

Television and Teenage Violence

POINTS TO DEVELOP

1. Crime by teenagers is on the increase.
2. Causes- urbanization, breakdown of old values, influence of mass media.
3. Effect of mass media, especially the television, is said by many to be a major factor influencing teenage crime.
4. Research in the west has shown a link between screen violence and real-life aggressiveness.
5. imitative factor also leads to teenage crime.
6. Unfulfilled advertisement- stimulated desires also lead to unreasonable resentment in and criminal acts by teenagers.
7. How to minimize the negative impact of television violence –technical devices and practical means such as a rating system and late slots for certain programmes.
8. Parents must play a positive role in guiding children.
9. television producers too must practice restraint.
10. Media education must put contents of television programmes in proper perspective for the children.

The increasing trend in crime by teenagers is a matter of serious concern. The world over, more and more teenagers are involved in robberies, muggings, murders and rape. This trend is visible in India as well. aggressiveness and violence at an early age have lead to shocking crimes: son battering his mother to death, brothers killing one another, daughter poisoning her parents, and all this over rather trivial issues for that major motive for murder –money. Banks are looted by teenagers, children are kidnapped for ransom, and killed if that ransom is not forthcoming, cars are stolen, old people are cheated, and the perpetrators are in their teens. Not a happy state of affairs, one would say. Many factors like urbanization, migration, breakdown of traditional values, inadequate attention given to children by parents and the influence of mass media, especially films and television, are said to be associated with the rise in crime among the young.

Today, we are living in a world dominated by the media. The mass media, especially television, is increasingly occupying the central stage in our lives. Most homes in cities have access to television, indeed, more than one set to meet the needs of different members in the family. With provision for 24- hour-telecast and many channels, exposure to television is increasing and is particularly high among children. Many concerned individuals and organizations have raised their voice against the adverse effects of television –viewing, particularly due to the excessive portrayal of sex and violence, the common and the view that such exposure to

television is contributory to the violent behavior of the young. Even leading to criminal acts like murder and rape.

Although very little scientific research has been done in the Indian context, there is an increasing evidence of association between screen violence and actual aggressive in western developed societies. That screen violence may prompt aggressive behavior was first suggested as early as the 1995s when television was in its infancy. Since then research findings pouring in, and high –powered committees examining this vital issue from all angles. People who watch more of televised violence have been found to exhibit greater tendencies toward aggressive behavior in both short and long term.

Further, research shows that the primary effect of television viewing is by way of imitation or emulation of television viewing is by way of imitation or emulation of the ‘action’ or scene depicted on the screen. It is a common observation that children enact the advertisements and emulate some of the popular characters. So much so, a few year back a young boy lost his life emulating the action shown to advertise a cold drink. Later, the advertisement in question was withdrawn. In some of the sensational murders by teenagers, investigation pointed to the youngsters having been prompted by a film or television programmed, so much so that the manner and method of killing closely resembled the screen depiction.

A heavy diet of screen violence and aggression, even as a feature of television news, formula films and many other television programmes, causes fear and leads to desensitization among growing children. Often film and television shows present violence as a justifiable means of settling disputes in daily life. Such depiction, if continually shown, tends to inculcate among the audience, particularly children, an increasing willingness to use violence in real life. Television programming, in general, and advertising, in particular, create an impression in the minds of the viewers that others are living far more glamorous lives than they themselves are. Based upon insights emerging form a large number of studies, it is safe to say that unfulfilled advertisement- stimulated desires lead to resentment towards parents and the society as a whole. This, coupled with exposure to violence on screen, further strengthens negative perception in growing children. It has also been observed that those who watch television for longer hours and come from a relatively deprived background grow up perceiving the outside world as ‘unfair’, ‘mean’, ‘unfriendly’, ‘hostile’. Often many of them become prone to aggressive behavior and actual violence as well.

Notwithstanding the voices raised against the portrayal of violence on television, common observations and system antic content analysis reveal rising trends in coverage of violence in news, and portal of sex and violence in

entertainment programmes of all sorts. as such, with the globalist ion of televise, the risk of excessive exposure of the young to television –depicted sex and violence is on the increase.

Many steps are being suggested and debated on how to curb this rising trend in the depiction of violence on the television screen or at least minimize the negative impact on audiences, especially young children. Methods include technical devices to block out violence content and making it known publicly, and shifting of programmes with excessive violence and sex to time slots when children are not likely to be significant audiences. These proposals are under active consideration in many developed countries, and the first two of these proposals were adopted as part of the Telecommunication Competition and Deregulation Act, 1996 in the USA.

Systematic efforts are being made in Western societies to determine the best possible and most efficient means of classifying programmer content and conveying that classification to viewers so that they could exercise choice in their television viewing and technically block “unwanted” or “undesirable” program me content with an electronic device fitted in the television set itself. The development of a systematic and socially and culturally acceptable classification of television programme content suited to India would help in dealing with not only the issue of violence on screen but also with the problem of an increasing threat to our cultural identity.

Perhaps, a more effective way of addressing this problem is to guide the children in their selection of television programmes. Researches have revealed that if parents share television watching their children and discuss the contents, they can guide in a subtle way the choice of programmes the children watch and influence the impact of television in the desired direction. Thus, to make the best use of television and minimize its negative influence, one should share television with children and take active part in their interests and discussions relating to television programmes.

There is also a need for self-regulation on the part of the television channels. Programme producers should exercise restraint and examine the television content from the perspective of growing children and the likely adverse effects of certain programmes. It is true that sex and valence sell across all cultures and societies, and a heavy does of sex and violence in any television program me means a more lucrative business. But should commercial gain be the end it itself? Considerations of larger social good and future of the new generation should also weigh equally m if not more, in programming decisions.

Above all, there is a need for “media education” in addition to formal education. The access exposure to television is increasing every day. With technological development and breakdown of international barriers in space, children now have access to Internet and numerous television channels. They can virtually view anything. The television screen is increasingly acquiring the place of a “third parent” and of a new “super teacher” as well. As such, the role of television in child growth and development is enormous even as some of the effects of television could be adverse and detrimental to the healthy growth of children. A well-thought-out media education programmed in the school curriculum can help in putting the contents of television in proper perspective by demystifying the ‘glamour’ and ‘action’; children could then begin to understand early enough that the make –believe world created on screen is mere fantasy and not real. Demystification and proper understanding of the television content will go long way in minimizing the adverse effect of television and enhancing its positive contribution to child growth.