

# **MEDIA CULTURE AND MEDIA VIOLENCE: IT'S GROWING IMPACT ON YOUNG CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD**

## **Effects of Television on Young Children's Behavior in Nepal\***

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This paper consists of four major sections. The first section describes the country and general situation of young children. The second section deals with the use of various forms of media including television by young children. The third section deals with the effects of television on young children. The fourth section presents examples of children's involvement in violence as the result of viewing television. Except in the first section, the paper is largely based on the views of 87 parents collected through the administration of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered only to parents having children below eight years of age. Thirty-nine of the parents were pre-primary school teachers with at least one child aged below eight. The questionnaire was distributed to only those parents who had at least one television set in the family. The views expressed in this paper do not represent the whole of Nepal. The respondents were only from Kathmandu Valley. So it represents only urban areas of the Kingdom of Nepal.

### **Country Profile and Situation of Children**

Nepal is a small landlocked kingdom bordering on India in the south, east, and west and on China in the north. It has an area of 147,181 square kilometers. The country, which is rectangular in shape, rises from the southern plains (terai), just a few hundred meters above sea level, to the Himalayas, including the World's highest mountain, Mount Everest, within a comparatively small breadth of 193 kilometers. Nepal has a total population of about 23.4 millions, which is growing at a rate of 2.4% per annum. Life expectancy at birth is 58 years. The total population comprises several language, cultural and ethnic groups.

It is predominantly an agricultural country. About 82 percent of the country's population depend upon agriculture. The per capita gross national product (GNP) stands at US \$ 220. About 38 percent of the country's national population is living in absolute poverty, (i. e. earning less than US \$ 1 a day). The national adult literacy rate is 45 percent. But the female literacy rate is only 28 percent. The net enrolment of primary school aged children is 72 percent. The net enrolment at the secondary level is only 18.2 percent.

The population of children below 6 years of age constitutes about 18 percent of the total population. About half (9.77 percent) of the children population fall under the age group

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of 3 to 6 years. The status of children is determined by the socio-economic condition of the country. Most of the people in Nepal live in remote rural areas, which do not have basic facilities like roads, pure drinking water, electricity and health services. Only 12 percent of the population live in urban settlements. Only 65 percent of pregnant women are immunized against tetanus and only 9 percent of births are looked after by trained health personnel. As a result, the maternal mortality ratio is as high as 540 per 100,000 live births. The infant and under-five mortality rates remain at 75 and 104 per 1,000 live births respectively. The incidence of morbidity is very high. About 50 percent of under-five children suffer from severe or moderate level of malnutrition. Among the total under-five children 47 percent are underweight and 54 percent are stunting (low height for age by reference population).

### **Use of Various forms of Media by Young Children**

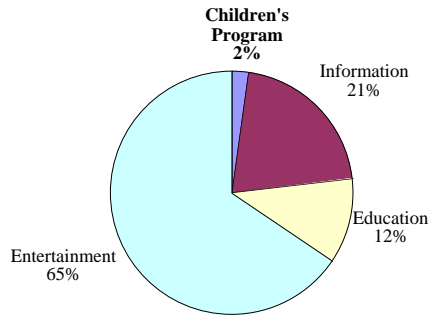
Media available for young children include toys, radio, television, video, movie, computer games, printed materials and ad boards. There is a wide difference in the availability of these means for the children in urban and rural areas. Most of the children living in rural areas have access to only toys and radio. Electronic means such as television, computer games, video and movies are not available to many children living in rural areas because of the cost of these materials and of the lack of electricity in the rural areas. Electricity in the country is available to only 14 percent of the population.

**Toys** are very common forms of materials available to children of both urban and rural areas. Children in urban areas have access to commercial toys whereas children in rural areas get locally made toys. It is common to make toys like butterflies, dolls and balls out of rags and old clothes. They make toy carts, toy guns and toy tractors out of wood. The toys children are given to play, and the toys the children choose themselves differ according to their sex. Dolls are very common forms of toys for girls and balls and guns are for boys.

**Radio** is the only media, which has reached every corner of the country. Thirty-eight sets of radio are available for a population of 1,000. Radio is a popular source for information and entertainment among the people living in both urban and rural areas. It is also being used for education purposes. In the 1980s radio was used for training primary school teachers. Even now it is being used for training pre-primary and primary school teachers. The “Dual Audience Interactive Radio Instruction” for primary school teachers and the “Interactive Radio Instruction” (IRI) program for early childhood education (ECE) program facilitators and children in the ECE centers are getting very popular. This IRI for ECE program is aired for 20 to 25 minutes twice a week.

**Television** became popular only after the establishment of the Nepal Television in 1985. The use of cable television and international program channels came to be used after the re-installation of the democratic form of government and its open policy since 1991. Television has been one of the most popular means of entertainment for the people living in urban settlements. At the national level 6 sets of televisions are available for a population of 1,000. However, there is a big gap between urban and rural areas. Many people in Nepal cannot afford having a television set at home. In the remote rural areas, even those who can afford are not in a position to use it— for want of electricity.

Distribution of Time for Various Programs on National Television



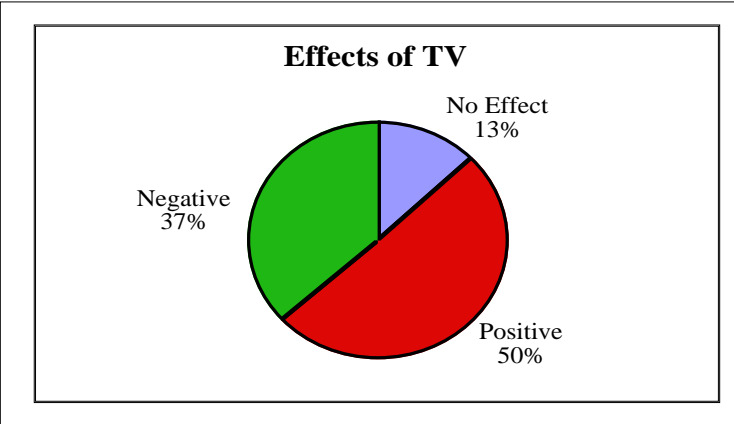
An analysis of the distribution of time for various programs on national television channel shows that about 65 percent of time is used on entertainment related programs, about 21 percent of time on information related programs and 12 percent on educational programs. About 2 percent of the total time is being used for telecasting children’s program.

However, due to the ignorance and carelessness the parents and guardians allow children to watch all the programs without keeping in mind what is good for them to watch and what is not. Out of 87 respondents 34 mentioned that they had cable television and international program channels. The international television channels and cable television networks have been adversely affecting the socio-cultural life of many people in Nepal. Many social scientists in the country are worried about the indiscriminate use of television by children as well as by adults. Of the 87 respondents (parents and teachers) only 4 mentioned that they did not allow children to watch television other than the children’s programs.

All the parents and teachers who returned the questionnaire mentioned that the children were spending lots of time watching television. An analysis of their responses show that on school holidays children at early childhood age spend 2 to 7 hours of time watching television. About 29 percent of the respondents mentioned that their children watched television 4 to 7 hours on holidays. More than fifty percent of the respondents mentioned that their children watched television 2 to 3 hours a day on holidays. However, on the workdays the duration of watching television was limited to three hours maximum. A majority of respondents (61 percent) mentioned that the children watched television for about one hour a day. Thirty-three percent mentioned 2 hours and only 6 percent mentioned three hours of television watching on workday.

**Effects of Television on Young Children**

The parents and teachers were asked to state their observations and feelings about the effects of television on children’s study and general behavior. The responses received in this regard were mixed. About fifty percent of the respondents stated that the television was making positive effects on children. About 13 percent mentioned that the television had not made any (neither



positive nor negative) effect on children. The rest (about 37 percent) of the respondents mentioned that the television was having negative impacts on the study habit and general social behavior of children.

**Positive Effects.** Those who felt that the television was making positive effects on children's behavior stated that as the result of viewing television children had become more knowledgeable about the international events, nature and the world at large. For instance, a teacher mentioned that it would otherwise have been very difficult for children to learn about sea and ship living in a landlocked country like Nepal. From the television children easily understand the concepts of the things which are not available in the immediate environment. Some of the parents mentioned that due to watching television children have become inquisitive, clever, outspoken and interested in taking part in singing and dancing.

**Negative Effects.** A majority of those who think that television is negatively affecting children's behavior state that it is adversely affecting the study habits of children. Children can watch television for hours and hours and while they are watching they forget everything. They even do not go to bed on time. They do not follow their regular routine. They become irritant when they have to follow the daily routines. Some of the parents have also mentioned that due to the television lots of indigenous cultural patterns are being changed. Children do not respect, as their elders would do in the earlier years. The way of life of the youngsters—their dress up, their hairstyle, walking style—all are being influenced by external cultures, which have entered in the country through television. They are worried that the influence will be greater when the young children of to day will get to adulthood. Some of the respondent school teachers mentioned that children use the fight, which they watch on television when they fight in and outside the school. The children these days are becoming more violent. Whenever they fight they use both hands and foot. The children in the earlier years were not like that.

### **Children's Involvement in Violence as the Result of Viewing Television**

After the analysis of questionnaire the respondents who mentioned that their children were involved in some kind of violence as a result of viewing television were again contacted for further information about the incidence. A total of six respondents mentioned that they witnessed such incidents in their families and relatives. A description of each incident, as stated by the parents, is given below.

1. After watching a horror movie on television, one girl child could not sleep soundly. She had seen a ghost chasing her, in the dream. So she was full of sweat when she got up early in the morning. The impact of the bad dream did not last the whole day. But the child was murmuring until late in the afternoon. So her family rushed her to the hospital for treatment.

2. In a very popular Hindu epic Tele-serial Ramayan, Hanuman, the son of the Wind God demonstrates his extraordinary power of flying. Inspired by this Tele-serial a child tried to fly himself from the roof of his two-storied house and was injured. He broke one of his legs and had to under go a major operation.
3. In another very popular Hindu epic Tele-serial Mahabharat, in a competition, the Hero, Arjun, hits one of the eyes of a moving clay fish with an arrow and marries Droupati, the Princess. In an incident, a six-year old boy hit one of the eyes of his four years old cousin with a sharp arrow made of bamboo. The injured girl was taken to the hospital immediately but she lost one of her eyes for ever.
4. One of the respondents who is also a school teacher mentions that these days children use their legs while fighting. This she thinks is the influence of television. As a result of it, once a child was seriously injured when they played kicking as shown on the television. She further said that such a behavior is common in the case of boys. The girls do not play such kicking games.
5. The WWF wresting shown on television is so popular among children and adults of all ages. In this program the fighters hit the opponents not only with their hands and legs but also with chairs, rods and belts. After watching this program a young boy, while playing, hit his father with a hammer on the head and made him unconscious. The father had to be hospitalized for two days.
6. A parent having a nuclear family (father, mother and a son) mentioned that she is having a problem with her son who is eight years old. Her son is addicted to watching television. For quite some time the parents watched television together with their son. The television they have has multi channel facility. 'MTV' and 'Bay Watch' were their favorite programs. The child watched the television program of his interest for hours with or without his parents by his side. The mother was shocked when the child asked his mother to dress up only in Bikini and kiss him the way he watched on the television screen. This made the mother realized their mistake of permitting the child to watch indiscriminately. Now, the parents have allowed the child to watch only cartoon films and national programs. However, the mother says that whenever parents are away he keeps on changing the channels.