

# TV VIOLENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Conducted by  
Centre For Advocacy and Research

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The monitoring study conducted during the week 24th August-2nd September 1998, across 5 channels, DDI, DD2, Zee, Sony, Star Plus, clearly indicates that the depiction of violence on television occurs across channels, in programmes telecast at different times of the day targetting varied audiences, which include children, adolescents and adults.

The study has been conducted by the Centre for Advocacy and Research for UNESCO. The study was jointly conducted by Akhila Sivadas and Shailaja Bajpai.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To quantify the extent of violence in drama serials across five channels.
2. To identify the nature and types of violence being depicted.
3. To identify the audiences targetted - particularly children - by such serials and by the advertisers who are sponsoring the serials.

## **METHODOLOGY USED**

### **Sample**

Identified drama serials across 5 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.
- In all, 56 hours 20 minutes were monitored. The break-up is as follows:
  - 81 serial episodes (or 40 hr. 30 mins)
  - 21 episodes of horror/ suspense (or 12 hr. 30 mins)
  - 6 news bulletins and two current affairs programmes (or 3 hr. 20 mins), and one documentary.

By channel the break-up was as follows:

Zee	18 hours 30 mins
Star Plus	13 hours 30 mins
DD1	13 hours
DD2	7 hours
Sony	4 hours 20 mins

Zee, STAR Plus and DD1 have 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 researchers were involved in designing the project which included determining sample size, evolving the monitoring format, and the methodology for tabulation and analysis.

The audience panel provided quantitative and qualitative feedback. The panel consisted of nine young viewers (18-25 years old: 4 male and 5 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 rechecked the consistency of the data.

## **QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS**

In all, there were 759 distinct acts of violence across the 5 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.

<b>Channel</b>	<b>Acts</b>
Zee	365
STAR	188
DD2	80
Sony	64
DD1	62

## **TYPES OF VIOLENCE**

- ◆ In all 59 types of violence, both audio and visual, both physical and psychological were identified. Of these threats, slapping, screaming, shooting, assaulting, expletives, pushing, clobbering, stabbing, mental torture, eerie soundtracks, threatening music are extremely prominent. These categories of violence account for over 50 per cent of the total acts depicted. Hence much of the violence is explicit and graphic.
- ◆ Some depictions of violence are unnecessarily lengthy.

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Some of these serials are often the most violent or disturbing - especially for children. For example: *X-Zone* and *Anhonee* (Zee) together had 118 or 53 and 65 acts of violence respectively; *Aahat* (Sony) had 13 acts of violence; *Kohra* (STAR Plus) had 30 acts of violence in a single episode

The remaining two-third acts are depicted in the 60 episodes of drama serials monitored. In fact, family drama serials or programmes specifically targeting children are no less violent. In a single episode of the serial *Gumraah* there were 32 acts, while there were 17 acts of violence in the child-specific *Shaktimaan*.

## Part II

### **Areas of Concern**

Within the larger question of the depiction of violence, there were specific areas of concern. These include:

- Programme schedules
- Violent promos
- Treatment and depiction
- 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**

##### *Channel-specific concentration:*

On different channels we found that specific days were more prone to violence than other days. For example, Tuesday on Sony Entertainment, Monday on Star Plus and Thursday and Sunday on Zee TV Network accounted for 35 per cent, 40 per cent and over 50 per cent, respectively, of the total acts of violence on the channel during the monitoring period.

##### *Time-slot concentration:*

Inter-channel rivalry and competition has led to a simultaneous scheduling of programmes with high incidence of violence. These prime time serials in the 9.00 p.m. and 9.30 p.m. are often the most violent and disturbing kind \_ especially for children.

Below is a table with a few examples of violent programmes across channels in the same time zones or succeeding each other:

DAY	TIME	PROGRAMME	CHANNEL
Tuesday	9 p.m.	Raja Aur Rancho Shapath Alpviram	DD 2 Zee Sony
Wednesday	9.30 p.m.	Who CID	Zee Sony
Thursday	9.00 p.m.	Sea-Hawks X-Zone	DD 2 Zee
	9.30 p.m.	Aahat Hindustani	Sony DD 2
	10 p.m.	Bhanwar	Sony

## • REPEATS

Even when programmes/films are telecast late at night, perhaps in an effort to reduce children's access to them, they are repeated in the afternoon and early evenings. Satellite and cable TV channels repeat many violent programmes/films in the afternoons and early evenings. For instance, *India's Most Wanted* and *Woh* have repeat telecasts at 4 p.m., and 4.30 p.m.; *Bhanwar* is repeated at 12 noon and the late night movie on Star Movies is often telecast the next afternoon in 3 p.m. slot.

## • VIOLENT PROMOS

Promos for all types of programmes \_ comedies, drama serials, films and even the news \_ carry very violent scenes in the belief that this is a hook for the viewer. Violence more than any other ingredient is being used to sell and promote programmes. The promos of a comedy such as *Tu Tu Main Main*, or a serial such as *Chattan* are more violent than the programmes themselves.

## • TREATMENT AND DEPICTION

### *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."

## 1.HORROR SHOWS

- + There is conclusive evidence, tacitly accepted by the industry, that children watch prime time evening television. Television viewing in India is still considered 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 programming.

Thus children watch programmes in the 7.30 p.m.-10 p.m. belt and also beyond that. They watch horror shows and suspense serials (sometimes, despite strong parental disapproval).

The issue of violence becomes critical because some of them go beyond the internationally acceptable limits of 5 to 6 acts of physical violence in a half-an-hour episode. While some reach figures ranging from 22 to 24 even serials targetted at children are not made an exception to this rule. 7 to 12 acts of violence exist even in them and they often include extreme acts such as murder, bombing and burning. (Anhonee, X-Zone, Shaktimaan and Raja Aur Rancho)

Moreover this excess depiction of physical acts of violence does not deter them from taking recourse to other categories of violence. Very often they co-exist with other forms of violence such as verbal and bizarre sound effects which includes music and occasionally even psychological violence.

Certain serials take great care to avoid acts of physical violence but they repeatedly used eerie sound tracks, occasional hallucinations, nightmares, paranoia to build an atmosphere of terror.

Recognising its implications they are even telecasting a warning note on superstition and a belief in the paranormal are being telecast. The warning before *Aahat* for example 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 importantly, based upon actual beliefs.

If you examine the justification or reason of violence we find that psychopathic behaviour accounts for percentages as high as 26% to 50% on a given day in a specific channel and within one episode of a programme can be even more than 50%. Other reasons are police interrogation, blackmail, revenge, rivalry, provoking aggression, dealings of the underworld, inter-generational conflict.

These serials are being telecast at family viewing times.

## 1b. Hooking the child-viewer to violence or horror in serials:

- It is quite clear that horror shows and crime series target the child viewer. Audience ratings in the 6-4 years age group indicate that *Aahat*, *Anhonee*, *Bhanwar*, *India's Most Wanted*, *X-Zone* are in the top ten programmes watched by children in the last 2 months.
- The UNESCO report found that children admire superheroes. 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 and though there is a warning by the star of the serial against such imitations, there have been instances when children have tried and got hurt imitating *Shaktimaan*.

Last month, *Times of India* reported the case of a boy who had seriously injured himself imitating *Shaktimaan*. Disclaimers in such cases are not always enough.

The nature of the violence in a serial such as this is also manifold: as mentioned earlier, in one episode of *Shaktimaan*, there were 17 acts of violence in approximately 25 minutes. These included assaulting, slapping, punching, shooting, strangulating, burning, pushing, stabbing 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: i.e., the clown or joker in *Woh*, and the monkey in *Raja Aur Rancho*.

## 2. Drama Serials:

It isn't only suspense or horror serials that depict violence. Family drama serials are predicated on conflict and often depict violence - what is most disturbing is that often this is domestic violence within a family and sometimes involving children. For example, *Viruddh* in one episode had six acts of violence. *Kabhie Kabhie* had seven acts of violence; *Mahayagya* had nine acts of violence. *Shatranj* and *Amar Prem* (afternoon repeat on Zee) had eight and 10 acts of violence, respectively; *Aashirwad* had eight acts of violence. *Gumraah* (Zee) had 32 acts of violence.

With the exception of *Gumraah* where physical acts of violence such as pushing, tripping, clobbering, kicking and punching are high most of the serials in this category are dominated by verbal and psychological violence. While some of this where male aggression is high is determined by marital discord and inter-generational conflict there are also serials like *Swabhiman* and *Mahayagya* where women and men are part of political and corporate rivalry and violence and yet others which are totally macho like *Shatranj* where it is the underworld that seems to be calling the shot.

### 3. **Comedies:**

Though we did not monitor comedies there is a great deal 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.

### 4. **Docu-Dramas:**

A new, successful trend on television has been the docu-drama. These shows like *Bhanwar* or *India's Most Wanted* reconstruct real crimes. In the process, some very violent scenes are shown on television. These programmes are said to perform a social duty: they help catch criminals, and discourage crime.

Many physical acts of violence such as kidnapping and shooting. Between these two they accounted for 9 out of 12 acts.

However, it becomes difficult to enforce any guidelines if docu-dramas in the name of reality depict violence in the most 'realistic' and explicit manner. This would lead to different standards for different programmes which is very difficult to justify.

### 4. **Positive Trends**

- π On certain days, there is a low degree of violence in serials. Violence is restricted to a programme/film or two on a few channels. Friday on Zee, Thursday on Star,
- π There are programmes of low or no violence, which are popular: e.g., *Amaanat*, *Just Mohabbat*, *Saans*, and Doordarshan's afternoon daily soaps are a few examples.
- π Within the specific genre of detective\thrillers\suspense, there are successful series in which there is a minimum use of any kind of violence e.g. *Mohandas BA LL.B.*, *CID*, *Saboot*, and on some occasions, *Saturday Suspense*.

Thus the depiction of violence does not necessarily enhance viewership.

- **REPRESENTATION OF CHILD AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE:**

1. **INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN**

A few serials like *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.

2. **SEXUAL OVERTONES**

Crimes of passion which exploit sex and violence are conspicuous in television serials; the love triangle often forms the basic story line in serials and the cause of the violence. In episodes of *Yehi Hai Raaz*, *X-Zone* we monitored, the basic conflict was an extra-marital affair, which leads to the murders. In an episode of *Saturday Suspense*, once again the murder was committed by a jealous woman in a man's life.

When sex and violence are linked to psychopathic behaviour, the problem is even more acute. In *Kohra*, one of the stories deals with a psychopathic rapist of a young schoolgirl. This was shown on 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 p.m.)

Our quantitative data also revealed that these serials perpetuate the idea of the male as the aggressor. In contrast, the depiction of women as the aggressor varies from 0% on Doordarshan to 50% in Sony. What is disturbing about the 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, 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 of violence shown.

The UNESCO study has emphasised that children tend to imitate superheroes and imitate violent means to solve their problems because they have seen the same on television.

There are Indian television 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*, *Saturday Suspense*, are a few examples of this.

***Role of Sponsors and Advertisers  
Are Commercials Targetting Children Supporting Horror Shows and Crime Series?***

Yes, indeed. It should be noted that in the absence of child-specific programmes, advertisers are advertising products for children with prime-time programmes and blockbuster films. As the ratings indicate high viewership amongst children for suspense/horror genres, advertising support for these shows is high with a fair number of child-specific advertisements.

Below is a table of some serials in the suspense/horror/super hero genre, which have attracted child-specific advertising:

<b>NAME OF SERIAL</b>	<b>CHANNEL</b>	<b>ADVERTISERS</b>
X-Zone	Zee	Cadbury's
Shapath	Zee	Cadbury's Little Heart Biscuits, Johnson's Kids Soap, Dabur Chyawanprash, Horlicks, Pepsodent
Aahat	Sony	Cadbury's Halls Orange, Kissan Squash, Colgate (with Sachin Tendulkar)
Shaktimaan	DD 2	Parle-G Biscuits, Complian, Hajmola Sweets, Kisme Toffee Bar, Monaco Biscuits, Parle Poppins
Anhonee	Zee	Dabur Chyawanprash
Kohra	STAR Plus	Johnson's Kids Soap, Bakemans Glugold Biscuits

## **THE CONSULTATION WITH PROFESSIONALS IN THE TV INDUSTRY AND IN ADVERTISING:**

In our discussions with professionals belonging to different sections of the industry, we benefitted from many viewpoints on the issue of violence and television. The professionals shared with us their opinions and the compulsions of the industry. Any discussion on media and violence and ways of minimising its presence must take these factors into account:

### **1. TV programme schedules and target audience:**

Across channels, prime time schedules were said to be aimed at the entire family as the target audience. Channels, TV producers and advertisers did not see children as a separate, niche audience. There was a feeling that child-specific programme were

(a) Too expensive to produce and that

(b) Children all over the world tend to prefer adult programmes. Channel executives and advertisers acknowledged the importance of the child as a consumer of both programmes and as the target of advertising. Therefore, TV schedules and programmes are designed to hook them.

### ***Points to be raised***

*a) Once there is a consensus that children are an integral part of the 'family audience', which is being targetted, then there has to be some caution and care exercised terms of themes, treatment and depiction. Care has to be taken to establish healthy programme practices and norms. This can be evolved through a process of consultation with forums of parents, special educators, and groups working with children.*

### **2. Nascent industry:**

The television industry is still a young, inexperienced industry. It took root only in 1993. Hence, there are no veterans in the business and everyone is still learning about television programming, schedules, etc. Much of the software put out on Indian television is imitative. Whatever has worked in other countries is being tried here. So the industry is passing through a trial and error phase.

Given the inexperience, the industry is open to any objective intervention that aims to debate and if possible define programme norms that are widely acceptable.

**Points to be raised:**

*In the case of depiction of violence, are arguments of inexperience justified? If the channels have to decide between commercial opportunities and the larger interests of society \_ and in this case children \_ what would take precedence?*

*Experience in other countries has indicated the adverse impact of media violence on children and the industry, alongwith the governments, special interests groups, have addressed the problem by introducing some measures to deal with violence and the media.*

**3. Programme Codes:**

In the case of foreign satellite channels, there are standards and practises on programme content and schedules. These codes are quite comprehensive on matters concerning violence, sex and children. Similarly Doordarshan also has fairly explicit guidelines as well as programme previewing norms.

**Points to be raised:**

*The industry might like to make known the fact that they do follow norms on Standards and Practises (S&P). Perhaps people in S&P units could appear in response shows on TV to explain some of the practises. Guidelines and programmes followed by channels could be publicised so that the public and advocacy groups become aware of them. There could be consultations on guidelines between viewers, parents, and teachers. This would help establish that the industry is responsible and responsive to public concerns.*

*For instance, there are many depictions of violence which appear to be problematic but which have nevertheless been telecast. So the criteria for application of guidelines, Standards and Practises, need some clarification.*

*Similarly on DD there is no consistent application of the codes related to programmes and advertising. Positive steps have been taken by channels and the industry in response to public opinion not as pro-active measure. The industry tends to react rather than initiate action.*

**4. Is violence/horror necessary in TV programmes? Is there an indirect audience pressure to make programmes more violent? Is there a direct pressure by channels to deliver more violent or action-packed programmes?:**

In the industry, there was a general abhorrence to violence. Nobody stated that they were consciously trying to promote it. This included channel executives, TV producers/directors/writers and advertisers. Violence and sex are not encouraged to boost TRPs (television rating points).

Advertisers were very conscious of horror/violence/sex giving them negative brand images. They admitted however, that they did not constantly preview or monitor TV serials and were often unaware of the content of programmes being sponsored.

When specific serials were discussed, the consensus was that suspense and horror were two of the more successful genres in TV programming. Horror shows were amongst the most popular serials across channels, worldwide. Sex and violence do sell and viewership rating reflect that these types of serials do well with audiences.

There was also a feeling that since audiences had matured, had been exposed to international television shows/films; their expectations had risen. To that extent, there was audience pressure to entertain in new ways. Increased levels of violence/horror/special effects were some of them.

Among TV producers there was no unanimity on the success of violence. There was an opinion that successful shows do not depend upon violence/horror or suspense: wholesome, family entertainment had always worked both in films and in TV serials and the success of serials such as *Amaanat*, *Sailaab*, and *Just Mohabbat*. Some suggested that viewers did not need violence and titillation to hook them. In the long run too much violence/horror could prove counter-productive to the industry as a whole as there could be an audience backlash.

Everyone acknowledged that competitive pressures in the TV environment and between channels had in some cases led to an increase in horror and violence. There was a feeling that there are cycles in programme trends, that once a genre gains a measure of popularity, it is replicated on other channels. It becomes self-perpetuating. Thus, violent/horror shows were currently on the rise because it was the current trend across channels.

Channels introduced these genres to cut into a competing channel's success: e.g., *X-Zone* was specifically introduced by Zee to challenge Sony's *Aahat*. The point made here was that once a show became popular with audiences, the competing channel introduced a similar programme to win an audience share and reduce the competitors' audience share.

***Points to be raised:***

*a) As a genre horror/suspense, etc; can be popular and successful. Fear is one of the easiest emotions to exploit. But is violence and horror to the degree now being shown really warranted? Are there no problems of depiction of graphic and explicit and prolonged violence? Can the drama not be entertaining without loud music and misuse of technology or computer generated special effects?*

*b) Violence is an integral part of all serials including comedy. Is this necessary?*

c) *Competition always raises the hen and the egg question. Competition between channels has sometimes resulted in a concentration of violent programmes across channels during the same day on the same time band. This exposes children to excessive amounts of violence on particular days/viewing hours Is this in conformity with existing standards and practices?*

d) *Should there not be watershed timing so that programme with greater violent content or adults serials, are telecast in late night slots? Should not there be some objective rating systems and warnings that would help parents choose programmes for their children?*

### **5. Justification for the use of violence. How do you define violence? Is violence on television only a reflection of violence in real life?**

One justification for violence on television was that it was a reflection of reality. There was also a feeling that since there was so much violence in the world around us, television was holding up a mirror to society.

Several TV producers even thought that television was an educative tool since it exposed and sensitised all of us to violence in real life; others stated that from cartoons and nursery rhymes to fairy tales and mythology, children were exposed to violence in many forms from a very early age and that therefore, violence on television was just another expression of it. One scriptwriter described how many story lines or acts in serials had been lifted from newspapers. The suspense serial *Shapath* is based on in depth research with investigating agencies, while *Bhanwar* and *India's Most Wanted* are based on real crimes/legal cases.

#### **Points to be raised:**

*There is great deal of violence in real life and in other media. We cannot insulate children from real violence. Nor is television solely responsible for encouraging violence in society. But it is a very strong influence. Television is something children watch every day. It is a recurring habit. It is universally accepted that the audio-visual media have a profound and deep impact, greater than other media does. It is also accepted that children, very young children are unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy: so for them the confusion between real violence and fictionalised violence is very real. The line between using violence, horror, fear to educate and exploiting it to titillate viewers is very thin.*

### **6. Definition of violence**

A definition of violence was difficult to establish. Such definitions would always be subjective. To judge what was violent, scary, too violent and too scary was also subjective. For example, one scriptwriter found the mix of the paranormal, the supernatural and superstitions in horror shows was problematic.

The argument was made that with the supernatural, people often have real experiences and so it should not be fooled around with. For another scriptwriter Woh was too terrifying for children, while for a third, India's Most Wanted was too realistic for comfort.

***Point to be raised:***

*An independent monitoring body which works out definitions in consultation with the TV channels could perhaps help solve this problem of subjectivity.*

**7. 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 an increase in the number of news and current affairs shows across channels, the amount of real violence that children are exposed to, has increased exponentially.

News executives stressed that they exercise caution in the depiction of violence. There are Standards and Practises, which they follow and are made to follow by their channel's S&P unit.

### III

#### **International Guidelines and Practises:**

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 the decades, countries have adopted different guidelines and various self-regulatory methods to try and cope with the problem of violence on television. These include the following:

1. A watershed times after which programmes that are adult or have considerable amounts of sex and violence are telecast.
2. Written and verbal warnings on the depiction of violence/sex before the programme begins.
3. Advice on the TV screen and in TV listings on the degree of violence in individual programmes/films.
4. Installation of the V-chip in TV sets, decoders or cable transmitters to block out violence
5. Prohibition of violent promos during family viewing hours.
6. A written code of practises concerning the child and violence.
7. Monitoring of the levels of violence on television.

It should be noted that barring a written code on violence which is included in the Standard and Practices of certain cable and satellite channels as well as Doordarshan, many of the above procedures are currently not applicable to television in India.

## IV

### **Proposed guidelines For discussion at Public Hearing on 5 December 1998**

#### **Introduction:**

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

The industry was positive on the question of self-regulation. Several people gave the example of the 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 dealt with the case of mythologicals. Also TV alone should not be targetted but other media should be held accountable on the question of sex and violence.

Ratings of programmes were welcomed by many channel executives.

An independent monitoring system found some acceptance too.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SCHEDULES:

#### 1. 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 an alternative for children.

Mandatory children's programming in the late afternoons and the weekend may be considered as part of the eligibility for broadcast licensing once the Broadcast Bill is enforced. 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 given 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.

#### 2. Watershed time:

A watershed time of 10 p.m. maybe considered. This watershed recognises the peculiar situation in India where children watch TV much later than children in western countries or a country like Australia do do. After 10 p.m. adult programmes may be telecast. The family viewing time could have serials without much violent or sexual content.

This aspect of 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 predominantly violent shows as far as possible

#### 3. Warnings:

Written and verbal warning on the depiction of violence/sex before the programme begins.

#### 4. 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.)

## **5. 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 TV viewers in the house. We strongly recommend the discontinuation of these repeats

## **6. Violence in Promos:**

Programme promos with violence in them should not be telecast before the 10 p.m. watershed. Violence as an incentive to watch any programme should be discouraged.

## **REGULATIONS AND CODES:**

7. Regulations and codes on children and the depiction of violence: these already exist for most channels in the form of Standards and Practises. The problem is that they are not always being implemented

## **TREATMENT**

8. To enhance and strengthen the Standards and Practises we suggest greater sensitivity on the treatment of violence

### *(a) 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 need to depict violent situations in an extremely sensitive and non-voyeuristic manner. In news and docu-dramas, therefore, every 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 their families. Real violence should not be exploited in the name of showing us `like it is'. Graphic simulations, mosiacing faces and distancing the camera from the scene of violence would be preferable to disturbing visuals.

### *(b) Drama Serials/Comedies:*

There is a tendency on Indian television serials to heighten dramas. Loud music, slapstick comedy dominates both films and TV shows. If these were modified, if they became less theatrical and more real, it would lessen many elements, which heighten the depiction of violence.

(c) *Other suggestions:*

Produce programmes that don't have violence; if the programme does have violence, keep the incidence of violent acts to a minimum.

When showing violence try:

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

## **TECHNOLOGICAL INTERVENTION:**

### **9. 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 example, 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.)

## **MONITORING:**

### **10. Independent monitoring of violence on television:**

Monitoring the depiction of violence on TV. 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 3-6 months a report is submitted to all the channels. This is being suggested to help facilitate regulation/self-regulation. Also, since we found that 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.

## **AUDIENCE RESPONSIBILITY:**

### **11. 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:**

12. We have spoken about the responsibility of the television industry. However, we all have to accept that 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 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 those 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.

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

**A UNESCO sponsored public hearing on 5 December 1998**

India International Centre  
New Delhi

Theme Paper  
by  
Shailaja Bajpai

### **Part I**

The world our children are growing up in is changing faster than they are growing up. No where is this more evident than in the field of communications. The advances in technology, the convergence of technologies and the boom in the electronic media have changed our lives irrevocably.

While the next decade will most certainly belong to the computer, the last eight years have seen television in India spread and develop beyond expectations. .

### **Why we need to discuss TV violence:**

We are here today for the following reasons:

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

We are here to discuss the issue of violence on television. We are here to put our heads together and try to agree on ways in which we can minimise its impact on our children.

### **Television: Access and Availability In India:**

In 1998, there are 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: Doordarshan. Six years later, the number has increased to an incredible 50 channels \_ and we're still counting.

Cable and satellite TV homes are now estimated at 20 million with a viewership of approximately 100 million.

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

**Nature of programmes available:**

A child's exposure to violence on television has everything to do with the kinds of programmes that are on offer.

Our children are exposed to everything from films, sports, current affairs and documentaries to cartoons drama serials, comedies, talks shows, and much more.

Five TV channels are exclusive film channels

Five are news and current affairs channels

More than 10 general omnibus/entertainment channels (in different languages).

***There is no exclusive children's TV channel***

***Films:*** Every day, between 40-50 films are telecast across channels or approximately 300 films a week. Hindi and other Indian language masala movies and Hollywood films dominate the small screen.

There is variety in the kinds of films shown but you will all accept that our films and theirs have more than a fair share of violence and sex.

***Cartoons:*** TNT telecasts cartoons until 9.30 pm, every day: the new satellite channel, AXN runs Japanese cartoons at 11.30pm (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% of children's programmes on DD and 41.79% 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 1%. (figures from :Kanoi Marketing Services, Madras)

**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.

Doctors will tell you that children under the age of 7 have difficulty distinguishing reality from fantasy on television; that making violence appear fun, prompts children to imitate it even more when they play.

The NCT study went on to say that by the age of 18, the typical, average child in America 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 fairly similar.

**TV serials:** In the realm of television 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 the channels ply the same kind of fare whether it is drama serials or comedies.

As our presentation will show, there is considerable amounts of violence not only in the genre of suspense/thrillers but also in our drama serials and comedies. As the UNESCO Executive Board member, Nils Gunnar Nilsson explained: ``One of the cheapest tricks is to create violence because 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:** We currently receive 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 many other channels.

So our exposure to real violence, is constant and constantly growing. Those of you who recall the telecast of the Gulf War on CNN may remember that on television it resembled a video game; we had to constantly remind ourselves that the fireworks in the sky were real bombs which landed on real human beings.

Meanwhile, children in Australia often reported that they do not like to watch TV news because it can contain accounts of horrifying and violent real events.

Just a word about natural documentaries: beautifully shot, these are often filled with very violent scenes of animal capturing and eating animal. Children who normally have a great affinity with animals, are simultaneously fascinated and horrified by such depictions.

**Other programmes and media:** There is also, the whole, uncharted area of the surrealistic music video, violent sports such as WWF (World Wrestling Federation, now showing on TNT and STAR Sports) and even TV commercials with violent depictions. The message implicitly and often explicitly, is that aggression, violence pays. 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.

**How much time do children in India spend watching television?**

3-4 hours daily A TNT Cartoon Network Study, Generasians '98 listed out Indian children's favourite channels: they were Zee, Sony and TNT \_ in that order.

Films, film-based programmes, cartoons and serials are their favourites.

**Conclusion:**

We in India, have leap-frogged an era in our exposure to media. We have gone from a one channel world in 1993 to a multi-media interactive world. The sheer volume and density of this media explosion is frightening.

Statistics are boring, not easy to grasp and seldom tell the entire story. However, they do help establish our case: that a child's exposure to violence on television - real or fictionalised - is considerable.

We have reached a stage where 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 real TV generation in India. So far, we have been unable to gauge the impact of media and media violence on them

(a) Because we have had no prior experience of it

(b) Because there has been little by way of research in the field of media and children, even less on the potential impact of media violence on children.

***These represent compelling reasons to hold this meeting: to stress the need for research into children and TV and TV violence.***

### **The Experience of Violence:**

It is not enough to look at the question of violence on television in quantifiable statistics alone. It is the experience of media violence which is equally or perhaps even more a cause for worry.

This concern especially regarding children, understandable. Though children have always been exposed to violence \_ in real life, in the bedtime stories told to them, in the nursery rhymes, fairy tales and books they read \_ media violence has been singled out for concern.

Media violence is not television violence alone. However, UNESCO has singled out television violence:

- Because television is the most widespread media in the world
- Because the audio-visual media is accepted as the most powerful communicator of all
- Because the Internet is still nascent at a nascent stage in most of the world

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

Is television violence a reflection of the violent world children live in? We do not wish to enter into the controversy over violence in reality and in the media, that the latter is only a reflection of the former. We accept that violence and aggression are intrinsic to the human condition: they always have been and always will be.

We also acknowledge that 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.

We are here today, to think about 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 in real life are exposed to the amount and the kinds of violence we see on television day after day, month after month, year after year?

American children by the end of elementary schools have witnessed 8,000 murders and 100,000 assorted acts of violence on television. Can anyone claim that this exposure mirrors reality?

### **International Research and the Impact of TV violence on children:**

The concern about media violence and specifically television violence, has resulted in global research to gauge its impact on children. In the United States alone, there have been over 3,500 studies.

There are studies which say there is no discernible impact of TV violence on children. Most of the evidence does support the view 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."

***But the overwhelming evidence does suggest that TV violence is a guilty accomplice.***

***To us 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.

### **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

There have been cases in India in which TV images have led to human tragedies in real life: last month the Times of India reported that a young boy had jumped

off the roof of his house in imitation of the superhero **Shaktimaan** seen on Doordarshan. According to press reports, Vivek Agnihotri, TV producer, received complaints from parents that subsequent to the telecast of an episode of **X-Zone** on Zee which he had produced, in which a man is attacked by the noodles he was eating, their children refused to eat noodles. As Agnihotri said, "I learnt for the first time what the impact of television is."

Parents or school teachers will tell you of instances when what they have seen on television, has deeply disturbed children resulting in insomnia, fear of solitude, anger, and other psychological disturbances. This is violence of another kind on our children.

These cases represent extreme responses to television violence and horror. But in general our concern relates to the impact of television violence on a child's cognitive and learning process, to how a child forms attitudes and life long perceptions. For example, in Israel, a study indicated that while children believed USA was richer, bigger, better and more beautiful, television and other media had fostered the belief that it was wilder, more violent and dangerous. Indeed, according to UNESCO, one-third of children believed the world is an evil place.

Such perceptions, we believe, are sufficient reasons for wanting to do something about the exposure of children to television and other media violence.

### **Part III**

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

Anna Home, Chief Executive of Children's Film and Television has said that the increasing choice of channels makes it impossible to regulate the industry. In India we have learnt the truth of her remark. In the last six years since cable and satellite TV really arrived in India, a single piece of legislation has been implemented: the Cable TV Regulation Act (1995). The Broadcast Bill, is still pending before successive Parliaments. In the absence of any legislation, there is little by way of programme standards and practises, though individual, foreign channels do have their programme codes.

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 on violence and children. As one senior government official said to us, ``nobody cares about the child."

Your presence here today, says you care.

#### **India and Global resolutions on the Child and Media:**

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 actions.

We are not asking 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."**

**ENDS**

**1. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:** ratified by 191 countries in 1997 including India.

Article 17 relates to the child and media. It stresses the child's rights to have access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources;

but 17 (e) states:

**“ Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being..”**

The Convention stresses both the right to access to information and the right to be protected against harmful material. This combined approach is necessary for the development of a comprehensive policy on children and media. Effective incentives for the production of positive material for children may be as effective as trying to limit the negative ones.

**2.** UNESCO has been very active on the issue of media violence and children. In April 1994, UNESCO convened a roundtable in New Delhi of heads of public television in India, China, Indonesia, Britain (BBC), France (TV5) and USA (CNN). Even then it was recognised that restrictive legislation were both undesirable and ineffective in controlling violence on TV; self discipline and self regulation were preferable; national broadcasting was seen as the best means to counter imported violence.

**3.** In September 1995, UNESCO cooperated with the Swedish National Commission of UNESCO in organising the *International Conference on Violence on the Screen and the Convention on the Rights of the Child*. It was at this meeting that the decision to create an international Clearinghouse on children and violence on the screen was taken. The primary objective of the Clearinghouse are to: highlight the question of violence on the screen related to young persons, to stimulate initiatives and activities to combat gratuitous violence and to promote a better basis for policy formulation. Data collected by the Clearinghouse is available especially in the form of a newsletter and this Yearbook (show it).

4. The UNESCO study on Media Violence released in March 1998 was conducted by the World Organisation of the Scout Movement. Over 5,000 12-year old pupils from 23 countries, including India were selected from the entire range of the Human Development Index for the study. It is the largest every study of its kind. The theme was: 'Young people's perception of violence on the screen'

Apart from the UN resolutions and UNESCO's efforts, there have been a number of other international initiatives concerning children and the media: these include:

1. In January 1996 media violence was the subject for debate organised by the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). India, Doordarshan participated in that debate.

2. The World Summit on Television and Children, 1995: Para 4 specifically deals with children and violence: "Children's programmes should be wide ranging in genre and context but should not include gratuitous scenes of violence and sex."

3. Asian Summit on Child Rights and the Media, 1996 which in essence adopts the World Summit recommendations and asks for positive measure to encourage more indigenous, children's programming.

4. African Summit on Children's Broadcasting, 1997

5. The World Summit on Television and Children, 1998

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Promos: use violence as an incentive for further viewing.

Israel TV: before 10 pm prohibits` any broadcast which includes harsh or blunt visual, verbal or audio related expression of violence, sex or suffering, or broadcasts which are the object of imitation; no promos will be broadcast before the above hour which include the above content..'

As children grow older, they tend to watch less children oriented shows and more adult programmes.

Colour television not PCs are the biggest selling consumer good across the world (UNICEF, The Bigger Picture, 1997) 105 million colour TV sets were sold in 1995 according to Philips.

V-chip is a microchip which can be incorporated (at a substantial cost?) in a Tv set, decoder or cable selector - this can give you the different levels of violence you want to allow or strike out. All new TV sets in the USA have it. In Europe too it is under study. Prof. George Gerbner: this is simply a cover to the industry- it is like saying we shall continue our profitable discharge into the common cultural environment but don't worry we'll also sell you gas masks to protect your children and have a free choice"