

## EFFECTS OF TELEVISION PROGRAMMES ON CHILDREN<sup>#</sup>

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*The purpose of this study was to investigate the dominant characteristics of some of the most popular television programmes and their effects on school children. 20 school children were selected as subjects. Within-subjects design was used. Each subject responded under different conditions in which independent variable was one of his/her most popular T.V. programmes. After every programme subjects were asked to write a story. Content analysis techniques were used. All these three posttest stories were compared with the 'story' they were asked to write before viewing the said programmes. Sign test was applied to the total number of aggressive and altruistic words used in pre-and-post test stories. t-test was also used to see the differences between total number of words used in all the stories. Results confirmed the expected change.*

Television is an essential part of the modern family in urban and rural areas. During the last 30 years a number of scholars in various countries such as USA, UK, Germany, and Japan became interested in the effect of this kind of communication (Murray & Kippax, 1979). Television is now one of the most important means of communication. It is very popular amongst the people, particularly youngsters. Television has been known to be such a potent means of communication, that it can dominate one's life (Furu, 1971). The effect of the aggression seen on television has been an area of great interest for many years.

Aggression has been defined as "physical or verbal behaviour with the intention injure or destroy", or to harm another person who does not wish to be harmed. Bandura and Walters (1963) suggested that exposure to an aggressive model causes the person to imitate the model and become more aggressive.

Aggressiveness may take the form of feelings and actions of anger and rage, of actual physical violence against objects and people, of verbal attacks, of fantasies of violent attacks. Aggression does not always arise in frustrating situations. Often it is not targeted on the

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frustrating agent. Under some conditions it may be turned inward against the self (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939).

Altruism is defined as unselfish concern for others. Altruistic behaviours are those forms of helping in which the cost or risks to the helper are more obvious or apparently stronger than any potential gain (Bryan, 1971; Bryan & Walbek, 1970; Rushton, 1980). Current approaches to altruism accept that at least covert reward of feeling good about the act is necessary. One study demonstrated the effects of both modelling and reinforcement (Midlarsky, Bryan, & Brickman, 1973). Sixth grade girls who were allowed to win money at a pinball game were encouraged to donate some of it to needy children. How to play the game was demonstrated by a model. Children were also given praise for any donation (i.e., social reinforcement). It was concluded that both social reinforcement and modelling increased the altruism.

Violence on television has often been blamed for producing aggressive behaviour in children. It is not the intention of this paper to review again this accumulation of evidence. The reader is referred to reviews and reports by researchers (e.g., Bandura, 1973; Bryan & Schwartz, 1971; Goranson, 1970, 1975; Murray, 1973; Murray & Kippax, 1979; Parke & Berkowitz, 1977). Studies have shown that aggressive themes were remembered even after six months (Belson, 1978). Children spend more time watching television than any other activity (Libert, Neale, & Davidson, 1973). It has also been documented that children's programmes presented a violent episode every two minutes (Gerbner, 1972). So far very little work is done on Asian population. The aim of this study was to examine the effect of violence on children in an Asian population with a view to comparison with what may be known about those effects in European and American populations.

## METHOD

### Sample

Twenty school boys from Peshawar city, with age range of 8 to 14 years, were recruited from the acquaintances of the students of Psychology, University of Peshawar. All the subjects of the sample shared similar educational background and socioeconomic status.

### Procedure

A within-subject design was used. Each subject responded under different conditions in which the independent variable was one of the school boys most popular television programmes of English, i.e., *The Hunter*, *Full House*, and *Captain Planet*. The dependent variable was

the increase in the number of aggressive or altruistic words in the postexposure story.

A small survey on the same population of school children had previously shown that the most popular television programmes among children between the ages of 8 to 14 were *The Hunter*, *Full House*, and *Captain Planet*. Subjects were first asked to write pretest stories on whatever came to their minds. Subjects were then shown their most popular T.V. programmes. All three programmes were shown on three different occasions with a gap of at least one week. At the end of each programme subjects were again asked to write stories. Three posttest stories were collected from every subject.

## RESULTS

Table 1 indicates the results of 20 subjects on 20 pretest stories. The total number of words used in the twenty stories were 1373, the average of which comes to 68.65. The total score of subjects on aggression and altruism were 96 and 65, respectively.

Table 1

### *Responses of subjects on pretest stories*

No. of Subjects	Total Words in Story	Aggressive Words	Altruistic Words
1	65	7	2
2	60	5	0
3	70	7	2
4	55	2	4
5	99	0	8
6	70	9	0
7	80	7	2
8	55	2	4
9	95	10	1
10	80	7	6
11	70	8	3
12	70	2	8
13	60	5	5
14	70	3	0
15	85	2	4
16	90	4	9
17	32	4	1
18	57	5	2
19	65	3	4
20	55	4	0
Total	1373	96	65
Average	68.65	4.8	3.25

Table 2

*Responses of subjects after viewing the television programmes "The Hunter" (Posttest Stories)*

No. of Subjects	Total Words in Story	Aggressive Words	Altruistic Words
1	75	10	2
2	60	6	0
3	84	4	4
4	70	9	2
5	99	7	6
6	70	9	0
7	80	9	0
8	95	8	1
9	95	10	1
10	80	7	7
11	70	8	3
12	75	3	4
13	60	4	5
14	70	4	1
15	82	5	5
16	70	4	7
17	65	4	2
18	60	5	3
19	73	4	1
20	60	2	0
Total	1493	123	51
Average	74.65	6.15	2.55

Table 2 indicates the responses of the subjects immediately after viewing the programme, *The Hunter*. The total number of words were 1493, while the number of aggressive and altruistic words were 123 and 51, respectively.

Table 3

Responses of subjects after viewing the television programmes  
"Captain Planet" (Posttest Stories)

No. of Subjects	Total Words in Story	Aggressive Words	Altruistic Words
1	70	6	3
2	85	4	1
3	90	8	1
4	95	4	2
5	84	3	1
6	92	6	2
7	95	9	1
8	70	5	2
9	90	8	2
10	80	7	3
11	92	6	2
12	80	7	3
13	65	2	3
14	92	4	1
15	100	3	5
16	65	8	2
17	65	8	2
18	90	4	3
19	60	5	2
20	50	6	0
Total	1549	112	44
Average	77.45	5.60	2.20

Table 3 shows the results of the subjects after viewing the television programme, *Captain Planet*. The total number of the words used in the stories was 1549. The number of aggressive and altruistic words used were 112 and 44, respectively.

Table 4

*Responses of subjects after viewing the television "Full House" (Posttest Stories)*

No. of Subjects	Total Words in Story	Aggressive Words	Altruistic Words
1	65	8	2
2	71	6	1
3	80	5	3
4	60	5	4
5	80	1	2
6	60	3	2
7	88	4	1
8	60	8	1
9	90	7	1
10	90	3	4
11	80	4	5
12	70	5	6
13	80	5	7
14	78	7	3
15	101	6	3
16	90	5	8
17	50	4	5
18	72	3	5
19	75	4	2
20	40	3	1
Total	1479	96	66
Average	73.95	4.8	3.30

Table 4 shows the total number of words used after viewing, *Full House*, were 1479, while number of aggressive words were 96 and, number of altruistic words were 66.

Table 5 displays all performances of 20 subjects in pre-and-posttest stories. It was noted that in all three posttest stories the subjects imagination appeared to be stimulated because they used more words in comparison with the pretest stories. *t*-test was applied to see the significance of a difference between pretest story and each one of the posttest story.

A content analysis of each story was done, using two raters to determine the percentage of total words in each story, which were aggressive, and the percentage which were altruistic. There was 91% agreement between their judgements. The change in percentages for aggression and altruism from the story written before viewing the programme to that written after viewing was recorded for each subject and for each programme. The significance of the extent of changes in the whole sample was measured using the sign test (Siegel & Castellen, 1988). The changes following viewing *The Hunter* were in the direction of increased use of aggressive words ( $p < .01$ ), but there was no significant change in the use of altruistic words. No other changes in the use of words following other programmes were significant. The most popular T.V programmes of children, on the one hand, enhanced their imaginative power but on the other hand, one of the programmes increased their aggression as well. In order to measure the increase in the use of total number of words after viewing each programmes, *t*-test for all three conditions was calculated. The obtained value of '*t*' for the story written after watching *The Hunter* was  $t(19) = 2.11, p > .05$  for the story written after viewing *Captain Planet* was  $t(19) = 3.90, p > .05$  and, for the story written after viewing the *Full House* was  $t(19) = 2.09, p > .05$ .

## DISCUSSION

The popularity of Western television programmes is partly due to their superior quality of production, as compared to television and films made in Pakistan. Western television programmes, produced with the benefits of more advanced filming technology, are more realistic than Pakistani programmes. The Pakistani television shows are usually low budget, studio produced programmes which do not appeal as much to young Pakistani audiences. Instead, the younger audience is more attracted to "action packed" Western television productions.

The younger audiences preference for Western television is illustrated by the results of a pre-experimental survey. This survey investigated the television viewing preferences of the same population. The top three favourite programmes were all English language Western

Table 5

*Total number of words used in pretest and posttest stories*

	Total number of words used			Total number of Aggressive words used			Total number of Altruistic words used				
	Pretest Story	Posttest Story	F.H	Pretest Story	Posttest Stories	F.H	Pretest Story	Posttest Story	F.H		
Total	1373	1493	1497	96	112	123	96	65	44	51	66
Average	68.65	77.45	73.95	4.8	5.60	6.15	4.8	3.25	2.2	2.55	3.3



television shows. *The Hunter* is an adult U.S. detective programme, filled with a lot of action sequences. *Captain Planet* is cartoon programme. While *Full House* is a comedy show. Although the most popular television programmes were in English, the majority of the children in the sample did not have a fluent understanding of the English language. Instead of concentrating on the dialogue, the children became involved with the non-verbal aspects of the programmes. The popularity of the programmes, such as *The Hunter* and *Captain Planet* was due mostly to their "action" scenes.

After viewing the aforementioned programmes, the post-exposure stories indicated an increase in the use of aggressive words. Although there was an increase in the use of aggressive words after viewing *The Hunter* and *Captain Planet*, the only statistically significant increase occurred after viewing *The Hunter*. However, after viewing the television programme *Full House*, there was a slight increase in the number of altruistic words used in stories. The pre-exposure scores of the Pakistani children in the sample were higher on aggression than altruism. Whereas, two of the programmes, *The Hunter* and *Captain Planet*, increased the use of aggressive tendencies, all three programmes contributed to an increase in imaginative imagery and vocabulary used in stories. The study only concentrated on the quantitative increase in the number of words used and not in the qualitative effects of these words.

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