

RECOMMENDATIONS TO NCW

Viewers felt that TV news and current affairs programmes do play a useful role in informing citizens, exposing unjust acts and even preventing all forms of "excesses." They felt strongly that the media should not be censored in any way as it is only doing its job of informing and educating the public.

However, in terms of guidelines viewers were clear that some practices need to be regulated. This included less repetition of violent images and watershed timings for adult programmes and images.

Whereas CFAR has steadfastly remained against any form of censorship of the media, it has always supported the need for an independent regulatory framework with an inbuilt redressal mechanism

Theme 1-Crime and Violence in News, Current Affairs, Reality Crime Shows and Entertainment Programme

Representation of Senior Citizens

The focus group discussion that we conducted with special groups such as senior citizens, widows and people living with disability had far less illusions, about the impact that media was having on their issues and concerns

Responding to the news reports relating to senior citizens, especially those that dealt with the violence and crime, they felt that media was “only ending up by scaring us.” The channels are “neither informing and educating us about our rights and entitlements nor exerting the right kind of pressure on the government to address the needs of senior citizens.”

Representation of Widows

In the case of widows, they felt that their concerns were very poorly represented on the media. “None of our day to day struggles like school admission for children or court cases against husband for adequate alimony and maintenance are reported,” they claimed

Given the high levels of corruption, they find that even wresting basic entitlements such as widow’s pension, was so difficult to ensure, that they were very keen that the channels should make an effort to highlight these issues.

When they were asked if whether in distress they would turn to the media for support, they were not quite confident about using such an option. “If we go the media, then we will be disgraced and ostracized by our neighbours. The boys of the locality will start harassing us,” they replied.

Then, when asked what should be role of media, they stated that the media should give us information about their rights, educate them about income-generation and skill development opportunities and raise issues concerning us.

OBJECTIVES:

- **Need to protect minors from gratuitous depiction and representation of violence**
- **Not to induce, encourage, justify and glorify violence or terror or its perpetrators**
- **Not to present violence as a glamorous solution or “romantic” “heroic” act**
- **Not to incite, encourage violence and hate campaign against specific groups on grounds of race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age or mental or physical disabilities**

WATERSHED POLICY

During family viewing time, till 10 p.m. programmes could be telecast without depicting excessive violence

During this time, every programme should be preceded by advice or cautionary warning regarding the degree of violence or sexual content in individual programmes

This Watershed Policy is particularly vital because since the late 90s, a successful trend on television has been **reality shows**, which reconstruct real life crime with the social responsibility of catching criminals and discouraging crime in society. In this process, however a lot of blood is splashed on the small screen. Of late such programmes have proliferated across news channels.

Though scheduled for the post-10 p.m. slots, most of these are repeated during the afternoon or early evening slots, when children have easy access them. This should not be allowed.

Programme and film promos with violence and explicit sexual content them should not be telecast before the watershed timing. Violence as an incentive to watch any programme should be discouraged.

GUIDELINES ON TREATMENT

REALITY CRIME SHOWS

To begin with Channels telecasting such Crime Shows should be enjoined not to treat crime in a stand-alone manner, or focus on the crime per se but provide factual information about the medical and legal aspects, including the rights of the victims, the specific sections of the laws which are in question and the precedence set by the Criminal Justice System. The social responsibility of the media in creating awareness among the masses needs to be kept in mind.

In the case of sexual crimes, do not lower the dignity of the survivor of violence by re-enacting or re-constructing the assault or crime in a crude and stark manner. Even if some of the facts have to be incorporated into the commentary/voice-over, care should be taken not to prejudice the case and initiate a media trial prior to the legal trial

COVERAGE OF MINORS ON NEWS, CRIME SHOWS

When the channels cover crimes committed by minors, some whom may even be juveniles, such incident should not be not covered in the same manner as crimes committed by adults.

Care should be taken not to flash sensational headlines. For example, recently a child, who had committed three murders was labeled as a “serial killer” by news channels. Such practices are particularly evident in the case of reporters doing on-spot, live reporting. To prevent such anomalies, clear guidelines should be given to reporters, often involved in covering a breaking news story and asked to flash the initial developments of the story. There should be no compromise as far as reporting on children is concerned.

In such instances, the entire episode should be treated from the perspective of behavioural concerns and experts associated with multi-disciplinary initiatives related to child-centered crimes should be involved in providing some insight into such occurrences (VIMHANS)

MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY

On no grounds should the identity of the child involved in or affected by the crime be disclosed. No reference should be made to the family, place of residence, the school they are enrolled in nor the family and their child, should be interviewed on the grounds that the family is ready to speak, or the child’s face is effectively hidden with a mosaic etc. Last year during the MMS case, news channels played a video clip over and over again of teenage students involved in a sexual interaction. Although a mosaic was used, their actions were clearly visible and shown repeatedly.

A child who has witnessed any crime should not be interviewed by the media. Even if their face is hidden, in the absence of any guardian or elder it becomes an extreme violation of the rights of the child.

In one instance, on one of the leading crime shows a news channel not only interviewed a minor on a murder that had occurred in her home but asked her to re-enact the crime committed by her mother and her partner against her father. This is totally unacceptable.

This law should also apply to rape victims, minor and adults and the witnesses. In many instances, we find that this practice, banned even by the existing law, is not applied as consistently. Quite often the identity of the victim becomes clear in the course of the coverage and we find repeated and outright violation of the Indian Penal Code.

TREATMENT OF VIOLENCE IN NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMMES

In news and current affairs programme, if news of violence-related content has to be shown prior to 10 p.m. then care should be taken not to show close-ups of mutilated, bleeding and damaged bodies, depicting these in decomposed state (Nithari) or body parts, (Nithari) followed by an explicit commentary on the bodily injuries.

CONCERNS ON PRIVACY, TREATMENT OF DEATH AND DISASTER

Invasion of privacy primarily in coverage of news related to sex, crimes, death and disasters on news channels.

Viewers note differential standards in portrayals of women and men, especially in the personal lives of female celebrities like Parveen Babi, Nafisa Joseph

Very often, media publishes photographs of representatives of marginal communities such as sex workers, HIV Positive people and do so against their will and cause incalculable harm in their lives

Media reconstruction of crimes related to women like the Siri Fort rape/Natasha Singh.

Media conducts panchayats and intervenes in the life of ordinary women

Coverage of death on TV news is particularly invasive. Bodies are repeatedly shown in close-ups (eg.,Veerappan, Phoolan Devi, Gurjars killed in the police firing). Viewers are subjected to repeated images and the plight of the survivors. Personal loss and grief are provided a public face with less concern.

Since such grief acquires a public face, even the questions posed to the ‘victims’ or affected people are insensitive and even downright rude at times.

There are instances when the media dealt with issues sensitively. This sensitiveness was in evidence during the recent tsunami disaster, when TV news shied clear of too much death and destruction and stressed on the relief and rehabilitation process. Similarly, in the case of the bomb blasts of 2006 in the local trains of Mumbai, and to a great extent, even during the pre-Diwali blast that occurred in 2005. In both instances, the news channels stayed with the victims, sensitized viewers to the personal loss and emotional upheaval they experienced.