

Media coverage of
terrorism
psychological impact
psychology essay



This research report concerns the psychological impact resulting from the media coverage of terrorism. The report focuses on the impact on school going children of Pakistan. In this report this relationship will be studied in the light of present literature. The present literature indicates an association between television viewing and symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress. However a gap exists in literature regarding the impact of terrorist activities occurring in Pakistan. Analyzing the present literature in the light of examples from Pakistan gives an insight into the psychological impact and changing behaviors of Pakistani children; primarily in the age group of eight to thirteen years. Interviews with parents and teachers were also conducted to investigate the observable changes in behavior that occur as an aftermath of a terrorist activity. As caretakers of children, their opinions have also been included in the findings to get a better understanding of the situation. These findings will form the basis of further research on the intensity of these effects and how to minimize and overcome the negative impacts of the media coverage of terrorism.

Television viewing is one of the major pastimes of Pakistani families. The trend towards news watching has increased dramatically in the last five years, the proof being the increase in number of news channels being broadcasted. Currently twenty six news channels are operating in Pakistan. News is often watched by the whole families and is resulting in a sense of engagement with what is reported in the news seen in documentaries and discussion programmes. A number of kids choose to watch news while a significant number of children see or hear news because their parents are

watching it. This raises concerns about children viewing horrifying images of terrorism on the news.

Terrorist activities in Pakistan have escalated in the last five years resulting in civilians' death. the number of civilian deaths in 2006 were 608; in 2007 the number of civilian deaths were 1522; in 2008 2155 civilians died; in 2009 the death toll reached 2324 and the year 2010 ended with civilian deaths reaching 1796 people.

This presents a serious situation of the country. All the terrorist incidents are extensively covered by the media and most of the reporting is conducted live. In Karachi alone the year 2010 witnessed 133 incidents of terrorist activities, including arrests, surrenders, threats, explosions and killings, against 45 in 2009. Karachi experienced the brazen CID building attack and the bomb blast at the shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi.

The international community is conducting extensive research on the impact of media coverage on terrorism. Unfortunately the concept of second hand trauma is widely ignored in Pakistani society. The need to understand the impact is vital now, given the brutal and heinous terrorist incidents that are prevalent in the country. There is a need to educate people that Television viewing of terrorism related news has negative impact on the viewers. The impact differs with regard to age groups, the amount of time spent while watching television, the reaction of parents, geographic proximity, type of incident and the timing of research. Usually the impact is not identified therefore no steps are taken to counter them.

The most susceptible target of negative impact of terrorism are children, more specifically the school going children. Their minds are in early development stage, and it is vital to monitor the television viewing to avoid psychological impact and stress symptoms in children. Research generally finds an association between watching media coverage of terrorist attacks and stress symptoms. In such a situation, at first level parents and secondly the teachers should be aware of the impact on the children. Only then can they work together for healthy development of children mind in these turbulent times.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS:

Operational definitions:

Psychological impact: the impact on emotional and behavioral characteristics of an individual

Media coverage: the focus will be on the television coverage of terrorism

Children : age group - eight to twelve year (Classes - three to seven)

Terms defined

Terrorism: most definitions propose that terrorism involves (1) the use of threat or violence, (2) to create fear and intimidation, (3) in an audience of indirect victims (4) to affect changes in ideology, attitudes, and behavior."

cultivation theory: The theory holds that even a massive use of the medium television has no immediate effects on individuals' mindset but in the long run a cultivation effect is able to alter the perception of reality and drive

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individuals to live in a skewed model, derived from what is broadcasted on TV

Psychological impact: pertaining to, dealing with, or affecting the mind, especially function of awareness, feeling or motivating.

post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): is a severe anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to any event that results in psychological trauma

functional impairment: Condition that requires assistance with one or more personal care services including, but not limited to, bathing, dressing, preparing meals, feeding, grooming, taking self-administered medication, toileting, and ambulation

ethnic stereotyping: is a generalized representation of an ethnic group, composed of what are thought to be typical characteristics of members of the group.

community violence: refers to exposure, as a witness or through actual experience, to acts of interpersonal violence perpetrated by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim.

clinical interventions: Clinical interventions include invasive and non-invasive procedures, and cognitive interventions.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy: is a psychotherapeutic approach, a talking therapy, that aims to solve problems concerning dysfunctional emotions, behaviors and cognitions through a goal-oriented, systematic procedure.

Cognitive restructuring: is the process of learning to refute cognitive distortions, or fundamental “ faulty thinking,” with the goal of replacing one’s irrational, counter-factual beliefs with more accurate and beneficial ones.

anger management training: Anger management commonly refers to a system of psychological therapeutic techniques and exercises by which someone with excessive or uncontrollable anger can control or reduce the triggers, degrees, and effects of an angered emotional state.

summary of report structure:

Section one

The abstract highlights the key issues, major findings and important recommendations of the research paper.

Section two

The introduction section introduces the purpose of the report, highlights aims and objectives. The key terms used in the research paper are also introduced.

Section three

The background of the research gives detailed review of literature. the major works of psychologists and sociologists is discussed.

Section four

The methodology section provides description of the research methods employed. This includes the rationale for the interviews conducted and details regarding the collection of present literature. The limitations have also been identified.

Section five

The analysis section provides extensive discussion regarding the present literature and the analysis of interviews conducted. Major inferences are concluded.

Section six

In the final section of the report conclusions are drawn by summing up the findings. The end results are followed by recommendations for parents and teachers. Areas that need to be further researched are also discussed.

BACKGROUND

Various pioneers in the field of psychology have evaluated the changing behavior and increasing symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), functional impairment and ethnic stereotyping in youth resulting from trauma related media coverage. Abundant research is available regarding events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, the SCUD (surface-to-surface missile system) attacks and terrorist activities in Israel and state terrorism in Guatemala between 1981 and 1983. Limited research has been carried out considering Pakistan as the target for the investigation; however some

initiative has been undertaken by the PIPS research journal which will hopefully create the need for more vital literature on this topic.

Many studies have shown that media exposure of disaster events have been correlated with posttraumatic stress symptoms in children. An example of this could be the repeated and extensive graphic coverage of the September 11 terrorist attacks, a comprehensive study conducted in an elementary school of Washington DC which consisting of 47 parent child pair teams concluded that the prevalence of PTSD was higher in children who spent more time watching the news or reading the paper. In another study by Christina Cantrell regarding the 9/11 attacks parents were questioned via phone calls over a period of 2 months regarding the time spent by their child watching news coverage about the attack, it was concluded that 26% parents believed that their child watched approximately four hours worth of attack related news coverage for an entire week following the event.

As discussed in the book "Peace Psychology" single act of terrorism and on-going terrorism campaigns both have distinct impacts on the minds of the youth. Single act of terrorism are much more dangerous as it comes as a shock and requires adaptive behavior which often results in being excessively difficult for children to deal with. On-going campaigns such that in Northern Ireland, Palestine and Srilanka become part of daily life, abhorred by society at large, but not unexpected.

Amjad Tufail in his research journal provides an in depth analysis of the victims of secondhand terrorism (glorification of terrorism through media coverage). The study is based on a survey conducted in three Pakistani

cities, evaluates the changes in subconscious behavior resulting from increased exposure to terrorism related media coverage. The study further sheds light on the social responsibility of the 26 current affair television channels operating in Pakistan and appeals for the urgent need for ratings, in order to ensure adult supervision while viewing the coverage of trauma related news.

The book “ The trauma of terrorism: sharing knowledge and shared care, an international handbook” places significant emphasis on the fact that children exposed to trauma related coverage are likely to exhibit reactions such as loss of appetite and sleep, increased sensitivity to sound, increase startle response and concern for security . More importantly these reactions may transform into much serious issues such as withdrawal syndrome, substance abuse and fascination with death and suicide.

According to the research carried out by Dr. Wanda Fermont many of the effects of terrorism-induced trauma on children are similar to the effects of man-made and natural disaster. Thus in order to successfully interpret the impact on children it is very important to set trauma reaction as a standard for the study . The research further evaluates the possible reactions which may result from the media exposure of the terror attacks such as acute stress disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, separation difficulties, and regressive and behavioral problems. This study further evaluates the impact of these responses on the subconscious behavior of children for example acute stress disorder or PTSD may re-experience the trauma by having nightmares or recurring flashbacks of the trauma. The study also evaluated how children of different ages

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respond to the same news for example children age 5 and under may exhibit regressive behaviors such as bed-wetting, thumb-sucking or fear of the dark whereas school-age children (ages 6 to 11) may have attention problems and schoolwork may suffer they may also show signs of anxiety including school avoidance, somatic complaints, irrational fears, sleep problems, nightmares, irritability and angry outbursts.

Kaiser Family Foundation conducted a comparative study on the impact of media coverage of terrorism over the past 20 years, the events covered were the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Oklahoma City bombing of 1995 and September 11, 2001 attack on the WTC. The results accomplished that children with even no proximal contact with the actual event of terrorism may develop severe psychological disorders due to the excessive media coverage. For example following the events of the 1991 Gulf War 45% parents interviewed reported that war related coverage had upset, frightened or disturbed their child. Among an estimated 10.5% (75,000) of students suffering from symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder six months after 9/11, included children who were not directly involved in the attack but did spend considerable time watching its media coverage. The research has also highlighted a gap in the literature which debates whether media coverage alone is the cause of PTSD in children or is it just a tool to set off a past experience. It is possible that news images trigger symptoms among children who suffered previous trauma in their lives, thus it is difficult to comprehend the exact cause of the behavioral change.

A research conducted by Elana Newman, McFarlin Chair of Psychology at the University of Tulsa provides comprehensive evidence about how factors such <https://assignbuster.com/media-coverage-of-terrorism-psychological-impact-psychology-essay/>

as age, gender, specific content and news medium affects distress levels after viewing trauma related news. The writer stresses that there is a positive relationship between exposure to media coverage of trauma and PTSD amongst youth. In a survey of 88 children within 100 miles of Oklahoma City conducted two years after the bombing, there was a positive association between media exposure of the tragedy and enduring symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder that was stronger for children who viewed print media than for those who viewed broadcast media . This is mainly because children usually create personal association with the victims shown in the media coverage; this increases their emotional vulnerability and leads them in a state of emotional disarray.

METHADODOLOGY

The research report uses both primary and secondary sources of information. The research related to media coverage of terrorism is relatively new and limited literature is available on the issue. Most of the research revolves around the incidents of 1986 Challenger explosion (Terr et al., 1999), the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing (Pfefferbaum et al., 2001), military attacks in Israel (Bat-Zion & Levy-Shiff, 1993; Klingman, Sagi, & Raviv, 1993), and the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States . The literature provided the basic guidelines on which inferences were formed with respect to Pakistani society.

Ten interviews were conducted, five with school teachers teaching grade four, five and six; and five parents of children between the age of eight and thirteen. Potential interviewees were contacted by telephone. The interviews

were semi-structured. This will help in forming accurate conclusion. This provided valuable insight into upcoming issues.

Due to constraints of resources a large national representative sample was not interviewed. The interviewee were mere observers of child reaction and some exaggeration or understatement may have occurred. Measurement was limited in that the same question was used for all children.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

SECONDARY RESEARCH

From the existence pool of research it can be drawn that media coverage of terrorism results in negative psychological impact on young minds. The effects include anxiety, depression, acute stress disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, sleep disturbances. The emotional reactions are witnessed immediately after the trauma. This includes need to be with someone, confusion and crying. Play and study is also affected. Plays may be acted on themes or aspects of the trauma. The most observable impact in school going children include the prevalence of angry outbursts and irritability, increased sensitivity to sounds such as sirens, planes flying above, thunder, loud noises. The thoughts regarding deaths and dying may increase.

Most of the parents and teachers agreed during the course of interviews that the media coverage of terrorism has negative influence on their children. It takes away their sense of security and exposes them to the brutal world.

However the extent of the impact depends on the house environment. The immediate response to the " Breaking News" includes crying or a request to

change the channel. the children question about the incidents and want more information or explanation and then it becomes very difficult to distract them away from the topic as they are too involved in the whole scenario. A very experienced teacher of primary school mentioned the prevalence of terrorism related story writing in class works. An arts teacher reported that now children are more fascinated in drawing people carrying guns wearing exploding jackets. The general observation has been the children being on guard and increase in future victimization. The proof is the increasing number of requests to bring cell phones in school so they can stay in contact with the parents. Rise in the general level of aggression has been reported. Confrontation has become a common expression with more cases of playground fights.

The media actions elicits the psychological impact on children. the actions of media include showing visuals of dangerous or catastrophic events, Showing individuals who have been injured, killed, or are displaying extreme emotional responses. The sudden show of catastrophe without prior announcements causes negative psychological impact. The repetition of graphics and the prevailing emergency sounds (gunfire, explosion, ambulances, sound of people in panic). If media portrays that the authorities are out of control and unable to respond also triggers the impact.

When these actions are viewed in the context of Pakistani media, it is observed that the majority of the stresses triggering action are taking place. The live coverage of terrorist affected sites have disturbing visuals. These visuals are repeated again and again. The site often shows dead bodies and blood, this causes serious damage to a young mind. The sounds of

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emergency are also heard and the whole situation of panic and loss of law and order is given extensive coverage. The graphic videos of the emergency areas of hospitals makes the children feel helpless and scared. Not only this some of the big news channel also create a short video regarding the tragedy, this video is aired from time to time. and then follows a whole series of talk shows where they discuss the break in law and order and the impact on society. Such media activity reinforces the fact that Pakistani children are in grave danger from psychological warfare.

The coping skills of children are also dependent on the responses from the community members. if the community members are not standing together and have conflicting beliefs and values it will have a bad influence on childrens development. The community of Pakistan is fragmented and currently fighting against each other and possess conflicting beliefs. This endangers the children even more.

The impact of single act of terrorism is different from the on-going acts of terrorism. Single act of terrorism are much more dangerous as it comes as a shock and requires adaptive behavior. On-going campaigns such that in Northern Ireland, Palestine and Srilanka become part of daily life, abhorred by society at large, but not unexpected. Pakistan falls in the category of on-going terrorist campaigns as well. The terrorism incidents are being accepted as routine activities by the masses. This is a dangerous indication. The young minds are accepting heinous activities and getting used to the idea of innocent people dying. Becoming indifferent is not an indication of a healthy mind.

This concern was also raised during the course of interviews

According to the teachers, difference in behavior of children is not observed when school reopens, most of the children are happy when they get holidays because of such sad incidents. This confirms the earlier theory of ongoing terrorist campaigns mentioned earlier. The trend in the changes in behavior occurring over last five years is, the children are bolder but violent. The concept of fighting is considered absolutely normal. They are becoming more violent and arguing because of difference in opinions. The number of playground fights has also increased to quite an extent.

When asked for their opinion regarding the future, Interviewees basically agreed on two impacts. There will be increased desensitization and skepticism. The impact of terrorist attacks simply becomes a number to be discussed in passing, like the scores of a football match. Both these situations indicate grave dangers. Desensitization and skepticism hinder the personality development of individuals.

CONCLUSION

RECOMMENDATIONS

Now that we have identified the presence of PTSD and other psychological problems resulting from terrorism related media coverage, it is essential that these children be examined and treated so as to curb any long term permanent damage. The effectiveness and comparative advantages of various treatment models for children exposed to terrorism related media coverage have not been extensively examined, however recently

researchers have concluded that children exposed to trauma related
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coverage often show similar symptoms to those exposed to non-terrorism induced trauma for example natural disasters, sexual abuse, community violence etc. So the use of clinical interventions and treatments can assist us in the rehabilitation of children suffering from trauma resulting from terrorism related media coverage.

It is very important to involve parents in the treatment of children as their presence can help speed up and stabilize the whole process. Family therapy, group therapy and school and community interventions can be used to reduce symptoms amongst children. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has been the most rigorously studied treatment for traumatized children. Cognitive restructuring (reprocessing the traumatic event and identifying traumatic triggers), relaxation training, anger management training, teaching of proactive coping skills and grief management are important methods to treat PTSD in children.

However these practices are difficult to carry out in Pakistan because of the poor literacy rate and lack of awareness but still government educational programs and compulsory school counseling sessions can help identify the extent of psychological damage terrorism related media coverage has caused on the youth of this nation.

Treatment is important but it is more important to prevent any further outbreaks. For that increased cooperation from parents is required. Parents should limit exposure to graphic news images and stop their child to view repeated replays of trauma events on television. Parents should monitor the

response of their children while watching news and should later discuss it with them.

Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) can also play an important role in providing a solution for this problem. PEMRA should strengthen its censorship policies and should force current affair channels to provide warning before graphic images of terrorist events. It should also limit the size, amount and repetition of graphic visuals. Media channels should also show some responsibility by respecting the emotions and sentiments of the public viewing these events at home. They should avoid eye-witness reports as they can be very traumatizing for children, limit replaying images on anniversaries of terrorism events (for example Mumbai attacks) as children may re-experience fright, and also avoid the viewing of graphic animations following an attack.

FURTHER RESEARCH

It is very important that constant and comprehensive research be conducted on this topic because terrorist threats and attacks have become more frequent throughout the country over the past several years and health care providers, parents and teachers are struggling to help youngsters cope with heightened anxiety and fear.

Focus groups comprising of all major stakeholders like parents, children, teachers and psychologists can provide detailed analysis of the problem. For this research method to work it is very important that it should be conducted by trained mediators so that the exact cause and effect relationship could be developed. The results may help the parents, teachers and psychologists to

take decisive action to rehabilitate the children from psychological issues arising from excessive terrorism related media exposure.

There is also a pressing need for more literature on this topic. There is very limited literature available which considers Pakistan as the target for the research which makes it very difficult to compare the situation with that in other countries. As comparative study is essential in reaching a conclusion about the problem lack of local literature makes it very difficult to implement policies to control it. Thus unless detailed literature in the form of journal articles , books and periodicals are made available for the government, parents, psychologists and other stakeholders progress is going to be increasing painstaking and slow