

Effects of Horror Movies on Psychological Health of Youth



Irem Sultana *

Arshad Ali †

Ifra Iftikhar ‡

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Abstract: *The current study is an explanatory study on the effects of watching horror movies on the psychological health of teenagers in the city area of Faisalabad. Researchers tried to explain the mental health and psychological problems like phobias, nightmares, sleep disorder, harsh behavior etc., in teenagers and their preferences of movies watching. The study explains that the majority of teenagers are used to watching movies, and they prefer Horror and Action movies via the internet, and these movies are affecting their psychological health. They choose films to watch for entertainment, but such kind of enjoyment has deep down affected their brains and social behaviors. Responses were collected through a survey questionnaire.*

Key Words: Psychological Health, Youth, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Horror Movies, Anxiety, Fear, Stress.

Introduction

A researcher wants to study the effects of watching Horror movies on the Psychological Health of Youth, how Horror Movies produce fear, how they affect the minds of youth, and different mental diseases like Gore, Nightmares etc., are produced because of horror movies. It is observed that watching Horror Movies cause long-lasting effects on young kids like nervousness, escapism, fascination, Nightmares. (NIMH: USA, 2005). Young people know that horror movies or characters of those movies do not exist in reality, but it is observed that youth are afraid of these movies. A researcher wants to study all type of effects of horror movies on the mental health of youth. Psychological health is very important for every person, so if the minds of people are active and healthy, they behave normally.

* Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: iremsultana@gcuf.edu.pk

† Assistant Professor, Center for Media and Communication Studies, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan.

‡ Associate Professor, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

Introduction to the Topic

Throughout the history of films, from the most primitive films to recent remakes, dreadful movies have scared the audience by spotlighting man's helplessness. ([Mary Dalton 2010](#))

Post-Traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychological sickness in which a person is capable of experiencing or viewing the same horrifying events again and again.

Human minds are very strong, and it tends to remember each and everything if watched with interest. And movies are mostly watched with great interest, so they affect human minds, and sometimes we do feel that we are related to some character and do play it at least for the day we have watched the movie. (Veena Sharma 2012)

Horror movies affect mental health if it is assumed that real things can happen in the same way, so the movies with a tag that are extracted from real stories are more dangerous for the psychological health of young minds. Sometime young brain may ballpark figure the risk of damage and experience factual 'fear' while watching horror movies when this comes about; one can notice that the immature youngsters fit tightly to a parent and weep, it is for sure that there is an exceptionally real chance of harm," ([David Rudd 2006](#))

Even though if someone is youthful and fit, watching dismay films can chaos with someone in such a way one couldn't guess. When someone gets frightened, his adrenaline and cortisone level prickles; this chemical raise, in turn, can dredge up withdrawn traumatic memories. The alter in one's brain chemistry reminds him of the times when it was in a similar state, even if he had no idea or he even had those memoirs. So if someone has a few horrible events in real life in his past that terrified him in actual, being frightened another time by a movie can accidentally make him relive it. If someone past is trauma-free, but he has been depressed prior to, even tearjerkers should be avoided. (Farhia Usama, 2015).

Just one year after presenting the first movie to the world in 1895. A French made a horror movie in 1896. it was short and sweet, not scary. After that, America followed this trend and made movies. After the First World War, German-made Horror movies with a cheap budget, better story and more creativity, strong social impact. Horror movies had to focus on style in 1920. More realistic monsters with a bigger budget and fancier sets and many characters were introduced in 1930. After the Atom bomb trend of horror movies was changed into fighting. Earlier horror movies were black and white and without any special effect. After that, a disturbing image was added in horror movies. After watching these horror movies, some people institutionalized in psychiatric wards. ([Cassidy Ward 2021](#))

Rationale of the Study

It is a general observation of the researcher that the cable network of that area off aired on telecast horror movies on their movie channel, and it is also observed that on CD shops of that area, there are posters of horror movies displayed in very prominent places. The researcher came across some researches on the internet, which is about horror movies effects on children mental health. Being

a researcher, the researcher wants to explore that does these movies affects the psyche of the youth of Faisalabad also. Is there any discrimination about the consequences of watching horror movies on a gender and education basis? Movie watching is considered a cheap and easy way of entertainment. That is why billions of dollars are being spent on the movies. Horror movies are being made and released on a frequent basis nowadays, and it has been observed that youth is fond of these types of movies; on the other hand, it has also been observed that these movies are affecting the psychological health of youth and increasing fear factor among them. The researcher selected the topic to know how these horror movies are affecting the psychological health of youth and either the aggressive and disturbing behavior of youth is because of such kind of movies. Or the horror movies are also a factor of panic which is being observed among youth these days. That is why the researcher selected this topic for study.

Literature Review

Horror Movies Affect Minds

NIMH

USA (2005), National Institute of mental health (NIMH) concluded in one of the researches conducted on the “effects of horror movies on the children” that disclosure to horror films/cinema might have long-term unpleasant effects on young kids.

Anxiety

The NIMH study reveals that scary movies can produce severe cases of anxiety in children. The symptoms of anxiety are sleeping disorder, aggressiveness and self-endangerment.

Avoidance

It is studied that children exposed to horror movies avoided real-life situations. They avoid seeing other movies or T.V shows.

Obsession

A common effect of seeing such movies is to obsessively talk about the film that produces fear. The subject of the obsessive talk may be to alienate themselves from what they have seen.

Nightmares

The most common effect of horror movies on children is the production of nightmares.

Reasons for Watching Horror Movies

Maria Lopz (2015) stated that scary movies and zombie games could produce a serious case of anxiety in teens and even pre-teens. The symptoms are aggressiveness, sleeping disorders, self endangerment. This research was done on children aged between 12-17 years. He found that

children avoid real life situation and have nightmares and nightmares put them in the condition to suffer once more through the same.

Rianna. J (2005), did research on the same issue. This study was made on the children aged between 10-17 years, who were very eager to watch scary movies in their free times. The researcher found that young people really love to enjoy the sense of relief coming at the end. Most movies are based on true incidents, which fascinate the guys more. He said that a roller coaster ride is just equal to watch a horror movie. In the end, researcher concluded that horror films satisfy the psychological urge of youngsters to feel frightened and terrorized. It can help them in facing fear in a controlled setting, but it is not a good way. Unlike real life in the movies, at least we can experience fear in a controlled setting and know that we are very safe too.

[Allmer P, Brick E, Huxley D \(2012\)](#) said that two theories are being used to explain “why people like horror movies”. The first one is that the person not afraid but only excited by the movies; the second is that the person love to endure the terror and fear to enjoy the euphoric sense of relief at the end. In the other words the viewers are happy to be unhappy. The author put it: “The most pleasant moments of a particular event may also be the most fearful.” The strong effects of horror movies on the psychology of people effect differently, but it is confirmed that horror in movies affects the minds and brains of people especially youngsters.

Watching Horror Films cause Mental Illness

[Aluja-Fabregat A. \(2000\)](#) conducted research; in this study, the researcher is tried to affirm the effects of horror movies on the general population and draw conclusions as: “There are a number of people in daily living who possibly will not get it acceptable to beat-up somebody, other than find it alright to exchange unkind language and abuse others. Films with violent content and horror make the public less civilize, less self-assured, and extra eager to pass harsh words and feel insecure and scared even living among the people. People learn such behaviors through scary horror films and violent media.

[Aluja-Fabregat A., Torrubia-Beltri R. \(1998\)](#), did research on the effects of horror films on the psychology of young people. It shows that children and teens have to face the same consequences. Viewing a frightening film can create severe case of anxiety, horror of dying, dizziness, increased heartbeat, feeling of shortness of breath. Horror movies can produce nightmare in children. You should protect your kids by watching scary films; there is not only one reason of harm but many.

[James B.weaver \(2000\)](#) Narrated that there are 2 studies that were accomplished by James B and Weaver by the department of communication at Virginia University of Alabama. The researcher required to study if regular exposure of aggression and scare in movies could make the populace a great help to settle down the real-life problems. Both researchers were astonished to see the well-built outcome of media violence. No matter what type of films people saw, they responded in aggressive behavior towards real life if they were motivated. The researchers found that men are more inclined to resolve social problems through a violent and scary situation. The researchers also concluded that not only from horror movies but also you have to protect your

children from scary games too. It is also not good to overprotect children, but still, a little control is necessary. The published study showed long-drawn-out experience to aggression and horror on media could destroy the real behavior of young's and tend them to adopt a different attitude which is very negative.

Illnesses from Prolonged Watching

[Baird, R. \(2000\)](#) conducted a research study. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the long term effects of watching horror movies from childhood. The sample consisted of both male and female around the age of 19. The participants were asked if they had fear, specific fear, wild imagination, fear of sleeping alone, nightmares and sleeping with lights on after watching a horror movie. The researcher found that once watching a horror movie leaves strong effects on the minds of young people, which they cannot forget after years.

[Ballon B., Leszcz M. \(2007\)](#). Said that the horror movies have deep impacts on the minds of children. A survey of New Zealand children aged 9-13 clearly shows that the horror movies have made these children endure violence, emotional and psychological damage.

1. **Physical violence:** The horror movies which are fully evaporated with fighting are a major cause of physical violence.
2. **Emotional damage:** Horror movies, according to the findings of the researcher, have the elements of emotional disturbance children watching such movies can be emotionally sick.
3. **Psychological damage:** Watching horror movies damages the psychological health of young people. They become victims of different behavioral and psychological disorders.

The Positive Sides of Viewing Horror Films

[Berry M., Gray T., Donnerstein E. \(1999\)](#) stated that scary movies are a big source of psychological catharsis. The researcher has reported a research study that he conducted with his own daughter. He describes that seldom his daughter got afraid with little matters in horror movies. But at all some time she is totally aware that all these scary movies are just at the scene of movies. The girl receives deep fear impressions psychologically by watching such films, but the researcher is of the view that if children continuously get chances to be in the fear situation, they learn to get themselves free from the situation by courage and wiliness.

Methodology

Researchers selected the survey research method through the questionnaire for this study. The survey research method will use because through this method, this researcher can easily contact respondents directly and can have their views on how horror movies are affecting them. More accurate results can be extracted by going to the people and ask their views and opinion about the effects of horror movies on them with the help of a questionnaire because respondents feel more comfortable while filling up questionnaires as compared to verbal answers, for this reason, the researcher used a questionnaire survey research method.

Leon Festinger (1951) synthesized a set of studies to distil a theory about communication's social influences. Cognitive dissonance enjoyed great popularity from the late 1950s through the mid-1970s. Cognitive dissonance is a term used in modern psychology to describe the feeling of discomfort when simultaneously holding two or more conflicting cognitions: ideas, beliefs, values or emotional reactions. Cognitive dissonance is a communication theory adopted from social psychology. The title gives the concept: cognitive is thinking or the mind; and dissonance is inconsistency or conflict; the researcher will compare the responses gender-wise, education-wise, to make the result more clear and get a conclusion about the effects of horror movies.

Findings

The findings of the current study are shown in tables, and SPSS is used for analysis.

Table 1. Favorite type of Movie

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Romantic	27	27.0	27.8	27.8
	Horror	29	29.0	29.9	57.7
	Action	29	29.0	29.9	87.6
	art	4	4.0	4.1	91.8
	any other	8	8.0	8.2	100.0
	Total	97	97.0	100.0	
Missing	System	3	3.0		
Total		100	100.0		

Table 2. Medium for Watching Horror Movies

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Dvd/CD	27	27.0	28.1	28.1
	Internet	43	43.0	44.8	72.9
	TV channels	25	25.0	26.0	99.0
	any other	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	96	96.0	100.0	
Missing	System	4	4.0		
Total		100	100.0		

Table 3. Purpose of Watching Horror Movies

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Enjoyment & entertainment	48	48.0	62.3	62.3
	Learning & information	20	20.0	26.0	88.3

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Other purpose	9	9.0	11.7	100.0
	Total	77	77.0	100.0	
Missing	System	23	23.0		
Total		100	100.0		

Table 4. Fear During Watching Movies

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	28	28.0	36.8	61.8
	no	19	19.0	25.0	25.0
	some times	29	29.0	38.2	100.0
	Total	76	76.0	100.0	
Missing	System	24	24.0		
Total		100	100.0		

Table 5. Fear after Watching Movies

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
Valid	yes	25	33.8	33.8
	no	24	32.4	66.2
	some times	25	33.8	100.0
	Total	74	100.0	
Missing	System	26		

Table 6. Fear in Real Life

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	37	37.0	48.1	68.8
	no	16	16.0	20.8	20.8
	some times	24	24.0	31.2	100.0
	Total	77	77.0	100.0	
Missing	System	23	23.0		
Total		100	100.0		

Table 7. Feel in the darkness of Night

Responses	Male	Female	Total
Good	10%	24%	34%
Horror	60%	38%	98%
Panic	20%	4%	24%
Any other	2%	8%	10%
Missing	8%	26%	17%

Table 8. Enjoy Horror Characters

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	25	25.0	32.5	32.5
	no	27	27.0	35.1	67.5
	some times	25	25.0	32.5	100.0
	Total	77	77.0	100.0	
Missing	System	23	23.0		
Total		100	100.0		

Table 9. Feel Frightened Under the Effects of Horror Movies

Responses	Male	Female
Yes	32%	34%
No	16%	26%
Sometimes	36%	8%
Missing System	16%	32%
Total	100%	100%

Table 10. Nightmares

Responses	Male	Female
Yes	60%	44%
No	6%	16%
Sometimes	26%	12%
Missing System	8%	28%

Table 11. Any kind of phobia do you have?

Responses	Male	Female
Yes	56%	42%
No	6%	20%
Sometimes	30%	12%
Missing System	8%	26%

Table 12. kind of Personality

Responses	Male	Female
Aggressive	24%	16%
Soft	30%	36%
Serious	32%	8%
Jolly	6%	8%
Any other	0%	4%

Responses	Male	Female
Missing system	8%	28%

Results

The finding of current research showed that the majority of respondents, who consisted of teenage male and females, love to watch horror and action movies(see table:1). Most of them watch movies through the internet for enjoyment and entertainment (see table:2 &3). The majority of the movie viewer feel fear during and after watching horror movies(see table:4&5). The respondents who watch horror films admitted that they have the feeling of fear during the normal course of life (see table: 6). Results of feeling in darkness at night are very interesting that male teenage respondents who feel horrified are almost double in number (see table: 7); it is also interesting that the majority of horror movies viewers did not like horror characters in movies. They did not enjoy such kind of characters (see table: 8). Most respondents feel frightened, according to them, under the effects of horror movies. The majority of respondent teenagers have nightmares after watching movies and horrified (see table: 9&10)

Discussions

Literature review of the subject under study showed that watching horror create bad effects on the mental and psychological health of teenagers. (Anthony. B, 2012). The current research study also finds out the same results that youngsters who watch scary movies have different types of phobias, feelings of frightening, fear in the darkness, nightmares etc. while the current study had one paradoxical result that teenagers who were the resident of the city area of Faisalabad watch scary movies for enjoyment and entertainment but they did not enjoy horror characters in the movies. It seems that they use Horror movies for their psychological catharsis as Amaya. J. (2000) stated that scary movies are a big source of psychological catharsis. majority of respondents of the current study rate themselves as a soft person; there is no difference among both genders regarding the issue under study. This result of the current study is also a paradoxical one as results of previous studies showed that the majority of horror movies viewer become aggressive and harsh. The majority of teenagers could not understand that they are in problem due to watching horror movies. They rank themselves as soft persons(see table 12) that could not be possible as the majority feel frightened, have sleep problems, facing different kinds of phobias. Both genders in young boys and girls are gone through almost equally bad impacts of scary films. The cognitive dissonance created by watching horror movies among youth will always end up with different types of disorder in personalities.

Conclusion

Horror movies have bad effects on young viewers, so they should not watch horror movies. Parents should be aware of these impacts on young minds. They should provide some other source of entertainment for their young boys and girls because Post Traumatic Stresses Disorder

(PTSD) is a mental illness that can be caused mostly by experiencing or viewing the same horrifying events. Human minds are very strong, and it tends to remember each and everything if watched with interest. And movies are mostly watched with great interest, so they affect human minds, and sometimes we do feel that we are related to some character and do play it at least for the day we have watched the movie. (Veena Sharma 2012)

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