



Determinants of violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents: The propositions

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ABSTRACT

Violence is a source of great concern for many researchers. Previous studies have suggested that cases of violent behaviour (VB) in developing countries have been increasing, including Jordan. Nonetheless, studies on VB among adolescents are still scarce in these countries. Many studies conducted in the Jordanian context focus on adults and violence against women; however, there is scarcity of research to examine adolescent violence due to exposure to violent media. As the number of violent cases in Jordan are on the rise, it is crucial that more studies are conducted to advance the issue of violence in the country, especially on the factors that contribute towards the involvement of Jordanian adolescents. Taking this into consideration, this conceptual paper discusses the factors influencing adolescents' VB, namely media exposure, cultural values, peer pressure and family communication, and consequently, examines the relationships between these variables. The model approach is used in this paper to expand theoretical propositions that can predict relationships between the desired constructs. The discussions are based on an extensive critical multidisciplinary literature review since literature suggests that violence among adolescents cannot be attributed only to a single variable, but rather to a combination of various variables. The literature review is crucial in guiding the investigation on how these factors affect Jordanian adolescents' VB. Gender and socioeconomic status (SES) are also discussed based on the prediction that these variables moderate the relationships between media exposure, cultural values, peer pressure, family communication and VB. Consequently, the findings will contribute valuable data to the growing body of knowledge related to adolescent violence. Furthermore, this study will be helpful for the government and other social agents in devising a concrete policy that can eradicate adolescent violence.

Keywords: **Violent behaviour, media exposure, cultural values, peer pressure, family communication**

INTRODUCTION

Violence has become a grave social concern for many countries in the world (Meinck et al., 2023). The proportion of violence among youths is highly troubling, leading to negative implications for the society (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2021). Violent adolescents pose a serious threat to community safety and security, as well as an extreme challenge to the future of communities. Thus, understanding adolescent violence is important since it is one of the many behavioural changes that occur primarily during this period (UNICEF, 2021). Studies on VB from the Arab region have shown that the number of adolescents engaging in VB is increasing, and the majority of these studies reveal that a significant number of adolescents have been physically assaulted (Ybarra et al., 2022; Obermeyer, 2015). A report by World Health Organization (WHO) (2023) reveals that violence is one of the most common causes of adolescent deaths and is the world's third greatest cause of mortality among adolescents. However, its prevalence varies greatly by area, family's socioeconomic status (SES) and gender. Deviant conducts peak in adolescence, with individuals becoming more deviant during this period (Miller et al., 2014).

While adolescent violence is considered to be one of the most investigated subjects throughout cultures, including Jordan, more studies are still needed to improve our understanding of adolescent behaviour (e.g., Elghossain et al., 2019). As suggested by Raffee et al. (2021), the rise in adolescent violent conduct in Jordan necessitates a deeper investigation of VB by looking beyond factors such as media exposure (Eneizat et al., 2023a). To date, research in the Middle East has mostly concentrated on VB among the younger generations in Jordan and Arab nations in general (Elghossain et al., 2019; Presler-Marshall, 2022; Rayan & Baker, 2019). These studies however, have not clearly examined the impact of media exposure on adolescents' behaviour and motivation towards VB, but instead had focused on other variables such as parents, friends, schools, and social context. Scholars have long emphasised the importance of paying more attention on media exposure and its impact on behaviour (Eneizat et al., 2023a), because diverse media, including movies, feature numerous scenes of violence (Eneizat et al., 2023a). Despite the fact that violent content dominates the media, there is a paucity of studies on media exposure, particularly the impact of violent movies on VB. Thus, the current paper aims to respond to these calls and dig deeper to discuss and investigate further VB of adolescents.

Violence cannot be traced back to a single cause. Its causes are multifaceted and can be triggered by a variety of factors (Bushman & Huesmann, 2015). For example, media exposure is a risk factor that can lead to more aggression and violence (Ybarra et al., 2022). Besides media exposure, cultural values, peer pressure and family communication may likely encourage and trigger VB (Garcés-Prettel et al., 2020; Korol & Stattin, 2021; Li et al., 2021). However, to date, only a few studies have explored the effects of media exposure, cultural values, peer pressure, family communication on adolescents' VB (Eneizat et al., 2023b; Elghossain et al., 2019). Specifically, this paper will focus on the relationships between media exposure, cultural values, peer pressure, family communication, and VB among Jordanian adolescents and generate propositions that explain the relationships between these variables.

As a conceptual paper, the study adopted a model strategy. The goal of this approach is to provide a theoretical framework that can predict and explain relationships between constructs (Jaakkola, 2020). Hence, this method was adopted to achieve the main purpose of this study, which is to explain the relationships between the study variables.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR

The conceptualisation and empirical works

In discussing the concept of violent behaviour (VB), it is also crucial to define and distinguish concepts such as aggression and violence, as scholars attribute different interpretations to such concepts. Human aggression is defined by most scholars as any behaviour that is meant to damage another person who does not desire to be harmed, either psychologically or physically (Bushman & Huesmann, 2015). The majority of studies describe violence as aggressive behaviour aimed at causing severe bodily harm, like death or injury (Bushman & Huesmann, 2015). For the purpose of this study, VB is characterised as extreme physical harm or injury that takes place among adolescents.

Media exposure, cultural values, peer pressure, family communication and violent behaviour

Adolescents consume and utilise all forms of media extensively for entertainment purposes. Although media is a popular means of entertainment among adolescents, research has shown that adolescents prefer to watch films containing violent scenes (Khan, 2020). Consequently, research has also found that violent television shows and video games are linked to negative health consequences, including interpersonal violence (Wallace et al., 2023). Additionally, exposure to violent media is a causal risk factor for increased VB (Miles-Novelo & Anderson, 2021). Research on media violence, in general, supports the idea that exposure to violent content portrayed by the media may influence VB (Aslam, 2015). Juveniles are more inclined to commit a violent act as compared to adults. This clearly reveals that media violence incites VB (Aslam, 2015). There are however, arguments that there is practically little evidence to prove that media violence is linked to severe VB (see Lindo et al., 2022). Although these studies agree that exposure to violent media is linked to an increased risk of significantly violent conduct, in most cases, these associations are mostly caused by other influential variables such as family, friends and social context (Bushman & Anderson, 2015; Ybarra et al., 2022).

Additionally, the frequency of viewing violent media content such as a movie or video game is significantly associated with an increase in physical violence amongst children and various physical abuse (Groves et al., 2020). Previous research seems to agree that media exposure is significantly linked to violent conduct. Simply put, the more the viewer is exposed to violent content, the more likely they are going to engage in VB. For the purpose of this discussion, media exposure refers to adolescents' exposure to violent and action films. Therefore, we illustrate the relationship between media exposure and VB and propose that:

Proposition 1: Media exposure is associated with violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents.

Cultural values are characterised as an individual's or group's moral beliefs and principles believed to be significant within the society. In a variety of ways, culture moderates the relationship between values and violence. Culture creates the environment in which values may be exercised (or not). Empirical and meta-analysis investigations on VB (e.g., Romera et al., 2023) reveal that violence and aggression are more prevalent in societies with a collective culture than individualistic societies. However, there are also studies that provided contrary findings. These studies show that collectivist social settings, which prioritise collective interests above individual needs, provide fewer possibilities for

violence to be expressed (Benish-Weisman et al., 2017; Gram et al., 2019). Violence may be more justifiable in a culture that prioritises individual wants over the needs of others (Benish-Weisman et al., 2017).

Culture has an impact on a wide range of social situations and behaviours of people. Different social and cultural values play different roles in influencing the behaviour of individuals (Von Suchodoletz & Hepach, 2021). These values can also reinforce and support the use of violent acts (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2018). For example, the cultural acceptance of violence as a natural part of raising children or as a natural way to solve problems, is one of the crucial predictors of violence among people (NASEM, 2018). Violence may also be present in societal situations or subcultures where it is seen as a respectable means of resolving conflicts (Benish-Weisman et al., 2017). This suggests how cultural values may also help explain why some countries have higher rates of violence than others (Lansford & Dodge, 2008; Li et al., 2021; Park et al., 2022). This leads us to the next proposition:

Proposition 2: Cultural values are associated with violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents.

Next, peer pressure is characterised as a situation where individuals of the same age group motivate another to do something violent. The impact of peer factors on violent conduct has been extensively researched, albeit with varying approaches, resulting in a complicated worldwide understanding of the problem (Hébert et al., 2019). The effect sizes of various peer predictors on violent victimisation, like dating violence, were examined from a meta-analysis context based on almost 87 studies (Hébert et al., 2019). Findings reveal that peer variables such as supportive peers, affiliation with deviant peers and peer victimisation had modest and major effect sizes in predicting violent acts among adolescents (Hébert et al., 2019). For instance, a close friend's susceptibility to peer influence predicts future negative and unfavourable peer pressure responses (Bozzini et al., 2020). Similarly, several studies (e.g., Farrell et al., 2022; Korol & Stattin, 2021) have found that peer pressure is a crucial factor in the rise of violence.

From the above findings, it is imperative to acknowledge that peer pressure is a crucial factor in determining VB. An earlier study by Anastasovski et al. (2015) examined the relationship between peer group pressure and VB. The findings concluded that peer pressure, as measured by the function of a peer group leader, plays a substantial influence in the manifestation and initiation of violent conduct. Their findings are in line with those of another study, which revealed that there is a strong positive association between peer pressure and violence (Farrell et al., 2022; Massarwi et al., 2019) and during adolescence, involvement with delinquent peers increases the commission of significant physical violence (Massarwi et al., 2019). The reviews from literature lead to an understanding that peer pressure may influence VB among adolescents. Thus, we posit the following:

Proposition 3: Peer pressure is associated with violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents.

Whether violent media is a symptom or a cause for violence, most violence experts agree that violence is multifactorial in nature and can be caused by a variety of variables (Le et al., 2023). On that note, the family environment is also seen as a causative factor that leads to VB. Several recent empirical evidences reveal that family environment and family cohesion (Krisvianti & Triastuti, 2020; Lanchimba et al., 2023; Zakaria et al., 2022)

all influence VBs, especially among adolescents. To illustrate, a study demonstrated that parental care and family communication are the most significant protective factors against VB among adolescents (Kast et al., 2016). In this context, we define family communication as the act of creating ideas, interaction and conversation between family members. Studies have shown that high levels of communication between mothers and fathers were linked to fewer cases of physical violence among adolescents (Kast et al., 2016). A study by Eneizat et al. (2023b) emphasised that adolescent preventative treatments focusing on family connectivity might be effective in reducing VB.

A more recent study by Garcés-Prettel et al. (2020) describes how family communication impacts violent conduct and victimisation among adolescents in school. The empirical data from this study reveals aggressive family communication as a risk predictor for school violence, but open communication between parents and adolescents is a protective way to reduce or prevent such violence. The findings are consistent with Bozzini et al. (2020) and Kast et al. (2016) who suggest that the most significant safety factor against adolescent violence is the perception of parental care as they posit that conducts of violence can also be learned by children from their home. Indeed, violence is a learned habit that is frequently learned through families, parents, or friends in the household or society (Decamp & Ferguson, 2017). Thus, family communication provides the necessary motivation for teens to engage in VB. This leads us to propose that:

Proposition 4: Family communication is associated with violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents.

The role of gender

The consequences of violent media exposure may be expressed differently for males and females (Kanz, 2016). Kanz (2016) highlighted that in their social context, girls and boys perceive violence differently. For example, since violence is still more acceptable for males, and in media portrayal, the most aggressive heroes are men, thus, the rewards are typically more appealing to males. The way the media portrays violence and the roles of boys in the society contribute towards violence having a greater impact on boys (Burnay et al., 2022; Kanz, 2016). Beside social context, gender stereotypes are also effectively communicated through films, violent videos and shows (Ward & Grower, 2020). As a result, early childhood exposure to media content with high rates of VB is likely to increase the likelihood of acquiring unfavourable gender stereotypes (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). When boys, but not girls, watch violent media, their acts of violence increase remarkably, implying that gender is a factor in violence (Zhang et al., 2021). Such evidences from past research clearly explain how media exposure affects viewers but the extent of the impact varies according to gender. For example, media outlets often contain scenes of violence that show men as heroes and more violent than women. Thus, exposure of adolescents to such scenes reinforces violence among boys as compared to girls. Thus, the following proposition is generated:

Proposition 5a: The moderating role of gender in the relationship between media exposure and violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents.

Some studies have also demonstrated that cultural values influence VB but differ based on gender (Alsaleh, 2022; Álvarez et al., 2015; Wamue-Ngare et al., 2023). In every country, attitude towards violence varies between different gender-based societies and cultural groups, as well as from one culture to another. For instance, adults born in non-English-speaking nations display weaker views on domestic abuse than those born in Australia or other Western

countries, according to an Australian study (ANOP Research Services, 1995). Adolescents who believe that both genders should use violence are more likely to have an Asian or Middle Eastern cultural background (Headley, 2002; Presler-Marshall, 2022). Likewise, variations in views regarding violence towards women based on ethnic background have been observed in a number of research. That is, men belonging to certain cultural values tend to support violence against women (Rezwana & Pain, 2021; Wamue-Ngare et al., 2023). The discussions presented above attest to the role of gender in the relationship between cultural values and VB. Thus, the following proposition is suggested:

Proposition 5b: The moderating role of gender in the relationship between cultural values and violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents.

Further, both empirical and theoretical data suggest that men and women have differential vulnerability to peer influence (see Coleman & Farrell, 2021; McCoy et al., 2019). However, some other studies yielded contradictory findings on gender differences and peer effect. A number of research suggests that males are more influenced by peers towards delinquency and VB than females owing to established gender expectations and norms (Selmini, 2020; Weerman & Hoeve, 2012). In relation to this, Heerde and Hemphill (2019) conducted a meta-analysis investigation to look at the relationships between peer group and family risk and physical violence experience. Involvement with deviant peers and experiences of physical violence showed a similar correlation but very little links between family and peer variables. Based on the sample, the gender variable as a moderator revealed the variance in the findings.

Another group of studies demonstrated that girls are more influenced by violent peers as compared to boys. Likewise, Zimmerman and Messner (2010) discovered that females had a greater positive connection between being exposed to violent peers and participating in violent conduct than males. Furthermore, at higher degrees of low SES, when there is a high concentration of violent peers, observed gender differences in the peer effect were responsible for a progressive narrowing of the gender gap in violence. Based on this literature, it clearly demonstrates that gender plays a big role in the relationship between peer pressure and VB. Thus, the following proposition is generated:

Proposition 5c: The moderating role of gender in the relationship between peer pressure and violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents.

Additionally, research have also shown that the impact of family environment on behaviours of violence among adults and adolescents may differ between males and females (Archer, 2022). Archer (2022) also claimed that boys commit more VB than girls. Smith-Marek et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis study to investigate the impact of violence on children being raised in a physically violent family and becoming a physical violence offender. The results indicate modest effect sizes, with perpetration having a larger effect size than victimisation. Compared to girls, boys were shown to receive a greater impact from family violence and perpetrating partner violence thereafter. Increasing evidence (Khoury-Kassabri, 2019) has proven that the relationship between family contact and violence depends on the gender. For girls, it was shown that there is a relationship between aggressive communication between parents and the commission of violence on dates, such as physical violence and abuse. In general, however, communication and aggressive behaviour between fathers and sons, males or females, affected their VB in adolescence (Temple et al., 2013). These studies demonstrate that family communication is an important factor that may

influence VB in adolescents. The impacts however, differ according to gender. For example, when family communication with adolescents is reduced, boys may appear more violent than girls because they are inherently violent and therefore, need more parental care and communication with family members. Thus, the following proposition is suggested:

Proposition 5d: The moderating role of gender in the relationship between family communication and violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents.

The role of socioeconomic status (SES)

Research have found that one of the key risk factors in the outcome of negative adolescent behaviour is the family's SES (Berkowitz, 2020; Lee et al., 2021). According to Ponnan et al. (2018), the relationship between film violence and real violence is largely associated to those younger and less educated rather than those from lesser socioeconomic backgrounds. Utilising questionnaires and in-depth interviews, Saleem et al. (2013) and Sim (2021) examined VB of adolescents and found that the economic or financial status and SES play a moderating role in the relationship between media exposure and VB. In contrast, DeCamp and Ferguson's meta-analysis study (2017) demonstrated that increased exposure to media does not significantly affect violence, but it appears that social and familial context has a bigger influence in predicting the violence risk. This explains that when an adolescent is exposed to violent content while living in a deprived neighbourhood characterised by behavioural problems and lack of discipline, it will lead to an increase in VB. Thus, this paper proposes the following:

Proposition 6a: The moderating role of socioeconomic status in the relationship between media exposure and violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents.

The interaction of socioeconomic and cultural elements in a dynamic social process explains VB. Similarly, a family's SES has a modest but considerable overall influence on violence (Ahmadabadi et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021). Violence can also be influenced by cultural and social beliefs and norms (Cala & Soriano-Ayala, 2021; Park et al., 2022). For instance, proponents of collectivist beliefs and values may encourage tolerance for higher levels of violence than individualistic cultures (Flood & Pease, 2009; Romera et al., 2023). The decision-making of adolescents in disadvantaged areas is influenced by cultural influences, including decisions about violent conduct (Berg et al., 2012). Similarly, Berkowitz (2020) contended that cultural values have a substantial impact on the degree of violence among adolescents. The study reveals that violence may arise in the case of low SES of adolescents. Based on this discussion, SES plays an important role in the relationship between cultural values and VB. To clarify, in deprived neighbourhoods, there are often values or practices that help spur violence, such as the use of beatings in child-rearing, while in non-deprived neighbourhoods, they may use modern methods instead (such as collective and individual cultures), and this can affect VB among adolescents. Thus, this paper posits the following:

Proposition 6b: The moderating role of socioeconomic status in the relationship between cultural values and violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents.

Furthermore, literature also suggests that peer pressure is associated with an increase in VBs. According to Zakaria et al. (2022) as well as Zimmerman and Messner (2010), the

impact of peer violence exposure on violent crime diminishes as peer violence levels rise. Furthermore, as neighbourhood poverty grows, so does violent exposure among peers, and the impact of exposure to peer violence on violence decreases as neighbourhood poverty increases. Living in a poor neighbourhood raises the exposure of both males and females to peer violence (Zimmerman & Messner, 2010). According to De Courson et al. (2023) and Haynie et al. (2006), socioeconomic deprivation is positively associated with adolescent violence in a wide variety of communities. Adolescent violence is influenced indirectly by neighbourhood deprivation, which increases the chances of adolescents joining violent peer relationships (Haynie et al., 2006; Zakaria et al., 2022). Based on these studies, this paper suggests that SES has a role in the relationship between peer pressure and VB. Simply put, disadvantaged neighbourhoods often experience violence and becomes an environment conducive to increased violence, through peer pressure that encourages others to commit more violence. Thus, this paper suggests the following:

Proposition 6c: The moderating role of socioeconomic status in the relationship between peer pressure and violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents.

Research have also found that the economically and socially disadvantaged families and low-income groups experience an increase in VB as compared to those of economically and socially advantaged families and high-income groups (Ahmadabadi et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021). Given the importance of SES, it is revealed that poor communication between parents and adolescents is an important predictor of violence, especially if they have a low SES (Baker et al., 2023; Beyers et al., 2001). In other words, if communication between family members decreases and they are from a low SES, the tendency of committing VB is greater. Findings from a systematic study conducted by Timshel et al. (2017) were also consistent with these insights, where they found that violence is linked to several factors such as child-rearing ways and family relationship. Along with family factors, low SES is a strong predictor of violence risk (Qorbani et al., 2022; Timshel et al., 2017). This suggests that SES has a role in the relationship between family communication and VB. For example, when family communication becomes weak or non-existent, especially between parents and children who live in slums, and is often characterised by violence, this leads to an increase in VB among adolescents. Thus, this paper proposes the following:

Proposition 6d: The moderating role of socioeconomic status in the relationship between family communication and violent behaviour among Jordanian adolescents.

Based on the above discussions, we developed a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that explains adolescents' predisposition towards VB in Jordan. The Cultivation Theory (CT) and Social Learning Theory (SLT) were considered in guiding the focus and direction of the present work. CT was used to emphasise the relevance of media, particularly television, in influencing individuals' VB (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). This theory postulates that people who spend more time watching TV are more likely to associate the real world in the same manner as they recognise the most common and frequent themes on TV (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). On the other hand, SLT comprehensively explains the relationships between variables involved in a research. The goal of this theory is to recognise and describe how humans behave in a certain way. The theory stresses learning that takes place in a social setting, where people are supposed to learn from one another (Ormond, 1999), and emphasises direct (through personal experience) and indirect (by

modelling other individuals) learning from the social environment, as well as cognition as main indicators of behaviour (Petraitis et al., 1995). Simply put, both theories explain the relationships between the selected variables and how these factors influence VB for a better understanding of the problem.

This study contributes to the existing literature on VB by examining variables that can increase its prevalence. The current study also integrated two theories (i.e., CT and SLT) and the work of previous studies that relied on a single theoretical perspective, such as SLT. Based on their importance, relevance and clarity to the topic under investigation, the aforementioned theories were deemed suitable to provide an in-depth and comprehensive assessment of the study variables, to enhance the understanding of adolescent violence. The theories are essential to the current study because they provide a detailed framework to explain and predict reasons of violence.

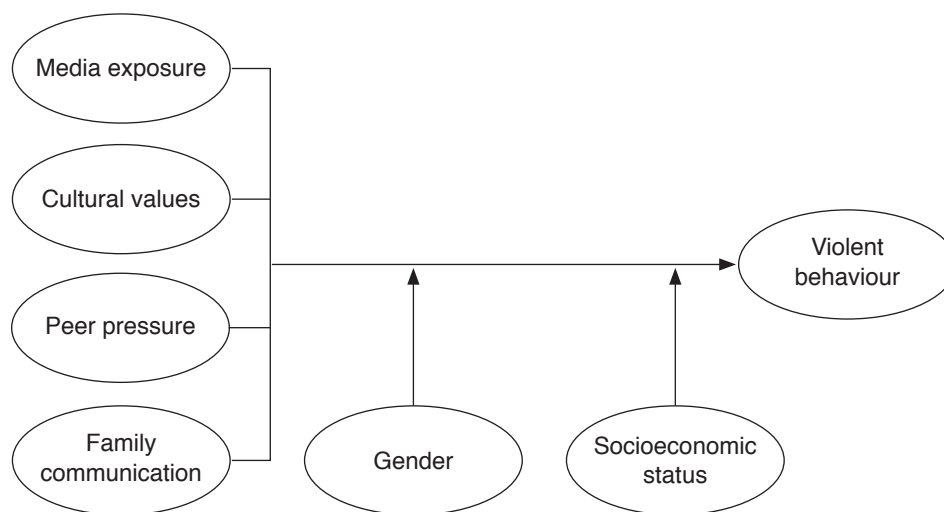


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The paper demonstrates a comprehensive view of the factors influencing adolescents' VB. The propositions and framework will guide future studies in this domain and explain the moderating effect of gender and SES on VB, especially among adolescents in the Jordanian context. The findings from the study will provide compelling evidence for future research into the relationships between these variables. Given that, it is crucial that more studies be conducted to further understand the reasons why VB among adolescents in Jordan is increasing and how gender and SES moderate the relationships between these variables. The study will substantially contribute to the new literature on the factors that influence adolescent VB in Jordan. Besides, it will also create awareness for leaders, decision-makers, government agencies and other related parties on the needs for the development of the adolescent cohort. In addition, this study suggests that violence is not limited to adolescents only, so future studies should focus on studying VB in children and adults.

CONCLUSION

The current paper adds to the existing literature on violence in various aspects. By generating propositions between important variables, it provides an opportunity for

future researchers to conduct empirical studies to evaluate adolescent violence, especially in the Jordanian context. This paper also provides detailed conceptual and theoretical foundations that enhance the body of knowledge in the field of violence. The paper presents the underlying causes of violence among adolescents that can likely to lead to more significant solutions. Aside from contributing to the literature on the topics of violence and adolescent behaviour, especially from the cultural perspective, the findings will also guide leaders as well as policymakers, government and non-governmental organisations on how to formulate and design policies related to media roles, and the impact of media exposure on adolescents. The knowledge gained from the paper can help decision-makers build an in-depth understanding of the problem and help them develop appropriate strategies and policies to reduce the engagement of adolescents in VB.

As with any conceptual studies, there are certain limitations to the current paper. First, its focus is on media exposure, cultural values, peer pressure, family communication, and violent conduct in Jordan, a developing country. Next, the moderating effect of gender and SES on media exposure, cultural values, peer pressure, family communication and VB among adolescents in Jordan may be regarded as sensitive, thus raising the possibility of bias. Nevertheless, the current nature of the paper and the proposed model can support further empirical research to be conducted and confirm the roles of each variable in adolescent VB.

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