

Psychological Consequences of Television Coverage of Terrorism among Youth

Rizwana Amin

Department of Applied Psychology
Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan

Khizra Iqbal

Department of Applied Psychology
Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan

Abstract:

At present, terrorism affected every aspect of life. As terroristic activities like bomb blast, target killing, security threats to different educational institution (public or private) etc. induced man made trauma among the affectees but also in non-affectees. It may affect physical as well as psychological well-being of an individual. Psychological consequences include stress, anxiety, anger, aggression, fear, post traumatic stress disorder etc. The present study intended to explore the psychological consequences of television coverage of terroristic activities in Pakistan. For this purpose, 250 secondary school students (Boys=148 & Girls=102) age ranged 15-17 years (Mean age =16.17 & SD= .816) were selected through simple random sampling and further prorated into two groups: Experimental and control. Television news clips related to terroristic activities were displayed to experimental group while control group was being divulged to news irrelevant to terrorism Finding revealed that the psychological consequences (anxiety, anger and disruptive behaviour) are more evident in the experimental condition than control condition. Therefore, it can be concluded that media coverage for the terroristic activities affect the mental health of youth. Implications have also been studied.

Keywords: Terroristic activities, Media coverage, Anger, Anxiety, Disruptive behaviour, Youth

I. Introduction

The effect of mass media on behavior as well as feelings of an individual has a vast argumentative past. On one end, it is considered as an influential mean for annunciation while on the other, it also claimed specific effect (McGoldrick, 2005). The television channels tried to over-come their competitor in reporting, in order to defeat them and it is evident in broadcasting of the terrorist activities (Ali, 2014). According to Bandura's theory of vicarious learning (1986), watching violent acts produce feeling of fear among individuals regardless of age. Since last few decades, terroristic activities have risen in Pakistan and terrorism related news has been mostly broadcasted by Pakistani television channels. Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (2017) has directed the news channels to be careful while broadcasting news about terrorist incidents.

Terrorism is a type of psychological war. Different ways are used to provoke fear in society but their purpose behind these tactics is remained same. Bomb blast, suicide bombing, bio-psychological bombing and even economic warfare can be forms to create destructions in society (Crenshaw, 2007). Terrorism is characterized as political savagery in lopsided conflicts that is intended to promote terror and negative psychological impact through the vicious exploitation and annihilation of civilian targets. Such acts are intended to communicate something specific from an unlawful undercover group and unions. The purpose behind the terrorism is to misuse of media to achieve extreme reputation and publicity as an enhancing power multiplier with a specific end goal to lead strong effect on target audience in pursuance of momentary as well as protracted objectives (George, 2008).

Terrorism is considered as man-made trauma which can be result of intent or failed system (Riaz, Malik, Nawaz, Batool & Shujaat, 2015). Different tactics used by terrorists, such as suicide bombings and weapons of mass destruction (Cox, 2008). Taj, Khan and Ayub (2012) as well as Dareida and Rasheed (2013) suggested that broadcasting about such incidents may lead to the viewers and reporters to suffer from psychological disorders like trauma leading to anxiety, depression, emotional problems, and even committing suicide. Javaid (2009) reported that live broadcasting of the terrorist activities, bomb blast, entombment, and other kind of catastrophe should be stopped to broadcast.

Khan, Sarhazndi, Hussain, Iqbal & Taj (2012) explored that terrorist attacks adversely affect an individual's mental health. One not only become apprehensive, anxious and dejected but may exhibit aggressive and disruptive behaviour. Mental health is envisaged as proviso of psychological well-being whither one understands one's capabilities and able to handle daily life hassles. Individuals are better able to work effectively and successfully and in social context, functioning can be appropriate (World Health Organization, 2016).

Mental reactions to psychological warfare are a blend of responses towards the traumatic reactions and furthermore towards a consistent terror of being a target to a traumatic incidence later on. Such response may fluctuate among people contingent on the degree of individual harm in any shape, closeness to where the people experience the act, violence, individual's capacity to adapt, cope or resilient, likely desire of a future occurrence and the chronicity of the hazard situation (Nugier and Guimond, 2016). Engel (2001), revealed that traumatic events increase the risk of mental health issues and behavioral dysfunctioning as well different psychological disorder and medically unexplained physical manifestation may result. Bleich, Gelkopf and Solomon's (2003) far reaching report of respiratory issues, chest pain and high blood pressure problems increased after the incidents of September 11 and were known as 'World Trade Center disorder'.

One of major concern of media coverage of terrorist activities is that it leads to increased risk of mental disorders. Unnoticeable and less severe changes in mood, feelings and behavior also contribute considerably to the individual's physical and mental health as consequences of terrorism (Khosrokhavar, 2015). According to Chaudhry (2016), terrorism has become a growing

concern in Pakistan and it has also affected the mental health of residents. From 2001 to 2011, the country witnessed an almost 100% increase in the incidence of mental illnesses, particularly stress-related disorders and depression. Moreover, Nasim et al., (2014) found a significant association between terrorism and psychiatric morbidity, even among participants who had no direct exposure to terrorism-related violence.

Numerous researches studied that exposure to terrorist activities on television news produced wide range of mental health consequences such as internalizing disorder, Post traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, stress and externalizing [(disruptive behaviour and substance use) (Shaw 2003; Fremont, Pataki & Beresin 2005; Ahmad, Mohammad, Ahmed & Sajid, 2014; Pfefferbaum, Newman & Nelson, 2014)]. Comer & Kendall (2007) identified that children and young people having proximal contact with psychological warfare demonstrate higher posttraumatic stress, separation anxiety, as well as different adverse effects on well-being. Hence, media coverage to such distinctive terrorist activities, exposed youth either at proximal or distal contact with assault experienced significant mental health problems.

According to DSM-5 (APA, 2017), symptoms of anxiety included trepidation, repetitive interfering thoughts and fear about unknown as well as physical changes such as amplified heart and pulse rate, blood pressure, sweating etc. Anger is a natural and mostly automatic response to physical and emotional stimuli. Individuals may become angry while experience some loss, denunciation and being threatened (Mills, 2015). Disruptive behaviour is a cluster of behavioural problems in which hostile, aggressive and uncooperative attitude toward authority, disruptive behavior problems severely significant impact on child's daily life functioning. Every individual in family perceived impact when they notice their child's disturbing activities such as ignoring the rules and laws; break out in obedience and irritating attitude towards others. These disruptions not only impact on youth mental health as well as their family is also effected (APA, 2017).

Pakistan is one of under developing country and young people in Pakistan makes up around 35% of its aggregate population. Amidst of critical time, Pakistan is confronting serious issues such as terrorist activities, suicidal bomb attacks, economic crises, target killing, disunity and responsibility to rid out the nation from the whirlpool is upon youth of Pakistan. Research identified that indirect exposure increases the vulnerability to trauma and violence among youth consequently effecting mental health (Ayza, Zadeh & Shafi, 2016). Therefore the purpose of study was to explore how television coverage of such activities influences children and adolescents mental health and focused on psychological consequences such as stress, anger, anxiety, and disruptive behaviour evoked by television coverage of terrorism among youth. On the basis of literature review, it was hypothesized that Psychological consequences (anxiety, anger and disruptive behaviour) will be high in the experimental group as compare to control group.

II. Method

A. Sample

Participants in the current study were 250 students were selected from high school through convenient sampling. Age range of participants was 15 to 17 years (Mean

age=16.17; SD=.816). Participants were allocated into two groups: Experimental group encompassed on 125 participants (Boys=90; Girls=35) who were exposed to media coverage of terrorist activities, while control group comprises of 125 participants (Boys=85; Girls=40) was exposed news clips unrelated to terrorist activities. Demographics characteristics of participants were included as age, gender, family system and socioeconomic status.

B. Instrument

Beck Youth Inventory (Beck, 2005)

It was used to measure psychological responses (anxiety, anger and disruptive behaviour). Inventory consisted on five self-report questionnaires used separately or in combination to assay manifestation of depression, anxiety, anger, disruptive behavior, and self-concept on 5 point-likert scale. Test re-test reliability is 0.84 and Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.86 for this study.

C. Procedure

Five different schools were selected and students of 9th and 10th class were approached after the permission of school authority. Participants were randomly assigned into two groups and were seated in a room equipped with multimedia. Experimental proviso was exposed to news coverage of terrorist activities that was consisting on 15 minutes film covered different bomb blast attacks such as APS Peshawar attack, Bacha Khan University, Gulshan Iqbal Park Lahore. Civil hospital Quetta and Police training centre Quetta attack. Control group was exposed to news clip without terrorist activities and also consisted on 15 minutes duration. Confidentiality was ensured to participants. After manipulation of independent variable behavior of participants included (anxiety, anger and disruptive behavior) was measured through Beck youth inventory.

III. Results

Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) was employed to elucidate characteristics of the data for demographic variables. Moreover, independent sample t test was used to check the difference in the score of psychological consequences (Anxiety, Depression and disruptive behavior) in control and experimental group after manipulation of independent variable. Table 1 describes the demographics characteristics of participants.

Table 1: Demographics characteristics of participants

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Groups							
Experimental	125	50	250	1	2	1.50	.501
Control	125	50					
Age							
15	65	26					
16	77	30.8	250	15	17	16.17	.816
17	108	43.2					
Gender							
Male	148	70.0	250	1	2	1.30	.459
Female	102	30.0					
Grades							

8 th	83	32.2					
9 th	85	34.0	250	8	10	9.00	.814
10 th	82	32.8					
Socioeconomic status							
Low	144	57.6					
Middle	84	33.6	250	1	3	1.51	.654
High	22	8.8					
Residence area							
Urban	175	70	250	1	2	1.30	.459
Rural	75	30					
Family system							
Nuclear	163	65.2	250	1	2	1.38	.774
Joint	86	34.4					

Table 2 implies the considerable difference in scores of experimental and control groups for anxiety (M=.945, SD=.503; M=.679, SD=.654) $p < 0.05$; anger (M=.700, SD=.501; M=.406, SD=.504), $p > 0.05$; disruptive behavior (M=.671, SD=.300; M=.571, SD=.788), $p < 0.05$. The enormity of differences in the mean was small (eta squared = 0.06) for anxiety and medium (eta squared = 0.07; eta squared= 0.09) for anger and disruptive behavior respectively.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation, t-value, p value and Cohen's d on sub scales of beck youth inventory on experimental and control group (N=250)

Scales	Gender	N	M	SD	t	p	Cohen's d
BAIY	Experimental	125	.9451	.50377	-.509	0.04	0.06
	Control	125	.6794	.55469			
BANIY	Experimental	125	.7008	.50143	-.088	0.00	0.07
	Control	125	.4065	.50493			
BDBIY	Experimental	125	.6715	.30035	.015	0.01	0.09
	Control	125	.5710	.28882			

Note. N=number of students; M= mean; SD=standard deviation; $p > 0.05^{**}$

BAI-Y= Beck Anxiety Inventory

BANI-Y=Beck Anger Inventory

BDBI-Y=Beck Disruptive Behavior Inventory

IV. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the current study was to measure the psychological consequences of television coverage of terrorism. The hypothesis of the study was that the Psychological consequences (anxiety, anger and disruptive behaviour) will be high in the experimental group as compare to control group. Difference in behavior was measured after the

manipulation of independent variable. Findings of current study concluded that there is significant impact of television coverage of terrorist activities on adolescent's mental health. Participants in experimental group who exposed to television news clips of terrorist activities have shown more anxiety, anger and disruptive behaviour as compare to those who exposed only simple news clips. Study of Shoshani & Slone (2016) supported the current findings of the study and is evident onlooker's prospect related to the association of terrorism with its media coverage

Vicarious exposure to such activities leads to mental health problems and increase negative affect on well-being. Another finding of Ayza, Zadeh & Shafi, (2016) study showed the evidence that vicarious exposure of media coverage leads to significant traumatic experiences and mental health problems. Youth who are directly or in directly involved, increased the vulnerability for internalizing and disruptive daily routines. Children and adolescents are at risk for experience mental health difficulties after vicarious exposure of attack. Ahmad, Mohammad, Ahmed & Sajid (2014) also identified that children and adolescents who are exposed to terrorist attack related media coverage and exposure show higher posttraumatic stress, separation anxiety, and other symptoms of externalizing and internalizing disorders.

V. Implications of the Study

There must be program to encourage youth and to provide extra emotional support. Parents and specialist can help children to cope with psychological problems by creating a healthy environment. It is necessary to monitor youth's exposure to media coverage. Limit children's and adolescent's disclosure to graphic news images, especially repetitions of traumatic events and consider not allowing youth to watch news, and observing them exposure to news. It may be suitable to watch selected news coverage with adolescent and then discuss it with them and also uplift children and adolescent that the state and federal government, police and hospitals are doing everything possible.

Research finding suggest that mental health interventions should be provided to children on school level so that they can learn to express feelings and emotions as well as new problem solving skills. Furthermore, there is a need for psycho-educational programs to cope with daily life stress effectively. Study should be extend to adults and old age participants. There must be some intervention and prevention measures to reduce vulnerability of emotional and mental health problems. Other variables should also be focus of study such as gender, residence areas and patterns of watching news coverage on terrorism and other criminal activities.

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