

Media Violence and Attitude towards Ethno-Religious and Communal Conflict among the Undergraduate Youth

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Abstract

Ethno-Religious and Communal conflict is one of the serious challenges facing African nations and other parts of the world. This has sucked the blood of the innocent members of the communities and nations involved and the members of international peace keeping forces and moreover, has placed an enormous burden on the economy of the nations involved as well as the United Nations as a global body concerned over the affairs of the entire globe. Of great importance here is the threat of this form of violence to the right and lives of women and children who are usually the most vulnerable in this situation. Many factors are suspected as the culprits and accomplices to this phenomenon, however, beyond the socio-economic analysis, this study focused on the youth exposure to media violence and attitude towards the phenomenon focusing on the University of Nigeria Undergraduates as the study population. The study involved 150 students from various faculties and departments (From first year to fifth year) between the ages of 17-35. The hypotheses that guided the study were tested using Pearson-r and Spearman Rank correlation coefficient. According to the findings, there is a positive correlation between exposure to media violence and positive attitude towards ethno-religious and communal conflict ($\rho=0.14$, $p<0.001$), there is a positive correlation between exposure to media violence and negative attitude towards peaceful conflict resolution ($\rho=0.12$, $p<0.001$), there is a negative correlation between age and regular exposure to media violence ($r=0.002$, $p<0.001$) and, there is a positive correlation between age and positive attitude towards ethno-religious and communal conflict ($r=0.042$, $p<0.001$).

Keywords: Africa; Communal conflict; Ethno-religious conflict; Media violence, Nigeria

Introduction

Among the major challenges facing the world today is conflict. It ranges from micro [interpersonal] to macro [intergroup] conflict. It also ranges from communal/ethnic to regional/religious or racial conflict. Conflicts dry the economy, drink human blood and paralyze human socio-economic development. The most vulnerable in terms of human loss are the women and the children. One of the inseparable parts of conflict is violence which, can appear in different forms and affect members of the society at different degrees. According to World Health Organization [1], violence is "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" Violence against children in a conflict situation is inestimable as data from across the globe have shown. By 2015, 50,000 have lost their lives in the Syrian conflict (SNHR, 2016). Since 2003, about 93,500 children have lost their lives or declared missing due to the conflict in Iraq and, 4.5 million children have lost at least one of their parents. In addition, about 600,000 children are living on the street due to loss of their parents or displacement (UNICEF, 2016). In the case of Yemeni conflict, over 700 children have lost their

Though the documentation in Sudan's case is inconsistent, between 1983 and 1992, at least 20,000 children between the ages of 7 and 17

have lost their lives while many have been recruited as child soldiers (UNICEF, 1992). In the case of Nigeria, more than 20,000 people have lost their lives to Boko-Haram activities alone majorly, women and children while, thousands of children had been forcefully recruited as child soldiers. There are countless children who have lost their lives, abused and directly or indirectly rendered useless by religious-communal conflicts across Nigeria, Africa and the globe.

Conflict at different levels especially, the religious-communal conflict constitute a major source of violence against children such as right abuse, rape/forceful marriage (in the case of abducted females), death and anxiety. Much focus and attention had been given to political, economic and religious factors. However, the issue of conflict is multifaceted that many factors such as exposure to violent media program by the children/youth can be a culprit. According to UNICEF (1992), youth constitute about 90% of the human resources used in executing communal/religious conflict across the globe. The implication is that apart from economic cum political interest, youth who's their mind had been configured for violence become handy for the perpetrators of violence both in battle field and the recruitment of others.

Youth exposure to media violence surfaces in two forms such as short term and long term effects. Furthermore, the long term effect can be as many years as possible before it starts telling on the behavior and attitude of the individual [2]. Individuals who constitute the group in ethno-religious conflicts are also affected by other factors surrounding their life styles such as exposure to media violence hence, the need for investigation in particular, the attitude of the individuals who are

exposed to media violence, towards ethno-religious conflict especially, among the undergraduate students. For more strict focus, this study is focused to answer the following research questions.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict and violence exist across the globe on different scales and degrees. It cut across the intra and inter personal, intra and inter group etc. [3]. All these forms of conflicts or degree of manifestation of violence are the by-products of individual, racial, cultural cum ethno-religious differences [3]. There a number of empirical evidences showing the connectivity between exposure to community violence and increase in aggressive behavior among the adolescent youth [4]. Of paramount importance here, is the relationship between community conflict and individual involvement. According to Anderson and Huesmann [5], the adolescent aggressive behavior which most likely become a motivator into violence, is a series of behavioral processes which develops with time and inform the attitude of an individual.

Among other factors, the aggressive behavior among the youth had been found to be related to the exposure to media violence [5-9]. In a number of laboratory experiments such as the ones conducted by Comstock [10]; Huesmann et al. [11] and Bushman and Huesmann [12]; evidences abound that youth who watch violence scenes subsequently display more aggressive behavior, aggressive thoughts or aggressive emotions compared to other youth who do not watch such type of scenes. On a larger scale, cross sectional surveys have shown that exposure to media violence is correlated to physical aggression, verbal aggression and aggressive thought [13,14]. According to the study by Eron et al. [15]; Lefkowitz et al. [16], the effect of exposure to media violence can surface after many years and become a composite structure of individual behavior and attitude towards factors surrounding him. Consistent and too much exposure to media violence including, violent video games had been found to be associated with violent thought about resolving differences and violent approach to misunderstanding among the youth and even after many years into adulthood [17-20]. According to Kolter and Calvert [21], the continuous viewing of violent imageries and scenes affect the children's struggle to develop an identity towards such line. According to Bushman and Huesmann [12], the children most at risk of forming aggressive behavior when they become young adults are those who watch a steady amount of television violence, perceive it as realistic, and identify with the aggressor [22].

In the wake of continuous ethno-religious conflicts which have consumed so many lives, properties and huge financial resources from communities, groups and government; there is a need for a shift of paradigm, moving from socio political and economic analysis of the causes, into socio-psychological investigation.

Does exposure to media violence affect the attitude of the undergraduate students (youth) towards communal/ethno-religious conflict?

Is there is a relationship between age and positive attitude towards ethno-religious and communal conflict?

Does exposure to media violence affect the attitude of undergraduate students to peaceful resolution of ethno-religious conflict?

Is there a relationship between age among the undergraduate students and being addicted to violent media program?

The following hypothesis guided the study;

There is a positive correlation between exposure to media violence and positive attitude towards communal/ethno-religious conflict.

There is a positive correlation between exposure to media violence and negative attitude towards peaceful resolution of communal/ethno-religious conflict.

There is a positive correlation between age and regular exposure to violence movies.

There is a positive correlation between age and positive attitude towards communal/ethno-religious conflict.

Methodology

The study was carried out in university of Nigeria Nsukka among the undergraduate male students of the institution (from first to final year) from different faculties and departments.

The study adopted cross sectional survey design which focuses on the immediate eliciting of information from the respondents about an ongoing phenomenon.

The researchers adopted Cohen's power sampling technique to arrive at the conclusion that 150 students would be sufficient number of respondents needed to ensure 0.05 and 0.01 levels of confidence. In light of the principles of Cohen's power sampling, a power of 0.80 is desired for a high confidence level of predictability, with a minimum of 44 respondents for 0.05 and 62 respondents for 0.01, respectively [22].

The study adopted both random and non-random sampling techniques in selecting the respondents. 5 faculties were selected using simple random sampling technique (balloting) out of the 15 faculties of the university. Among the 5 faculties, 2 departments were selected from each of the faculties using balloting. Among the 10 departments selected, 15 respondents were selected from each of the departments using purposive sampling. At least 2 respondents were selected from each level (first to final year). The reason for the mixed sampling techniques was due to the unavailability of detail information on the students to the researchers [28-31].

Data Presentation and Analysis

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Levels	Frequency	Percent
100-Level	28	18.7
200-Level	30	20
300-Level	39	26
400-Level	19	12.7
500-Level	34	22.7
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.1: Distribution of respondents by level in school (Year of study).

Age	Frequency	Percent
17-21	64	42.7
22-26	71	47.3
27-31	13	8.7
32-36	1	0.7
37+	1	0.7
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.2: Distribution of respondents by age.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Yes	68	45.3
No	81	54.7
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.3: Distribution of respondents on whether their parents place restriction on the movies they watch before they gain admission.

Source of introduction	Frequency	Percent
family member	24	16
Friends outside the family	43	28.7
Through advert on TV & other media program	81	55.3
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 1.4: Distribution of the respondents on who introduced them to violence movies.

The tables above display the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. According to Table 1.1, 18.7% of the respondents are in their first year of study, 20% are in their second year of study, 26% are in third year while 12.7% and 22.7% are in their fourth and fifth years of their study. Table 1.2 displayed the age characteristics of the respondents, according to the table, 42.7% of the respondents are in the age bracket of 17-21, 47.3% are between 22-26 years, 8.7% are between 27-31 years, while 7% and 7% are in the age brackets of 32-36 and 37+.

According to Table 1.3, 47.3% of the respondents were being monitored on the type of movies they watch before they got admission while, 54.7% were not being monitored before they got admission into higher institution. According to Table 1.4, 55.3% of the respondents were introduced to the watching of violence movies through media programs, 28.7% were introduced to that by their friends, while 16% were introduced to violence movies by their friends.

Other Substantive Issues to the Study

How often	Frequency	Percent
Once in a while	102	68
Monthly	13	8.7
Weekly	26	17.3
Daily	9	6
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 2.1: Distribution of respondents on how often they watched violence movies.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	11	7.3
Disagree	31	20.7
Agree	72	48
Strongly Agree	36	24
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 2.2: Distribution of respondents on participating in communal conflict as a responsibility of the indigenes to protect their community.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	26	17.3
Disagree	60	40
Agree	37	24.7
Strongly Agree	27	18
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 2.3: Distribution of respondents on inter communal violence due to misunderstanding as necessary.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	42	28
Disagree	67	44.7
Agree	23	15.3
Strongly Agree	18	12
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 2.4: Distribution of respondents on going on violence reprisal attack as necessary.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	42	28
Disagree	72	48
Agree	21	14
Strongly Agree	15	10
Total	150	100
Source: Field Survey, 2016		

Table 2.5: Distribution of respondents on responding to domination and suppression in violence as necessary.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	31	20.7
Disagree	54	36
Agree	39	26
Strongly Agree	26	17.3
Total	150	100
Source: Field Survey, 2016		

Table 2.6: Distribution of respondents on dominating other ethnic/religious groups in violence.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	6.7
Disagree	28	18.7
Agree	68	45.3
Strongly Agree	44	29.3
Total	150	100
Source: Field Survey, 2016		

Table 2.7: Distribution of respondents on negotiating for peace in a communal conflict instead of using violence.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	21	14
Disagree	57	38
Agree	53	35.3
Strongly Agree	19	12.7
Total	150	100
Source: Field Survey, 2016		

Table 2.8: Distribution of the respondents on observing judicial procedure in the presence of communal violence.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	34	22.7
Disagree	54	36
Agree	53	35.3
Strongly Agree	9	6
Total	150	100
Source: Field Survey, 2016		

Table 2.9: Distribution of respondents on accepting the decision of set panel in a communal violence.

The above tables displayed the substantive issues to the study such as, exposure to violence movies, ethno religious and communal conflict and conflict resolution. According to Table 2.1, 68% of the respondents watch violence movies once in a while, 8.7% watch it once in a month, and 17.3% watch it weekly, while 6% watch violence movies every day. According to Table 2.2, 48% of the respondents agree that participating in communal conflict as a responsibility of the indigenes to protect their community is necessary, 24% strongly agreed, 20.7% disagreed while, 7.3% strongly disagreed. According to Table 2.3, 40% of the respondents disagreed that inter communal violence due to misunderstanding as necessary, 24.7% agreed that it is necessary, 18% strongly agreed while 17.3% strongly disagreed. According to Table 2.4, 44.7% of the respondents disagreed that going on violence reprisal attack after communal conflict is necessary, 28% strongly disagreed, and 15.3% agreed that it is necessary while 12% strongly agreed. According to Table 2.5, 48% of the respondents disagreed that responding to domination and suppression in violence as necessary, 28% strongly disagreed, 14% agreed that responding to domination and suppression in violence as necessary and 10% strongly agreed. According to Table 2.6, 36% of the respondents disagreed that dominating other ethnic/religious groups in violence is necessary for survival, 26% agreed that it is needed for the survival of the ethnic or religious group in control, 20.7% strongly disagreed and 17.3% strongly agreed. Table 2.7 indicated that 45.3% of the respondents agreed that it is important to negotiating for peace in a communal conflict instead of using violence, 29.3% strongly agreed, 18.7% disagreed that it is important to negotiating for peace in a communal conflict instead of using violence and 6.7% strongly disagreed. According to Table 2.8, 38% of the respondents disagreed that it is necessary to observe judicial procedure in the presence of communal violence, 35.3% agreed, 14% strongly disagreed and 12.7% strongly agreed. According to Table 2.9, 36% of the respondents disagreed on accepting the decision of set panel in a communal violence other than using violence means to actualize their will as a group, 35.3% agreed, 22.7% strongly disagreed and 6% strongly agreed [32-38].

Test of Stated Hypothesis

The stated hypotheses were tested using Spearman Rank correlation and Pearson moment correlation. According to the findings, there is a positive correlation between exposure to media violence and positive attitude towards ethno-religious and communal conflict ($\rho=0.14$, $p<0.001$), this means that the more the exposure to media violence by the undergraduates, the more they see ethno religious and communal conflicts as good and worth participating in. There is a positive correlation between exposure to media violence and negative attitude

towards peaceful conflict resolution ($\rho=0.12$, $p<0.001$), this means that the more the exposure to media violence, the more the undergraduate youths see peaceful conflict resolutions as unnecessary compared to resolving such issues through violence means. There is a negative correlation between age and regular exposure to media violence ($r=-0.002$, $p<0.001$), this point to the fact that increase in age reduces attachment to violence media programs though in a slower rate as the result showed. Finally, there is a positive correlation between age and positive attitude towards ethno-religious and communal conflict ($r=0.042$, $p<0.001$).

The interest of the study was to unravel how ethno religious conflicts which have been a problem to Nigeria and other African nations can be affected by other factors such as exposure to violent media programme, age, attitude to peace and ethno religious conflict. The problem of ethno religious conflict has paralyzed the economic and political progress in different parts of Nigeria in different times and still continues to the present. Though the assumption is that education holds the ultimate answer to the problem however, in the educational institutions, the students are still exposed to other factors which in themselves reinforce the problem on the high magnitude. For instance, in the university community, the students join cult as a way of seeking for protection in the cause of doing this, when there is communal or religious conflict they easily invite their cult members over to assist them or even pay them for such dangerous mission. Now the onus of the matter is that there are some strenuous factors which make the violent attitude to continue irrespective of the youth having access to educational institution. Among them is continuous exposure to media violence while in school, as the students continuously view gore scene and regard it as normal thing in the subconscious of their mind, the possibility of being motivated to practice such is very high. Even the cult members have been found to be using media violence to encourage their members into bloodshed. Of course the result indicated the positive relationship between exposure to media violence and positive attitude to ethno religious violence and in essence, revealed that having access to media violent programmes is a factor that affect the individual's attitude and regard for ethno religious conflict irrespective of education and level of exposure to civility. This is the continuation of the protection of group interest in Nigeria which has become a common thing in every facet of the national life. While the citizens who have access to power and other resources use it to champion the interest of their regional, religious and communal group, the continuous exposure to media violence and the strong attachment to religious, ethnic or communal group become motivator to the individual youth to see their functionality in violence as a responsibility to their group. Again the results revealed that there is negative relationship between exposure to media violence and peaceful resolution of conflict. One of the factors that keep reinforcing ethno religious and communal conflicts across the nation and in most African nations is the availability of the youth to participate in violence as well as their willingness to support war in order to revenge for any attack on their group otherwise, the elderly people and the wealthy men in the community cannot go to fight war they only put the youth in front for such purpose. The result currently indicated that exposure to media violence by the youth encourages their willingness to participate in ethno religious and communal war as the means of settling conflict. Although on the surface people may view the motivation of the communal leaders in the community or the bad gang in the community as the factor behind the youth willingness to partake in conflict during crisis time, the motivation lies on the exposure to media violence where the youth gather the courage to confront any

perceived threat with violence. Almost in all the violent media programmes, they are started and closed without a point of seeking for amicable resolution of problems in a peaceful manner also, these programmes are designed to give glory to violence as sign of being strong and a man or woman that command respect among people if you can summon courage to kill and destroy properties. Such a scene is a major facilitator for the youth to see the violence as the ultimate choice against peaceful resolution of conflict at any point. According to the findings, there is negative correlation between age and regular exposure to media violence and at the same time a positive correlation between age and positive attitude towards ethno religious and communal conflict. This further revealed that after some time of being exposed to media violence, the individuals continue to harbor the image of violence and aggression which reflects when the opportunity of violence avail itself [13,14,39].

Conclusion/Recommendation

Ethno religious and communal conflict had been a global challenge to the present generation as it has a multifaceted effects on the system in which it appears. Economically, ethno religious and communal conflicts had made many third world nations a market channels for the arm merchants while at the same time, rendering these nations poor. Politically, ethno religious conflicts are responsible for political instabilities in the third world nations. In addition, ethno religious and communal conflicts have been responsible for millions of deaths across the globe. More worrisome is the violence against women and children which on a large scale, is the salient aspect of the phenomenon.

Owing to the serious challenges posed by this phenomenon, scholars have approached it mostly from the political cum economic perspectives leaving the argument at the level of accusing poverty and the activities of political demagogues. However, the present study focused on the other micro aspect of the phenomenon which has to do with individual exposure to media violence and their attitude to ethno religious and communal conflicts. The study point to the huge gap which needs serious attention especially, in the third world nations which are vulnerable to all forms of manipulations. Beyond the economic and religious policies, the issues of media policies should be encouraged in order to counter certain channels through which the socially unfavourable media activities are spreading among the youth in these nations.

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