

# Violent Cinema and Children with Special Needs

Garima Bhayana\*

M.A. in English, Kurukshetra University, Haryana

**Abstract – The following paper aims to analyse the impact of watching violent media on Children with Special Needs. It inculcates a Case Study of a Down Syndrome boy who got access to a number of violent films and videos through online and offline media. It is followed by an analysis of behavioural changes that are observed with the help of a professional Special Educator. The paper also includes a personal interview of the aforementioned expert in the field. A detailed analysis is followed by the ramifications and risks possible because of the impacts. The paper concludes with a detailed and well researched compilation as well as testing of improvement techniques.**

**Keywords: Cinema, Impact, CWSN, Reality, Imagination, Media**

-----X-----

Reality and fantasy are left to be seen as two conjoined poles of the same string, attributable to the emergence of media and literature. The question of what reality is and how it should be differentiated from fantasy and imagination remains unanswered owing to the fact that the “simulation” of one’s imagination comes to be a dime a dozen on screen through mediums and tools such as VFX et al. What an author writes or a screenplay writer writes is the result of one’s intersectional productivity sourced from imagination and reality. The power of literature and screenplay is such that the readers or watchers start believing in what is being shown. That is the major parameter of appreciation for the writer, to make imagination seem real. However, where the imagination seems to be the beginning point, one should think beyond. If the source of seemingly real images on the screen is imagination, what is the source of imagination? Indeed, the source of imagination is reality itself. One aspect to be certain here is that it should not be assumed that this chain of sources is becoming an umbrella of supersets and subsets. It is not linear. If we try to visualise this process of extracting imagination from reality and then reality from imagination and so on, one might end up drawing a complex diagram where every circle has something but not everything overlapping with the other circle. The uncovered parts of the circles should be called pure imagination while the overlapping parts are influences from reality or imagination already existing.

The media represents world that is more real than reality that we can experience. People lose the ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy. They also begin to engage with the fantasy without realizing what it really is.

They seek happiness and fulfilment through the simulacra of reality, e.g. media and avoid the

contact/interaction with the real world. (Baudrillard J, 1981, Simulacra and Simulation)

In such a complex apparatus of reality entwined with fantasy as well as imagination, the vision of a mind that is of an adult can still manage to remain still in self-awareness of reality. However, a childlike mind, presumably not as mature and aware of the ability to distinguish between what can possibly be the reality of the virtual world on screen, would most probably, better than the adult struggle, believe in the wondrous illustrations on screen. The scope of cinematic illustrations can take a large toll as well. It is highly powerful how cinema affects the multisensory faculty of the watchers, influencing the psychological paradigms and grasping of information to a deeper level of understanding along with “relatability”.

The understanding of the film language and the perception of the message which the film seeks to convey, is an entirely different process from that of reading and understanding a book. The understanding of a book is an intellectual process, whereas the film is a direct sensory experience.(38)

From the age of 10 years the influence of a film on the child is immediately discernible, with regard to his perception, understanding and emotion. The study of perception in children requires accurate and comprehensive experiments in both visual and auditive fields. There are two stages that can be distinguished in understanding a film: a mental age of 10 years is required for the child to keep pace with the sequences; for an understanding of the entire significance of the film a mental age of 12 years is required. Only the simple comic element is understood by children under the age of 12. Above this age the child's understanding of the comic

element is on a level with that of adults. For the understanding of a commercial cartoon, a mental age of at least 12 years is essential. Emotional reactions to a film yield valuable evidence for the investigation of the child's individual tendencies. These reactions are of an individual nature, and differ according to sex. The role of the cinema in developing criminal tendencies has not been conclusively demonstrated, but it appears that the gangster film does play a part in "teaching" the techniques of crime. The film also influences factors which remain in the child's mind after a film performance, and thus affects the child's conduct. Electro-encephalographic and biological investigations must be encouraged to give a physiological basis to psychological observations of emotional reactions. (UNESCO, The influence of the cinema on children and adolescents- An annotated international bibliography, 37)

Children with Special Needs have been said to have an even mind full of inquisitive energy to observe and adapt to the environment. Media plays a yet imperative function in defining the energy of one's environment in the present scenario. Films, YouTube entertainment are only few of the highly and very easily accessible sources of environment and societal encapsulation for one. With the ease of operations, media centred gadgets influence the mindsets of users.

A 2002 report by the US Secret Service and the US Department of Education, which examined 37 incidents of targeted school shootings and school attacks from 1974 to 2000 in this country, found that "over half of the attackers demonstrated some interest in violence through movies, video games, books, and other media." In a 2009 Policy Statement on Media Violence, the American Academy of Paediatrics said, "Extensive research evidence indicates that media violence can contribute to aggressive behaviour, desensitization to violence, nightmares, and fear of being harmed." This year, the Media Violence Commission of the International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA) in its report on media violence said, "Over the past 50 years, a large number of studies conducted around the world have shown that watching violent television, watching violent films, or playing violent video games increases the likelihood for aggressive behaviour." According to the commission, more than 15 meta-analyses have been published examining the links between media violence and aggression. Anderson and colleagues, for instance, published a comprehensive meta-analysis of violent video game effects and concluded that the "evidence strongly suggests that exposure to violent video games is a causal risk factor for increased aggressive behaviour, aggressive cognition, and aggressive affect and for decreased empathy and prosocial behaviour." In a Psychiatric Times interview, psychologist Craig Anderson, PhD, Director of the Center for the Study of Violence at Iowa State University, said the evidence for the media violence—

aggression link is very strong from every major type of study design: randomized experiments, cross-sectional correlation studies, and longitudinal studies. There is growing evidence, Anderson said, that high exposure to fast-paced violent games can lead to changes in brain function when processing violent images, including dampening of emotional responses to violence and decreases in certain types of executive control. But there also is some evidence that the same type of fast-paced violent games can improve some types of spatial-visual skills, basically, ability to extract visual information from a computer screen.

A research available on the NCBI website gives the following results.

We not only found a high rate of exposure overall but also identified several independent risk factors for exposure. Boys, minorities, those with low socioeconomic status, and those with poor school performance are all more likely to see extremely violent movies. There is a strong relation between exposure and race, with black adolescents at particularly high risk for exposure. This is consistent with previous work that demonstrated a higher exposure to movies, television, and radio among black adolescents than among white adolescents. However, these effects held even when controlling for the total number of movies seen and, therefore, does not simply reflect risk factors for watching movies in general. Although more research needs to be performed to investigate the causes and consequences of these high rates of exposure to violent movies, given that many of these risk factors for exposure mirror risk factors for violent behaviour (e.g., race and gender), it is important to examine the role that movie exposure plays in encouraging violence in youth.

Although all mechanisms of the connection between exposure and behaviour are not yet understood, it is clear that parents of adolescents should be aware of the negative consequences of this exposure and encouraged to limit it. However, many aspects of the modern media environment work against adequate parental oversight. With the advent of DVDs, movie channels, pay-per-view channels, and even Web-based movie downloads, adolescents have unprecedented access to adult media. Director's cuts on DVDs are not subjected to the ratings process and often include additional violent material that was edited out of the theatrically released version. These movies are often viewed in American homes, in which approximately two thirds of adolescents have a television and more than half have a VCR or DVD player in their bedroom, which makes parental oversight difficult. In addition, extremely violent films are marketed on television during programming that is seen by children and adolescents, which raises awareness of these films and piques interest. Even among adolescents who

report that their parents never let them watch R-rated movies, 22.6% reported having seen at least 1 of these movies from their list.

These features of the media environment represent a significant challenge to parents who are interested in restricting their adolescents' exposure. Furthermore, parents may not be aware of the extremely graphic nature of these films and the high rates of exposure among young adolescents. Parents are often shocked when presented with the violent scenes included with this article, because many older adults (including paediatricians) do not watch them. For educational reasons, we have included with these article scenes from some of the movies that young adolescents watch (Movies 1–5); we believe that viewing the scenes may motivate paediatricians and parents to take movie violence more seriously. Parents may also not be aware of the well-documented connection between exposure to violence and negative outcomes such as increased aggression. Therefore, restriction to media violence may not be a top priority for some parents. It is not known to what extent parents are unaware of the violent content in some of these movies and to what extent they may discount the potential negative effects of them (e.g., comedic violence). We urge paediatricians to play a more prominent role in motivating and educating parents to manage the home media environment, which may involve (1) educating parents about the high rates of exposure and the link between exposure and outcomes, (2) motivating parents to restrict access to violent media, and (3) conducting research into ways to assist parents in using available technology such as the V-Chip. In addition, these high rates of exposure to movies rated R for violence call into question the effectiveness of the current rating system. An R rating for violence tells parents that adolescents under the age of 17 must be accompanied by a guardian but does not clearly communicate that some of this violence should not be seen by young adolescents. Cross-cultural research should be performed to determine if more restrictive ratings systems, such as those of Canada and the United Kingdom (which prohibit children from seeing such movies in theatres), are more effective at preventing exposure.

Following is a personal interview of a distinguished Special Educator to throw light on the same concern.

Interviewer: Greetings! Madam, kindly let us know about the basic and prerequisite aspects you keep in mind while educating children with special needs.

Interviewee: We make sure that we never, ever lose patience. Special children are emotionally highly sensitive and very keenly observant. They have the special ability to adapt every fashion of behaviour that might allow them to feel at par with other people around them.

Interviewer: I'm sure you have numerous teaching aids for their holistic development, how do you include the use of media precisely in educating them? Do you think watching violent content affects their psychological paradigms?

Interviewee: A lot. Children with Special Needs, as I mentioned are highly sensitive, both emotionally and psychologically. In fact, any child for that matter would grasp the visualisation of the video content and relate it with the real life situations. It can lead to serious behavioural problems in Children with special needs, to a large extent. This is also because one of the consequences of such children consuming violent films is that they might not be able to exercise one's ethical cognition in a situation of venting out his or her catharsis.

Interviewer: Madam, kindly elaborate the repercussions with the reference of a case that you have experienced in your professional journey so far.

Interviewee: We deal with similar problems very commonly. That is why patience and empathy are the two major pillars of my field. Sometimes, kids rage up in stubbornness or get angry at something. They might even physically throw random objects or harm somebody, not intentionally, but as I said, they might not use their ethical faculty at that time of vengeance. Gaurav, a Down Syndrome child, is a technically savvy boy. He loves to explore and self-learn using gadgets and audio visual applications. He is fond of music and watching videos. Being a completely non-violent boy once, he started watching CID on YouTube when his interest in surfing accident videos on web surged. He would look for specific scenes that showed a car bursting up into flames or one falling off a cliff. He would wait to see bloodshed in videos and then repeatedly watching such content. In just a few weeks' time, his family members observed major changes in his normal reactions. While earlier he would sit in the front seat of the car and ask his sister who was driving to be careful, now amusingly suggests his sister to pace up and bang on the vehicle in the front. Such differences in psychology of a child have the potential to grow the violence factor in the child's own behaviour and reaction to certain situations. Films that glorify violence with bright colors and audio effects can reach the core of a child's actions and bearings.

Below are the observation sheets of the aforementioned case. The results are self-explanatory.

| Behavioral Assessments Scales     |              |        |        |        |        |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| I am able to : <del>Control</del> | Year 2012-20 |        | Year   |        | Year   |
|                                   | Term 1       | Term 2 | Term 1 | Term 2 | Term 1 |
| Violent and destructive behaviour | +            | +      |        |        |        |
| Temper tantrums                   | +            |        |        |        |        |
| Misbehaviour                      | +            |        |        |        |        |
| Self injurious behaviour          | +            | +      |        |        |        |
| Repetitive behaviour              | C            |        |        |        |        |
| Odd behaviour                     | SP           |        |        |        |        |
| Hyper activity                    | SP           |        |        |        |        |
| Rebellious behaviour              | A            |        |        |        |        |
| Antisocial behaviour              | C            |        |        |        |        |
| Over my fears                     | C            |        |        |        |        |

| Behavioral Assessments Scales     |              |        |        |        |        |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| I am able to : <del>Control</del> | Year 2012-20 |        | Year   |        | Year   |
|                                   | Term 1       | Term 2 | Term 1 | Term 2 | Term 1 |
| Violent and destructive behaviour | +            | +      |        |        |        |
| Temper tantrums                   | +            |        |        |        |        |
| Misbehaviour                      | +            |        |        |        |        |
| Self injurious behaviour          | +            | +      |        |        |        |
| Repetitive behaviour              | C            |        |        |        |        |
| Odd behaviour                     | SP           |        |        |        |        |
| Hyper activity                    | SP           |        |        |        |        |
| Rebellious behaviour              | A            |        |        |        |        |
| Antisocial behaviour              | C            |        |        |        |        |
| Over my fears                     | C            |        |        |        |        |

## WORKS CITED

- Anderson CA, Shibuya A, Ihori N, et. al. (2010). Violent video game effects on aggression, empathy, and prosocial behavior in eastern and western countries: a meta-analytic review. *Psychol Bull*; 136: pp. 151-173.
- Baudrillard, Jean, 1929-2007. *Simulacra And Simulation*. Ann Arbor :University of Michigan Press, 1994
- Blosser B.J. (1988). Ethnic differences in children's media use. *J Broadcast Electron Media*; 32(4): pp. 453-470. [Google Scholar]
- Council on Communications and Media. From the American Academy of Pediatrics: Policy statement—Media violence. *Pediatrics*; 124: pp. 1495-1503.
- Federal Trade Commission. *Marketing Violent Entertainment to Children: A Review of Self-regulation and Industry Practices in the Motion Picture, Music Recording and Electronic Game Industries*. Washington, DC: 2000. Available at: [www.ftc.gov/reports/violence/vioreport.pdf](http://www.ftc.gov/reports/violence/vioreport.pdf). [Google Scholar]
- Kaplan, Arline (2012). *Psychiatric Times*. Volume 29, Issue 10. "Violence in the Media: What Effects on Behavior?" October 5, 2012. <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/child-adolescent-psychiatry/violence-media-what-effects-behavior>
- Media Violence Commission (2012), International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA). Report of the media violence commission. *Aggress Behav.*; 38: pp. 335-341.
- Roberts D.F., Foehr U.G., Rideout V. (2008). *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year Olds*. Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation; 2005. [April 29, 2008]. Available at: [www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/Generation-M-Media-in-the-Lives-of-8-18-Year-olds-Report.pdf](http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/Generation-M-Media-in-the-Lives-of-8-18-Year-olds-Report.pdf). [Google Scholar]
- Shalala D. (2001). Prevalence of violent behavior. *Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General*. 2001. [April 29, 2008]. Available at: <http://download.ncadi.samhsa.gov/ken/pdf/surgeon/SG.pdf>.
- Unesco (1961). *The Influence of the Cinema on Children and Adolescents- An annotated international bibliography*.
- Vossekuil B., Fein R.A., Reddy M., et. al. (2002). *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: US Secret Service, US Dept of Education.
- Worth, Keilah A. et. al. (2008). "Exposure of US adolescents to extremely violent movies." *Pediatrics* vol. 122, 2: pp. 306-12. DOI:10.1542/peds.2007-1096 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2778277/>

## Corresponding Author

**Garima Bhayana\***

M.A. in English, Kurukshetra University, Haryana