

THE EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE PROGRAMS ON INDONESIAN TELEVISION

*A literature study about the attempts to find solution for
The effects of violence television programs on Indonesian Children*

PAPER

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By:

Drs. Dede Mulkan, M.Si.



**UNIVERSITY KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA (UKM)
UNIVERSITAS PADJADJARAN (UNPAD)**

The Effects of Violence Programs on Indonesian Television

1. Background

Along human's life, there is no more beautiful and impressing thing than a childhood. Adults always keep it in their mind and they tell it happily with a pride.

Recently, however, psychologists and socialists believe that childhood is facing a collapse and will just remain a story. In the future, children will not find their sweet childhood, which should be the most important thing to define their personality.

By presenting programs which shows immorality and violence, Western mass media is now breaking the wall between childhood and adulthood. This phenomenon not only occurs in western countries but also in developing countries because of a strong infiltration of western media all over the world. In other words, today's children are allowed to watch any television programs even the adult's. This, of course, will cause a bad impact for the children.

Doctor Tabatabaei, an Iranian expert, said that the childhood is one of human's phases, which has its own capacity. Therefore, children physically and mentally cannot cope with adult's conflicts and problems. Neil Postman, an American writer, wrote that there is no more border between childhood and adulthood so that there is no more children's world.

Today we can find the fact that children are struggling against mass media (especially television) which present several programs outside their world. In general, the programs presented are not suitable with children's world both its contents and its time. On the

other hand, the adult's programs are aired at children's time and the children's programs sometimes do not match their world.

A lot of television programs presented everyday and every time have influenced children's self-unconscious mind, which cause them unrealized that they are being contaminated by mass media. How far they can escape from mass media and avoid the worse things. Otherwise, how far the managers of mass media (television) realize what they have done. Finally, how far the parents realize that they are producing a bad future for their children.

2. The effects of Television Programs on Children

Among several mass media, television has a greatest role in presenting bad and too early information for children. According to media experts and psychologists, behind its power, television has a big potential to leave negative effects on society, especially children.

It is true that there are many efforts to make parents drive their children watch their programs only, however, there are few parents concerning about this.

Based on a research in America, there are many children who watch the adult's programs. Doctor Tatabei, responding to the case, said, "Today in Western, the children are facing murder, violence, kidnapping, hostage, immorality, moral, social and culture decadency. The impacts of these problems are the decline and the destruction of children's personality, which then finally disappear.

Neil Postman in his *The Disappearance of Childhood*, wrote that since 1950, American television has broadcasted similar programs which cause children and society be the victims of them. By emphasizing on the point that television has broken the border

between childhood and adulthood, Neil Postman mention three characteristics of television:

First, the message of this media can be directly received by its viewers without any guidance or direction. Second, the message is delivered without any thought. Third, television gives no distinction to its viewers, which means whoever can watch television programs. These three characteristics will have a good effect if the messages delivered are the good ones. On the other hand, it will be dangerous when television presents immoral and dilapidated programs, such as violence and crime. Unfortunately, today's television programs are full of violence and crime.

To attract its viewers as many as possible, the managers of this media compete to one another to present more violence and immorality on television. The pure and innocent children are the most influenced ones and think what they watch is the truth.

US statistic shows there is the increase of violence done by children from day to day. Between 1950 and 1979, there was the increase until 110 times of heavy crimes conducted by teenagers under 15, which means it increases 11 millions percent. Today, there are many children and teenagers in America who bring guns, either for attacking the others or to defense themselves.

The other research shows that there is correlation between violence programs and children behaviors. A survey has also been done by Christian Science Monitor (CSM) in 1996 which gave a question to 1.209 parents whether Violence in television affects children. The result shows 56% respondents reply that it really affects children, 26% affects, 5% rather affects, and 11% does not affect.

The result of Dr. Brandon Cartwright's research from Washington University strengthens that survey. He attempted to find statistical correlation between the increase of crimes especially

violence and the coming of television in three countries (Canada, U.S., and Africa). The focus of this research is the white.

The result showed the number of murder in Canada and America had been increasing almost 100%. At the same time, the possession of television increases with equal comparison. In South Africa, TV programs had been permitted in 1975. the research of Canterwall from 1975 to 1983 showed that the number of murder among the white increased 130%. Whereas, between 1945 and 1974, the number of murder had been decreasing (Kompas, 20-3-1995).

Canterwall then explained that TV does not directly affect people who conduct murder, yet it has gradually affected them since they were children. Therefore, there three stages of violence recorded in the research: at first, the number of violence increases among children, several years later the violence increases among teenagers, and finally the most dangerous violence occurs when adult people conduct murder.

This result corresponds to the result of American National Mental Health Body which had been conducted in a large amount in 10 years. The result showed that the violence on television programs causes aggressive behavior on children and teenagers who watch the programs.

Meanwhile, Ron Solby, a researcher of Harvard University, specifically explained that there are 4 effects of violence on television on children which will influence the development of their personalities:

1. Aggressor effect, where the rude personality increases on children
2. Victim effect, where children become coward and it is hard to trust the others
3. Observer effect, where children do not care about the others' difficulties

4. Passion effect, where children are eager to conduct violence to cope with every of their problems

The research of The National Television violence Study, which was the biggest scientific study ever conducted on television in US, for example, is a quantitative study. This analysis started in 1998 had involved four great universities and showed that the quality of television should be more reviewed.

If we look back, the investigation of television's contents was done for we believe that the effects of media, especially television, are strong on its viewers. In the classic and dominant communication study, "the effects of media" is up and down. However, in general, the media-effects theory has been developed from limited-effects in 1950-1960s to powerful effects in 1980-1990s. Consequently, the majority of mass communication experts now believes that media have a great power to influence public.

In the classic paradigm, there is an attempt to qualify the media effects, yet in critical paradigm, such an attempt is no more done. Frankfurt's thought and elite philosophers, such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1972), had thought since the beginning that media make fool of people and create artificial consciousness. In short, the point of the problem is on its contents.

Television can present messages or objects which had actually been dramatized audiovisually with movement effect (live) at the same time (broadcast) at the same time. The message produced by television can either resemble its real object or differ it. Therefore, this medium has a great potential to change people's attitude and behavior (especially children).

Meanwhile, the competition among television stations gets greater. They compete in presenting programs its viewers fond of

without considering the negative effects from it. The viewers are varied. One of those is children and teenagers who are too easy to be influenced.

The appearance of television and many people's making use of it causes television becomes a major information media among the society all over the world. Television can be the source of good information and takes its role in the development of education and people's level of thought, and gives pleasure which can eliminate a lot of social frustrations.

Television can also be the media of good education for children. Even though the use of television has been attempted as well as possible, the result does not show as it is expected. In western, this electronic media gradually shifts into an effective media to spread violence and free sex, which leads the protests of social observers and a group of intellectual.

Nowadays, western televisions are powered by capitalists, who are arrogant and make priority on their interests. They get richer and success through television, yet they do not use it to make people realized and intelligent, but they attempt to hypnotize people to be unrealized to what is happening. Those capitalist have made people get addicted to watch their television programs.

In US, a third of its people watch television during more than 4 hours. According to the communication experts, the viewers who spend 4 hours watching television are the extreme and professional viewers.

For this reason, when this media broadcasts violence acts and crimes in its programs, it automatically influences people because of its great power.

3. The Negative Effects of Violence Programs on Television

One of television stations in US shows this fact in a statistical report. Based on the report, in 1999, the program themed sexuality on television increases three times compared to those in the 10 previous years. Meanwhile, from 1989 to 1999, the programs related to homosexuality had increased 24%. Moreover, the report showed that the use of swearwords between 1989 and 1999 had increased 5.5 times. Besides, violence acts and pornography are clearly performed.

In a research and experiment on three major television channels in the US; CBS, NBC, and ABC, it is reported that those channels present 113 scenes of sexual harassment, 92 scenes of armed attacks, 9 scenes of murder, 78 scenes of fight with strokes and kicks, 179 scenes of law disobedience every weeks.

The other statistical numbers also shows that it is the US' society who spends their time watching television programs which present violence and sexual harassment. This kind of program is not only presented in the films, but also in most of reports and ads.

The extreme performance of violence acts on television in US has caused the increase and dispute among the society in the country. George Garbner and Terry Grose, two television researchers in America, concluded that the viewers of television who have been addicted to watch television programs feel as if they lived in a frightening world so that they are afraid to face the real world. Therefore, they are lack of interaction with their neighbors and other people.

If we look at US society, we can easily see a great fear in their psychology and distrust in other people. They set an extreme security system in their homes, markets, and other places. This shows that American people actually feel that they are in a dangerous situation.

Based on the research of a psychological institution in US, the children in this country have watched the acts of murder 8 thousand times and the acts of violence 100 thousands on television programs before they graduate from elementary school. Those numbers will increase twice as they are 18 years old.

Leonard Irwin, the psychology lecturer of Illinois university, US, along with his team, has held a long study concerning about this problem. He found that children in 8 years of age have watched violence acts through television, and when they are adult, they tend to behave undoubtedly to conduct crimes and rude things, do not sympathetic on children even on their wife.

The performance of violence and sexual harassment in US media, especially television, has led this country into crimes and insecurities. English weekly magazine Sunday times wrote, "although US has 440 thousands federal police, there are two murders every hour, 194 armed thefts, 10 rapes on women and children, and 600 thefts in homes." In such condition, Hollywood can be considered as the cause of free sex and violence in US. Moreover, Arnold Schwarzeneger, who is the symbol of violence in American movies, was elected Governor of California, one of the major cities in US. Such unfortunate condition dangers not only American society themselves, but also all of societies in the world as because the American movies are spread out all over the world.

The great spread of television programs included violence, consumptive behavior, sadism, eroticism, even sensualism make the parents worried. Such condition is acceptable as the children can watch television programs every time. People undoubtedly blame television as the cause of violent acts and the other negative behaviors which now tend to be conducted by children and teenagers.

This is because human is an imitator and imitative. Such behavior is mainly found on children and teenagers.

The worry of parents is also caused by children's thought which is still relatively simple. They commonly think what they watch on television is real. They have difficulty to differ which one is fictive and which one is real. They also have difficulty to select which ones are good and correspond to religion norms and national personality. The acts of violence, crime, consumptive, and sexuality on television are strictly considered to affect children's behavior.

Is it true that the aggressiveness of children appear simply because of the violence programs on the screen? Basically, every people has aggressiveness since they were born. This character is useful to keep survive. Without aggressiveness, a child will not respond when he or she gets a symptom which dangers his/her life. However, without a good guidance, such character can be dangerous.

There are some who view that the process of a watching which finally becomes a real manner takes a long time. However, it will be a problem when violence programs serve the viewers everyday, and they become used to it. Besides, it is also supported by surrounding environment.

According to psychologist of Sandford University, Albert bandura, aggressive response is not inherited, but it comes from experience. There is a game which can stimulate aggressiveness. "a learner does not like and attack a certain individual through experience or unpleasant meeting."

The following survey can help to describe. The Americans in average watch TV during 25 – 30 hours per week. In the research involving 100.000 respondents as the subjects, it can be concluded that there are strong evidences about correlation between aggressive

behavior and watching television presenting violence extensively. Many children enjoy spending their times in front of television. "to them, watching television is the best way to eliminate frustration, or to escape from it," said mark I Singer, the professor of mandel School of Applied Social Sciences who investigated 2.244 students aged 8 to 14 years old in Northeast Ohio, us.

According to TV Guide magazine, about 70% children who usually watch tv say that watching television is just an escape. Only one of ten viewers who says that watching television is for intellectual exercise. Whereas, the research shows, watching tv passively for hours increases the level of psychological trauma. It does not eliminate frustration but make it worse.

In fact, there is correlation between programs chosen and the level of anger or aggression. "boys or girls who choose tv programs presented fights and heavy crimes are more furious than the others." It is also reported that they usually attack the others more.

Singer also reported that almost a half group of girls with a high fury think to commit suicide. Meanwhile, boys in the same type fears that there is someone who will murder them.

Besides, Aletha Huston, Ph.D. from university of Kansas said,"children who watch violence on tv are sensitive and beat their friends more often, do not obey the rules, neglect their assignments, and more impatient than those who do not watch violence on tv." This Aletha statement is accountable, because this invention is based on Aletha hutson's investigation on elementary school students in his country.

4. Violence Television Programs in Indonesia

Several cases as the effects of violence tv programs on the change of children behavior have occurred in Indonesia. One of those

cases which is the most sensational is when a boy reza fadilah died after his friends had treated him as in Smack down on tv 9kompas, 22/11).

Television stations just think about what they get from the programs presented without thinking what will happen as the result of the programs. Violence practice now seems to be a strict tradition on Indonesian television.

Indonesian serial movies which present illogical story and violence acts are daily views which we can watch on the screen. Crime news shooting a bleeding dead body is a routine agenda and a profitable commodity which the news producers serve everyday. Unfortunately, there is no logical explanation of those illogical pictures which cannot easily be accepted by children. We can see how the face of Indonesian generation would be in the next 10 or 15 years from what children watch today.

Perhaps we still remember how a character shincan, who always behaves impolitely to his teacher at school. Thus the character shincan is not a good example for our children. Unfortunately, it precisely takes its position and is the favorite program for almost all children in this country. According to the survey by YKAI, there are many parents who do not realize the effects of watching television on the development of their children. Some of them even think it is not necessary to prohibit or to guide their children when they want to watch adult programs, such as WWF Int'l smackdown, WWF superstars, and pride fighting championship.

In Indonesia, all tv stations have animation movie program. Until now, no less than 30 American and Japan animation movies are presented during a week. Let us say, Kobo Chan, P-man, doraemon, Samurai X, Superman, Batman, Scooby & Scrappy Doo, Looney Tunes, Mojacko, Winnie the Pooh, Sailorstars, Sonic Underground,

cardcaptor sakura, Fiveman, and detective Conan. Those movies usually starts at 3 p.m.. on Sunday, the movies starts at 6.30 a.m. till 10.30 a.m. we should be aware of the huge spread of those films. Crayon shincan, for example, presents humors which tend to be sarcastic and quite vulgar. This film is actually presented for adults, which seems that it is okay if children also watch.

Realizing the effects of television programs, several groups of society in developed countries perform advocates against media. They call it media literacy. The coming of those social organizations is backgrounded by a wish to save children from uneducated television programs.

The concept of media literacy can also be adopted by non-governmental organizations in Indonesia. The main task of media literacy activities is to give a clear description to anyone about the existence of media, especially the improper television programs. Everyone can do media literacy, either individually or cooperatively with several groups. Those are people who will give explanation to every parties (especially children) and open their minds about television programs. These institutions regularly criticize the media (especially television), which present improper programs.

The attempts to explain television to children is not such an easy job, but as the more spreading appearance of media, such attempts are still carried out. At least we can start from the smallest thing, from our own environment, and do it now so that people are literate in media and children can choose the programs they may and should watch. The story of reza fadilah may be the last story we heard as the negative effects of television programs.

Why can television change people's attitude and behavior especially children? According to skomis, compared to other media (radio, newspaper, magazine, book, etc), television is the combination

of hearing media and visual (motion/live) which may include political interests, information, fun, education, or the combination of them.

The scene of riot in Ambon, for example, was well presented only on television, neither in newspapers nor magazines. The lament of hunger Ethiopian, the cheering applause in football games, the tumultuous campaign situation around Hotel Indonesia, are more living on television.

As a media of information, television is powerful to deliver messages because it provides a living experience with a wide scope (broadcast) at the same time. According to Kathleen Hall Jamieson, it is true that television dramatizes and makes sensation of the content of the message. Similarly, according to Indonesian communication expert Dr. Jalaludin Rakhmat (1991), the presentation of world on television is actually an edited world presentation. Rakhmat call this as irresponsible hands:

1. The first irresponsible hand is camera, motions, shots, angles, all of which give impression to every individual viewer.
2. The second hand is editing process. Two or more scenes can be combined to give an expected impression. Serial *Jin dan Jun* in RCTI, for example, the genie looks as if he could pass the wall, walk on the sky, run on the water, and be invisible. The scene of cutting someone's head, fighting on the sky and other unusual scenes are the products of editor through editing process.
3. The third hand is the scene we watch on the screen. It changes our paradigm about space and time. It also makes something far closer to the viewers. It is true that television can make interpersonal communication between the viewers and what is viewed. It creates happiness, sorrow, sympathy, even love without geographical restriction.

4. The fourth hand is the attitude of the presenters of television. They can underline the news, give another interpretation, or even underestimate it. They take a strategic position in delivering messages to public.

The great potential of television on societal changes leads pros and cons. The pro views television as a means of education and socialization of positive values among society. On the other hand, the con views television as a dangerous threat, which decreases moral and makes other destructive things.

In general, those controversies can be classified into two categories; first, television programs can damage the existed moral values. Second, television strengthens the existed moral values. Third, television creates new values in society including children.

5. To Find Solution for the Effects of Violence Television Programs

Complaints on some television programs in Indonesia have actually been made by several groups of society; parents, educators, and even children themselves. They feel the programs have turned away from children's world.

Several seminars and workshops are also often held by several groups to find solution for this problem. Yet, because of the emerge of such a recommendation as a response to people's worry about the effects of television programs, the managers of tv stations seem not to concern about the complaints.

If our children are presented television programs which do not correspond to their world every time, then we can imagine what kind of generation our country will have in the future. The reason the managers of tv stations have is often more in economic interest; that is, when a program makes children fond of – even though it is neither

ideal nor educative, yet it is profitable – then the complaints of the society are neglected.

One extreme action which we can take to cut the cycle of this violence virus is to turn the tv itself off. However, to turn it off while the children are enjoying a television program is not an easy way. Perhaps parents are judged as little dictator who act absolutely and unwise.

If to turn the tv off is not a wise act, then what we can do is to stay beside children when they watch television programs. The parents must be patient to always stay beside them even though it is children's programs.

Parents must clarify every illogical and unacceptable scene appeared on the screen, because it is possible that this illogical things presented both in pictures and in the theme of the story.

The position children have on television programs is that of low. This corresponds to children's characters, which are: first, children have difficulties to differ which program is good or bad, which one must be adopted or neglected. Second, children have no self-censorship and have no value limitation. Third, children who watch tv is passive and uncritical. Consequently, all programs presented on tv are considered normal. These characters are susceptible when television programs which is anti-social such as violence and pornography come to them. Moreover, the quality of television programs is generally not provided for children.

Therefore, now we must find solution how to save Indonesian children from the negative effects of violence on television.

The solutions offered in this paper are:

1. The related institutions in Indonesia, both governmental or non-governmental, such as Indonesian broadcast commission (KPI), Media Watch and the other NGOs are supposed not to be bored to

remind the managers of tv stations in order not to present the programs which will contaminate children. The managers are allowed to present educative programs.

2. Parents must prohibit their children to watch programs which do not correspond to their world.
3. To stay beside children when they are watching television, and then give explanation about which one is good and which one is bad to them.
4. Parents must choose and select which programs their children can watch
5. Turn the tv off at the time the children are studying at home. Make a schedule of watching television which is agreed together between parents and children. Parents must also do a good thing in front of their children by not watching television when their children are studying.

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Author Biography

Name : Drs. Dede Mulkan, M.Si
Place/date of birth : Kuningan, September 2, 1965
Position/type : Lecturer / IV-a
Religion : Moeslem
Home : Jl. Panyawangan V no. 4
Panghegar Permai Residence, Ujung Berung
Bandung 40627, Indonesia
Phone/fax: (022)7802921
Mobile : 081 723 999 80
Email : dekans@rad.net.id
Office : Fikom – Unpad Jatinangor
Jl Raya Jatinangor Km 21, Sumedang
Phone (022) 7796954
Fax : (022) 7794122

Education Background:

1. SD Purwasari 2, Garawangi, Kuningan, West Java, graduated in 1977
2. SMPN Garawangi, Garawangi, Kuningan, West Java, graduated in 1980
3. SMAN 2 Kuningan, Kuningan, West Java, graduated in 1983
4. Undergraduate Program of Journalism, Communication Faculty, Universitas Padjadjaran, graduated in 1988
5. Postgraduate Program of Communication Study, the Faculty of Social and Political Study Indonesian University (UI), graduated in 1996
6. Certified Television Journalist Training, Internews, The Faculty of Social and Political study Universitas Indonesia, 2003.

Working experiences:

1. Lecturer of Journalism study, the Faculty of Communication, UNPAD Bandung, since 1989 until now
2. Lecturer (extraordinary lecturer) of TV Dakwah and Film Dakwah in the Faculty of Dakwah, IAIN Sunan Gunung Djati, , since 1997 until now.
3. Lecturer (extraordinary lecturer) of TV program production, TV script writing, TV program management, in the faculty of social and political study ARS-International school, from 1999 to 2002.
4. Lecturer (extraordinary lecturer) business ethics and business communication, in the Faculty of Economics Universitas Kuningan (UNIKU), since 1999 until now.

Academic Position:

1. Dean co-assistant of academic field, Faculty of Communication UNPAD, from 1996 to 1997
2. The head of television laboratory (mini studio Fikom TV) Faculty of Communication UNPAD, from 1997 to 2004
3. Chief Assistant of student affairs (PK3) on diploma degree applied communication expert study (PAKT), Faculty of Communication UNPAD from 2003 to now

Research and Training Experiences:

1. The correlation between current issues' attacks in daily newspaper Pikiran Rakyat and the stages of decision making of DPRD Kodya Bandung members, a thesis research, FIKOM Unpad, Bandung, 1998.
2. Youth Aspiration to the concept of development, a research, Bappenas, Jakarta, 1992
3. The effectiveness of KIE-KB communication in Aceh Province, a research, central BKKBN – LPPKM Jakarta, 1994.
4. The effectiveness of KIE-KB communication in South Sulawesi Province, a research, BKKBN – LPPKM Jakarta, 1995

5. The Increase of Human resources in the countryside of West Java Province, a research, Depdagri – Tridakerta, Jakarta, 1994.
6. The Increase of human resources of the villagers in Indonesia, a Training Module, Depdagri – Ttridakerta, 1995.
7. The increase of human resources of the villagers in several provinces of Java, Sumatera, Sulawesi, Kalimantan, a training for sub-regency staffs (Kecamatan), Depdagri – Tridakerta, 1995 to 1996
8. The network of KIE communication in Aceh Province, a thesis research, PPS – FISIP-UI, Jakarta, 1996.
9. Quality Assurance of KBK in education field in Bandung, a reseach, Depdiknas, Jakarta, 1997.
10. The Effectiveness of KIE-KB applied communication through the network of local mass media in Ujung Pandang, South Sulawesi, a research, central BKKBN – LPPKM, 1998.

Other Activities:

1. **Writing** about communication and television in daily newspaper Pikiran Rakyat, Kompas, and other media in Jakarta
2. **Speaker** of several communication trainings, especially journalistic and television
3. **Teaching** about television in several subjects, i.e.: the language of television journalistic, television news production, television feature production, television interview production, television journalism production and television program production management, on D3 and S1 degree and extension in the faculty of communication, UNPAD.