

## INFLUENCE OF WATCHING TELEVISION ON CHILDREN'S SOCIALIZATION: THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY

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### **Abstract**

*Certain significant factors influence the growth and development of children's personality and their process of socialization within the family systems in a variety of ways among which is television. The purpose of this article is to examine the influence of watching television on children's socialization and the role of the family. Specifically, the paper has explained the meaning of socialization, television, children's socialization process and the various agents that are responsible for their socialization. These are the family condition, school climate, mass media, peer group, and religious institutions. The paper has also discussed the influence of watching television on children which include development of cognitive and verbal skills, formation of aggression and violent acts, sexual drive and abuses as well as emotional and physical development. The psychological perspectives of both positive and negative effects of watching television on children's development were analyzed. Finally, the paper has discussed the roles of family in modifying the negative effects of watching television on children. These include involvement of parents and other members of the family in watching television together with children, setting limit for time, channel and programmes of television for children, avoidance of using television as a baby-sitter, encouraging children to develop interest in other activities like reading and sports, monitoring the contents of television news and programmes, among many others. The paper recommended that laws and legislation should be put in place by Government through the supervising agencies to regulate television activities and portrayals.*

**Keywords:** Television, Socialization, Children and Family

### **Introduction**

The individual child is a product of both biological and social aspects. Man, as a biological element, is composed of inherited traits (genes) transmitted from his parents and ancestors. The individual person becomes a

social being through his/her interactions with others and the wider environment. Covertly or overtly, however, for the child to become socially developed, he/she must learn the skills, knowledge, culture, and other desirable behavioural traits of the society in which he/she lives. This, by and large, is done through the socialization process. Socialization therefore, is the process by which the individual person is adapted to his social environment, and becomes a recognized, cooperating, and efficient member of it (Lila, 2014 & Ramalingam, 2006). According to Parke and Hetherington (1999), socialization is the process by which parents and other significant others ensure that a child's standards of behaviour, attitudes, skills, and motives conform closely to those deemed appropriate to his or her role in the society. Concisely, socialization is viewed as the process by which children acquire the beliefs, values, attitudes, skills as well as other behaviours that are considered appropriate in their culture and the society (Levine & Ornstein, 2006). In this context, socialization process refers to the series of trainings by which an individual is made a member of a particular society. Certain underlying imperatives and influences play a significant part in acculturating and socializing children in many ways. Thus, various social institutions such as the family, school, culture, peers, religious institutions, and of course, the television and other mass media emerged as socializing agents of the individual person (Cingel & Krcmar, 2017 & Lila, 2014).

Television, in this premise, may be defined as an instructional media, and a type of audio-visual material that produces motion pictures with sound simultaneously. It is a set of electronic machine used as a system of communication (receiving and dissemination of information), usually in a form of a programme, news cast and advertisement (Davey, 2005). Technologically, television represents a piece of electrical equipment with a screen on which you can watch programmes with moving pictures and sounds (Huber, Yeates, Meyer, & Fleckhammer, 2018, Lila, 2014 & Hornby, 2000). Television is an apparatus used to transmit a view of events, plays, opinions, ideas and beliefs from films or tapes with synchronized sounds that exert influence on the socialization process (Lissak, 2018). Television therefore, is an important form of mass media that has a pervasive influence on children and their socialization from a very early age across the developmental stages. Children viewing of television from early years have been bombarded with materials of often questionable values and sometimes dangerous consequences (Lila, 2014 & Nair & Thomas, 2012). Educational and informational programmes on television have had useful impact on children's audiences and other dimensions of socialization. Nevertheless, there has been a fear that television may displace and turn children into television addicts rather than

intelligent, inquiring and social adults (Lissak, 2018&Health Groups, 2000). On the basis of this background, this paper explored the influences of watching television on children's socialization and the role of the family as a psychodynamic system in the wellbeing of the developing child.

### **Children's Socialization Process**

Children's socialization process begins shortly after birth. When a new baby is born, it experiences a diametric change from the prenatal world into the external world; where the infant experiences changes in sensations, movements, voices, touches and faces. This early childhood experience is the period of the most intense and crucial socialization patterns (Raygor, 2005 & Travers 1982). This, according to the psychoanalytic perspectives, is called the formative years and is designated as the period of primary socialization which has a longstanding impact on the lives of children. As the child grows and develops older, he learns and acquires things through experiences (views of Stimulus - Response Theories) and use cognitive structures and processes as emphasized by Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Santrock, 2007 & Raygor, 2005). In teaching children social roles and rules however, parents and other significant others use principles of reinforcement (reward and punishment) and modeling techniques. Parents therefore, modify their social environment to facilitate good modeling and acceptable standards of behaviour for their children by choosing good neighbourhoods and homes, good school climate and peers and use of television to enhance children's sociability, positive personality type, adaptive behaviour and academic excellence.

### **Agents of Socialization**

Five agents of socialization are commonly recognized as various institutions that help to transmit culture to children and youths (Santrock, 2007 & Raygor, 2005). These are briefly discussed below:

- **The Family:** The family although its organization varies, is the most basic and major early socializing agent in every society (Santrock, 2007 & Levine & Ornstein, 2006). It is the micro system, and the medium for transmitting culture to children. One of the primary functions of family however, is the care and rearing of children. The family members teach a child what matters in life through stories, family rituals, reinforcement (reward and punishment) and modeling behaviour. In this case, the type of family structure or types under which a child is brought up and the level of its responsiveness and control patterns affect children's socialization. For example, a family

type that is warm, supportive and uses punishment on children carefully would give rise to children who are independent, assertive and responsive (Lila, 2014 & Parke & Hetherington, 1999).

- **The School:** The school is a structured and an organized agency responsible for socializing children in particular skills, knowledge and values of the society. It is a mesosystem and heterogeneous institution that socializes young people in the area of cultural transmission and aspect of occupational development through a body of knowledge. The routines of school such as athletic events, creative arts, lessons, clubs and organizations, graduation ceremonies, among many others collectively convey the school culture and socialize pupils/students in a number of ways (Levine & Ornstein, 2006 & Travers, 1982).
- **The Peer Group:** A peer group is made up of people of about the same age, having similar interests and social positions within which one has reasonably close association and contact (Lissak, 2018, Alberto & Ferrara, 2009 & Parke & Hetherington, 1999). As a sub-social system, a peer group has its own sub-culture, values, thoughts, dressing code, rules of behaviour and even its peculiar vocabulary and language usage; which are followed by the members. According to Levine and Ornstein (2006), peer group interactions exert powerful socializing effects from play group to teenage clique, where they teach young people many significant learning experiences and various forms of behaviour. Peer group teaches its members how to interact with one another, how to be accepted by others, how to achieve status in a circle of friends, and dictate to its members behavioural patterns both in and out of home or school system.
- **The Mass Media:** Mass media or sometimes called the media organization, refers to the instruments used to disseminate information or knowledge to the society (Kelly, 2004). Examples of mass media include: the radio, television, internet services, newspapers, films, periodicals, magazines, journals, books and many others. The greatest roles of these agents include political socialization, transmission of socio-cultural values, and advancement of economic and academic growth. It is worthy to remark that socialization process through the mass media is highly selective; because the individual selects the behaviour and knowledge that he/she wants and leaves the rest. Thus, information obtained from the mass media influences peoples' beliefs, ways of thinking, language styles and overall behaviour (Zafar, 2018).
- **The Religious Institutions:** Religious rites and rituals play a vital role in the socialization process. Moral instructions given in mosques and

churches, as well as the fundamental rules and regulations enshrined in the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Bible all have remarkable impact on the child's attitudes, beliefs and different styles of life.

### **Television and Children's Socialization Process**

There is no doubt that viewing television has a pervasive influence on children's socialization process. Television has represented one of the most powerful forms of mass communication, and it has increasingly exerted impact on the personal and social development of children from early infancy stage across childhood to adolescent period and adulthood. Children's Television watching patterns are affected not only by the programme content but by the "formal features" of the television, such as animation, high actions and loud musical, visual and auditory portrayals (Kelly, 2004 & Nevid, 2004). Research findings have revealed that the pattern of Television viewing has similar outcomes across Europe, Canada, Australia, America and even Africa (Lissak, 2018; Lila, 2014, Mares, 2013; Nair & Thomas, 2012; Kelly, 2004; Nevid, 2004 & Parke & Hetherington, 1999). According to Raygor (2006), the rate of violent crimes in the United States of America and Canada rose dramatically along with the spread of American television. Researchers (such as Wright, Peters & Huston 1990; & Wright, Huston, Reitz & Plemyat, 1994) estimated that children in the United States see over 30,000 murders or at least attempted murders on television before reaching their mid-teens. Lila (2014) posited that television viewed by children in Albania without selection of programmes and channels has created opportunity for children to see violent scenes, crimes, frauds, theft, and moral degradation which increase their chances for aggressive and anti-social behaviour. Levine and Ornstein (2006) maintained that some scientists refer to television as the "first curriculum" because it appears to affect the way children develop learning skills and orient themselves toward acquiring knowledge and understanding. Also, Davey (2005) found that some television programmes help young children to learn, but also posited it negative effects to include violent acts, sexual abuse and emotional outburst. Thus, television unequivocally has positive and negative influences on children's socialization.

Against this backdrop, the challenging questions within the psychological views are: What are the major influences (positive or negative) of TV viewing on children's behaviour? What kinds of programmes should children watch? How long should children be allowed to watch television? And what can family or parents do to modify the effects of television on their children? The answers to these questions are relatively simple. This is because television viewing can neither be all positive nor all negative. It is based on

the foregoing, the researcher present the following impacts of watching television on children's socialization (Lissak, 2018; Cingel & Krcmar, 2017; Lila, 2014, Nair & Thomas, 2012; Raygor, 2005; Davey, 2005; Kelly, 2004; Nevid, 2004 & Parke & Hetherington, 1999).

### **Impact of Television on Cognitive Development**

Watching television brings various cognitive skills, abilities and experience to children. Several important intellectual shifts take place as a result of viewing television. For example, programmes such as AM Express on Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) produce clear illustration of television's educational potentials. Preschool children often focus on the most striking perceptual features of a Television programme, and are likely to link scenes together to draw causal conclusion about realities (Santrock, 2005). Thus, educational programming for young children can promote creativity and imagination, and interactive TV can hold promise for motivating children to learn and become more exploratory in reading skills, communication and problem solving (Cingel & Krcmar, 2017&Singer, 1993).

### **Impact of Television on Children's Aggression**

The amount of violence and aggression viewed on television is significantly predictive of children's violence and formation of aggressive behaviour (Raygor, 2005). According to Bandura (1986), children learn by observation and imitation. Research findings by Bandura and his colleagues has shown that children will display aggressive and violent behaviour after exposure to aggressive models. For example, children are likely to imitate fire of guns as a result of watching frequently Television series that show firing of guns. Hence, a television permeated with violent content has a high degree of relationship with aggressive behaviour of children. Moreso, television violence may kindle or prime aggressive thoughts, provide aggressive scripts, and lessen inhibitions against violence (Lila, 2018; Nair & Thomas, 2012 & Nevid, 2004). Similarly, when children are regularly exposed to TV violence, they often believe that violence is an effective way to resolve conflicts, thereby leading to a kind of emotional numbing or what social psychologists call habituation effects (Cingel & Krcmar, 2017 & Davey, 2005).

### **Impact of Television on Development of Sexual Drive**

Although media programmes may teach sex education, television contents increasingly emphasizing sexual themes often produce sexual drive (Kelly, 2004). Frequent talk about sex on television and exposure to sexually explicit materials has attendant influence on children's socialization process.

In a related view, display of hard-core pornographic films or themes also produce effects on viewers' attitudes, values and perceptions of sexuality (Huber, Yeates, Meyer, & Fleckhammer, 2018 & Kellers, 2002). Aspects like sexual images, nudity, sexual scenes, and use of sexual language on TV are equated to create sexual fantasies and masturbation leading to direct sexual abuse in adulthood (Kelly, 2004 & Kellers, 2002).

### **Impact of Television on Formation of Attitudes and Emotions**

Watching television produces emotional reactions as defined by the viewers and subsequently leads to changes in children's attitudes toward other people. Depicted stimuli (such as vandalization and destruction of properties, mass killing of people, e.t.c.) that individuals considered bizarre or socially deviant are likely to produce a negatively emotional response (Santrock, 2005). Also, theories of attitude change postulate two paths through which human beings process persuasive communication. These are central processing route, which involves careful, thoughtful, and systematic processing of the information and the peripheral processing route, which is automatic and involves a minimum of cognitive effort. Theoretically, therefore, for real attitudinal change to occur, materials must be processed thoroughly through the central route. Against this background, television viewing by children is done solely for its arousal value, and psychologists believe that this can distract children from processing information thoroughly leading to mis-education and permissive attitudes (Lissak, 2018; Santrock, 2005 & Kelly, 2004).

### **Impact of Television on Children's Physical Development**

According to Nevid (2004), there is a strong link between high Television viewing and children's physical development. In his view, high rate of Television watching could foster childhood obesity and poor dietary habits in children. Children who watch TV spend more time in front of it and this may limit their opportunities to burn off excess calories through physical activity. Moreover, children who are glued to the TV are likely to add unneeded calories by munching on junk food like snacks (Leeuw & Buijzen, 2016 & Miller, 1999).

### **Positive Effects of Television on Children's Socialization**

Findings from the studies of Lillard and Boguszewski (2015), Nathanson, Alade, Sharp, Rasmussen and Christy (2014), Nevid (2004), Kelly (2004), Raygor (2006), Levine and Ornstein (2006), and Bandura (1986)

revealed the following psychological scenery of watching television on children socialization to include both positive and negative consequences.

1. Television programmes enrich students' background knowledge and contribute to pre-academic skills, talents and proficiency. In other words, television stimulates academic performance in school children by advancing their cognitive level through deductive thinking, problem solving and abstraction (Levine & Ornstein, 2006).
2. Television increases children's proficiency in language development, creativity and verbal skills (Lillard & Boguszewski, 2015).
3. Television provides spirit of cooperation, nurturing and models of pro-social behaviour among children (Mares, 2013).
4. Television stimulates and reflects fundamental social interchanges in attitude and positive values that prevail in the society.
5. Watching television creates impact on recreational and play activities among children.
6. Television provides useful information to children about the world beyond their immediate environment, thus arousing their interest in a wide range of topics in school learning.
7. Television assists teachers in programme instructions by making learning palatable, easy and fun among children (Leeuw & Buijzen, 2016).
8. Television provides a catharsis for feelings of hostility and anger. Children who watch television dramas can work out potentially violent impulses that ought to otherwise be directed at parents, teachers or other peers.
9. Television provides a good socializing experience. Television programmes on pro-social behaviour such as empathy, altruism and other good virtues are associated with positive personality development in children and adults (Raygor, 2006).
10. Television complements parenting behaviour in a form of substitute especially in single-parents' homes and where parents are workers.
11. Television is a useful contingency management for behaviour modification. That is, watching television could serve as a means of reward and punishment to correct problem behavior among children (Edith & Weller, 2011).
12. Television is useful to solve emotional problems such as phobias, fears, anxiety through desensitization and exposure techniques (training and exposing an individual to fearful situations).

### **Negative Effects of Television on Children's Socialization**

Huber, Yeates, Meyer, Fleckhammer, and Kaufman (2018), Lissak (2018), Lila (2014), Edith and Weller (2011) and Alberto and Ferrara (2009) have identified the following negative effects of television on children's socialization.

1. Television miseducates young children. Preschool children often focus on the most striking perceptual features of a TV but have difficulty in distinguishing reality from fantasy in the portrayals. Thus, information gained from television is a superficial collection of facts and not a useful background of knowledge (Alberto & Ferrara, 2009).
2. Television takes children away from homework, school activities and other important intellectual exercises. This makes them passive learners, lazy and creates body weakness. Hence, extensive television watching by children is associated with a reduced attention span.
3. Early children exposure to "fun" learning on television creates mental habits and raises false expectations among children within the school. This makes discipline and classroom control extremely difficult for the teachers and school managers (Nevid, 2004).
4. Television viewing ruins the smooth flow and patterns of childrearing system used by parents (Lila, 2014). Bandura (1986) also indicated that parallel situation which children are confronted with may affect the parenting behaviour by alienating children from the values of the family, school and the society at large. Consequently, children tend to copy what they see and hear from the television (learning by imitation and observation).
5. Television teaches children stereotypes, discrimination and unrealistic views of the world.
6. Television viewing is responsible for poor school performance. Children who watch television late into the night yawn their way through school the next day (Huber, Yeates, Meyer, Fleckhammer, & Kaufman, 2018 & Nevid, 2004). This causes truancy, lateness to school, absenteeism and many other indiscipline acts which in turn contribute to lower school grades and withdrawal syndrome.
7. Television viewing fosters violent or aggressive behaviour. TV permeated with violent content teaches violent models of aggression (Bandura, 1986 & Health Groups, 2000).
8. Television watching induces forced sex, and increases discrimination and violence against women. An explicit sexual image creates erotic stimuli in a form of fantasies about raping, homosexuality, lesbianism and heterosexuality (Zafar, 2018, Robert & Oster, 2009 & Kelly, 2004).

9. Television viewing and other media (such as movies, video, games, e.t.c.) deeply influence the acculturation and socialization process of children and youths; thereby making them desensitized and more prone to delinquent acts and criminality (Mores, 2013 & Raygor, 2006).

### **The Role of Family in Modifying Effects of Television on Children's Socialization**

The following are a number of strategies that parents, teachers and any other child care groups could use to encourage more responsible television watching among children.

1. Screening of violent or sexually proactive programmes. Television programmes that portray and demonstrate violent and sexual contents that are inappropriate for children should be weeded out by parents. Parents should also explain differences between violence in the media and real-world violence to give children clear understanding that TV shows tend to sensationalize and glamorize violent behaviour, and in real life, people resolve their problems in peaceful means.
2. Parents or other children care groups should reinforce contents of TV programmes by helping young children identify and discuss characters and events of the TV for their understanding and interpretations.
3. Parents should watch television with their kids. Sharing the viewing experience with children called co-viewing, can help them understand what they are watching. Also, co-viewing allows parents or other adults to help diffuse any fear or anxiety which children might experience, and to clearly disapprove any undesirable aspects of the TV shows for children to sort out their reactions.
4. Parents should avoid using television as a baby-sitter. Parents should avoid sitting children in a front of a TV screen as a means of substitute for stimulating their activities. This creates sensory problems, affectionate disorders and poor adaptation (Zafar, 2018 & Miller, 1999).
5. Parents and other child managers should set limits for children television viewing. Clear limits such as the number of hours to use, the right period to watch the TV, the kind of shows and programmes, and even the channels to watch should be established. It is also advisable for parents to turn off the TV or close eyes to regulate children and limit their chances of watching undesirable programmes. Using these techniques would enable parents to moderate the frequencies of watching TV, model appropriate behaviour and steer children away

from anti-social activities toward a more educational and pro-social activities.

6. Parents should teach children how to use the TV and encourage them to regulate their own television viewing behaviour. This can assist children to learn, identify and select only those TV activities that are appropriate for them, and could help them to distinguish between fiction and reality on TV portrayals.
7. Parents should monitor TV news for children. The content and direction of television news produce both positive and negative emotional reactions and perhaps mis-educating. The TV news also seems to follow the motto: "If it bleeds, it leads". Therefore, parents should control children's exposure to news programmes in order to avoid an unbalanced view of the society.
8. Taking snacks while watching television or having family meals in front of the TV should be avoided. This could create dietary and physical health problems such as overweight and unneeded calories (Lila, 2014, Nevid, 2004 & Miller (1999).
9. Children should be encouraged to develop interest in other activities like reading, sports, and play-dates with friends, and outdoor play besides watching television. These exercises would promote their physical health, sociability and talents as a result of practice and active participation in manipulating objects in the environment.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are offered to minimize effects of television on children's socialization:

1. There should be proper and regular monitoring and scrutiny of TV scenes and activities by the regulating agencies or authorities before transmission. Similarly, sanctions should be made on any erring TV station for corrective measures.
2. Government should provide legislation and enact laws that will guide the TV authorities.
3. Government should ban TV stations from portraying pornographic materials and violent programmes as well as hate speeches.
4. Punishment such as withdrawal of license and taxation should be melted on defaulters to serve as deterrent.

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that television and other media exert influence on the development and socialization of the child. The positive sides of watching TV

include development of cognitive skills, pro-social behaviour and reinforcement to academic performance as well as behaviour modification. The negative effects may include mis-education, development of anti-social behaviour and a source of wrong modeling. Hence, since watching TV is a family affair, families as well as government need to take responsibility for what children watch. Therefore, parents, teachers, social workers and all other relevant agents that are involved in management and welfare of children should work round the clock for better and realistic reforms on the television industry. Thus, more educative and pro-social activities should dominate other negative programmes of the television stations in order to modify how children use and react to television watching for better socialization and national development.

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