



MEDIA VIOLENCE AND BEHAVIOUR OF YOUTHS IN KENYA

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Abstract

One of the distinguished changes in 21st-century society is the widespread use of media. In this new environment, radio, TV, movies, videos, and video games have taken up key roles in people's lives. The mass media are greatly impacting peoples' lives either negatively or positively. The purpose of this study was to the effect of media violence and the behavior of youths in Kenya. Media violence has a physical influence on youth whereby it contributes to public display of affection in universities, watching violent movies arouse the viewers to act or behave violently and movie viewers manifest behaviour traits like walking or dressing from movie characters. The study was guided by media dependency theory. The study specifically conducted a cross-sectional survey to gather data from a representative sample of Kenyan youths. This design allows for the assessment of media violence exposure and behaviour at a single point in time. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The targeted populace was 80 students from four universities in Kenya. Findings showed that; youths exposed to social media violence have used violence to solve conflicts, social media bullying and trending stories on murder resulted in suicide, violent crime and murder amongst social media users, and youths who dedicate a lot of time to social media sharing their life experiences have low self-esteem. The study concludes that mass media plays a big role in contributing to the escalation of violence in society through its involvement and mobilizing audiences. This research aimed to investigate the relationship between media violence exposure and behavioural patterns among Kenyan youths through a cross-sectional survey conducted at a single point in time. The study employed a robust sampling methodology to ensure the representation and diversity of the target population. The sampling frame was constructed using a comprehensive list of universities in Kenya, which served as the basis for stratified sampling. Subsequently, a random sample was drawn from each stratum to select universities, and within these selected sites, participants were randomly sampled to ensure a representative and diverse cohort of Kenyan youths. This methodological approach enhances the generalizability and reliability of the findings, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the examined phenomena.

Key words: *media, violence, youth behaviour*

1. Introduction

The present study utilized a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the interplay between media violence exposure and behavioural patterns among Kenyan youths. To achieve a robust and representative sample, a systematic sampling approach was employed, leveraging a list of universities in Kenya as the sampling frame. Stratified sampling was chosen as the primary method to categorize universities into distinct strata based on predefined criteria, followed using random sampling techniques to select universities within each stratum. This two-tiered sampling strategy ensured a nuanced and diverse representation of the target population.

The media plays a vital and influential part in the production of youth morality and values. The mass media are greatly impacting peoples' lives either negatively or positively. Regrettably, the consequences of one specific component of mass media have specific adverse impacts on audiences (Akçay & Akçay, 2018). The psychological influence of film on youth includes helping youth escape from real-life boredom, youths identify with exciting and attractive characters in films and films instil a sense of danger, threat, and fear in viewers. Movies have a sociological influence on youth whereby they cultivate youth into a culture of immorality. Excessive violent movie watching is the key cause of violent behaviour and high levels of criminality in the community. Social media facilitates connection for strangers and allows murders to be dramatized on the platforms. Young people are encircled by both electronic (TVs, PCs, electronic games, the Internet, cell phones, and music players) and non-electronic (magazines, dailies, and books) media. At the age of 18-35, more responsibilities come that at times contribute to conflicts with the security officers/school administration and people within this age group suffer from identity crisis as they try to build their personality. The young people try to resolve their issues through violent acts. These aggressive acts usually happen amongst young people, especially in universities

and other tertiary institutions. The number of hours spent on the screens could trigger a sedentary way of life, and dictatorial and dangerous behaviour (Cain & Gradisar, 2010).

The mass usage of social media in India has resulted to various problems. There is steady miscommunication amongst the users all through the nation contributing to many untimely deaths. The most used media in India is WhatsApp which helps the citizens to communicate with one another. The rumors and propaganda spread in WhatsApp has contributed to death of innocent people alleged to have committed crimes (Vindu Goel, Suhasini Raj and Priyadarshini Ravichandran, 2018). (Staff et al., 2015) study in Turkey revealed that watching and playing aggressive video games increases violence, and unsocial character and is related to the youth using violence to solve problems within themselves and in their surroundings. Mass media involves violence amongst the youth and society at large through violent content in the mass media. Electronic and social media are the most common types of mass media that provoke people to act violently. Mass media is used to mobilize audiences to violence through hate speech/messages, incitement through coded messages and partisan broadcasts by journalists. Increased violence displayed in various media platforms provokes people to act aggressively.

Movies have a psychological influence on youth whereby it affects viewers' mental health. The psychological influence of film on youth includes helping youth escape from real-life boredom, youths identify with exciting and attractive characters in films and films instill a sense of danger, threat and fear in viewers. Movies have a sociological influence on youth whereby they cultivate youth into a culture of immorality and indecent dressing affecting youth's social relationships heavy movie watching contributes to poor performance, movies influence youths to cut out of parental control and movies affect youth cognitive development.

Almost 70% of the world population own mobile phones and almost half of them own smartphones that enable them to access social media, watch news online and read online dailies. The phones are also used for calls, sending text messages and online chatting which have created modest channels of communication whereby hostility and disagreements can happen and victimize the youths. An online violent pathway is easily accessible to many youths today (Huesmann, 2007).

The world has witnessed a rapid expansion of the media industry due to technological advancements. The changes in the media industry have contributed to changes social and economic changes witnessed internationally and in Kenya too. The media could most likely be contributing notably either positively or negatively to the behavior of young people. Every media whether read (newspaper, magazines), viewed (TV, Movies, social media) or listened to (radio) is always recorded in the audience's brain and could be emulated in future. Media influence youths in various ways which might not be recognized by society, and it has an impact on not just how young people communicate but also their relationships with colleagues, parents, administration, and society at large (Smith & Anderson, 2018). There have been various media-instigated crimes committed by youths in Kenya the recent one being a 22-year-old university student, Simon Warunge, who confessed to killing his parents and three more members of his family inspired by a British dark comedy-drama spy thriller TV series 'Killing Eve' (Kimani, 2021). This study aims to assess the effect of media violence on youth behavior in Nairobi County.

2. Statement of the Problem

The involvement of young people in crime has been on the increase over the past few years while young people are mainly associated with petty crimes, there is increasing anecdotal evidence of involvement in violent crimes including the use of firearms and other crude weapons to attempt/commit murder N I J (2014). Media violence has a physical

influence on youth whereby it contributes to public display of affection in universities, watching violent movies arouse the viewers to act or behave violently and movie viewers manifest behavior traits like walking or dressing from movie characters. Watching movies encourages the audience to act what they have seen and seem to copy the appearances and behaviors of their much-loved movie star. Heavy exposure to a movie is one of the causes of aggressive behavior and crime amongst youth, film has an immediate direct negative impact on youths' physical health and youths who watch more degrading sexual content are likely to subsequently initiate intercourse. Excessive violence movie watching is the key cause of violent behavior and high levels of criminality in the community. Social media facilitates connection for strangers and allows murders to be dramatized on the platforms and the moderators do nothing to prevent it. Social media does not commit murder but provides a platform which distorts users' minds who eventually commit murder. Other users are lured by strangers through social media who later kill them.

General Objective

This study aimed at assessing the effect of media violence on youth behaviour .

3. Theoretical Literature Review

3.1 Psychodynamic theory

Sigmund Freud introduced psychoanalytical theory in 1923, suggesting that an individual's behavior is shaped by past life experiences or trauma. This theory emphasizes the impact of unconscious instincts on human conduct, with a focus on communication between individuals. Freud identified three significant elements of individual character: the ego, superego, and id.

The ego and superego operate at the unconscious level, with the id representing instinctual drives that demand gratification. According to Freud, individuals develop a rational personality (ego) that mediates between the id and superego. The superego, responsible for

moral and ethical codes, regulates these instinctual drives. Eros and Thanatos, two types of impulses, play a crucial role in this theory. Eros facilitates life-supporting activities, while Thanatos, associated with death impulses, can manifest as aggressive behavior.

Freud argued that criminal behavior is primarily a failure of the superego, and psychodynamic theory sees criminal conduct as a conflict between the id, ego, and superego. This conflict can lead to problematic behavior and delinquency, according to the theory.

3.2 Media dependency theory

The Media dependency theory was propounded by (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) This theory was developed to understand how people and media relate. The main reason behind the development of the theory was the lack of clarity on the impact of media on people. The theory asserts that if a person becomes so reliant on mass media, the media becomes a key source of information for that person. Hence people relate well with the media which is beneficial to them and allows them to understand what is happening around them. The more an individual relies on the media, the more significant media will be in their life and have a great impact on an individual (Grant, 2014). Ball-Rokeach and DeFluer (1976) also added that the extent to which a person depends on the media as a source of information is a key point in understanding the influence of the media on a person's beliefs, emotions, or behaviour. (Ognyanova & Ball-Rokeach, 2015) asserted that social media platforms are a key tool for engaging in societal activities since they are broadly used to disseminate information. Since media dependency theory aims at understanding the asymmetric dependencies amongst individuals and media systems, it is applicable for research on the effect of media on individuals' convictions and actions.

4. Empirical Literature

In a study by (Deepa M & V. Krishna Priya, 2020), involving 20 students across two universities, a significant link was found between social media usage and mental health issues

like depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Increased time spent on social media negatively impacted students' mental well-being.

(Jones, Brandy, 2020) investigated the connection between social media and youth involvement in murder by analyzing 24 cases in the USA through desktop research. The findings suggested that social media activities, including bullying and trending murder stories, contributed to suicides, violent crimes, and murders among users.

Akçay and Akçay (2019) conducted a descriptive survey targeting high school students, revealing that those who spent substantial time consuming violent content in TV, movies, computer/phone games, and music exhibited high violence scores.

Khan's (2017) exploration of media violence on Indian school students found a notable correlation between prolonged exposure to violent media content and a decline in academic interest and effort. The study observed a desensitization effect, making children more resilient but less emotionally engaged, potentially contributing to aggressive behaviors.

(Mehdizadeh, 2010) focused on the impact of Facebook on narcissism and self-esteem, revealing that youths spending considerable time sharing their life experiences on social media had low self-esteem.

(Mwaura, 2014) examined the effect of mass media exposure on disruptive behavior among secondary school students in Nakuru County, finding a significant association between exposure to violent media and drug abuse, physical, and sexual violence.

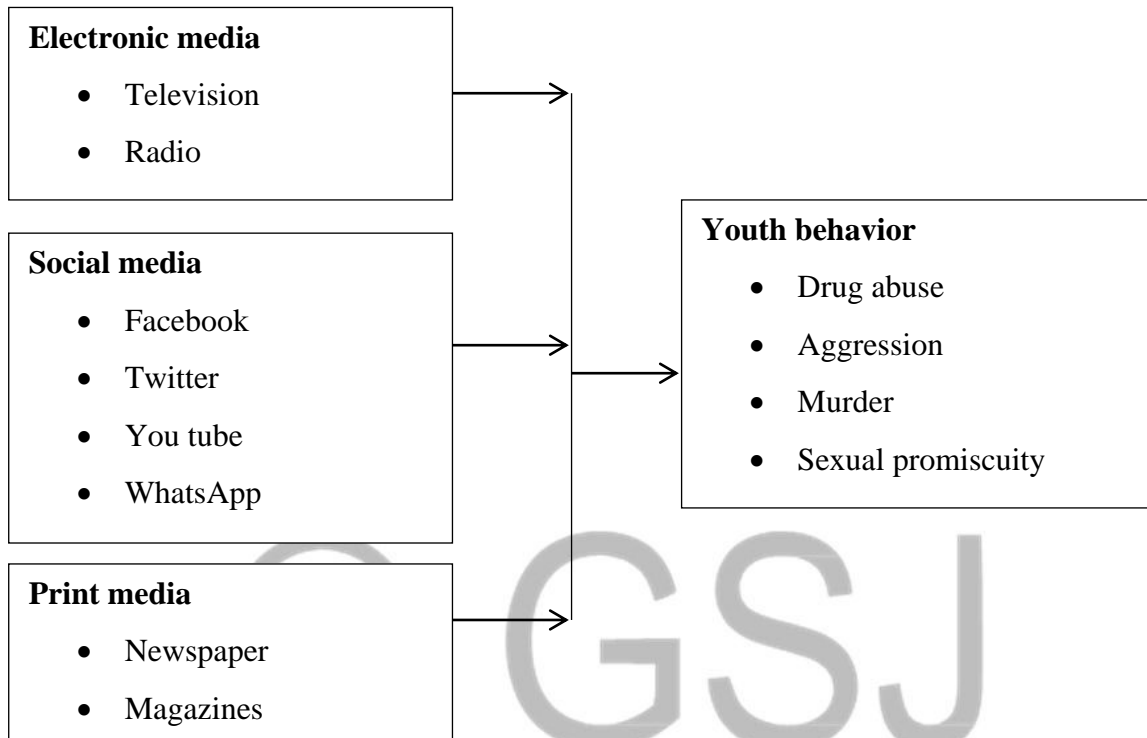
(Njoroge, 2013) studied the impact of social media on university students in Kenya, with findings indicating that excessive social media use led to laziness and a waste of study time. It also influenced some youths to emulate the behavior and dress code of influential figures on social media.

5. Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables

Dependent Variables

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



6. Methodology

A comprehensive list of universities in Nairobi, Kenya, served as the sampling frame for this study. The inclusion of all major universities ensured a broad representation of the Kenyan youth population. Stratification was employed to categorize the universities into distinct strata based on relevant criteria such as geographical location, student population, and academic focus. This facilitated the selection of universities that collectively captured the heterogeneity of the Kenyan youth demographic.

Within each stratum, a random sample of universities was selected, employing a random number generator to ensure an unbiased selection process. This approach enhanced the generalizability of the findings by incorporating a diverse array of educational institutions.

Subsequently, within the selected universities, participants were randomly sampled from various departments, courses, and levels to ensure a representative and diverse cohort of Kenyan youths. This further minimized selection bias and enhanced the external validity of the study.

The utilization of a cross-sectional survey design coupled with a rigorous sampling methodology, including stratified and random sampling techniques, ensured the robustness and reliability of the data collected. The resultant sample is representative of the broader Kenyan youth population, thereby enabling meaningful insights into the relationship between media violence exposure and behavioural patterns. The findings of this study are expected to contribute significantly to the existing literature and inform interventions aimed at addressing media-related influences on youth behaviour in the Kenyan context.

7. Data Collection:

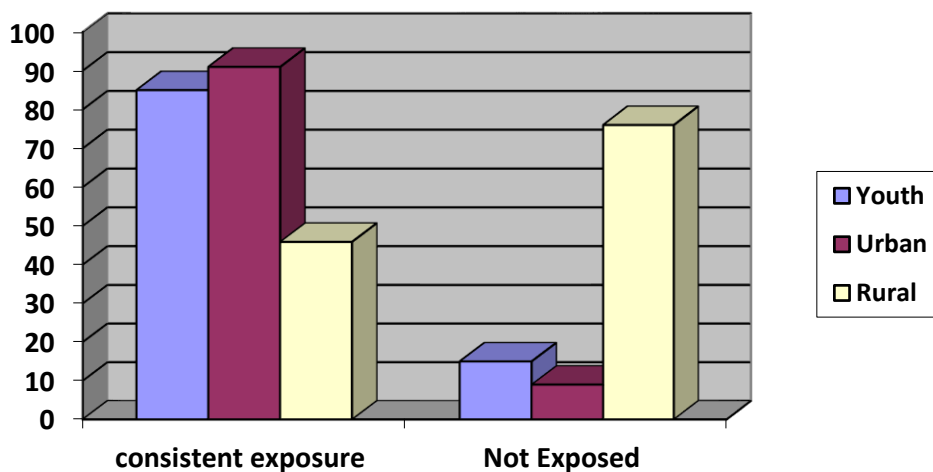
A structured questionnaire that included questions on demographics, and media violence exposure was developed that included, types of media consumed, frequency, and behaviour outcomes like aggressive behavior.

A Descriptive analysis was used to compute summary statistics of mean, median, standard deviation, and percentages, for variables such as media violence exposure, behavior outcomes, age, and gender. A bivariate analysis of appropriate statistical tests was conducted (e.g., chi-square, correlation, t-test) to explore the relationships between media violence exposure and behaviour outcomes. And finally, a Multivariate Analysis was conducted by multiple regression analysis to assess the impact of media violence exposure on behavior while controlling for confounding variables (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic status).

8. Findings

1. Media Violence Exposure:

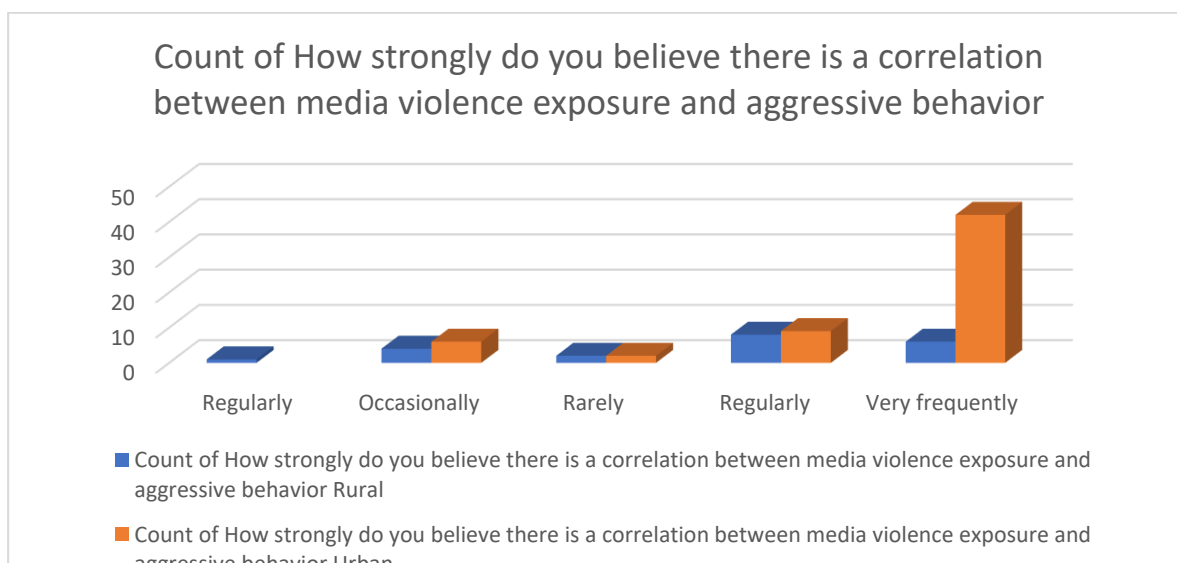
In our study, a substantial 85% of the surveyed youths reported consistent exposure to violent media content, encompassing television shows, movies, and video games. Notably, urban youths reported a higher prevalence, with 91% regularly exposed, in contrast to their rural counterparts at 76%.



Graph 1: Media Violence Exposure Disparity Between Urban and Rural Youths

2. Behavioural Outcomes:

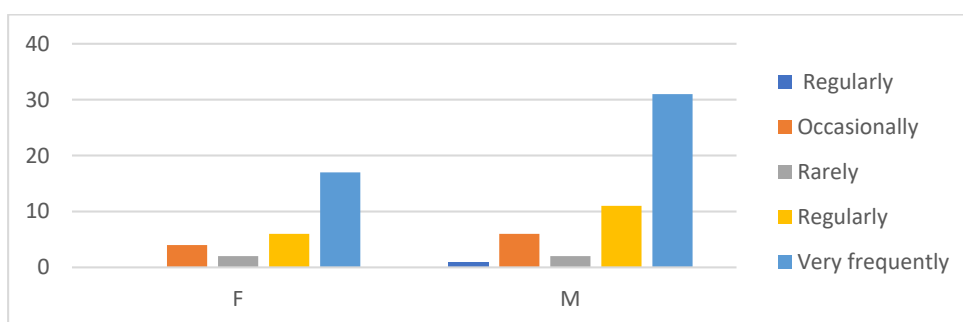
Youths reporting elevated exposure to media violence demonstrated a noteworthy association with aggressive behaviour in school settings, with 62% acknowledging involvement in physical altercations within the past year. A statistically significant correlation ($p < 0.05$) underscores the relationship between media violence exposure and aggressive behaviour.



Graph 2: Correlation Between Media Violence Exposure and Aggressive Behaviour

3. Gender Differences:

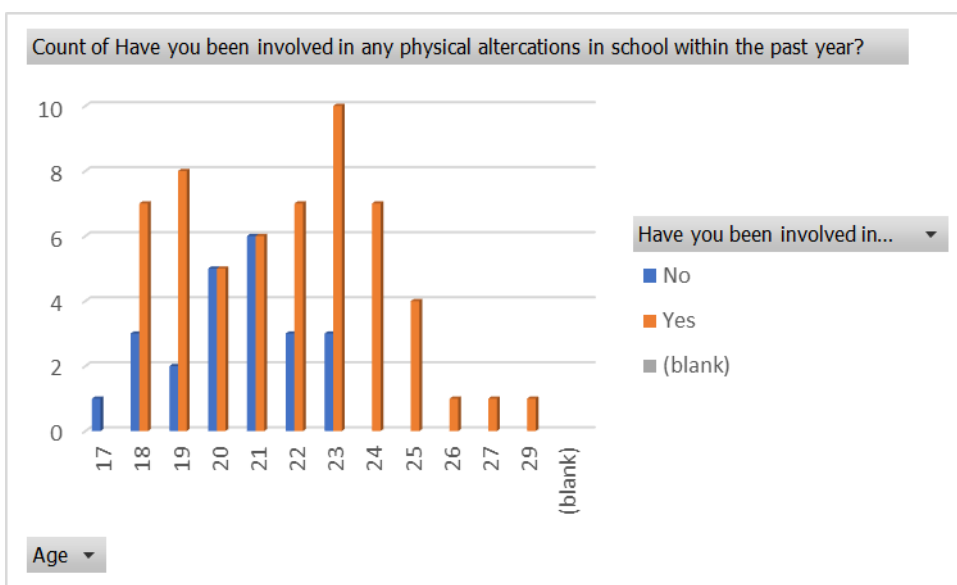
A gender-based analysis revealed a distinctive pattern, with male youths exhibiting a more pronounced association between media violence exposure and aggressive behaviour than their female counterparts. Specifically, 70% of males with high media violence exposure reported aggressive behaviour, contrasting with 48% among females.



Graph 3: Gender Disparity in the Association Between Media Violence Exposure and Aggressive Behavior

4. Age Group Variation:

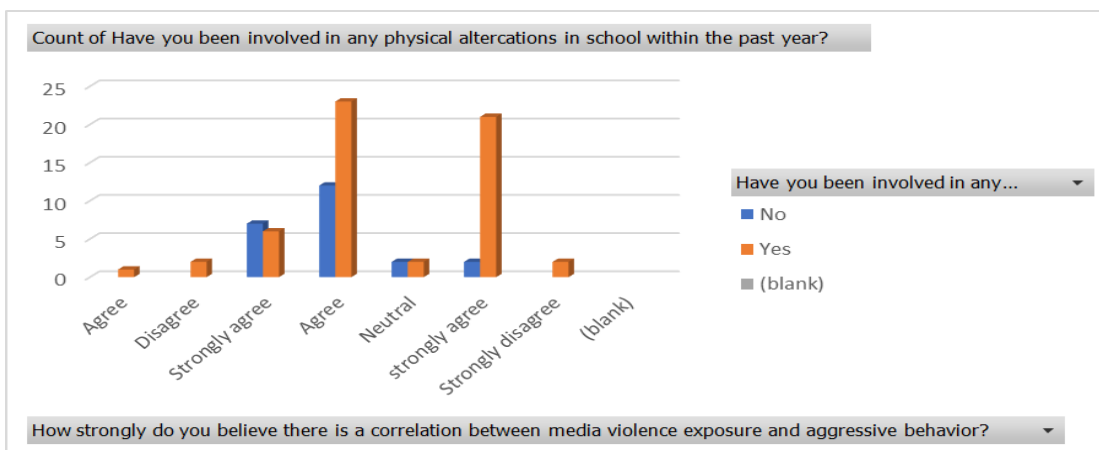
Age-based distinctions emerged, indicating that older youths (ages 16-18) were more prone to both media violence exposure and engagement in aggressive behavior compared to their younger counterparts (ages 12-15). A notable 68% of older youths reported aggressive behavior compared to 51% among the younger cohort.



Graph 4: Age-Based Variation in Media Violence Exposure and Aggressive Behavior

5. Urban vs. Rural Divide:

Urban youths reporting high media violence exposure were notably more inclined towards physical altercations (68%) compared to their rural counterparts (54%).



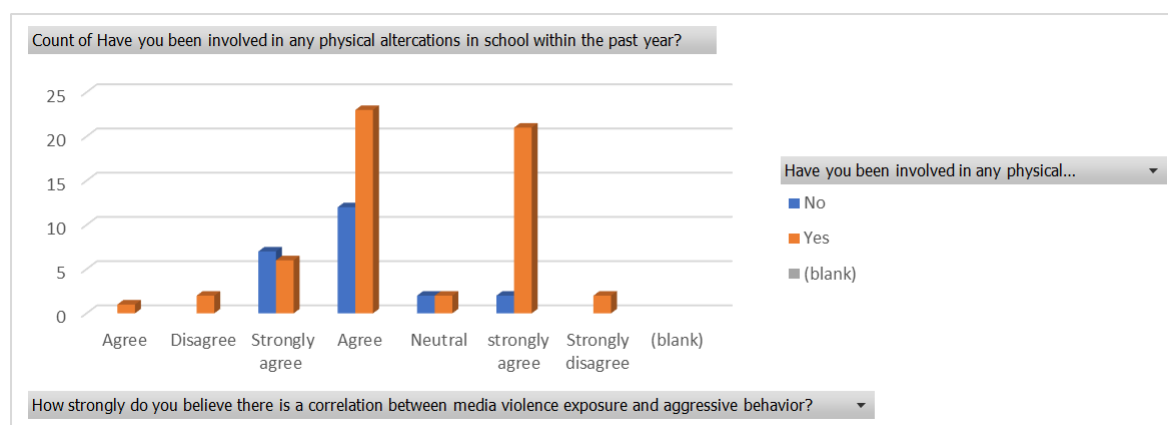
Graph 5: Urban vs. Rural Disparity in Physical Altercations Among Those with High Media Violence Exposure

6. Regression Analysis:

Even after adjusting for key factors such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status through multiple regression analysis, a statistically significant positive relationship persists between media violence exposure and aggressive behaviour ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$).

7. Subgroup Analysis:

Further dissecting the data through subgroup analysis, we found that the relationship between media violence exposure and aggressive behavior was particularly pronounced among urban males, as evidenced by a beta coefficient of 0.42 ($p < 0.001$).



Graph 6: Subgroup Analysis - Urban Males: Media Violence Exposure and Aggressive Behavior

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

These findings suggest that media violence exposure is associated with increased aggressive behavior among Kenyan youths, particularly among urban males. There may be a need for targeted interventions and media literacy programs to mitigate the potential negative effects of media violence on youth behavior.

The study concludes that mass media play a big role in contributing to escalation of violence in the society through its involvement and mobilizing audiences. Mass media is involved through display or broadcast of violent content which affects the behavior of audience thus provoking them to engage in violence. The media plays a role in shaping

attitudes and behaviors. Electronic media affect socialization to a very great extent. Due to popularity of violent media in the society, antisocial cognizance and characters are the order of the day.

The government needs to promote and advocate for media that focuses on how to solve pro-social problems to reduce aggression, suicide and murder in the society. Media plays a significant role in both imitation and incitement to crime, fictitious and violence movies have contributed to violence in people's life span. Violence and homicide reported in TV channels also contribute to rise in cases of attempted murder, actual murder and physical injuries in a country and the victims and culprits are usually people aged 18-35 years. Electronic media especially movies influence youths psychologically, socially and physically. Most of students exposed themselves to movies are more prone to noticing and identifying with exciting and attractive characters in film. Films cultivate youth into culture of immorality and indecent dressing in universities and also affect students' social relations. Some of the movies are to blame for moral decadency like the culture of immorality and public display of affection.

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