MEDIA - THE VIRUS OF VIOLENCE

# INTRODUCTION

Every person in society, irrespective of nationality, age, race, colour or creed, is exposed to an excessive amount of media sources - albeit in the form of newspapers, magazines, television, films, arcade and computer games, cartoons, music and music videos and even the World Wide Web. It is not surprising, therefore, that the communication of the media *will* influence societal behaviour in various ways. The media has in fact been accused of being **'the virus of violence'** but one cannot target any specific media source as the only demon to be blamed for the crimes of society. (Villani, 2000, p. 199)

Does media violence actually cause real-life violence?

Prof Huesmann argues that fifty years of evidence shows "exposure to media violence causes children to behave more aggressively and affects them as adults years later”. Children being more susceptible at such a young age are at a higher risk ofbeing influenced by the media. According to Madeline Levinethe amount of media exposure society endures directly affects aggressive behaviour in four main ways:

* **Imitation** - people imitate the actions they have seen
* **Desensitisation** - we may not like violence, but we may not hate it as much as we should
* **Normative socialisation -** violent actions and attitudes are defined as socially acceptable
* **Vicarious reinforcement -** deviant behaviours are portrayed as having positive outcomes

1. TELEVISION AND FILMS

Craig Anderson states that the average person spends approximately 29 hours per week watching television and by the time most people reach the age of 70 they will have spent 7 to 10 years watching television.

In 1963, Professor Ross studied the effect of exposure to real-world violence via television violence, and cartoon violence. He divided 100 preschool children into four groups. The first group watched a real person shout insults at an inflatable doll while hitting it with a mallet. The second group watched the incident on television. The third watched a cartoon version of the same scene, and the fourth watched nothing. When all the children were later exposed to a frustrating situation, the first three groups responded with more aggression than the control group. The children who watched the incident on television were just as aggressive as those who had watched the real person use the mallet; and both were more aggressive than those who had only watched the cartoon.

*Popular heroes teach us violence is justified, heroic, without consequences and. glamorous. One should, therefore, be more concerned with the good heroes of movies because they do the majority of the killing and they're not punished.* (Levine, 1996)

This statement made by Madeline Levine illustrates all the characteristics which directly affect aggressive behaviour - imitation, desensitisation, normative socialisation and vicarious reinforcement - and it is this enhanced aggressive behaviour that is contagious and is spreading.

1. VIDEO GAMES(Smith, 2016)

Video and arcade games are probably the most dangerous due to the fact that, according to researchers, "they are interactive, very engrossing and require the player to identify with the aggressor".

1. MUSIC AND MUSIC VIDEOS

Craig Anderson of the Texas Department of Human Services reported that violent music lyrics increased aggressive thoughts and hostile feelings. He concluded, "There are now good theoretical reasons to expect effects of music lyrics on aggressive behaviour to be similar to the well-studied effects of exposure to TV and movie violence and the more recent research efforts on violent video games". (Anderson, 2003)

1. WEBSITES AND CYBERSPACE

Susan Villani says that we have a generation of kids abandoned to the electronic babysitter. (Villani, 2000, p. 90)

Virtual violence is also readily available on the World Wide Web. Children and young people can download violent lyrics (including lyrics that have been censored from retail versions of songs), and visit web sites that feature violent images and video clips.

# CONCLUSION

Considering all the research, the facts and the true stories, the growth of violence in society is a combination of various factors. Factors such as inadequate parenting and family dysfunction, educational deprivement, the availability of guns, alienation of today's youth, mental illness, manipulative violence in films, video games, television, the internet and music. All of these factors vary in importance as children grow from infancy to early adulthood.

Media,*the virus of violence***,** is here to stay and will continue to dominate the audio-visual channels and airwaves for decades to come. Naturally, there will be those who are more vulnerable to the adverse influence of media violence because they have not yet acquired the complex sets of moral and social values which prevent adults from behaving in a violent, unrestrained way towards each other. Likewise therewill also be those who have acquired the fundamental sets of moral and social values and who will put media violence into perspective by selecting healthy entertainment channels that they can benefit from.

