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### Children's television viewing in Mizo family dynamics: A study in four districts

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#### Abstract

The contemporary world we live in revolves around media technology which has become an essential aspect of communication. Television has been deeply rooting itself in every socio-familial system and brings about changes in every culture. Its immense quality to influence children's life raises interest as well as about child media use or misuse in this techno-social world. The study took place in four districts of Mizoram. It investigates how family members interlace children's television viewing with forms of mediation, rules, restrictions and also parental views on television.

During family viewing, children tend to perform other activities out of individual choices or responsibilities. Despite watching television, some children had a preference for play. There were some gender and age differences in their play pattern. Academic responsibilities also compelled older children to study during family TV viewing. It was noted that children were more focused when they viewed their own choices of programmes, but when they 'have to' watch programmes like News channels their attention was easily diverted. Parents are unable to regulate their children's TV viewing and a large number of them practiced restriction on viewing hours. Some parents were able to watch TV with their children. This co-viewing often led to adult child conversation based on the show. However, most parents simply discussed the programmes without stressing on child directed dialogues. Parents had views on benefits and hazards of TV viewing on children. They definitely felt that children imitate actions, language and other physical adapting of dress or hairstyle of characters that sparked their interest. They displayed a tendency to often use television as a target of blame for defending children's socially unacceptable behaviour yet, good traits were attributed to good 'social circle'.

**Keywords:** Influence, constructive mediation, restrictive mediation, co-viewing, media literate

#### Introduction

In today's world, it has been well recognized and accepted that television possesses immense qualities to impart both positive and negative learning. To foster positive learning, several researchers indicated the importance of the content and parental influences leading to monitoring of television viewing. With such propensities, television industry has been reaching the tribal areas of Mizoram and undisputedly becoming a part of family lives. It has been changing the people and children in their lifestyle, attitudes, fashion, behaviour and culture with increasing Western and Korean influences.

#### Influence of television viewing

With television becoming a part of the ecology, children have been viewing programmes predominantly for entertainment as visual images with sound attract children and have instant appeal. They are a vulnerable population and can be influenced by the content of television; because during the formative years, the brain of the child soaks everything from their environment (Menon, 2004). Throughout the years, television has been known to influence children in a positive or negative manner depending on certain variables like age, gender, content of the message and attitude of the viewer. From the child developmental domains, these influences can be distinctly identified.

**Physical Development:** Television's potentials to influence the physical development in children have been noted. Television content can create the desire to look as the portrayed screen-beauty in children as well as in adolescence.

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This could lead to image-consciousness and discontentment. Studies have also linked to the relationship between body dissatisfaction and television. They notice that, children start becoming aware of how they look from the young age of 6 years. They start fantasizing with the popular 'model-figure' characters and wish to 'look alike or be alike'. Their aspiration to become popular or beautiful makes them go on a diet because television programmes shows that overweight individuals are unattractive, unsuccessful and unpopular (Scheibe, 2007).

On the other hand, various channels advertise unhealthy junk food like pizza, fast-food, etc. in such a way that makes children desperately want to consume the new flavour foods over traditional forms of food (Horgen, Choate & Brownell, 2001). This food companies tactfully mesmerize children, which than pressurize parents in buying the product. Excessive consumption of these junk food products leads to overweight and obesity in children which is one of the major public health problems (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2007). The conflicting messages of combining thin and lean figure as an ideal body, while promoting desire to consume unhealthy food create a rise in both eating disorder and obesity in children (Horgen, Choate & Brownell, 2001).

Report on Children and the media: Advocating for the future Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP, 2004) said, pre- school children who have television in their bedroom, are more likely to be overweight as it changes their nature of play. They do not involve much in physical activities such as sports or other outdoor games. Extreme viewing of television also slows down the metabolism leading to obesity and diabetes. Moreover families who combine viewing and eating have shown to eat more junk food causing health problems (as cited in Pitman, 2008).

Over exposure to television could also cause other problems for children. It increases the risk of epilepsy as the flashing bright screen images may provoke epileptic seizures. It was also found that, excessive viewing could cause eye problems like short-sightedness. It also increases the risk of premature puberty or cancer because it disturbs the body's hormonal balance. Moreover, children with TV in their bedroom were found to have sleeping problems as they were more prone to night-time viewing (RACP, as cited in Pitman, 2008).

**Language development:** Television is also known to influence language. There is a relationship between various forms of phrases, sentences, meanings, etc. in a language. Discovering the connection between various concepts helps in acquiring different languages (Naigels & Mayeux, 2001). Television has been contributing to the acquisition of language and helps in understanding a foreign language from the 'native speaking' and their culture simultaneously (Koul,1983). Sesame Street has played a crucial role for immigrants in the US in building understanding of English and American culture. Television helps a child or even adults in learning new and unusual words that extends their vocabularies (Kremer, 2007). Studies also indicated that children have the ability to 'fast map' new words from viewing television in a single exposure. It consists of the ability to gain fast and incomplete understanding of words and its meaning by restructuring the concepts and underlying abstracts (Rice & Woodsmall, 1988). They are capable to learn new words by listening to the conversation, interaction and actions of others even in a distracting situation lacking child directed speech (Mills & Danovitch, 2012). Pre-school children can even learn foreign language from exposure to

television as they can achieve accurate pronunciation by their power to mimic sound accurately (Koul,1983). Children are imitative and easily mimic the skimming voice and accent of villains in Chota Bheem or the sound of different Pokemons like Pikachu, etc. However, studies of pre-school children at Harvard University of Human Development found that children who were exposed to television at a very young age had limited language abilities than those who were more exposed to the sound of their mother's voice. Other studies also denotes that, although children can learn vocabularies from television, very young children below 2 years learn better from real life experiences (Kirkorian, Wartella & Anderson, 2008). These researches indicated that learning of language from television depends on children's cognitive age.

**Cognitive development:** Television has a way of maintaining children's attention by various means, be it, the medium itself or the content; it raises an issue of concern amongst researchers. It is one of the most debated subjects. There were conflicts amongst researchers, some said that television impaired children's attention while other said it is not the medium itself, but the content. Some researchers said that the frequent and rapid shift of focus, change in scenes, speed of dialogue and content captures a child's attention so well, that it reduces the time for processing. This leads to the inability to retain focus on a particular segments causing short attention span (Kirkorian, Wartell & Anderson, 2008). Yet, another study indicates that television is not the cause of short attention span but the content of the programme watched (Christakis, 2007).

Just as there is difference of opinion about television's affects on children's attention, there were some critics who claimed that television reduces a child's creativity and imagination (Moeller,1996). Researchers said that television impaired young children's executive functioning that is the collection of skills, memory, attention, etc. because of the fast moving scenes and dialogues that hampers their academic skills (Lillard & Peterson, 2001). Other study also shows that when children watch television purely for entertainment their academic grades lowered. However, if a child watches more educational programme at a young age, they were more likely to have better academic skills and shows more creativity (David, Diehl & Stephanie, 2013). It indicates the importance of content; as the more children watch un-educational television, the lower their school achievements (Chomstock & Scharrer, 2006). George Garbner's 'cultivation theory' also gives more importance to the content rather than the medium.

**Socio-emotional development:** Television has virtually become a part of our society. It resides in the socio-dynamics of children; it influences their socio-emotional development because it makes its presence felt in every social context of children. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory also states that the social context in which a child belongs to is very important. They learn from everything in their environment and it shapes their characteristics and behaviour (Santrock, 2007). Television becomes a part of children's 'technology' that shapes their social behaviour.

From the perspective of observational learning theory, children learn the acceptable social behaviour through observation, imitation and reinforcement. A child learns when, how and against whom one needs to elicit certain behaviours (Sears, Peplau & Taylor, 1991). They learn these desirable behaviours from television if the portrayed characters exhibiting unacceptable behaviours were punished

and those displaying favourable behaviours were rewarded (Rosenkoetter, 2001). Example: when a television programme shows a teacher punishing a bully for stealing lunches from smaller kids and praising the boy who tries to defend the helpless kid. Children observed the programme and quickly identify the acceptable or unacceptable behaviours.

At the same time, children also learn the negative behaviour of violence and aggression by observing and imitating the behaviours from a programme. A child observes people being aggressive or controlling and quickly imitates them (Sears, Peplau & Taylor, 1991). In Albert Bandura's classic study, a group of children were exposed to violent films; these children were placed in a playroom with other children who were not exposed to the film. They found that children who saw the violent film were more aggressive than the other group of children (Rice, 1992). Content of television has a tendency to impart violence (physical action that harms others) and aggressive behaviour (hostile action intended to dominate) in children (Lefrancois, 1996) when the perpetrator is being rewarded for his violent actions (Bushman & Huesmann, 2001).

Extreme viewing could also dampen children's social interaction skills. They seemed to have a feeling of interaction with the characters in the programme. This form of screen interaction satisfies their social needs, but does not give them the needed skills to interact with others (Mena, 2009). Lacking the skills to function effectively with people makes them become isolated in their own world. This further increases their inability to interact and communicate, which is an essential activity to be a part of a society (Lefrancois, 1996).

Television viewing may also hamper family relationship as children slowly lose sight of their presence. They barely converse with their parents nor respond to their greeting during intense viewing. A problematic case also arises when parents neglect the social, emotional and physical needs of their children because they were extremely engrossed in a television programme. However, other studies pointed that viewing a television programme together with families fills the generation gap in a family, generates conversation amongst family members and helps a family to share a common experience and interest (Kubey & Donavan, 2001).

Besides the socio-behaviour affects, television is also known to influence a child's emotions. It could instill fear in children, especially when viewing violent or horror films as this content provides images that frighten or even traumatized children. It misguides them in believing that the horror scenes were real as children were not able to differentiate reality from fantasy. It makes that feel that they are in a dangerous world than they really are (Vivian, 2013). The fear induced by this medium is often intense with long lasting effect (Cantor, 2001).

**Moral development:** There are several mechanisms by which morality can be imparted in children through television; they could be conveyed through modeling of moral behaviours or verbal mechanism. Studies have shown that children learn honesty from television programmes when the popular character resists lying, cheating, stealing or other dishonest behaviours, as they observe and learn from the modeled behaviour (Rosenkoetter, 2001). Other researchers also found that children learn the importance of sharing and helping by observing people on television who engages in such behaviours. They conducted an experiment in light of Bandura's classical study. In this experiment, one group of

children were shown a pro-social programme where a boy risked his life to save a puppy, while another group were shown a neutral programme. Both groups of children were asked to play a game of pushing a button, where they earn points by pushing that button. They were also told to listen to puppies in a distant kennel and push a separate help button when the puppies seemed distressed, but pushing this help button did not give points. Children who had seen the moral pro-social programme were more likely to push the help button more than the other children who had not seen the programme. Another mechanism could be by verbally promoting moral prescriptions and prohibitions. Example, parents in television talked to their children about honesty and told that cheating on a test is bad and punishable. However, the effectiveness of conveying moral message is stronger in modeling mechanism than in verbal mechanism (Hardy & Claborne, 2007)

Age of the viewer and content of the message seemed to be central for television influences. However, will these influences be similar for children of different culture with different socio-economical backgrounds? The working of a child's mind is individually different and even though many believed that we should harness this power of television to induce positive learning, it is profoundly important to understand how children learn from viewing television.

#### **Parental role**

Proverbs-22:6 states "train up your child in a way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it".

The Holy Bible, NKJV, 2010)

In India, television viewing is a collective activity between families (Mahajan & Luthra, 1993). Their choice of programmes depends on conditions stipulating viewing process. Lull (1988) said family viewing may be determined by the decision of a particular familiar member or by the whole family (as cited in Mishra, 2007). No matter who or what influence the viewing process, children and parents use television together as a way to spend time together. They use it as a source of entertainment and a means to attain social information (Hofferth, 2010). According to Nikken and Jansz (2006), parents viewing behaviour can have a positive or negative impact on children (Hofferth, 2010). They have the responsibility to monitor, mediate and select a programme for their children. They must help their children become a critical media user by clearing doubts, highlight sense, interpret the actions and by giving child directed dialogues related to the content. They possess the power to control and mediate their children's viewing activity (Hogan, 2001).

**Mediation:** Mediation means to intervene between two parties. Adult mediation can help children understand the reality behind a programme. It can enhance their learning in a positive manner. Warren (2007) suggested three basic forms of mediation:

- Constructive, active or instructive mediation: In this form there is adult-child communication. Parents formally discussed about the content of a programme and give constructive comments to their children
- Restrictive mediation: In this form of mediation parents set rules and regulations that control the amount or pattern of television viewing.
- Co-viewing: Here, parents and children simply share television together without a lot of purposeful comments directed to the child's need.

**Media literate or media educated:** Parents should also become media literate so as to help their children learn the ways of 'media-world'. Media literacy means having a logical and deep understanding to print and electronic media (Brown, 2001). "Media literacy is a set of perspective that we actively use to expose ourselves to the media and interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter" (Potter, 2008, p.19). It cannot be categorized as it is a continuous process. A person cannot attain complete media literacy nor could he have no literacy; there is always some room for improvement. It is multidimensional that requires different perspectives on the message it provides.

#### **There are three essential building blocks of media literacy**

- First is the personal locus which is the goal and drive of the viewer. The goals help in filtering the information provided. Through personal locus people use television more effectively and eliminate the time spent on mindless exposure.
- Second is the knowledge structure which is the information that remains in the memory. It does not occur immediately but needs time, accuracy and care. The essential element for knowledge structure is information, which is the message provided by media. When the information interpreted dwell in the mind, it builds knowledge structure.
- Third is the skills which is a tool developed through practice. The seven media literacy skills are: analyzing which is decoding messages into meaningful elements; evaluation is the judgment made on the broken down messages; grouping is determining which elements are similar or dissimilar; induction helps in understanding the general pattern; deduction explains the particular messages; synthesis helps in gathering the elements into new structure and abstraction which helps in creating an accurate and brief description of the message (Potter, 2008)

Media literacy is a lifelong process and is not a product. It needs intentional effort and parents should encourage and motivate their children to become media literate. Attaining these skills would help children in analyzing the message, evaluate the source of information and also makes them a wise and careful media consumer (Bonfadelli, 2007; Mittal, 2005).

Parents and adults in the metropolitan cities who have the means to consume all the advance and new technologies might be fully aware about media literacy or mediation and its influences on their children. However, parents in the tribal state of Mizoram who are less exposed to this form of information 'might be or might not be' aware about their role as a media educator for their children.

#### **Method**

"Third methodological movement" (Teddlie & Tashakori, 2011, p. 285) also know as mixed method research was used. This method includes both qualitative and quantitative data as it can be an effective method to understand individual growth and change that occurs in human development.

#### **Location of the study**

The study was conducted in Mizoram, one of the North Eastern tribal states in India. Mizoram has eight districts with a number of sub-towns and villages. From these eight districts the locale was selected using 'stratified sampling method. In

this study, the districts were divided into different regions - north, east, west and south. The data was collected from parents, child participants and families from these selected districts:

- Aizawl, the capital in the North,
- Lunglei in the South,
- Mamit in the West and
- Champhai to the East.

**Sampling procedure:** A non-probability sampling method was utilized as willingness of the sample to participate was of vital importance in the study. Depending on willingness to participate the samples were developed through 'Purposive sampling technique'. This section of the study consists of 120 parents with variations in occupation, educational qualification, skills and expertise. It also included 20 families, 5 from each districts, each family owning one TV set. All the participants were mainly from the lower and middle income groups. Flexibility in sampling procedure was necessary as implementing strict procedure was unattainable. Some schools and parents were unwilling to participate mainly because of time constraint and the feeling that they were under surveillance.

**Description of tools:** Tools for data collection were designed to attain the research objectives. Observations and pilot study was conducted to test validity and reliability of the tools. To understand the dynamics of children and family use of television FGD, semi-structure interviews was conducted. Observation of family dynamics was integral to the process of data gathering

**Focus group discussion:** Discussion points for parents were designed to understand their viewership and involvement in their child's viewing. Topics of discussion for parents were:

- Hours of family viewing
- Regulating and monitoring children's viewing
- Kind of mediation which takes place
- Perception on television influences and their responsibility
- Opinion on family viewing and suggestions

This technique provided detailed information and allowed flexibility depending on the participant's expressions and response towards discussion points.

**Semi-structure interview:** Semi-structure interview was also formulated for parents (who were not part of FGD) to understand whether they monitor and regulate their children's viewing. It explores the kind of mediation which was practiced. Detailed information was asked if needed. The researcher probed related questions depending on the gesture of the participants like sudden smile, facial expression and other body language. There were some unfinished sentences amongst children and the researcher often reframed the questions.

**Observation:** This technique was used to monitor or watch viewing processes or situation as they occurred. Families with children were observed while viewing a television programme in their own home. The focus was to understand family viewing dynamics and children's behaviour during family viewing. This observation was recorded with the help of a camera and a field note.

**Analysis of data:** Qualitative and quantitative data obtained were analyzed using appropriate software whenever necessary. The responses were classified into sub-categories

and the emergent themes were listed. Specific patterns, common responses as well as unusual responses were noted. Unique and unusual responses were inserted in the suitable result chapters. Quantitative data were analyzed by appropriate statistical measures. The numeric outcomes were noted, calculated and significant responses were listed to organize and present the data.

**Results and Discussion**

Television serials add to the close knit sociality of the Mizo people. They were largely ritualistic viewers as they seemed to emphasize more on entertainment programmes rather than informative ones. Dubbed Korean serials are central to family viewing patterns as they created social connections. At times desire to belong to social group becomes the driving force for family viewing. Garbner (1992) also found that families viewed the most popular programmes in the society (as cited in Mishra, 2007). Children get included in the social process of collective identity. However, children identified with objects used by different characters. The appeal of object leads to consumer demand. Branding of product in relation to a popular programme increased local sales. Examples: One bakery named its common breads as ‘Takgu’s bread (*Takgua chhang*)’ after one popular character in a Korean serial. Branding the ordinary bread after him increased local sales. A mixed fermented fruit was named Khiangawia’s fruit (*Khiangawia thei*) which was illogical but attracted children in buying the product.

Parents seemed to be generally aware on the impact of family viewing pattern on children. Many parents believed that sharing television strengthened family relationships as it brings the whole family to laugh together, share happy and sad emotions. However, not all parents had the opportunity for watching television as a whole family because of economic reasons. At times difference in choices of programmes within families decreased family viewing.

In the present study, explicit viewing as a whole family was 2:30 hours with a significant difference at 0.05 significant levels between the districts. Aizawl the Capital has the lowest family viewing time. Being a bigger town family social time was different. Work space distance, nature of livelihood, parental social activity and children’s academic responsibilities decreases family TV time. Children’s interest in computer games rather than watching TV was also one of the reasons for decline in family TV time in Aizawl. One participant from Aizawl said, “We watched TV together only during news hour and during local reality shows”.

**Table 1:** Average hours of viewing by family (n=40)

| District | Family TV time (In hours) |         |       |          | Mean |
|----------|---------------------------|---------|-------|----------|------|
|          | Aizawl                    | Lunglei | Mamit | Champhai |      |
| Hours    | 1:24                      | 2:30    | 3:00  | 3:06     | 2:30 |

**Table 2:** Between groups one way Anova

| Anova                     |                |    |             |       |      |
|---------------------------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|------|
| Family viewing (In hours) |                |    |             |       |      |
|                           | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F     | Sig. |
| Between Groups            | 18.200         | 3  | 6.067       | 3.221 | .034 |
| Within Groups             | 67.800         | 36 | 1.883       |       |      |
| Total                     | 86.000         | 39 |             |       |      |

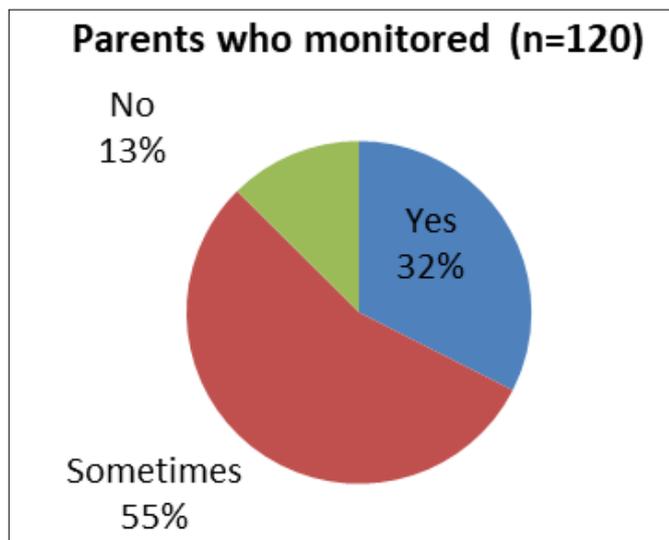
Significance level at 0.05

At a significance level of 0.05, there was no significant difference between the three districts of Lunglei, Mamit and Champhai with p value of 0.657. Between two districts, there

were no significant difference between Aizawl and Lunglei (p value 0.090), Lunglei and Mamit (p value 0.504) or Mamit and Champhai (p value 0.886).

**Monitoring children’s television:** The family viewing time was not high but parents monitored their children’s television viewing despite their busy schedule. Parental comment was, “watching TV with family is safer” (*chhungte nena TV en chu a him*). 32% parents regularly viewed TV with their children even if they were not so fond of the programmes, while 55% parents co-viewed only if the programme interested them or if they had time. One parent said, “We have no interests in viewing cartoons and our children do not enjoy what we watch, the only common interest we have in our family is the Mizo reality competition shows”.

The nature of family earnings prevented 13% parents to monitor children’s TV. One mother said, “We (father and mother) wanted to watch TV with our children but we do not have time, I have to sell vegetables in the market, sometimes go from house to house which is time intensive. My husband has to find work everyday to generate resources for our living”. Another parent said, “I do not have the time as I sell clothes, work as domestic help, in farms or anything possible to support my children”.



**Fig 1:** Parents who monitor children’s television

**Parental mediation:** Research has indicated that careful monitoring of children’s television could impart positive learning and help children become selective, wise and critical media user (Hogan, 2001). Parent’s responses and interactive behaviour are often analyzed on three types of mediation:

- Instructive or constructive mediation which refers to parents-child discussion about content with purposeful and constructive comments directed to children.
- Restrictive mediation is when parents sets rules and regulations, and
- Co-viewing refers to situation where parents-child simply shares TV without constrictive or formal discussion of content (Warren, 2007).

In the present study, parents watched together with little discussion of content. There were no constructive or instructive mediation. None of the parents had formal discussions about the show with their children. They gave no constructive or purposeful comments about the content of programmes. Constructive mediation by adults for children

related TV was not present as social responses. Researchers have indicated that this form of mediation is both helpful to protect children against the negative effects or to reinforce positive outcome from televisions' content (Opgenhaffen, Vandenbosch, Eggermont & Frison, 2012).

Majority of parents (82.5%) reacted by imposing restriction such as setting rules and limitations on TV viewing. Warren (2005) also mentioned that this form of mediation is the most common type of parental mediation amongst all social classes (cited in Harris & Sanborn, 2014). The common pattern for implementing rule bound mediation was based anxiety about academic performance. Sometimes parental decisions were also health related concerns such as pressure on eyes or lack of exercise. Parents also feared learning bad behaviours, manners and language form non-child oriented contents. One parent said, "It is good to have timings for everything in order to help them learn time management or time balancing". Few (4) parents did not have restrictive practices as they felt the content in cartoons and pogo were harmless. Some (2) parents placed restriction on computer games and not TV. There was one mother who was very serious about what her child was exposed to. She said, "We cut all the unwanted channels so our children do not have access to inappropriate programmes".

**Table 3:** Restrictive mediation (n=120)

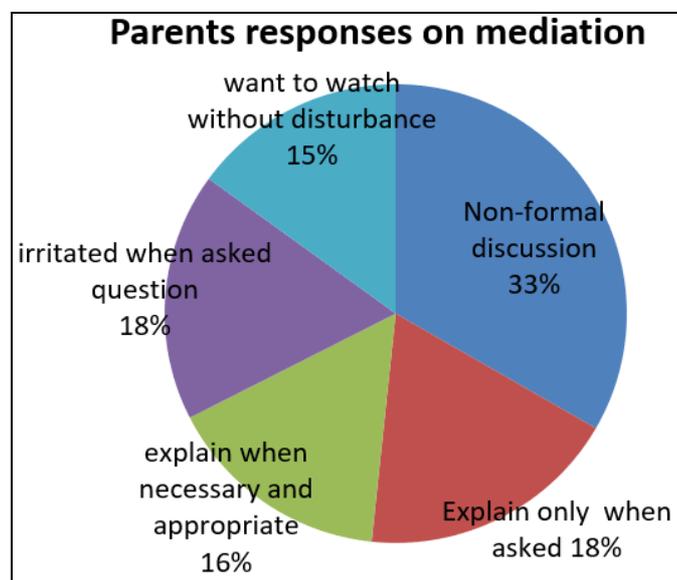
| Setting rules and limitations |                |        |
|-------------------------------|----------------|--------|
|                               | No. of parents |        |
|                               | Yes            | No     |
| Aizawl                        | 27             | 3      |
| Lunglei                       | 23             | 7      |
| Mamit                         | 25             | 5      |
| Champhai                      | 24             | 6      |
| Total                         | 99             | 21     |
| Percentage                    | 82.50%         | 17.50% |

Simple *co-viewing* was also a common practice among parents in Mizoram. Valkenburg, Kremar, Peeters and Marseille (1999) research in Netherlands found social co-viewing to be the most commonly practiced form of parental mediation (cited in Soni & Behal, 2014). Parents simply viewed television with their children without any felt need for discussion or dialogue yet the sitting together did promote shared social moments. Some incidental reactions such as common jokes or comments occurred as a family watches with each other. Some parents reported in-formal discussion with their children. One parent said, "We sometimes discussed the programmes, the heroes, the stories and even their clothing". Another mother said, "My children like to talk about what we watch (Korean serial). Dinner time exchanges have references to the serials we watch and sometimes the whole story is narrated in bed". There were parents who explained the show when they felt it is necessary or appropriate. One parent said, "If I keep explaining they get irritated, explaining certain concept needs to be appropriate". Another parent said, "Sometimes they asked unrelated questions while watching other programmes, like 'How did Chota Bheem get so strong by only eating ladoo?' while watching news. Or unnecessary questions like, 'Why is that girl wearing that dress? It does not look good on her' I explained what I felt necessary".

Some parents get irritated by children's persistent questions. One mother said, "My youngest repeatedly asks the same question even after I explained it. She would say, 'Who is that? I explained it. Later, when the same person appears on

screen, she asked again 'who is that?' This repeated question irritates me, I told my daughter to stop asking the same question." There was another parent who said, "We were watching Savdhan India and my children kept asking 'why does it happen, what happens next, where are the bad people?' I cannot concentrate on the show. I told them to ask questions only after the show and not in between". Another said, "They ask so many difficult questions like 'Why is the bad man so mean? Why is Mr. Bean so silly?' which becomes irritating as it was hard to answer such questions". Due to the parental involvement with the content, the element of elaborating on possible mental or emotional influences sometimes gets ignored and child focus conversation was absent. 13% parents wanted to watch television alone without any disturbance from their children. They wanted their alone-time in a peaceful and relaxing environment with TV.

Children persistently asked questions and looked for immediate responses. Their curiosity to engage and comprehend from television programme was noted in their tendency to ask 'disturbing questions'. Parents seemed to be quite indifferent to how children internalized the TV programme. However, on repeated probing, some parents gave content based dialogues to their children.



**Fig 2:** Parents responses on mediating TV viewing

**Children's activities during family viewing:** 20 families with one TV set were observed to document children's activity during family viewing. It was significant to note that all these families in the present study were nuclear families.

During family viewing, adult choices of programmes often subdued children's preferences as adult members usually hold the remote. At times, academic responsibilities also restrain children from viewing TV with families. Parental social activity was also seen as an interfering agent for family TV time.

Despite watching television, children had a preference for play. Playing with siblings in a separate room or playing with toys in the same or separate rooms was noted while the families were watching TV. Children's choices of programmes and the most frequently viewed popular show influence their play activity.

There were some gender and age differences in their play pattern. Younger children usually played 'pretend play' or 'imaginative play' with their siblings in a separate room (room where TV was not kept). Girls played 'princesses' and

'dressed up' like Barbie- they wear their mother's make up, shoes, clothes, bags, etc. There were two siblings (girls) who played the movie 'Frozen' where one was Queen Elsa and the other was Anna. Boys played 'Turbo- from the movie Turbo'; it was an interesting imaginative play where they used bucket on their back as a shell, crawled and raced like Turbo (snail). There were two boys who played football in the house. They passed the ball around and put two chairs as a goal post. These plays show that children are imaginative and creative with what they have at hand. The imitation of content was quite gendered with feminine and masculine acts. There was another boy who played with his toys in the TV room. He seemed least interested in the programme, but with sudden sound and music, his focus was immediately on the screen. Some observations echo the effectiveness of music and rhymes in children's learning as it engages, motivates and captures their interest (Ara, 2009)

Older children have outgrown pretend play or imaginary play. They prefer their own silent space and were guided by their individual interest and hobbies. Family social activity seems to gradually deplete in older children. They play individually in a separate room and were more engaged in gadgets. One boy played computer games (FIFA) while another boy was playing (COD) on his mobile phone. One girl played with her mobile phone and listened to the music on her phone while another girl played games (Candy Crush) on her tablet. There was a boy who played guitar and listened to music in another room.

Academic responsibilities compel older children to study during family TV viewing. There were children (12) who studied in a separate room away from TV with and without parents or other adults' supervision. There were some

children (7) who were studying in a partially separate space where TV was still visible and audible. One parent said, "I want to watch television and at the same time look to their needs". One child said, "Everyone is watching TV and I am scared to study alone in a separate room". Five children studied in the same room where TV was viewed, they were asked whether they were able to study under such conditions. Their responses show that some children enjoyed studying simple and easy school-work like handwriting, simple math, etc. in the presence of television but when they have tough homework like memorizing work they studied in a separate room.

Parental social activity, differences in choice of content and demand on children's educational tasks impact family viewing. Parental conversation with guests while viewing caused interference especially for children. Two siblings were seen to lose focus but were still engaged and continued watching a particular programme in between distracting adult conversations. It was also noted that dubbed serials and local shows were the common programmes which was deeply enjoyed in a family. Two siblings were watching Savdhan India (dubbed in Mizo) with their family. Two girls were watching Yellow Boots (Korean serial dubbed in Mizo) with their mother while their father was working. Three children were watching Comedian Search a local competition show. These children were hardly distracted by the researchers' presence and intensely continued watching the programme. However, two siblings who were compelled to watch news with their family seemed least interested as their focus was easily diverted. Few younger children were also seen sleeping alongside their parents in the TV room or separately in the bedroom.

**Table 4:** Children's activity during family viewing

| Children's activity while family members viewed television |                 |          |          |                         |
|--|-----------------|----------|----------|-------------------------|
| Districts  | No. of children |          |          |                         |
|  | Playing         | Studying | Sleeping | Watching TV with family |
| Aizawl   | 6               | 7        | 2        | 2                       |
| Lunglei  | 8               | 6        | 1        | 2                       |
| Mamit  | 8               | 5        | 3        | 3                       |
| Champhai   | 9               | 5        | 2        | 4                       |
| Total  | 31              | 23       | 8        | 11                      |

**Parental perception of television influences:** Parents were aware of the fact that television will influences children in some ways. They often commented that viewing television is good within limits and can be productive when parents and other adults are able to supervise the viewing. Quite frequently and strongly parents stated that without supervision television did more harm than good on children. The varied influences mentioned by parents could well be categorized to different developmental domains.

The most common feature of child behaviour was physical imitation of actions. Children slipped into TV character roles on the play field, while walking around their homes demonstrating '*physical behavioural imitation*'. Parents were quite amused when their children imitated the heroes of the shows they have watched. They imitated their favourite wrestlers or other players and would role play actions of favorite sportspersons. Play-fight with friends or siblings was often enactments of TV sports or other content. Parents fondly shared children's reactions such as: a) my son plays football with his friends, imitating and celebrating like Neymar. b) my son acts like Ben-10 using Ben-10 wrist watch and acts as if he is transformed to an alien. Most parents reported that

children have immediate responses in their play and behaviour. They imitated the characters of the recent programmes that they have watched. If they watch Samurai, then they pretend to be Samurais. Some parents also mentioned that their children do play acting of worship services like homecoming worship service; "they take out the hymn book, sing, dance, and clap along while singing, etc." as the experience of going to church is powerful. The family dynamics of TV serials also leave a deep impact on childhood imagination. "My daughter wanted to eat food like the Koreans." Physical behavioural imitation is strongly in tune with Bandura's emphasis on observational learning (Fish, 2005).

TV shows evoked much interest in physical appearance such as a desire to "look like favourite heroes". Children copied the lifestyle, fashions and eating habits to live and be like their character heroes. Korean dresses and hairstyles were especially attractive. Older children and more so, girls were drawn towards Korean styles with pre-teen interests and orientation. Mothers felt Korean serials were influencing dressing style and appearances. They said that a) "My daughters choose clothes according to the Korean fashion

style” b) “I want this cloth, it’s so Korean” (*He kawr hi ka duh, a Korean e*) c) children in general wanted to have a fair glowing skin (like Koreans). The impact of “wish for Korean look” can be detrimental. In a Mizo based research, the Korean influence could be potentially damaging to Mizo identity.

Researchers have also reported the damaging effects of television such as eating problems causing obesity or overweight (ref). However, there was no mention of children from the research with such problems. This maybe because the *displacement theory* where TV viewing activity replacing other activity (Hofferth, 2010) was not so apparent in this study. For these children, performing different physical activities like household work and playing outdoor games is still a part of their everyday schedules.

If used judiciously the benefits of TV outweigh the hazards. Several researches indicated that a television programme helps in acquisition of language (Koul, 1983). Most parents were also able to see the impact of language of the shows on children’s linguistic abilities and communication. They noted children’s quick ability in learning language from programmes, whether foreign or local. In Mizo society, Hindi has been over shadowed by a dominant presence of English and as such Hindi is not part of the family dynamics nor is it taught in schools at young age. However, parents reported that young children grasped and understood smatterings of Hindi because of occasional viewing and airing of cartoons in Hindi. Similarly, some parents also mentioned children’s ability to grasp bits of Korean language (Korean serial with English subtitles). Parents whose children viewed the dubbed Korean serial also mentioned children’s use of uncommon Mizo. In-turn, they also learn bad words which are frequently used in the programmes.

Television viewing can be an intense experience stoking *emotions* like sadness, happiness and fear. Most parents noted that children viewed a particular show with deep concentration as if they were a part of that show crying and laughing with the characters. As parent shared “One evening we all watched “Hachiko” a story of a faithful dog and our children cried watching the show...even after a week, our children talked about the dog’s loyalty and its heartbreaking yet satisfying quality” or “When we watched Comedian Search (local) we laughed so much as a family, our children repeated the jokes and laughed even after the show”. Parents also talked about influences of television on fear. One mother said, “My daughter watched Mizo horror film without my supervision and she could not sleep for the night. Even after days, she was easily shocked by loud and sudden sounds”. The participants also generally described how horror, thriller and scary movies instill fear in children.

Television and its relation to aggression amongst children are quite undisputed with a large body of research evidence (Boyle, 2005). Most Mizo parents were also unanimous in attributing violence and aggressive behavioural traits to television viewing. Parents noted aggressive and violent screams among children and their children’s friends such as loud shouts which seemed to resemble sounds from the shows children had been watching. There was a tendency to shift the nature of violence on general behaviour patterns in children, protecting “socially un-acceptable behaviour” of their own children. Some parents strongly believed television is responsible for aggressive and violent behaviour while other parents recognized these behaviours as innate or something acquired from the child’s social circle. Similarly, some parents reported children’s favourite characters promoted

prosocial behaviour like sharing toys or food with friends, avoiding lying and cheating, helping others in need while other parents found these qualities were not influenced by television alone but were individual traits or how families socialize the young.

Out of the ordinary actions also influenced children’s imagination. Children have affinity for objects and possess a tendency for “transitional objects” (Winnicott, 1953) and thus Popeye walking with spinach or Chota Bheem’s penchant for laddoo is appropriating childhood propensities. Parents of younger age group mentioned their children wanting to eat laddoo or spinach to gain strength. The popularity of certain characters or content is intimately linked to childhood perspectives

The ubiquity of the appeal of rhythm and rhyme is well established by the presence of rhymes and songs for children in all cultures. Parents reported that their children know all the songs and jingles in advertisements, movies and in cartoon shows. One mother said, “Even if my son is in another room, he easily knows the programme through the songs and music in that particular show”. The pattern in rhymes and rhythms delights children and triggers their memory. Even advertisement companies capitalize rhymes and rhythms in ad jingles and song lyrics which create an appeal for children and capture their interest (Maysonave, 2013).

## Conclusion

The responses of parents substantiated television use and relation with children. Imitation of television content was seen in children’s behaviour resonating the classic Bandura’s frame of observational learning theory. They exhibit immediate responses to the programmes they watch. They also observed a character and exemplify the desire to ‘look and be alike’; they copied the fashion, style of eating and so on. The possibility of language acquisition and the chances of stocking emotions like fear, happiness and sadness from a television programme were visible from parent’s responses.

The influence of television on children seems inevitable. They are the most enthusiastic and frequent viewers of television but still lack experience and judgment as critical media users. They need guidance from parents. In Mizoram, parents were generally aware of television’s impact, but were uncertain about their vital roles in children’s viewing. The absence of educational TV content had left families unaware of the vast potentials of the medium in children’s academic development.

- Parents need to regularly keep watch on what their children view. Even within their busy schedules, they need to keenly observe the content of programmes and put restrictions on programmes which could have negative influences
- Parents could become media literate, filter certain inappropriate programmes and also help their children in becoming selective and critical about programmes.
- Restrictive mediation and simple co-viewing are initial steps conveying need for regulation of television use by children. Parent’s active mediation and informed choices will make TV use more constructive. Purposeful comments, explanation and formal discussion about the programme could be more useful.
- With younger children, more focused content related conversation could contribute to enhancing lyrics and curiosity which have possible mental and emotional influences.

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