

CINEMATIC VIOLENCE AND YOUTH BEHAVIOR: A QUANTITATIVE EXPLORATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the psychological and behavioral impacts of cinematic violence on youth in Tamil Nadu, a region with a dynamic film industry known for its intense and action-packed narratives. Drawing on Social Learning Theory, Cultivation Theory, and Psychoanalytical Film Theory, the research investigates how exposure to violent movies influences youth aggression, emotional desensitization, and behavioral mimicry. Using a cross-sectional quantitative design, data was collected from 157 participants aged 19–25 across five districts in Tamil Nadu. Findings reveal a significant correlation between violent movie exposure and aggressive tendencies, emotional numbness, and imitation of violent characters. Additionally, the study highlights the moderating role of parental monitoring in mitigating these negative effects. The research underscores the urgent need for media literacy programs and parental involvement to foster healthy media consumption habits. These insights provide valuable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and families to address the growing influence of violent content in Tamil cinema and its impact on youth behavior.

Keywords Cinematic violence, Youth aggression, Social Learning Theory, Cultivation Theory, Tamil cinema, Media influence, Behavioral mimicry, Emotional desensitization, Parental monitoring, Media literacy

1. INTRODUCTION

The influence of cinematic violence on youth development has been a subject of extensive research and debate. In Tamil Nadu, a region renowned for its vibrant film industry ("Kollywood"), movies often depict violence as a means of resolving conflicts, shaping societal norms, and influencing youth perceptions (Ahmad & Munusamy, 2020). While prior studies have highlighted the role of media violence in fostering aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 2002), there remain significant gaps in understanding the cultural contexts and long-term psychological impacts of such exposure. This research addresses these gaps by examining how violent movies alter youth behavior, perceptions, and emotional well-being in Tamil Nadu, employing quantitative methods to provide actionable insights.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

The study is grounded in three key theoretical frameworks. **Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)** posits that individuals, particularly youth, learn behaviors by observing and imitating others, especially influential figures such as movie characters. This theory is particularly relevant in explaining how exposure to violent media can lead to the reinforcement of aggressive behaviors in real-life scenarios. **Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1998)** suggests that repeated exposure to media content, particularly violent movies, can shape individuals' perceptions of reality, leading to the normalization of violence and the development of a "mean world syndrome." **Psychoanalytical Film Theory (Mulvey, 1975)** explores how violent media content can tap into subconscious desires and repressed emotions, particularly in adolescents who are in the process of forming their identities.

2.2 Empirical Evidence

Recent studies have linked violent media to reduced empathy (Funk et al., 2004), heightened aggression (Huesmann et al., 2003), and desensitization to real-world violence (Bushman & Anderson, 2009). However, cultural nuances in

media consumption remain underexplored (Ghazali & Munusamy, 2020). In Tamil cinema, hero worship often glorifies violent protagonists, amplifying behavioral mimicry (Santhosh, 2020). Parental mediation and media literacy programs have been identified as critical moderators, but their specific strategies and effectiveness require deeper examination (Gentile et al., 2014).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative study was conducted with 157 participants (54.1% male, 45.9% female) across five districts in Tamil Nadu. Stratified random sampling ensured geographical diversity, capturing a wide range of perspectives and experiences. The study focused on young adults aged 19–25, a demographic highly engaged with media content.

3.2 Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on movie-watching habits, exposure to violence, demographic factors, and psychological and social impacts. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to capture quantitative data. Data was collected online via Google Forms to ensure accessibility for participants from different locations.

3.3 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics summarized demographic information and movie-watching behavior. Pearson's correlation analysis examined relationships between variables such as exposure to violence and aggressive behavior. Regression analysis was used to predict outcomes based on independent variables, and t-tests compared gender-based differences in responses. Reliability analysis confirmed the internal consistency of the scales used in the questionnaire, with Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.94 for all scales.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The majority of respondents (61.8%) were aged 23–25, with 38.2% aged 19–22. Gender distribution was slightly skewed toward males (54.1%), reflecting their higher engagement with violent media content. Most respondents resided in semi-urban areas (53.5%), followed by urban areas (43.9%), with only 2.5% from rural areas. The district-wise distribution showed Trichy with the highest representation (36.9%), followed by Thanjavur (17.2%) and Chennai (16.6%).

In terms of movie preferences, Gangster/Crime genres were the most popular (42.7%), followed by Romantic genres (24.8%) and Action genres (21.0%). The majority of respondents (85.4%) preferred watching movies in theaters, while only 7.6% used OTT platforms. A significant majority (73.9%) reported always watching violent fight scenes, and 85.4% identified with violent characters.

4.2 Key Findings

The study revealed a strong positive correlation between exposure to violent movies and aggressive behavior ($r = 0.678, p < 0.01$). A significant majority of respondents (86.0%) reported feeling like acting aggressively after watching violent movies, aligning with Social Learning Theory. Additionally, 85.4% of respondents stated that violent movies made them less emotionally affected by real-world violence, indicating a desensitization effect. The high percentage of respondents (89.2%) who believed that violent movies influence young people to be more aggressive underscores the societal concern about the impact of media violence.

The tendency to imitate movie characters was also significant, with 75.8% of respondents reporting that they imitated the actions of their favorite movie characters in real life. This finding is consistent with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the role of observational learning in the development of aggressive behaviors. Furthermore, 86.0% of respondents had the habit of posting violent movie scenes on social media, highlighting the deep influence of violent content on viewers' behavior and attitudes. Parental monitoring played a crucial role in moderating the effects of violent movie exposure. The regression analysis showed that parental monitoring was significantly influenced by exposure to violent movies and aggressive feelings ($\beta = 0.914, p < 0.001$). This suggests that parents are more likely to monitor their children's movie-watching habits if they perceive that violent content is influencing their children's behavior or emotions.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align closely with the theoretical frameworks of Social Learning Theory, Cultivation Theory, and Psychoanalytical Film Theory. The strong positive correlation between exposure to violent movies and aggressive behavior supports Bandura's assertion that individuals learn behaviors through observation and imitation.

The high level of identification with violent characters and the tendency to imitate their actions in real life further reinforce this theory.

Cultivation Theory explains the desensitization effect observed in the study, where repeated exposure to violent media content led to a diminished emotional response to real-world violence. The perception of Tamil Nadu as becoming more violent, as reported by 89.8% of respondents, reflects the "mean world syndrome" described by Gerbner. This altered perception of reality can have serious implications for social cohesion and the normalization of aggressive behaviors. Psychoanalytical Film Theory provides insights into the subconscious psychological impact of violent movie content. The data revealed that many respondents used violent movies as a medium of escapism during mood swings, indicating that youth may turn to violent media to cope with emotional distress. Additionally, the high percentage of respondents who experienced nightmares or fear-based thoughts after watching violent movies suggests that violent content can trigger subconscious fears and anxieties.

The role of parental guidance and the broader social environment in moderating the effects of violent movie exposure cannot be overlooked. The study found that parents who actively monitored their children's media consumption and discussed the content with them were more effective in mitigating the negative effects of violent movies. This finding aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes the importance of environmental factors in shaping behavior.

Gender-based differences in response to violent movies were minimal, contradicting previous research that found males to be more influenced by violent content. However, the study did find that males were more likely to prefer Gangster/Crime movies, while females showed a higher preference for Romantic genres. This suggests that gender may influence movie preferences but not necessarily the psychological impact of violent content.

6. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the profound psychological and behavioral impacts of cinematic violence on Tamil Nadu's youth. The findings highlight the need for collaborative efforts among parents, educators, and policymakers to create a safer and more positive media environment for youth. By addressing the psychological, emotional, and behavioral effects of violent movies, society can help young individuals develop healthier media consumption habits and build resilience against the negative influences of violent content. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs and explore cross-cultural comparisons to further deepen our understanding of this complex issue.

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