

Juvenile offences and social work intervention: A study on the influence of mass media on children in committing crimes

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Abstract

Media has become an integral and indispensable part of our lives. Today's generation is suffused with media. Many TV shows, serials, series, documentary, movies or even video games contain excessive violence, over-the-top sexuality, profanity, racism, and many other things. The main objectives of the study are to examine the influence of mass media on children in committing crimes and to understand how social work intervention can prevent the onset of antisocial behaviors of the juveniles. The findings of the study show that the constant revelation and exposure of children to violent media can cause aggression and violent behaviour among them. Secondary data was used to collect information for this study. The study concludes that there is a profound impact of mass media on the children in committing crimes.

Keywords: Juvenile delinquency, mass media, violence, crimes, aggressive, anti-social behaviour

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency is a social problem which affects families, communities and society as a whole. It is a harsh reality in today's world which is still

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increasing at an alarming rate. This has now become a universal problem in most of the industrialized countries including India. More and more children are engaged in violence and antisocial acts in our country. Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi are some of the states in India which has the highest percentage of crimes by juveniles.

As far as India is concerned, it is poverty and the effects of mass media which makes juveniles more inclined towards criminal activities. Media influence on children has created a fertile ground for increased rate of Juvenile delinquency. The crimes and techniques that are used in these media can influence the malleable minds of children which they then try to imitate thus leading to murders, bank lootings, snatching of money and gold, eve teasing, making obscene advances towards girls, kidnapping them and so on.

For today's generation the world is fictional. They are addicted to television and mobile phone, thus confining themselves to screen life. This makes them unaware of the real world and its experiences which they are missing out.

Need for the study

Children's lives have become increasingly dependent on online sources in today's world. Even the online classes have made it difficult to keep the children away from gadgets and have also raised the spectre of screen addiction among children. Nowadays, mass media act as a digital drug among the children.

Studies have shown that some movies, television serials, cartoons, video games and social media demonstrate a lot of immorality, violence and aggression which leave a strong and lasting impression on the tender minds of children and make the children think that these are approved by the society and thus, imitate it without fear and also use them in practical life. The mass media therefore reinforce delinquency and crimes to a great extent.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives are:

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- To study the influence of mass media on children in committing crimes
- To understand how social work intervention can prevent the onset of antisocial behaviors of the juveniles
- To explore the roles of social workers to deal with children in conflict with law.

Methodology

The information for this study was collected through secondary sources of data which include case studies, newspaper articles etc.

Similar studies conducted

- Contributing Factors Of Juvenile Delinquency

A study carried out by Dr. Prakash. D. Haveripeth which was published on January 2013 in the international journal of innovative research and development pointed out that mass media have considerable influence over the attitudes and behaviour, especially among those under the age of 18. In his study, he highlighted that excessive exposure to violence in mass media increases a child's desire to see more violence in real life and in entertainment, influencing them to view violence as an acceptable way to handle conflicts.

- Analysis of Risk Factors Occurrence of Juvenile Delinquency Behavior

The study published in Indian Journal of Public Health Research & Development in the year 2020 analyses the risk factors that influence the occurrence of juvenile delinquency. Technology is one of the independent variables that she used in her study. The results indicated a significant cause of juvenile delinquency from family and peer factors to technological factors. He concluded that technology is the variable that has a greatest influence on the occurrence of teenage wear.

- Impact of TV Violence on Children in India

A study conducted by Mr. Fareed Ahmad in 2014 suggests that television

is one of the most prevalent media that influences the lives of children. In his study, he brought out various types of negative impact of intense viewing of television by children. Some of them are aggressive and deviant behavior patterns in children.

Social work intervention

Social work interventions through social work methods play a crucial role in reducing the rates of juvenile delinquency. It can help in the treatment of serious offenders who have the potential for long and harmful criminal careers and such interventions can help in lowering recidivism among juvenile offenders and help them in becoming a contributing member in the society. This can be

- By confronting the root causes of the problems.

As a social worker, understanding the root cause of the problems will help us to answer the question 'why was the crime committed'. Once we understand that, we will be able to design effective interventions for them. Moreover, understanding the root cause will help us gain a deeper insight into criminal behaviour and we can use this knowledge to prevent crimes in society.

- By providing individual therapeutic intervention.

As a social worker, being aware of the fact that each offender is an individual with their own problems is vital here. Using the principle of individualisation is crucial so that the interventions offered to them best address the individual's problems and can alter his/her behaviour. Individual counseling and casework are being applied by professional social workers to deal with children in conflict with law.

- By improving their environmental conditions

As a social worker, creating an environment that provides personal growth is important for the offender. The environment should be secure, hygienic, and free from any form of violence or discrimination. This is important

because if the environment is unfavourable, it will affect the offender's mental and physical health.

- By changing their behaviours.

First of all the social worker needs to work with the child directly in order to modify the child's behaviour and attitudes. As social workers, it is vital for us to use the principle of acceptance to firstly accept the client and their problems. Providing him/her with a non-judgemental and supportive environment will help the client to fully open up and can help build a strong bond. Here, it's important to remind the client of how he/she is a worthy individual and even though a crime was committed, he/she can still be valuable members of society who can contribute with so much more.

- By creating opportunities.

A social worker can create opportunities for children in conflict with law such as vocational training can help them to gain valuable skills and knowledge, and can prepare them for a work environment.

- By rehabilitating and re-integrating them back in to their family and community.

When an ex-offender enters back into society, it is extremely challenging for him/her. As social workers we have to work with the family and the community so they can provide love, care and support for the individual. Making the community understand that yes, a crime was committed but the individual still deserves the respect. He/she is still has dignity and worth. Winning the trust of the family and community is important. A social worker should establish family visits immediately upon admission to encourage the participation of the children's families in the rehabilitation process.

- By modifying family structures and engaging in lobby and advocacy.

Advocacy and lobbying are effective ways to bring this issue into light. Social workers can use resources like schools to work with other professionals so any tendency to develop criminal behaviour can be identified and appropriate

help can be provided.

Roles of a social worker

Social workers play different roles at different stages of the juveniles in conflict with the law and these roles are interrelated in nature.

- **Counsellor:** For an effective counselling, a social worker has to first establish a good rapport and develop trust and empathy with offenders. Social worker as a counsellor can help in bringing about a change in child's behaviour and can help in personality development of the child. It can help the child to reintegrate with their family, and can help in creating an opportunity to connect the child with their victim and initiate a restorative justice process.
- **Advocate:** Social workers can advocate for laws and policies that address both the needs of the offender and the safety of the community.
- **Mediator:** Social worker acts as a mediator between the offender and his/her family and the community so they can be accepting and provide a supportive environment for the offender once he/she comes back.
- **Facilitator:** Social worker as a facilitator ensures that the legal processes are smooth and does not cause any stress or mental harm for the offender.

Social workers can also act as a catalyst, enabler, researcher and trainer to deal with children in conflict with law. The role of social workers in the Juvenile Justice Board makes sure that the case proceedings happen in a way to ascertain the welfare of the child.

Case study

Teen convicted of killing 6-year-old son of neighbours

The juvenile, then 17 years old who allegedly kidnapped and murdered the six-year-old son of his neighbours in central Delhi's Ranjit Nagar. His father was a vegetable vendor and his elder brother worked in a pharmacy store. Life wasn't all that the Class XI student wanted. He had his outlet in technology

and gadgets. Technology was his life. Instead of playing outside like others his age, he spent most of his time in his home, exploring the world he loved. So he didn't have any friends. He was the 'techie' of the area as he was the first person everyone would go to for getting their phones or other gadgets repaired.

After returning from school, he used to accompany his father in setting up their vegetable kiosk. His heart was not into selling vegetables with his father. He used to sit in a mobile phone repairing shop nearby. He had developed a mastery over gadgets, especially phones, and had an intense desire to have an iPhone. He could not afford it, but had to have it. This led him down a path to commit the crime.

According to his teachers, he was one of those students who are hard to notice. He was average in academics. He did not mix much with the other children. Sanjay, an auto rickshaw driver of the locality recalled the dark side of the teenager that 'he was caught stealing from a neighbour to buy a laptop. He had one and spent hours on it. He was smart with gadgets and would break trackers installed in mobile phones and sell them.' Incidentally, it was Sanjay's information which helped police in the case. Sanjay told the police that he had seen Ganesh playing with the teenager some time before he vanished.

Ganesh's father was also a fruit vendor. After questioning the neighbours and relatives, police believed that a person who knew the family was involved because clear professionals would not have kidnapped a fruit vendor's son and demanded Rs 1.5 lakhs as ransom. This was same amount Ganesh's father raised with difficulty, to undergo a heart surgery some time ago. Police tracked down the number which was used to make the ransom call. It belonged to a woman who lived in the locality. When the police questioned, she said four people, including the teenager, had used her phone. When the police questioned him, he tried to mislead investigators by cooking up stories. A big clue came after investigators found the ransom call was made after changing the caller's voice with software, which police found in the women's phone.

The juvenile finally confessed to the crime. He thought Kumar could definitely raise the amount to get back his son. He wanted to buy an iPhone and decided to kidnap Ganesh. He got scared and murdered the child. Their fami-

lies knew each other well and he thought nobody would suspect him. He said that he had planned the crime for a month after watching a crime show on television.

The Juvenile Justice Board found him guilty of having kidnapped and murdered Ganesh. According to the JJB Principal Judge Vishal Singh, the teenager 'lacks value for human life' and the incident revealed the failure of his guardians. They awarded him the maximum punishment provided in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act. The board sent him to a special home for three years.

The parents of the murdered child wanted the teenager to be hanged and the court should set a benchmark with this judgment because nowadays juveniles are misusing the law on the grounds of being juvenile. They are unable to come to terms with this. They never expected that the teenager would do something like this only to get a high-end phone. Ganesh was their only son. They had lot of dreams for him. But the teen always enticed him with fancy gadgets. Ganesh's parents are scared and they no longer allow their three daughters to play in the neighbourhood or with children of neighbours.

According to an official at the special home, for eight months, the teen mostly kept to himself. At times, he showed signs of regret and remorse, but unlike most juveniles, his behaviour was rather normal and more importantly, non-violent. The boy enrolled into three to four vocational and skill-based courses while in the special home. According to the official, everyone was bit surprised to see the teen's overall performance and leaning towards the computer course. He picked up fast. Soon after completing the computer course, he started leading the other batch mates and helped them solve problems.

If we critically analyse this case, the reality was totally distorted in this case. The teen lived in a fictional world and that became his reality. He found happiness in that. It was clearly said that he had planned the crime for a month after watching a crime show on television. I would rather say that today's generation is addicted to TV's, mobiles, serials, movies, video games. Most of them are confined to screen life. They grow up in a world saturated with media use.

They are finding happiness in all these than the outside fun. I would say that most of the mass media contain some physical violence. This triggers the children in committing crimes.

Cases

1) In Chattisgarh, a 17-year-old boy who was reportedly addicted to mobile gaming was killed by his friend when he was unable to repay the money which he took for purchasing 'in-game' items. He and his friend had an altercation when both were consuming liquor. Suddenly, his friend hit him due to which the victim sustained serious injuries on his head. His friend thought that if the victim regained consciousness he will be exposed, hence he killed him with a razor and buried him.

2) A tycoon's son was sentenced for three and a half years for killing his friend after losing a game. He invited his friend who was then 15-year-old to his family's mansion to show off the new 5D video game his father had gifted him. He attacked his friend with a knife after he lost a game. Police said the boy had a total of 27 stab wounds and his neck was slashed with a knife.

3) A 15-year-old boy from Maharashtra allegedly killed his elder brother for scolding him over playing PUBG game on his mobile phone. The boy flew into rage when the victim asked him to stop playing the game on his mobile phone. He allegedly banged the head of Shaikh against wall and stabbed him repeatedly with scissors.

Findings

In India, 80% of adolescents own at least one form of new media technology. From the study conducted, it was found out that boys commit more crimes than girls. Also, frequent and a regular exposure to murder-mystery movies, and stories filled with violence can cause stress, fear, tensions, bad dreams and tendencies towards delinquencies of children.

Children and adolescents who are exposed to media violence have poor school performance. It was found that the more time children spent in mass

media, the less time they spent with their families and friends and this causes poor family and peer relationships and thereby increases the risk for social isolation, anxiety disorder, and antisocial behaviour, including aggression and gang involvement.

It was found that there is a strong association between marijuana and alcohol use and smoking in adolescents, and media exposure. Also, under age sexual activity among adolescents can be also due to exposure of sexual content in the mass media. Thus, it was found out that mass media has a greater influence on children in committing crimes.

Conclusion

Today's generation is growing up in an overtly extreme media culture. They are engrossing massive amounts of media every day. This constant consumption has made a noticeable amount of negative impact on children on how they see themselves and their perceptions of reality. They also become victims of false information and distorted reality.

Children are our country's future. They need to be nourished physically, psychologically and mentally, by providing them with a healthy socio-cultural environment so that they become physically fit, mentally alert and morally healthy responsible citizens. Since prevention is better than cure, preventive measures should be taken to stop or reduce recidivism or the involvement of juveniles in delinquent acts.

Suggestions

- Parents should make their children aware about the differences between reality and fictional world.
 - Parents should address the mistakes done by juveniles rather than dismissing it.
 - Gender sensitization programs should be conducted in schools.
 - Proper counselling sessions for children should be conducted in schools.
 - Strict measures should be undertaken by the law enforcement offices.
 - Proper Schooling should be given to the juvenile offenders to rehabilitate
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- Social workers in the Department of Correctional Services should be given specialized training to work with juvenile.
- Bullying of a child at home and school should be avoided.
- Sudden changes in behaviour of a child should be noticed.
- The functioning of Observation Homes and Shelter Homes should be monitored.

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