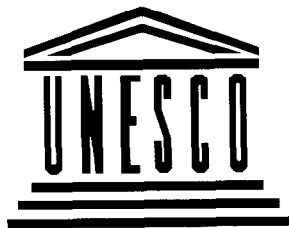


# **The Killing Screen**

## ***Violence on Television and its Impact on Children***

A Public Hearing



**Edited by Latika Padgaonkar**

The authors are responsible for the choice and presentation of the facts contained in this book and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organisation.



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# Acknowledgements

In recent years the question of violence in the media has acquired an extremely serious edge. The reason for this is the sudden appearance of multiple modes of transmission: television, cable TV, video and the Internet. Violent and aggressive material is now easily and abundantly available in the market. At the same time, however, the results of many surveys conducted worldwide establish that public opinion is disturbed by the omnipresence of violence on the screen. The debate on the impact of cruel media images on the minds of young people has been rekindled.

In 1998, Akhila Sivadas of the Centre for Advocacy and Research and media critic Shailaja Bajpai conducted a monitoring study of television programmes for UNESCO. The study looked at a variety of widely viewed programmes on major TV channels in India. Ms Bajpai wrote a background paper on the theme, and together the two documents formed the basis of a Public Hearing in New Delhi which brought together – as suggested by *The UNESCO Global Study on Media Violence* – TV producers, TV channel executives, politicians, parents, teachers, psychiatrists and the public.

This book is the result of all these cumulative efforts. UNESCO expresses its gratitude to Ms Bajpai and Ms Sivadas for the grave concern they brought to their task of reflection and analysis; and to UNICEF, the UN Information Centre and the India International Centre which partnered us in organising the Public Hearing. We hope this publication will go some way in helping people understand the scale of the problem and in keeping the issue alive.

**Latika Padgaonkar**

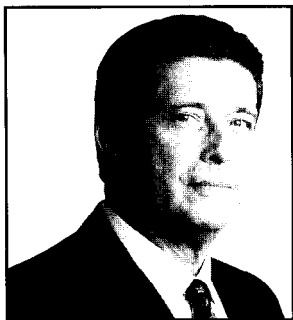
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**Federico Mayor**

## Foreword

As the Director General of UNESCO, whose core mission is to build “the defences of peace” in the minds of men, women and children, I am greatly concerned to note the prevalence of violence in television programmes watched by children and young people. UNESCO’s recent *Global Study on Media Violence* indicates that children not only watch a great deal of television – including violent programmes – but that they are deeply influenced

by what they see. We must be equally aware, the report points out, that children are also influenced by their immediate environment, which many find violent.

The study proposed that public debates be held among politicians, parents, psychologists, TV producers and teachers on this problem. To reduce violence on screen, producers need to formulate their own professional guidelines, practise self-regulation and self-discipline. Children need to be taught to watch television in a spirit of *critical awareness*. Hence, media education is extremely important.

The UNESCO Regional Office in New Delhi brought out a report on the television scene in India, presenting the issue of violence in the media and a monitoring study. In the same spirit, UNESCO organised a Public Hearing so that viewers and media decision-makers could discuss these issues and spread awareness about the potential benefits but also the dangers of television viewing for children.

The findings of international research into the impact of on-screen

violence are now circulating widely. This booklet has been prepared to complement, at the Asian regional level and within the national territory of India, the efforts of research colleagues in other regions of the world. I hope that these pages will provide information about the problem of violence on television and contribute towards public awareness of the need to protect young viewers.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Mayor', with a large, sweeping initial 'F'.

**Federico Mayor**

*Director General of UNESCO*

**UNESCO GLOBAL STUDY ON MEDIA VIOLENCE**

*A Summary*

## UNESCO GLOBAL STUDY ON MEDIA VIOLENCE

### A Summary

This report presents the results of the UNESCO *Global Study on Media Violence*, conducted between 1996 and 1997 as a joint research project by the World Organization of the Scout Movement and Utrecht University, under the scientific supervision of Prof (Dr) Jo Groebel. It is the largest ever intercultural study on the impact of media violence on children. More than 5,000 children from 23 different countries all over the world participated in the study.

The methodology used was unique in so far as all participating 12-year-old children answered exactly the same standardised 60-items questionnaire. The content of the questions was not culture-bound, as otherwise a direct comparison of the data would have been impossible. The children reported their media behaviour, their habits, preferences, and social environment. By January 1998, approximately 350,000 individual datum had been collected and processed in the context of the study.

The following countries participated in the core study: Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Egypt, Fiji, Germany, India, Japan, Mauritius, the Netherlands, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, South Africa, Spain,

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The world's children spend an average of three hours daily in front of the screen...That is at least 50 per cent more time spent with this medium than with any other out-of-school activity, including homework.



Tadjikistan, Togo, Trinidad, Tobago and Ukraine.

In each country, data were collected in metropolitan and rural areas, in high- and low-aggression environments, from boys and girls, and from different types of schools. The only groups of children who could not be considered in the study were those not attending school or living in extremely remote areas.

Five major issues were addressed:

- Which role do the media, and in particular TV, play in the lives of children on a global level?
- Why are children fascinated by media violence?
- What is the relationship between media violence and aggressive behaviour among children?
- Are there cultural as well as gender differences in the media impact on aggression?
- How do violent environments (war/crime), on the one hand, and the state of technological development, on the other, influence the coping with aggressive media content?

The results demonstrate that:

Ninety-three per cent of the children in this study have access to a TV set. The range is 99 per cent for the North-Western hemisphere and 83 per cent for Africa, with Asia and Latin-America in between. In the areas surveyed, the screen has practically become a universal medium. For school children, it is the most powerful source of information and entertainment. Even radio and books do not have the same global distribution.

The world's children spend an average of **three hours daily in front of the screen** with of course a broad international spectrum of individual viewing behaviour. That is at least 50 per cent more time spent with this medium than with any other out-of-school activity, including homework, being with family or friends, or reading.

Prof Moegiadi  
Director, UNESCO

*(Extract from the speech at the Public Hearing on Impact of TV Violence on Children, held at the India International Centre, New Delhi, on December 5, 1998)*

Children's behaviour and children's personality have been troubling educationists, media critics and parents, among others, for quite some time. In recent years, hundreds of studies on the subject have been carried out. The topic has been debated again and again in meetings, seminars and symposia. Yet, as we all know, the centrality of violent images and emotions in the arts is not new. On the contrary, violence and fear have been embedded in grammar, literature, mythology, and even in popular culture, since millennia. What then is new today? The newness lies in an omnipresent mass-media, and in the wide space violent images have come to occupy on the television screen and now on the Internet. For the first time, fear-inducing images are easily available to anyone, at any time. As technology becomes more widespread and more sophisticated and more interactive, as future reality and three-dimensional images make their impact even more potent, the problem of what effect these have on people, especially children, becomes very vital.

Thus, **TV has become a major socialisation factor and dominates the lives of children in urban and electrified rural areas around the globe.**

In particular, boys are fascinated by aggressive media heroes. **Some of these such as Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Terminator*, have become global icons, 88 per cent of the world's children know him.** Fifty-one per cent of the children from high-aggression environments (war, crime) would like to be like him as compared to 37 per cent in low-aggression neighbourhoods. Clearly, children need and use media heroes as role models to cope with difficult situations. And these are plentiful for the children of the world.

A remarkably large number live in a problematic emotional state. **Nearly half of the children report that they are anxious most of the time or very often;** 9 per cent had to flee their homesite at least once in their life; 47 per cent report that they would like to live in another country. In high-aggression areas, 16 per cent of the children report that most people in their neighbourhood die because they are killed by others. Here, 7.5 per cent of the children have already personally used a weapon against someone.

In this situation, media heroes are used for escapism and compensation for the children's actual problems. For boys, it is primarily aggressive role models (30 per cent name an action hero); for girls, pop stars and musicians. There are regional differences for the favourite heroes: Asia has the highest ranking for action heroes (34 per cent), Africa the lowest (18 per cent), with Europe and America in between (25 per cent each). **Many children are surrounded by an environment where both 'real' and media experiences support the view that violence is natural.**

The impact of media violence can primarily be explained through the fact that **aggressive behaviour is rewarded.**

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Children need and use media heroes as role models to cope with difficult situations. And these are plentiful for the children of the world.

Forty-seven per cent of those children who prefer aggressive media content would also like to be involved in a risky situation (as compared to 19 per cent with another media preference). Again, this is particularly true for boys.

All in all, one can conclude:

- Media violence is universal. It is primarily presented in a rewarding context
- Depending on the personality characteristics of the children and on their everyday-life experience, media violence satisfies different needs: It 'compensates' one's own frustrations and deficits in problem areas. It offers 'thrills' for children in less problematic environments. For boys it creates a frame-of-reference for 'attractive role models'
- There are many cultural differences, and yet, the basic patterns of the media violence implications are similar around the world
- Individual movies are not the problem. However, the extent and omnipresence of media violence (with an average of five to 10 aggressive acts per TV-programme hour in many countries) contribute to the development of a global aggressive culture
- The 'normality' and the 'reward characteristics' of aggression are more systematically promoted than non-aggressive ways of coping with one's life. Therefore, the risk of media violence prevails on a global level

What can be done in this situation?

Violence has always been an element of fiction and news reporting. However, its extent, extreme nature, and reward characteristics are a problem. Therefore, three major strategies should be considered on an international level.

- Public debate and 'common ground' talks between the five Ps: Politicians, Producers, Pedagogy, Parents, and the future Prosumers (active consumers)

Forty-seven per cent of those children who prefer aggressive media content would also like to be involved in a risky situation (as compared to 19 per cent with another media preference).

- ❑ The development of a code of conduct and self-control among media professionals
- ❑ The establishment of media education to create competent and critical media users

With communication systems such as the Internet, the media will be even more omnipresent, universal, and global. The media bear 'risks', as this study has demonstrated, but they also offer many new pro-social possibilities. As a consequence, the new digital environment demands similar attention as culture and education in the traditional world

### **The Problem**

Thousands of studies have demonstrated the risk of media violence to stimulate aggression. Until now, however, no single study dealt with the problem on a global scale. In this situation, UNESCO decided to initiate a project which would analyse the international importance of the issue. In particular, possible cultural differences, as well as the influence of different aggressive experiences in the actual environment (war and crime), and the different media available for the children were to be identified.

### **The Media**

With the technical means of automatisisation and, more recently, of digitalisation, **media content has potentially become global**. Not only does news reach all parts of the world, mass entertainment, too, has become an international enterprise. For example, American or Indian movies can be watched in most world regions. Much of what is presented contains violence. The media themselves differ in their impact. Audiovisual media in particular are more graphic in their

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The media themselves differ in their impact. Audiovisual media in particular are more graphic in their depiction of violence than books or newspapers.

depiction of violence than books or newspapers; they leave less freedom in the individual images which the viewers associate with the stories. As the media become ever more 'perfect', with the introduction of three dimensions (virtual reality) and interactivity (computer games and multimedia), and as they are always accessible and universal (video and Internet), **the representation of violence 'merges' increasingly with reality.**

Violence as a pure entertainment product often lacks any embedding in a context which is more than a clichéd image of good and bad. The final difference between the individual media forms has to do with their distribution. A theatre play or a novel are always singular events; the modern mass media, however, create a time- and space-omnipresence. Even here, a distinction between problematic and non-problematic forms of media violence has to be made. A news programme or a TV documentary, which present the cruelty of war and the suffering of its victims in a non-voyeuristic way, are part of objective investigation or may even serve conflict-reduction purposes. Hate campaigns, on the other hand, or the glorification of violence stress the 'reward' characteristics of extreme aggression. In general, one can roughly distinguish between three different modes of media content: purely investigative (typically news), message oriented (campaigns, advertisement), and entertainment (movies, shows).

In general, the impact of media violence depends on several conditions of media content: roughly 10 acts of violence per hour in the average programming (see the recent US National *TV Violence Study* by Donnerstein and colleagues, 1997); media frequency; culture and actual situation; and the characteristics of the viewer and his family surroundings. Yet, as the media now are a mass-phenom-

Feodor Starcevic  
Director  
UN Information Centre

*(Extract from the speech at the Public Hearing on Impact of TV Violence on Children, held at the India International Centre, New Delhi, on December 5, 1998)*

A thought or two on the forms of manipulation based on two kinds of violence. One is political manipulation...the second is commercial, and is based on TV-generated scenes of violence in films, shows, etc, as well as in scenes of sex. Producers are fully aware that humans are eternally attracted, fascinated or imprisoned by images of sex and violence. Such programmes automatically attract high viewership and guarantee high income from commercials. While most societies are relatively strict about banning explicit sex scenes, it is much less the case with violence.

Television must not confine itself to satisfying the demands of the market, but should steer the market towards the achievement of certain social and ethical values on the basis of which our societies are organised. This does not mean that the exercise of freedom in the production and development of the audiovisual media should be diminished. It merely means that this freedom must be exercised for the benefit of the community. In other words, this freedom must be exercised responsibly.

enon, the probability of a problematic combination of these conditions is high. This is demonstrated in many studies. Based on scientific evidence, one can conclude: the risk of media violence prevails.

Children's emotional states, as well as their ideals, are important factors which moderate the way they cope with their environment and how they evaluate what they observe in the media. Of course, the media themselves can influence these states and norms. What is the general emotional state of children? About two-thirds report that they are happy most of the time; about one-fourth know the feeling, but do not regularly experience it; about 2.5 per cent say that they are never happy. There is no difference between boys and girls. Nearly half of the children are anxious most of the time or often, with again no difference between boys and girls. About 47 per cent of the children report that they would like to live in another country (either for adventure or for escapism).

**Although the majority of the children are relatively happy, a remarkable number live in a problematic emotional state.**

What kind of persons are perceived as role models by the children? They were asked to give a name which then was ordered along a list of different characteristics. The results again demonstrate the importance of the media.

Most children (26 per cent) name an action hero, followed by pop stars and musicians (18.5 per cent). However, there are important gender differences. Thirty per cent boys mention an action hero, as compared to 21 per cent girls. But even for the female group this character comes second after pop stars/musicians (girls: 27 per cent, boys: 12 per cent).

Other personalities play a less important role: about

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About two-thirds of the children say that they are happy most of the time; about one-fourth know the feeling, but do not regularly experience it; about 2.5 per cent say that they are never happy.

8 per cent name a religious leader; 7 per cent a military leader (boys: 9 per cent, girls: 3.4 per cent); 6 per cent a philosopher/scientist; 5 per cent a journalist, and only 3 per cent a politician. The remaining are personal acquaintances or have other roles.

**This confirms the global trend: action heroes and pop stars are the favourite role models among children.**

Nevertheless, religious beliefs are still widespread: about 90 per cent of the children report that they believe in (a) god.

What are the personal values of the children? Forty per cent report that their favourite wish is to have a family, because they either live in a functioning parent-child relationship or because they lack it but would like to have it. For 10 per cent enough food is the favourite. This may mean that this group regularly experiences food-deprivation. For 25 per cent boys the favourite wish is always to be a winner, 19 per cent girls say the same.

There are regional differences between the favourite heroes: Asia has the highest ranking for action heroes (34 per cent), Africa the lowest (18 per cent), with Latin-America and Europe/Canada in between (25 per cent each).

## Regional Differences

There are regional differences between the favourite heroes: Asia has the highest ranking for action heroes (34 per cent), Africa the lowest (18 per cent), with Latin-America and Europe/Canada in between (25 per cent each). This may have to do with the significantly lower saturation of audiovisual media in Africa, but may also have other cultural reasons.

**However, there is a clear correlation between the presence of TV and reporting action heroes as favourites.**

The favourites in Africa are pop stars/musicians (24 per cent) whereas these rank lowest in Asia (12 per cent). Africa has also high rankings for religious leaders (18 per

cent), as compared to Europe/Canada (2 per cent), Latin-America (6 per cent), and Asia (6 per cent). Military leaders score highest in Asia (9.6 per cent), and lowest in Europe/Canada (2.6 per cent). Journalists score well in Europe/Canada (10 per cent), low in Latin-America (2 per cent). Politicians rank lowest in Europe (1 per cent), highest in Africa (7 per cent).

Again, there may be a correlation with the distribution of mass media: the more TV, the higher the rank of mass-media personalities, and the lower the traditional ones (politicians, religious leaders). There is a strong correlation between the accessibility of modern media and the predominant values and orientations.

### **Social Environment**

#### Violence and Aggression

As reported, roughly one-third of the children in our sample live in a high-aggression environment or problematic neighbourhood. This ranks from high-crime areas over recent war zones and (refugee) camps to economically poor environments which, of course, do not have to be aggressive *per se*. Yet, in these areas, for more than twice as many people the cause of death is getting killed by others than in low-problem neighbourhoods (children's reports: 16 per cent versus 7 per cent).

They report more personal enemies (9 per cent versus 5.9 per cent) and regard attacking more often as fun than do children from low-aggression neighbourhoods (8 per cent versus 4.7 per cent). They have also used weapons more often against someone (7.5 per cent versus 5.5 per cent). Thus, it comes as no surprise, that they are also more anxious (most of the time: 25 versus 19 per cent), and would

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There is a strong correlation between the accessibility of modern media and the predominant values and orientations.



	High Aggression	
Are killed		7%
	9%	
Regard attacking as fun		4.7%
	7.5%	

Razia Ismail  
Deputy Director  
(Programme), UNICEF

*(Extract from the speech at the Public Hearing on Impact of TV Violence on Children, held at the India International Centre, New Delhi, on December 5, 1998)*

UNICEF has been extremely challenged by what the right to information means for children, and this Public Hearing really brings that into sharp focus. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the child has the right to information, just as the child has the right to freedom of expression. But in the context of today's media, and in the context of the onslaught on all of us, young and old alike, of the kind of 'might is right' messages, and the kinds of macho images that come on the little screen, what does that right to information really imply?

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a very unique Human Rights document, and its underlying message is that all that is in it should be implemented and pursued and upheld in the best interests of the child.

like to live in another country (53 per cent versus 46 per cent). But they also report a similar level of happiness as the low-aggression group. However, their world view is obviously influenced by their experience: nearly one-third of the aggression-environment group believes that most people in the world are evil (compared to slightly more than a fifth of the low-aggression area group).

**The pattern is clear and plausible: in high problem areas, children not only experience more aggressive behaviour, they are also emotionally and cognitively affected – more hedonistic violence, more anxiety, a more pessimistic world view.**

Different forms of aggression are evaluated differently in the cultures of the world. We wanted to know whether a physical attack or a verbal insult is perceived as more 'damaging' in different areas.

The results confirm the cultural differences. In Europe and Canada, children regard a physical attack with fists as worse (55.5 per cent) than being given insulting names (44 per cent). In Asia, the opposite is the case. For nearly 70 per cent, verbal insults are worse than physical attacks (29 per cent). Africa is similar to Asia (verbal: 63 per cent; physical: 35 per cent). Latin-America is balanced

(50 per cent each).

The next issue we addressed was: in different situations, where is the highest probability of aggressive reactions to be found?

We presented a number of simple sketches which showed a variety of social situations: a verbal conflict; a physical attack; a recorder damaged by another child; a stereo which a child urgently wanted to have; a group of people hanging around. For each of these situations, the children had to say how the involved persons would react, and what they themselves would do in a similar situation. In situations of social conflict, children in Africa reported most frequently that they would regard physical attacks as adequate reaction: for example, 32 per cent would hit the other as reaction to verbal insult (Asia 15 per cent; Latin-America 14 per cent; Europe/Canada 16 per cent); 9 per cent even reported shooting the other as adequate.

Nearly one-third of African children reported that a group of people hanging around would attack another group as the next action (Asia 28 per cent; Europe/Canada 20 per cent; Latin-America 19 per cent). At the same time, children in Africa experience having a gun as a powerful feeling more often than in the other regions (25 per cent; Latin-America 18 per cent; Europe 18 per cent; Asia 10 per cent). They also report that they themselves have a gun more often (4.5 per cent; Latin-America 3.5 per cent; Asia 3.3 per cent; Europe/Canada 2.4 per cent). In general, children in Africa and Asia have twice as often used a weapon against someone (7.1 per cent; 8.3 per cent) as those in Latin-America and Europe/Canada (4.4 per cent; 3.6 per cent). All in all, children's aggressive behaviour patterns and perceptions are a mirror of what they experience in their real environment: frustration; aggression; problematic circumstances.

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All in all, children's aggressive behaviour patterns and perceptions are a mirror of what they experience in their real environment: frustration; aggression; problematic circumstances.

However, to what extent do the media contribute to these patterns? To what extent do they channel the already existing aggressive predispositions?

### Media Violence

Are children able to distinguish between reality and fiction? Do they perceive media and everyday experiences to be similar? We compared children from high- and low-aggression environments and asked them whether what they saw in the media resembled their own experiences.

In all cases, the high-aggression-area group reported a stronger overlap between reality and fiction than the low-aggression-area group (movies: 46 per cent versus 40 per cent; TV: 72 per cent versus 69 per cent; radio: 52 per cent versus 48 per cent; comics: 26 per cent versus 22 per cent) – all in all not an extreme but homogeneous trend. Obviously, media content reinforces the already mentioned belief that most people are evil. **Many children are surrounded by an environment where 'real' and media experiences both support the view that violence is natural.**

The fascination of violence is often related to strong characters who can control their environment, are (in the end) rewarded for their aggression, and can cope with nearly every problem. The message is threefold: aggression is a good means to solve conflicts; aggression offers status; aggression can be fun. The larger-than-life hero of course is an old theme of art and literature. It serves both needs – the compensation of one's own deficits, and the reference point for one's own behaviour. Relatively new, however, is the global uniformity of such heroes through the mass media and their commercial weight.

One such media figure is the *Terminator* character from

The larger-than-life hero of course is an old theme of art and literature. It serves both needs – the compensation of one's own deficits, and the reference point for one's own behaviour.

two movies by the same name, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. Our results confirm that *Terminator* is a cross-cultural hero. About 88 per cent of the world's children (if our sample is representative) know him.

A comparison between high- and low-aggression areas shows, remarkably, that 51 per cent of the children in high-aggression environments would like to be like him as compared to 37 per cent in the low-aggression. He seems to represent characteristics which children think are necessary to cope with difficult situations.

Equally successful are heroes such as 'Rambo', and of course 'local' heroes from the respective domestic media markets, for example, India, Brazil or Japan.

An aggressive media hero is particularly 'successful' as a role model in the high-aggression areas of the world. Some of these heroes have become cultural icons.

Are there any systematic patterns in the aggressive cognitions which link personal motives, actual environment, and media content?

There was no difference in sensation seeking in the high- and the low-aggression environment. However, twice as many children in the 'high technology' group as in the 'low technology' group reported a risk-seeking tendency (20 per cent versus 10 per cent).

There could be two reasons for this:

- a)** The sensory stimulation is probably higher in high-technology environments; it thus creates a generally higher state of permanent arousal;
- b)** With a higher availability of media programming, the risk-seeking tendency is modelled into uniform patterns which mirror the content of the media (for example, the car chase as a movie icon).

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Children, and in particular boys, with a risk-seeking tendency have a higher preference for aggressive media content than those who lack this tendency.

Also, children, and in particular boys, with a

risk-seeking tendency have a higher preference for aggressive media content than those who lack this tendency (boys: 40 per cent versus 29 per cent). When asked whether they would themselves want to be involved in an aggressive situation, the tendency was even stronger: 47 per cent of those who prefer aggressive media content would also like to be involved in a risky situation. **There is a link between the preference for media violence and the need to be involved in aggression.**

Thus, depending on the 'real' environment, media-violence can serve different functions. Nevertheless, either way it confirms the 'reward' characteristics of aggressive behaviour.

...the basic patterns of media violence implications are similar around the world. Individual movies are not the problem. It is the extent and omnipresence of such violence which contributes to the development of a global aggressive culture.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The role of the media in the perception and application of aggression may be summarised as follows:

Media violence is universal. It is primarily presented in a rewarding context. Depending on the personality characteristics of children, and depending on their everyday life experiences, media violence satisfies different needs: It 'compensates' our frustrations and deficits in problem-areas. It offers 'thrills' for children in a less problematic environment. There are many cultural differences, and yet, the basic patterns of media violence implications are similar around the world. Individual movies are not the problem. It is the extent and omnipresence of such violence which contributes to the development of a global aggressive culture. The 'reward-characteristics' of aggression are more systematically promoted than non-aggressive ways of coping with one's life. Hence, the risk of media violence.

The results of our study demonstrate the omnipresence of TV in all areas of the world. Most children around

the globe seem to spend much of their time with the medium. What they get is a high portion of violent content. Combined with the real violence, which many children experience, the probability is high that aggressive orientations are promoted rather than peaceful ones. But in lower-aggression areas too, violent media content is presented in a rewarding context. Although children cope differently with this content in different cultures, the trans-cultural commonality of the problem lies in the fact that aggression is interpreted as a good problem-solver for a variety of situations.

Children want a functioning social and family environment. Since these are often lacking, they seek role models which offer compensation through power and aggression. This explains the universal success of movie characters such as the *Terminator*. Individual preferences for films such as this one are not the problem. However, when violent content becomes a common phenomenon, the probability that children develop a new frame-of reference, and that problematic predispositions are channelled into destructive attitudes and behaviour, increases immensely.

What are the possible solutions? Probably more important than the media are the social and economic conditions in which children grow up. However, the media as constituents of cultures, beliefs, and orientations also deserve serious attention. Centralised control and censorship are not efficient and do not meet the criteria of democratic societies. We, therefore, propose three major strategies:

- Public debate and 'common ground' talks between politicians, producers, and teachers
- The development of a professional code of conduct and self-discipline for producers
- Innovative forms of media education to create competent and critical media users.

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Children want a functioning social and family environment. Since these are often lacking, they seek role models which offer compensation through power and aggression.

**MEDIA VIOLENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN**

The Argument

## **MEDIA VIOLENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN**

# The Argument

### **PART I**

**T**he world our children are growing up in is changing faster than they are growing up. Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of communication. The advances in technology (the Internet), the convergence of technologies and the sudden boom in the electronic media have changed our lives irrevocably.

The last eight years have seen television in India spread and develop beyond expectations.

### **Why We Need to Discuss TV Violence**

- With the growth of the electronic media in India, a child's exposure to television and violence on television has increased phenomenally
- There is sufficient evidence to suggest that TV violence has a negative effect on children
- Though some TV channels do have standards and practices regarding the depiction of violence, there is very little by way of self regulation

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Though some TV channels do have standards and practices regarding the depiction of violence, there is very little by way of self regulation.



## Television: Access and Availability in India

In 1998, there were an estimated 60 million TV owning households. That is an audience of anything between 250-300 million people.

In 1992, Indians had access to only one channel: the terrestrial DD1. By 1998, the number of channels had increased to an incredible 50+ satellite and cable channels. Cable and satellite TV homes are estimated at 20 million with a viewership of approximately 100 million.

With the exception of a few Doordarshan channels and some India-specific satellite channels (SUN, Eenadu, Sony, TVi, etc), these are 24-hour channels.

The world of today's child is limited to the idiot box. It seems that he lives his life, indirectly by escaping his own reality. He borrows the identities of the heroes that strut across the small screen, performing unbelievable stunts; the suspension of disbelief is total.

## Nature of Programmes Available

A child's exposure to violence on television has everything to do with the kinds of programmes that are broadcast. In 1998, there were:

- Five exclusive TV film channels
- Five exclusive news and current affairs TV channels
- More than 10 general omnibus/entertainment TV channels (in different languages)
- There was no exclusive children's TV channel\***

**Films:** Every day, between 50-60 films are telecast across channels. Hindi/other Indian language *masala* movies and popular Hollywood films dominate the small screen. These have more than their fair share of violence and sex. Indeed, one channel, AXN (Action TV), by name and defini-

*\*In 1999, there has been a further increase in the number of satellite and cable channels, including the children's TV channels, Kermit and Nickelodeon.*

tion, celebrates violent movies.

**Cartoons:** TNT telecasts cartoons until 9.00 pm, every day: the new satellite channel, AXN runs Japanese cartoons at 11.30 pm (these are considered amongst the most violent in the world).

Cartoons, across channels, constitute the single largest form of children's entertainment. It has been found that 19.83 per cent of children's programmes on Doordarshan and 41.79 per cent on satellite channels were animation.

In India, the total number of children's programmes of any other kind, on all channels, was estimated to be less than 1 per cent. (figures from: Kanoi Marketing Services, Chennai).

**Impact of cartoon violence:** According to a 1991 American National Coalition on Television (NCT) study of 100 cartoons, 50 per cent glorified violence or used it to entertain children. The study went on to say that by the age of 18, the typical, average child in the USA would have witnessed 200,000 acts of violence including 25,000 killings. At the rate television is growing in India, we can safely estimate that the quantum of violence children are exposed to on television here would be comparable.

Doctors will tell you that children under the age of seven have difficulty distinguishing reality from fantasy – especially on television; that making violence appear fun, prompts children to imitate it even more when they play.

**TV serials:** Five channels alone – DD1, DD2, Zee, Sony and STAR Plus – offer over 55 serials in a day. That is a great deal of choice and no choice at all because all channels ply the same kind of fare – drama serials or comedies. There is considerable violence in these. As the UNESCO Executive Board member, Nils Gunnar Nilsson, explained: "One of the cheapest tricks is to create violence because

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Doctors will tell you that children under the age of seven have difficulty distinguishing reality from fantasy – especially on television; that making violence appear fun, prompts children to imitate it even more when they play.

humans are always attracted, fascinated or imprisoned by such images. The advances in technology, in the area of special effects have further increased the amount of violence we see in films and serials.”

**News and current affairs:** In 1998, there were five exclusive news and current affairs channels (in alphabetical order: BBC, CNN, STAR News, TVi, Zee India) as well as news and current affairs programmes on other channels, (Doordarshan launched a news channel in 1999.) Thus, exposure to real violence is constant and constantly growing. Conflicts and war situations are telecast live. This can give us a horror of violence but it can also rob violence of its horror.

**Nature documentaries:** Discovery Channel, National Geographic and Animal Planet cover the natural world. Their documentaries are often filled with very violent scenes of animal capturing and eating animal. Children, who normally have a great affinity with animals, can simultaneously be fascinated and deeply disturbed by such depictions.

**Other programmes and media:** There is also, the whole, unchartered area of the surrealistic music video, violent sports such as *WWF* (World Wrestling Federation, telecast by TNT and STAR Sports) and even TV commercials with violent depictions. The message implicitly and often explicitly, is that aggression and violence pay. Children, to their cost, have imitated stunts seen in *WWF* and advertisements. They discovered that violence did indeed pay – but that they were the ones paying the cost.

There is also the increasing popularity of computer and video games and, of course, the Internet.

Exposure to real violence is constant and constantly growing. Conflicts and war situations are telecast live. This can give us a horror of violence but it can also rob violence of its horror.

## How Much Time do Children in India Spend Watching Television?

It is estimated by various viewership studies that children watch on an average three to four hours of television every day.

A TNT Cartoon Network Study, *Generasians '98* listed out Indian children's favourite channels as Zee, Sony and TNT – in that order. Films, film-based programmes, cartoons and serials are a child's best friends.

## Conclusion

We, in India, have leap-frogged an era in our exposure to media. We have gone from a one channel world in 1992 to a multimedia interactive world in 1998. The sheer volume and density of this media explosion is frightening. Statistics may be boring and seldom tell the entire story. However, they do help establish the following: a child's exposure to violence on television – real or fictionalised – is very high. We have to ask: how much more violence must there be before we say enough, no more?

## PART II

Today's child and teenager represent the first TV generation in India. So far, we have been unable to gauge the impact of media and media violence on them because:

- We have had no prior experience of it
- There has been little by way of research in media studies and children, even less on the potential impact of media violence on children

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We, in India, have leap-frogged an era in our exposure to media. We have gone from a one channel world in 1992 to a multimedia interactive world in 1998.

### The Experience of Violence

The experience of media violence, rather than simply high exposure to it, is a primary cause of concern. Children have always been exposed to violence – in real life, in the bedtime stories told to them, in nursery rhymes, fairy tales and books they read.

If television violence has been singled out for criticism it is for several reasons.

According to UNESCO, television violence requires special attention because:

- Television is the most widespread medium in the world
- The audiovisual media are accepted as the most powerful communicator of all
- Internet and computer games are also a source of violent depictions and violent computer games are still not as widely available

There is nothing new about media or television violence. What is critical, as Professor Groebel points out in the UNESCO study, is its dominance and the extreme levels it has reached.

To an extent, television violence is a reflection of the violent world children live in. Violence and aggression are intrinsic to the human condition: they always have been and always will be. Children enjoy watching cartoons, enjoy horror and violent programmes. However, children cannot be expected to realise and understand what lasting impact these fleeting pleasures may have on them.

TV violence raises certain issues: is the existence of real violence sufficient justification for the amount of violence depicted on television? Should television reinforce what exists in reality? And how many of us are exposed to the amount and the kinds of violence we see on television day

TV violence raises certain issues: is the existence of real violence sufficient justification for the amount of violence depicted on television? Should television reinforce what exists in reality?

after day, month after month, year after year? If American children have witnessed 25,000 killings by the age of 18, can anyone claim that this exposure mirrors reality?

### **International Research and the Impact of TV Violence on Children**

There is no dearth of global research to gauge TV violence and its impact on children. In the United States alone, there have been over 3,500 studies.

Many studies say there is no discernible impact of TV violence on children. The evidence also suggests that television violence is seldom the primary cause for real violence or aggressive behaviour in children. In the words of Prof Groebel: "(those) are to be found in their family environment and the social and economic conditions in which they are raised."

**The overwhelming evidence, however, does suggest that TV violence is a guilty accomplice. It seems only reasonable that any activity which is pursued by a child for up to three hours a day (and violence is so much a part of that three-hour experience), will leave its mark on the child.**

It is the nature of the impact which varies and differs.

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### **Impact of TV Violence**

Studies indicate that the impact of TV/media violence could be manifold. It could be any of the following or a combination of them:

- TV violence increases aggressive behaviour
- TV violence legitimises, justifies violence and aggression as a solution to problems

- TV violence and the characters who indulge in it are imitated in real life
- TV violence and constant exposure to it desensitises, immunises us to real violence
- TV violence encourages a fear psychosis
- TV violence encourages us to take the law into our own hands
- TV violence is seen to be rewarded
- TV violence is a form of catharsis, providing an outlet for our pent up aggressiveness

Parents or school teachers have found that TV images have deeply disturbed children resulting in insomnia, fear of solitude, anger, and other psychological disturbances. This is a violence of another kind on our children.

These cases represent extreme responses to television violence and horror. Our concern relates more to the impact of television violence on a child's cognitive and learning process, to how a child forms attitudes and life-long perceptions.

Parents or school teachers have found that TV images have deeply disturbed children resulting in insomnia, fear of solitude, anger, and other psychological disturbances.

### **PART III**

## **Lack of Regulations/Guidelines for Children and the Media in India**

Anna Home, Head of Children's Programmes, BBC, has said that the increasing choice of channels makes it impossible to regulate the industry. In India we have learnt just how impossible. Since cable and satellite TV arrived in India in 1993, only one piece of legislation has been implemented: the Cable TV Regulation Act (1995). In the absence of any other legislation, there is little by way of programme standards and practices, although individual, foreign channels do have their programme codes. There is

also no Broadcast Council to which viewers may turn for redressal of grievances.

Worldwide, countries have enacted laws and insisted on certain broadcasting codes in relation to the child. Worldwide, governments, broadcasting authorities, TV channels, TV producers, advertisers, parents, teachers, doctors and media experts have worked together to arrive at a consensus on ways in which to diminish TV/media violence.

In India there has been a certain amount of concern voiced about sex and obscenity but much less about violence and children. As one senior government official put it "Nobody cares about the child".

### **India and Global Resolutions on the Child and Media**

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Worldwide, countries have enacted laws and insisted on certain broadcasting codes in relation to the child. Worldwide, governments, broadcasting authorities, TV channels...and media experts have worked together to arrive at a consensus on ways in which to diminish TV/media violence.

India is a party to global and regional resolutions on the child and media. Little has been done to translate the spirit of these resolutions into action.

The demand is not for censorship; but there is no contradiction between freedom of expression and limiting material injurious to a child's well-being.

**In the words of Carlos Arnaldo and Asa Finnstrom of the UNESCO Clearing House on Violence: "What is at issue, finally, is the ability of society as a whole to make informed choices about the type of media it wants – especially for our children."**

**Shailaja Bajpai**



**MONITORING STUDY**

The Facts

## MONITORING STUDY

# The Facts

### Introduction

A monitoring study on the extent of violence in television serials on terrestrial, cable and satellite TV channels serving India, was conducted between August 24-September 2, 1998. It covered five TV channels – DD1, DD2, Zee, Sony, and STAR Plus.

The study clearly indicated that the depiction of violence occurs across channels, in programmes telecast throughout the day and aimed at different target audiences, which include children and adolescents.

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The depiction of violence occurs across channels, in programmes telecast throughout the day and aimed at different target audiences, which include children and adolescents.

### Objectives of the Study

- To quantify the extent of violence in drama serials across five channels
- To identify the nature and types of violence depicted
- To identify the audiences targetted – particularly children – by such serials and by the advertisers who sponsor them

## Methodology Used

### Sample

Identified drama serials across five channels (DD1, DD2, Zee, Sony, STAR Plus) of different genres:

- Daily soaps/drama serials/suspense/horror in the prime time evening and afternoon bands as well as selected news items
- 56 hours 20 minutes were monitored. The break-up is as follows:
  - 81 serial episodes (or 40 hours 30 minutes)
  - 21 episodes of horror/suspense (or 12 hours 30 minutes)
  - 6 news bulletins and two current affairs programmes (or 3 hours 20 minutes), and one documentary

The channel-wise break-up is as follows:

	18 hrs 30 mins
STAR Plus	
	13 hrs
DD2	
	4 hrs 20 mins

Zee, STAR Plus and DD1 received a higher degree of representation because of the greater concentration of serials in the prime time and afternoon transmission. DD1 and DD2 did not always stick to the scheduled programmes and this affected the monitoring sample.

## Research team

The monitoring study was jointly conducted by a group of researchers in close association with an audience panel. The audience panel provided quantitative and qualitative feedback. The panel consisted of nine young viewers (18-25 years old: four male and five female). The monitors were given a pre-tested format, which ensured both quantitative and qualitative data-collection. The monitoring was done while the programmes were actually being aired. To that extent, the responses of the panel members were spontaneous and those of the average viewer rather than the deliberate scrutiny of a researcher. However, the research team reviewed the findings for consistency of data.

## Quantitative Findings

In all, there were 759 acts of violence across five channels over a period of nine days.

In proportion to the hours monitored, Zee had the highest acts of violence and DD1 had the lowest.

	Violent Acts
Zee	188
DD2	64
DD1	

The monitoring study was jointly conducted by a group of researchers in close association with an audience panel. The audience panel provided quantitative and qualitative feedback.

## Types of Violence

- In all, 59 types of violence, audio and visual, both physical and psychological, were identified. Of these threats, slapping, screaming, shooting, assaulting, expletives, pushing, clobbering, stabbing, mental torture, eerie soundtrack and threatening music are prominent. These categories account for over 50 per cent of violence in the sample. Hence much of the violence is explicit and graphic
- Nearly one-third of the depictions (283 acts out of a total of 759 acts) appeared in 25 per cent or 21 out of 81 episodes monitored. These 21 episodes were in the genre of horror/murder/mystery/suspense thrillers – often the most violent or disturbing – especially for children. For instance: *X-Zone* and *Anhonee* (Zee) had 53 and 65 acts of violence respectively; *Kohra* (STAR Plus) had 30 acts of violence in a single episode. *Aahat* (Sony) had 13 acts of violence
- Two-thirds of the acts were depicted in the 60 episodes of drama serials monitored. In some instances, family dramas or those specifically targetting children are no less violent: in a single episode of the serial *Gumraah* there were 32 violent acts, while there were 17 in the child-specific *Shaktimaan*.

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## PART II

### Areas of Concern

Within the larger question of depiction of violence, the study identified specific areas of concern. The main ones are:

- Programme schedules
- Violent promos

- Depiction and treatment of violence
- The representation of child and gender-based violence
- Glorification of violence
- The role of companies and sponsors specialising in children's products supporting such programmes

### Programme schedule

*There is channel-specific concentration of violent programmes:* On different channels, specific days were more prone to violence than others. For instance, Sunday on Zee, Monday on STAR Plus and Tuesday on Sony accounted for 50 per cent, 40 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively, of the total acts of violence on the channel during the monitoring period.

*Time-slot concentration:* At the same time, inter-channel rivalry and competition led to the simultaneous scheduling of programmes with high incidence of violence across channels during prime time. These serials in the 9.00 pm - 10.00 pm slot are often the most violent and disturbing kind – especially for children. This table illustrates the issue:

	Time		Channel
Tuesday		Raja Aur Rancho	
		Shapath	
		Alpviram	
	9.30 pm		Zee
		CID	
	9.00 pm		DD 2
		X-Zone	
	9.30 pm		Sony
		Hindustani	
	10.00 pm		Sony

*Repeats:* Late night 'adult' serials on satellite and cable TV channels are repeated in the afternoon and early evenings when children are likely to be the largest audience. Amongst these are horror shows and thrillers. For instance, at the time of the study, *India's Most Wanted* (based on real crimes) and *Woh* (thriller) had repeat telecasts at 4.00 pm and 4.30 pm respectively; *Bhanwar* (legal cases) was repeated at 12 noon and the late night movie on STAR Movies was often telecast the next afternoon at 3.00 pm.

Promos for all types of programmes - comedies, drama serials, films and even the news - highlight violent scenes in the belief that this will hook viewers. Violence more than any other ingredient sells and promotes programmes.

### **Violent Promos**

Promos for all types of programmes – comedies, drama serials, films and even the news – highlight violent scenes in the belief that this will hook viewers. Violence more than any other ingredient sells and promotes programmes. Promos for the comedy *Tu Tu Main Main* or the serial *Chattan*, are more violent than the programmes themselves.

### **Depiction and Treatment**

#### **Definition of violence**

The fundamental definition of violence places emphasis on a number of elements including intention to harm/scare, the physical or mental nature of the harm and the involvement of animate beings. To quote from the National Television Survey of America: "Any overt depiction of a credible threat of physical (and even psychological) harm or the actual use of forces intended to harm an animate being or group of beings."

## Horror Shows

- There is conclusive evidence that children watch prime time evening television. Television viewing in India is a family affair and TV serials are produced for and aimed at the entire family. As children grow older, they tend to watch more adult programmes.

Thus children watch programmes in the 7.30 pm-10.00 pm slot and beyond. They watch horror shows and suspense serials (sometimes, despite strong parental disapproval).

The internationally accepted norm of five to six acts of physical violence in a half-an-hour episode is often violated in these serials. While some serials had between 22-24 acts of violence, even those targeting children registered a high incidence. They contained between 7-12 acts of violence, and often included extreme acts such as murder, bombing and burning (*Anhonee*, *X-Zone*, *Shaktimaan* and *Raja Aur Rancho*).

In addition to such excessive depictions, there is verbal abuse and bizarre sound effects (loud, disturbing music) and even, occasionally, psychological violence. Certain horror/thriller serials take great care to avoid acts of physical violence but they repeatedly use eerie sound tracks, occasional hallucinations, nightmares and paranoia to build an atmosphere of terror.

The potential impact of such material has forced some producers to telecast a warning note on superstition and belief in the paranormal before each episode. The warning before *Aahat* for instance states: "These stories are based on fantasy and are meant to entertain only." However, it was found that episodes dealing with superstition were not depicted as fantasy at all. The stories were often situated in perfectly realistic and every day situations and more

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importantly, based upon actual beliefs.

If you examine the justification or reasons for the violence, psychopathic behaviour accounts for between 26 per cent-50 per cent on a given day on a channel or a specific programme. Other reasons include police interrogation, blackmail, revenge, business or personal rivalries, dealings with the underworld and inter-generational conflict.

### **Hooking the child-viewer to violence or horror in serials**

- ❑ Horror shows and crime series target the child-viewer. Audience ratings in the four to six years age group indicate that *Aahat*, *Anhonee*, *Bhanwar*, *India's Most Wanted*, *X-Zone* were amongst the top 10 programmes watched by children in the period October-November 1998
- ❑ The UNESCO report found that children admire superheroes. The serial *Shaktimaan* is about a superhero who is capable of extraordinary physical feats. Children tend to imitate such exploits notwithstanding the warning by the star of the serial against such imitations.

The nature of violence in a serial such as this is also multifaceted: as mentioned earlier, in one episode of *Shaktimaan*, there were 17 acts of violence in approximately 25 minutes. These included assaults, slaps, punches, shootings, strangulations, burns, pushes, stabs as well as grotesque representations, bodily transformations and supernatural occurrences.

- ❑ In both *Woh* and *Raja Aur Rancho* the child-viewer is being hooked to the serial by elements, which will appeal to children: that is, the clown or joker in *Woh*, and a friendly monkey in *Raja Aur Rancho*.

The serial *Shaktimaan* is about a superhero who is capable of extraordinary physical feats. It is very popular with child-viewers who are attracted by *Shaktimaan*'s exploits. Children tend to imitate such exploits notwithstanding the warning by the star of the serial against such imitations.

### **Drama serials**

Family drama serials are predicated on conflict and often depict violence. What is most disturbing is that this is domestic violence within a family and sometimes involves children. For instance, in one episode of *Viruddh* there were six acts of violence; *Kabhie Kabhie* had seven acts of violence; *Mahayagya* had nine. *Shatranj* and *Amar Prem* (afternoon repeats on Zee) had eight and 10 acts of violence, respectively, *Aashirwad* had eight, *Gumraah* had 32.

### **Comedies**

Though comedies were not monitored, there is a high incidence of violence in sitcoms. This takes the form of extreme conflictual situations and slapstick physical violence. When violence is shown to be fun, it loses its seriousness and children tend to imitate it more in their play.

### **Docu-dramas**

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A new, successful trend on television has been the docu-drama. Series such as *Bhanwar* or *India's Most Wanted* reconstruct real crimes. In the process, some very violent scenes are telecast. There are many physical acts of violence in these series. Kidnappings and shootings alone accounted for nine out of 12 acts we identified in our study.

### **Positive trends**

- On certain days, there was a low degree of violence in serials. Violence was restricted to a programme/film or two on a few channels, for instance, Thursday on STAR Plus,

Friday on Zee

- ❑ There are programmes of low or no violence, which are popular: for instance, *Amaanat*, *Just Mohabbat*, *Saans*, and Doordarshan's daily soaps
- ❑ Within the specific genre of detective/thrillers/suspense, there were successful series with a minimum use of any kind of violence, for instance, *Mohandas BA LLB*, *CID*, *Saboot*, and on some occasions, *Saturday Suspense*

The above examples demonstrate that the depiction of violence does not necessarily enhance viewership.

The depiction of violence does not necessarily enhance viewership.

## **Representation of Child- and Gender-based Violence**

### **Involvement of children**

A few serials such as *Shaktimaan*, *Shapath* and *Kabhie Kabhie* had children involved in acts of violence either as victims or, in one instance, as a participant. In *Shapath* a child is shown witnessing the brutal murder of his father, then being kidnapped and taught how to handle a gun.

### **Sexual overtones**

Crimes of passion which exploit sex and violence are conspicuous in television serials; the love triangle often forms their basic story line and is the source of violence. In monitored episodes of *Yehi Hai Raaz* and *X-Zone*, the root conflict was an extra-marital affair, which led to murder. In an episode of *Saturday Suspense*, the murder was committed by the jealous 'other woman'.

Sex and violence are also linked to psychopathic behaviour. In *Kohra*, one of the stories deals with the

psychopathic rapist of a young school girl. This was shown on STAR Plus, a channel which in its Programme Code, states: "Extreme caution must be exercised in any themes, plots or scenes, which mix sex and violence, including rape and other sexual assaults." (It may be noted that this serial was originally telecast at night and then had a repeat telecast at 6 pm).

Our quantitative data revealed that many serials perpetuate the stereotype of the male as the aggressor. In contrast, the depiction of women as the aggressor varies from 0 per cent on Doordarshan to 50 per cent on Sony. What is disturbing about male aggression is that it is often directed at women: it is domestic violence within a family.

## **Glorification of Violence**

### **Violence is seen to be rewarded**

There are serials such as *Hindustani*, *Shaktimaan*, and *Shapath*, which use the triumph of good over evil to justify the use of violence and commend it. The police and the concept of the vigilante or the superhero are used to sanction the use of violence. In the name of justice, there are no holds barred in the degree brutality shown.

There are serials in which the perpetrator of violence is punished not rewarded; but in many instances, violence is used to settle issues or the conflict between good and evil. Episodes of *Yehi Hai Raaz*, *Kohra*, *X-Zone* and *Saturday Suspense* are a few examples of this. According to the UNESCO study, children turn to violence to solve their problems – just as they have perhaps witnessed on television.

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## Role of Sponsors and Advertisers

### Commercials targetting children support horror shows and crime series

In the absence of child-specific programmes, advertisers advertise products for children with prime-time programmes and blockbuster films. As the ratings indicate high viewership among children for suspense/horror genres, advertising support for these serials is high, with a fair number of child-specific advertisements.

The table below lists some serials in the suspense/horror/superhero genre, which have attracted child-specific

	Channel	
X-Zone		Cadbury's
	Zee	
Aahat		Cadbury's Halls Orange, Kissan Squash, Colgate (with Sachin Tendulkar)
	DD 1	
Anhonee		Dabur Chyawanprash
	STAR Plus	

advertising: it is ironic and more than a little worrisome that products such as Complan, Horlicks, Chywanaprash or even toothpastes meant to support wholesome, healthy lifestyles, advertise and support violent programmes which give children gooseflesh and nightmares.

### **Violence in news and current affairs**

Good news is never news. Bad news makes headlines. With an increase in the number of news channels, international as well as those based in India, and in the number of news and current affairs shows across channels, the amount of real violence that children are exposed to, has increased exponentially.

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Bad news makes headlines.  
With an increase in the number of news channels, international as well as those based in India, and in the number of news and current affairs shows across channels, the amount of real violence that children are exposed to has increased exponentially.

### **Conclusion**

Thus the study conclusively establishes that there is a great deal of violence on television; that this violence is often graphic and specifically targeting a child audience. The study has spelt out certain areas of particular concern. These are areas which need to be addressed by the TV industry and the government when it formulates its Broadcast Policy.

**Centre for Advocacy and Research/  
Akhila Sivadas/Shailaja Bajpai**

**PUBLIC HEARING**

The Viewpoint And  
The Response

As a manifestation of its commitment to young people and of its concern at the turn television is taking, UNESCO initiated a debate on the subject by holding a Public Hearing on 'Violence in the Media and its Impact on Children: Can We Soften the Blow? Building a Consensus on Self-regulatory Guidelines'.

## PUBLIC HEARING

# The Viewpoint And The Response

**Sai Paranjpye [Chief Guest]**  
**Chairperson, Children's Film Society**

It is indeed a sad state of affairs that in the land where the dictum proudly proclaimed *ahimsa paramodharma* (non-violence is the supreme religion), we have to discuss the effects of the omnipresence of violence on the small screen. Alas, is it now *ahimsa puranodhara* (belief in non-violence has become a thing of the past). True, it is not the 1990s which have suddenly discovered violence, it's always been there. We grew up on nursery rhymes in which Jack fell down and broke his crown, poor Humpty Dumpty had a tumble, and was damaged beyond repair, and Ms Muffet was stalked by a horrid spider. Closer to home, we have Laxman slicing off Shurpankha's nose at the behest of brother Ram. Then there were the funnies. The comics. Cartoon characters which were constantly rough-handed in animation films. Bonked on the head, pummelled, stretched out like elastic, tied in knots, pushed down wells, flattened by road-rollers – all kinds of terrible things happened to them. But they would pop back to normal and go bouncing about their merry way.



It was **harmless** violence, if there can be such a thing. At any rate it was a "don't take it too seriously" kind of a violence.

What frightens one today is that violence is no longer ugly. It is glamorous, even attractive, macho. Take a look at the film posters around us in the city. Every self-respecting hero will be shown wielding at least one weapon. A revolver, a stun-gun, or maybe a hatchet, promising great excitement that will unfold on the big screen, unleashing an all-out assault on the senses. The small screen is not to be left far behind. It too supplies violence in regular doses, an opiate to hook young, gullible viewers, backed by the nuclear power of advertising, all in the name of television rating points.

The world of today's child is limited to the idiot box. It seems that he lives his life, indirectly by escaping his own reality. He borrows the identities of the heroes that strut across the small screen, performing unbelievable stunts; the suspension of disbelief is total. These larger-than-life characters wield total control over him. They keep him riveted to the screen. Hair-raising chases with cars crashing into one another, exploding, turning turtle, somersaulting in the air, plunging down cliffs; all this makes breath-taking viewing. The fights, again, are something else. Slashing, chopping, pumping bullets, plunging knives, spilling blood, splitting heads, the variety is truly awe-inspiring! It's also frightening. Add computer special effects, blood-curdling inhuman sounds of pain and spine-chilling music, and you have a good mix. The TRPs soar. This is a frightening dimension to television: the cult of violence is claiming yet another impressionable victim.

So what can we do? The real remedy that would work is a voluntary, straight from the heart, un-stage-managed public response to the situation. A response born out of anguish, concern. A switch-off campaign stemming from a

What frightens one today is that violence is no longer ugly. It is glamorous, even attractive, macho. Take a look at the film posters around us in the city. Every self-respecting hero will be shown wielding at least one weapon.

mature understanding of the situation by the people themselves. This would bring sanity back to tele-viewing. A programme or a *genre* of programmes rejected by society is not going to stay on the air for long. One section of society that can effectively participate in eradicating violence from our TV screens, and our living rooms, and maybe our lives, is children themselves. Let us not underestimate their intelligence, their understanding, or maybe even their enthusiasm to participate in, even spearhead, worthy causes. Remember the recent, vigorous and on-going campaign all over the country to ban the mischievous little polythene bag? Schools and teachers can motivate the bright and popular students, with leadership qualities, to muster forces in an effort to wean away their peers from patronising violence. Coming from their own mates, the need to wake up and to shake off this addiction to horror shows will be driven home.

A few dos along with the don'ts may be considered. Making televising a family activity of sharing, of enjoying, discussing certain select programmes, instead of leaving the child to do his own thing. This might just work out if tactfully handled. More child-specific programmes should be floated and funding made available for such programmes by public-spirited, public and private companies.

I'd like to talk about *Baldoot*, the children's tele-journal, produced by the Children's Film Society of India. It is a magazine programme for the child, telecast every Sunday at 12.30 pm, unless of course, cricket elbows us out. Naturally, Doordarshan earns big revenue from cricket, and naturally, children take a back seat. *Baldoot* started on September 6, 1998. It was taken off the air summarily four times by December 1998. This is how a government channel treats the the children of India. The national network must ensure that prime time is ensured for our prime people – children.

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One section of society that can effectively participate in eradicating violence from our TV screens, and our living rooms, and maybe our lives, is children themselves.

### CHANNEL VIEWPOINT

**R. Basu**  
**CEO, Star TV**

I do not think censorship of television is feasible. Censorship in the sense of pre-censorship. Censorship of films has been there for decades. However, even this has severe limitations. But, television is an immediate medium, and there is no time to gain clearance from the Censor Board. Also, much of the violence on television is in the news. The most vivid pictures of violence that I have were the scenes in the UP Assembly which were carried by television around the country and around the world. I don't think that those scenes were good for our image abroad or for our image before our children. But there they are, and I still think they remain in our memories. How do you control that type of violence on television without having censorship? The one and only way is through self-regulation; every producer or channel manager has to take note of this and has to exercise restraint.

Not every kind of violence can be excluded from television, but much of the needless violence can be removed. There are means of showing violence without showing explicit incidents. Unfortunately, we tend to forget channels such as National Geographic or Discovery, which show animals killing their prey, mating or copulating. These make for compelling television. This issue of 'What compels viewers to watch an audio visual medium?', needs to be researched, and creative ideas need to be put forward to find out ways and means of getting there without violence.

The same can be said for sex. I have a slightly different view on our prudish attitude towards sex. If the general code regarding sexuality was relaxed slightly, it might help

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producers lean more towards that side and leave violence alone. But, I don't know if that is something we are ready for. I have seen this work in the Netherlands and in Scandinavian countries. The more conservative a country, greater the tendency to use violence.

Finally, while we all need to be more responsible in depiction of violence, the real solution lies in developing new genres of programming which would keep people glued to their TV sets and give the high TRPs and the advertising revenue everybody wants.

### **Kiran Karnik** **CEO, Discovery Channel**

One of the major concerns for people in programming is: what are children's programmes and what should they consist of? One of the concerns is that we, as adults, tend to impose our tastes on children and decide what is good or bad. But like beauty, taste is in the eye of the viewer. We should look at what children perceive and not what we think children require.

There was a comment that sex and violence are necessary and interchangeable. This is questionable and it would be dangerous to take for granted that this is so just because many popular programmes have a large dose of them. There are many programmes which disprove the theory that you need sex and violence to be popular even in terms of viewership ratings (TRPs). There is also some feeling that there are no good children's programmes. This seems to be overstated – they could be better, but examples of good children's programmes are there. There is enough demand for creativity, and the challenge is all the greater when dealing with children.

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### **R.D. Tyagi** **Legal Advisor, Zee Telefilms**

My comments are based upon certain broad presumptions. Number one, there is a lot of violence being shown in the cinema, on TV – crime, thrillers, horrors, vulgarity, obscenity, etc. Two, this can adversely affect young minds. Three, there is need to control the adverse effects of violence on the minds of young children. But violence is in-built in nature. The laws of nature suggest that the strongest and mightiest survive. Thus, it is impossible to completely eliminate violence from crime or suspense stories.

We see violence everywhere – in the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharat*, and in society. At the same time, the way it is being shown now is adversely affecting the upbringing of children. There is a need, therefore, to control the way in which violence is depicted. How can this be done? For cinema, there is a Censor Board, but for TV, there is no law controlling any objectionable programme from being broadcast. It took the Government of India five years to come up with the Cable Regulations Act, after cable TV started in 1992.

It is very clear that censorship is not wanted for TV programmes. However, the government should have the authority to prohibit objectionable programmes which are adversely affecting the root of Indian culture. And with the advent of the Direct-to-Home (DTH), matters will grow worse. If a programme is broadcast by a foreign TV channel then no action can be taken. The situation today is one of helplessness. Nevertheless, there is hope in the formation of a Code of Conduct. I suggest that as this is a creative and powerful medium, it should not be strangled. But there is a need to regulate rather than control it. Autonomous bodies from various TV channels, parents, teachers, media

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bodies etc, should be formed, so that they can regulate and decide on a code of conduct, to be adhered to by all.

## **THE PLAYERS: TV PRODUCERS, DIRECTORS, ACTORS, SCRIPTWRITERS**

**B.P. Singh**

**TV producer of thrillers and horror shows**

My serial, *Aahat*, is the number one serial (in cable and satellite TV homes). I will not argue with the conclusions that TV violence has the capacity to affect the minds of children. The question is: what is to be done about it? There is violence in cartoons, in mythologicals, music videos, news reports, family shows and relationship dramas. The problem doesn't lie in the type of programme, but in the attitude of the makers of the programme.

Rather than talk generally, I will specifically talk about myself. I make a serial based on the supernatural, and another based on police procedures called *CID*. It is easy to assume that as these two are thrillers, they must deal with violence. Not at all. They might deal with crime, but you won't find violence in them because the purpose of the programme is to entertain, and violence is not entertainment by any standards. I am well aware that Indian television is for family viewing. Most households have only one TV, and so the programme must be something the entire family can watch together without embarrassment or repulsion. My team has an internal set of rules which we strictly adhere to. Thus, none of our protagonists smokes or drinks as we don't want children to mimic them. Also, graphic display of violence is taboo. We never glamourise murder. We are not here to show how to commit a crime, but how a

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criminal is caught. Hence, our protagonists use a mix of forensic and investigative procedures (in *CID*), instead of physical violence to track down criminals. In *Aahat* we have refrained from showing mutilated bodies, etc, and I repeat, our purpose is to entertain, hence, the need for actual violence is not necessary.

Thus we practise self-censorship. But I am just one of the many producers. Everybody comes from different backgrounds, has different ideas, beliefs and sensibilities. Who knows whether they practice any sort of self-censorship or not? There are frightening statistics attributed to the 1991 study by American National Coalition on Television. It says by the age of 18, the typical child in America would have witnessed 2 lakh acts of violence including 25,000 killings. TV in India is far behind the West but we are heading there, so something needs to be done about it now before the same sort of thing begins to happen rather than after it has happened. One thing is very clear: all of us want to entertain but not do anything which will affect the minds of children. So how can we go about the business of entertaining without consciously or unconsciously overstepping any boundaries?

Self-censorship is one solution but it is not enough. The need of the hour is for a uniform set of guidelines to work out what is permissible. This doesn't mean an intricate list of dos and don'ts to further complicate things, but a simple set of broad guidelines that helps ensure we do not want to do anything that would affect children. The only people who could do this are those directly involved in the TV industry, as they are in a position to change things. We should sit down together and work out a set of guidelines which everybody adheres to. This would be better than a set of guidelines imposed by people who are not fully aware of the intricacies of the medium. We need to have some-

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thing across the board which is practical and agreed upon by all channels.

Currently, there are very few channels in India and this debate is still possible. Once we reach a point where the channels are in agreement over a few set of rules/guidelines, then the producers/directors will adhere to them. After all, we want to make programmes which are accepted by the channels. It is my experience that in the last 25 years there has not been a single good children's programme on Indian television. We are somehow not trained to make good children's programmes.

## **Vinta Nanda** **Producer of TV drama serials**

Recently the trend has been to increase the number of horror serials, detective and suspense shows. Viewership ratings indicate that violent shows do well with audiences.

I have nothing against a certain amount of violence in television serials. But what did disturb me was that the character of a joker, so popular amongst children, was being portrayed as evil. A friend of mine once played the joker to entertain my young daughter and she got really scared because she had seen the evil joker on television. That really shocked me.

Conflicts are the basic ingredient of television serials; and conflicts often have to be resolved through violence. In such a competitive television environment, where the viewer has so much choice, a TV producer has to continually find new ways to hook the viewer. The benchmark is always changing, and drama often gets more heightened because the viewer wants something new, something more exciting. This can lead to more violence in serials.

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When I am writing a serial, I take many ideas from real life. It could be from a newspaper story or something a neighbour told me happened in our colony. It is violence in the world which is leading to violence in the media whether it is television or films. We are living with violence on a day shift up. Remember the Iraq war? People watched it like they watch cricket. Children play war games. I believe re- portage of such events should be muted. So if you want to kill violence in entertainment then first kill violence in real life. Truth is far worse than fiction.

We believe that the drama can be more explicitly portrayed by dialogue rather than actual acts of violence.

### **Sunil Mehta**

#### **TV producer of dramas, thrillers and comedies**

My serials, *Junoona* and *Saboot*, are two absolutely diverse genres. The first is a drama serial, the second a police show. So the approach has got to be different. *Junoona* ran for about five years and five months on DD and you'd be surprised that from the 463 odd episodes that were telecast, only about 93 had acts of violence in them.

More important, the approach that we at Cinevista have always taken in serials is that we always bank more on the story element. We believe that the drama can be more explicitly portrayed by dialogue rather than actual acts of violence.

As far as *Saboot* goes, the entire approach is different because it is a "howdunit" drama rather than a "whodunit", which is more common in India. In *Saboot* we showed the murder taking place right in the beginning and then how this lady policewoman, in a very calm manner goes about, through clues, detecting the murderer. Another thing: *Junoona*, was made for DD1 to appeal to a national audience. *Saboot* kept in mind viewers who would be watching it on STAR Plus which caters more to an urban, metro audience.

## **Karan Razdan**

### **TV producer/director/scriptwriter**

It is not only detective or crime serials which don't need violence: no programme needs either sex or violence in order to become a hit. My affair with television, both as a writer and actor started with *Rajni*, when television was in its infancy. That was an age of innocence! Did *Rajni* have any sex? Did Priya Tendulkar or Karan Razdan as actors have any kind of bedroom scenes? Was *Rajni* violent with her hands? No, and yet the serial was a success. I refuse to believe that this was so because there was only one channel then (DD1). I am sure if a *Rajni* came along today, it would take a little more time to establish TRPs, but it would be a popular series.

Violence affects the mind. There is no doubting that violence on television or in real life does create some sort of psychological disturbance. But it would be naive to think channel heads/producers will simply cut out all the violence. That is not going to happen. But let us not lose hope. We've all seen the amount of violence that Hindi cinema has perpetrated on the audiences over the years. Tell me one successful film in the past three years which has had an act of violence or has been a violent film? From *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* onwards, we have seen the success of family cinema. People are going to reject violence and sex and we are once again going to come to terms with drama which is more wholesome and family-based. *Osho*, better known as Acharya Rajneesh said: "You have to be careful when you create, because creativity could be dark and negative, and so too its influences. But at the same time if it is positive, it could spread a lot of joy and love."

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**Mukesh Khanna**  
**TV producer of the children's serial,**  
**Shaktimaan, in which he plays a superhero**

Children love characters such as Superman. I strongly felt that Indian children deserved an Indian superhero. We have many great mythological heroes but we have not created any modern ones. That was why I decided to create the superhero, *Shaktimaan*.

I was more successful than I had imagined. Mothers and children would salute me with *Shaktimaan Zindabad!* My serial has definitely made an impact. But I realised that this impact could also be negative, that the popularity of the serial was scary as it placed a great responsibility on me. So at the end of every episode, I give a warning and message on good behaviour to children, and mothers have told me their children follow what I say.

When I heard that children were falling or injuring themselves after imitating some of my actions, I forbade children from imitating me. I told them that *Shaktimaan* can perform these acts because he has the strength, the power, the *Kundalini* enlightenment. Children do not, so they should watch *Shaktimaan* as they watch cartoons – just for enjoyment.

One point is very clear in my mind: *Shaktimaan* does not kill any one. I wanted *Shaktimaan* to be different from Western superheroes. We have never shown anybody dying; at the most *Shaktimaan* throws the person into the Universe. So we are not teaching children violence. We say: fight evil through good behaviour, through non-violence.

Indian children deserved an Indian superhero. We have many great mythological heroes but we have not created any modern ones.

**Peggy Mohan**  
**Director and producer of children's**  
**programmes**

It is almost impossible to make a children's programme in this country. Neither the government nor any institution or sponsor will pay attention. We don't even get 13 episodes, let alone TRPs. We are an endangered species. When we try to be really nice, our advertisers tell us to put a little violence into our series. We have to follow that formula. So, if you are really creative, just go to sleep for a 100 years, nobody wants it. They just want what they have seen before.

**Dr H.S. Dhavale**  
**Psychiatrist**

In March 1998, we had a 12-year old patient who came in a very severe state of anxiety. We couldn't diagnose his illness, so he was admitted in the ward for observation. After one or two days, he recovered and told us stories of husbands burning their wives, etc. He added a dramatic dimension to it like children do. Finally, his father told us that these stories were from horror films on TV and he was unconsciously frightened.

This incident awakened my interest in such cases. We approached children in the Mental Clinic attached to our department, and children in schools. During holidays, we received many young patients complaining of bed-wetting, etc. We were told by the parents that this happened more frequently after the children had watched a horror show/film.

I then conducted a study on the impact of television on children. In the study we compared children from the lower socio-economic strata, middle class and upper class. We

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*So, if you are really creative, just go to sleep for a 100 years, nobody wants it. They just want what they have seen before.*

asked them about the kinds of violence they saw on television. They spoke of fights, burglary, murders, cruelty, hooliganism, rape. Only 3 per cent of the sample said they had seen no violence on television. Fights and goondaism were identified as the main forms of violence. The percentage of violence seen on television was much higher in the lower socio-economic strata because their television exposure is greater as compared to the middle and upper classes where more parental control is exercised.

We then asked the children for reactions to violence on television, whether it frightened them. The upper/middle classes were less affected because they said they were not exposed to violence in their surroundings. "Don't mind" the violence was stated more by the middle class children who said they enjoyed it as entertainment. But "enjoyed it" was equal in both the groups, about 22-23 per cent. "Feeling sad" on seeing violence was highest in the lower class (39 per cent) because they said when it happens on television, they feel it could happen to them, because their surroundings are full of the same violence. Only 9 per cent of the children declared they "felt angry" on seeing violence.

We asked how many had experienced frightening and violent dreams? About 56-57 per cent of the children said they had had such dreams. But when we asked them which were their favourite programmes, they said horror films and serials! Parental control was found to be highest in the middle class (87 per cent). The objections of parents in all classes was to horror, *WWF* and adult movies. However, children do watch these programmes – mostly lower class children.

As a psychiatrist, I am not saying that television alone affects children, but it is one of the major factors. We know that genetics plays its part, as do the neuro-hormonal factors. The family and school environment and surroundings,

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play their part too. But wherever we can make changes, we should do so. One area is in the viewing of television violence. I think aggression is a basic instinct with all human beings but only adults know how to manage it. They use different mechanisms – sublimation, whereas children use displacement. Moreover, children are full of physical energy. If this energy is not channelled through play or other activities, then it comes out as aggression.

### **Rachna Pant**

**Principal, Summerfields School, New Delhi**

There is no denying the fact that violence does affect children. How can we soften this blow? There are three agents we are talking about: the producers, the school and the parents. These three together mould the hearts and minds of the next generation.

Violence has always been there, but how it is portrayed is what concerns us. I have talked to children from classes: 6 to 12 about television and asked them which serials they liked. Detective serials. They found *Zee Horror Show* very comical and they said *WWF* was unreal. The children of our generation may be very smart, but we cannot say that violence has no impact. So what should we do? The producers have to try and give good content matter, portraying harmony, peace and some universal values. That is what the producers should be doing.

The schools have to learn to channelise the energies of the children. It can be done through education, sports, fine arts. We should never reward aggressive behaviour. Lastly, the onus does fall on parents, neighbours and the social-economic environment. Parents must remember that each word or action seen on TV is reinforced by the environment their children inhabit.

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**THE NEXT STEP**

Proposed Guidelines

## THE NEXT STEP

# Proposed Guidelines

### Introduction

In discussions held with a cross-section of people in the industry, the question of what could be done to minimise the effects of violence on television drew varied responses.

The industry was positive on the issue of self-regulation. Several people gave the example of such self-regulation the industry exercised in relation to liquor advertising on television. They felt that a similar process of negotiation and consensus within the industry was possible on the question of violence.

However, in view of the subjectivity in defining violence or excessive violence and horror, some channel executives and TV producers welcomed the idea of formulated guidelines; a few wanted guidelines which covered not only violence or terror/horror serials but also, for instance, mythologicals. Furthermore, they felt that television alone should not be targetted but other media – print and the Internet – should be held accountable on the

question of sex and violence, too.

Ratings of programmes were welcomed by a number of channel executives. An independent monitoring system found some acceptance too.

### International Guidelines and Practices

Worldwide, countries recognise that the depiction of violence on television is an area of concern related to the child-viewer. On the basis of exhaustive research over decades, countries have adopted different guidelines and various self-regulatory methods to try and cope with this problem. These include the following:

- A watershed time: Adult programmes, which have considerable amounts of sex and violence, are telecast only after a certain time
- Written and verbal warnings on the depiction of violence/sex before the



programme begins

- ❑ Advice on the TV screen and in TV listings on the degree of violence in individual programmes/films
- ❑ Installation of the V-chip in TV sets, decoders or cable transmitters to block out violence
- ❑ Prohibition of violent promos during family viewing hours
- ❑ A written code of practices concerning the child and violence
- ❑ Monitoring the levels of violence on television.

It should be noted that barring a written code on violence which is included in the Standards and Practices of certain cable and satellite channels as well as Doordarshan, most of the above procedures are not adhered to by television channels available in India.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. SCHEDULES

- ❑ **Child-specific programmes:** Child-specific programmes should be encouraged across channels. Channels must offer children an option to adult programmes and what they call family dramas. This increase in programming must not take the form of animated serials. There must be alternative programmes for children.
  - ❖ Mandatory children's programming in the afternoons and the weekend may be

considered as part of the eligibility for a broadcast license once the Broadcast Bill is passed. In the absence of the Bill, channels may come forward and agree to a time band of children's programmes.
 

- ❖ A Children's Media Foundation to promote children's programmes and try to help fund child-specific programmes should also be considered.

- ❖ Advertisers must be encouraged to promote child-specific programming. They may be offered incentives in the form of tariff concessions, increased FCT (free commercial time). Social commitment could be recognised with an award for the most-child friendly advertiser.

- ❑ **Watershed time:** A watershed time of 10:00pm for the telecast of adult programmes or those with excessive violence/sex, may be considered. This watershed recognises the peculiar situation in India where children watch TV much later than they do in Western countries or in Australia. After 10:00 pm adult programmes may be telecast. The family viewing time could have serials with minimal violent or sexual content.

This aspect of the regulation could be made part of the Code for Commercial Advertising on each channel. Children's products should not be advertised with horror shows, and predomi-

nantly violent shows as far as possible

- ❑ **Warnings:** Written and verbal warnings on the depiction of violence/sex before the programme begins.
- ❑ **Advice:** Advice on the TV screen and in TV listings on the degree of violence in individual programmes/films: V for 'Violent', EV for 'Extreme Violence' or whatever is agreed upon by the industry. *(Numbers 1,2,3,4 will help parents/adults at home mediate children's viewing habits.)*
- ❑ **Repeats:** Violent serials, films, docu-dramas, etc, should not be telecast in the mornings, afternoons and early evenings when children are prime viewers: on many channels late night adult films, serials and even cartoons are being repeated in the morning, afternoon and early evening schedules when children are often the sole viewers in the house. This should be discontinued.
- ❑ **Violence in promos:** Programme promos with violence in them should not be telecast before the 10:00 pm watershed. Violence as an incentive to watch any programme should be discouraged.

## 2. REGULATIONS AND CODES

- ❑ Regulations and codes on children and the depiction of violence: These already exist for most channels in the form of

Standards and Practices. The problem is that they are not always being implemented.

## 3. TREATMENT

- ❑ To enhance and strengthen these Standards and Practices a greater sensitivity to the treatment of violence is required.

❖ **News and Current Affairs/ Docu-dramas:** In news and current affairs shows, every attempt should be made to provide warnings before violent scenes, to desist from close-ups and prolonged clips of violence and dead or injured people. In some situations it may be better to use computer simulations.

Docu-dramas based on real life situations should depict violent situations in an extremely sensitive and non-voyeuristic manner. In news and docu-dramas, care should be taken to conform to the codes on the depiction of violence so that they do not violate the dignity of the victim or his family. Real violence should not be exploited in the name of showing it 'like it is'. Graphic simulations, mosiacing faces and distancing the camera from the scene of violence would be preferable to disturbing visuals.

❖ **Drama Serials/Comedies:** There is a tendency in Indian television serials to

heighten dramatic situations. Loud music and slapstick comedy dominate both films and TV shows. If these were modified, if they were to be less theatrical and more real, it would lessen many elements which heighten the depiction of violence.

❖ **Other Suggestions:** Produce programmes that do not contain violence; if this is not always possible, keep violent acts to a minimum.

When showing violence try to:

- (i) show that violence is punished not rewarded
- (ii) highlight the negative impacts of violence
- (iii) include alternatives to violence in solving problems
- (iv) add strong anti-violence messages in the story
- (v) avoid violent and abusive language as far as possible.

#### 4. TECHNOLOGICAL INTERVENTION

- ❑ **V-chip:** The installation of the V-chip is something which should be considered but its application requires greater research. Its cost effectiveness and usefulness should be studied.

(V-chip is a microchip, which can be incorporated in a TV set decoder or cable selector. It allows you to blank out

violence at whichever level you decide. If you don't want any rape scenes, for instance, it can be programmed to blank out all rape scenes. Since 1998, the V-chip has been installed in all new TV sets in the USA. In Europe, too it is under consideration.)

#### 5. MONITORING

- ❑ **Independent monitoring of violence on television:** An independent unit, as part of the broadcasting regulatory authority, may be set up to monitor the incidence and depiction of violence on TV. Every three to six months a report would be submitted to all the channels. This is being suggested to help facilitate regulation/self-regulation. Also, since media professionals do not have time to monitor TV programmes, this would help provide information to all sections of the industry. It would also help in anti-violence advocacy.

Qualitative studies to assess the impact of TV programmes on children may also be conducted by independent agencies.

#### 6. AUDIENCE RESPONSIBILITY

- ❑ **Viewers panels:** Adult panels, perhaps along the lines of Parent Teacher

Associations (PTAs) in schools, could be instituted by the proposed Broadcast Authority and TV channels in a consultative capacity.

- **For parents and schools:** Much of the responsibility in relation to children and television rests with parents or adults in homes with children. Unless parents show children the way – by not watching violent/sexually explicit shows and films, watching them only once the children are asleep, watching television with their children and explaining the images they see, providing children with alternatives to television viewing, etc – no amount of regulation or self-regulation by the industry will work.

Parents, teachers, etc, could come

forward and publicly make their opinions known so that channels become aware of their views. Public opinion could be a strong tool in the fight against media violence.

Schools and public interest institutions working with children and the community should encourage media education for students and parents. This could take several forms. The first is to teach and allow children to make use of the video technology themselves so that they understand how programmes are produced. This helps decode TV messages. Teaching children and parents to become critical viewers is equally important.

**CFAR/A. Sivadas/S. Bajpai**

**UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

Three Articles Concerning The Media

## UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

# Three Articles Concerning The Media

### Article 3

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration.

2. State parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

3. State parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care and protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

### Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

- (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or
- (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (order public), or of public health or morals

### Article 17

State parties recognise the important function performed by the mass media and

shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health. To this end, State parties shall:

- Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance to the spirit of Article 29

- Encourage international cooperation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources

- Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books

- Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous

- Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of Articles 13 and 18.

### The Children's Television Charter Adopted May 29, 1995

*(The Children's Television Charter was presented by Anna Home, head of Children's Programmes, BBC, at the first World Summit on Television and Children in Melbourne, Australia, March 1995. The*

*Charter was revised and adopted in Munich in May 1995. It is actively used by many organisations.)*

- Children should have programmes of high quality which are made specifically for them, and which do not exploit them. The programmes, in addition to entertaining, should allow children to develop physically, mentally and socially to their fullest potential

- Children should hear, see and express themselves, their culture, their language and their life experiences, through television programmes which affirm their sense of self, community and place

- Children's programmes should promote an awareness and appreciation of other cultures in parallel with the child's own cultural background

- Children's programmes should be wide-ranging in genre and content, **but should not include gratuitous scenes of violence and sex**

- Children's programmes should be aired in regular slots at times when children are available to view, and/or distributed via other widely accessible media or technologies

- Sufficient funds must be made available to make these programmes to the highest possible standards

- Governments, production, distribution and funding organisations should recognise both the importance and vulnerability of indigenous

children's television, and take steps to support and protect it.

### **Asian Declaration on Child Rights and the Media**

**Adopted July 5, 1996**

#### ***Asian Summit on Child Rights and the Media, Manila***

*(The Asian Summit on Child Rights and the Media was held in Manila, the Philippines, in July 1996. Delegates to the Summit – including ministers and senior government officials, journalists, media executives, educators and child rights advocates from 16 countries adopted the Declaration.)*

We, Ministers of Information, Education, Welfare and Social Development from 27 countries of Asia, senior officials representing the various governments, executives, researchers, practitioners and professionals from various streams of media, non-governmental organisations, advocacy groups and concerned individuals gathered in Manila for the Asian Summit on 'Child Rights and the Media' and one:

- **re-affirming** our commitment to ensure implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) as ratified in our countries;
- **acknowledging** the developmental role, responsibility and power of all forms of media to inform, entertain, educate and influence; and
- **recognising** their potential for children and for social change.

### **Now, Therefore, Resolve That All Media For Or About Children Should:**

- protect and respect the diverse cultural heritage of Asian societies;
- be accessible to all children;
- provide for the girl child and counter the widespread discrimination against the girl child; and,
- provide for children with special needs; children in especially difficult circumstances, children of indigenous communities and children in situation of armed conflict.

### **Resolve Also, That All Media About Children Should:**

- adopt policies that are consistent with the principles of non-discrimination and the best interest of all children;
- raise awareness and mobilise all sectors of society to ensure the survival, development and participation of all children;
- address all forms of economic, commercial and sexual exploitation and abuse of children in the region and ensure that such efforts do not violate their rights, particularly their right to privacy;
- protect children from material which glorifies violence, sex, horror and conflict; and,
- promote positive values and not perpetuate discrimination and stereotypes.



**Resolve Further, That All Media For Children Should:**

- be of high quality, and made especially for them, and do not exploit them;
- support their physical, mental, social, moral and spiritual development;
- enable children to hear, see and express themselves, their culture, their languages and their life experiences through media which affirm their sense of self and community, while promoting an awareness and appreciation of other cultures;
- be wide-ranging in genre and content, but not include gratuitous scenes of violence and sex; and,
- be accessible to them at times when they need and can use it.

**Resolve Finally, That Governments, Media, Non-Governmental Organisations, The Private Sector And Other Local, Regional And Holding Agencies Should:**

- provide media education for children and families to develop their critical understanding of all media forms;
- provide opportunities for children in creating media and to express themselves on a wide range of issues relating to their needs and interests;
- provide sufficient funds and resources to

- ensure access to and enable the production and dissemination of high quality materials for and about children as well as capacity building for media practitioners so that they could perform their role as development agencies;
- promote regional and international cooperation through the sharing of research, expertise and exchange of materials and programmes, networking among government, non-government organisations, media organisations, educational institutions, advocacy group and other agencies;
- provide incentives for excellence through awards at regional and national levels;
- provide coordinated monitoring mechanisms and encourage self-regulation at regional and national levels to ensure the implementation of this Declaration; and,
- convene as early as possible broad, national multisectoral consultations to develop action plans, including professional guidelines consistent with this Declaration.

**The UNESCO International Clearing House on Children and Violence on the Screen**

In January 1997, the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom) set up an International Clearing House on children and violence on the screen. The Clearing House receives financial support from the Government of

Sweden and UNESCO. Its aim is to contribute to and effectivise knowledge on children, young people and media violence, seen in the perspective of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by making new information and data available to prospective users all over the world.

**The Clearing House informs groups of users about:**

- Research findings concerning children, young people and media violence
- Ongoing research on children and media violence
- Children's access to mass media and their media use
- Training and courses of study on children and the media
- Positive alternatives to media violence

- Measures and activities which aim at limiting gratuitous violence on television, in films and in the interactive media.

**The Clearing House has a three-fold aim:**

- To draw attention to the question of violence on the screen and its role in the lives of children and young people
- To stimulate initiatives and activities to combat gratuitous violence
- To help provide a better basis for policy in the field.

The Clearing House is user-oriented, offering services in response to demand, and adapted to the needs of the client. It publishes a newsletter and a yearbook.



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