Chapter 11

The Psychological Effects of Violence–Related Information From the Media

Lala Jabbarova
Baku State University, Azerbaijan

ABSTRACT

The media is one of the main resources from which people derive information about events surrounding them. The media tries to mirror realities, transmit various events, including cases of aggression and violence; however, lack of control on quality and quantity of information may result in perilous outcomes. This chapter offers a psychological analysis of the influence of media on crime in society, as well as the relation of crime levels with information about aggression and violence. The results of the research suggest that frequent, overstated, and embellished media disseminations of information of an aggressive character, without considering its possible psychological outcomes, increases viewers’ levels of aggression and violence. In order to prevent this increase, it is crucial not to eliminate aggressive information from media completely, but instead to present it while taking into account its psychological effects.

INTRODUCTION

One of the primary sources society receives information from is the media, where aggression, violence, and whatever happens in reality is described in maximum and sensationalized. The quantity and quality of mediated information and its presentation forms should be taken into consideration, because, otherwise it can cause dangerous consequences for society.

Research conducted on this topic in the USA, Canada, and North Africa between 1957-1989 has shown that, always and everywhere, increased exposure to television correlated significantly with increased quantity of murders (Старова, n.d.). Recently a growth has been observed related to the crime of violence and particularly domestic violence crimes in families in Azerbaijan. Naturally, citizens have the right to receive information from media about what happens around the globe, including the crime level of society. While journalists should not hide the facts about crimes committed, they sometimes

The Psychological Effects of Violence-Related Information From the Media

tend to exaggerate details. For example, they often report the details of violence in information on any crime case, offering a comprehensive explanation of how a crime was committed, because they seek to capitalize on the sensation of graphic events which are improper for broadcasting and can pose serious danger for human psychology.

Taking into account that comprehension of violence, victims, criminals and their punishment by members of society depend on how media present them, we can make the conclusion that media has very high impact on people’s social attitudes, behavior, and psychology. So, we need to conduct serious investigations in order to define what these impact forms consist of. In this chapter, information related to violence and crime on media, especially TV and Internet information resources and its impact on people has been analyzed. Theories and conceptions on this topic have been studied, and scientific works in this sphere and materials delivered on media have been analyzed and generalized. Surveys and observation methods have been used in this research.

ANALYSIS OF THEORIES AND RESEARCHES

The basic theoretical and methodological source on the subject of this research is A. Bandura’s social learning theory (Baron & Richardson, 1977) related to behaviorism. Bandura considered aggression as a specific form of social behavior, as it is based on learning it as one would other social behavior forms. For example, in order to commit any aggression, it is necessary to know how to use weapons, to understand which actions can cause physical pain to victims, and which words or forms of behavior can harm objects of aggression. This kind of knowledge is not inborn, according to Bandura. It is gained in social life, so social life has a great impact on aggression cases. Therefore, we can assume that media scenes with aggressive characters arouse the social learning process, bringing one to learn new behavior types. Such learning processes help potential criminals to use new ways to cover the lack of experience in committing crimes. From the viewpoint of Bandura's social learning theory (Baron & Richardson, 1977), adoption of aggression occurs in one of the following cases:

1. Demonstration of no punishment measures against violence actions;
2. Demonstration of different forms of aggression;
3. Demonstration of absence of consequences occurring as a result of aggression;
4. Quantity of time spent watching TV;
5. Strengthening aggression in real life, demonstration of the possibility of such behaviors by people of authority and prestige.

According to Bandura (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963), aggressive behaviors are learned more easily by the way of observation of actions done by others. That is, no danger is expected to face one as a viewer, but the ideas formed in a viewers’ mind on how these behaviors gain shape can become “instructions” for committing real aggressive actions in the future. After the broadcasting of tragic cases of violence on TV, similar events happen in quite different places. For example, four children in the US, Pakistan, India, and Azerbaijan have hung themselves after watching the execution video of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein on television (В Азербайджане Саддам убивает после смерти, 2007).