Portrayal of Violence in Bollywood Movies and its Effects on Real-life Violence & Crimes against Women in Pakistani Society

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Abstract

This study aims at examining the possible connection between increasing violence against women in Pakistani society and its excessive portrayal in popular Bollywood movies, ardently watched in the country, during the four decades (i.e. 1980s, 90s, 2000s and 2010s). Firstly, top ten grossing films selected through popularity charts and youth polls are analyzed from the four decades under study. Considering the symmetry of the movies sampled, Jang newspaper (the largest circulated and most popular daily in Pakistan) from the same four decades is content analyzed as a day-to-day reflection of real-life crime scenes, committed against women in our society. Then Violence Index, as per customized George Gerbner's formula (1976) is calculated to identify and compare the trends in the defined time period. Results show that violence has evidently increased against women, both on and off screen, during the

forty years sampled. Though, there seems to be a fragile, proportional relationship between the two variables, it is observed that the crime rate against women in Pakistani society fluctuates independently, and rather follow the trends and frequency of the portrayal of violence and crimes in Indian movies in the preceding decade under study.

Keywords: Onscreen Violence, Bollywood Films, Item Numbers, Crime Rate, Pakistani Society

Motion Pictures are declared the most lethal weapon of propaganda that can influence the culture, perspectives and attitudes of its viewers in a subtle yet certain manner. It is estimated that on an average, a person in the modern age spends more time using media (3, 661 hours including films) annually than sleeping (2, 920 hours) or activities other than media (2, 179 hours) out of total hours of 8, 760 in a year (Biagi 2015). Hence people get understanding of most of the unusual life's experiences such as violence, love and sex through media especially films.

India has the largest film industry in the world, popularly known as Bollywood and often referred to as Hindi Cinema. Bollywood churns out around one thousand movies every year, recognize globally and has a large following across the world. In Pakistan too, Bollywood films are high on demand. The celebrities of the Indian silver screen are equally worshipped by the native people since partition, and Hindustani rituals and fashion fads are readily adopted by the local public as their own. Dozens of Hindi films are telecast regularly on 24/7 movie channels available on cable television, and online while the new Hindi films are showcased in Pakistani cinemas openly since last few years after the ban has been lifted on the screening of the Indian films.

In this scenario, one cannot overlook the possible detrimental effects of these highly graphic movies on the sense and sensibilities of Pakistani viewers. Bollywood films are likely to play a vital role in transmitting the patterns of conduct and defining role models in Pakistani society. Numerous research studies conducted by the researchers evidently indicated that crime and violence are the major themes that have dominated cinema screens globally since the arrival of films in the late 19th Century. The very fact raised the serious concerns about the potentially damaging effects of these images on the vulnerable sections of society. In about three thousand studies conducted over the last four decades, researchers have argued that incessant and excessive exposure to on-screen violence often leads to antisocial and aggressive behavior (especially against women) when complemented with hostile surroundings at home and in the wider society.

The present study examines the possible relationship between increasing violence against women in Pakistani society and its excessive portrayal in the popular Indian films. Character analysis of the leading roles indicates that females in the mainstream Indian cinema are mostly projected in submissive roles. Indian blockbusters often glamourize sexual harassment, violence and rape, especially when inflicted from the main male leads onto females. In the last five years, rape and gang rape scenes are gradually replaced with suggestive item numbers that objectify women and their bodies mindlessly for the commercial success of the movies.

Theoretical Background:

The present study heavily engages with the theories of culture and learning, which analyze the relationship between on-screen violence and vulnerable viewers who are inclined to replicate the media violence against women in real life. As Bandura (1986) indicated, most people, especially children, learn and adopt behaviour, following striking role models, both in the real world

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and in the media. Jarvie (1970), on the other hand, pointed out, believes that the film often contributes to social reality in an extremely slow and subtle manner. Changes in attitude and behaviour often manifest themselves only occasionally and in a seemingly erratic manner, which appears to be the case in our own correlation of the depiction of violence against women in films and in our society. This study also assumes that people learn and adopt deviant and criminal behaviors as a ready reaction and quick solution to social injustice when they observe positive reinforcement of deviant actions in the media. Even if the majority of viewers does not turn violent criminal in reaction to exposure to violent films, they may get desensitized or fearful if they take on-screen violence to be a true representation of the age.

Literature Review:

Antisocial effects of films are one of the most heavily researched areas in the field of media psychology. Public concerns about the problem were aroused in 1920s. However, the earliest research found on the topic was the multi-volume Payne Fund Studies that were conducted from 1928-33 with a focus on movies Influence on children and teenagers.

The studies identified movies as a powerful source of information, attitudes and behaviour for youth, but also established that most of this learning had harmful implications. It discovered that 72 percent of commercial films in 1930s revolved around love, crime and sex which remain the same even today as evident from the present study that content analyzed Indian movies across the four decades. However, the Payne Fund studies were unable to establish evident link between movie viewing and major crimes, except some petty thefts and inappropriate sexual conduct in criminally inclined adolescents.

Other researchers such as Blumer (1900-87) and Hauser (1909) were able to conclude that motion pictures may incite delinquency and even crime considering a variety of projected themes as well

as social background and personal tendency of the viewers. The same violent movie may provoke a child in the high-rate, delinquency area while it desensitizes others to violence from the low-rate, delinquency area.

On the contrary, Klapper (1960) simply downplayed potential harmful effects of media by maintaining that the media only reinforces an individual's established approach and inclination, hardly foster anything new. Despite the fact that early researchers were unable to prove any direct relation between real and reel world violence, public and politicians continued blaming movies for increasing social and moral crimes against women, which were assumed to become increasingly violent with the passage of time. (Wimmer, 2005)

From various aspects, three studies (Shipley and Cavendar (1964-94), Allen (1945-91) and Web (1999-2000) content analyzed top grossing box office hits to code and calculate the intensity and rate of violence against women in the US and Britain respectively. Shipley and Cavendar found that graphic violence and death increased across the four decades but in a non-linear manner. Violence was limited to a particular genre as found by Allen's longitudinal content analysis that covered films from 1945 to 1991. The study discovered that the overall proportion of crime films and that of crime content in all film genres have remained same during fifty years. Moreover, similar characteristics are seen both in the US and Britain in terms of proportion of crime content by genre.

However, Webb's recent study on the carefully sampled PG -13 rated films from the 100 top grossing movies of 1999 and 2000 maintained that violence pervaded 90 percent of the films and it contributed to teach violence techniques, increasing aggression against the fair sex besides ratio of anxiety and indifference towards real-life miseries in the excessive viewers .

Overall, very few researches were conducted to evaluate the effects of strikingly popular Indian film industry in the region. Akbar

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Ahmed (1992) declared Indian Cinema as "a metaphor of Indian society and politics." He remarked that the two no longer imitate each other but seem to have merged so much so that it affects India's self-perception and its role as a regional power in South Asia, which evidently have a direct and powerful impact on the cinema and society of its neighboring countries such as Pakistan.

There were two relevant researches using exploratory content analysis to examine the portrayal of sexual violence (Ramasubramanian and Beth 2000) in popular Hindi films and portrayal of police torture (Shaheen 1999) in Hindi films and TV serials respectively. The former research randomly studied late 90s box office hits concluded that victims of on-screen sexual violence were mostly women. Though serious sexual violence was often portrayed as criminal; moderate violence perpetrated by heroes such as sexual harassment was often depicted as a likeable act. Iran's study analyzed films and TV series from 1970s, 1980s and 1990s in a day across the Indian channels (widely viewed in Pakistan with the advent of satellite and cable TV) and found a large number of violent acts against women which were often portrayed graphically.

Methodology:

Content Analysis is used as a primary method in this study pertaining to the nature of the research, as Kerbo (2007) identifies that content analysis adopt, wherever analysis of the message system (media content) in a quantitative, systematic and objective manner is required.

Sampling:

The assumption that Bollywood movies are getting increasingly violent suggests temporal dimensions. To gauge the changes in frequency and the depiction of violence against women both on and off screen during recent decades, a selection of films and newspapers was sampled from 1985 to 2015.

Firstly, five top-grossing films, selected on the basis of popularity charts and youth polls, were analyzed from each of the four decades under study, following the sampling techniques of Shipley and Cavendar. These films were examined for their portrayal of the male-female characters and the depiction of themes related to violence and crimes against women.

Gerbner's violence Index was calculated to identify and compare the trends in the defined time period. Subsequently, focusing crime and violence related news against women, four samples of one month's issue of the Daily Jang, Pakistan's national Urdu daily (sometimes spreading over 20 to 30. News pages) were carefully content analyzed for each decade. Eventually, the findings of the two studies were compared statistically to evaluate potential linkages.

Definition of Violent Crime:

A basic definition of violent crime is based on offenses against the person (woman in this case). It includes homicide (murder), aggravated assault, rape, domestic violence, kidnapping and harassment. The present study adopts the definition of violence used by Khan and Rashid in their study of violence on Pakistan TV. This definition further broadens the horizon and the scope of our study and includes both overt expressions of physical force of the kind mentioned above, and the more complex category of the verbal and symbolic violence that includes verbal threats, abuse and gestures such as yelling, shouting, showing off weapons to threaten as a symbol of power, and that might be psychologically and physically injurious to a victim.

Findings and Analysis:

Prevalence of Violence:

The study discovers that as such there are no direct links between the number of violent crimes depicted against women in films and news reports covering real-life incidents during the four decades

under observation. For example, the 1990s returns the highest number of incidents in news reports (370) whereas the decade simultaneously shows the lowest rate of violent scenes depicted in sampled films in the same period (62). Similarly, the current decade exhibits the second highest number of violent incidents (360) in reported news, but the second lowest number of violent scenes on silver screen (76).

Subsequently, the rest of the two decades of the 1980s and 2000s reflect a relatively lower figure of violent crimes (76 and 275) compared to the high number of violent scenes calculated in the top five popular Indian films (80 and 94 respectively).
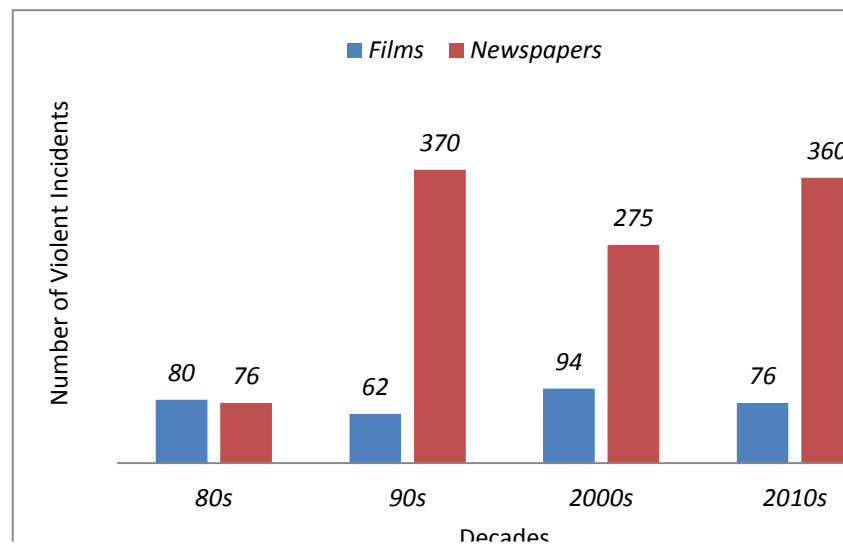

Figure 1: Number of Violent Incidents in the films and newspapers 1985-2015

The media of film and the press are characterized by somewhat peculiar and characteristic trends as far as the prevalence of violence is concerned.
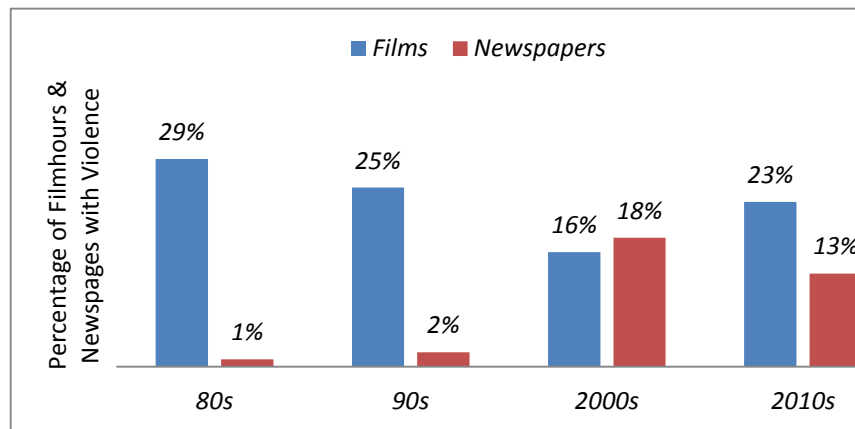
Figure 2: Percentage of Film Hours and Newspaper Pages containing violence in

Indian Films and Pakistani Newspapers 1985-2015.

As a reality check, we refer the Crime Growth Rate and other relevant statistics, calculated by the Bureau of Police Research and Development in Pakistan, to explore whether the reported news represents the real crime scene as assumed in the study or not . It is shocking to note that the annual population growth rate has been lower than the crime growth rate in Pakistan since 1951 despite the fact that data includes reported crimes only. On the other hand, numbers of unreported crimes against women are roughly speculated to be around 30-50% percent in the country (UN office on Drugs & Crime, Center for International Crime Prevention, 2010).

The constantly increasing crime rate against women in Pakistani Society makes sense only when we analyze it in reference to the social, political and economic scenario of its times. As Kunczik (2003) discovered that though the majority of viewers will remain unaffected, portrayal of violence in the media might adversely

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influence some inclined, predisposed young males in the environment in which violence is a routine experience

The study further investigates other aspects such as:

Gender Representation in Films and News world: The fictional world of Indo-Pak cinema is throughout dominated by male characters, which outnumbered female roles by almost a ratio of 4 to 1. In the sampled films, out of the 91 major characters coded, the 66 male roles accounted for 72.5% as against 17 female characters or 18.68 % of the major roles for the females. Thus the females are markedly under-represented in the Indian world of cinema.

The demography of the factual world of violence is also studied. Numerically, man distinctly dominates woman as major characters in violent stories. Out of the population of 2654, 2216 (83.49%) characters are male, 160 (6.02%) are female while 278 (10.47%) are unidentified. Men are mostly reported as violent 1109 (94.3%) than women 06 (0.51%) in news reports.

Male domination both in movies as well as reported news reinforce the fact that women are still subjected to severe violence in countries like Pakistan and India, which is often glamourized than condemned in local media, especially on the silver screen as confirmed by the findings of Ramasubramanian and Mary's study (2003) about the portrayal of sexual violence in popular Hindi films in the nineties. The study revealed that moderate sexual violence, including harassment is often romanticized when it's inflicted upon heroines by heroes.
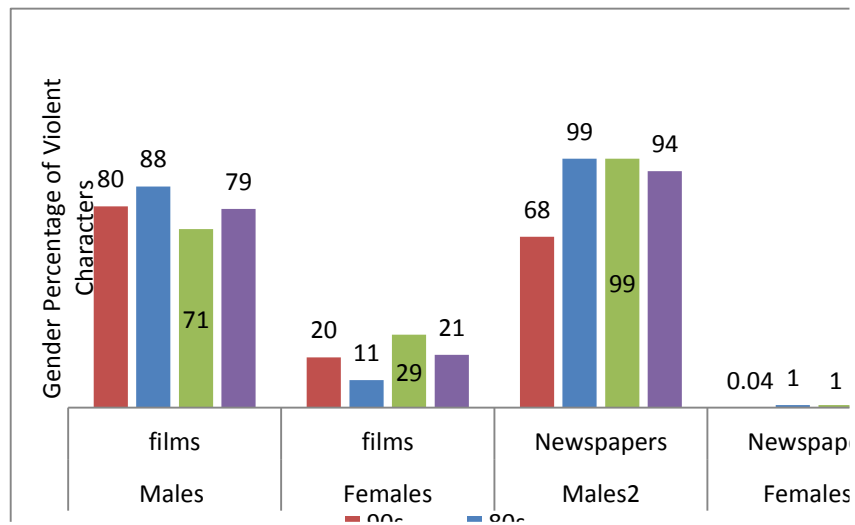
Figure 3 reflects Gender Percentage of Violent Characters in Films in the decades of 1980s, 90s, 2000s and 2010

Gender Percentage of Victimized Characters: In the fictional world of Indian Cinema, women are mostly depicted as victims on silver screen than men, i.e. 57.5% women against 42.5 men % in 80s, 64% females versus 36 males% in the 90s, and 62.5% women compared to 37.5% men in the 2000s. However the ratio changed in 2010s to 29% females and 71% victimized male presence on screen**.** Unlike the on-screen depiction, in the journalistic world of news, most victims were males, 86% in 80s, 22% in the 90s, 75% in the 2000s and 81% in 2010s in comparison to female representation of 14% in 80s, 2% in 1990s, 12% in 2000s and 19% in 2010s.
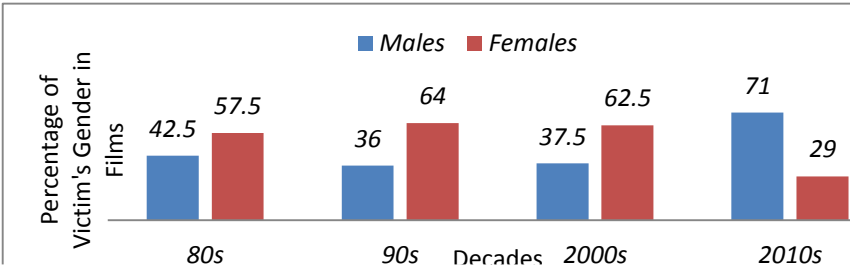
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Figure 4 reflects Percentage of Victims' Gender in Films in the decades of 1980s, 90s and 2000s and 2010s
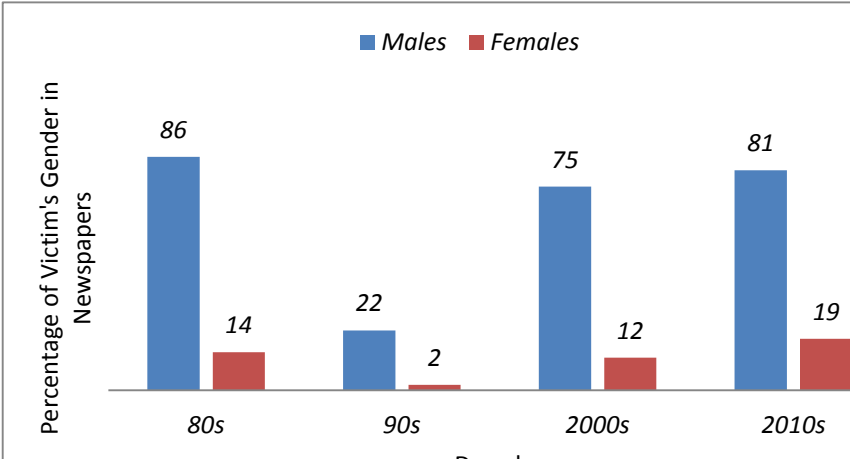

Fig 5 shows Percentage of Victims' Gender in Newspapers in the decades of 1980s,

90s, 2000s and 2010s

Percentage of Killers & Killed: In terms of intensity too, violence was quite pervasive among the on screen characters because 49% of them had some involvement in lethal violence either as murderers (12 %), victims (11%) or both (26%. All the

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killers were male, while 54% of the victims of lethal violence were male and 45% were females.

Discussion:

The findings of the study indicate the possibility that the effects of media and film content are slow and gradual and it might take more than a decade to change the mindset of a generation - as discovered from 1960 onwards by Leonard Eron's Columbia County Longitudinal Study, focusing on 856 children living in Columbia County, NY and resulting in four waves of data across the subsequent decades. It was found that heavy viewers of on-screen violence were more likely to commit serious crimes, treat their families and partners rather aggressively, and punish their kids a seriously, than non-viewers, but the media violence took more than a decade to exhibit its effects on the conduct of its viewers.

Moreover, it is evident from the current research that violence and crimes against women have increased both in Pakistani society as well as in Indian films during the forty years sampled, but that the increase is curvilinear rather than linear in nature. The very fact reflects that the impact of media messages on society is rather slow, gradual and subtle, unlike the outcomes proposed by the 'hypodermic needle' or 'magic bullet theories' of yesteryear. Besides, there is a broad observation that strikingly popular Indian films (which actually fill the cinematic vacuum in the absence of sufficient quality local films) play a major role in transmitting patterns of conduct and defining role models in Pakistani society.

Conclusion:

Eventually, it is vital to realize that even small statistical effects of media violence on aggressive behavior (+0.2% found in the current study) can have crucial effect, since it affects almost everyone in a large population, influences individuals' psyche gradually and leaves lasting impressions on their minds through repetitive

exposure to on-screen violence over a period of time. Though Indian films can't be singled out as a sole reason of growing violence against women in Pakistani society, it is one of the vital stimuli that might trigger the already inclined, vulnerable people in a volatile environment

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