

# Exposure to Media Violence and Vicarious Trauma Among Tertiary Victims in Selected Barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental

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## ABSTRACT

This research focused on the level of media violence and its influence on vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental, and determined the strength of the correlation between the two variables, their level of exposure to media violence and vicarious trauma, and which domain of media violence had the most impact. A descriptive-correlational research design was utilized, involving three hundred ninety-five (395) tertiary victim respondents who completed an adaptive survey questionnaire. Statistical tools employed included mean, Spearman's rho, and stepwise regression analysis. Findings revealed that justified

violence was at a high level (3.71), media violence and aggression was low (3.34), and the overall mean was moderate (3.33). Vicarious trauma garnered an overall mean of 3.53, indicating a high level. The correlation analysis yielded an r-value of 0.524, reflecting a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship ( $p < 0.001$ ). Among three predictors, enjoyment of violence ( $\beta = 0.450$ ,  $SE = 0.032$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) had the strongest influence, surpassing the significance threshold and leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. The  $R^2$  value indicated that 31.8% of the data fit the regression model, demonstrating that exposure to media violence significantly influences vicarious trauma.

**Keywords:** *Media Violence, Vicarious Trauma, Tertiary Victims, Justified Violence, Enjoyment of Violence, Exposure*

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## INTRODUCTION

Vicarious trauma represents a significant public health concern. The emotional well-being of individuals can be profoundly impacted by their experiences of abuse, neglect, community violence, and other traumatic events that they either witness or hear about. Studies indicate that this is especially applicable to welfare workers whose everyday work involves clients who are going through trauma (Brend & Sprang, 2020). Several symptoms are subtle (e.g., irritability, sleep problems, overall dissatisfaction), while others are more conspicuous and disruptive, such as hopelessness, withdrawal from colleagues, or challenges to one's philosophy of life (Hubble, 2021).

Within the larger framework of human services and mental health, vicarious trauma is acknowledged as a professional difficulty. These professions frequently deal with distressing situations, which can cause secondary traumatic stress disorder or vicarious traumatization. Their mental health and the standard of care they offer may be severely impacted by this exposure (Virginia Department of Social Service, 2023).

In order to reduce the effects of vicarious trauma, the study highlights that systemic supports, including screening, education, and access to clinical supervision, are essential (Isobel & Thomas, 2021).

Based on the study of Friedman et al. (2021), there was a significant correlation identified between media violence and the emergence of vicarious trauma symptoms in tertiary victims who encounter traumatic events through media rather than experiencing them directly. Those who frequently engage in violent media are at a greater risk of expressing feelings of anxiety, hypervigilance, and emotional numbing. Media violence can have major psychological impacts, including the development of vicarious trauma. It affects both those who directly experience violence and those who watch violent media, emphasizing the pervasive influence of media on mental health (Gonzalez et al., 2023).

Furthermore, most studies emphasize the behavioral impact of media violence with little concern for the psychological and emotional impact. There exists a vast knowledge gap regarding how casual viewers are impacted by vicarious trauma, since most of the available research has only catered to clinical populations or professionals working with trauma (Smith & Lee, 2024). In addition, qualitative studies are required to qualify vicarious trauma in a range of contexts and professions (Mushquash, 2022; Shorey & Wong, 2021), with current research primarily failing to address the diverse experiences of tertiary victims.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals No. 16 (SDGs 16), adopted in 2023, aim to reduce all forms of violence as well as promote accountable institutions, access to justice, and peaceful and inclusive societies. While largely focused on governance and physical violence, SDGs 16 implicitly support acknowledgement and treatment of psychological trauma that diminishes individual well-being and social cohesion. In the digital era, media violence emerged as a significant concern for bystanders or tertiary victims—individuals who suffer, often psychologically, through repeated exposure to difficult material in news and social media.

This exposure compounds symptoms of anxiety, fear, and emotional numbness in young adults (Jones & Park, 2023). Similarly, UNESCO (2023) raised concerns that unregulated digital content and sensational digital journalism, like storytelling for creativity, increase stress on society. The World Health

Organization (2022) noted that addressing the psychological impacts and negative effects on mental health is necessary for SDGs 16, which aims to advance peaceful, just, and inclusive societies through stronger institutions, better access to justice, and reduced violence and corruption. Progress is monitored through targets and indicators, which reveal mixed global trends alongside lingering data deficiencies.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study generally aimed to determine the effect of media violence on vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental. Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Determine the level of media violence of the respondents in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental in terms of:
  - 1.1 Justified violence
  - 1.2 Aggression
  - 1.3 Enjoyment of violence
2. Determine the level of vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental in terms of:
  - 2.1 Avoidance
  - 2.2 Intrusion
  - 2.3 Arousal
3. Determine the significant relationship between media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims.
4. Determine which domain of media violence significantly influences vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental.

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings of the study may be useful and necessary to the following groups:

**Parents.** This study may benefit parents in comprehending how media violence can lead to vicarious trauma, especially among tertiary victims such as teens who, although not directly involved, feel emotionally impacted. Enhanced understanding may assist parents in shielding their children from the damaging consequences of media violence.

**Youth.** This study may benefit youth, who are 18 years old and above, by showing how repeated media violence can produce vicarious trauma, resulting in feelings of emotional distress or anxiety in the absence of actual involvement in violent occurrences. It highlights the potential for mental health issues associated with digital and social media violence.

**Employees.** This study may benefit employees as it highlights the potential cause of vicarious traumatization from violent media content in the workplace and other emergency response roles, which

may frequently expose them to trauma and lead to stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion that detrimentally affect mental health, job performance, and well-being.

***Unemployed Individuals.*** This study may benefit unemployed individuals as it highlights the psychological effects of consuming violent media content, to which they may have higher exposure due to fewer responsibilities and more free time. Media consumption during unemployment may serve as a vehicle for developing vicarious trauma. Understanding how vicarious trauma develops from repeated media exposure helps individuals recognize triggers of emotional distress and utilize coping methods or seek support.

***Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO).*** This research may be useful to improve prevention, response, and psychosocial support for tertiary victims of media violence and vicarious trauma. By measuring exposure levels that capture the role of narrative framing and contextual moderators, it facilitates the prioritization of strategic interventions. It also provides baseline information to guide social worker education, community outreach, and school linkages and enhances grant applications and policy proposals related to both immediate coping needs and long-term prevention.

***Future Researchers.*** This research may serve as a valuable reference for researchers planning related studies regarding vicarious trauma and media violence. They can obtain information and have their research questions informed by this study.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study focused on the impact of media violence on vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental, using a descriptive correlational design. A total of 395 respondents from barangays Poblacion, Felis, Fishing Village, Lacaron, and Tubalan were selected using stratified random sampling based on Slovin's formula. Data were collected using an adapted survey questionnaire from Braman (2017) and Thurmer (2013). The study was conducted in August until a specific date was determined.

To assess these factors, the study used two approaches:

1. Assessing the level of exposure to media violence of the respondents based on three components: justified violence, enjoyment of violence, and aggression.
2. Assessing the level of vicarious trauma among tertiary victims based on the three components: avoidance, intrusion, and arousal, using an emotion-related scale.

The researchers acknowledged limitations, focusing only on media violence indicators (justified violence, aggression, and enjoyment of violence) and vicarious trauma indicators (avoidance, intrusion, and arousal). The media violence questionnaire served as the independent variable, and the vicarious trauma questionnaire served as the dependent variable. Face-to-face surveys were conducted.

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## Definition of Terms

The terms listed below have operational definitions depending on how they were used in the study:

***Arousal.*** In this study, it refers to the physiological and psychological state of heightened alertness or emotional activation caused by exposure to violent media content. This can include increased heart rate, rapid breathing, heightened anxiety, or feelings of distress.

***Avoidance*** – In this study, it refers to a behavioral response or coping strategy where people purposefully avoid circumstances or media content that could expose them to violent or traumatic imagery.

***Enjoyment of Violence.*** In this study, it refers to the psychological or emotional high that comes from consuming or watching violent media. This pleasure can manifest as thrill, excitement, or contentment when watching violent movies, playing violent video games, viewing violent television, or consuming other media.

***Impact*** . In this study, it refers to the quantifiable and noteworthy outcomes that people experience as a result of violent media content.

***Intrusion*** . In this study, it refers to the unwelcome and upsetting psychological experience wherein violent media information, such as visual representations of violence, continually infiltrates a person's memories, thoughts, or feelings.

***Justified Violence*** . In this study, it refers to the representation of violent acts in the media that are ethically or legally permissible, often in the context of protection, retribution, or self-defense.

***Media Violence*** . In this study, it refers to the manner in which violent activities are portrayed or presented in media, such as movies, television shows, video games, newscasts, social media, and other online platforms.

***Media Violence and Aggression.*** In this study, it refers to how violent behaviors, bodily harm, or aggressive acts are portrayed in films, television shows, video games, news, and social media. Characters frequently act violently, aggressively, or hostilely in these representations, which might be realistic, dramatic, or sensationalized. Both direct forms of aggression, like physical assaults, and indirect forms, like psychological or emotional hostility, are included.

***Tertiary Victims.*** In this study, this refers to people who are impacted by violent events indirectly, through media representations rather than firsthand involvement or witnessing of the violence, and who suffer psychologically or emotionally as a result.

***Vicarious Trauma.*** In this study, this refers to the psychological, emotional, or cognitive effects experienced by people who are indirectly exposed to horrific events, often through media depictions or

other people's testimonies. This kind of trauma occurs when individuals not directly involved or witnessing the actual event are influenced by graphic depictions of violence, misery, or abuse.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The researchers first cover the independent variable of the study, Media Violence, which encompasses domains such as justified violence, enjoyment of violence, and aggression. Secondly, the dependent variable, Vicarious Trauma, is measured by the three indicators: avoidance, intrusion, and arousal. As a result, the literature review examines existing studies and publications concerning the impact of media violence on vicarious trauma among tertiary victims. Though numerous studies are conducted by reputable academics, this chapter demonstrates how media violence influences vicarious trauma and whether there is a significant relationship between the two variables.

### Vicarious Trauma

Changes in a person's perspective, mental state, and sense of security as a result of extended exposure to another individual's trauma experiences are known as vicarious trauma. Figley (2020) claims that vicarious trauma can cause symptoms like intrusive thoughts, emotional numbness, and increased anxiety that are similar to symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Furthermore, this phenomenon is more common when traumatic events are described in a graphic and detailed manner, resulting in psychopathological changes in therapists or caregivers that may impact their perspectives on themselves, others, their relationships, and the environment (Branson, 2019). In addition, tertiary victims frequently encounter difficult emotional situations while managing grief and supporting loved ones. This combined burden can exacerbate emotions of hopelessness and helplessness (Acquadro Maran et al., 2023; Cleveland Clinic, 2024).

Vicarious trauma in tertiary victims may also exacerbate psychological effects by fostering social isolation and problematic family dynamics (Baum, 2019; National Children's Advocacy Center, 2023). It encompasses profound emotional and cognitive changes brought on by recurrent exposure to traumatic content or the suffering of others, altering perceptions of safety, control, trust, and self-identity (Acquadro Maran et al., 2023). These changes manifest as intrusive thoughts, increased anxiety, emotional numbness, and disruptions in interpersonal interactions (Knight, 2023; Baum, 2019).

According to Patel et al. (2021), practitioners who suffer from vicarious trauma frequently display diminished empathy, increased irritation, and decreased job satisfaction, negatively impacting client outcomes. Smith et al. (2022) discovered that communities dealing with frequent traumatic occurrences, such as natural disasters or violent crimes, show symptoms of collective vicarious trauma, including heightened anxiety, mistrust, and social disintegration.

### Avoidance

Avoidance is the first domain of vicarious trauma. In a longitudinal study of mental health practitioners, Smith et al. (2022) discovered that avoidance behaviors emerged during the initial months of exposure to trauma cases. Participants reported increased unwillingness to engage with trauma-related

content, which was linked to later symptoms of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. Avoidance serves as a primary coping tactic, especially to distance oneself from discussions regarding trauma (AMSSA, 2025).

Lee and Kim (2023) observed first responders, noting that avoidance behaviors such as behavioral withdrawal and emotional numbness often precede more severe vicarious trauma symptoms. Scott (2024) states that avoidance can serve as psychological regulation, helping individuals manage intense emotions. However, persistent avoidance can lead to burnout and reduced empathy.

Monson et al. (2022) and Cieslak et al. (2022) categorize avoidance into two types: cognitive or emotional avoidance, which involves attempts to repress trauma-related thoughts, feelings, or memories, and behavioral avoidance, which involves physical withdrawal from people, places, or activities that provoke trauma. Wang et al. (2024) note that while emotional repression and cognitive detachment help manage trauma-related distress, excessive reliance on avoidance can create lasting psychological challenges.

Kumar and Feldman (2023) found that social media users frequently exposed to violent news who used avoidance strategies such as scrolling past distressing posts initially experienced reduced emotional discomfort, but over time developed emotional detachment and psychological fatigue. Similarly, Davis and Ortega (2024) found that among humanitarian workers in digital crisis response roles, suppression of empathy in response to repeated exposure to traumatic images predicted compassion fatigue and depersonalization. These studies highlight that while avoidance may initially serve as a coping strategy, prolonged use can impair emotional functioning and hinder long-term psychological resilience.

## **Intrusion**

Intrusion is the second domain of vicarious trauma. Intrusive experiences have been thoroughly studied in relation to mood and anxiety disorders, where they serve as both sustaining factors and symptoms of psychological discomfort (Hinuma et al., 2025). Intrusive thought patterns are classified according to their origin, emphasizing stress reactions, negative assessments, and controlling thoughts as major contributors to intrusive thinking.

Herzog et al. (2022) found that individuals with negative expectations about their ability to control thoughts were more prone to intrusive memories, highlighting the role of cognitive appraisal and self-perception in vulnerability to intrusion.

The frequency and severity of intrusive thoughts are influenced by psychological and environmental factors, including stressful life events, trauma exposure, and elevated anxiety levels (Moritz et al., 2019). Intrusive thoughts often occur involuntarily and are linked to Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). They reinforce unpleasant emotional states and contribute to maladaptive coping strategies (Mayo Clinic Press, 2023).

Molnar et al. (2017) discovered that community members working in trauma-prone areas often experienced intrusive symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, and recurrent distressing thoughts related to others' trauma. These involuntary experiences led to emotional exhaustion, concentration difficulties, and a decline in cognitive functioning, impairing daily responsibilities. Similarly, May and Wisco (2019) found that secondary trauma survivors, such as counselors and first responders, often experience intrusive memories triggered by empathic engagement rather than direct trauma exposure.

Javakhishvili et al. (2022) studied how intrusive recollections of historical and intergenerational trauma among marginalized communities inspired collective healing practices, including storytelling, intergroup dialogue, and memorialization efforts. Hobfoll et al. (2015) emphasized that communal processing of intrusive trauma-related thoughts can reinforce social ties, enhancing collective efficacy and support systems.

### **Arousal**

Arousal refers to brain-body states associated with wakefulness and variations in alertness, affecting the central and autonomic nervous systems (Kandel et al., 2021). Changes in arousal can manifest in a wide range of physiological markers, such as increased heart rate, rapid breathing, and heightened anxiety.

Severe subjective arousal may impair performance, as high arousal competes with cognitive capacity for task-relevant processes (Plass & Kalyuga, 2019). Neurons act as filters, adjusting locus coeruleus activity to balance attention and arousal, ensuring focus while managing distractions (Luskin & Li, 2025).

Elevated arousal can be adaptive, promoting readiness and attention, but persistent high arousal can result in burnout and trauma-related symptoms (McEwen, 2021). Prolonged arousal can disrupt group healing and social cohesion, while unregulated arousal reactions may result in emotional numbness, intrusive thoughts, and hypervigilance (Smith & Lee, 2023).

Community interventions, trauma-informed care, mindfulness practices, and social support networks have been shown to lower arousal levels and foster emotional regulation (Kim & Patel, 2023; Garcia & Nguyen, 2023).

### **Media Violence**

Media violence is the independent variable of the study. Its indicators include justified violence, aggression, and enjoyment of violence. Media violence refers to the portrayal of aggressive or harmful behavior in media formats such as television, film, video games, social media, and digital platforms. It encompasses both physical violence (e.g., fighting, shooting) and psychological violence (e.g., manipulation, verbal abuse).

Chen and Wang (2025) found that exposure to violent video games increases hostile tendencies by activating the brain's reward system and reducing empathy. Dou and Zhang (2025) noted that repeated exposure reinforces aggressive responses and desensitizes individuals to violence.

Interactive and immersive media violence can have an even stronger behavioral impact. Moqbel et al. (2024) argued that addiction to violent video content is linked to increased aggression and desensitization in young audiences. Anderson and Dill (2000) showed that playing violent video games leads to more aggressive thoughts and behaviors compared to nonviolent games.

Kim and Patel (2024) noted that watching violent media may allow young adults to process violent impulses in a safe, virtual context, potentially reducing real-world aggression. Johnson et al. (2023) found that violent media paired with moral lessons or positive role models can encourage prosocial behavior, supporting the "catharsis hypothesis."

Anderson (2022) reported that exposure to violent media increases aggression and decreases prosocial behavior, affecting both individual behavior and community culture. Johnson and Lee (2023) emphasized that normalization of violence in media desensitizes audiences and weakens empathy, potentially undermining social cohesion.

### **Justified Violence**

Justified violence refers to the use of force in situations deemed acceptable by society, law, or moral standards. Philosophical frameworks like Just War Theory suggest that violence is not always wrong if certain conditions are met, such as having a valid reason, exhausting nonviolent alternatives, and ensuring the response is proportionate (Chae, 2025).

Typically, justified violence appears in self-defense, where using force is legally and morally acceptable. Ashworth (2022) notes that justified violence must meet two criteria: it must be necessary to stop a threat, and the response must be proportional.

However, repeated exposure to justified violence in media can normalize aggression, potentially reducing empathy for victims (Dorlin & Flanigan, 2020). This includes depictions of self-defense, heroic acts, or marginalized groups using violence for survival. Exposure can also shape attitudes toward acceptable force, especially among adolescents (Martins et al., 2022).

Johnson and Smith (2022) found that teenagers exposed to morally justified violence develop stronger awareness of justice and social responsibility. Similarly, media portraying justifiable violence against oppressive authorities can enhance critical thinking about ethics and resistance (Martinez, 2023).

Exposure to media that justifies violence correlates with increased acceptance of aggressive conflict resolution, potentially reducing social cohesion and heightening communal violence (Martinez et al., 2022; O'Connor & Nguyen, 2024).

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## **Aggression**

Aggression is behavior intended to cause harm to others and can be influenced by cognitive, emotional, and social factors. Vagos et al. (2025) studied how early maladaptive schemas and social information processing contribute to hostile and instrumental aggression, particularly when aggression is framed as justified or heroic.

Emotional impulsivity also reinforces aggressive behavior, as heightened urgency can result in impulsive violent reactions (Martin et al., 2025). Media portrayal of morally acceptable aggression, especially in self-defense or heroic contexts, can influence societal attitudes and youth behavior.

Addiction to violent video games and social media is strongly linked to increased aggression (Moqbel et al., 2024). Wang et al. (2023) found that perceived social inequalities, or relative deprivation, can lead to aggression, mediated by beliefs in a just world and moral disengagement.

Moreover, narrative-driven violent media can foster reflective engagement and prosocial attitudes if moral lessons or justice-related outcomes are embedded (Williams et al., 2022; Kim & Lee, 2023).

Meta-analyses show that repeated exposure to violent media increases aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, particularly among children and adolescents, while also desensitizing viewers to violence (Anderson & Bushman, 2021; Coyne et al., 2022).

## **Enjoyment of Violence**

Enjoyment of violence describes the psychological satisfaction or thrill individuals derive from consuming violent media. Lagrange et al. (2019) found that actively choosing violent narratives enhances enjoyment. Similarly, Rasul (2025) noted that moral evaluations and narrative context influence audience enjoyment of violent content.

Violent media provides intense emotional stimulation without real-world consequences, allowing viewers to experience excitement safely (Perry, 2022). Vorderer and Reinecke (2022) suggested that enjoyment also arises when violence resolves conflict, restores justice, or completes a narrative arc.

Hartmann and Vorderer (2021) found that well-crafted violent stories increase engagement, tension, and closure, enhancing enjoyment. Breuer and Scharkow (2022) highlighted that a sense of control and empowerment derived from violent media contributes to enjoyment.

Klimmt and Hartmann (2021) argued that violent scenes often simulate personal mastery or dominance, satisfying intrinsic human needs for competence and control. Thus, the popularity of violent media is driven not only by sensationalism but also by its ability to fulfill psychological desires safely.

## Relationship between Media Violence and Vicarious Trauma

Studies have shown a substantial positive correlation between media exposure and acute stress reactions. Holman et al. (2019) found that graphic media coverage of collective trauma was associated with acute stress and post-traumatic symptoms ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, Nelson (2023) reported that regular exposure to violent media significantly changes cognitive processing, showing a moderate correlation with emotional dysregulation ( $r = 0.39$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), which can increase emotional instability and reduce sensitivity to aggression.

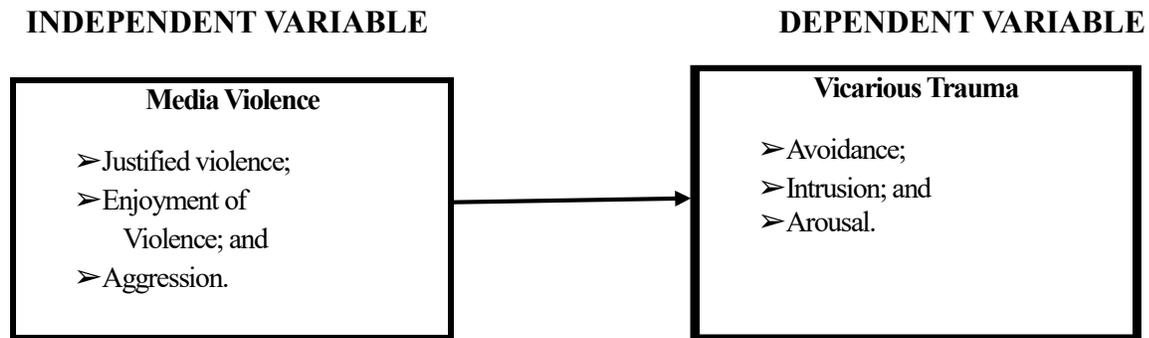
Pfefferbaum et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis on mass trauma media coverage and identified a small but significant positive relationship between exposure and trauma-related psychological outcomes ( $r = 0.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Fitzpatrick et al. (2021) found that young adults who consumed violent news exhibited higher anxiety and intrusive symptoms, with a correlation of  $r = 0.34$  ( $p = .002$ ). These studies suggest that indirect exposure to violent events through media can produce psychological distress similar to vicarious trauma.

Thompson et al. (2019) studied media exposure during natural disasters and found that watching news coverage significantly predicted post-traumatic stress symptoms ( $r = 0.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ), even when accounting for direct exposure. Zhang et al. (2020) observed that exposure to commercial media during the COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted vicarious trauma symptoms ( $r = 0.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ), which in turn predicted anxiety outcomes.

Holman and Silver (2020) reported that repeated exposure to violent news was linked to increased helplessness and intrusive memories ( $r = 0.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ), highlighting that even indirect media exposure can negatively affect emotional well-being. Individual differences, such as resilience or past trauma, also influence responses. Martinez and Lee (2022) found that people with lower resilience experienced stronger vicarious trauma symptoms after viewing violent media ( $r = 0.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Conversely, some studies found no significant relationship between media violence exposure and vicarious trauma. Ferguson (2021) conducted a longitudinal study assessing emotional responses, empathy, and aggression among participants exposed to violent video games and found a negligible overall effect size ( $r = 0.08$ ). Ferguson (2023) confirmed similar findings with behavioral and neurological data, showing no significant long-term effects. The American Psychological Association (2020) also reported that media violence may have minor short-term behavioral effects, with typical correlation coefficients below 0.10 and non-significant p-values. These studies indicate that evidence linking media violence to serious emotional distress or vicarious trauma remains inconclusive.

### Conceptual Framework of the Study



**Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework Showing the Relationship of the Variables of the Study**

Figure 1 shows the variables of the study. The independent variable is *Media Violence*, with indicators of justified violence, enjoyment of violence, and aggression. The dependent variable is *Vicarious Trauma*, with indicators of avoidance, intrusion, and arousal.

According to the Victim Precipitation Theory, first proposed by Marvin Wolfgang in 1958, a victim’s own victimization may result from specific actions or choices they make. Modern interpretations expand this notion to include psychological vulnerability, though historically it referred to physical or interpersonal violence. Environmental and situational factors that indirectly cause harm can also be considered forms of victim precipitation. People who frequently watch violent or upsetting media may unintentionally place themselves in emotionally damaging situations, increasing their vulnerability to vicarious trauma.

Moreover, the Victim Precipitation Theory explains that even when individuals are not directly involved, repetitive and voluntary exposure to violent media may increase their emotional risk. People who regularly absorb frightening news are more likely to experience psychological distress and emotional dysregulation. The theory emphasizes that active engagement with violent media is linked to heightened anxiety and desensitization.

Persistent exposure to violent media narratives is associated with emotional depletion and chronic fear. Even if they have never been present at traumatic events, individuals frequently exposed to media coverage of violence may exhibit signs of trauma. This provides a useful foundation for understanding how daily actions influence a person’s emotional susceptibility to vicarious trauma.

According to Gerbner’s Cultivation Theory (1976), prolonged exposure to television shapes individuals’ perceptions of reality, often aligning them with media portrayals rather than lived experience. A key concept, “mean world syndrome,” suggests that heavy viewers of violent content tend to perceive the world as more dangerous than it is, leading to increased fear, mistrust, and support for punitive social policies.

Cultivation Theory also emphasizes the long-term and cumulative effects of media exposure rather than immediate or short-term influences. It posits that media is not merely entertainment but a powerful socializing force that gradually shapes perceptions of reality. Understanding this theory helps researchers and practitioners grasp how media consumption affects beliefs, emotions, and behaviors, particularly regarding complex social issues such as violence, fear, and trauma.

### Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 alpha level of significance:

**Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental.

**Ho2:** There is no domain of media violence that significantly influences vicarious trauma in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Locale

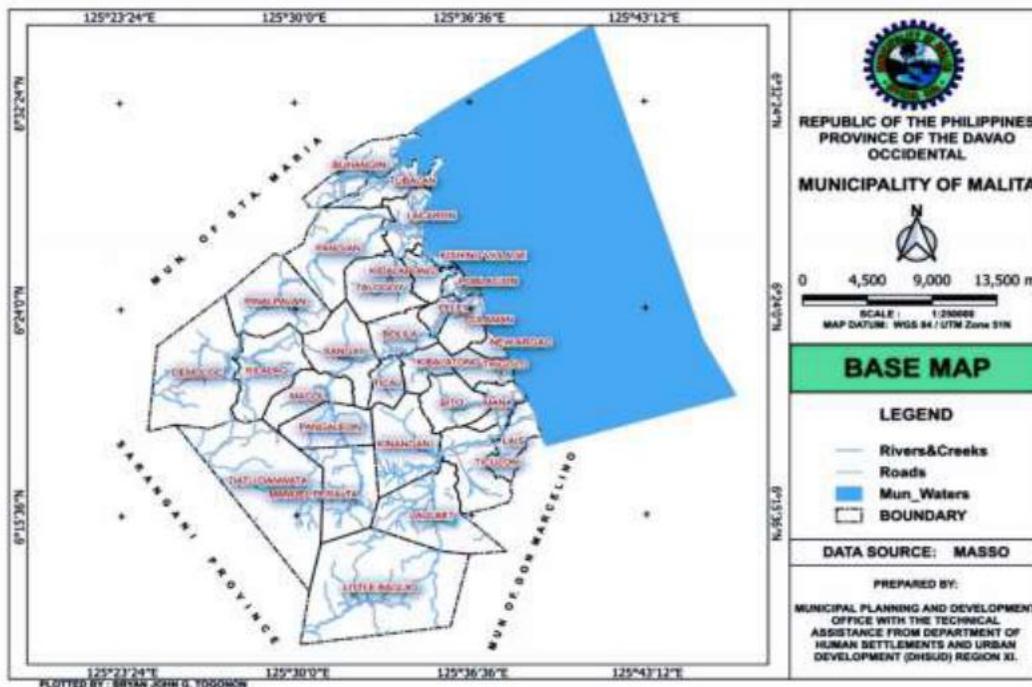


Figure 2. Map of Malita, Davao Occidental

The study was conducted at selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental, specifically: Brgy. Poblacion, Felis, Fishing Village, Lacaron, and Tubalan. These areas were chosen because they are among the barangays with the greatest number of households and population, according to records from the

Philippine Statistics Authority – Malita for the year 2020. In addition, the PSA – Malita conducts a census survey every five years. Based on the 2020 population survey by PSA – Malita, these barangays are among the top in terms of population percentage in the municipality of Malita: Poblacion (19.07%), Felis (2.88%), Fishing Village (3.61%), Lacaron (4.17%), and Tubalan (4.46%). Thus, this locale was appropriate for the conduct of the study.

### Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational method for analysis. A descriptive-correlational research design focuses on describing the relationship between variables rather than establishing a causal link. This method is suited for the study because the researchers aim to collect information about the current condition—the impact of media violence—and determine the significant relationship between media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental. Data were collected using surveys with pre-determined questions answered by the respondents.

### Sampling Design and Technique

The researchers used stratified random sampling to select respondents. Stratified random sampling ensures that a representative sample is obtained by dividing the population into homogeneous subgroups (strata) and selecting samples proportionally from each stratum. This method improves the accuracy and representativeness of survey results (Wei Liu et al., 2021).

Slovin’s formula,  $n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$ , with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, was used to determine the sample size. As a result, 395 respondents were included. The respondent list was obtained from the selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental.

**Table 1.** Respondents of the Study

<b>Barangay</b>	<b>Population Size</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>
Felis	2,889	23
Fishing Village	3,611	42
Lacaron	4,179	48
Poblacion	19,079	220
Tubalan	4,462	52
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,220</b>	<b>395</b>

*Source: Philippine Statistics Authority (2020)*

### Respondents of the Study

The respondents were 395 individuals from a total population of 34,220 from selected barangays: Poblacion, Felis, Fishing Village, Lacaron, and Tubalan. Stratified random sampling determined the study’s respondents.

**Inclusion criteria:**

- Must be residents of the participating barangays.
- Must be 18 years old or older.
- Selected to determine the significant relationship between media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims.

Respondents who were uncomfortable or felt threatened by the survey had the right to refuse or withdraw. Non-residents of the participating barangays were excluded.

**Research Instrument**

An adapted and validated survey questionnaire was used to collect data from tertiary victims. It was validated by three experts: Pamela Ciriaco, RCrim; Tarra Dawn C. Marquez, RCrim; and Ferry Luz M. Bisenio, RSW, MSSW. The questionnaire was contextualized to local settings and divided into **two parts**:

***Part I – Media Violence***

- Adapted from Braman (2017), “Measuring the attitudes towards Media Violence using Item-response theory.”
- 12 items: justified violence (1–4), enjoyment of violence (5–8), aggression (9–12).
- Rated on a 5-point Likert Scale: 5-Strongly Agree, 4-Agree, 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree, 2-Disagree, 1-Strongly Disagree.

***Part II – Vicarious Trauma***

- Adapted from Thurmer (2013), “An invitation to pay attention: a quantitative study of Vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress in child advocacy employees, volunteers, and interns.”
- 16 items: avoidance (1–7), intrusion (8–12), arousal (13–16).
- Rated on the same 5-point Likert scale.

Panel testing rated the questionnaire 4.9 (Very Good) overall, indicating consistency. The instrument has 28 items, with a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.781, indicating acceptable reliability.

**Data Analysis**

The Likert scale was used to interpret respondents’ sentiments and measure the impact of media violence on vicarious trauma.

**Table 2.** Range of Means of Exposure to Media Violence

Range of Means	Descriptive Level	Interpretation
4.20–5.00	Very High	Level of exposure to media violence is severe.
3.40–4.29	High	Level of exposure is above average.

2.60–3.39	Moderate	Level of exposure is average.
1.80–2.59	Low	Level of exposure is below average.
1.00–1.79	Very Low	Level of exposure is minimal to none.

**Table 3. Range of Means of Vicarious Trauma among Tertiary Victims**

<b>Range of Means</b>	<b>Descriptive Level</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
4.20–5.00	Very High	Tertiary victims have severe vicarious trauma.
3.40–4.19	High	Tertiary victims have high vicarious trauma.
2.60–3.39	Moderate	Tertiary victims have moderate vicarious trauma.
1.80–2.59	Low	Tertiary victims have minimal vicarious trauma.
1.00–1.79	Very Low	Tertiary victims have no vicarious trauma.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

The following are the procedures on how the researchers administered and collected the data of the study: Before the conduct of the study, the researchers underwent pilot testing and validation of questionnaires to ensure the reliability of the survey questionnaire given to the respondents. The researchers obtained an endorsement letter to conduct the study, which was noted by the research adviser, the program head of the Criminology Department, and approved by the College Dean of the Institute of Human Service (IHS). The data were gathered by submitting a letter of request to the offices of the Barangay Captains. The head officials approved the request letter and subsequently furnished the approval proposal and cover letter on the subject of the study to solicit support and cooperation. The researchers then arranged a schedule to visit the participating areas to conduct the survey questionnaire personally. Afterward, all accomplished questionnaires were retrieved immediately. Finally, the data were encoded and tabulated for statistical analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researchers observed complete ethical standards in the conduct of the study, following the study protocol, assessment, and standardized criteria, particularly in managing the population and data, including but not limited to:

**Authorship.** The researcher’s adviser was recognized as a co-author of the paper in acknowledgment of their invaluable guidance. Their expertise, knowledge, and direction played a crucial role in shaping and completing the study, transforming it from a mere concept into a fully developed research work.

**Beneficence.** Researchers strove to optimize the researcher’s advantages while limiting any drawbacks. This principle serves as a guiding force for ethical behavior in research, ensuring that it positively impacts the welfare of participants and society.

**Conflict of Interest.** The data gathered in this study was interpreted objectively to serve its purpose. The researchers ensured that there was no personal interest in developing this research paper. It is desired in this

study that the results serve as feedback for vicarious trauma and are not influenced by financial gain or recognition.

**Consent.** Consent and authorization were obtained. Permission letters were issued to complete the report. Respondents were not forced to share their interactions with the researchers; instead, they were given the option to withdraw.

**Credibility.** To ensure benefit, fairness, and consideration of the individual's capabilities, the researchers carefully avoided altering the original data to preserve the study's conclusions.

**Falsification.** The researchers guaranteed that the study was not misrepresented as what other studies showed or indicated. It was correctly cited and based on the truth rather than on theories, thoughts, ideas, or conclusions that are false or fabricated.

**Integrity.** In this study, the researchers acted honorably, were dependable and incorruptible, and adhered to moral standards that include decency, honesty, and fairness. They also acted in good faith and with intellectual honesty.

**Permission from Organization or Location.** The researchers obtained authorization from the government offices where the study was conducted to send the survey questionnaire to the expected respondents. The letter was properly signed, acknowledged by the researcher's mentor, and approved by the college's dean. The researcher confirmed that formal permission was from the organization where the study was conducted, and the communicated parties had the power to provide the requested permission.

**Plagiarism and Fabrication.** The researchers ensured that proper and exact methods of citing ideas from other writers and academics were properly followed. The writings in this study did not use any type of deception to affect the respondents' welfare. The panel of experts reviewed and evaluated all written material.

**Privacy and Confidentiality.** The respondents' personal information required in the study was kept private, and confidentiality of their data was strictly adhered to.

**Reliability.** The researchers provided dependable data and ensured the accuracy of the devices used to produce consistent study outcomes.

**Risk.** The researchers ensured that participants were free from risk. No respondents were put in danger; rather, they were given an opportunity to fully express themselves in accordance with the stated goal.

**Social Justice.** The researchers treated all respondents fairly and equally and respected their human rights as individuals throughout the study.

**Transferability.** The researchers established findings that could be applied to other contexts, situations, times, and populations.

**Voluntary Participation.** All tertiary victims in the selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental were given the free will to participate without any consequence or penalty. After the purpose and benefits of the study were presented, the rights of the respondents to contribute were carefully considered and adhered to.

### Statistical Analysis

**Mean and Standard Deviation.** This tool was used to measure the average scale of impact of media violence on vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental.

**Spearman’s Rank-Order Correlation Analysis.** This was used to determine the relationship between media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental. The values below were used to analyze the relationship between media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims, as follows (Higgins, 2005):

R-Values	Description	Interpretation
0.00	No correlation	No relationship between media violence and vicarious trauma.
±0.01– 0.20	Slight correlation	Very weak or almost no predictive influence.
±0.21– 0.40	Low correlation	Weak predictive influence; limited role.
±0.41– 0.60	Moderate correlation	Moderate influence; higher exposure increases likelihood of vicarious trauma.
±0.61– 0.80	High correlation	Strong influence; higher exposure significantly increases likelihood.
±0.81– 0.99	Very High correlation	Very strong predictive influence; major factor.
±1.00	Perfect correlation	Fully explained by exposure to media violence.

**Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis.** This tool was used to determine which domain(s) of media violence best influence(s) the vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Level of Exposure to Media Violence of the Respondents

**Table 4.** Level of Media Violence of the Respondents in Selected Barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental

Particulars	Mean	Description
<b>Justified Violence</b>		
1. I think it’s okay for media to show violence if there’s a good reason behind it.	3.93	High
2. The media should regularly show the negative consequences of violent behavior.	3.67	High
3. Sometimes, showing violence in the media can serve an important purpose.	3.52	High

4. I'm okay with watching media where the good guys often use violence to stop the bad guys.	3.71	High
<b>Category Mean</b>	3.71	High
<b>Enjoyment of Violence</b>		
5. Media without some kind of violence often feels boring to me.	3.33	Moderate
6. Watching violent media can be fun or exciting sometimes.	3.46	High
7. I enjoy watching well-choreographed fight scenes in movies or media.	3.66	High
8. I think it's common for people to enjoy watching very violent media.	3.71	High
<b>Category Mean</b>	3.53	High
<b>Media Violence and Aggression</b>		
9. Watching violent media could make me more likely to act violently.	3.36	Moderate
10. People should blame the media for violent crimes.	3.13	Moderate
11. Violent media makes people more people more violent.	3.48	High
12. People who watch a lot of violent media are more likely to be violent.	3.41	High
<b>Category Mean</b>	3.44	Moderate
<b>GRAND MEAN</b>	3.33	Moderate

Table 4 presents the levels of media violence among tertiary victims, each assessed through different indicators. Table 4 above shows that the Justified Violence domain got the highest category mean score of 3.71 (High). This indicates that most of the respondents accept justifiable presentation of violence.

In recent theory and evidence syntheses (e.g., General Aggression Model; priming; script theory; desensitization), repeated exposure, even when “justified,” is linked to desensitization, stronger aggressive scripts, and changes in normative beliefs about aggression. However, moral and narrative framing can legitimize harm in stories, increasing tolerance and engagement (Anderson et al., 2022).

This is consistent with research by Waddell et al. (2019), which demonstrates how the detrimental effects of violence can reduce enjoyment and response arousal, offering a workable path for moral representation without glamorization. In addition, Delhove and Greitemeyer (2021) show that longitudinal network studies indicate increased use of violent media predicts increases in aggressive behavior and the spread of aggressive norms across social ties. This pattern is consistent with survey results, which show that items endorsing justified violence and tolerance for protagonist violence register high means, indicating above-average exposure and social acceptance.

According to Krahé et al. (2019), regular exposure to violent media during adolescence predicts aggressive behavior trajectories and shifts in normative acceptance. This supports the warning that repeated justified portrayals, if not balanced by consequence framing, can eventually lead to normalization. Reconciling contradictory meta-analysis and methodological meta-discussion, Mathur & VanderWeele (2019) emphasize that effect sizes differ depending on study design and moderator factors (e.g., framing, measurement of justification), but they nevertheless lend credence to the cautious conclusion that context and framing moderate rather than erase effects.

Among the items about justified violence, the item No. 1 “I think it’s okay for media to show violence if there’s a good reason behind it” obtained the highest mean score of 3.93, described as high. This indicates that most of the respondents think that showing violent content in any kind of media platform is acceptable if there is a good reason behind it.

According to Yao et al. (2019), exposure to violent video games and related media is linked to increased aggression in part due to moral disengagement and associated emotional processes. This suggests that individuals who defend or reframe violent content are more likely to accept it and exhibit downstream effects on attitudes and behavior.

Similarly, Annenberg Public Policy Center (2019) demonstrates that viewers consider justified violence as more acceptable in real time and that justified and unjustified on-screen violence elicit different patterns of brain activity in regions linked to moral assessment.

Meanwhile, Ferguson (2015) reports that violent games have little effect on aggressiveness and identifies methodological and contextual modifiers that make simple, direct causal assertions less plausible. These findings are consistent with respondents' hesitation to blame the media alone. Likewise, the American Psychological Association Task Force on Violent Media (2015) concludes that although some violent media can slightly increase aggressive thoughts or behaviors under specific circumstances, the evidence does not support straightforward, direct claims that media alone causes violent crime. The report emphasizes contextual moderators (e.g., individual differences, family environment, and situational factors) that shape outcomes, which is consistent with respondents' reluctance to place sole blame on media.

Audiences rely on “good reason” framing (protection, heroic action, exposing wrongdoing), which boosts acceptability but runs the risk of normalizing instrumental harm when applied frequently. Research supports media literacy and editing methods that prioritize costs and human impact by showing violent images with obvious repercussions and moral complexity, which lessens enjoyment and emotional attraction to violent content (Anderson et al., 2022).

However, empirical syntheses show that such framing interacts with situational moderators (e.g., parental mediation) and individual variations (e.g., trait aggression, empathy), so the same “justified” depiction may have different downstream effects across viewers (Kim, 2024).

Also, compared to unjustified or consequence-heavy depictions, justified portrayals frequently increase immediate acceptance and enjoyment; however, combining justification with obvious costs or moral ambiguity decreases enjoyment and aggressive priming (Waddell et al., 2019; Moorhouse & Brooks, 2020). Furthermore, studies of reciprocal and longitudinal effects show that exposure and aggressive

behavior do not follow a straightforward one-way causal path but rather influence one another over time. This helps explain why audiences may support justified violence while still acknowledging the complex causes of aggression in the real world (Dou & Zhang, 2024; Kim, 2024).

In addition, the General Aggression Model (GAM) explains how personal characteristics interact with situational signals (such as narratives that justify violence) to activate aggressive ideas, affect, and scripts that can become more accessible with repeated exposure (Anderson et al., 2022). Short-term priming and long-term learning of violence as a successful problem-solving technique when it is constantly presented as justifiable are further explained by script theory and cognitive neoassociation models.

On the other hand, Media Violence and Aggression obtained the lowest category mean among the three domains on the level of exposure to media violence among tertiary victims in selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental. Media Violence and Aggression got the lowest mean of 3.34, described as moderate, indicating that respondents show an indication of mild aggressive or violent tendencies. More specifically, they indicate a weak association between violent media and their own aggressive behavior, leading them to experience a mild avoidance response (i.e., limited viewing or filtering) rather than a large change in their own behavior.

According to Kim (2024), many previously reported benefits diminish under more stringent inclusion criteria and replication tests, and effect sizes for media exposure on aggressive outcomes are frequently tiny and subject to study design, measurement decisions, and publication bias. It also highlights the significance of longitudinal, pre-registered, and well-controlled designs to elucidate causal pathways and boundary conditions, pointing out that situational moderators and individual variations (such as trait aggression and familial context) significantly modify observed relationships.

Likewise, Oshodi (2024) analysis of adolescent encounters with violent content on social platforms highlights that exposure to violent media is widespread but heterogeneous, with many youths reporting intermittent or context-dependent contact rather than constant, high-intensity consumption. This pattern aligns with a sample mean near the midpoint and reflects average, community-level exposure rather than extreme prevalence.

Among the items about media violence and aggression, item No. 10 "People should blame the media for violent crimes" obtained the lowest mean of 3.13, described as moderate. This indicates that respondents are somewhat reluctant to hold media solely responsible, implying they see multiple causes for violence and may favor broader solutions.

According to Ray et al. (2019), the way questions are phrased and whether or not respondents are asked to think about other factors have a significant impact on public attitudes regarding media and crime. When given a more comprehensive context, people are more likely to assign blame to social, economic, and personal factors rather than just media.

Similarly, Surette (2015) thorough analysis of media-crime scholarship highlights that media effects are usually one of several interacting influences on violent behavior and public perceptions. Therefore, a moderate level of agreement with the statement "People should blame the media for violent

crimes" is consistent with a public that acknowledges multiple causes and favors broader solutions rather than media-only remedies.

Furthermore, Khairuddin et al. (2023) claim that while some studies find links between violent media and aggressive behavior, others find negligible effects once confounds and publication bias are taken into account. As a result, general recommendations to "blame the media" for violent crimes are not supported by a consistent body of evidence. Additionally, he recommends policy responses that stress media literacy, family and community interventions, and targeted mental health supports rather than punitive measures aimed just at media content, since multifactorial prevention better reflects the empirical complexity they reveal.

Meanwhile, the level of exposure to media violence among tertiary victims in selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental obtained an overall mean of 3.33, described as moderate. This indicates that the respondents are moderately exposed to media violence. Furthermore, the level of exposure to media violence of the respondents in selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental is average. The moderate mean suggests people see violent content fairly often but not all the time. It likely comes from several sources: TV shows, social media feeds, and streaming services.

Furthermore, Kim (2024) found that many reported associations between media violence and aggression diminish under stricter inclusion criteria and when publication bias and study quality are taken into consideration. Similarly, study heterogeneity and the influence of measurement and design choices are highlighted in Khairuddin et al. (2023) analysis of the meta-analytic debate, which helps explain why lay respondents select a moderate attitude that acknowledges some hazards but rejects oversimplified causal attributions.

Additionally, Das et al. (2024) demonstrate that higher-quality longitudinal studies frequently indicate lesser impacts and that the sensitivity of anxiety, aggression, and other outcomes to media exposure varies, which is consistent with the public perception that views media as one contributing factor among many. According to research on narrative framing and audience enjoyment, respondents may accept justified or aesthetically framed violence while remaining skeptical about the causality of media crime. This is because audiences evaluate violence differently when it is embedded in coherent moral or narrative purposes than when it is gratuitous. This distinction helps reconcile the moderate concern about real-world aggression with the relatively high acceptance of justified portrayals.

### Level of Vicarious Trauma among Tertiary Victims

**Table 5.** Level of Vicarious Trauma among Tertiary Victims in Selected Barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental

Particulars	Mean	Description
<b>Avoidance</b>		
1. I experienced emotional detachment.	3.56	High

2. I felt hopeless about what the future will hold.	3.68	High
3. I had little desire to be around others.	3.64	High
4. I was more inactive than usual.	3.58	High
5. I became unaware of lapses in my job when dealing with people.	3.53	High
6. I felt a desire to distance myself from working with certain people.	3.46	High
7. I steered clear of people, places, and things that triggered memories of my work with colleagues.	3.43	High
<b>Category Mean</b>	3.56	High
<b>Intrusion</b>		
8. My heart would race whenever I thought about my work with certain people.	3.61	High
9. It felt as though I was re-experiencing the trauma(s) my colleagues had gone through.	3.39	Moderate
10. Anything that reminded me of my work with people would upset me.	3.33	Moderate
11. I had unsettling dreams related to my work with certain people.	3.41	High
12. My work with colleagues would often come to my mind when I didn't expect it.	3.45	High
<b>Category Mean</b>	3.44	High
<b>Arousal</b>		
13. I struggle to focus.	3.60	High
14. I had difficulty sleeping.	3.54	High
15. I became irritated very easily.	3.74	High
16. I anticipated that something negative would occur.	3.52	High
<b>Category Mean</b>	3.55	High
<b>GRAND MEAN</b>	3.53	High

Table 5 presents the levels of vicarious trauma among tertiary victims, each assessed through different indicators. Table 5 above shows that Avoidance got the highest category mean score of 3.56 (High).

This means that the respondents experience acute emotional numbness, social isolation, and detachment from coworkers and structures in order to avoid psychological stimuli. Respondents report increased

levels of loss of feelings, isolation, and detachment from co-workers, decreased activities, distance from colleagues, and deliberately avoiding triggers. They are perceiving clear emotional distance, withdrawal from social situations, reduced level of involvement, and keeping away from co-workers at a physical distance.

Organizationally, this pattern calls for proactive supervision, structured debriefing, and access to counseling to prevent chronic disengagement and burnout. Avoidance is a common manifestation of vicarious trauma, and workplace preventive measures (training, peer support, task management) lessen these effects. According to Anderson et al. (2022), multi-level prevention (individual coping + organizational transformation) explains mechanisms relating recurrent exposure to others' pain with emotional numbness and avoidance. Moorhouse and Brooks contend that by assisting employees in contextualizing traumatic content and upholding professional boundaries, critical media literacy and reflective practice can lessen secondary harm.

Among the items about avoidance, item No. 2 "I felt hopeless about what the future will hold" obtained the highest mean score of 3.68, described as high. This indicates that tertiary victims are anxious and feel distressed to the point of hopelessness in relation to what the future will hold.

According to Li (2025), in studies of caregivers, sense of safety and future orientation can be undermined by prolonged exposure to others' trauma narratives, resulting in recurrent intrusive imagery, increased anxiety, and a growing sense of hopelessness—similar to the high mean seen in your sample. The *Frontiers* editorial highlights risk factors and consequences and recommends trauma-informed policies and targeted coping strategies to reduce anxiety and restore future-oriented hope among affected caregivers and tertiary victims (Acquadro Maran et al., 2023).

Furthermore, elevated despair about the future is a well-established correlate of vicarious traumatization and secondary traumatic stress (STS) in tertiary victims, particularly when exposure is extended and social or organizational support is scarce (Sprang & Garcia, 2022). Anxiety, emotional exhaustion, intrusive imagery, and pessimism about the future are symptoms of STS that are exacerbated by high exposure intensity, a lack of coping mechanisms, and role-related helplessness (Kendall-Tackett, 2023).

In addition, Dou and Zhang (2024) emphasize the reciprocal relationships between exposure and deteriorating affect over time, highlighting the necessity of early intervention to prevent worsening hopelessness. Likewise, Kim (2024) stresses the importance of high-quality longitudinal and organizational studies to determine effective means of reversing affective decreases in helpers exposed to trauma narratives. Unmanaged hopelessness is predictive of deteriorating mental health and decreased occupational functioning.

On the other hand, Intrusion obtained the lowest category mean among the three domains of vicarious trauma in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental. Intrusion got a mean of 3.44, described as high, indicating that tertiary victims still experience significant distress. Despite being the lowest domain, it remains in the high range, suggesting clinically meaningful vicarious trauma.

Anderson et al. (2022) suggest focused cognitive and organizational therapies and characterize intrusion as a core symptom cluster that frequently precedes more general functional loss. Framing and prior briefings can lessen intrusive re-experiencing by diminishing affective reactivity to unpleasant material, which varies by context. The domain includes unpleasant recollections, physiological arousal, and distressing reminders. Because intrusion symptoms interfere with sleep and focus, they are clinically significant even though lower relative endorsement may reflect coping or suppression techniques. Intrusion symptoms are frequently early signs of vicarious trauma and respond to sleep hygiene therapies, cognitive coping techniques, and trauma-informed monitoring.

The item No. 10 “Anything that reminded me of my work with people would upset me” obtained the lowest mean score of 3.33, described as moderate. This indicates that tertiary victims get upset sometimes when thinking about their work. This suggests that situational triggers are still important; even though they are less endorsed than avoidance items, this type of reactivity impairs day-to-day functioning and indicates the necessity for trigger management techniques (trigger mapping, gradual exposure in safe contexts, and supervisor-led coping plans).

According to Leung et al. (2023), repeated empathic engagement and exposure to others' trauma narratives can make people more sensitive to distress cues, intrusive memories, and emotional reactivity, especially when organizational resources are scarce or the helper has a history of personal trauma. Acquadro Maran et al. (2023) underline that cue-triggered upset is a typical and clinically significant aspect of secondary traumatic stress, often occurring with emotional tiredness, diminished coping ability, and sporadic avoidance behaviors.

This pattern is further supported by empirical syntheses showing that organizational factors (workload, supervision, and access to mental health resources) moderate reactivity to work cues. Reminder-triggered upset co-occurs with anxiety, burnout, and reduced coping capacity among child welfare, healthcare, and mental health workers. These findings support trauma-informed workplace responses, such as routine screening, supervision, and accessible supports for tertiary victims (Leung et al., 2023).

However, the overall level of vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental obtained an overall mean of 3.53, described as high. This indicates substantial secondary stress across domains and supports implementing multi-tiered responses: routine screening, supervisor training, accessible mental-health services, workload adjustments, and organizational policies that normalize help-seeking. Recent syntheses call for integrated approaches combining individual coping skills with systemic changes to workload and supervision to reduce vicarious trauma prevalence and severity (Kim, 2024).

### **Correlation Analysis between Media Violence and Vicarious Trauma among Tertiary Victims**

Table 6 shows the relationship between exposure to media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental. The *r*-value indicates the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables, while the *p*-value determines whether the relationship is statistically significant.

**Table 6.** Relationship between Media Violence and Vicarious Trauma

Variable	R-Value	Description	P-Value	Decision
Media Violence and Vicarious Trauma	0.524	Moderate	< 0.001	Reject null hypothesis

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 displays the correlation between exposure to media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental. The r-value represents the strength of the correlation between the two variables, while the p-value indicates whether the correlation is statistically significant.

The correlation analysis revealed an r-value of 0.542, indicating a moderate correlation between exposure to media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims across all domains. This suggests that as the level of exposure to media violence increases, the level of vicarious trauma also increases. The p-value < 0.001 indicates that this relationship is statistically significant, leading to the rejection of the first null hypothesis. Therefore, exposure to media violence is moderately or slightly correlated with vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental.

According to Nelson (2023), regular exposure to violent media significantly changes cognitive processing. The findings showed a moderate correlation between media violence and emotional dysregulation, making individuals more prone to emotional instability and less sensitive to aggression. Substantial positive correlations between media exposure and acute stress reactions have been observed in studies examining graphic media coverage of collective trauma and its relation to acute stress and post-traumatic symptoms (Holman et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Pfefferbaum et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis on mass trauma media coverage and found a small but significant positive link between exposure and trauma-related psychological outcomes. Similarly, Fitzpatrick et al. (2021) examined young adults' responses to violent news coverage and found that higher consumption of such news was associated with increased anxiety and intrusive symptoms, demonstrating a positive correlation between indirect media exposure and psychological distress akin to vicarious trauma.

In addition, individual differences, such as resilience or past trauma, influence how people process media violence. Martinez and Lee (2022) found that individuals with lower resilience experienced stronger vicarious trauma symptoms after viewing violent media. Their data indicated a significant correlation between exposure to media violence and trauma symptoms, especially for those with fewer coping resources. This demonstrates that while many people are impacted by media violence, personal and psychological factors can amplify or reduce the emotional response.

According to Gerbner's Cultivation Theory (1976), prolonged exposure to television shapes individuals' perceptions of reality, often aligning them with media portrayals rather than lived experience. A key concept, the "mean world syndrome," suggests that heavy viewers of violent content perceive the world as more dangerous than it is, leading to increased fear, mistrust, and support for punitive social policies.

Cultivation Theory emphasizes the long-term and cumulative effects of media exposure rather than immediate or short-term influences. It suggests that media is not merely entertainment but a powerful socializing force that gradually shapes beliefs, emotions, and behaviors, particularly regarding complex social issues such as violence, fear, and trauma. Understanding Cultivation Theory helps researchers and practitioners grasp how media consumption impacts individual perceptions, emotional responses, and social behavior.

### Regression Analysis of Exposure to Media Violence and Vicarious Trauma

**Table 7.** Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	B	Std. Error	P-Value	Decision
Constant	1.704	0.154	< 0.001	—
Enjoyment of Violence	0.450	0.032	< 0.001	Reject null hypothesis

Table 7 presents the results of a Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis conducted to predict the exposure to media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangays of Malita, Davao Occidental. The domains included justified violence, enjoyment of violence, and media violence and aggression.

The analysis revealed a significant regression equation ( $F = 91.548$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with an  $R^2 = 0.318$ , indicating that 31.8% of the variance in vicarious trauma can be explained by exposure to media violence, while the remaining 68.2% of the variability is due to other factors not included in the model.

Notably, among the three indicators, enjoyment of violence ( $\beta = 0.450$ ,  $SE = 0.032$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) was found to be the best predictor of vicarious trauma. This means that enjoyment of violence significantly influences vicarious trauma. The beta ( $\beta$ ) value of 0.450 suggests a moderate positive relationship between media violence and vicarious trauma. In other words, as enjoyment of violence increases by one standard deviation, vicarious trauma is expected to increase by 0.318 standard deviations, assuming all other domains remain constant.

Out of the three predictors, enjoyment of violence was the only significant factor, emphasizing its pivotal role in influencing vicarious trauma.

According to Regnoli et al. (2024), media exposure intensity and the way viewers process content predict symptoms of vicarious traumatization, linking engagement with stronger secondary trauma responses. People who enjoy violent content pay closer attention and develop stronger affective and cognitive bonds with what they watch; this deeper engagement increases the likelihood that traumatic scenes will be mentally rehearsed and vividly encoded, raising susceptibility to vicarious trauma through repeated emotional activation.

Similarly, Miedzobrodzka et al. (2023) note that psychophysiological studies show empathy attenuation following repeated exposure to violent media, and psychometric studies find stronger symptoms

among those who engage with and enjoy violent content more. Beta regression showed enjoyment positively predicted vicarious trauma ( $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $z = 3.78$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The findings of this study highlight the pivotal role of enjoyment of violence in influencing vicarious trauma among tertiary victims. The regression indicates that enjoyment of violence uniquely accounted for 31.8% of the variance in vicarious trauma. This aligns with Thompson et al. (2019), who found that media exposure to natural disasters significantly predicted post-traumatic stress, even when accounting for direct exposure.

According to Rasul (2025), whether people enjoy violent media depends not just on the violence itself, but also on personal moral judgments and narrative framing. Furthermore, Perry (2022) suggests that regulated forms of media violence provide intense emotional stimulation without real-world repercussions, allowing viewers to experience thrilling emotions safely. This type of entertainment lets viewers feel intense emotions in a controlled environment, which can be exciting and satisfying.

## SUMMARY

This study aimed to determine exposure of media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental. In particular, it determines the level of media violence of the respondents in selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental, the level of vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental, the significant relationship between media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims, and which domain of media violence significantly influence vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental.

A descriptive-correlational research design was employed in the study. There are three hundred ninety-five (395) respondents from selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental, who were included in the study. An adopted questionnaire on media violence by using Braman (2017) "Measuring the attitudes towards Media Violence using Item-response theory" was utilized to measure the independent variable, while vicarious trauma by using Thurmer (2013) "An invitation to pay attention: a quantitative study of Vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress in child advocacy employees, volunteers and interns" survey questionnaire. The statistical used were mean, Spearman's rho, and step-wise multiple regression analysis.

The results of this study showed the levels of exposure to media violence, with justified violence (3.71) garnering the highest responses, and media violence and aggression (3.34) received the lowest category mean and an overall mean of 3.33 (Moderate). Regarding vicarious trauma, it garnered an overall mean of 3.53 (High).

Regarding the relationship,  $R^2$  reveals that 3.18 percent of the considered data fit the regression model. Between the two variables, the r-value was 0.524, indicating a moderate positive correlation and statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Among the three predictors, enjoyment of violence ( $\beta = 0.450$ ,  $SE = 0.032$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) is significant, which implies the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that media violence significantly influenced vicarious trauma.

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## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings presented, the following are the conclusions drawn:

1. The results on the level of media violence of the respondents in selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental obtained an overall mean of 3.33 described as moderate indicating that the level of exposure to media violence is average. This implies that the respondents are often engaged nor exposed to media violence.
2. The level of vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental, with a mean score of 3.53 (high), means that the tertiary victims have high vicarious trauma.
3. The results also revealed a significant relationship between the media violence and vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental, with an r-value of 0.524 and p-value of 0.001. This indicates that the media violence influences vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental.
4. The study results highlighted that the enjoyment of violence was the key indicator that most significantly influences the vicarious trauma among tertiary victims in selected barangay of Malita, Davao Occidental. This implies that people with prolonged exposure to media violence are prone to experience traumatization.

## RECOMMENDATION

1. It is suggested that Parents may verify the rating and trigger warning information for a media portrayal prior to allowing their children the opportunity to view, parents may set limits to their children on how much they consume watching media representations. The children may provide ratings at any point in time and be certain to have communicated these limits prior to allowing them to partake of the entertainment.
2. It is suggested that Youth may participate in Barangay Media Literacy Workshops to develop skills in identifying harmful stereotypes, glamorization of violence, and manipulative messages in any kind of media platforms. They may also learn how to check ratings and trigger warnings prior to viewing media, discuss with family and friends how media has affected them emotionally, and eliminate/block from view all media that makes them experience fear, anxiety, or other feelings associated with an individual feeling unsafe.
3. It is suggested that the Local Government Unit (LGU) may issue resolutions on responsible viewing of the media, support for trauma-informed interventions, and for groups offering alternative recreational activities other than violence and violence-themed activities in the community; form a multisectoral task force for health, education, and youth departments, as well as the influence of the media and social welfare, to prevent duplication of actions and messages; and identify and establish guidelines for measuring success, among which are decreasing personal enjoyment of viewing violent media and increasing utilization of counseling or support services.

4. It is suggested that Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO) may establish and conduct targeted screenings for vicarious trauma on a quarterly, confidential basis through schools, barangay health stations, and community clinics using an established and proven assessment instrument, and relevant psychoeducation that normalizes experiences of trauma and trains affected individuals using controlled exposure reduction techniques, while also training MSWDO social workers, barangay health personnel, and school counselors on how to appropriately and professionally respond to and refer tertiary victims of trauma.
5. It is suggested to filter down the literature to focus on longitudinal designs testing the impact of individual (vulnerability measurements: previous trauma, baseline mental health, empathy, emotional regulation) and social/contextual (social support, family-peer norms, community violence) variables, together with properties of the media (type, level of usage, realism, narrative), measure them using longitudinal multilevel designs with mediation/moderation models, supplement existing measures with usage records when possible to incorporate both subjective and objective data, and preregister the literature to spot small-to-medium effects that can inform the implementation of interventions.
6. It is suggested a brief, targeted intervention to decrease enjoyment of violent media and, as a result, decrease attention and increase rumination and affective bonding. A media literacy session that teaches how to deconstruct violent framing, paired with daily cognitive reappraisal exercises (2-5 minutes), to reframe scenes as staged or harmful, so as to down-regulate positive affect. Provide structured co-viewing prompts or simple exposure limits for high-risk audience members. Assess the impact of these activities by taking pre/post measurements of feelings of enjoyment, attention, empathy, rumination, and vicarious trauma symptoms.
7. Future researchers can use this study as a foundation for exploring related topics such as the nuanced relationship between media violence and vicarious trauma, and more studies may be conducted to address claims and research gaps in the study.

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