

The Unrelenting Media Exposure in Pakistan and its Link with Vicarious Trauma

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The present study investigated the impact of Unrelenting Media Exposure on experiences of Vicarious Trauma among adolescents in Pakistan. For this a purposive sample comprising 150 boys and 150 girls with an age range of 12 to 18 years participated in this research study. Impact of Event Scale (Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979) was used to measure the symptoms of vicarious trauma regarding the 16th December Peshawar incident. A self-report questionnaire was designed to measure the unrelenting media exposure of organized violence. Findings of the present study indicated that media exposure significantly predicted vicarious trauma (β (298) = 113.71, $p < .001$). A significant difference ($p < .001$) was found among the students of three institutions that are public, private and government schools in the context of their response to unrelenting trauma exposure and gender differences. A limitation to the study is that the research was conducted in the twin cities of Pakistan only due to easy access and availability of respondent data. A more meaningful picture could have been obtained if the research was conducted in schools of Peshawar.

Keywords: Unrelenting media exposure, vicarious trauma, media exposure, trauma

The people of Pakistan are going through a very stressful and traumatizing situation. For instance, terrorists' attacks and suicide bombings have been taking place across the country for the last two decades. The people are directly or indirectly exposed to the violence.

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Even when not directly, they are indirectly exposed to the violence because it happened to someone they knew, or they heard through news, internet and newspaper etc. It affects a range of population including children, young adolescents, adult, and older people. However, adolescent are more frequently expected to experience indirect exposure via hearing or viewing violence on media, which is known as vicarious trauma. For the purpose of this study vicarious trauma is defined as the response of those persons who have witnessed or been subjected to explicit knowledge of or had the responsibility to intervene in a seriously distressing or tragic event (Lerias & Byrne, 2003). Vicarious trauma can be viewed over a long period of time in the absence of actual traumatic site and could be single cause for provoking of trauma related symptoms (McGuinness, 2015).

Vicarious trauma is also known as compassion fatigue, it is a form of post-traumatic stress disorder. If a person is directly or indirectly exposed to a threatening event, chances are high that he/she can suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (Jaffe, Crooks, Dunford-Jackson, & Town, 2003). Also vicarious trauma prevents individuals from struggling and moving on to regain their former sense of self. Even people who work with traumatized people and develop empathy can also increase the likelihood of developing vicarious trauma.

However the people in Pakistan are greatly affected by terrorism and natural disasters. The ever growing problems in the country have given rise to certain mental health problems. Media is playing a great role in magnifying the impact of terrorist actions, however; people when not present there at the affected area or are not exposed to certain attacks or incidents but have an indirect exposure to that situation through media, i.e. television, internet, newspaper, radio or through social media (Zadeh & Abid, 2012). The issue arises here that what is the impact of media on the attitudes and behaviors of young children and youth, and how do people react and perceive the things shown by media.

A study was conducted in which participants were shown a short video clip that depicted two natural disasters and one manmade disaster. The images brought back memories of the 2005 earthquake and the flood affectees starving for food. As a consequence to the exposure most of the people in the hall were left into tears after the graphic depiction of 16th December, 2014, terrorist attack on Army Public School Peshawar (Maqbool, 2015). It will be worth mentioning to include two important cases highlighted by the printed media as below:

“A case of 31 years old teacher at army public school who had developed symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and complaining of seeing blood and faces of martyred children in her dreams (Maqbool,2015). Another case was of a young girl who had lost her brother in Peshawar terrorist attack. She had withdrawn from public interaction, but despite weeks having passed since the catastrophe she didn’t recovered” (Maqbool, 2015).

Media is the most powerful agent for change. Media can create harmony and unity, as well as panic situation. Researches show that children are more vulnerable to accept negative changes in their attitudes. Findings of a study by Khalily, Fooley, Hussain and Bano (2011) indicated that media cause some negative symptoms like aggression, desensitization and fear and also traumatize people as a result of exposure to different terrorist events. The time when school and college going individuals make their identity in the age of development, media violent messages and information gave them passive way of development. It also creates psychological distress in children after seeing violent events (Huesmann & Taylor, 2006). A Research on 2 to 17 years old children of different countries of the world was conducted in which children behavior was observed after extensively viewing the images, videos, breaking news of the violent events (Becker, Finkelher, & Turner, 2008).

Oklahoma City bombing, jet attacks of September 11th, 2001 on New York buildings and children kidnapping incident’s

appearance on media reported that children who had exposure through media news experienced mood disturbances, nightmares, fear, and panic occurrence, loneliness while some of the children place different physical things like teddy bear or basketball to overcome their fear (Becker, Finkelher, & Turner, 2008).

The media holds an immense and awful responsibility in traumatizing and playing with the minds of people. Media is unrelentingly broadcasting the violent news; even the news against the terrorists has a long lasting negative impact over the people. For instance, a research indicates that the visual tribute and a song dedicated to the public school martyrs had subsequently developed mistrust among the children (Qasim, 2015). A research was conducted in Islamabad including 494 respondents, out of which 29% were those who watched coverage of traumatic events for more than one hour daily and were positive for post-traumatic stress disorder while 47% were positive for depression.

In china, media gave exclusive coverage to the people of Poly Technique Institute of Virginia, in which 32 people were murdered and 25 people were injured. The images of the murdered people and the interviews of the injured people induced traumatic symptoms in the people who were exposed through media (Fallahi & Lesik, 2009). In Pakistan, media creates fear in children due to excessive coverage of the violent events and also creates conflict. Children became depressed and panicked when they were asked to give information about 2007 incident in Islamabad (Maqbool, 2015).

Rationale of the Study

In the current situation of Pakistan most of the people have been experiencing traumatic events such as, organized violence, terrible accidents, natural calamities and domestic violence for the last few decades. People are exposed to trauma whether direct or indirect, however the unrelenting media exposure is playing an enormous role in spreading the negative impact of trauma among

those who are not present at trauma sites or witness to the traumatic event. So in this study an attempt has been made to explore the vicarious effects of trauma in relation to the significant media role in order to reduce the psychological illnesses particularly PTSD prophylactically. However some evidence shows that vicarious trauma can be developed through the indirect exposure to traumatic scenes and experiences. Nevertheless, this study serves to explain that Criterion A4 that has been eliminated from the diagnostic criteria for PTSD/Vicarious trauma does apply to exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures.

Objectives

1. To explore the impact of unrelenting media as a predictor of vicarious trauma.
2. To investigate the gender difference in existence of vicarious trauma and exposure to unrelenting media.
3. To discover distinctive response of individual to vicarious trauma and unrelenting media in the context of institutional background.

Hypotheses

1. Unrelenting media anticipates the presence of vicarious trauma.
2. There is a significant difference of responses on vicarious trauma between boys and girls.
3. There is a significant difference between boys and girls in the context of exposure to media.
4. There is a significant difference of responses on vicarious trauma among the three institutions (i.e. public, private and government schools).
5. There is a significant difference among the three institutions (i.e. public, private and government schools) in the context of exposure to unrelenting media.

Method

Participants

The sample consists of 300 adolescents comprising of 150 boys and 150 girls. The age range was from 12 to 18 years and recruited from the three public, private and government schools. The education level of all the participants ranged from 8th to 12th grade.

Measures

Impact of Event Scale (IES). The IES was developed by Horowitz, Wilner, and Alvarez (1979) to measure current subjective distress related to a specific event. The IES is a 15 items questionnaire and 4 point likert scale evaluating experiences of avoidance and intrusion. Both the scales have acceptable reliability (alpha of .79 and .82), and a split-half reliability for the whole scale of .86. Respondents are asked to rate the items. The scoring categories are as follows: 0 (not at all), 1 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), and 4 (often).

Unrelenting Media Exposure. This self-report questionnaire was developed to measure unrelenting media exposure, consisting of 13 items regarding the incidents (organized violence) which took place on 16th December, at Army Public School Peshawar and which got a huge coverage from the media. It is a dichotomous scale having Yes and No responses. High scores on the questionnaire indicated higher exposure to incidents of organized violence.

Procedure

The data was collected from three schools (i.e. public, private and government). The data was collected through purposive sampling techniques. A description of instructions and purpose of the study was provided to the respondents. Respondents were assured about the anonymity and confidentiality of their

information. Ethical approval was taken from the Department of Psychology Ethical Committee before conducting the study.

Results

Table 1

Reliability Analysis of Self-Report Questionnaire of Unrelenting Media Exposure and Impact of Event Scale Revised (N= 300)

| Scale | Items | N | M | SD | α | Range | | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|----------|-----------|--------|----------|----------|
| | | | | | | Potential | Actual | | |
| UME | 13 | 300 | 42.18 | 16.85 | .59 | 0-26 | 13-26 | -.299 | -.710 |
| IESR | 15 | 300 | 15.97 | 1.900 | .86 | 0-60 | 0-55 | .730 | .084 |

Note: UME= Unrelenting Media Exposure IESR=Impact of Event Scale Revised

Table 1 shows Cronbach alpha reliability value of self-report questionnaire Exposure to Unrelenting Media, and Impact of Event Scale, which indicates that both the scales meet the criteria to investigate the impact of event as a reliable and suitable instrument for the study sample.

Table 2

Linear Regression Analysis Indicating Unrelenting Media as the Predictor of Vicarious Trauma (N=300)

| Model | B | SE | β | t | P |
|---|---------|-------|---------|--------|-----|
| Constant | 113.171 | 7.150 | | 15.829 | .00 |
| Self-Report $R^2 = .50$ $\Delta R^2 = .251$ | -4.444 | .444 | -.501 | -9.998 | .00 |

Linear regression analysis shows effect of media exposure on traumatic impacts among adolescents. Results showed that

media exposure significantly predicted traumatic impacts β (298) = 113.71, $p < .001$. The overall variance explained by model was 25.10%.

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviation and t- Values of Media Exposure and Traumatic Impacts for Boys and Girls (N= 300)

| Variables | Boys (n = 150) | | Girls (n = 150) | | t(298) | p | 95% CI | |
|-----------|----------------|-------|-----------------|-------|--------|-----|--------|-----|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | LL | UL |
| UME | 16.06 | 2.00 | 15.88 | 1.78 | .85 | .39 | -.24 | .61 |
| IESR | 40.24 | 14.81 | 44.12 | 18.51 | 2.00 | .04 | -7.68 | .07 |

Note: UME= Unrelenting Media Exposure IESR=Impact of Event Scale Revised.

Results show gender differences among study variable. Results showed that girls were higher on IESR (t (298) = 2.00, $p < .05$). No significant difference was found on unrelenting media exposure.

Table 4

Analysis of Variance for Institution wise Differences among Study Variables (N= 300)

| Variables | Public (n = 100) | | Govt. (n = 100) | | Private (n = 100) | | F | P |
|-----------|------------------|-------|-----------------|-------|-------------------|-------|-------|-----|
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | | |
| UME | 16.64 | 1.62 | 16.27 | 1.81 | 15.01 | 1.87 | 23.22 | .00 |
| IESR | 33.61 | 15.90 | 39.58 | 13.93 | 53.37 | 14.25 | 47.40 | .00 |

Note: UME= Unrelenting Media Exposure IESR=Impact of Event Scale Revised

Table 4 shows institution wise differences among study variable. Results showed that students of public school were higher on media exposure ($F= 23.22, p<.001$) as compared to students of government and private schools. The results also indicate that students of private school system were higher on traumatic impact (IESR).

Discussion

The present study aimed at exploring the impact of exposure to unrelenting media on experience of vicarious trauma. This study explores the vicarious effects of trauma in relation to the significant media role in order to reduce the impact of vicarious trauma. This study explores a significant difference among the three institutions i.e. public, private and government schools in the context of exposure to unrelenting media. This study further investigated the gender difference on vicarious trauma and unrelenting media.

The results of the present study supported all the hypotheses. It has been confirmed that the exposure to unrelenting media leads to vicarious trauma. If the exposure to unrelenting media increases, the vicarious trauma will also increase in adolescents and vice versa. The results of the present research are consistent with previous studies that there are harmful effects of media violence broadcasted by television cable channels on viewers (Geen & Donnerstein, 1998). Therefore, the present findings also make it evident that the population that was exposed to the scenes of December 16th 2014, Peshawar incident is likely to experience the traumatic impacts of the videos and pictures broadcasted on television.

The gender difference has been confirmed on vicarious trauma. Results showed that girls were higher on vicarious trauma. No significant gender difference was found on unrelenting media exposure. The results are supported by the study conducted by Giaconia and associates (1995) which reflected that girls are more

symptomatic, sensitive and emotional than boys. This could be a reason that in the present study the girls reported to be high on vicarious trauma.

The present research intended to study the difference on vicarious trauma and unrelenting media in public, private and government schools. The institutional difference was studied as it was expected that students from Public School would be having more effect as the event took place in one of the same institution branch. Results indicated that the students of public school were high on media exposure $F(298) = 23.22, p < .001$ as compared to students of Government and Private school. The reason could be that due to affiliation to the Institute of Public School that was attacked by the terrorists on December 16, 2014, the students viewed more and more news, pictures, and videos related to the event. And as a result they reported to be high on exposure to unrelenting media.

The results also indicate that students of Private school were higher on Traumatic impact (IESR) as compared to participants from Public School and Government School ($F(298) = 47.40, p < .001$). The students of Public School and Government School are being trained to deal with the terrorist attacks with the provision of daily morning drill and exercises. This factor could have been a source of alleviating the traumatic impacts in the students.

Conclusion

In the present study, focus was on the unrelenting media which anticipates vicarious trauma, and to test out the effect of vicarious trauma on adolescents in different educational system (i.e. public, private and government). And the results of the study concluded that the sources of media whether electronic, print or social has significant impact on adolescents anticipating vicarious trauma. The main aim is to focus on the media not to broadcast the news regarding trauma, terror or any other massacre pitilessly or

unrelentingly so that it may not create panic, trauma and would have a bad effect on their minds. Those transmissions which cause bad effect on the adolescents must be discouraged. However this study also serves to enlighten and supports the reconsideration regarding the addition of criteria A4 for the diagnosis of PTSD/ Vicarious Trauma that has been eliminated from the diagnostic criteria for PTSD.

Limitations

The research was conducted in the twin cities i.e. Capital City Islamabad and Rawalpindi of Pakistan. The main reason was easy access and availability of different variables required, for data collection such as; public, private and government. Therefore, the generalizability of the results is low. If the research was conducted in Peshawar, the results could have been different or more meaningful.

Suggestions

For data collection only scales were used, though using interview in combination with the scales about the desire phenomena of unrelenting media could be a more realistic approach. Furthermore, interviews should be used with instruments and scales for fruitful results. Sample size should be large, and should be the representative of the whole population so that the results could be generalized over it. It is indeed necessary to organize different seminars and programs to help individuals suffering from vicarious trauma in order to make them healthy members of the society. Norms and code of ethics should be made and implemented for media for broadcasting the news pitilessly and effecting the minds of people especially children.

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