Investigating the influence of mass media

On general public attitudes

Towards criminals and fear of crime

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Abstract

Public knowledge of criminals and crimes is predominantly obtained from mass media. This study investigates the effect of media consumption on attitude toward criminals, fear of crime and also looks at level of stress in viewers. A self-report questionnaire including variety of demographic and audience trait variables, was given to 110 convenience sample participants. Employing the nonparametric test (Kruskal-Wallis), the results determine that greater levels of exposure to media is not related to increased fear of crime, negative attitudes toward criminals or level of stress. However Mann-Whitney looks at the difference in fear of crime between men and women and the results indicate that there is significant difference between genders in fear of crime. Still, fear can be triggered by many other factors and conditions and the challenge for further research is to address these factors. Ultimately, the study provides little evidence to imply that there is an association between media exposure and fear of crime.
Introduction

Mass media influence

In the present era people learn a lot about crime and violence from mass media (internet, TV and newspapers), as this is the most easily accessible sources of information. It is where people hear about others and gain access to what is happening around them in the world; it is also used as an entertainment tool (e.g. movies, reality TV). Television is a very important instrument in how people perceive criminals, even though information in the media might not always be an accurate view of reality. By talking about crime the broadcasters try to alert people of what is going on. Warr (2000) indicates that in some cases, when the public is misinformed by media, people tend to firmly believe that the information provided is legitimate and that they are aware of the risk. As a result of this information viewers are sensitive and more afraid of victimisation (Jewkes, 2011). Chiricos, Padgett and Gertz (2000) suggested that frequency of news viewing is highly significant to fear of crime. This paper highlights that fear of crime is not only associated with local but also national news (Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz, 2000). This theory was also supported by Warry (2000) who states that there is positive correlations between times spend watching TV and fear of crime.

In the 1990s school shootings in America induced radical panic among parents whose children where in the schools at the time. Media described it as school violence and as shootings were on the rise among schools, parents started to demand some changes. This resulted in increasing school budgets. Congress decided to raise security in schools by installing metal detectors and cameras. The media attention given to the school shootings spread panic and had a negative effect on public attitudes. But according to statistics and logical valuation of the actual threat, these incidents were isolated (Burns & Crawford, 1999). In reality, school violence and risk of armed children at the time had decreased steadily from 1993 to 2003 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005).
Some research suggests that people who watch more violent television believe that the crime in reality is more frequent than statistics would show, and that’s why those individuals would take more care against crime (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1980). They are more likely to feel a higher danger from crime than others, and they believe that the crime shown in media is more violent, random and far more dangerous than in real world (Gerbner et al, 1980). This would suggest that the viewers internalize information received from media and evolve their own opinion of the world as shabby and scary (Surette, 1990:8). Further studies suggest that there is a strong relationship between media influence and fear of crime (Barille, 1984; Morgan, 1983; Weaver and Wakshlag, 1986). But not all research indicates that this relationship is strong. In 1990 Rice and Anderson discovered a weak relationship between television viewing and fear of crime an inverse result to previous findings.

The relationship between mass media influence and fear of crime not only depends on the amount of violent television programmes viewed but also, as discovered by Gilbert and Heath in their 1996 study, on the quality (type of information) and the audience. Presenting a greater amount of local crime media causes an increase in fear of crime with members of the public (Brillon, 1987; Sheley & Ashkins, 1981). But according to Liska and Baccaglini (1990) when media do the opposite and start to present a greater amount of non-local criminal news the viewers in local areas feel much safer in comparison to areas outside their “comfort zone” (Liska & Baccaglini, 1990). This highlights that there is a relationship between local and national news and the fear of crime. In addition to the above, some research suggests that fear of crime is stronger among people living in the areas with higher levels of crime where public views more local than non-local news (Chiricos et al. 2000).

Media plays an important role in people’s lives. Most viewers rely on information received from it and news is not the only programmes that viewers watch. Reality TV programmes become more popular. Oliver and Armstrong (1995) carried out a study on
reality-based crime shows and results show that the more frequently these programmes were watched the more negative was viewer’s attitude to crime and criminals. However, viewers watching fictional crime television programmes like movies did not have negative attitude.

Fear of crime

Crime is defined as an act that violates the judicial system, and this does not only involve criminals but also society in general. It is not the product of criminal’s minds but a result of social processes which operate at every social and psychological level (Howitt, 2011). According to Warr (2000) fear of crime is a criminological occurrence that is widely recognized. Some believe that most previous studies done on “fear of crime” have focused attention almost entirely on the negative (Jackson & Gary, 2010). Most psychological research has speculated about possible “positive effects of fear” (Gladstone & Parker, 2003; Holoway, Rodebaugh & Heimberg, 2006), but only in recent studies has criminology begun to look at fear’s potential benefits (Gray, Jackson & Farrall, 2011). According to Jackson and Gray’s 2010 study, people’ behavioural response to fear may be helpful in advocating “functional fear”, which encourages an organisms’ alertness and “stimulates precautionary activity” (Jackson & Gray, 2010). As stated above more recent studies looks at the possibility of “functional fear” but it appears that there has not been much research done on how media might possibly influence maintaining a “functional fear”, despite the idea that media is the one of most influencing resonators of general public fear of crime (Doob & Macdonald, 1979; Jewkes, 2011). Inversely, some propose that media, by influencing the level of fear, level of avoidance behaviour and that the Fear of Crime Media Feedback Model can be seen as contributing to a decreasing level of victimisation (Cashmore, 2012). The Fear of Crime-Media Feedback Model assumes that individuals get information about crime via television shows (e.g. Forensic Evidence, or Serial Killer Profile), news programs (e.g.
BBC, CNN), newspapers and variety of other mass media sources. These sources include a disproportionately large number of serious, unusual crime types, which over-sensitises individuals to their chance of their victimisation (Jewkes, 2011), and this uncertainty can drive to fear consolidation in those viewers who spend time watching such crime media. Consequences of this become even scarier as people reduce their outside activity to a minimum in order to decrease the risk of on-street victimisation, which is associated with staying in the safe and familiar environment of their homes (Box, Hale & Andrews, 1988). It can be speculated that this phenomena leads to spending more time at home watching more crime media, reading more newspapers, listening to the radio and various other forms of in house recreation, which only reinforces the feedback cycle. According to Liska (1990) fear increases forced behaviour which successively increases fear, and they become part of an increasing loop.

Certain researchers try to explain the significant ambiguity of fear when it’s applied to the public’s attitude toward crime and its probability. Some studies suggest that there should be distinction made among the conceptual idea of fear of crime and an individual’s perception of being a victim of crime as certain people might see themselves as being at increased risk of victimisation more than others and still continue to stay unafraid (Gunter, 1987). According to others there is a need to make a distinction among “fear” and “worry”, “concern” and “anxiety” as they might be perceived as the same (Warr, 2000; Gray, Jackson & Farrall, 2011). As an illustration of this point, fear is said to refer to instant danger to an individual in certain situations, such as walking in dark alleyways at night, where the fear of threat exists. Concern, on the other hand, is perceived as an idea used to show or describe anxiety and also a fear of high risk of events; this idea is much more documented within the literature on “fear of crime”. According to Gray, Jackson and Farrall (2011) fear and worry might be correlated with prior victimisation of an event, rather than perception from
intermediary sources of information on the probability of future victimisation. Even though debate continues, questions surrounding “potential danger to self and/or others, risk, concern, worry, anxiety or behaviour are, at times all considered to be about “fear” (DuBow, McCabe & Kaplan, 1979).

**Attitudes towards criminals**

In the past the public image of the ‘criminal’ appears be a contradictory idea. According to Melossi (2000) public attitudes toward criminals can change depending on social and economic circumstances. In previous decades some offenders have been perceived as investors of new ideas and even as heroes more than thieves or villains. At other times they were viewed as ‘public enemies’ due to social design (Melossi 2000).

In more modern times the majorities of people have developed their impressions and attitudes toward criminals from newspapers, movies, books and in particular through television. The media plays an important role in the way the public perceives criminals and their actions. Most individuals have developed their fear due to extensive viewing of crime television programs, crime shows, and also news. They feel uncertain and tense in their own homes because T.V. presents the burglars and criminals as cold, unscrupulous, cruel individuals, armed with variety of advanced gadgets. This portrayal has a negative effect on viewers as it brings a fear of being burglarized or attacked when no one else is in the house; or in other words, become a victim.

Contemporary research looking at effects of television exposure and crime/offenders started with the Cultural Indicators Project (Signorielli, Gerbner & Morgan, 1995). This proposed idea, led by George Garbner, supported Gerbner’s and Gross Cultivation Hypothesis (Garbner & Gross, 1976). According to their 1976 theory people who watch television more frequently have the idea that the two worlds, real life and the world presented to them in media, are very similar and sometimes even this same. This theory is mainly
focused on the common patterns of time spent watching television, rather than the content (Garbner, 1970; Gerbner & Gross, 1976) because this occurrence is more highly significant in serious viewers rather than the casual ones. Several more recent studies also show the relationship between television exposure and individual’s attitudes, understanding and sometimes even perception of the real word, derived from media (Juliette, Konijn, Van & Walma, 2005). According to Morgan and Shanahan (1997) cultivation is a procedure for measuring the influence of the amount of television viewing on attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of individuals. However improvements in research have exposed that the association is far more complex than originally assumed in the original cultivation literature. Many studies have found interaction between television exposure and anxiety about crime and criminals where others such as Doyle (2006) and Ditton, Chadee, Farrall, Gilchrist and Bannister (2004) have not found any correlation. After a detail revision of their research Gilbert and Heath argued that certain programs would have an effect on not all but some of the viewers ” (Heath & Gilbert 1996). This kind of stimulated discrepancy, also called reception research (Dahlgren, 1988), where an individual’s specific characteristics and programs features (e.g. messages in the program, degree of crime and justice) are important variables that need to be taken in to the consideration in order to understand the relationship; as all of these components would have an impact on the result (Eschholz, 2003). This would indicate that the term “cultivation” is not a label to cover all viewers with different backgrounds and interests looking at television from different points of view, but that the idea of a central, although presumed research agenda exists (Van Den Bulck, 2004).

Level of stress

During the 20th century technology developed so fast that it has resulted in significant rise in the openness and graphic nature of television coverage of live events. This occurrence is best visible during conflict times for humanity, such as natural disasters, terrorist
attacks and many others. Due to the increase in conflicts and all the disadvantages related to it, it has become more noticeable to people during that time and stress started to increase thereafter. Those kinds of acts produce violence and intimidation commonly aimed at civilians in order to create fear and force others into actions or inactivity; carried out in specific way to gain maximum publicity though mass media and originated from political or religious motives (Bogen & Jones, 2006). Terrors acts are “designed” to injure and even kill large amounts of people; they are unpredictable and tend to take place in location considered to be relatively “safe” for people (Dougall, Hayward, & Baum, 2005). As found by a variety of studies, exposure to terrorism and its associated acts is correlated with increased level of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and a variety of related distress signs (Maguen, Papa & Litz, 2008; Norris et al., 2002).

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon (also known as 9/11 -September 11, 2001), the Oklahoma City Bombing, the Boston Marathon bombings are some of the most famous events of the 20th century. 9/11 received full live coverage from the very beginning, on most television channels all over the world for a number of days and even weeks after the event. Continuous coverage contained repetition of the actual events, hypothesis about causes, and speculation on reasons for the attack and also the significance of the events for the future (Marshall et al., 2007). While the importance of the incident deserved the widespread coverage, the amount of stress brought about in viewers by these kinds of reports is a relatively new bi-product of contemporary cultures. Since then there has been variety of different definitions to represent the impact of indirect exposure to this kind of trauma e.g. secondary traumatization, compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995) and also vicarious traumatization (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). The symptoms typical for secondary traumatization, have been found to be like those of PTSD but of a lower strength, including re-experiencing the event via persistent thoughts, flashbacks, bad dreams, escaping from any form of reminders of the trauma, paralysation and number of different psychological and
physiological over - excitation symptoms (e.g. anxiety, increased heart rate and alert response). Dougall, Hayward and Baum (2005) discovered that information passed by mass media is one of the main causes of secondary trauma, due to watching and learning about the harm of terrorism, which reached millions of people all over the world. After September 11, Schuster et al. (2001) carried out a national survey and discovered that 44% of all television viewers have developed one or more of the secondary trauma symptoms. In 2003, two years after 9/11, Swenson and Johnson conducted a study on the American academic population and found that 76% of respondents developed one or more secondary PTSD symptoms, where the other 32% reported three and more. Another study carried out in New York after the 9/11 attacks implied that the fact of being in this same place where the attack happened (directly affected) and TV viewing on regular basis resulted in secondary PTSD and anxiety, but the amount of time spent watching television alone did not have an effect on the development of the PTSD (Ahern et al., 2002). However consecutive research has established that the involvement in the past of stressful events raised the amount of people seeking mental health services in the New York area (Boscarino et al., 2004), initiated PTSD in individuals who had been previously exposed to trauma (Ai, Santangelo, & Cascio, 2006) and increased stress in a hospital patient population (Stout & Faroque, 2003). Studies carried after the Oklahoma City Bombing shows that the exposure to information from the actual event had a negative effect and resulted in PTSD symptoms in adolescents, children and teachers, who did not have any contact with victims of the attack (Pfefferbaum, Pfefferbaum, North & Neas, 2002).

Some news-specific studies imply that bad news displayed to viewers has the tendency to increase anxiety and sad mood in individuals, who were more likely to view personal worries as considerably worse than they actually were (Johnston & Davey, 1997). Studies of trauma in total promote the idea that individual subjective experiences have an
effect on the growth of PTSD irrespective of objective exposure to the events (Creamer, McFarlane & Burgess, 2005). Those findings suggest that there is a need for further development in the area of study in this relationship (Marshall & Galea, 2004)

The current research seeks to establish how far reaching the mass media influence is on the general public’s attitudes toward criminals and fear of crime. While this kind of research has never been conducted in Ireland, previous research is very instrumental in formulating the hypotheses stated below.

Hypothesis 1: It is hypothesised that there will be a relationship between exposure to violent television programmes and attitudes toward criminals.

Hypothesis 2: It is hypothesised that there will be a relationship between exposure to violent television programmes and fear of crime.

Hypothesis 3: It is hypothesised that there will be a significant difference in fear of crime between men and women.

Hypothesis 4: It is hypothesised that there will be a relationship between exposure to violent television programmes and news and level of stress.
Method

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 110 participants (n=110) age 18 and over who resided in the Republic of Ireland during the survey. There were no specific circumstances under which the participants participated in the study, only voluntary agreement to take a part. In order to achieve a probability sample of general population opportunity sample was used among all candidates to obtain 110 randomly select general public candidates. The population for the survey were employees from two different companies based in Tullamore (Byrne Casey & Associates, and Heatwise Tilewise Tullamore). Also some of the sample was enrolled at Athlone Institute of Technology, which is a higher education institution in the midlands of Ireland. The questioner was also passed around family and friends living in different parts of Ireland such as: Offaly, Westmeath, Wicklow, Tipperary, Laois and Limerick. An opportunity sample was obtained by asking employees of those two companies, students at AIT, family and friend of the all population of interest if they would take part in research

In the studied population 66 (60%) participants were females, 42 (38.9%) were males and 2 (1.8%) didn’t specify their gender. Participants’ age ranged from the youngest being 20 years old with the oldest being 83 and with 3 individuals who didn’t answer this question. The mean age was 39.76 years with a standard deviation of 12.28, and median and mode of 37.00 and 31 respectively.

In accordance with the questioner 108 (98%) of the samples belong to White race, 1 (0.9%) was Asian and 1 (0.9%) didn’t specified their race. There was relatively diverse mix of nationalities approximately 69.1% were Irish, 11.8% were Poles, 0.9% were Portuguese, 1.8% were Latvian, 1.8% were Romanian, 0.9% were Macedonian, 0.9% were Brazilian, 4.5% were Lithuanian, 1.8% were Czech, 0.9% were Afghan, 0.9% were German, 0.9% were
Pakistani, and 0.9% were English, there was 3 individuals (2.7%) in the sample that did not reveal their nationality.

Socio-economical characteristics of the sample show that 95 (86.4%) participants who answered income question have takings ranging from €3,000 to 80,000, which indicates a great distinction between individuals. For this characteristic approximate combined income made by primary caregiver was taken in to the account and indicate that most 40% ticked box with €10,001-€40,000, 32.7% €0-€10,000, 14.5% €40,001-€60,000, 6.4% €60,001 plus and 7 individuals didn’t give an answer.

Socio-demographic traits indicate that father’s education lever also varies from Junior Certificate 22.7%, through Leaving Certificate 21.8%, Qualified Trade Person 17.3%, Collage/University (Cert or Diploma) 11.8%, Collage/University Degree 5.5%, to Professional Degree (e.g. lawyer, doctor) 8.2%, with 10.9% who didn’t know father’s education level and 2 people who didn’t answer this question.

**Design**

This research is a qualitative study using a self-reported survey, composed from four different questioners assimilated to collect necessary information. The design of this study is descriptive, which is used in order to gather data without changing the participants environment (nothing was manipulated). The descriptive study was used to examine the relationship between dependent and independent variables.

There were many independent variables in the research, including demographic construct (age, gender, nationality, race etc.). These variables were important in order to define participants taking part in the study. Gender was also used to check one of the hypotheses looking at differences between men and women. The essential independent variable of interest was media exposure. This was looked at under different aspects of an individual’s exposure. First the average amount of hours spent watching television per day
was looked at. Second asked about the variety of different crime related programmes and news coverage watched on regular basis by the respondents. Further, the list of crime programmes was split into “reality” shows and “fictional crime drama”, while news programmes where broken to “national” and “international”. The crime related programs were added together in order to create separate variable used to look at the hypothesis. Similarly, news programmes and crime related programmes were put together to look if those have any impact on individuals stress. Many other independent variables were incorporated in the study. First, indicated if participants were exposed to criminal and non-criminals victimization in the past 12 months. Other included participants opinion about news programmes and crime related programmes.

The current research looks at the effects of mass media exposure on three dependent variables - attitudes toward criminals, fear of crime and the level of stress. Attitude toward criminals was measured using Generalized Attitude Measurement with six questions related to the individual’s feeling about criminals. This was measured using the 7-item scale to indicate the most accurate answer for each participant. Fear of crime was measured using 16 questions covering a variety of different phobias. The score range from which participants were asked to choose their number was from 0-8. The last dependent variable that was looked at in the current study was the perceived level of stress. To examine this variable, participant were asked to answer 10 questions on a 4 item scale.

Materials

In this research to examine the media influence on general public attitudes toward criminals and fear of crime, a short survey made of 46 questions was administered to collect the necessary data. The questionnaire was five pages long (see Appendix) and it took on average of 10 minutes to fill out. Included in the questionnaire were the dependent and independent variables. The three main dependent variables measured in this research were
attitude toward criminals, fear of crime and the level of stress. Using previous research as an indicator, a variety of other significant variables were included. The independent variables contained demographic measures (e.g. age, gender, race and other), media exposure, previous victimisation and other related to personal opinion about television programmes.

**Demographic Measures.** The self-administered (Edwards, 2007) questionnaire was used to look at independent variables. The first type of independent variable that was included in the questionnaire was a demographic measure which contained age, gender, race, nationality and also socioeconomic status of responded. The fist construct was age which was measured by simply asking the respondent to write their age (ratio level). Gender and race both asked individuals to tick a box that would best describe them, as those questions were measured by categories. Nationality was measured by openly asking each individual to write their nationality. Socio-economic status was measured by requiring respondent’s to answer three separate questions, two of which were related to income. The first was simply asking participant to give approximate income for the past year in euro. The second question related to income was interested in the approximate combined income of respondent’s primary caregivers when they were growing up; this was again done in a categorical measure by simply ticking a box. The third question was related to father’s highest education level (substitute mother if they had no father).

**Media Exposure.** A variety of aspects of media exposure (Edwards, 2007) were evaluated in the questionnaire. The first question asked the individual to tick a box with approximately how many hours he/she spent watching television on average day. Another inquires which type of media is their primary source of news. This is followed with a question asking respondents to indicate crime related programmes that they regularly watch. This list included four different types of television programs such as crime dramas, reality shows (crime related) and news, which were divided into national and international. The
reason for the separation of news programmes in to two is in the evidence provided by Liska & Baccaglini (1990); that they have differential effects on viewers. This part also asked how individuals perceived crime dramas and crime related reality shows by simply choosing one of the four categorise (very realistic, somewhat realistic, somewhat unrealistic, and very unrealistic). The final question related to news programmes also asked individuals to rate them the following four categories; exaggerate crime a lot, exaggerate crime a little, get it just about right, or underestimate crime.

This part of the questionnaire also included items that are looking at an individual’s exposure to crime in the past 12 months, both direct and indirect. Two questions were incorporated in to survey to find out if respondent and any of their family members have been in contact with any type of violent and non-violent crime. This list included five most common types of crimes (burglary, theft, robbery where someone threatened to harm them, assault, auto theft) and also space for any other crime that someone might be a victim of.

**Attitudes toward Criminals.** Attitude toward criminals was one of three dependant variables measured in the survey. To measure attitudes toward criminals “Generalized Attitude Measure” (McCroskey, Richmond, 1996) was used a seven-item Likert-type scale. This part was developed to look into different extends of attitudes toward criminals. The questions were universal in nature, as they asked respondent to provide overall attitudes toward criminals, and not specific unexpected contact they might have had. Respondents were asked to indicate their feelings about criminals on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 and 7 indicate a very strong feelings, 2-6 indicate a strong feelings, 3-5 indicate a fairly week feeling and 4 indicate that person is either undecided or did not understand the question. This section was made of 6 questions put in to adjective pairs such as “Good-Bad”, “Wrong-Right”, “Harmful-Beneficial”, “Fair-Unfair”, “Wise-Foolish”, and “Negative-Positive”. Before scoring, codes: 2(“Wrong- Right”), 3(“Harmful-Beneficial”) and 6(“Negative-
Positive”) were reversed. Then scores were summed, higher scores meaning more negative attitudes toward criminals. The scale as used in the research obtained a Cronbach’s coefficient alpha of .855

_Fear of Crime Scale_. Participants were asked to complete the 14 selected questions from full (24 questions) Fear questionnaire (Marks & Mathews, 1979). The current research uses the scale which consists of an 8 item Likert-type scale. From this section three different fear scores were obtained as it is divided into three subsections. The first subsection “total phobia scores” includes questions 21-28 with total score range of 64. This total was used as a dependent variable to check the hypothesis and had a Cronbach’s alpha level of 0.809. Responses ranged from would not avoid it (0-1), slightly avoid it (2-3), definitely avoid it (4-5), markedly avoid it (6-7) to always avoid it (8). This total score is made up of 2 separate phobia sub-score (agoraphobia items 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28 with score range of 0-48, and social phobia items 24, 26 with score range of 0-16). The second subsection “associated anxiety and depression” includes five common non-phobic symptoms (questions 30-34 with score range 0-40). Respondents were asked to choose form hardly at all (0-1), slightly troublesome (2-3), definitely troublesome (4-5), markedly troublesome (6-7), and very severely troublesome (8). The last subsection of section 3 contained only one question asking for individual’s to rate their present state of phobic/ fear symptoms, with the scale ranged from no phobias present (0-1), slightly disturbing/ not really disabling (2-3), definitely disturbing/ disabling (4-5), markedly disturbing/ disabling (6-7) and very severely disturbing/ disabling.

_Perceived Stress Scale_. The Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen & Williamson, 1988) was used in part 4 of the current study. Participants were asked to complete the 10-item section with responses ranging from 0-never, 1-almost never, 2-sometimes, 3-fairly often, and 4-very often. This part of the questionnaire asks individuals about current levels of experienced
stress, their feelings and thoughts during the last month. The questionnaire was designed to find out how often respondent felt a certain way, and to measure the degree to which everyday situations in one’s life are evaluated as stressful. Scores are achieved by summarizing across all items and by reversing responses to the four positively defined questions (40, 41, 43, 45). The Cronbach Alpha for this study sample was .780.

Procedure

The survey was conducted over 10 week period between December 2015 and February 2016. Each person who met the study criteria was asked individually if they would like to take part in the current research. For those who volunteered, the purpose of the study was explained, including the nature of the research. Potential participants were advised not to feel obligated to take part unless they want to. The ones who decided to become part of the survey were asked to answer all questions precisely and to the best of their memory. It was also explained to them that because some of the questions used in this paper are of a sensitive nature, which might bring bad memories for certain individuals, participants were advise that they are not required to answer any questions that might make them feel awkward or uncomfortable. It was also explained to them that if at any point of the survey they become distressed they can finish participation without any repercussion. However once the filed questionnaire was given back to researcher it is impossible to withdraw as there is no way of finding out which questionnaire belongs to which individual. An assurance of confidentiality was also given to each participant.

Each individual received their own copy of the questionnaire with an information sheet including researcher and supervisor details if there were any questions regarding the study and a helplines page that was easy to separate in order keep. Participants were told that the survey includes 46 questions, and it will take approximately 15 minutes to complete and that their participation will be used for thesis purpose and that all the data will be kept for a year
after the survey. Also they were advised that there will be no way of connecting individuals’ names to the responses.

After completing questionnaires, which took between 10-15 minutes, participants passed on their copy back to researcher, in order for him to analyse the data.
Results

There were two different analytical techniques used in this research to establish if there was a relationship between independent and dependent variables. To test the hypothesis 1, 2 and 4 one-way between groups ANOVA was used, but as some of the assumptions were broken, a non-parametric test was conducted. As an alternative for ANOVA, Kruskal-Wallis was used to determine whether there are significant differences between the means of two and more independent samples of different sample sizes. For hypothesis 3 t-tests was computed to compare the mean differences between groups that are different from each other. The main goal of a t-test was to see if there is any interaction among the two independent variables on the dependent. However when the assumptions were run to checked some were broken. Alternatively Mann-Whitney (nonparametric test) was run to compare the means between men and women.

Descriptive statistics were conducted for all of the dependent variables of interest included in the current study. The set of descriptive statistics was run on the variables attitudes toward criminals, fear of crime and level of stress. The minimum and maximum scores, mean, standard deviation, median, skewness and kurtosis and also test of normality Kolmogoro-Smirnov were reported for each variables (see Table1 and Table 2). Also descriptive statistic were run for independent variables included in hypotheses (Table3)
Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics Dependent Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward criminals</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>42.00</td>
<td>34.31</td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>37.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of crime</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>11.23</td>
<td>9.58</td>
<td>8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of stress</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>44.00</td>
<td>20.71</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics Dependent Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>K-S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward criminals</td>
<td>-.74</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>&lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of crime</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>&lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of stress</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>&lt; .05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics Independent Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violent television programmes</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mann-Whitney is appropriate with dichotomous (nominal) independent variable and a continuous (scale) dependent variable. This particular test compares differences between two independent variables when the dependent variable is not normally distributed. In this study Mann-Whitney is looking at difference in fear of crime between men and women (H3). From this data, it can be concluded that fear of crime was statistically significantly higher for females (U= 883.50, p=.002) (see Table 4).
Table 4: *Mann-Whitney test table displaying difference between males and females in fear of crime.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Ranks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42.54</td>
<td>1786.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>61.41</td>
<td>3991.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kruskal- Wallis test were generated for H1, H2 and H4. It is non-parametric method for evaluating whether the population medians on a dependent variable are the same across all levels of a factor. It is also used to compare two or more independent variables of equal or different sample sizes.

In order to run Kruskal-Wallis test for first and second hypotheses independent variable – violent television programmes was re-categorized. Reality shows and crime drama from question 10 were taken as one variable with 4 subgroups (1=none, 2=reality, 3=crime, 4=both). By adding that variable it was possible to include all answers within this specific question.

The Kruskal-Wallis test was first conducted to evaluate difference among the four violent television programmes on the attitude toward criminals. A Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in attitude toward criminals score between the different violent television programs, \( x^2 (3) = 1.851, \ p = .604 \), with a mean rank attitude toward criminals score of 49.15 for None, 58.53 for Reality Drama, 57.13 for Crime Drama and 55.17 for Both.
Second Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to evaluate difference among the four violent television programmes on fear of crime. This test as the previous one used violent television programs re-categorised group as a variable.

A Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in fear of crime score between the different violent television programs, $x^2 (3) = 3.318, p = .345$, with a mean rank fear of crime score of 49.71 for None, 57.97 for Reality Drama, 61.98 for Crime Drama and 50.79 for Both.

Third Kruskal Wallis test was conducted to evaluate difference among the violent television programmes including national and international news and the level of stress. As previously programs were re-categorised to get one measurable variable. New category included: 2=TV programs only, 3=news only, 4=both, 1=none, wasn’t included as there was only 4 participants in that group.

A Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in stress level score between the different violent television programmes including news, $x^2 (2) = 1.142, p = .565$, with a mean rank fear of stress level of 48.92 for TV programmes only, 49.31 for news only and 55.72 for Both.
Discussion

The main goal of this study was to investigate if the media has an impact on person’s attitudes toward criminals, fear of crime and also level of stress. From a review of previous research findings and existing literature results that the mass media has effect on fear of crime. The main hypothesis of the current study is that the more television programs (crime related and news) individuals watch the more impact on fear of crime it has. In previous research some specific types of programs were accepted to be more significant than others, and these variables were incorporated in this study, which contained crime related reality shows, crime drama, and also national and international news. However from current research the results do not support a connection between media consumption and fear of crime. Ultimately finding of this research do not support the main hypotheses.

One of the hypothesis looked if exposure to violent television programs has an impact on respondents’ fear of crime. The first concept that was looked at in terms of fear of crime was Fear of Crime Media Feedback Model, where viewers learn about crime from television shows, news programs, newspapers and other media sources and become more sensitive to higher chances of victimisation. This state can lead to consolidation of fear in them, which results in individuals’ limiting their outside activities due to fear of victimisation. Simply speaking the more television their watch it can lead to greater fear of crime. In this study, this particular correlation was not statistically significant. This doesn’t support Fear of Crime Media Feedback Model. The concept that the more crime related reality shows people watch influence fear of crime was also not supported by the results. This finding might have some indication that as according to Chiricos et al. (2000) that not the quality of the quality of programs watch that have impact on fear of crime but the amount and the previous victimisation.
Mann-Whitney was used to establish if there is significance of some participants’ traits variables in fear of crime, specifically gender. Results found that there is a statistically significant difference which determines that females had a higher level of fear of crime than males.

The concept that certain media formats (e.g., television, radio,) affect attitude toward criminals differently was tested using the Kruskal-Wallis analysis. Research attempted to look at the Cultivation Hypothesis, which focus on the idea that the more frequently they watch television the more negative is their attitude toward criminals. In viewers opinion the two worlds real and seen on the screen are this same. Even though the number of previous research has found the relationship this study attempted to but did not look at this due to the important factor that the individuals taking part in this study did not watch television, on average more than 4 hours a day. Instead this research looked at the relationship between violent television programs and attitude toward criminals, but this also didn’t give significant result. Findings might indicate that maybe there are some differences between the individual categories, such as social and economic status. The area where people live and maybe the amount of time they can allow to watch television influence their attitude toward criminals.

The results of this study also do not support the last hypothesis, stating that there will be a relationship between exposure to violent television programs and news, and level of stress. Previous literature review indicates that there is a relationship between those variables. Some studies suggest that information presented by media might cause secondary traumatization to viewers, due to their perception of the harm and damage done by criminals. Also news programs can influence individuals and increase their anxiety and sad mood, by leading them to view personal worries worse than they are. In current study respondents did not reported any significant correlation between television watching and their level of stress. This might lead to variety of different reasons why those finding do not support previous
literature. One might be as previously mentioned the area where participants were taken from. It can indicate that even though there might be bad news on television or radio but the area they live in might be safe with very little crime rate. Also some studies indicated that previous victimisation influences stress in viewers. Fortunately for individuals taking part in this research 99% of them did not become victim of crime in the past year, which can also indicated why there was no significance founding.

Despite all the efforts to design this study as methodologically strict as possible, there are some weaknesses with this research. First can be related to the sample size and area where the participants were taken from. Even though there is some variety in places where the sample was taken it still may not be generalized to other populations. People in more racially diverse areas and maybe in places with higher crime rates may have different attitude toward crime. Another possible limitation is the type of questionnaire that was used. Self-report questionnaire asks individuals to answer as accurately as possible but researcher does not have a guarantee that the respondent told the truth in their answer. This type of questionnaire can also be inaccurate in measuring dependent variables as not every individual is able to refer to their emotions when responding to a question. Also some participants didn’t like to answer question relating to their income, as it was simply asking them to write an approximate amount. This question could have been asked to in a categorical manner, which might have increased number of answers. As the results of the study do not support hypothesis another weakness might indicated that maybe some of the crime shows that the respondent is viewing are misinforming people about the nature of the criminality. Also even though respondents provide information of what kind of crime programs they are watching there is no way of determining how much time they spend watching it. Although one question asks individuals to provide amount of hours spend watch television, not all might be related to crime shows or news. Another limitation providing some explanation why there
was no significant relationship found might be the use of opportunity sampling which is obtained by asking members of the population if they would like to take part in the research. Even though it is a quick and easy way of selecting participants, the disadvantage is that it might be bias.

In the future this kind of researchers should try to test people in more urbanized areas, more racially diverse, more religion diverse and with objectively higher crime rates, as this may have some effect on individuals’ perception of crime. Maybe adding more relevant types of programming for specific area, and specific participants would provide some indication to the relationship. Also due to continuing impregnation of crime in media, it can be very hard to understand if exposure to mass media has a casual effect on fear of crime and attitudes toward criminals. That’s why future researchers should consider using quasi experiment or longitudinal study to evaluate the relationship. As this investigation uses fear of crime questionnaire, the incorporation of perceived risk in fear of crime study could have some advantageous findings because those two concepts are seen as two separate ideas which would be reflected in study.

The further studies proposed in this part are intendent to improve researchers knowledge of how useful this concept might be in viewing and clarify some part of public attitude toward criminals and the fear of crime. Perhaps most importantly information received form the research might provide important guidance to viewers.

In conclusion, it is hypothesised that the generality of the individuals’ knowledge about crime and criminals is determined form mass media. As a consequence of this phenomenon it is crucial that people understand how media impacts public attitude toward crime and criminals. This research shows that in contrast to other countries, people living in Ireland are less at risk of experiencing a fear of crime due to media influence, than others nationalities. It can also indicate that, while fear of crime can decrease life quality for some,
the majority of participants taking part in the research either worry less about crime or are not influenced by media
References:


Appendix

Data Collection Instrument

Dear Respondent,

My name is Ewelina and I am conducting research in the Department of Psychology at Dublin Business School entitled “Investigating the influence of mass media on general public attitudes towards criminals and fear of crime”. Your participation in this research study is greatly appreciated as your data collected will be used for my final year thesis.

Please answer each question accurately and to the best of your memory. Your participation is completely voluntary therefore you can choose, to withdraw from the study without penalty. However, as your name will not be on the questionnaire you cannot withdraw your data once you have submitted your anonymous questionnaire. During this survey you may be asked some questions that might cause some minor negative feelings, it has been used widely in research. If any of the questions do raise difficult feelings for you, contact information for support services are included on the final page.

This research will be collected in the format of a questionnaire and will take roughly 15 minutes to complete. You must be at least 18 years of age. It is your right to remain anonymous during and after this research study. Do not put your name or any other identifying marks on this questionnaire. All of the data will be securely stored and information from the questionnaire will be transferred form the paper record to electronic format and stored on a password protected computer.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the questionnaire that you are consenting to participate in the study.

If you have any questions regarding this research study, please feel free to contact me via email at XXXX@XXX. I am working on this project under the supervision of Dr Caroline Rawdon. You may contact her at XXXX@XXXX

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Ewelina Leszczynska
Section 1

Please answer each question by marking the appropriate response or filling the blank space provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. What is your age? ________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Before attending college, where was your primary residence? (Note: Be sure to enter only county, not street address).______________________Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is your gender?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Male □ Female □ Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Which best describes your race?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ White □ Black □ Asian □ Irish Traveller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Other (please specify if other is selected)_____________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What was your approximate income last year(in euro) €__________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What was the highest level of education achieved by your father (substitute mother if you had no father)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Junior Certificate □ Leaving Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Qualified Trades Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Collage/ University (Certificate or Diploma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Collage/ University Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Professional Degree (e.g. lawyer, doctor, accountant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Don’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What was the approximate combined income made by your primary caregivers when you were growing up?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ €0-10,000 □ €10,001-40,000 □ €40,001-60,000 □ €60,001+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Approximately how many hours do you spend watching television on an average day?
- □ 0-3
- □ 4-6
- □ 7-10
- □ 11+

9. Which of the following is your primary news source? (select only one)
- □ Television
- □ Radio
- □ Newspaper
- □ Social interactions / Word of mouth

10. Which of the following television programmes do you watch on a regular basis? (Check all that apply)
- □ 24
- □ America’s Most Wanted
- □ Born to Kill
- □ CSI
- □ CI Investigates
- □ Cops
- □ Crimes That Shook Britain
- □ Evil Up Close
- □ Forensic Evidence
- □ Homicide Hunter
- □ Other crime related reality shows: ____________________________
- □ Other crime dramas: ____________________________
- □ Judge Judy
- □ Law and Order
- □ Local News (Example: RTÉ)
- □ Motives & Murders
- □ Mind of a Murderer
- □ National News (RTÉ, TV3, TG4, Etc.)
- □ International News (BBC, CNN, Sky News, Etc.)
- □ Serial Killer Profile
- □ The First 48: Missing Persons
- □ Women Behind Bars

11. Would you say that news programs: □ Exaggerate crime a lot
- □ Exaggerate crime a little
- □ Get it just about right
- □ Underestimate crime

12. Would you say that TV crime dramas: (example: CSI, Law and Order, etc.)
- □ Are very realistic
- □ Are somewhat realistic
☐ Are somewhat unrealistic
☐ Are very unrealistic

13. Have you or anyone in your family been a victim of any of the following crimes in the last 12 months: (check all that apply)
☐ Burglary
☐ Theft
☐ Robbery where someone threatened to harm you
☐ Assault
☐ Auto Theft
☐ Any other crime ______________________________________

14. Have you been a victim of a non-violent crime in the past 12 months?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Section 2

Directions: On the scales below, please indicate your feelings about "Criminals." Numbers "1" and "7" indicate a very strong feeling. Numbers "2" and "6" indicate a strong feeling. Numbers "3" and "5" indicate a fairly weak feeling. Number "4" indicates you are undecided or do not understand the adjective pairs themselves. There are no right or wrong answers. Only circle one number per line.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>15. Good</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>Bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Wrong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Harmful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Fair</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Unfair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Wise</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Foolish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Negative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 3

Choose a number from the scale below to show how much you would avoid each of the situations listed below because of fear or other unpleasant feelings. Then write the number you choose in the space opposite each situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>would not avoid it</td>
<td>slightly avoid it</td>
<td>definitely avoid it</td>
<td>markedly avoid it</td>
<td>always avoid it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21 | Traveling alone or by bus
22 | Walking alone in busy streets
23 | Walking alone in quiet streets
24 | Being watched or stared at
25 | Going into crowded shops
26 | Talking to strangers
27 | Going alone far from home
28 | Large open spaces
29 | Other fearful situations (describe) _____________________________

Now choose a number from the scale below to show how much you are troubled by each problem listed, and write the number in the space opposite.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hardly at all</td>
<td>slightly troublesome</td>
<td>definitely troublesome</td>
<td>markedly troublesome</td>
<td>very severely troublesome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30 | Feeling miserable or depressed
31 | Feeling irritable or angry
32 | Feeling tense or panicky
33 | Upsetting thoughts coming into your mind
34 | Feeling you or your surroundings are strange or unreal
35 | Other feelings (describe) _____________________________
36. How would you rate the present state of your phobic/fear symptoms on the scale below?

Please circle one number between 0 and 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no phobias present</td>
<td>slightly disturbing/not really disabling</td>
<td>definitely disturbing/disabling</td>
<td>markedly disturbing/disabling</td>
<td>very severely disturbing/disabling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 4

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate by writing how often you felt or thought a certain way.

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

| 37 | In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? |
| 38 | In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? |
| 39 | In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed? |
| 40 | In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? |
| 41 | In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way? |
| 42 | In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? |
| 43 | In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life? |
| 44 | In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things |
| 45 | In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control? |
| 46 | In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? |
Samaritans is a confidential emotional support service for anyone in Ireland. The service is available 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair. You can talk to Samaritans at any time of the day or night.

Calling Samaritans is now free of charge from a landline or mobile.

116 123

jo@samaritans.org

Samaritans Ireland
4-5 Usher's Court
Usher's Quay
Dublin 8