

## CHAPTER SIX

### RECREATION AND LEISURE

As the previous chapters indicate, the Committee believes that family and socio-economic factors can impact on the attitudes and behaviour of young people. A lack of appropriate recreational and leisure options can exacerbate the frustrations that result from these environmental factors.

This chapter examines the experiences of, and attitudes towards, young people using public spaces, the facilities that should be made available to them, and their involvement in planning and decision-making. A range of initiatives which aim to improve the recreational options available to young people are also discussed. Section 6.2 examines the impact of sport on the lives of young people, both in terms of the positive benefits and its contribution to legitimising aggression and violence in our society. Section 6.3 firstly discusses issues surrounding the recreational use of alcohol and violence in and around licensed premises, then examines the link between violence and the abuse of alcohol and drugs and strategies for harm minimisation.

#### 6.1 YOUTH ENTERTAINMENT

##### 6.1.1 Use of Public Space

A number of witnesses were critical of public perceptions and fears regarding young people congregating in public spaces such as parks and shopping malls:

*The fact is that public space is really the only space available to young people who do not have their own home, particularly if they want to get away from their parents or if they are in difficult situations at home .... It is natural for kids to want to be out doing things. It is natural for anyone, not just young people, to socialise in groups. It is a human phenomenon (D'Astoli Evidence, 10.02.94).*

A submission from the Newcastle Community Youth Development Project highlights the lack of affordable entertainment for young people. Young people congregate in local malls for entertainment, and security staff target young people, even if they are in the mall to shop. The submission suggests that although the nature of group dynamics occasionally leads to problems, this stems from boredom and frustration and could be overcome if groups of young people were provided with alternative recreation and entertainment options (Submission 49).

As this submission demonstrates, concern has been expressed to the Committee that young people experience a considerable level of harassment from security personnel when they meet and gather in groups in public places such as shopping centres. The Committee believes that this type of harassment can result in feelings of resentment and build a hostility to authority figures in young people. While any anti-social behaviour should not be

condoned, it should be recognised that young people have the same rights to access and use public places as any other group in the community.

### 6.1.2 Youth Facilities and Projects

The need for social outlets for young people, such as shop front youth centres with youth 'ownership', is highlighted in a submission to the Committee from the Director of the National Children's and Youth Law Centre. A democratic approach to rules in youth centres is also supported (Submission 26).

The need for youth facilities that meet the needs of young people was raised in evidence to the Committee. One young person informed the Committee that after a local youth centre closes in the early evening, a large group of young people gather outside because there are no other recreational alternatives. While it was previously possible to play basketball at one local high school, this option is no longer available due to the belief of the local police and school principal that this attracts young people to crime. It was suggested, however, that it is the lack of recreational options that can lead to crime:

*If kids are able to go and play basketball, they have something to do. Now they cannot play basketball, so what else is there for them to do? (Ulrich Evidence, 28.07.94).*

Members of Western Sydney Committee of the Inter-departmental Committee on Youth Affairs recommended that public places be designed to cater for passive recreation, which may include simply "hanging out" with friends, and that schools and sporting facilities be accessible after-hours. While the Committee believes that recreation options should be expanded, it also recognises that security and safety must be considered. The Committee is of the opinion that after-school programs could be expanded to include the 12 to 15 years age group and assist them in developing skills relevant to organising their own after school recreation, with appropriate support, on school grounds. The Western Sydney Committee of the Inter-departmental Committee on Youth Affairs also stressed that services, youth organisations and recreational activities need to be located where young people are, including isolated suburbs. The importance of considering the needs of young people in the planning and development of new housing estates was stressed by the Youth Action and Policy Association's (YAPA) Western Sydney Project, as these developments often attract second home buyers with older children (Submission 53). The Committee supports these strategies and believes that state planning provisions should be reviewed and guidelines developed to ensure the needs of young people are considered in planning and development decisions including public and private housing estates. The Committee believes the implementation of this key recommendation would contribute to the safety and enjoyment of the entire community.

Innovative strategies that provide recreational options and contribute to crime prevention include the Graffiti Alert Project on the Gold Coast which involves establishing contact with graffiti crews and providing legal venues for graffiti artists (Wilson *et al*, 1994). Marrickville also has a Local Graffiti Arts Strategy (Newman Evidence, 01.11.93).

Youth Service projects in Western Sydney include Residents in Safer Environment (R.I.S.E.) and Positive Directions which have implemented study assistance projects, and Youth Out West League (YOWL), which involved rugby league games between young offenders,

unemployed youth, youth workers and police to break down barriers and build self-esteem. The Hills District Youth Service offers the Vibes Radio Program; a mobile youth centre in a double decker bus; an aerobics program; Mandarin and Chinese culture classes; a cross cultural exchange program; a youth newspaper; street outreach work; music and dance workshops; employment development projects; and effective parenting seminars. Fusion, a youth and community work organisation, operates the Axolotl Cafe and Nightspot in Penrith. A range of community and government agencies are involved in the operation of the Youth Outreach Bus in the Blacktown Local Government Area which provides information, support, referral and direct delivery of health and welfare services (Submission 53).

The Committee met with a group of young offenders at Cobham Juvenile Justice Centre who indicated that it was important that young people are made aware of the range of facilities and recreational options available to them. The Committee believes that local campaigns should be developed to ensure that this information is disseminated. Young people should have access to areas that offer recreational opportunities, and be empowered to participate in the planning and operation of youth programs.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 29**

**That the Minister for Planning review state planning provisions to develop guidelines which ensure the needs of young people are considered in:**

- **public places, parks and recreation areas;**
- **the planning and development of new housing estates;**
- **the development of commercial premises involving public access;**

**to contribute to the safety and enjoyment of the entire community.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 30**

**That the Minister for Education encourage principals and School Councils to ensure that school sporting and recreation facilities are available to young people after hours.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 31**

**That the Minister for Local Government, in consultation with the executives of the Local Government Association and Shires Association, encourage local government agencies to ensure that sporting and recreation facilities are accessible for extended hours.**

## RECOMMENDATION 32

**That the Minister for Local Government, in consultation with the executives of the Local Government Association and Shires Association, encourage local government agencies to consult with youth service providers and allocate appropriate resources to developing campaigns informing young people of the range of youth facilities and recreational options available to them.**

### 6.1.3 Hurstville Youth and Town Centre Project

During the course of the Inquiry, the Committee met with a group of people involved in the Hurstville Youth and Town Centre Project.

The Committee heard that the impetus for the project was the large numbers of young people congregating in the main road and shopping complex, resulting in a number of violent incidents, problems of graffiti, and verbal altercations with security staff.

Westfield provided a grant to the Council to employ a consultant to work with a Steering Committee comprising representatives of the police, Council, youth service providers, young people, Westfield management and retailers, to examine the conflicting needs of users of the town centre.

A final report was submitted to the Council, which then made a number of recommendations and resolved to investigate options for a multi-purpose youth facility.

The project has aimed to ensure young people are committed to the project by a process of active consultation:

*[The multi-purpose youth facility] has been conceived of in such a way that young people will have a sense of ownership of that space ... there is a genuine possibility for young people to have an on-going part in the management of that space (Dwyer Briefing, 24.02.94).*

It is envisaged the multi-purpose youth facility could include indoor basketball, music, pool tables, a recording studio, cheap coffee, and TV and video facilities. A fund-raising strategy is to be devised to encourage community and corporate sponsorship.

A Hurstville Town Centre Community Committee has also been created, to examine a range of issues and community needs, including crime prevention strategies, urban design issues, and long-term planning. The position of Youth and Town Centre Co-ordinator has also been established.

The Committee strongly endorses the approach taken by the Hurstville community. The Committee believes that local government agencies should ensure that the needs of young people are considered in planning and development decisions; encourage retail shopping centre management to develop youth facilities on their premises; and encourage sponsorship in developing youth facilities.

### **RECOMMENDATION 33**

**That the Minister for Local Government, in consultation with the executives of the Local Government Association and Shires Association, encourage local government to:**

- **ensure that young people are actively consulted regarding planned youth facilities;**
- **seek sponsorship in developing youth facilities; and**
- **encourage retail shopping centre management to develop youth facilities on their premises.**

#### **6.1.4 Police Citizens Youth Clubs**

There are currently 54 Police Citizens Youth Clubs spread throughout the state, consisting of 22 metropolitan and 32 country facilities, and a camp. The clubs collectively offer over 100 different sporting activities and over 100 community based policing/crime prevention programs to over 60,000 members as well as other groups in the community.

While Police Citizens Youth Clubs have expanded their services beyond that of the traditional sporting and recreational activities, these services still play a key role in the organisation and are considered a valuable component to preventing youth crime.

The range of services now provided include:

- Educational programs - Road Safety, Crime Prevention Workshops, Homework tuition, Alternative Schools, Drug & Alcohol Prevention, Protective Behaviours;
- Truancy Reduction Programs with Department of School Education Staff;
- Young Offender Support - Community Service Order supervision, Juvenile Justice Centre visits, Community Aid Panels, Wagga Wagga Family Group Conference Scheme;
- Food Services, such as Breakfast Clubs;
- Family Support Services; and
- Services for the Unemployed - Career markets, work search assistance, support of Skillshare, Circuit Breaker, HELP and other training programs.

In addition, the range of recreational services provided include:

- Coaching clinics;
- Camps and outdoor adventure programs;
- Excursions;
- Vacation Activities;
- After school care;
- Rock concerts, discos and dance parties; and
- Music, dance, drama, arts and crafts (Madden, 1994:10)

#### **6.1.5 Koori-Matha Committee**

During the course of the inquiry, Committee members met with representatives of the Koori-Matha (Aboriginal-White) Committee in Wellington. This group of young people formed to work to provide recreational alternatives to spending time on the streets. The young people discussed problems of alcohol and drug abuse and poor relations with the police. They suggested that their experience has demonstrated that if activities are available for young people, they are willing participants (Briefing, 10.08.94).

The Committee believes that facilitating the involvement of young people in examining youth problems and finding solutions to these problems should be encouraged.

#### **6.1.6 Youth and the Law Project**

The Committee heard evidence relating to the Youth and the Law Project (YALP) which was auspiced by the Law Foundation of NSW. YALP has undertaken a range of projects, which has including work with the South Sydney Police Citizens Youth Club. A group of young people organised a regular basketball competition and a series of profit-making dance parties (Purcell and Robertson, 1994:6-7).

The Committee heard that the approach taken by YALP inverts the normal relationship between young people and adults, where adults make decisions, structure programs and then seek to involve young people in these programs:

*[YALP has] a process of allowing young people to make those decisions for themselves. It is one in which young people are trained to run workshops and forums where you gather together a variety of different types of young people (Smith Evidence, 28.07.94).*

In evidence to the Committee, the Director of the Law Foundation indicated that in attempting to work with various government and non-government agencies, YALP met with resistance to the philosophy of encouraging young people to participate and to develop their own leadership skills (Purcell Evidence, 28.07.94).

The Law Foundation is developing a kit to record the experiences and strategies of YALP which can be used in a school or community context (Purcell Evidence, 28.07.94).

The Committee believes that young people should be empowered to participate in the operation of youth programs in meaningful ways.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 34**

**That NSW Government agencies funding youth programs encourage the participation of young people in the planning and operation of these programs.**

##### **6.1.7 Access to Licensed Premises**

The Committee heard that hotels and registered clubs have the potential to provide a range of youth entertainment and activities. The Committee also heard that events for young people tend to be arranged in town halls or places which are considered unfashionable, and which may offer inadequate facilities. Members were told that young people would be more likely to attend events in areas set aside for them in licensed premises (D'Astoli Evidence, 10.02.94).

Minors are not permitted in restricted areas in hotels, in which approved amusement devices such as video poker machines are located, but are permitted in authorised areas in the immediate presence of a responsible adult, and in bottle-shops and dining areas. The Registered Clubs Act provides for unrestricted areas in clubs which do not have poker machines but in which alcohol can be served and young people allowed with adult supervision.

However, the Committee heard that registered clubs rarely use these areas for under-age events. The provision of entertainment such as live bands is expensive, and alcohol is generally sold to recoup costs. The difficulties in policing the serving of alcohol to younger people mean that young people are usually not admitted to such events. Smaller clubs that may not be able to close off areas are also unable to provide access to young people. Clubs can also apply for Community Function Permits under section 23(1)(b) of the Registered Clubs Act (Kerr Evidence, 16.09.94).

In regard to hotels, S.112 (1)(b) of the Liquor Act provides that licensees may apply to the Liquor Administration Board for minors to use part of the hotel, under adult supervision, for under-age events. The Board may impose conditions when approving such applications. The Committee heard that, even if hotels have an area suitable for an alcohol-free event which can be closed off from the rest of the hotel, conditions imposed by the Board would prohibit the serving of alcohol in all areas of the hotel (D'Astoli Evidence, 10.02.94).

The Youth Advisory Council recommended that the provision of alcohol-free entertainment for young people at hotels be facilitated by removing restrictive conditions, and that guidelines be developed for alcohol-free events. (Submission 45). The Committee supports reform in this area.

The membership of registered clubs was also raised in evidence to the Committee. There are 64 RSL Youth Clubs in NSW. In addition, Section 30(2)(e) of the Registered Clubs Act allows young people to be junior members of clubs established for primarily athletic purposes, or if the club is a golf club or bowling club. However, the Committee heard for non-sporting clubs, such as RSLs, which also provide substantial sporting facilities, the Registered Clubs Act only allows young people to join through a parent. The Registered Clubs Association approached the previous government to amend the legislation to alter this restriction (Kerr Evidence, 16.09.94). The Association has recommended that Section 30(2)(e) be amended to allow junior membership of all registered clubs, provided that the juniors' membership relates to membership for the purpose of participating in a sport conducted by the club. The Committee believes that there are also potential benefits to be gained by allowing junior membership of clubs to young people who may not be participating in sporting activities offered by the clubs. Clubs are often the hub of social activity in the community. Providing that young people can be kept from the areas of the club which serve alcohol or contain gaming machines, the Committee believes that allowing social membership would provide a means of improving the integration of young people in the communities.

A discussion paper, *Minors and the Liquor Laws*, was released in 1994, describing current provisions and canvassing public comment. Issues canvassed include the adequacy of existing laws relating to minors in licensed premises and clubs, and junior membership of clubs (Chief Secretary's Department, 1994:2). The Minister for Gaming and Racing will be considering submissions made on these issues.

The Registered Clubs Association also requested that restricted areas be defined in terms of "physical separation" from the rest of the clubhouse such that the physical separation may consist of such things as a screen, a row of pot-plants or a roped off area, to enable smaller clubs to allow access for junior members and encourage their integration.

The Committee believes that facilitating the availability of club membership to young people, and their access to club premises, would offer increased opportunities for recreation and integration in the community.

The Committee heard that the Southern Metropolitan Region of the Registered Clubs Association of New South Wales has discussed a proposal for clubs to assist in youth education and participate in community activities (Submission 2). The Committee also heard that the Registered Clubs Association would welcome contact with youth workers to develop anti-violence programs:

*I think the extension into youth violence is a logical extension which the clubs and some of my committees would only be too willing to take up if the offer was made (Kerr Evidence, 16.09.94).*

The Committee supports this co-operative approach.



### RECOMMENDATION 35

That the Minister for Gaming and Racing ensure that hotels be permitted to hold alcohol-free events in closed-off areas while allowing alcohol to be served in other areas.

### RECOMMENDATION 36

That the Minister for Gaming and Racing amend the Registered Clubs Act to allow young people to join non-sporting clubs as junior members.

### RECOMMENDATION 37

That the Minister for Gaming and Racing ensure that restricted areas can be defined in terms of "physical separation" from the rest of the clubhouse to enable smaller clubs to allow access for junior members and encourage their integration.

## 6.2 SPORT

Witnesses were supportive of the positive benefits of sport played for fun and fitness, and in building team spirit:

*we do need to be promoting the fun, healthy side to [sport] and cracking down on the unnecessary use of force and violence. We need to have some perspective (Jeffcoat Evidence, 10.02.94).*

Participation in sporting activities has been associated with a reduction in assaults committed by Aboriginal youth. Methodological limitations make it difficult to statistically correlate levels of delinquency and sporting activities. However, interview evidence and a comparison of crime in towns with adequate sporting facilities and crime in more isolated reserves support the contention of sport reducing delinquency (Tatz, 1994:41-3). This contention is also supported by low arrest rates during sporting carnivals with large attendances (Tatz, 1994:38). Tatz suggests that sport in Aboriginal communities:

- *provides, however temporarily, some purpose and meaning in life;*
- *enhances (diminishing) social cohesion and togetherness;*
- *emphasises ritual and attracts loyalties;*
- *demonstrates Aboriginal organisational skills;*
- *enables a few moments of total empowerment and sovereignty;*
- *acts, on occasion, to offset alcohol abuse;*
- *occupies time in the absence of real employment;*
- *helps overcome, however temporarily, chronic ill health;*
- *reduces serious internal violence and juvenile delinquency; and*
- *provides an avenue for successful competition against mainstream society (Tatz, 1994:25).*

A number of witnesses contended, however, that sport is another factor which legitimises aggression and violence in society. Representatives of the Young Women's Electoral Lobby, in evidence to the Committee, were critical of social norms condoning violence in the name of sport, particularly codes of football, as this "national pastime" involves "chasing, tackling and slamming other men into the ground" (Jeffcoat Evidence, 10.02.94).

It was suggested that aggression on the sports field is often seen as an integral part of the sport:

*In sport it's OK to be violent ... it's sometimes ... idolised to be violent .... that whole contradiction is a big problem, it sends confusing messages to people (Marsden, 01.11.93).*

The fact that sport is often advertised and promoted in militaristic metaphors of "battles" and "clashes" further reinforces the aggressive elements. The Committee believes that tighter controls are necessary to restrict these elements.

A recent study of violence in the home and on the sports field revealed that while all groups of children responded to a domestic violence scene on television as being violent and condemned the perpetrator, there were different responses to sporting violence. Younger children took the violence more seriously, while older males saw it as non-violent or even funny (Tulloch 1993:7).

The recent involvement of a number of rugby league players in violent incidents off the sporting field also brings into question their value as role models for young people.

It was suggested that violent incidents in top grade sport are paralleled by violence in youth sport:

*[in] a Commonwealth Bank Cup grand final last year, a schoolboys' football competition, ... there was a huge brawl. They were obviously influenced by adult competitions (D'Astoli Evidence, 10.02.94).*

One school principal suggested that the increasing professionalisation of sport is an example of the sort of pressures being placed on young people:

*you must win; you must be dominant, and if needs be, use any means to make sure you get there (James Evidence, 22.02.94).*

The Committee believes that sporting programs for young people should encourage the positive aspects of health and team-building, with an increased emphasis on non-competitive sport in schools. The Committee also feels that aggression on the sporting field must be condemned and appropriately dealt with, and supports the establishment and promotion of a code of ethics to apply to the conduct of contact sports.

It was suggested that sports in which violence is fundamental, such as boxing, provide particular challenges. A minority report of the National Committee of Violence endorsed the 1983 statement on boxing of the World Medical Association recommending that boxing be banned. The minority report suggests that a review of medical literature since 1984 reveals

a continuing medical concern and mounting evidence about serious injuries to boxers, particularly to the brain. The psychiatric consequences of brain injury to boxers include paranoid illnesses (including psychosis), morbid jealousy and rage reaction - all conditions associated with serious violence (National Committee on Violence, 1990:250).

The Committee was informed that the National Health and Medical Research Council recently recommended the banning of professional boxing, that kick-boxing should be actively discouraged and that strict rules should govern amateur boxing. The publicity surrounding major professional title fights was said to entice children into amateur boxing and promote a culture of violence in Australian male society. These recommendations were supported by the Young Women's Electoral Lobby (Jeffcoat Evidence, 10.02.94).

The Committee heard evidence regarding the medical conditions associated with boxing, such as chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), the chronic brain damage characterised by professional boxers becoming demented and unstable on their feet. A comparison of a large group of sportsmen matched for their age, sex and racial background found that twelve jockeys suffered from this condition, five soccer players, two rugby players, two professional wrestlers, one parachutist, and 294 boxers (Stening Evidence, 08.08.95). The Committee was informed that

*Not every boxer develops this problem, but when boxers do develop this problem it is absolutely devastating and ruins their lives* (Stening Evidence, 08.08.95).

The Committee heard an alternative view from another medical practitioner who suggested that opponents of professional and amateur boxing often base their conclusions on studies with a small sample size. Dr Lewis suggested the results of a recent study conducted by John Hopkins University of 500 amateur boxers over a four-year period were "very favourable" towards amateur boxing (Lewis Evidence, 08.08.95). A review of ten studies, with a total of 289 amateur boxers, found "minimal impact" on neuropsychological function (Butler, 1994:189)

Dr Stening, in commenting on the National Health and Medical Research Council Inquiry and recommendations, suggested that professional boxing has a different injury profile and that the number of serious injuries is not as high in amateur boxing. However, he contended that there is no accurate body of data that would enable clear distinctions between professional and amateur boxing to be drawn:

*The common factor to both sports is that [the] aim is to damage an opponent's brain* (Stening Evidence, 08.08.95).

It was, however, suggested to the Committee that the safety measures that have been introduced in the sport have significantly reduced the risk of harm:

*Boxing, especially amateur boxing, is probably one of the safest sports anyone can take part in .... you could probably count on one hand the number of serious injuries we have seen* (Lewis Evidence, 08.08.95).

People with pre-existing medical conditions are precluded from registering as boxers, and all beginners must complete fitness training with a registered trainer. Equipment includes head protectors, padded gloves and cup protectors. Competitors are matched for size and weight, and sparring is supervised. Further medical and psychological examinations are required regularly.

If a person is knocked out or concussed, they are automatically banned from participating in both amateur and professional boxing for a period of at least one month, and must then get a medical clearance. If the same thing happens in their next fight, they are automatically banned for three months (Lewis Evidence, 08.08.95).

It has also been suggested that injuries from sports other than boxing should be of greater concern. It has been estimated that AFL causes 246,000 injuries a year; soccer, 146,000; cricket, 89,600; rugby league, 80,000; rugby union, 52,300; and netball, 37,500. Approximately 25% of rugby league and union injuries are to the players' heads (Koch, 1994).

In responding to the assertion that boxing contributes to a culture of violence in society, Dr Lewis contended that the sport actually reduces the level of violence:

*boxing is a sport of discipline ... which teaches you respect for people, for your opponents. It is a sport that puts values back into youth ... [such as] respect for your elders and peers. I have seen ... street toughs come into a gymnasium, be humbled, and leave the gymnasium far better people* (Lewis Evidence, 08.08.95).

Dr Lewis suggested that

*the sport is not about violence, it is about controlled aggression* (Lewis Evidence, 08.08.95).

The Committee acknowledges the proven health risks involved with boxing, and believes that a strategy to phase out amateur and professional boxing should be developed at the federal level. Some members of the Committee expressed reservations regarding this approach and believe that boxing has some merit as a competitive sport.

The Committee is also concerned about kick-boxing, but believes an inquiry into the health risks associated with this sport should be undertaken before an appropriate policy response can be considered.

### **RECOMMENDATION 38**

**That the Attorney General urge the Standing Committee of Attorneys General to request the federal government to pressure media organisations to develop tighter controls to reduce violence in the advertising and promotion of sport in the electronic media.**

### **RECOMMENDATION 39**

**That the Minister for Education, and Minister for Sport and Recreation ensure**

- **that sporting programs offered to young people encourage the positive aspects of health and team-building;**
- **increased emphasis is placed on non-competitive sport in schools; and**
- **the establishment of a code of ethics to apply to the conduct of contact sports.**

### **RECOMMENDATION 40**

**That the Minister for Health, in liaison with his federal counterparts, consider a strategy to phase out amateur and professional boxing.**

### **RECOMMENDATION 41**

**That the Minister for Health conduct an Inquiry into the health aspects of kick-boxing.**

## **6.3 ALCOHOL, DRUGS AND VIOLENCE**

The Committee recognises that some young people view the use of alcohol as a valid recreational and leisure option. This is true for young people under the legal drinking age, as well as young adults.

While the abuse of alcohol by teenagers is of concern to the Committee, problems associated with alcohol consumption are by no means confined to this age group. Alcohol abuse by young adults is also a serious matter, and the Committee believes that the abuse of alcohol, particularly by young men in the 18-24 year age group, may significantly impact on the disproportionate incidence of violence perpetrated by this group.

In an analysis of a random sample of 855 police incident reports in NSW from 1982 and 1986-87, 40% of serious and common assaults were found to be alcohol-related. The period of the day showing the highest number of reports was consistent with hotel and club closing times (Robb, 1988:10).

Section 6.3.1 deals with issues surrounding the recreational use of alcohol, including violence in and around licensed premises, serving practices and trading hours. Section 6.3.2 examines the abuse of alcohol and drugs, its links with violence, and strategies for harm minimisation.

### 6.3.1 Licensed Premises, Alcohol and Violence

The NSW Police Service conducted research into the impact of alcohol through an incident survey conducted over four weeks in six metropolitan patrols in 1991. The main findings were:

- 77% of public order incidents (assaults, offensive behaviour, offensive language) were alcohol-related, including 73% of assaults;
- 60% of the alcohol related incidents occurred in or near licensed premises;
- 52% of alcohol related offences occurred on Friday and Saturday;
- 70% of alcohol related offences occurred between 10 pm and 6 am;
- 91% of all incidents between 10 pm and 2 am were alcohol related;
- 40% of domestic violence incidents were alcohol-related (Ireland and Thommeny, 1993).

An analysis of assault and break and enter incidents in the Sydney municipality of Waverley found that a large proportion of assaults occurred in the vicinity of clubs, hotels and restaurants (Devery, 1992:13).

#### ■ Trading Hours

The Committee heard from a police witness at Dubbo that the introduction of 24 hour operating licences for hotels had contributed to a decrease in street violence because closing times were effectively staggered and fewer people were on the street together at any one time. However, the officer reported that domestic violence reports in the early hours of the morning (5.00 to 6.00 a.m.) were increasing (Fitzsimmons Evidence, 11.08.94). The Committee is aware that attention has been drawn to problems of violence associated with extended trading hours in a number of communities:

- A Byron Bay Police spokesperson called for 6 pm hotel closures following violence and riots in the area on New Year's Eve 1993 (Olsen and de Vine, 1994).
- The Wollongong Police Patrol Commander has called for a midnight curfew on alcohol sales to reduce street violence in response to traders calling for more police patrols in the early morning hours (Hannan, 1995). Some hotels had been trading to 5 a.m. and two men were seriously assaulted in the same week. Trading hours at one hotel were subsequently restricted to 2 a.m. by the Liquor Administration Board (Cunningham, 1995).
- The Police Commander for Brewarrina has applied to the NSW Licensing Court to ban takeaway liquor sales after 6 p.m; to make local publicans provide free transport home for patrons on certain nights; and to provide security patrols around the hotels and clubs. A number of other conditions

have already been imposed by the court. When the town's hotels were closed for two weeks in 1994, the arrest rate was virtually nil (Wockner, 1995).

- A police detective formerly stationed at Kings Cross informed the Police Royal Commission that with the prevalence of 24-hour liquor licensing, most assaults were linked to alcohol consumption rather than drugs. With little money and no public transport options, the solution is to "roll people" to get the cab fare home (Owens, 1995).
- Hoteliers in Manly have recently agreed to forego 24 hour operations and close at 3.00 a.m. in an attempt to help reduce crime (Gee, 1994).

The Committee believes that increasing the availability of alcohol also increases the problems associated with its use and abuse.

#### ■ Alcohol-free Zones

The Local Government (Street Drinking) Amendment Act 1990 aimed to curtail anti-social behaviour by drinkers on roads and footpaths by enabling the declaration of alcohol-free zones allowing the confiscation of alcohol. The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research evaluated the impact of the legislation in Walgett. An analysis of trends in the recorded incidence of assault, malicious damage to property and offensive behaviour before and after the introduction of a "dry zone" revealed no discernible effects of the policy (Burns, 1992:19). However, many councils are introducing alcohol-free zones in tourist and beach areas in an attempt to reduce crime and violence.

#### ■ Serving and Management Practices

The Victorian Community Council Against Violence, as part of their Inquiry into Violence in and Around Licensed premises, identified a number of management practices which it considered represented "good" and "bad" practice - strategies that could either reduce or prevent violence or increase the possibility of violence occurring:

##### Good practice:

- Sensible admission and "door" practices;
- Supervision of patron numbers;
- Quality entertainment;
- Variety of places/activities;
- Cleanliness, excellent services;

- Trained, accountable security staff;
- Responsible alcohol policies;
- Co-operation and liaison with local police;
- Management presence.

**Bad practice:**

- Antagonistic "door" practices;
- Overcrowding;
- Poor entertainment/violent videos;
- Poorly planned interior design;
- Poor standards of cleanliness and service;
- Untrained, unaccountable security staff;
- Alcohol gimmicks, serving drunken patrons;
- Antagonism to/poor relationship with police;
- Absentee management (Victorian Community Council Against Violence, 1990:47).

The Committee supports these principles.

In New South Wales, the then Chief Secretary targeted the promotion of binge drinking in 1994, suggesting it leads to a range of social problems including domestic violence (Chief Secretary, 1994c:1). Promotions which encourage irresponsible drinking habits and which may result in a rapid increase in intoxication can bring into question the suitability of a person to hold a licence under the Liquor Act or a certificate of registration under the Registered Clubs Act. Hotels and clubs promoting binge drinking can also face monetary penalties (Chief Secretary, 1994c:1).

In 1994, the consultative body known as the Liquor Industry Ministerial Advisory Council (LIMAC) developed a voluntary Code of Practice for the Responsible Promotion of Liquor Products, outlining acceptable and unacceptable practice, which was similar to the successful Victorian Liquor Licensing Commission model (Chief Secretary, 1994c:3). LIMAC was provided with a \$50,000 grant to implement a Strategic Plan on Alcohol and Anti-Social Behaviour which had been developed by members of the state's ten peak liquor industry associations in 1993 (Chief Secretary, 1994b). The Plan contained strategies dealing with responsible serving, staff training, house policies and responsible liquor promotions (LIMAC Working Party, 1993). Proposals for implementation on LIMAC's



agenda included greater liaison with police, active promotion of industry codes of practice and a wide distribution of the Strategic Plan.

A revised Strategic Plan was launched in December 1994 (LIMAC Working Party, 1994). A poster campaign encouraging responsible serving practices was also launched, with the poster distributed to all 10,000 licensees in NSW, and all new entrants to the industry. A video funded by the liquor industry as a training aid is also available. An evaluation of the campaign and the adoption of measures in the Strategic Plan was planned for the middle of 1995. LIMAC has now been replaced by the Liquor Industry Consultative Council. The Committee believes that the Minister for Gaming and Racing should ensure the continuation of co-ordinated campaigns to promote practices which reduce and prevent violence from occurring in and around licensed premises.

An inter-departmental Committee, known as the Alcohol and Violence Task Force was established in 1994 to develop a range of strategies. The Committee understands the Minister for Gaming and Racing will consider the Taskforce's recommendations.

The National Committee on Violence (1990:229) recommended that guidelines for recruitment, training and conduct of bouncers be an integral part of server intervention programs. All personnel performing duty as doormen or bouncers in New South Wales must hold a Class 1 Security Licence issued by the Police Service. In order to apply for such a licence, an applicant must have completed an accredited training course. The Committee believes that staff performing this role should have sufficiently developed interpersonal skills to deal with difficult or aggressive clientele, and be trained in non-violent restraint and conflict resolution.

At Kings Cross, the introduction of numbered badges for doormen was introduced as part of the Eastside Sydney Project discussed in the following section. The move has dramatically decreased the number of assaults attributed to doormen (Thompson, 1995).

The Committee recognises that alcohol is a key factor contributing to violent behaviour and is concerned to limit the ill effects of alcohol on our society by examining issues relating to availability. The Committee believes that licensees must accept responsibility for modifying the ways liquor outlets manage the sale and serving of alcohol, and the design of their premises, to minimise the likelihood of violence occurring. The Committee therefore recommends, as a key recommendation, that the Liquor Act be reviewed to ensure it clearly indicates these responsibilities by linking the issue and renewal of licences to responsible management practices. This review could also examine the related issues of hours of trading and numbers of licensed outlets in our communities.

LIMAC also considered whether licensing magistrates can impose a condition that licensees who fail to meet appropriate standards attend an appropriate liquor training course dealing with responsible practices (Chief Secretary, 1994b:1). While no fixed policy on such disciplinary actions exists at present, licensing magistrates are empowered to impose conditions on licensees under the Liquor Act. The review of the Liquor Act could also ensure that recalcitrant licensees can be compelled to attend appropriate courses.

#### RECOMMENDATION 42

That the Minister for Gaming and Racing review the Liquor Act to ensure it clearly indicates the responsibilities of licensees to limit the likelihood of violence on their premises by measures including:

- ensuring appropriate hotel management and design practices affecting alcohol consumption and the safety of patrons are a condition of licence renewal;
- requiring all licence applicants to undertake a course on strategies to minimise such violence; and
- ensuring the Licensing Court can compel attendance at training courses for licensees who fail to meet these standards.

#### RECOMMENDATION 43

That the Minister for Police, together with the liquor industry and relevant trade unions, review the training pre-requisites for the issue of Class 1 Security Licences to ensure that doormen of licensed premises have appropriate training in interpersonal skills, non-violent restraint and conflict resolution.

#### ■ Co-operative Approaches to Violence Prevention

A number of initiatives in New South Wales and other states involve a comprehensive approach to the licensed premises in areas identified as particular crime trouble spots.

The West End Forum Project was established by the Melbourne City Council in June 1990 in response to the problems experienced in the area, including vandalism and patron behaviour. A large number of licensed premises are concentrated in the King Street area of Melbourne. In its report, *Violence in and Around Licensed Premises*, the Victorian Community Council Against Violence (1992:85) noted

*[the area's] popularity, coupled with the particular features of its late night environment, generates the potential for considerable aggravation and conflict.*

Included in the Forum were representatives from the West End community, the Centre Against Sexual Assault, the nightclub industry, the Australian Hotels Association, Victorian Police, the Liquor Trades and Allied Industries Union and the Victorian Community Council Against Violence.

The aims of the project were to:

- work towards the West End becoming a safe recreational area for a wide cross section of the people of Melbourne;

- increase public awareness of the nature and causes of criminal behaviour and nominate priority preventive strategies;
- reduce or eliminate violence in and around the West End; and
- improve inter-agency cooperation and coordination in providing services to the area (Melbourne City Council, 1991:vi).

A full time Project Officer was appointed and funded through the Good Neighbourhood Program of the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services.

Issues and problems were identified and Task Groups established to develop specific goals. The Task Groups addressed issues relating to town planning and urban design; traffic and by laws; venue management and cultural attitudes; policing; and transport (Melbourne City Council, 1991:vii).

A number of initiatives were introduced including the development of a Code of Practice for West End nightspots, a Responsible Serving of Alcohol Training program, the appointment of a Community Police Liaison Officer, police foot patrols on Thursday, Friday and Saturday Nights, and the establishment of the West End Community Police Committee and the West End Community Association. The final report of the project concluded that violence has decreased in the West End area (Melbourne City Council, 1991:ix).

**Partnership for Personal Safety: Preventing Violent Crime in and around Licensed Premises** is a project of the South Australian Crime Prevention Strategy. The project involved two pilot projects, the first in one hotel which resulted in a total of 24 changes to work practices and physical features of the premises, with changed attitudes of patrons and staff. The second pilot involved a number of licensed premises in the Hindley Street area. A safety audit was undertaken, with ten clubs then agreeing to operate a jointly agreed standard of management practice and introduce a customer service pledge. The strategies which licensees and managers tried and found useful have been written into a training manual (Fisher, 1993).

**The Surfers Paradise Safety Action Project** began in 1993 under the auspices of the Gold Coast Council and a Community Steering Committee. The project involved three levels of intervention: community mobilisation through the creation of a community forum, task groups, and an environmental safety audit; the development of a Code of Conduct by nightclub owners, governing such practices as discount pricing and the behaviour of bouncers; and preventive policing of licensed premises using visible checks and undercover operations. Analysis of police and security data suggests a marked reduction in violence and aggressive behaviour has been achieved (Homel *et al*, 1994).

**The Eastside Sydney Project** was established as a collaborative project co-ordinated by St. Vincent's Hospital's Alcohol and Drug Service, Eastern Sydney Area Health Service Health Promotion Unit, South Sydney City Council and the N.S.W. Police Service. The Project sought active support and advice from the local community by forming a Community Advisory Committee.

The strategies finally adopted by the Eastside Sydney Project and the Committee were:

- A Safety Audit of the Kings Cross and Darlinghurst areas;
- Initiation of a training program in the Responsible Serving of Alcohol;
- Visible identification for crowd controllers, doormen or 'bouncers'; and
- A print campaign to heighten community awareness and encourage patrons of local establishments to drink in moderation (Lander, 1995:4).

■ **Police Response**

The police approach to licensed premises is also relevant to addressing problems of violence. The issue of alcohol and drug related crime is one of the NSW Police Service's six key result areas for the period 1993-1996 to achieve the corporate vision of "the safest streets in Australia by the end of the decade" (NSW Police Service, 1993:18).

A study undertaken in England by Jeffs and Saunders (1983, cited in Burns and Coumarelos, 1993:2) examined the impact of a policing strategy undertaken in Torquay designed to enhance the enforcement of licensing legislation. It found a significant drop in assault, malicious damage to property and offensive conduct after police officers began an enforcement regime involving regular but unpredictable visits to licensed premises to check for breaches of licensing laws.

The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has recently attempted to replicate this study by a patrolling strategy designed to enforce prohibitions on the serving of alcohol to intoxicated persons and to persons younger than 18 years of age in a number of licensed premises in police patrols in the Sydney metropolitan area. Trends in the number of offensive behaviour, assault and malicious damage offences in these areas and a number of control patrols were examined before, during and after the intervention.

The hypothesis that the enforcement strategy would lead to a decrease in alcohol-related offences was not supported by the findings. The total number of recorded offences and the total number of arrests were higher in the experimental patrols than in the control patrols. The report of the findings noted that the nature of the intervention itself may have increased the opportunities for observing offences and making arrests (Burns and Coumarelos, 1993:12).

The authors of the study conclude that

*the use of proactive policing strategies that target alcohol consumption may not always constitute the optimal use of police resources in NSW* (Burns and Coumarelos, 1993:13).

The approach of the NSW Police Service focuses on the broader concept of alcohol-related crime, rather than the narrower concept of regulating licensed premises, with equal attention paid to the general neighbourhood in serious crime trouble spots (Ireland, 1993:7).

In conjunction with the Department of Health and the then Chief Secretary's department, the NSW Police Service developed the "Alcohol Crime Connection" video. Each police district has held an alcohol related crime workshop for all patrol commanders in the district, and each patrol is to develop an Alcohol Related Violence and Crime Strategic Plan (Ireland, 1993:8).

The Police Service has also established Police Liquor Industry Consultative Committees in areas where alcohol related crime, violence or anti-social behaviour are a problem (Ireland, 1993:9).

### **6.3.2 Abuse of Drugs and Alcohol and Harm Minimisation**

The previous section revealed that alcohol use and licensed premises are associated with a considerable proportion of assaults. This section discusses evidence presented to the Committee and other data on the specific effects of alcohol and other drugs on aggressive behaviour, and examines strategies to reduce alcohol and drug abuse.

The Committee heard that combinations of drugs such as alcohol and rohypnol can produce violent behaviour (Keogh Evidence, 01.11.93). The majority of a group of young offenders the Committee met with at Cobham Juvenile Justice Centre indicated that they thought drugs and alcohol had contributed to their offending behaviour. One young violent offender informed the Committee that he had attempted to stab someone after taking a number of Serepax tablets, and had no recollection of the event.

Other witnesses suggested that the relationship between alcohol, drugs and violence is more complex than a direct causal link. One youth worker suggested that while alcohol and drugs did not cause violence directly, the consumption of alcohol and drugs may mean that physical violence is more likely when groups of young people have disputes (Jablonka Evidence, 01.11.93). Another witness suggested the abuse of alcohol may be linked to other feelings of frustration which could be a precursor to violence (Seed Evidence, 10.02.94). One witness with considerable experience in working with violent young people suggested that she had noted no signs of drug use before violent outbursts (Wilson Evidence, 29.07.94).

A number of studies have attempted to identify the extent of alcohol abuse among young offenders. A NSW study found that alcohol had been the most commonly used drug by young offenders in secure care, and that over 70% had consumed alcohol on more than 40 occasions (Howard and Zilbert, 1990).

A South Australian survey of 197 young offenders suggested that 64% drink every weekend or more often, and 57% acknowledged they had been drinking with 37% claiming they had been drunk at the time of their last offence. Approximately 48% indicated that their drinking had resulted "in a fight ... destroyed property ... an accident ... injury, arrest or being punished at school" (Putnins and Harvey, 1992:754).

A psychiatrist informed the Committee that violent behaviour may be triggered by a reaction to drugs such as amphetamines or other stimulants, where some individuals may become extremely agitated and lose contact with reality (Wever Evidence, 26.04.94). The

National Committee on Violence, in reviewing available research evidence, also expressed concern regarding large doses of cocaine and crack; PCP (phencyclidine), which is not commonly used in Australia; and the neurological impairment resulting from sniffing volatile substances which may lead to violent behaviour (National Committee on Violence, 1990:91-4)

The Committee was also informed that steroids, taken in an attempt to increase body mass, can result in aggressive behaviour and that evidence of this has been seen in young people (Wever Evidence, 26.04.94). Witnesses appearing before the Senate Standing Committee on the Environment, Recreation and the Arts during that Committee's Drugs in Sport Inquiry spoke of their "horrible black moods", and psychoses leading to aggression and paranoia which stemmed from steroid abuse. Witnesses also discussed feelings of invincibility, low thresholds of arousal to violence, and loss of self-control in fights (Senate Standing Committee, 1990:60). A doctor informed that Committee that the psychological effects of steroid abuse may be irreversible, with long-term effects on the brain (Senate Standing Committee, 1990:61). The Committee expressed concern over the damage to personal relationships, family breakdown, and financial loss that can result from steroid abuse (Senate Standing Committee, 1990:64). Criminal assault and violence at social venues such as night-clubs was also highlighted, with a high incidence of steroid abuse by nightclub bouncers (Senate Standing Committee, 1990:364).

The Committee believes that this emerging issue is cause for considerable concern, and that appropriate steps should be taken to inform young people of the dangers of steroids. The Department of Health (1994) has released a pamphlet for distribution in gymnasiums, *Anabolic Steroids: Let's Get the Facts Right*, which contains information on side effects and harm minimisation, and also a brochure for general practitioners. A pilot clinic at St Vincent's hospital is also targeting steroids users, and the specialist advisory service for general practitioners has been enhanced by the availability of a professor of endocrinology.

The National Drug Strategy is preparing a paper on steroids which will be discussed at the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy.

The Committee is also concerned about the abuse of prescription drugs. A submission from the Youth Advisory Council urges that appropriate resources be allocated by the Department of Health to monitoring prescription practices to minimise the abuse of prescription drugs (Submission 45). The Committee supports this proposal.

The latest survey on drug use by secondary school students in NSW indicated that, despite some signs of a reduction in regular use of alcohol, binge drinking is still a serious problem, with 30% of females and 40% of males aged 16 or 17 saying they had consumed five or more drinks in a row at least once in the previous two weeks (Cooney *et al*, 1994:12). Alcohol use by the younger teenage group is also of concern to the Committee. In 1993, the NSW Drug and Alcohol Directorates surveyed 2406 upper primary school students. A total of 26% of students reported that they had ever drunk a whole glass of alcohol, and 2.8% drank alcohol weekly or more often. While a small decline in the proportion who had consumed a whole glass of alcohol was noted when compared to 1986 and 1989 surveys, no change in regular alcohol use was observed (Bauman *et al*, 1994:4-5).

A range of initiatives that address drug and alcohol abuse are outlined in this Committee's Youth Violence Issues paper, and include the introduction of the Proof of Age Card, the

---

NSW Youth Health Policy and Plan, the NSW Drug Strategy and the NSW Youth Alcohol Strategy. As restrictions on underage drinking in licensed premises have increased in recent years, it appears that the problem of underage drinking is shifting to parks, beaches and homes (Chief Secretary, 1994a).

A campaign to reduce binge drinking among teenagers, "Drink Drunk - the difference is U", was developed with the assistance of 15 teenage advisers as the major theme of Youth Week 1994. The campaign included alcohol-free "U Can Dance" dance parties and an education program (Minister for Health, 1994). A television commercial was also launched showing a drunk boy being sick on the girl he likes. A campaign focussing on HSC students was also conducted.

To evaluate the campaign, pre-campaign and post-campaign surveys of 400 young people aged from 15 to 18 years were conducted. The surveys found that 64% of respondents could correctly remember and describe the television commercial (Market Attitude Research Services, 1995:11). The number of young people responding that they had drunk alcohol within the last seven days decreased from 32% in the pre-campaign survey to 26% after the campaign (Market Attitude Research Services, 1995:24).

In the post-campaign survey, 49% of respondents linked alcohol consumption to becoming violent and abusive, and 40% linked alcohol to getting into a fight (Market Attitude Research Services, 1995:18).

Phase Two of the Drink, Drunk campaign will include a cinema advertising campaign and two new projects, focussing on alcohol and violence and drinking by Aboriginal young people (NSW Health Department, 1995).

The Committee urges the continuation of these initiatives, and believes that appropriate resources must be allocated to ensure the reduction of drug and alcohol abuse by young people.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that rather than young people buying the alcohol themselves, adults are buying it for them. The penalty for supplying liquor to, or obtaining liquor on behalf of, a person under 18 years is \$2,000.

A number of advertisements addressing alcohol and amphetamine abuse have also been produced as part of the Drug Offensive, and the Roads and Traffic Authority have continued to produce confrontational campaigns which address the tragedy that can be associated with drink-driving. The Committee supports this approach.

The Social Policy Directorate has identified a number of strategies to assist in the implementation of the recommendations of the Community Youth Support Taskforce on minimising violence and alcohol use in rural Aboriginal communities. Strategies include seminars at local and state level to inform and motivate key players in confronting the problem; a comprehensive, accredited training program for indigenous workers in the pilot areas; and the development of an Action Plan for the provision of information, networking, co-ordination of services, documenting and evaluating interventions, developing and implementing policy, and lobbying (Social Policy Directorate, 1994:23).

#### RECOMMENDATION 44

That the Minister for Health ensure that appropriate resources are allocated to

- prioritise the reduction of alcohol and drug abuse by young people as a primary objective;
- continue publicity campaigns on the dangers of steroid use to target young people; and
- monitor prescription practices to minimise the abuse of prescription drugs by young people.

#### 6.4 CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

- For many young people, leisure and recreation includes congregating in public places such as shopping centres. However, young people experience a considerable level of harassment when they meet and gather in groups in such places. This type of harassment can result in feelings of resentment and build a hostility to authority figures in young people. While any anti-social behaviour should not be condoned, it should be recognised that **young people have the same rights to access and use of public places as any other group in the community.**
- Local campaigns should be developed to ensure that young people are made aware of the range of facilities and **recreational options** available to them. Young people should have access to areas that offer recreational opportunities, and be empowered to participate in the planning and operation of youth programs. As a key recommendation, guidelines should be developed to ensure the needs of young people are considered in planning and development decisions to contribute to the safety and enjoyment of the entire community. Retail shopping centre management should be encouraged to develop youth facilities on their premises; and local government agencies should encourage sponsorship in developing youth facilities.
- The Committee is supportive of the positive benefits of **sport** played for fun and fitness. Participation in sporting activities has been associated with a reduction in assaults committed by Aboriginal youth. However, the Committee also recognises that some sport can legitimise aggression and violence in society. Sporting programs for young people should encourage the positive aspects of health and team-building, with an increased emphasis on non-competitive sport in schools. Aggression on the sporting field must be condemned and appropriately dealt with, and a code of ethics to apply to the conduct of contact sports needs to be established and promoted.
- The Committee acknowledges the proven health risks involved with **boxing**, and believes that a strategy to phase out amateur and professional boxing should be developed at the federal level. The Committee believes an inquiry into the health risks associated with kick-boxing should be undertaken before an appropriate policy response to this sport can be considered.



- The provision of **alcohol-free entertainment** for young people at hotels should be facilitated. Registered Clubs should be allowed to offer **club membership** to young people so as to offer increased opportunities for recreation and integration in the community.
- **Alcohol** is a primary factor linked to violent behaviour. The Committee believes that increasing the availability of alcohol increases the problems associated with its use and abuse. The Committee supports initiatives encouraging responsible serving practices and the non-violent management of conflict in licensed premises and, as a key recommendation, believes the Liquor Act should be reviewed to link the issue and renewal of licences to responsible management practices.
- Violent behaviour may also be triggered by a reaction to such **drugs** as amphetamines or other stimulants, and to steroid abuse. Appropriate resources must be allocated to ensure the reduction of drug and alcohol abuse by young people.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### MEDIA VIOLENCE

This chapter examines the relationship between violence in the media and youth violence. The Committee considered a range of research evidence covering a number of distinct but related issues, including the causal relationship between television coverage and crime rates, and the impact of television on the aggressive behaviour of children. This chapter reviews bodies of evidence supporting and rejecting these relationships. A number of other effects of television violence are also considered, including desensitisation to violence, the modelling of values, and copy-cat acts of violence. The Committee also examined strategies for addressing film, video and television violence. Action considered includes restricting access to violent films, videos and television; the adequacy of complaint mechanisms; the promotion of non-violence in the media; and the encouragement of responsible and critical viewing.

Violence in a number of other media are also considered, including video and computer games, and issues relating to game parlours; computer bulletin boards; virtual reality; and music.

#### 7.1 FILM AND TELEVISION VIOLENCE

While testimony to the Committee from teachers, academics, professionals and parents, overwhelmingly expressed concern about violence in the media and its negative effects on children, it is probably impossible to **prove** such effects. Human beings are complex creatures reflecting cultural and social influences, and it is difficult to isolate individual variables affecting behaviour.

Consequently, while there have been many studies into the effects of media violence, even those who believe most strongly such violence has negative effects, will not claim that their studies constitute proof. One of the experts, Professor Edward Donnerstein from the United States, speaking at the World Summit on Television and Children, stated it may not be possible to ever determine a direct causal link between the media and violent behaviour, although he believes very strongly that media violence is harmful (Donnerstein, 1995).

Given the difficulties in drawing definitive conclusions from such research, the studies considered by the Committee are briefly presented in the following sections as an overview of the current debates.

##### 7.1.1 International Crime Rates, Violent Offending and Television Viewing

The relationship between criminal behaviour and the number of television sets and television viewing has been the subject of considerable community and academic interest and concern. One question usually posed is whether there is a direct causal link between television viewing and violent behaviour, as revealed in crime rates.

■ **Evidence Supporting a Link**

Brandon S. Centerwall has examined the connection between exposure to television violence and homicide rates in South Africa, Canada and America (Centerwall, 1992:3060-3061). Eight years after television was introduced in South Africa in 1975, showing mostly Hollywood-produced material, the murder rate had risen dramatically in the white community. Centerwall uses this statistic, as well as increases in homicides in America and Canada to make a causal link between rising homicide rates and the introduction of television.

Centerwall (1992) has extensively reviewed studies supporting the contention that exposure to television violence in childhood may result in violent behaviour later in life. As supporting evidence, Centerwall quotes a twenty-two year longitudinal study in a semi-rural U.S. County by Huesmann and Eron (1986, cited in Centerwall, 1992:3060). The study found that the boys' television violence viewing at age eight predicted the seriousness of the crimes for which they were later convicted.

In a retrospective case-control study, Kruttschnitt *et al* (1986, cited in Centerwall, 1992:3060) compared 100 male felons imprisoned for violent crimes (including homicide, rape and assault), with 65 men without a history of violent offences, matching for age, race and area of residence at age 10 to 14 years. After controlling for school performance, exposure to parental violence and base-line level of criminality, it was found that the association between adult criminal violence and childhood exposure to television violence approached statistical significance.

Centerwall concludes that all Canadian and US studies of the effect of prolonged childhood exposure to television (two years or more) demonstrate a positive relationship between earlier exposure to television and later physical aggressiveness, although not all studies reach statistical significance. The critical period of exposure to television appears to be during pre-adolescent childhood, with later variations in exposure in adolescence and adulthood not exerting any additional effect. The aggression-enhancing effect of exposure to television appears to be chronic, extending into later adolescence and adulthood (Centerwall, 1992:3060). Murray, in a review of long-term studies, also found they show that children who are high-violence viewers are significantly more likely to be aggressive and antisocial when they reach adulthood (Murray, 1988:16).

This was also supported in evidence to the Committee:

*Children do not seem to grow out of aggressive behaviour, they seem to grow into it* (Waters Evidence, 26.04.94).

■ **Evidence Against a Link**

Another study comparing international crime statistics with the number of television sets and television viewing hours provides the evidence which the author suggests shows no relationship between television violence and violent crimes (Wiio, 1995:26-27). In the first section of this study, Wiio takes murder statistics from over 40 countries and compares them with the number of television sets. The evidence shows that while one country, the United States, has a high homicide rate and high television coverage, nineteen countries,

---

including Australia and Canada, have relatively low rates of homicide and high television coverage (Wiio, 1995:27).

One Committee member expressed reservations about the Wiio research, believing the substantial socio-cultural and environmental differences between the countries in the study - for example Australia, Japan, Peru and Russia - renders comparisons between television coverage and violence across such countries meaningless, and that it is like comparing chalk and cheese.

In a second section, Wiio conducts an analysis of content of television programs. Again, the author finds no conclusive link with rates of violence and the amount of audience exposure to violent content. The study shows that while Japan has one of the largest viewing hours at 3 hours, 21 minutes per day, and some of the most violent programs, the murder rate at 0.6 per 100,000 population is, along with Great Britain and Iceland, the lowest in the world. Finland proves an interesting case, in that it has three times the number of homicides than other Scandinavian countries and a lower than average television viewing time (Wiio, 1995:29-30).

One Committee member expressed concern about such data, believing long term socio-cultural differences between these countries are clearly major factors in predicting violence, making it too difficult to separate television from such complexity for comparisons to be made.

While the United States has both a high homicide rate and high television viewing time and violent content, Wiio speculates that other factors are involved, such as the high rate of weapon ownership. Wiio concludes that there is no simple explanation for violent behaviour and suggests the causes are to be found in a nation's culture, including its values, history, political systems and social conditions.

It has also been suggested that the methodological difficulties associated with longitudinal research studies limit the validity of their findings. For example, Hueszman and Eron's study has been criticised for limitations in the peer rated aggressive measure, where children rate their peers on such items as 'did not listen to the teacher', which is regarded as aggression. Most of the high early viewers of violent television did not grow up to become violent criminals. While the study found a slight association between preference for violent television at age eight and commission of violent crime at age thirty, there was also a slight association between rated aggressiveness at age eight and violent crime at age thirty. These data are based on small numbers of subjects, the minority of their sample who became criminals (Durkin, 1995:20).

### **7.1.2 Children's Television Viewing and Aggressive Behaviour**

Some researchers suggest other types of studies support the view that there is a relationship between aggressive attitudes, values and behaviours and the viewing of or preference for violent television. The community is particularly concerned regarding the impact of television violence on childhood development. When the Committee questioned groups of young people about violence in the media, invariably the response was that while they were not affected by media violence, it could have an effect on younger children. The

Committee did hear opinion from people working with children, including teachers, parent groups and academics, that media violence impacts on children from a range of age groups.

■ **Evidence Supporting a Link**

A large number of studies have been carried out in the laboratory and in the field to assess the impact of television violence on children's behaviour. In one field experiment, children who were judged to be initially somewhat aggressive became significantly more so as a result of watching Superman and Batman cartoons over a four week period, while children who had viewed Mr Rogers' Neighbourhood were less aggressive, more co-operative and willing to share with other children (Stein and Friedrich, 1972, cited in Murray, 1988:15). Another field experiment found that highly aggressive boys in a minimum security institution demonstrated increased levels of aggression after a week of viewing violent movies, with those who had watched neutral films reducing their level of aggression (Parke *et al* 1977, cited in Murray, 1988:14).

Another study cited by Centerwall has also suggested a correlation between the introduction of television and the level of aggression in children. In 1973, when a town in mountainous Western Canada was wired for television signals, the incidence of hitting, biting and shoving increased by 160% in classes of first and second grade children within two years (Joy *et al*, 1986 cited in Centerwall, 1992:3060). Arguments against the longitudinal studies discussed in the previous section cannot be used against the aggression findings in this study.

A study of 1,565 boys aged 13 to 17 years in London suggests that particular types of programs may have differential effects. Serious interpersonal violence was found to be correlated with exposure to, in descending order of importance: programs in which close personal relationships are a major theme and which feature verbal or physical violence; programs in which violence is included for its own sake and is not necessary to the plot; programs featuring fictional violence of a realistic nature; programs in which the violence is presented as being in a good cause; and violent westerns. On the other hand, programs that were removed from the immediate experience of these teenagers, such as science fiction, were not implicated (Belson, 1978, cited in Murray, 1988:18).

In a review of a substantial number of studies on children - both international and Australian - John Murray reported that: children who prefer and/or watch a lot of violent television are more aggressive and antisocial; as aggression increases **after** viewing violence in both laboratory and field studies, it seems clear that the connection is causal; and while individual differences exist, "some level of effect may be found in all children" (Murray, 1988:15).

A number of Inquiries have considered the effects of media violence. The federal Joint Select Committee on Video Material concluded that excessive exposure to violent material may have deleterious effects upon some people, particularly children and those predisposed to aggression (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1988:229).

The Committee heard of a number of parallels between younger children's behaviour and the media. Many witnesses indicated that they had observed children acting out various scenarios depicted in the media, such as in the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Power

Rangers. Some evidence to the Committee suggested that simulated and real violence are merging in the playground:

*When Ninja Turtles were very popular, many primary schools had to ban any reference or activity that related to Ninja Turtles simply because of the amount of damage being done to fellow students in the playground (Cross Evidence, 11.10.93).*

#### ■ Evidence Against a Link

In relation to children imitating television characters, other evidence suggested children who act out this media violence represent a small minority. One psychiatrist suggested to the Committee that it is children with psychotic tendencies, rather than conduct-disorders, that may form an identity with movie characters such as the Terminator or Rambo (Wever Evidence, 26.04.94). Another psychiatrist suggested that:

*Most nine year old children can very confidently tell you, "it is just a story" (Kowalenko Evidence, 26.07.94).*

The Committee was informed that modelling play on media influences may be a normal part of child development:

*If we have children who are coming to school and pretending to be Ninja Turtles, that is probably quite a healthy activity for them to be playing and acting out ... that only becomes a problem when the children fail to differentiate between simulated violence and it merges into real violence (Jenkin Evidence, 11.10.93).*

It is important to define and distinguish different kinds of violence and types of effects. It was suggested at the World Summit on Television and Children that the question that must be asked is whether media violence is contributing to a greater sum of violent behaviour. While it is clear that media violence influences the form of play children undertake, this does not mean they are more violent than they would otherwise be (Buckingham, 1995).

Other evidence suggests there is no relationship between the viewing habits of violent offenders and their behaviour. The Young Offenders and the Media survey commissioned by the British Board of Film Classification, the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Broadcasting Standards Council and the Independent Television Commission polled 80 young recidivist offenders and 500 school children. The survey found that the young offenders did not watch more violent films or television programs than other children, and preferred soap operas (Moir, 1994). However, the Committee notes there is violent content in soap operas.

An Argentinian researcher suggested at the World Summit on Television and Children that a person's relationship with television will depend on society, culture and family roles and ties, resulting in two levels of influence of TV. The first is a general level of influence, from which young people derive their language, fashion, and social issues for communicative purposes.

The second level of influence is exerted in the presence of unresolved individual or social needs, with TV serving as a compensatory mechanism through the characters children identify with. While different children may select the same hero to identify with, different traits may be selected and integrated. Case studies discussed included two introverted boys from broken families who identify with Jo Cartwright from Bonanza. While the non-aggressive boy wants to go "riding alone through the country like Jo", the aggressive boy wants to be a good shot and fight (Merlo, 1995).

In the case of Australia, research shows that primary school children are discriminating in their television viewing, making active choices about programs and exercising self-censorship about things that concern them. A recent study revealed that items categorised under violence were most likely to be of concern to children, with approximately half of the 1,602 primary school children surveyed saying a violent incident or program had been of concern to them (Sheldon *et al*, 1994:21).

### 7.1.3 Effects of Television Violence

While research studies on television violence, violent behaviour and international crime rates may never be able to isolate the influence of media violence on human behaviour, the Committee is concerned about a number of effects of television violence.

#### ■ Desensitisation

Given the frequency with which children are bombarded with violent images, it is frequently suggested that heavy viewers can be desensitised to the effects of violence. The Committee was informed that content analysis of U.S. programming reveals that a child sees approximately 7½ violent incidents during each hour of viewing time, rising to 25 incidents each hour at times, including Saturday mornings (Hatswell Evidence, 22.02.94). News reports and sporting telecasts may also contribute to this desensitising effect. Violent incidents on sporting fields are often replayed many times. News footage of violence and war is also prevalent, although such footage often also demonstrates the devastating effects of violence:

*If some glorification of violence is depicted, that makes it all the worse. If it is done in a way that represents the tragedy of violence, it is probably not that destructive (Wever Evidence, 26.04.94).*

In evidence to the Committee, witnesses were critical of the media's failure to treat violent incidents in an appropriate context, with a tendency to glorify or condone violence:

*There was an item [on the news] on two heavyweight boxers who had had a punch-up after a press conference. The two commentators ... laughed at it as though it was a big joke. Any child watching it learns, along with everything else they see from day to day, that this is acceptable and even funny (Richie Evidence, 10.02.94).*

Investigative journalists adopting aggressive tactics in an attempt to provoke violent behaviour by interviewees were also criticised (Submission 15).



### ■ The modelling of values

Several witnesses were critical of a range of messages contained in the less obviously violent television programs. Programs aimed at and portraying young people, including soap operas, are important in modelling teenage values and development. The Committee heard that

*lack of respect for family, lack of respect for parents, antisocial behaviour, the gaining of benefit through violence, and solving of conflicts through violence - all those things are portrayed in those programs (Dibble Evidence, 10.02.94).*

One submission to the Inquiry was critical of imported U.S. television shows which portray an unrealistically perfect family life and foster consumerism and disillusionment, which could lead to resentment and violence. In situation comedies, ridicule is often held to be humorous, and this may affect children's behaviour and attitudes (Submission 15).

The media may also contribute to the development of a youth culture that includes values which glamorise violence. Several witnesses expressed concern regarding the portrayal of gangs and ghetto lifestyles in movies such as "Colors" (James Evidence, 22.02.94). While gang violence is not a widespread phenomenon in Australia, the fact that elements of dress, music and language have become incorporated into mainstream Australian youth culture from the U.S. does demonstrate the potential cultural effects of the media. The Committee also heard that the media encourages a consumerist culture where instant gratification becomes a fundamental objective:

*We have a whole generation of young people who are growing up on media images which say "you must have this, you must have the best, you must have it now" (Bowie Evidence, 08.11.93).*

In presenting a model of dispute resolution that is mainly confrontational and violent, the media may be encouraging young people to resort to violence more frequently or rapidly when they face situations of conflict or feel frustrated:

*I do not think we ought to be surprised that these days children hit first and ask questions afterwards (Waters Evidence, 26.04.94).*

### ■ Copy-cat violence

While evidence to the Committee suggests that the media have a fundamental influence on the modelling of attitudes and values, evidence is less clear on the influence of the media on specific criminal acts.

Since brutal crimes are statistically rare and involve severely disturbed offenders, few valid conclusions can be drawn. If a violent perpetrator is already pathologically disturbed, any type of material may be implicated in their crimes. For example, Jeffrey Dahmer was obsessed with Star Wars and a British serial killer, Colin Ferguson, with the Book of Revelations (Buckingham, 1995). However, media reports suggested that the methods

used by Victorian serial killer Paul Denyer were modelled on videos which included stalking and stabbings to the neck which he discussed in police interviews (Telegraph Mirror, 1993).

The Committee heard from the Senior Children's Magistrate that:

*very rarely in any case that has come before me has it been said that this child or juvenile has been influenced by something he or she has seen on television or at the pictures (Blackmore Evidence, 28.07.94).*

One example of copy-cat violence discussed in evidence to the Committee related not to fictional media violence, but to the reporting of certain violent crimes. The Committee heard that a spate of robberies involving designer clothing and Reebok shoes was started by a media story on one individual offender:

*with the level of reporting by the media, such as "Colour gang steals Reeboks", or whatever, came an increase in the level of that type of crime. Whilst the media were reporting it, we appeared to have this mini crime wave of kids getting their Reeboks or designer jackets or clothing ripped off by gangs (Hickman Evidence, 26.04.94).*

Another witness suggested that this wave of offending resulted from a desire for publicity:

*It's copycat, it's "that group got their name in the press, we want ours in the press" (Acheson Evidence, 09.11.93).*

#### 7.1.4 Conclusion

While a correlation between media violence and violent behaviour may be evident in some cases, it may not be possible to ever determine a direct causal link. Even researchers who make claims for a causal link admit to the impact of other factors such as stress and alcohol abuse (Centerwall, 1992:3061).

The academic research on the influence of media violence on aggressive behaviour also reaches conflicting conclusions. However, in reviewing the research, Murray concludes that:

*The weight of evidence is fairly consistent: viewing and/or preferring violent television is related to aggressive attitudes, values and behaviours (Murray, 1988:12).*

Donnerstein also suggests all research concludes that violent media material contributes to children's attitudes and behaviour, while not necessarily proving a causal link. This is particularly true for aggressive children, and no evidence of a cathartic effect exists (Donnerstein, 1995).

In considering the impact of media violence it is important to draw a distinction between the effects on general behavioural responses and effects in producing acts of copy-cat criminal violence. Focussing on young people directly imitating acts of criminal violence viewed on the media would fail to appreciate the subtle effects of a life-time diet of televised violence.

Evidence to the Committee suggests that the modelling of behaviour provided by television is a potential contributing factor to aggression in young people.

At the recent World Summit on Television and Children, the Chairman of Britain's Broadcasting Standards Council expressed concern that violent material without dialogue was becoming the *lingua franca* of the media. Lady Howe suggested that is not necessary to demonstrate violent media material causes imitative behaviour, as it is clear that the reliance on this type of programming is not the balanced approach which should be aimed for in a medium offering so much potential. While the material may or may not lead to violent behaviour, it does debase rational argument and agreement (Howe, 1995).

Clearly, other variables such as family background are major factors contributing to violent behaviour. The Committee was informed that:

*I think the issue is that it's a multi-causal model that you have to look at (Keogh Evidence, 01.11.93).*

It was also suggested to the Committee that:

*[the media] might be said to be an expression of a culture that is permeated with violence, that the media is just one of the many areas of our culture we have to look at in tackling the whole issue of violence (Denborough Evidence, 29.06.94).*

This evidence is certainly supported by researchers such as Wiio, who says

*There are no simple explanations for violent behaviour .... The causes of violence are to be found in (the) culture and the shared values, history, economy, religion, political systems, and social conditions (Wiio, 1995:31).*

The Committee recognises that it may never be possible to establish the precise influences of television on violent behaviour through research studies. The Committee does support the view that television, as both a reflection of society and as a medium influencing behaviour, is one of the many factors which may contribute to youth violence.

It is the view of the Committee that Governments need to address the issue of media violence, and respond to the widespread community concern about this matter. In acknowledging cultural impacts on violent behaviour are considerable, the Committee believes there is a need to determine the significance of a range of influential factors specific to our community that contribute to aggression and violence. The Committee supports the need for further study to examine media violence as a factor influencing behaviour in the context of the Australian cultural milieu.

## RECOMMENDATION 44

**That the Attorney General urge the Standing Committee of Attorneys General to commission a national research project to examine the effects of television, film and video game violence on the learning outcomes and behaviour of Australian children.**

### 7.2 ADDRESSING FILM, VIDEO AND TELEVISION VIOLENCE

#### 7.2.1 Restricting Access

Concern was expressed to the Committee regarding the ease of access to classified or restricted film and video materials by under-age children:

*children are admitted to mature and restricted films, even though it is illegal ... and they can hire the videos in shops as well* (Jeffcoat Evidence 10.02.94).

One Sydney newspaper found that a number of video stores rented R-rated videos to children aged from 11 to 15 years. None of the store proprietors were aware of the penalties they could face for breaching the *Film and Computer Game Act* (Neilson and Thurlow, 1995).

The Video Industry Distributors' Association has launched a national education campaign to encourage viewers to study the censorship ratings on movies following a survey that found 50% of people ignore age classifications.

The Women's Electoral Lobby, in a submission to the Inquiry, recommended that cinemas should be monitored to ensure that they adhere to the law and not admit underage children to MA and R rated films, with an information program introduced informing them of their obligations. Video outlets should be informed of their legal obligations and monitored in regard to access to this material by underage children (Submission 18).

The Committee believes that video outlets should be required to prevent access to MA and R-rated material by underage children by displaying such material in restricted areas. Cinemas and video outlets should be monitored to ensure that underage children do not gain access to R- and MA rated material.

A number of measures attempting to reduce the exposure of children to violence in the electronic media have recently been introduced. In cinemas, the new MA classification is restricted to people aged 15 years or over because of the intensity and/or frequency of violence, sexual depictions, or coarse language, or because violence is central to the theme. In relation to television, a self-regulatory code, approved by the Australian Broadcasting Authority, ensures that M programs are not shown on television before 8.30 p.m., and MA programs before 9.00 p.m. In evidence to the Committee, the General Manager of the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations suggested that the M and MA classifications for television are not identical to the cinema and video classifications, and

movies with these classifications would be edited significantly before being suitable for television (Branigan Evidence, 08.08.95). In addition, the Federation of Commercial Television Stations have developed a system of classifications using letter coding - S for sex, L for language; V for violence; D for drug use; H for Horror; and A for Adult themes - and a full screen warning on the program's content.

The Committee believes many children are still viewing television at 9.00 p.m and that 9.30 p.m. would be a more appropriate time for MA material. Further steps should be taken to minimise violence during times that children are likely to be watching television.

The Committee heard, however, that the setting of time limits for certain categories of programs is not a comprehensive solution to prevent exposure to media violence, since studies have shown that within the family those best able to use video technology are primary school age children and teenagers (Waters Evidence, 26.04.94). In addition, video tapes can be borrowed or exchanged and come into homes without the parents' knowledge:

*any legislation put in place will have a limited impact, unless it is really draconian legislation that puts a stop at the border. We can expect only so much from government and regulation (Waters Evidence, 26.04.94).*

Clearly, further measures are therefore required. In the U.S., a computerised device known as a V-chip has been developed, which can be installed in television sets to block violent programs after receiving an electronic advisory signal from a television network about to broadcast violent-rated material. The *Television Violence Reduction Through Parental Empowerment Bill* has been introduced in the Congress requiring V-chips to be inserted in all new television sets manufactured in or imported to the U.S. The legislation has been referred to the House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. The Canadian Radio, Television and Telecommunications Commission is currently reviewing technical means of controlling violence by testing V-chip technology on cable channels in 100 homes in Edmonton (Senchuk, 1995).

The Canadian Association of Broadcasters and the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission recently amended the Voluntary Code Regarding Violence in Television Programming. The Code is administered by the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council. The new television code provides a watershed hour of 9 p.m. after which violent material can be shown, and then only when it is not gratuitous. Specific rules govern children's programming which provide that very little violence is used, and only when it is central to plot development, and shows the consequences of violence. The *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* was deemed not to fulfil these criteria. The New Zealand Broadcasting Standards Authority has also recommended action against the *Power Rangers* (Cohen, 1995).

#### RECOMMENDATION 45

**That the Attorney General consider legislation requiring video outlets to prevent access to MA and R-rated material by underage children by displaying such material in restricted areas.**

#### RECOMMENDATION 46

**That the Minister for Police act to:**

- **monitor cinemas to ensure that they adhere to the law and not admit underage children to MA and R rated films; and**
- **monitor video outlets in regard to access and hiring of R-rated material by underage children.**

#### 7.2.2 Complaints Mechanisms

The Committee heard evidence of public perceptions of and concerns regarding violence on television, and the efficacy of the complaints processes available to them. The ABA recently conducted an Australia wide survey of the concerns of 1,225 people about television programs and their awareness of classification codes. It was found that 73% said that they had no concerns. The 24% that had concerns mentioned news/current affairs (28%); violence/aggression (13%); and advertising content (10%) (Osborne Evidence, 08.08.95). While suggesting that these respondents represent a small proportion of the population, a representative of the ABA conceded:

*we are aware that those who expressed concerns felt very strongly (Osborne Evidence, 08.08.95).*

In a survey of 2,000 respondents conducted for the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal in 1989, 25% of respondents spontaneously mentioned violence on television as being of concern. However, when prompted with a list of issues regarding television content, 78% indicated they were concerned about the amount of violence (Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, 1990:198-200). The majority of respondents (72%) saw children as the group most likely to be affected by television violence. Approximately 38% of this group felt television violence makes violence more acceptable and desensitises, and 26% felt it makes people copy or imitate the behaviour (Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, 1990:220-223). While the freedom for people to watch what they like on television was a strongly held belief, when opinion was sought on the statement "there should be more control on the amount of violence shown on television", 84% of respondents agreed (Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, 1990:236).

However, the Australian Broadcasting Authority has also conducted a national survey on R-classified programs on pay television involving 2,440 respondents. Prior to being asked their opinion on the availability of R-rated material on pay television, respondents were informed of the requirement that subscribers be given equipment which can block or restrict

access to R-rated programs. Approximately 82% of respondents believed adults should have the option of watching R-rated programs on pay television in the home, with 69% believing R-rated violence should be permitted with restrictions (Australian Broadcasting Authority, 1994:18,23).

The Young Women's Electoral Lobby expressed concern that while advertising industry guidelines and ethics are not adequate, they do at least provide a monitoring and complaints system. Similar guidelines for media content and the responsible media coverage of sporting events were supported (Richie Evidence, 10.02.94).

As a result of the passage of the Broadcasting Services Act through Federal Parliament in 1992, each sector of the broadcasting industry was encouraged to develop its own formal codes of conduct, which were subject to approval by the Australian Broadcasting Authority. The Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) had previously introduced a code on violence, key elements of which were included in the new Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (Branigan Evidence, 08.08.95). The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) also have codes of practice.

In responding to the assertion that this arrangement provides only a voluntary regulatory system, the General Manager of FACTS stated that

*It sits somewhere between a voluntary code of practice and a mandatory code. It is a requirement in the Act that the industry develop a code of practice. There is no absolute requirement that stations subscribe to the code, but in practice all of them do* (Branigan Evidence, 08.08.95).

If a viewer is concerned that the code had been breached, the Broadcasting Services Act requires that they must first complain in writing to the station in question. Commercial stations are required to maintain appropriate ways of dealing with oral complaints, and more complex complaint handling processes for written complaints (Branigan Evidence, 08.08.95). In 1993, 96 (5%) complaints about commercial television involved violence, rising to 144 (9.5%) in 1994 (Australian Broadcasting Authority, 1995:8-9). Of the 928 written complaints in 1994, 7.1% involved violence. Four of these complaints were upheld by television stations (Australian Broadcasting Authority, 1995:14-15).

Should complainants be dissatisfied with the station's response, or the station fails to respond within 60 days, the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) may be called upon to investigate the alleged breach. If the program appears to involve a breach of the code, the ABA writes to the broadcaster, setting out its concerns and seeking comment before a decision is made and the complainant and the station are advised of the findings (Osborne Evidence, 08.08.95).

The Committee was informed that the ABA received a total of 1,542 complaints about commercial television during 1993-94, and that 67 of these complaints (4%) related to violence. This includes complaints made in the first instance to the ABA which were then referred back to the station in question. The majority of complaints concerned what was considered to be the inappropriate classification of material (Osborne Evidence, 08.08.95). Two unresolved complaints involving violence were referred to the ABA for investigation in

1993-4: *Heartbreak High*, a G-classified drama which was broadcast at 5.00 p.m.; and *The Accused*, an M-classified movie about sexual violence, which was modified for television and broadcast at 8.30 p.m. Neither of these programs were found to have involved a breach of the code (Osborne Evidence, 08.08.95). The ABA has not upheld any complaint regarding the inappropriate classification of violent material.

The Committee was informed that if a station is found to have breached the code, there is no immediate regulatory response; if it displays a pattern of deliberately breaching the provisions of the code or systematically not taking the steps necessary to comply with the code, the ABA may impose the code on the station as a condition of licence. If this occurs, there are financial penalties for subsequent deliberate or calculated breaches of the code. The ABA may also take administrative action, such as the issuing of a notice, to ensure compliance with the Act. The Committee heard that while it is true that the codes are not directly linked to a regulatory system, the fact that penalties can be imposed by the ABA effectively link the codes to a mandatory system for the regulation of television (Branigan Evidence, 08.08.95). At the present time, no penalties have been applied.

Several members of the Committee are concerned that the ABA is not empowered to receive complaints in the first instance. In response, representatives of the ABA stated that

*We are set up to take complaints ... Whenever someone contacts the Authority they are not just told to go to the station. A note is made of their complaint. Their concerns are registered and we report on those concerns .... an ever increasing number of people ... have phoned back to say, "Thank you very much for explaining it to me". [They] have gone to the stations, have not been satisfied, and have come back to the Authority (Marin Evidence 08.08.95).*

It was suggested to the Committee that the ABA complaints data does not indicate that complaints about commercial television are increasing, particularly in relation to violence, and that this indicates that stricter regulation is not presently required (Osborne Evidence, 08.08.95). The Committee is concerned, however, that the complaints procedures are time-consuming, not well known and complainants may be drawn from the persistent and the well-educated. Complaints data may therefore not reflect the true extent and depth of the public's concern regarding media violence.

In relation to awareness of complaints procedures, a representative of the ABA informed the Committee that

*there is responsibility under the code that licensees broadcast the existence of the code and also the complaints procedure. For the four weeks of January [1995] all stations around Australia will make announcements throughout the day, including prime time, letting people know that, if they wish to make a complaint, this is the process (Marin Evidence, 08.08.95).*

The Committee is of the opinion that the success rate of complaints to media monitoring bodies such as the Press Council and the ABA indicates that such mechanisms provide inadequate controls on media content. The Committee is also concerned that the codes of practice do not adequately restrict violent content. The General Manager of FACTS states that



*what we have set out are basically precepts for acceptable behaviour, acceptable on-screen material, acknowledging that this is a very difficult area to define and that a great deal will depend on the specific context (Branigan Evidence, 08.08.95).*

In other jurisdictions, rules governing children's programming provide that very little violence is used, and only when it is central to plot development, and shows the consequences of violence. The Committee encourages the review of media codes of conduct to ensure that material that condones, glorifies or promotes violence is appropriately recognised and restricted, and the further development of monitoring and complaints systems. These matters are dealt with in the Committee's recommendation at the conclusion of Section 7.2.

### **7.2.3 The Promotion of Non-Violence**

The Sticks and Stones report of the federal parliamentary inquiry on school violence stated that the media and entertainment industries have a responsibility to examine the use of violent, aggressive and inappropriate behaviours and to promote non-violent values and behaviour (House of Representatives Standing Committee, 1994:27).

The Prime Minister has indicated his support for a family network on the sixth free-to-air television band. At present networks must screen 16 hours of Australian children's drama each year. This quota is to be raised to 40 hours per year by 1998.

The Committee also believes that television networks should be encouraged to broadcast material providing alternative, prosocial messages which may serve to balance the messages provided in violent material. It has been suggested that watching one hour a day of enriching television during childhood years would be equivalent to two years of school education (Palmer, 1995). One way that this objective could be achieved would be to levy a fee on broadcasters which could be allocated to the production of such material.

In response to this suggestion, the General Manager of FACTS suggested that most television programming is currently non-violent, and community service announcements run regularly on television which

*promote precisely the sorts of messages you have described; that there are alternative ways of resolving conflict (Branigan Evidence, 08.08.95).*

The Australian Children's Television Foundation is a registered public company limited by guarantee, incorporated in Victoria in 1982. The Foundation is supported by and receives financial assistance from the Commonwealth Government and the Governments of all States and Territories.

The Foundation's principal functions as detailed in its Memorandum of Association are:

- to encourage (through assistance, script development funding and equity investment) the development, production and broadcasting of television programs for children and to improve their quality and suitability for the viewing audience;
- to promote issues relating to children's television within the industry and the community; and
- to provide a source of information on all aspects of television relevant to children.

The Committee believes that the Foundation is an appropriate body to receive increased financial support through a levy on commercial television networks to enable the production of children's television material which incorporates prosocial messages encouraging non-violence.

The Committee stresses, however, that existing levels of Commonwealth and State funding should also be maintained.

#### 7.2.4 Responsible Viewing

Another strategy to address the impact of media violence may be to encourage a more responsible and critical approach to the media diet of children and young people. It was suggested to the Committee that:

*we ought to be doing a lot more to help parents mediate their children's media utilisation ..... Rather than simply prohibiting viewing, parents should be helping their children to use the media in an intelligent way. The television media have extraordinarily rich resources (Waters Evidence, 26.04.94).*

While many parents are not sufficiently supervising their children's viewing, Professor Waters asserted that media agencies have a responsibility to assist parents:

*I see no reason that the media could not invest a small amount of money in programs to educate parents to help their kids become more discerning consumers (Waters Evidence, 26.04.94).*

There is some evidence to suggest, however, that both parents and children themselves are selective and discerning viewers. Representatives of the ABA informed the Committee of research findings from a 1993 study on children and television involving 108 primary school children in focus groups and 1602 primary children completing a questionnaire. The study also involved a sample of 517 matched parent-child pairs. The research findings were published in *Cool and Gross, Children's Attitudes to Violence, Kissing and Swearing on Television* (Sheldon *et al*, 1995). The study showed the type of violence a program contained largely influenced the way the children reacted to the program. Children spontaneously mentioned a number of themes which caused them concern. Items grouped

---

under the category "violence" were of concern to 50% of children (Sheldon *et al*, 1994:21). A number of specific scenarios were also described to the children. The strongest negative reactions were evoked by programs depicting violence which involved victims, such as violence against children and animals. Sixty-two per cent (62%) of children said they didn't like to watch programs that showed children being hurt or 'whacked' and 60% rejected programs that made it look as if animals were being hurt or killed. Fifty-nine per cent (59%) of children also said they did not like to see programs that showed parents arguing and hitting each other.

Positive reactions were evoked by programs that were action packed with fights, guns and car chases, with 50% of all children claiming they really liked to watch them and 20% that they did not like to watch them (Sheldon *et al*, 1994:32-33).

The research also suggested that the overwhelming majority of families have rules surrounding television viewing. Of the sample of 517 parent-child pairs, 98% of parents and 92% of children claimed that there were rules, including children having to fulfil other obligations towards homework, music and helping before they are allowed to watch television (Sheldon *et al*, 1994:13).

A school principal suggested in evidence that with increasingly sophisticated communications technology bringing images of war and violence, there is a social responsibility to confront and address these problems. Children should be encouraged to understand what they are viewing to encourage the development of values which include a sense of an individual's responsibility in society:

*we can build up a sense of understanding and some sense of competence that, yes, the world is a pretty nasty place in a lot of ways but you can do something about it* (Wheeldon Evidence 22.02.94).

The Committee supports the development of programs developed to educate parents and other adults to assist children to become more discerning media consumers, and believes that strategies that encourage media analysis and criticism should be extended in the school syllabus.

At the World Summit on Television and Children, the Education Projects' Manager of the Australian Children's Television Foundation was critical of the fact that 'viewing' has been deleted as a core learning mode in the K-6 curriculum in NSW, while it continues as a component of the curriculum in several other states (O'Brien, 1995).

A number of outcomes in the Year 7-10 English syllabus are relevant to media analysis. One of five key objectives is that "students experience, enjoy and respond sensitively and perceptively to mass media" (Board of Studies, 1987:53). Several years ago, a Media Studies Syllabus Committee of the Board of Studies produced an elective syllabus for Years 7-10 which was not implemented. However, the Board of Studies' Senior English Review has proposed a Media Text Elective. The Committee endorses this approach, and believes the primary and secondary syllabus should be reviewed to ensure that students are equipped with adequate skills in media criticism that facilitate a responsible approach to their media diet.

#### RECOMMENDATION 47

That the Attorney General encourage the Standing Committee of Attorneys General to call on the federal government to:

- pressure television networks to eliminate television violence during children's viewing hours;
- monitor the televising of MA material after 9.00 p.m. and consider extending it to 9.30 p.m.;
- pressure the media to review its code of conduct to ensure that material that condones, glorifies or promotes violence is appropriately recognised and restricted;
- review the effectiveness of the complaints process in responding to community concerns;
- levy a fee on commercial television networks to be allocated to the Australian Children's Television Fund for the production of prosocial programs encouraging non-violence; and
- develop programs to educate parents and other adults to assist children to become more discerning media consumers.

#### RECOMMENDATION 48

That the Minister for Education review the K-6 syllabus and Year 7-10 English syllabus to ensure that students are equipped with adequate media criticism skills to facilitate a responsible approach to their media diet.

### 7.3 VIDEO AND COMPUTER GAMES

The Committee also heard evidence relating to the effects of video games on young people. Provenzo, in a review of Nintendo games, concluded that racism, sexism and the use of violence are intrinsic to these games (1991:140).

The Committee heard that counsellors in juvenile justice centres report that youths in custody get great pleasure from video games, and usually end up in a heightened state of arousal and often behave aggressively afterwards:

*I believe that fantasy plays a large part in [children's] behaviour, and I think for a poorly integrated impressionable child or youth, these video games indeed represent an important contribution to a final pathway of violence (Keogh Evidence, 01.11.93).*

In a survey on perceptions of films, videos and computer games conducted in 1994 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and commissioned by the Office of Film and Literature Classification, it was found that:

- In households containing 1-12 year olds, 58.1% of children had watched a videotape, and 46.4% of children had played a computer game in the fortnight prior to the survey;
- In these households, 78.1% of parents were heavily involved in the choice of films, but only 44.7% in the choice of computer games;
- In these households, 67.8% of parents held reservations about the content of available computer games;
- In households containing 13-17 year olds, 55.4% of children had watched a videotape, and 50.5% of children had played a computer game in the fortnight prior to the survey;
- In these households, 39.4% of parents were heavily involved in the choice of films, but only 27.9% in the choice of computer games; and
- In these households, 66.5% of parents held reservations about the content of available computer games (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1994a:15-17).

The Federal Attorney General has funded the Office of Film & Literature Classification to undertake research on the culture of video games, including the effects of violence. The project will collect and analyse market-place data on game sales, examine the experiences of users, and conduct interviews to gauge community concerns.

The Senate Select Committee on Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies recommended that games of R and X equivalence should be refused classification. While they found no conclusive research into the consequences of such material being accessible by children, the Senate Committee believed that it was better to err on the side of caution and eliminate the material at source, rather than wait until research evidence became available which proved that harm had been caused to children by playing R or X- games (Senate Select Committee, 1993:29).

However, the Classification of Publications (Amendment) Ordinance 1994, provided that the Chief Censor could review video and computer games for all classifications, including R and X. All States and the two Territories have since announced that they have resolved to prohibit the sale and distribution of R and X-rated video and computer games within their jurisdictions (Senate Select Committee, 1994:27).

In NSW, four categories of classification are provided under section 9AA of the *Film & Video Tape Amendment Act 1994*, namely "G", "G(8+)", "(M(15+))" and "MA(15+)". These are defined to mean:

- "G", if the censor is of the opinion that the game is suitable for all ages;
- "G (8+)", if the censor is of the opinion that the game cannot be recommended for viewing or playing by children under the age of 8 years;
- "M (15+)", if the censor is of the opinion that the game cannot be recommended for viewing or playing by children under the age of 15 years; and
- "MA (15+)", if the censor is of the opinion that the game depicts, expresses or otherwise deals with sex, violence or coarse language in such a manner as to make the game unsuitable for viewing or playing by children under the age of 15 years.

The censor is to refuse to classify a computer game for which an application for classification has been made if the computer game:

- (a) describes, depicts, expresses or otherwise deals with matters of sex, drug misuse or addiction, crime, cruelty or violence, or revolting or abhorrent phenomena, in a manner that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult; or
- (b) depicts in any form a person (whether engaged in sexual activity or otherwise) who is, or who is apparently, a child in a manner that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult; or
- (c) promotes, incites or instructs in matters of crime or violence.

In the U.S.; a self-regulatory system has been introduced which provides consumers with more specific information. The following classifications have been introduced:

- EC** Early Childhood, ages 3+;
- KA** Kids to Adults, ages 6+ - contains minimal violence, some comic mischief, some crude language;
- T** Teen, ages 13+ - contains some violence, mild/strong language;
- M** Mature, ages 17+ - more intense violence, stronger language inappropriate for teen category, sexual themes;
- AO** Adults Only - graphic depictions of sex/violence.

Additional content descriptions on the back of software products provide additional information, e.g. mild animated violence; strong sexual content; gaming; alcohol and tobacco (Pober, 1995).

Under the new classification rules for computer and video games in New South Wales, the demonstration and sale of games rated "MA" (15+) is restricted to adults or children under 15 with parental or guardian consent.

---

It was suggested to the Committee that spot checks should be introduced for video arcades and retail outlets selling classified video games and computer software to ensure that under-age children are not gaining unsupervised access to classified material. A retailer information campaign explaining ratings and penalties was also supported (Submission 18). The Committee supports these proposals.

The Senate Select Committee recommended that the Government find ways to encourage the video and computer games industry to develop and give emphasis to positive educational and entertainment games. In the United States, there have been some encouraging moves towards the development of a self-regulatory regime. SEGA has withdrawn the game Night Trap from the market and Nintendo has responded to complaints about an advertisement promoting a violent game (Senate Select Committee, 1994:28).

#### **RECOMMENDATION 49**

**That the Government develop a campaign explaining ratings and penalties for retailers selling classified video games and computer software.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 50**

**That the Minister for Police act to monitor retail outlets selling classified video games and computer software to ensure that the demonstration and sale of games and software rated MA is restricted to adults and children under 15 who have parental or guardian consent.**

#### **7.3.1 Video Game Parlours**

During the course of the Inquiry, Committee members visited Laser Zone and Time Zone arcades to inspect these facilities and examine the latest video games and concepts. The Committee noted the increasingly realistic video imagery and scenarios in video game machines requiring the player to shoot various characters with a model gun, such as in "Lethal Enforcers", "Crime Patrol", and "Mad Dog II". At Laser Zone arcades, players are equipped with laser guns and sensors to shoot members of the opposing team. The Committee was concerned about health and safety aspects of these premises, and raised these concerns with the Minister for Police and Minister for Consumer Affairs.

With the introduction of classification of video games, game parlours must ensure that access to MA (15+) games is restricted to adults and children under the age of 15 years who are in the care of a parent or guardian while in that restricted area. The Committee believes these access restrictions should be monitored.

The Committee was informed of the large sums of money that some young people spend on video games, with arcade owners collecting up to \$1,000 per week from each machine. It has also been suggested that problems of truancy can be exacerbated by such facilities.

The opening of suburban arcades was linked with increases in violent crime in several media reports during the course of this Inquiry (O'Connor, 1993). One witness stated that:

*I believe that there is an association at times, and a causal relationship between playing those machines and attending those parlours and petty crime (Acheson Evidence, 01.11.93).*

Some local government authorities have taken steps to ensure that restrictions are placed on premises with video game machines. In 1992, an application for a Time-zone arcade in Marrickville was refused by Marrickville Council, with the decision upheld in the Land and Environment Court. In the Marrickville local government area, business premises are only allowed to have two video game machines. It was suggested to the Committee that this balances the wishes of young people with the need for some controls:

*it means that young people are using those amusement machines in their local community (and because they are known) ... you are bringing back the forms of control which get lost within a city (Acheson Evidence, 01.11.93).*

The Committee supports this arrangement in areas where it is appropriate for the local community.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 51**

**That the Minister for Police act to monitor video game parlours to ensure that access to games rated MA (15+) is appropriately restricted.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 52**

**That the Minister for Local Government, in consultation with the executives of the Local Government Association and Shires Association, encourage local government agencies to limit the number of game machines in local business establishments where this is considered appropriate for the community.**

### **7.4 COMPUTER BULLETIN BOARDS AND THE INTERNET**

The effect of any classification or restriction of video games and other material will be reduced by the availability of prohibited material on computer bulletin boards which can be accessed though telephone lines by computers equipped with a modem. In a report to the federal Attorney-General, a Task Force examining the regulation of electronic bulletin boards suggested that the federal and state laws are "patchy with several gaps". The report outlines a number of possible options to regulate content on Australian computer bulletin boards, as follows:

- The development and adoption of guidelines by the Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) community.



- The application of partial classification to BBS, including -
  - a) a prohibition on material on BBS corresponding to "refused classification" equivalents under the computer game and film and publication classification schemes;
  - b) no compulsory classification of material on BBS; and
  - c) the development of formal guidelines for compliance with community standards.

A further measure imposing a legal obligation to take all reasonable steps to deal with material corresponding to restricted classification categories under the computer game and film and publication classification schemes in a manner appropriate to its classification could also be included under this option.

- The application of full classification to BBS, including regulation, compulsory classification and enforcement (Computer BBS Task Force, 1994:4-9).

The Task Force noted that the anonymous posting of messages, the use of code names, the high volume of message traffic and the impossibility of operators being aware at all times of the content of a BBS make it infeasible to hold an operator directly criminally liable for the content of BBS, at least in the absence of a warning or complaints system providing an opportunity to remove offensive material before enforcement action is taken (Computer BBS Task Force, 1994:4). The Task Force concluded that government controls would be virtually impossible without the co-operation of the operators, and recommended that the industry develop guidelines to control the content of these forms of electronic communication, in line with the first option outlined above (Computer BBS Task Force, 1994:10). The Task Force also considered whether customs information should be amended to cover material from overseas BBS, and concluded that such provisions would be unenforceable as transmissions would be virtually undetectable (Computer BBS Task Force, 1994:23).

The Committee supports the continuing attention to this issue to develop means of reducing violence in the complete range of electronic media.

### **RECOMMENDATION 53**

**That the Attorney General urge the Standing Committee of Attorneys General to develop national strategies to reduce violence in the electronic visual media, including Bulletin Board Systems accessed through computers.**

## 7.5 VIRTUAL REALITY

One witness suggested that while the pace of the development of communications technology has effectively outstripped the development of appropriate social controls and responses, one area in which some control remains possible is virtual reality. The size, nature and expense of the technology involved in virtual reality means that it is not readily available or accessible at present. While it was suggested that virtual reality has potential for practical applications in the fields of architecture and medical science, most of the developments appear to be in the area of game applications:

*You put on your helmet and your glove .... If your friend is standing opposite you, you try to kill him (Wheeldon Evidence, 22.02.94).*

The Committee is concerned about the potential of this interactive technology to introduce a new dimension to the problems of media violence, and urges the assessment of appropriate policy options to restrict violent material.

### RECOMMENDATION 54

**That the Attorney General urge the Standing Committee of Attorneys General to review interactive virtual reality technology and assess policy options that could ensure appropriate restrictions on violent materials are introduced and enforced.**

## 7.6 MUSIC

The Committee heard that music styles are intrinsic to the various sub-cultures that young people may identify with.

A student from one High School in Sydney's South-West suggested that rap music is fashionable for the group of young people who identify as "homies", and that some think:

*they themselves come from the ghetto, where a gunshot is the sound that sends many people to sleep (Submission 58)*

The Committee heard evidence from representatives of "LISTEN! ... to the music of your children", a community organisation of parents and citizens concerned with the impact of the music genre "gangsta rap" on children. The Committee was supplied with lyrics of particular concern, which contain graphic depictions of violence and sexual abuse:

*and so I had to kill her. Yeah, straight hit.  
Now listen up and let me tell you how I did it.  
I tied her to the bed, I was thinking the worst  
but I had to let my nigger fuck her first  
loaded up a 45, yo then I sprayed, smoked the 'ho'...  
One less bitch you've got to worry about (NWA, "One Less Bitch")*

The Committee was informed that three of the rappers in United States' bands of particular concern - JD from Lynch Mob, Snoop Doggy Dogg, and the lead singer from Niggers with Attitude (NWA) - have been charged with violent offences, two for murder and one for assault (Sutton Evidence, 29.08.94).

The LISTEN organisation conducted a survey of 100 Sydney teenagers and found a high level of awareness of these bands, with 82% and 85% having heard of the bands NWA and Ice Cube respectively. Of these respondents, 51% knew some of the song lyrics, and 37% most of the lyrics. When asked how these particular lyrics made them feel, 11% of respondents said that the lyrics made them feel aggressive (Sutton Evidence, 29.08.94).

Concerns were raised regarding the problems of prohibiting or classifying audio materials. The Committee was informed that in 1992 the Australian Customs Service referred 36 audio compact discs of recorded music to the Office of Film and Literature Classification for an opinion in terms of sections of the customs regulations (Sutton Evidence, 29.08.94). Four of the 36 CDs were considered to breach regulations, in that they depicted, expressed or were otherwise concerned with matters of sex, drug misuse or addiction, crime, cruelty, violence or revolting or abhorrent phenomena in a manner that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult person to the extent that they should not be imported.

However, the opinion of the Office was based on the lyric sheet accompanying the CDs, rather than the lyrics themselves (Office of Film and Literature Classification, 1993:41).

Current industry regulations require record companies to attach "Parental guidance advisory, explicit lyrics" stickers to material with explicit lyrics. When questioned on their ownership of cassettes or CDs with such stickers, 77% of respondents in the "LISTEN" survey indicated they owned a cassette or a CD of this type.

"LISTEN" sought advice from the NSW Attorney General as to whether offensive material on audio tapes and compact discs is subject to the provisions of the NSW Indecent Articles and Classified Publications Act, 1975. Under that legislation, articles are defined to include gramophone records and other sound recordings. The Attorney General's Department informed "LISTEN" that while the Act does not provide for the classification of these materials, they may be considered indecent articles under the Act. They further advised that:

*if you suspect that an audio tape or compact disc is an indecent article I suggest you refer the matter to the police who are responsible for investigating such matters.*

The matter has been raised with police who have been reluctant to act (Sutton Evidence, 29.08.94). The Committee believes police action and relevant legislation should be reviewed to ensure audio tapes and CDs are appropriately regulated, that the sale of restricted material is prohibited to minors, and that material which promotes violence be refused classification.

The Committee believes that music of this nature could be considered to be an incitement of violence, and considers that a campaign to outline the illegality of such incitement should be introduced.

#### RECOMMENDATION 55

That existing powers to restrict the sale of audio and compact discs that contain violent lyrics be investigated by:

- the Commissioner of Police reporting to the Attorney General on the reasons police are reluctant to act on complaints relating to the sale and distribution of such materials considered by the Attorney General's Department to be indecent articles under the provisions of the *Indecent Articles and Classified Publications Act*; and, if considered necessary following this report,
- the Attorney General reviewing the provisions of the *Indecent Articles and Classified Publications Act* to ensure that provisions relating to indecent articles extend to audio tapes and compact discs.

#### RECOMMENDATION 56

That the Attorney General urge the Standing Committee of Attorneys General to

- support and encourage the introduction of state and federal legislation to classify audio music;
- prohibit the sale of restricted material to minors; and
- refuse classification to material that promotes violence.

#### RECOMMENDATION 57

That the Attorney-General develop a public education campaign outlining the illegality of incitement to violence, as provided in the Crimes Act and anti-vilification legislation.

### 7.7 CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

- While testimony to the Committee from teachers, academics, professionals and parents overwhelmingly expressed concern about **violence in the media** and its negative effects on children, it is probably impossible to prove such a causal link. However, the community concern about youth violence and media content continues and must be addressed.

The Committee is concerned about a number of effects of television violence. Given the frequency with which children are bombarded with violent images, heavy viewers may be desensitised to the effects of violence. The media may also present a model of dispute resolution that is mainly confrontational and violent and contribute to the development of a youth culture that includes values which glamorise violence.

Evidence is less clear on the influence of the media on specific criminal acts. Few conclusions can be drawn as these cases are statistically rare and involve severely disturbed offenders.

The Committee concludes that television, as both a reflection of society and as a medium influencing behaviour, is one of many factors which may contribute to youth violence. Given the potential of television to provide positive, pro-social messages and education, the reliance on violent material in programming decisions is disappointing and socially negative.

- **Access** to violent material should be restricted. Video outlets should be required to prevent access to MA- and R-rated material by underage children by displaying such material in restricted areas. Cinemas and video outlets should be monitored to ensure that underage children do not gain access to R- and MA- rated material. Further steps should be taken to minimise violence during times that children are likely to be watching television.

The Committee encourages the review of **media codes** of conduct to ensure that material that condones, glorifies or promotes violence is appropriately recognised and restricted, and the further development of monitoring and complaints systems.

The **production** of children's television material which incorporates prosocial messages encouraging non-violence should be facilitated, with the Children's Television Foundation receiving increased financial support through a levy on commercial television network.

Programs should be developed to educate parents and other adults to assist children to become more discerning media consumers, and strategies that encourage **media analysis** and criticism should be extended in the school syllabus.

- The Committee is also concerned about violence in **video games** and other electronic media. Spot checks should be introduced for video arcades and retail outlets selling classified video games and computer software to ensure that under-age children are not gaining unsupervised access to classified material. A retailer information campaign explaining ratings and penalties should also be developed. The Committee supports restrictions being placed on premises with video games machines in areas where it is appropriate for the local community.

The Committee supports the continuing attention to the development of means to control material on computer bulletin boards and the **Internet**. An assessment of appropriate policy options to restrict violent material on **virtual reality** technology is also required.

- Police action and legislation should be reviewed to ensure violent material on **audio tapes** and CDs is appropriately regulated, with the sale of restricted material prohibited to minors, and material which promotes or glamorises violence refused classification.

---

---