent media.

Keywords: Violent media; aggressive behavior; media literacy.

1. Introduction

In our contemporary society, with the advances in technology and the rapid expansion of online social media, an increasing number of people have a variety of channels and approaches to access video as well as gaming content from different fields and different levels. Nevertheless, under such circumstances, violence in videos and games has always been a controversial topic. Factors contributing to this are the uncontrollable nature of violence in videos and games, as well as the aggressive impact it can have on users. The relationship between exposure to violent games and videos with subsequent aggressive behaviour is a complicated and multifaceted issue that encompasses a range of internal and external factors. Internal factors include perceived aggression, trait anger, violent emotions, and implicit aggression, which determine to a great extent how individuals process and react to violent media. These factors affect cognitive and emotional responses and may reinforce aggressive tendencies. In addition, external factors such as cultural differences, age of exposure to violence, proximity to real-life violence, domestic violence, and life setbacks may further moderate the effects of violent media on aggressive behaviour. In examining the impact of violent content on behaviour, a wide range of influences need to be considered, and the importance of media literacy and mental health interventions in mitigating negative societal influences is highlighted.

2. Influencing Factors

The relationship between exposure to violent games and videos and subsequent aggression is multifaceted, influenced by a combination of internal and external factors.

2.1. Internal Factors

Internal factors such as perceived aggression, trait anger, violent emotions, and implicit aggression play crucial roles in shaping how individuals process and react to violent media. Perceived aggression refers to an individual's recognition and interpretation of aggressive content, significantly impacting their cognitive and emotional responses [1]. This recognition can shape the way individuals mentally frame and emotionally respond to violent stimuli, potentially reinforcing aggressive tendencies.

Trait anger, a stable personality characteristic, predisposes individuals to experience anger more frequently and intensely, thereby amplifying the effects of violent media [2]. Individuals with high trait anger are more likely to exhibit heightened emotional responses to violent content, which can translate into increased aggression. Violent emotions, which are evoked directly by the content, can lead to heightened aggression, particularly in individuals with pre-existing tendencies toward such emotions [3]. These emotions can act as immediate triggers for aggressive behavior, especially when they resonate with an individual's emotional baseline.

Implicit aggression, referring to unconscious aggressive tendencies, can also be activated and exacerbated by violent media, leading to spontaneous aggressive behaviors [4]. Implicit aggression operates below the level of conscious awareness, making it particularly insidious as it can influence behavior without the individual being fully aware of it. Exposure to violent games and videos has been extensively studied to understand its impact on both internal and external forms of aggression. Specifically, individuals who frequently engage with violent media often experience an increase in perceived aggression and trait anger, leading to a heightened state of violent emotions and implicit aggression. According to research, the General Aggression Model (GAM) suggests that exposure to violent media can prime aggressive thoughts and increase physiological arousal, which may translate into aggressive behavior [2]. This model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how violent media can influence an individual's cognitive, affective, and arousal states, contributing to aggressive behavior.

Furthermore, a study by Carnagey et al. found that violent video games can desensitize players to real-life violence, potentially making them more likely to exhibit external aggression in social contexts [5]. Desensitization reduces the emotional responsiveness to real violence, making aggressive responses more likely when provoked.

In conclusion, internal factors such as perceived aggression, trait anger, violent emotions, and implicit aggression significantly contribute to how individuals react to violent media. Studies have emphasized that perceived aggression affects cognitive and emotional responses, while trait anger amplifies the impact of violent content, leading to increased aggression. Violent emotions are direct triggers, especially for those prone to them, while implicit aggression occurs unconsciously, leading to spontaneous aggressive behaviour. GAM effectively explains these dynamics, illustrating how violent media can stimulate aggressive thinking and heighten physiological arousal, ultimately fuelling aggressive behaviour. Subjectively, there are concerns that exposure to violent media can lead individuals to become insensitive to real-life acts of violence, as underlined by a number of studies. With this comprehensive understanding, it becomes necessary to develop strategies to address the psychological impact of violent media on aggressive behaviour, while emphasising the importance of media literacy and mental health interventions.

2.2. External Factors

External factors refer to the external factors that have an impact on individual aggression, including cultural differences, proximity of violence exposure, age at exposure, domestic violence, and life frustration, further modulate the impact of violent media on aggression. First of all, cultural differences can affect the norms and acceptability of aggression, thereby influencing how violent media is perceived and its subsequent effects [6]. In cultures where violence is more normalized, the impact on aggression levels may be less pronounced compared to cultures that have a lower tolerance for violence [7]. These cultural contexts shape the social learning environment, where violent behaviors might be either reinforced or condemned.

Besides, the age at which individuals are exposed to violent content plays a crucial role. Early exposure, particularly during formative years, can have a more profound impact on long-term aggression. Research by Huesmann et al [6] indicates that children exposed to violent media at a young age are more likely to develop aggressive behaviors as they grow older. Younger individuals are more impressionable and may internalize aggressive behaviors more readily, leading to longer-lasting effects [8]. Proximity of violence exposure, or the temporal closeness of the media experience to real-life aggression, can heighten the perceived realism and intensity of the aggression portrayed, thereby increasing its impact [9].

At last, domestic violence and life frustration are significant external stressors that can predispose individuals to aggression, making them more susceptible to the influences of violent media [10]. When these stressors are present, the aggressive cues from violent games and videos can exacerbate existing tensions and contribute to real-world aggressive behaviors [11]. This interaction suggests that violent media does not act in isolation but rather interacts with existing stressors and individual differences to influence aggression. The proximity of violent exposure—how recent the exposure is—also affects aggression levels, with more immediate exposure having a stronger impact [12].

In summary, external factors such as cultural differences, age of exposure to violence, distance from exposure to violence, domestic violence and life frustrations would remarkably moderate the effects of violent media on aggressive behaviour. Cultural background and early exposure during development could shape long-term aggressive behaviour, while direct exposure to real-life violence and family stress further exacerbate these effects. Such complex interactions underline the need to consider a wide range of influences when examining the relationship between violent media and aggressive behaviour. The fact that external pressures and cultural norms can intensify the negative effects of violent media is worrying from a subjective point of view. Under this circumstance, young people and those who suffer from domestic violence are more susceptible to aggressive behaviour, which requires positive measures, such as enhanced media literacy education and support systems for at-risk populations. Addressing these factors holistically is critical to mitigating the wider impact of violent media on society.

Overall, the complex interplay between internal predispositions and external influences highlights the multifaceted nature of the relationship between violent media and aggression. This interplay underscores the importance of considering a broad range of factors when examining the effects of violent content on behavior.

3. Suggestions for Coping with Aggression Stemming from Violent Media Exposure

Addressing the potential aggression resulting from exposure to violent video games and media involves a multi-faceted approach. Monitoring and regulating the content that young individuals are exposed to is a fundamental first step. Parents and guardians play a critical role in this regard. By limiting access to violent media and encouraging engagement with non-violent alternatives, the internalization of aggressive behaviors can be mitigated. A study by Gentile and Anderson emphasizes that parents who actively manage their children's media consumption significantly reduce the likelihood of their children developing aggressive tendencies [10]. This proactive involvement includes setting clear boundaries and discussing the content viewed to ensure children understand the distinction between entertainment and reality.

Educational programs that focus on media literacy are also essential. These programs are designed to help individuals critically analyze media content, discern the intent behind it, and differentiate between virtual portrayals and real-world behavior. Media literacy education can effectively reduce the likelihood of translating on-screen violence into actual aggressive actions [13]. By equipping individuals with the tools to question and interpret media, they are less likely to adopt the aggressive behaviors they observe.

Furthermore, providing robust support systems for those experiencing domestic violence or significant life setbacks is crucial. Stressors such as these can exacerbate the effects of violent media on aggression [11]. Access to counseling, social support networks, and community resources can alleviate these external pressures, creating a more supportive environment that diminishes the impact of violent media.

Therapeutic interventions, particularly cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), are beneficial for individuals who already exhibit aggressive tendencies. CBT focuses on identifying and altering maladaptive thought patterns and behaviors, making it an effective method for addressing aggression influenced by violent media exposure [14]. Through structured sessions, individuals learn to recognize the triggers of their aggression and develop healthier coping mechanisms. Additionally, promoting competitive but cooperative gaming environments can redirect competitive drives into positive interactions rather than aggressive ones. Adachi and Willoughby suggest that such environments can foster teamwork and constructive competition, which are less likely to lead to aggression [15]. Finally, it is imperative to consider cultural sensitivities when developing coping strategies. Approaches that are effective in one cultural context may not be successful in another, highlighting the need for culturally tailored interventions [7]. Understanding and respecting cultural differences can enhance the effectiveness of these strategies, ensuring they resonate with and are adopted by the target audience.

In summary, exposure to violent media during the secondary school years has been shown to influence episodic aggression, with various internal and external factors affecting the extent of this impact. Research indicates that the interaction between violent media exposure and factors such as competitiveness, domestic violence, and life frustration significantly contributes to individual aggression more than media exposure alone [12]. The age at which individuals are first exposed to violent media also plays a critical role; younger individuals, due to their developmental stage, are more susceptible to external influences [1]. These findings underscore the necessity of considering both individual characteristics and broader contextual factors when assessing the impact of violent games and videos on aggression. Comprehensive strategies that address these multiple dimensions can promote healthy emotional development and resilience against external stressors.

By implementing these varied strategies, the negative effects of violent games and videos on aggression can be mitigated, fostering healthier emotional and behavioral outcomes in individuals exposed to violent media.

4. Conclusion

In general, the influence of violent media on aggressive behaviour is the result of a complex interaction of internal and external factors. Internal factors such as perceived aggression, trait anger, violent emotions, and implicit aggression largely influence how individuals process and react to violent content. These factors affect cognitive and emotional responses and tend to reinforce aggressive tendencies. Externally, cultural differences, age of exposure to violence, proximity to real-life violence, domestic violence, and life setbacks further moderate these effects. Cultural norms and early exposure during formative years have profound long-term effects, while direct exposure to violence and family stress exacerbate aggression.

GAM provides a powerful framework for understanding these dynamics, illustrating how violent media can stimulate aggressive thoughts and heighten physiological arousal, leading to aggressive behaviour. The potential for increased external aggression is further highlighted by the possibility of becoming desensitized to real-life violence as a result of regular exposure to violent video games and media.

Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that includes media literacy education, parental involvement in media consumption, and support systems for those facing significant life stressors. Therapeutic interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and the promotion of cooperative play environments can help to mitigate the negative effects of violent media. It is

crucial to develop culturally sensitive strategies to ensure their effectiveness in different social settings. By considering a wide range of influences, we can better understand and address the psychological and behavioral impact of violent media, ultimately leading to healthier outcomes for society.

From an academic perspective, the ubiquity of violent media in contemporary society necessitates a proactive approach to addressing its potential harm. The findings of the study highlight the urgent need for media literacy programs to develop critical thinking skills in individuals (especially adolescents) to identify and challenge the offensive narratives prevalent in the media. Furthermore, the role of parents and guardians cannot be over emphasized; their active involvement in monitoring and discussing media content with their children is crucial in mitigating negative influences.

Culturally specific interventions are particularly important in a globalized world where media consumption transcends national boundaries. Acknowledging and respecting differences in cultural perceptions of violence will increase the effectiveness of these interventions. Additionally, given the psychological burden that real-life violence and family stressors place on individuals, the provision of strong mental health support is critical.

Finally, although CBT and collaborative play environments show promise, continued research and adaptation is necessary to keep up with the changing media landscape. In conclusion, safeguarding the well-being of society from the insidious influence of violent media requires a holistic, culturally aware and psychologically informed approach.

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