

Psychological Effects of Viewing News Channels Among Adult Population of Karachi, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Background: News viewing is directly linked to a person's cognitive behavior and hence deeply affects psychological status of the viewer. Live events and deteriorating images affects different aspects of a person's cognition. Stress is one of them which was measured in this study using a Psychological Stress Scale (PSS).

Objective: To assess the psychological effects of viewing news channels among adult population of Karachi, Pakistan.

Methods: This Cross Sectional study was carried out for a 2 month duration targeting the adult population of Karachi. Total 400 participants were selected through the convenience sampling technique. A pretested and self administered questionnaire was used to collect data. PSS (Psychological Stress Scale) was used to measure stress among study participants. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 20.

Results: Of total n=400 participants, 273 (68.3%) used TV as the source of getting news and at the time of watching TV 166 (41.5%) preferred to watch news channels. 115 (28.8%) individuals had lasting effect after watching news of violence and 173 (43.3%) participants were stressed after watching news. Using PSS, 288 (72%) individuals had moderate stress score, 78 (19.8%) had low and 34(8.3%) had high stress score.

Conclusion: It was concluded from the research that news is adversely affecting the psychological health

KEY WORDS: *Psychological Effects, News Channel, Psychological Stress Scale (PSS).*

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INTRODUCTION

Today the world is known as a global village¹ where information is easily accessible by all. Media plays a vital role in providing information, education and entertainment to the masses. Media updates people about the current situations through their news channels which are providing the most up-to-date news within no time with live evidences and substantiation². It will not be inappropriate to state that television news casting is the most important news medium available at each house for a quick snapshot of world and society.

Today media's role has become extremely crucial with so many disasters and catastrophes affecting world adversely including terrorists' attacks, natural adversity, fire outbreaks, political clashes and many more. Considering the fact that they have an immense power to influence the masses, media faces aggressive competition to become more popular and economical. Disrespect for the sentiments and ethics of the people's, biasness towards certain political parties, live coverage of violent scenes, exaggeration of events and repeated breaking news have become a norm to follow for every news channel³.

News channels profits more by serving sensational news of boisterous and unethical behavior of people as such incidents attract more interest of people than news of constructive work. According to a study done, 60% of television news content could be considered as bad news in contrast to only 22% as good news⁴.

Certain news depicts negativity and pessimism to severe extents. Such measures of news channels can be proven to be extremely unhealthy for the society. Not only do they spread hopelessness in populace, it also instills fear and stress in people of all ages⁵. Psyche of people is immensely affected by the consistent profusion of doom and gloom events. The negativity of news is creating violence and instilling negative psychological effects⁶.

As a proven fact, human psychology gets disturbed with atypical acts, happenings and sayings. Even for a person who is not at all involved in the event being viewed, watching violent or stressful coverage on television has negative psychological effects. Unambiguous

evidence has revealed that aggressive and sadistic behavior is likely to increase due to media exposure and would result in both immediate and long term effects⁷. Experimental evidence suggests that temporary changes in mood or affect can be provoked by television viewing^{8,9} and that illustrative images can bring out alike emotional and physiological effects as real experience to certain extent¹⁰.

A study done on National Television Violence reports that viewing aggression and hostility on television can cause learning of aggressive behaviors, desensitization to violence and fear of being persecuted by violence. A study by University of Haifa has suggested that watching TV coverage of terrorist proceedings can lead to deterioration of psychological resources, such as commitment and a sense of success¹¹.

The negative psychological effects tend to inculcate long term effects in children¹² and youth and instill escalated depression in old age people. Negative news attracts people more than positive news. Those thoughts tend to linger in one's mind resulting in thinking about it for a long time even after watching news. Daily routine is adversely affected where people start visualizing the things and circumstances in negative way. All other areas of life are affected due to the stress generated in the above fashion. The images seen on TV linger in head and causes tremendous psychological affects other than stress.

However, no such study has been carried out in Pakistan. Unstable supporting situations today causing frequent terrorist attacks and clashes among political groups are already causing increased death toll. The stress causing factors should be examined to aware media about their social and moral responsibility and people about the negative effects of it on health. How do people react to it and what are the immediate and long-term effects of such exposure are questions which need to be tackled intelligently and the study aims to do the same. This study therefore aims to research about the psychological effects among adult population of a metropolitan city of Pakistan due to extensive news exposure.

METHODOLOGY

This cross sectional study was carried out from September to December 2012 amongst adult population of Karachi. Data was collected from universities, offices and public places of Karachi and non probability convenience sampling technique was used to collect data.

Sample size was calculated by WHO sample size estimation calculator. For sample size calculation anticipated proportion was taken as 50%, at 95% confidence level and keeping 0.05 margin of error. The minimum number of participants required for inclusion in the sample was calculated as 385 but total 400 individuals were included in the study.

Adult population, working in different disciplines and who had Television at home or work place were surveyed and asked to fill the questionnaire. Those who did not have television at their homes or work place and those who were not given consent will be excluded. Entire information from data was handled confidentially, and subjects were fully informed about the study objectives.

A structured, pretested and self administrative survey questionnaire was used as the main data gathering instrument for this study. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. First part of questionnaire contained socio-demographic characteristics of respondents such as, gender, education and occupation. Dependent variable was (PSS) perceived stress scale which is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring perception of stress. It consists of 10 items which are designed to assess how much respondents find their lives to be unpredictable, uncontrollable and overloaded. The scale investigates about the feelings and thoughts of respondents during last month and also includes a number of direct queries about current levels of experienced stress.

PSS scores are obtained by reversing responses (e.g.; 0=4, 1=3, 2=2, 3=1, & 4=0) to the four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, 8) and then summing across all scale items.

Last part of the questionnaire contained 15 items which were structured to get daily news watching habits. After gathering the entire completed questionnaire from the respondents,

total responses for each item was obtained and analysis was done by using SPSS (Statistical package for social science). Frequency distribution and cross tabulation was be used to show relation between two variables.

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often

RESULTS

Socio Demographic Profile

Out of 400 respondents, 240 (60%) were males and 160 (40%) were females, majority of the participants were from age group of 26-35 years i.e. 186 (46.5%), 170(42.5%) were from 18-25 years of age, 32(8%) were from 36-45 years and 12(3%) participants from 46-55 years. Of the total participants 259(64.8%) were unmarried whereas 137 (34.3%) were married and only 4 (1%) participants showed their marital status as either divorced, widow or in parity. Most of the participants from sample were educated to graduate level i.e. 191 (47.8%), 39 (9.8%) had post graduate degree, 39 (9.8%) participants were Intermediate and 6 (1.5%) were Matriculate.

Participants belonged to varied occupations with majority with 111 (27.8 %) generalized as Private Employee and second majority belonging to the industry of healthcare 51 (12.8%) and they included nurses, doctors, pharmacists and health managers. Other occupations included were bankers, engineers, educationalists, entrepreneurs, IT Professionals and researchers.

News Watching Habits of Participants

Respondents were asked to answer questions regarding their news watching habits in context with the leisure time spent on watching news, types of news they are interested in, sources from which they get local news and affects of news watching on their health and other areas of life.

Out of all participants, majority of them 253 (63.3%) got 0-3 hours of leisure time in a day, 127 (31.8%) participants got 3-6 hours leisure time however only 20 (5.1%) participants in total

got a leisure time of more than 6 hours. When asked about the type of activity they did in their leisure time, majority i.e. 164 (41%) replied they watch TV in their free time. However 141(35.3%) participants responded that they surf internet, 16(4%) participants said they play games (indoor or outdoor) and 2 (0.5%) participants prefer reading in their free time. Majority i.e. 373 (93.3%) of the people responded that they watch Television for at least 0-3 hours in a day, 25 (6.3%) participants watch television for 3-6 hours and 2 (0.5%) watch television for 7 – 10 hours per day.

During the survey details regarding television news watching habits were asked from the participants. From the total sample about 242 (60.5%) watch entertainment channels and news channels were watched by 101 (25.3%) participants. On the other hand, channels preferred by rest of the family members were entertainment and news by 194 (48.2%) and 166 (41.5%) respectively. Important source of getting news by respondents was Television by 273 (68.3%) respondents. Around 179 (44.8%) individuals watched news at a specific time every day and night was the time when 345 (86.5%) preferred to watch news. Breaking news was the topic of interest selected by 213 (53.3%). (Table I)

Majority of the participants i.e. 166 (41.4%) were of an opinion that the effects of watching news of violence was of brief period and they soon recovered from the trauma, however among 115 (28.8%) the effects were lasting and linger on for a long time in their minds. When asked about their feeling after watching television news, 173 (43.3%) of the participants replied that they feel stressed, 116 (29%) feel aware and 105 (26.3%) feel updated with current situations. Of all, 78 (26%) participants responded they engage themselves in some other work after watching stressful news to buffer its effects however 155 (51.7%) people preferred watching some other channel. It was also asked to the participants if they have ever forbidden their child to watch news or political talk shows, 83 (20.8%) participants responded many times and 75 (18.8%) participants forbid their child sometimes. (Table I)

Scoring on PSS (Perceived Stress Scale)

Participants were asked to fill the standard PSS based questions which were included in the last

part of questionnaire. PSS scores were obtained by reversing responses (e.g.; 0=4, 1=3, 2=2, 3=1, & 4=0) to the four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, 8) and then summing across all scale items. The aim was to assess the individual PSS score in order to find its relation with the news watching habits.

Average mean score obtained was 18.2 ± 5.7 . Minimum stress score of participants was 0 and maximum was 40. On the basis of average PSS Score two groups (above average and below average) were formed among the study participants. Stress score of 200 (50%) participants was fall below average stress score however other 200 (50%) participant had more than average stress score. Also the obtained scores were divided in to three groups of ranges low stress: Score 0-1, Moderate Stress: 13-26 and High Perceived Stress: 27-40.¹⁵ (Fig I)

Association of PSS score groups with age, effects of watching breaking news and feeling after watching TV news was performed. Significant association was found between PSS based score groups and feeling after watching TV news. (table II)

In this research we were basically asking about stress due to watching TV news but other than that various factors that may be the reason for stress were also asked. In response to the question asked what might be the reason for them to be stressed in last month, majority of the participants 111 (37%) responded that they had personal reasons. However second majority 82 (27.3%) participants said country situations to be their reason for stress. Thirty five (11.7%) said they had financial issues, 32 (10.7%) people were undergoing family problems, 28 (9.3%) people were stressed with world politics and 6 (2%) were under work pressure.

This question was added in questionnaire to limit the bias of accounting stress score to only news watching habits. As participants being individuals and part of a culturally diverse society playing multiple roles of a family member, employee, friend, citizen and etc can have various reasons to be stressful. This question is an effort to know what exactly is accountable for their stress score. Fig II showed the association of PSS score groups with other factors of stress and results were not significant with p -value 0.485.

DISCUSSION

Results of this study supported our hypotheses and corroborate the findings of other studies that stress level increases with the exposure to news in general public of Karachi. Most of respondents watch television in their leisure time rather than any other activity. Second majority of the people watch news channels even more than entertainment channels resulting in constant exposure to the news. Almost every single person watches news at least once in a day regardless of the age group or profession they belong. Night time is the most preferred time of watching news which also accounts for increased stress level due to the lack of less or no distracting activities to buffer the effects of violence news. Breaking news is the most preferred part of news showing also the highest level of stress scores. This indicates that breaking news plays a major part in increasing the stress level of masses more than any other segment of news; a similar finding was reported by William Joe Watson while studying about cognitive effects of breaking news.¹³ Results also showed that masses are no more interested in science or technology news posing a serious concern to country's future achievements.

Study shows moderate stress score almost in every age group which was expected as we are moving in a fast paced world where studies, work, home all have high expectations. In addition to all this, stress score could be a result of insecurity of life and money in country with riots and attacks being a norm on regular basis (Dawn, September 23, 2012). Constant exposure to news showcasing all these pressures and violence makes the participant feel part of the incident even if they are not directly related to it.¹⁰ Similar to Casill, Homels and Smith results such causes and affects increase a person's stress score² and results in affecting other areas of life.¹⁴ Parents some time or rarely forbid their kids to watch news of violence, which is a major concern as studies have shown that those who are exposed to violence at early age are violent to their kids and spouses when grow up and engage in aggressive interactions with strangers, friends or classmates.¹⁶

In future observational studies should be conducted to explore the duration of the negative residual effects of the newscasts because this study was limited to a survey only.

Alternative control or coping mechanisms (or both) should be also explored because the emotional influence of the distracting activities taken by respondents could only be assumed to be neutral. In fact a much wider segment of the population, as opposed to an urban sample, needs to be studied and a cross cultural research for the same shall be conducted. Studies in this area are important because this research clearly suggests that unless specific or directed coping is introduced, the negative effects of television newscast may not be limited to the immediate post-watching period, but they could expand into the subsequent periods and daily activities of the individuals.

On the other hand, news media should work hard to install zeal and enthusiasm among people. Media should realize their responsibility in providing a basis for good culture, free of cost health programs, free education and awareness to people. It should practice censorship while showing scenes consisting of violence and a code of conduct strictly with the participants of political talk shows while avoiding sensationalizing news. Repeated telecasting of news of violence should be avoided as it creates hype and panic among people and is resulting in insensitivity among people. Achievements made by the nation or citizens shall be highlighted and culture shall be promoted to present our nation as a reputed one amongst international audiences and to develop positive energy and optimistic mind set. News coverage of anything bad or demoralizing should be broadcast in a way that could buffer its impact. Training in teaching sessions is important in schools, colleges and universities to watch media in an objective way with a critical eye to analyze news on the basis of its content, source and reliability. Media itself should be used to design programs for stress management techniques that could help develop an ability to cope with negative events coverage.

Breaking news segment should not be used to make profitability however it should be used in times of need and urgency. The panic created by breaking news should be made placid and trauma creating activities should be restricted.

Media channels should have a health manager or psychologist ensuring the content and its execution to be safe for public health. Health standards should be made part of the policy whereas training sessions for media personnel

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in public psychology should be arranged. Government should bring laws to restrict news media to sensationalize news and show obscene scenes of violence.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the study that increase exposure to news channels increases stress

score of a person and different news watching habits have severe implications to a person's psychological health. Their psychological health is adversely affecting and so urgent majors should be directed in this regard to counteract it. Not only that high stress score would affect an individual badly it creates a great influence on lives of people living with them hence badly affecting the society's peace in general.

Table 1: Television News Watching Habits of Participants

	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Preferred channels watched by respondents	242	60.5
Entertainment	101	25.3
News	17	4.3
Informative	9	2.3
Cooking	4	1
Sports		
Preferred channels watched by family members	194	48.2
Entertainment	166	41.5
News	6	1.5
Informative	15	3.8
Cooking	3	0.8
Sports		
Sources of getting News	273	68.3
Television	73	18.3
Internet	41	10.3
Newspaper	10	2.5
Radio		
Frequency of watching news on Television	179	44.8
Once in a day at some specific time	122	30.5
At the time of breaking news only	52	13
Every hour in a day	47	11.8
Don't watch news		
Preferred time of a day for watching news	345	86.5
Night	32	8
Afternoon	23	5.8
Morning		
Topic of interest in news		
Breaking news	213	53.3
Political news	63	15.8
Sports news	51	12.8
Life style and Health news	28	7
Science & Technology news	28	7
Business news	11	2.8
Effects of watching breaking news of violence	166	41.5
Brief	115	28.8
Lasting	66	16.5
No effect	53	13.3
Don't know		
Respondents feelings after watching television news		
Stressed	173	43.3
Aware	116	29
Updated	105	26.3
Preferred activity to buffer effects of watching stressful news		

	Watch other channels		51.7
	Engage in other work	155	26
	Nothing	78	14.7
	Switch off TV	44	7.7
		23	
Forbidding their children to watch television news	Not applicable	176	44
	Many times	83	20.8
	Sometimes	75	18.8
	Rarely	39	9.8
	Never	27	6.

Table 2: Association of PSS Score Groups with Different Variables

		PSS Score Groups			P-Value
		0-13	14-26	27-40	
Age	18-25 years	30 (7.5%)	130 (32.5%)	10 (2.5%)	0.064
	26-35 years	37 (9.3%)	128 (32%)	21 (5.3%)	
	36-45 years	6 (1.5%)	24 (6%)	2 (0.5%)	
	46-55 years	6 (1.5%)	6 (1.5%)	0	
Effects of watching breaking news	Brief	30 (7.5%)	119 (29.8%)	17 (4.3%)	0.09
	Lasting	16 (4%)	88 (22%)	11 (2.6%)	
	No effect	17 (4.3%)	45 (11.3%)	4 (1%)	
	Don't Know	16 (4%)	36	1(0.25%)	
Feeling after watching TV news	Stressed	39 (9.8%)	120 (30%)	14 (3.5%)	0.018
	Updated	20 (5%)	80 (20%)	5 (1.3%)	
	Aware	16 (4%)	86 (21.5%)	14 (3.5%)	

Figure 1: Grouping of Study Participants on the Basis of PSS Scores

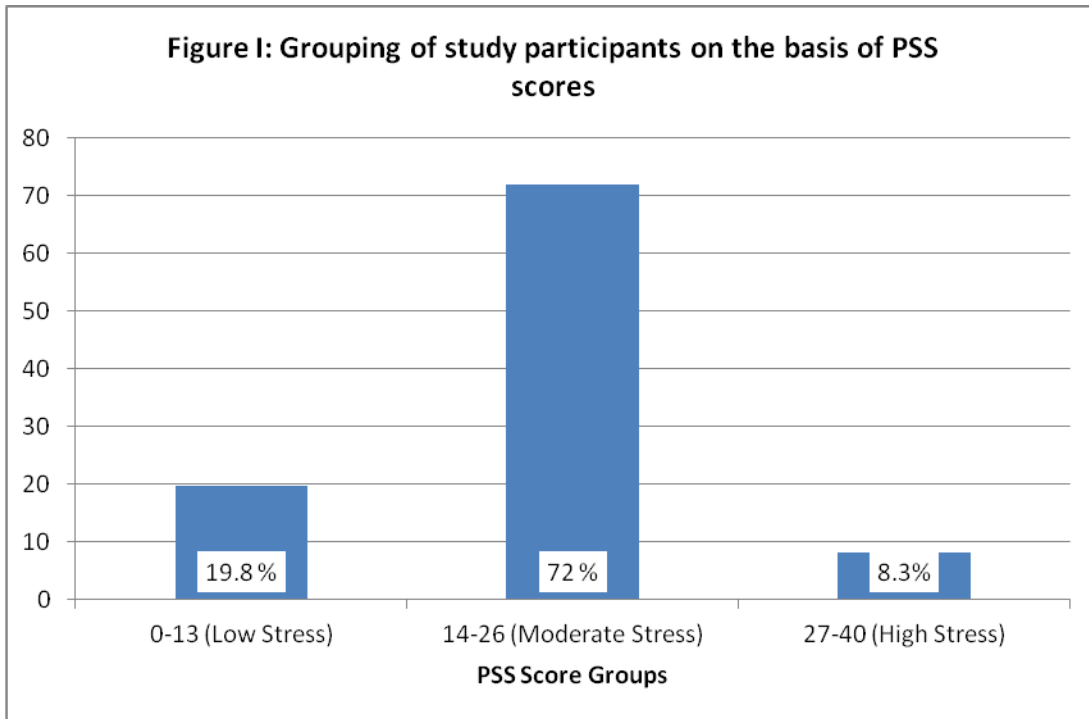
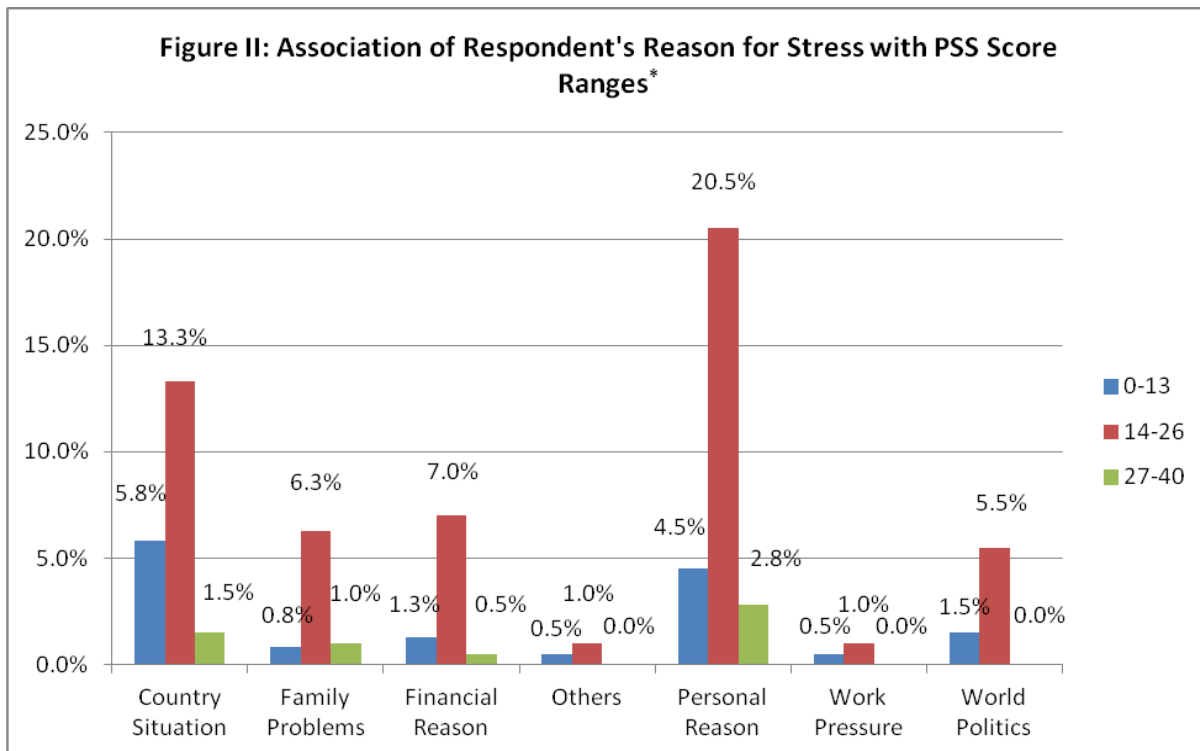


Figure 2: Association of Respondents Reason for Stress with PSS Score Ranges



* p- value 0.486

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