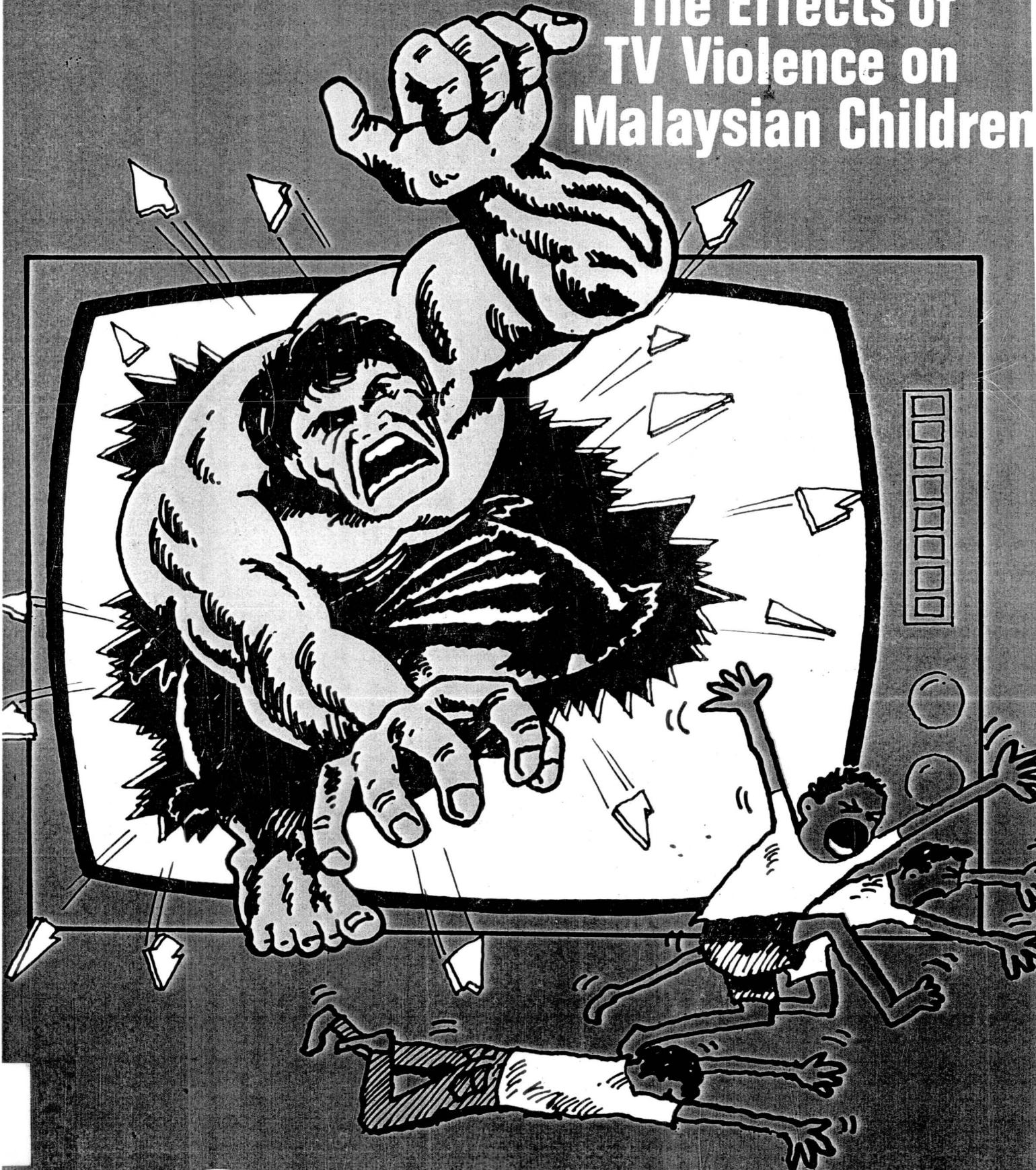


What TV does to our children

The Effects of
TV Violence on
Malaysian Children



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**The Effects of
TV Violence on
Malaysian Children**



CAP report no. 1

Consumers' Association of Penang

Published by
CONSUMERS' ASSOCIATION OF PENANG
87, Cantonment Road,
Penang
Malaysia

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) is a voluntary, non-profit organisation which fights for the rights and interests of all consumers through research, educational and representational activities.

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Printed by
Jutaprint,
54 Kajang Road,
10150 Penang.

ISBN-967-9950-02-6

1st Printing: 1984
2nd Printing: 1988

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PREFACE

In the modern world, TV has become an extremely important influence, not only on the use of leisure time but also on the culture, values, attitudes and behaviour of people all over the world.

Of all consumers, children are the most vulnerable to the effects of TV. Although much controversy still enshrouds the issue of how much TV influences the child, the fact that such influence exists is no longer in doubt. Extensive studies in the developed countries have shown that violence on TV has had significant impact on the attitudes and also the behaviour pattern on children.

The Consumers' Association of Penang has long been concerned with many of the programmes which are imported from the West and screened over TV Malaysia, and by the cultural influence of TV in general.

Our concern turned into alarm with a small news item in a national daily newspaper on 1st January 1983 that four young children had plunged to their deaths from buildings and hills in the previous week in Sabah, thinking they could fly like their TV screen heroes, 'Superman' and 'The Greatest American Hero'.

The same report mentioned that 12 other children were injured whilst trying to 'fly' and another five-year-old child was seriously injured by a moving car which he told police he was trying to lift.

With such dramatic and tragic proof of the effects of TV on children, CAP embarked on a survey of the extent and types of violence on selected popular programmes on Malaysian TV. This was followed up with a sample survey of children's and parents' attitudes towards TV, and of the effects which TV has on the children's attitudes towards violence, play habits and toys.

The results of the survey, presented in this report, are rather startling. They reveal that:

- * On average, a child watches TV 2-3 hours daily during weekdays and 3-4 hours during weekends. This adds up to about 1,200 hours of TV in a year compared to 1,040 hours a year in the classroom.
- * Of the top eight programmes liked by the children, seven contain a high degree of violence.
- * In the 13 TV programmes which CAP surveyed, there were 736 instances of violence within a total of only eight and a half hours of viewing time. The violence included 66 killings, 91 injuries, 94 shootings, 106 show of weapons, 147 instances of verbal violence, 92 demonstrations of physical strength and 140 other forms of violence like bomb explosions and car chases.
- * Half the parents interviewed said they did not control the type of programmes their children watch and two-thirds make use of TV to 'babysit' their young children.
- * 68 per cent of the parents reported that their children imitate the TV super heroes and 65 per cent said the children requested for toy guns and war games to play with. Other favourite birthday presents include superhero dolls, and caped T-shirts with super heroes embossed on them. None of the children interviewed mentioned a desire to play with tops, kites or marbles.
- * Asked what they would do to a crook, 12 out of 50 children said they would 'shoot him dead'. Most of the others would 'box him', 'beat him', 'wallup him', 'poke him with a knife', 'hang him' or 'put him in a cage'.
- * Many of the most violent programmes are cartoons (like Popeye) which, according to psychologists, have a great impact on children.

While this study is by no means comprehensive as it is based on a small sample, it nevertheless gives a good indication of the present situation regarding TV and its effects on children in Malaysia.

Some suggestions to remedy the situation are given in Chapter 8. The most important of these is that the government should institute a Commission of Inquiry to carry out a comprehensive study of the effects of TV with a view to reforming the selection of programmes.

This study indicates that such a review and reform of TV in Malaysia is called for and we hope that this study will itself contribute to such a process.

I would like to thank Mary Assunta who designed and conducted the research and wrote up the study, Evelyne Hong and Khor Kok Peng for helping in the conceptualisation, Lim Jee Yuan for the book design, and others who contributed in one way or another.

S.M. Mohd. Idris
President
Consumers' Association of Penang

April 1983

I INTRODUCTION

Watching TV has become an integral part of the Malaysian lifestyle. In fact it is the most important past-time for millions of Malaysians. It is the third biggest time consumer, coming after work and sleep. (1)

The effects of violence on TV on children has long been a debated topic. Time and again we have read foreign reports on loss of lives and injuries because of the influence of televised violence. We may have read these reports with interest or may have brushed them aside because they were reports on foreign incidents.

Now we have our own share of loss of lives and injuries to prove that this is not a matter to be treated light heartedly anymore. In January this year, five children died and a dozen more were seriously injured in Kota Kinabalu, when they jumped off buildings and cliffs while trying to fly in imitation of a TV Super Hero.

The incident came to light only because it was reported. This raises our concern as to how many similar incidents may be occurring in other parts of the country, but go unreported.

It is now time we took the effects of televised violence on children more seriously. We need to examine the problem in Malaysia and what can be done to overcome it.

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of violence on TV on children in Malaysia. We will specially look into the following areas :-

- * How TV can influence the child.
- * The extent and content of violence in some programmes screened over TV Malaysia.
- * The TV viewing habits of children in terms of their favourite programmes.

- * The extent to which TV has influenced children's playing habits.
- * What parents have to say about TV and their children.

The study also makes recommendations on improvements needed in our programming policy.

II THE EFFECTS OF TV VIOLENCE

The United States National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) states that watching violence on TV promotes violent and aggressive behaviour in children. This conclusion was reached after 10 years of research on how TV affects children.

The NIMH had come out with numerous laboratory and field studies involving more than 100,000 children from many parts of the world.

In 1972, the US government's chief medical official, the Surgeon General, Jesse L. Steinfield, blamed TV for violent behaviour in children. Since then, numerous studies and research involving thousands of children between the ages of 2 - 18 years have been carried out. Most of the findings confirm this allegation.

In one study for example, J.R. Dominick and Bradley S. Greenberg (1971) found that the greater the level of exposure to TV violence, the more the child was willing to use violence as a solution to conflicts. It was also found that the child believed in the effectiveness of violence in solving the conflict.

The following reports are two examples of children behaving under the influence of televised violence in foreign countries.

* San Diego : A high school honor student watches a lurid ABC - TV fictionalization of the 1890's Lizzie Borden axe murder case, then chops up his own parents and sisters to death and leaves his brother a quadriplegic.

* Denver : The Deer Hunter is telecast and a 17 year -old kills himself with a revolver, acting out the movie's climatic game of Russian Roulette. He is the 25th viewer in two years to kill himself that way after watching the drama on TV. (2)

Four kids 'fly' to their deaths

APPENDIX I

KOTA KINABALU, Fri.

— Four children have plunged to their deaths in the last week in the State thinking they could fly like their screen heroes, a police spokesman said today.

More than 12 children have also suffered broken arms, legs and ribs in the last few weeks trying to imitate Superman and Ralph Hinckley, the teacher with the power to fly in the television series "The Greatest American Hero", currently showing here.

The dead children, all under five, had jumped from hills and buildings, he added.

Most of the dead and injured had, been wearing tee-shirts with a picture of Superman on the front.

Police warned motorists this week to look out for children trying to perform superhuman feats after a five-year-old child was seriously injured by a moving car which he told police he was trying to lift. —
Reuter.

from The Star, 1.1.83

By the time an average American youngster reaches the age of 16, he would have spent 15,000 hours before the TV set as compared to 11,000 hours spent in the classroom. He will have witnessed some 150,000 violent episodes, including an estimated 25,000 deaths.⁽³⁾

MALAYSIAN EVIDENCE

Televised violence is our problem too and not to be passed off merely as studies done overseas on foreign children in foreign lifestyles watching foreign television. What is true for American children now seems true also for Malaysian children as evident in the two reports below.

* Kota Kinabalu, January 1983 : Over one week, four children died and 12 others were seriously injured when they tried to fly and perform other superhuman feats like 'The Greatest American Hero'. They were clad in Superman T-shirts. They had jumped off hills and buildings. All those who died were below five years old. One five year-old was seriously injured when he tried to lift a moving vehicle.

* February 1983 : A mother writes in to a local newspaper, 'I found my son (3 years old) perched precariously on a chair which he had pulled from a nearby table. He was about to jump from our upstairs bedroom window when I managed to restrain him in the nick of time.'

'Once I had recovered my senses, I asked him why he did it.' His answer was, 'Imen nak berlompat macam Greatest Ameycan Heyo' (Imen wants to fly like the Greatest American Hero).

.* General Observation : Television has also influenced the clothes the children wear and the kind of toys they play with.

Clothes : It is common to see children wearing T-shirts with TV super heroes such as Superman, the Incredible Hulk and the Six Million Dollar Man printed on them. Now the latest fad is Superman T-shirts with a cape attached to it.

Children at Play : We have seen children running in 'slow motion' in imitation of the Six Million Dollar Man or

from New Straits Times, 9.2.83

Not so gweat a heyoy

I AM the mother of a precious little boy not quite three years old and I have a big problem which I hope can be solved through your column, failing which I have every intention of forming a protest group.

I wish to protest against RTM's screening of *The Greatest American Hero* because it is no longer greatest, heroic nor funny.

A few days ago, I found my son perched precariously on a chair which he had pulled from a nearby table.

He was about to jump from our upstairs bedroom window when I managed to restrain him in the nick of time.

Once I had recovered my senses, I asked him why he did it. His answer was "Imen nak lompat macam Gweatest Ameylean Heyo." Need I say more?

I have often read articles about the effects TV programmes have on children and, to be honest, I have been shamefully nonchalant and dismissed them as intellectual exercises which make thoughtful reading and only applied to others.

Not anymore, because I now not only have had a first-hand experience and nightmares about my son jumping down windows, I also have to reckon with his wanting to fly downstairs and crashing onto and climbing over just about every imaginable article in the house.

It is not easy explaining to an active small boy his age the dangers and pitfalls of his emulating the Stupidest Hero Yet (after Superman). Thursday nights we stay home now no matter what because we cannot take chances anymore.

I sincerely hope RTM will look into this matter as I feel it warrants some serious thinking and something positive must be done.

I believe mine is not an isolated case as I am told that three little boys in East Malaysia had jumped from some blocks of flats in the fashion of Superman.

Everytime my son hums and sings "Beylv (believe) it or not I'm orking (walking) on air" I wonder how many other little children have contemplated putting that into practice. RTM, please do something.

S. SALLEH,
Kuala Lumpur.

trying to grunt like the Incredible Hulk. They also throw Bruce Lee's flying kicks and karate chops on their friends.

Children can also be seen running around with battery-worked toy guns (which light up and make a great deal of noise) shooting at their fellow playmates.

TYPES OF INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN

It is useful for us to understand how the children can learn these aggressive behaviour from watching televised violence. Research has shown that there are basically four processes which can influence the child. They are :-

- a) Observational learning
- b) Attitude change
- c) Immunization
- d) Justification(4)

a) Observational Learning

According to advocates of observational learning, a child learns to behave aggressively from watching violent actions on TV, just as he learns cognitive and social skills from watching parents, siblings and peers.

Children who see someone rewarded for doing something on TV will imitate that behaviour. At the same time, in the case of very young children, they simply imitate the violent act.

American TV provides numerous violent acts for the children to imitate. In one week, between the times of 3.00 p.m. - 11.00 p.m., a child would have seen 113 shootings, 93 stabbings, 168 beatings, 9 stranglings and 179 other violent acts. This gives 1 act of violence in every 18 minutes.

b) Attitude Change

TV also exerts its influence on children by moulding their attitudes. The more TV a child watches, the more accepting is the child's attitude towards aggressive behaviour. Attitudes in turn can influence one's behaviour.

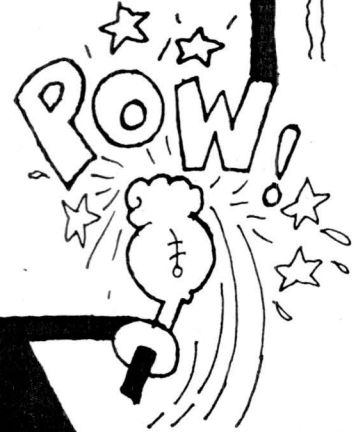
HOW TV AFFECTS OUR KIDS

3 WAYS IN WHICH
TV CAN INFLUENCE
OUR CHILDREN

1 IMITATION
OF TV CHARACTERS

2 IMMUNIZATION
TO VIOLENCE

3 JUSTIFYING
VIOLENCE



Two researchers, Rybeck and Connel, in 1978, carried out some experiments to test this. They examined the relative incidence of unruly behaviour among white and black high school students in the weeks before, during and after the broadcasting of 'Roots'.

Using the number of after-school detention as a measure, they found that there was a significant increase of black students in detention during the week 'Roots' was shown.

The researchers say that apparently watching 'Roots' has changed the black students' attitude about obedience.

c) Immunization

There is evidence to indicate that violence viewing immunizes and desensitizes children. They become immunized against violence and horror and as a result come to accept it as a natural part of life.

In an experimental field study conducted by Cline et al, 1973, boys who regularly watch a heavy diet of TV violence display less physiological arousal in response to new scenes of violence.

d) Justification

A child psychologist at Pennsylvania State University, USA, Dr. Harbarino, says that police shows and cartoons are the worst culprits of violence content.

He referred particularly to 'Starsky and Hutch', a crime drama. 'They make car crashes and high-speed chases seem like harmless fun. They are not harmless - they are dangerous and often fatal.

'And just like most make-believe situations depicted on the screen, TV's emphasis on invincible good guys is bound to give kids the wrong idea about pushing and shoving their way through life, ' says Dr. Harbarino.

He said, 'In American Television, it's only the bad guys who get shot. That legitimizes aggression because violence is

rarely seen hurting innocent bystanders. In this way, children learn to justify their own act of aggression.'

Another well known researcher in the study of effects of televised violence on children, Dr. George Gerbner, together with Dr. Larry Guess found a side effect to heavy TV viewing. The children tended to over-estimate the extent of violence and danger in the world.

Violence viewing seems to foster insecurity, self-doubt and undue concern about real or imagined threats of bodily harm. They tended to be more suspicious and distrustful of others.

A well known journalist, Patrick A. Parnell, illustrates the severity of the problem by asking the right questions, 'Do we want our children to murder someone? Of course not, no normal parent would. Then why allow your child to watch someone else get murdered? Why let your child experience the vacarious participation in a murder on television?.'

WHAT IS VIOLENCE?

Violence can be defined as the use of physical force or verbal abuse which is psychologically or physically injurious to a person or persons and the destruction of property and animals. The act can be either accidental or intentional.

Or more simply put, where TV is concerned, violence can be measured by how much fighting, shooting, yelling or killing there usually is in the show. (5)

Violence itself is subjective because there are different degrees of violence. For example yelling words of abuse at a person is an act of violence and so is shooting a person dead.

Violence can be basically divided into 2 categories : physical violence and psychological violence. Psychological violence can be verbal or subtle.

a) Physical Violence

Physical violence is the overt obvious violence such as killing a person, mugging, car chase, blowing up buildings and vehicles, etc.

b) Psychological Violence

Verbal psychological violence - This kind of violence is when the damage done is psychological. For example:-

- * Shouting - This is an act of violence because it evokes fear.
- * Threats - For example, 'I'll blow your head off.' This is a form of violence because it is meant to be a warning before the actual act.
- * Curses - 'God damn it.' This is swearing and blasphemous.

Subtle psychological violence - This form of violence is when the doer is usually out to ruin the victim. This kind of violence is so subtle that on the surface it may not appear to be 'violent', for example blackmail, cheating, etc. As an illustration, this is the kind of violence JR Ewing from 'Dallas' uses to settle his problems - to arrange for the elimination or ruin of people or anything that stands in his way.

III METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

To study the extent and effects of TV violence in Malaysia, the following methodology was used:-

- a) Selected programmes were coded to determine the level of violence.
- b) Survey of TV viewing and its effects, with interviews conducted among children and parents.

CODING OF PROGRAMMES

Thirteen foreign programmes screened over TV Malaysia were selected at random and viewed. Indicators of acts of violence were then determined and scoring sheets were drawn up. (Please refer to Appendix 6)

The following indicators of acts of violence were used in the coding : (6)

- * Killing (people or animals)
- * Inflicting injury (people or animals)
- * Number of shots fired
- * Weapons shown on the screen for example guns, sharp instruments, etc.
- * Verbal abuse for example shouting, threats ('I'll blow your head off'), swearing ('God damn it')
- * Physical strength for example blows, rape, strangulation, etc.
- * Other indicators for example bombs, poisons, drugs, gadgets or vehicles used to inflict pain or death, electrocution, supernatural, etc.

One point was allocated to each act of violence, that is, equal weightage was given to all acts of violence. The points for each programme were added up to give the totals for the respective programmes. How violent a programme is will be indicated by the size of the total.

Viewing and coding of the programmes were carried out over one ordinary week, 23 January - 29 January 1983. Each programme was viewed only once. A total of 13 programmes were selected and viewed. They are:-

- a) Cartoons
 - Space Stars
 - New Adventures of Superman
 - All New Popeye Show
 - Mickey and Donald
 - Scooby and Scrappy Doo

- b) Crime Drama
 - Kojak
 - Streets of San Francisco
 - Strike Force
 - Greatest American Hero

- c) Drama
 - Jason of Star Command (Space drama for children)
 - Battlestar Galactica (Space)
 - Movie of the Week
 - Best Sellers

(Please refer to Table 1 for the analysis of each programme)

SURVEY OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS

Two surveys were conducted on attitudes towards TV, one on children, and one on parents. The survey method used was random sampling. Questionnaires were administered to both groups of samples.

Survey on Children

The sample size for children was 50. The children interviewed were between the ages of 5 - 12 years. They were selected at random from three groups classified below to get a balance.

- a) One kindergarten which consisted of children mainly from the middle class and upper middle class.

- b) One kindergarten which had a mixture of children from all levels of income.

- c) At random from different areas in Penang.

Survey on Parents

A total of 40 parents were selected at random and administered with the questionnaires. All these parents had children below 12 years.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following are some of the limitations of this study.

- a) Equal weightage (that is, one point) is given to all acts of violence. Examples: a punch has equal weightage as a killing. Hence the severity of the act of violence is not taken into consideration.
- b) There is no yardstick to make a basis for comparison. How violent a programme is, is merely indicated by a total. This does not enable one to measure programmes in terms of: very violent or violent or non violent, etc.
- c) Since the programmes were viewed only once, the score of these programmes is not the average score. Ideally it would be better to view several episodes of the same programme in order to get an average score.

In this study for example, 'Battlestar Galactica' usually has a high score of shooting, explosions and killings. But the particular episode that was coded was the first part of a two-part episode, hence there was little 'action' Most of the 'action' came on in the second part.

- d) Not all the programmes were coded. Hence, this does not give a complete picture on the total potential violence the audience can be exposed to.
- e) The sample size is relatively small.
- f) The sample is basically an urban sample.

Nevertheless, despite the above limitations, we believe the survey gives at least a good indication of the situation regarding TV violence and its effects on children in Malaysia.

IV JUST HOW VIOLENT IS MALAYSIAN TV ?

Malaysian children are exposed to 4 killings, see 24 guns, hear 14 gunshots and see 38 physical blows daily. This is the conclusion of a study conducted by students in the Department of Mass Communications in the Universiti Sains Malaysia in 1978.(7)

According to this survey, in a year a child would have witnessed close to 3,000 killings, come across a minimum of 2,000 guns and weapons and heard thousands of shots fired over TV Malaysia.

GENERAL ANALYSIS

For the purpose of this study, 13 programmes on TV Malaysia were watched for a one-week period, between 23 January 1983, to determine the extent and types of violence in these programmes. Five of these programmes were cartoons, four were crime or detective programmes, two were 'Space' programmes aimed at children, and the remaining two were serious dramas, 'Best Sellers' and 'Movie of the Week'. (The full results of this survey is given in Table 1.

The TV survey revealed a high degree of various types of violence in almost all the programmes watched. In one programme, 'Strike Force' as many as 42 people were killed, whilst in another, 'Battlestar Galactica' there were 9 killings. In nine out of the 13 programmes, there were more than ten occasions when weapons were used or shootings took place. The most number of show of weapons and shootings occurred in the 'Greatest American Hero' (35 times), 'Jason of Star Command' (32 times), 'New Adventures of Superman' (30 times) and 'Battlestar Galactica' (26 times).

In all the 13 programmes watched, there were a total of 736 instances of violence of all types, made up of 66 killings, 91 injuries, 106 show of weapons, 94 shootings, 147 instances of verbal violence, 92 uses of physical strength and 140 other

TABLE 1: CONTENT OF VIOLENCE OF SOME TV MALAYSIA PROGRAMMES (23 JANUARY – 29 JANUARY 1983)

Name of Programme	Time	Length (min.)	Type	Types of Violence						Total
				Killing	Injury	Weapon/ Shooting*	Verbal Violence	Physical Strength	Others	
Space Stars	6.15	25	Cartoon	—	9	3/20	10	—	51	93
New Adventures of Superman	5.15	15	Cartoon	—	4	15/15	13	25	15	87
Mickey and Donald	6.30	28	Cartoon	6	14	4/	16	24	18	82
Strike Force	11.00	45	Crime	42	2	10/	6	4	9	73
Greatest American Hero	8.40	45	Crime	—	11	20/15	12	3	3	64
All New Popeye Show	6.12	18	Cartoon	—	18	—	20	13	5	56
Kojak	10.24	54	Crime	3	4	12/	24	6	2	51
Battlestar Galactica	8.45	45	Space	9	2	6/20	3	4	6	50
Scooby and Scrappy Doo	6.13	24	Cartoon	—	18	2/	10	6	12	48
Jason of Star Command	4.50	20	Space	—	3	12/20	6	—	6	47
Movie of the Week	12.00	90	Drama	2	1	15/	10	—	10	38
Streets of San Francisco	9.45	45	Crime	2	3	6/4	7	5	2	29
Best Sellers	11.55	45	Drama	2	2	1/	10	2	1	18
Total		670		66	91	106/94	147	92	140	736

SOURCE: CAP TV SURVEY

* Indicates number of times weapons appear on the screen and the number of shots that ring out.

violent scenes. All these were shown in the total space of eight-and-a-half hours, the total length of the programmes.

All the cartoons were screened during the 'children's peak hour' in the early evening (before 7.00 p.m.) while the 'Greatest American Hero' and 'Battlestar Galactica' were screened at the peak family hour just after 8.30 p.m. Only four of the programmes ('Kojak', 'Streets of San Francisco', 'Best Sellers' and 'Movie of the Week') were screened at 9.45 p.m. and after.

Below an analysis is made of the cartoons and the crime drama programmes.

Analysis of Cartoons

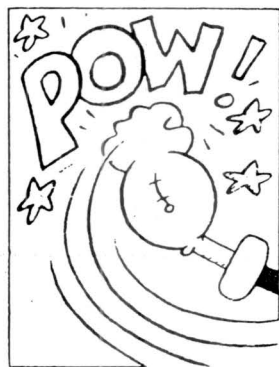
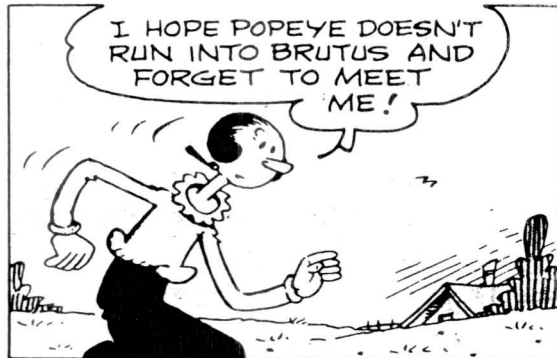
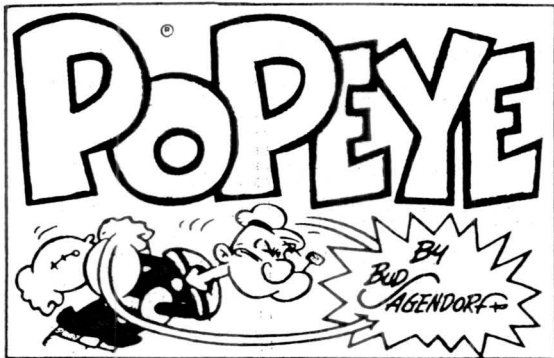
Here five cartoons screened over TV Malaysia will be analysed. They are: 'Space Stars', 'New Adventures of Superman', 'Mickey and Donald', 'All New Popeye Show' and 'Scooby and Scrappy Doo'.

Table 2: Total Violent Acts for Cartoons
(23 January - 29 January 1983)

Cartoons	Length of Programme (min.)	Total Acts of Violence
Space Stars	25	93
New Adventures of Superman		87
Mickey and Donald	28	82
All New Popeye Show	18	56
Scooby and Scrappy Doo	24	48
Total	95	366

SOURCE: CAP TV SURVEY

The total acts of violence is particularly high for the cartoons. In fact 'Space Stars' - 93, 'New Adventures of Superman' - 87 and 'Mickey and Donald' - 82, have the



EXAMPLE OF POPEYE VIOLENCE

Even women and children are portrayed as extremely violent characters. Six out of the nine comic frames had people exchanging blows. And despite the many violent blows, Popeye and Olive emerged unharmed. Such is the unrealistic portrayal of violence in many of our TV characters. (Cartoon appeared in Sunday Mail, March 18, 1984)

highest total scores of violence in the analysis of the 13 programmes.

Cartoons also have a high incidence of violence, that is, number of acts of violence in terms of the duration of the cartoon. For example, for 'Space Stars', a 25 minute programme, on an average has one violent act every 16 seconds, for both 'Mickey and Donald' and 'All New Popeye Show', one violent act every 20 seconds, and 'Scooby and Scrappy Doo', one in every 30 seconds.

'New Adventures of Superman' has the highest frequency of violent acts. For a 15 minute programme, it had a total of 87 violent acts. On an average, that is one violent act every 10 seconds.

Cartoons are funny. People may find it difficult to see cartoons as being violent. According to Dr. Jenni Ibrahim, it is a misconception that all cartoons do not 'harm' children. Dr. Jenni said studies have shown that children become more aggressive after watching 'Superman' and 'Batman' cartoons. She said of the popular cartoons screened by TV Malaysia, many had violent themes that could affect the young.

The cartoons that appear in Table 2 ('Space Stars', 'New Adventures of Superman', 'Mickey and Donald', 'All New Popeye Show' and 'Scooby and Scrappy Doo') are currently very popular with the children. (This is indicated in the survey which is discussed later). Most of the children watch these cartoons - and all the violence that goes with them.

Analysis of Crime Dramas

Crime dramas have always been noted for its fast paced action, suspense and violence. A few crime dramas screened over TV Malaysia will now be analysed. They are 'Strike Force', 'The Greatest American Hero', 'Kojak' and 'Streets of San Francisco'.

Table 3: Violent Acts for Crime Dramas
(23 January - 29 January 1983)

Crime Dramas	Length of Programme (min.)	Total Acts of Violence
Strike Force	45	73
The Greatest American Hero	45	64
Kojak	54	51
Streets of San Francisco	45	29
Total	189	217

SOURCE : CAP TV SURVEY

The table above gives the time length of the programmes and the total number of acts of violence for each show.

The incidence of the occurrence of an act of violence for each show on an average is: for 'Strike Force', one act of violence every 37 seconds; 'The Greatest American Hero', one act for every 42 seconds; 'Kojak', one act every 64 seconds; and 'Streets of San Francisco', one act every 93 seconds.

The examples of some of the most common acts of violence in crime dramas are: shooting down person/persons in cold blood, physical blows, car chase, car explosions, people being chased, run down, threats - made very often with a weapon, etc. In most instances the acts of violence are shown explicitly. The audience get to see the injury inflicted (either physical or verbal), blood and death.

'Strike Force' and 'Streets of San Francisco' are typical crime dramas. In this particular episode of 'Strike Force', the programme started of with 38 people already dead and the death of the other four people were clearly shown.

'The Greatest American Hero', Ralph Hickley is a real super hero. This is basically a crime drama but with an element of fantasy - the hero can fly and has other super powers. He uses these powers to catch crooks. Incidence of show of weapons, shooting and injury is high for this programme. Children just love this programme.

Flying off roof-tops, lifting moving vehicles off the road or hurling people around is all exciting and fun to watch. But not when children start trying them.

'Kojak', a popular series with the Malaysian audience, has a very high incidence of verbal threats, shouting and curses; such as 'God damn it', 'bloody', etc.

'Battlestar Galactica' has been a hit in Malaysia and secured fifth placing in a recent Top 10 TV Poll carried out by a local newspaper. This programme is also a top favourite among the children as indicated by the survey carried out by CAP. It is the second most popular programme with the children.

What the children like most about this programme is all the sophisticated shooting and fighting between the space crafts and the space warriors, not to mention lazer guns and robot fighters. This programme also has a high incidence of explosion of space crafts.

It is obvious that TV Malaysia has not given enough thought to the amount of violence emanating from current programmes on our TV.

Although the most atrocious forms of violence are cut out, there is still a lot of shootings, murders, punching and hitting being screened.

The CAP study on TV shows that children are very susceptible to the examples of behaviour they see on the screen. Even if only a few may follow what they seen, many more will, at the least, be made more insensitive to the effects of violence.

While our concern here is with children, we are

sure that adolescents and adults too are negatively affected by TV violence.

So while TV Malaysia has been careful to censor sex scenes from the screen, it should now also pay equal attention to violence.

V WHAT PARENTS AND CHILDREN HAVE TO SAY

This chapter discusses the findings of the survey on parents and children.

PARENTS' CONTROL OVER CHILDREN'S TV VIEWING

Table 4: Parents' Control Over Their Children's TV Viewing

PARENTS	YES		NO		SOMETIMES	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. Do you control the number of hours of TV?	25	65	15	37		
2. Do you control the type of programmes?	20	50	20	50		
3. Do you watch TV with children?	8	20	1	2	31	78
4. Is TV a blessing?	26	65	14	35		

SOURCE: CAP TV SURVEY

From the table above, we can see that 37% of the parents do not control the number of hours of TV their children watch. Half of the parents do not control the programmes their children can or cannot watch. This means that the children can watch anything that they choose to. Most of the parents (78%) only sometimes watch TV with their children. A large number of parents (65%) have also indicated that they will find TV a blessing because it keeps the children occupied while they are free to do their own chores. In other words, most of the time parents look upon TV as a "baby sitter". As far as the children are concerned, they are very happy watching the screen.

EXTENT OF CHILDREN'S VIEWING TIME

All the 50 children interviewed said they like to watch TV, and all of them watch TV every day. On an average, a child watches TV 2 - 3 hours daily during weekdays and 3 - 4 hours daily during weekends. This adds up to about 1,200 hours of TV in a year compared to 1,040 hours a year in the classroom.

CHILDREN'S FAVOURITE PROGRAMMES

Below is the list of eight popular programmes the children have named as their favourite. The programmes are ranked according to popularity.

Table 5 : Favourite TV Programmes of the Children

PROGRAMME	WEIGHTED SCORE
1. Greatest American Hero	37
2. Battlestar Galactica	34
3. Mickey and Donald	16
4. All New Popeye Show	15
5. New Adventures of Superman	14
6. Eight is Enough	8
7. Ultraman	5
8. Buck Rogers	3

SOURCE: CAP TV SURVEY

The contents of the top 5 programmes have been discussed earlier and they have been shown to be violent. Though Ultraman and Buck Roger have not been discussed or analysed, it is beyond doubt that these two programmes have violent themes.

"Eight is Enough" is a programme which can be recommended for children's viewing. Its focus is on family relationships and its themes are on love, sharing, caring, friendship - aspects of human relationships which children should develop.

REASONS FOR LIKING THE TV PROGRAMMES

(Reasons below are what most of the children said, given as quoted).

1. **Greatest American Hero**
 - he can fly (more than half the children gave this reason but the answers varied. Example — his flying is nice)
 - because got fighting
 - he is comical
 - he is very good, he can fly, he can fight.
2. **Battlestar Galactica**
 - nice spaceships
 - it is exciting
 - there is plenty of action/fighting
 - nice to see the shooting
 - nice to fly away.
3. **Mickey and Donald**
 - nice
 - animals have power
 - got skating
 - I like cartoons.
4. **All New Popeye Show**
 - because Popeye can punch very hard
 - because got fighting
 - because nice
 - I like cartoons.
5. **New Adventures of Superman**
 - because he can fly (several children gave this reason)
 - he can fight
 - he has power.
6. **Eight is Enough**
 - Nicholas is nice
 - nice.
7. **Ultraman**
 - can fight the creatures
 - got rocket
 - destroy the monster.
8. **Buck Rogers**
 - Robots are fantastic.

"The Greatest American Hero" and "Battlestar Galactica" have come out tops with the children. In fact more than 70% of the children have listed these two programmes as their favourite. They prove to be even more popular than the cartoons.

The children seem to like the "Greatest American Hero" mostly because the hero can fly. (The other reasons for liking the programme can be found in table on page 25). As for "Battlestar Galactica", the children seem attracted to the sophisticated space ship and the sharp, fast shooting.

CHILDREN'S FAVOURITE TV HEROES

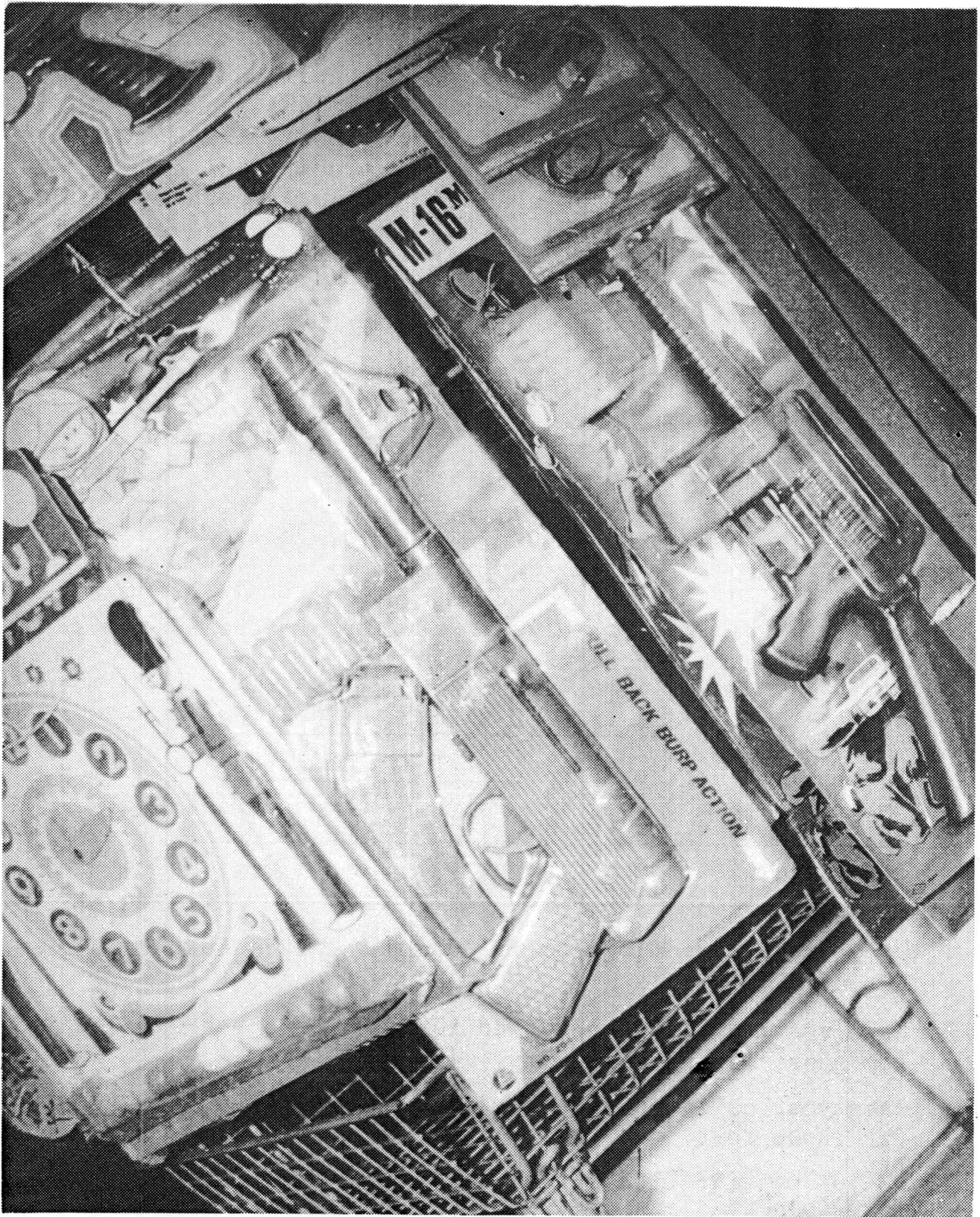
The children's favourite TV characters follow closely their favourite programmes. The table below gives the most popular TV personalities according to rank.

Table 6: Favourite TV Characters Ranked According to Popularity

FAVOURITE CHARACTER	VOTES	%
1. Greatest American Hero	20	40
2. Starbuck / Apollo (Battlestar Galactica)	8	16
3. Popeye	7	14
4. Mickey & Donald	6	12
5. Superman	5	10
6. Ultraman	2	4
7. Nicholas (Eight is Enough)	2	4
	50	100

SOURCE: CAP TV SURVEY

From the table above one can see that the hero from the 'Greatest American Hero', Ralph Hickely, is a real "hero" with the children, sweeping 40% of the children's votes. Starbuck/Apollo only come a poor second with 16% of the children's votes.



Toy guns are on sale in most toy shops. The bigger and more sophisticated the gun, the more expensive. The guns also come with special features such as light, rapid shooting or sound.

TOYS CHILDREN PLAY WITH

It looks as though traditional children's toys such as tops, marbles and kites are out of fashion these days. When asked what kind of toys they liked to play with, none of the children mentioned any of these traditional toys. It cannot be denied that TV programmes to a large extent influence the imagination of the children and the kind of games they play.

About 75% of the children said that they possessed toy guns at home and that they liked playing with the guns. The other 25% of the children were mainly girls and those above 10 years old.

The children did not hesitate when asked to describe their toy guns: "big one, so long", "automatic machine gun", "Starwars gun with light and sound", "police gun", "water pistol", etc.

The table below gives the views of parents on the playing patterns of their children.

Table 7 : Views of Parents on Playing
Patterns of Their Children

PARENTS	YES		NO	
		%		%
1. Do your children imitate TV super heroes?	27	68	13	32
2. Have your children requested for toy guns, war games to play with?	26	65	14	35
3. Have your children shown preference for these toys?	24	60	16	40
4. Do you provide them with facilities for games such as badminton, etc.?	24	60	16	40

SOURCE : CAP TV SURVEY

From the table above, we can see that 68% of the parents have said that their children imitate TV superheroes.

It is a common scene to see children roaring like the "Incredible Hulk" or running in "slow motion" like the "Six Million Dollar Man". This is alright as long as the imitation is not dangerous and adults are around to keep an eye. But evidence shows that accidents can happen with such imitation.

A principal of a local kindergarten, Mrs Priscilla Ong, says that she strongly believes TV has an influence on children. She explained how when children first come into her kindergarten they tend to imitate superheroes, like superman, when they play. They do get into fights and hurt each other.

Following an incident where a child was hurt, she and the teachers prevent the children from playing such violent games. Instead she provides them with educational toys and other games. She also makes it a point to reprimand the children when they try to imitate superheroes.

Children learn to play with toy guns and other toy weapons from watching TV. Altogether 65% of the parents in the survey reported that their children have requested for toy guns and other war games to play with. Another 60% of the parents have also said that their children have shown a preference for these toys over other toys.

Although 60% of the parents have said that they provide their children with facilities for games such as badminton, scrabble, monopoly, they can do so only for older children. For children below 8 years especially, they have to settle for toys.

When the children were asked with whom they play their toy guns it was found that they play most with their brothers, sisters, friends or parents. One child said, "I play gun with my brother. I be policeman, he is thief, and then I shoot him. Take the bullet and put inside the gun and the bullet is very powerful."

The children were asked what presents they would like for their birthday. Their answers are tabulated below.



The superman suit with the super hero embossed on the front. This six year old boy positions his hands all ready for the 'take off'.

Table 8 : Birthday Presents Children Would Like

BIRTHDAY PRESENTS		%
1. Guns (of all types)	15	30
2. Racing cars/trucks/aeroplanes	12	24
3. Superheroes dolls (e.g. Popeye, E.T.)	5	10
4. Bicycle (E.T. bicycle) (9)	3	6
5. Dolls	3	6
6. T-shirts with Superheroes printed on/ Superman suit	2	4
7. Kavada	2	4
8. Computer games	2	4
9. Soldier/War games	1	2
10. Others	5	10

SOURCE : CAP TV SURVEY

As shown in the table above, 30% of the children said that they would like toy guns for their birthday. Of these children, some already possess toy guns. Those who had small, simple guns, were going to ask for bigger and "better" guns. For example, "Starwars gun, so long, got sound and light". (Some of the children described the kind of toy guns they would like by indicating the size with their hands).

Models of superhero such as Popeye, Superman, Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Ultraman, E.T. are popular with the children. 10% of the children have indicated they would like these superheroes for their birthday.

A few of the children already possess the Superman suit and another 4% of them have said they would like to have one.

What a child sees on the screen can influence him directly. Sometimes the influence of TV must also be seen in perspective of other factors such as those shown in this survey.

Many parents look upon the TV set as their children's "babysitter". It keeps their children occupied and off their hands while they do their chores. The majority of the parents

(78%) have said that they only sometimes watch TV with their children. This leaves the children unsupervised in front of the screen most of the time.

Besides this, how many parents refuse the requests of their children for toy guns and superman suits? The survey has shown that parents have on the contrary been encouraging their children by providing them with toy guns, superman suits, etc., to play with. A child sees guns on TV and he has guns to play with. He sees Superman flying on the screen, and soon he has a similar suit to put on. What is there to stop him from experimenting with his fantasies?

HOW WOULD CHILDREN TREAT A CRIMINAL?

The influence of TV on the children was further tested by asking the children how they would punish a crook or a murderer. Their answers are tabulated below.

Table 9 : How the Children Would Punish A Crook

		%
1. Put him in prison	19	38
2. Shoot him	12	24
3. Box/Beat/Wallup him	7	14
4. Take a gun, handcuff him and put him in prison	5	10
5. Take a knife and poke him	3	6
6. Hang him	2	4
7. Hit him with a bottle	1	2
8. Put him in a cage	1	2

SOURCE: CAP TV SURVEY .

"Put him in prison." That is how 38% of the children would punish a crook. About 10% of them said the crook had to be handcuffed first, and this must be done with the help of a gun.

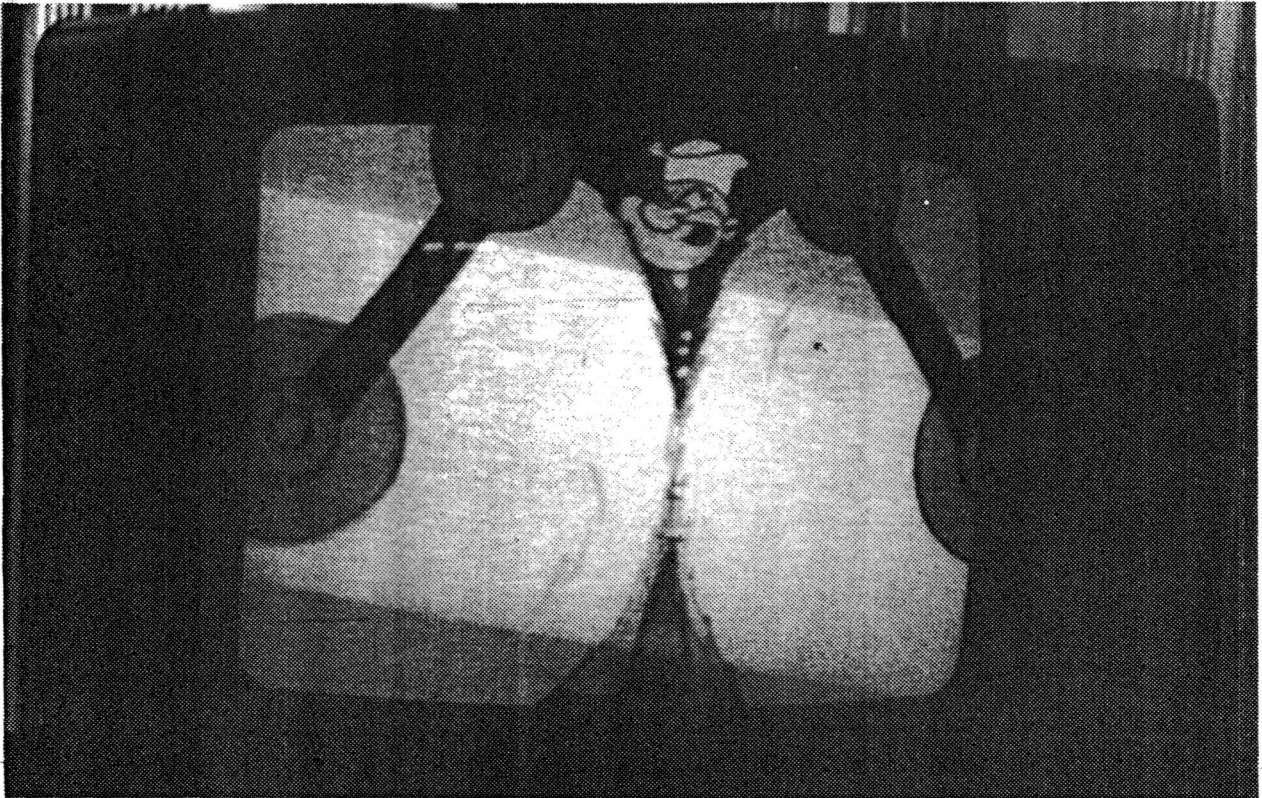
One child quoted a typical scene from a crime drama, "Take a gun, say "Roger", handcuff the hand and lock him in jail."

The answers given, strongly indicate the influence of TV. 14% of the children said they would "box", "beat" or "wallup" a crook. The answers had variations like, "Take a stick and beat him". In crime dramas especially, crooks or suspected crooks can be seen either beaten up or shot by police officers and the children can recall these scenes. 24% of them feel crooks should be shot.

The other answers too strongly indicated recalling of scenes from a movie: 6% of them would want to "Take a knife and poke him", 4% want to "hang him", 2% want to "hit him with a bottle" and 2% want to put him in a cage.

It is unlikely that these children would have witnessed the actual arrest or punishment of a crook in real life. But they are unhesitant as to what to do with them and have come up with punishments they feel are justified. What more, most of these are not punishments, but violent actions like those they have seen in violent scenes.

It is significant to note that the children do not see the need for the "Crook" to explain himself or be given a fair trial. Instead "an eye for an eye" seems more logical in their minds. In fact the children seem to react violently towards the crook and feel justified about it.



Popeye caught in a faulty car wash.



Mickey Mouse all ready to confront an intruder. It is only seconds before the shots ring out.

VI CARTOONS - CULPRITS OF VIOLENCE

Cartoons and police shows are the worst culprits of violent programmes, says Dr. Jini Harbarino, a child psychologist at Pennsylvania State University, U.S.A.

According to the survey conducted by CAP all of the children below 10 years old like to watch cartoons. What concerns us is that children are exposed to all the violence and they enjoy watching it.

The scenes of violence in cartoons may not appear to be violent because firstly it is animated and secondly no one really suffers pain and dies. For example, despite the fact the Popeye may fall off a flying plane, land on a tree branch, bounce off, land on the road, be flattened by a truck, and still be able to get up and walk away muttering.

Studies listed below show that "action" cartoons are damaging on children.

- * Stanford University psychologist, Albert Bandura, in his study found cartoon violence as potent as real-life models in increasing violence amongst youngsters.
- * Playground depredation like fighting and kicking were far greater among steady action-cartoon viewers. This was the finding of Drs. Jerome and Dorothy Singer of Yale University in their year long study on 200 preschoolers.
- * Another study by University of Kansas researcher on 66 preschoolers found that Saturday morning cartoons markedly hiked aggression and decreased imaginative play.

We will now examine the main themes in some of the cartoons. In Popeye for example, the theme is, "the problem can be solved by brute force which is obtained by eating

spinach." So Popeye settles his problems with his enemies by his fists. (Please refer to photos on page 34). These photographs are examples of violent scenes in cartoons.

In Space Stars and Superman, we see superheroes shooting rays and beams from their eyes and hands, gadgets which can perform any feat and explosion after explosion.

In the case of Scooby and Scrappy Doo, the characters are always hiding from draculas and mummies in drawers, cupboards and boxes while the beings are out to kill them.

What needs to be noted is the constant and quick flow of violent actions. Everything happens at split seconds. There's no time to think. The eye sees everything and it all gets registered.

If one still asks what is so violent about cartoons; well, what is not violent about characters falling off moving aircrafts and buildings, or being shot at, run over by vehicles and turning into human pancakes, and characters fired off as human cannon balls?

Cartoons tend to reduce the intensity of danger, pain and suffering and thereby give a false picture of reality. Adults may be able to distinguish reality from fantasy, and merely laugh while watching cartoons. But some children are unable to yet distinguish right from wrong and are not yet capable of anticipating nor assessing danger. They have curious minds and imagination which need to be fulfilled. There's nothing to stop them imitating what they have seen on TV.

There is evidence to show that the influence of action cartoons on children is real.

Evidence : Capital Hill, U.S.A.

During a hearing on TV violence a case was presented before the network executives in which a three-year old boy had poked his fist through a glass door in imitation of a TV cartoon character and had almost bled to death.

The language used in cartoons is often not only

grammatically wrong, but harsh; e.g. "blundering fool", "knuckle head", etc.

Popeye is a typical example of bad English. One parent recently wrote in to a local newspaper, "My seven year old son's addiction to the TV set is so bad that his lingo consisted of 'I yam going to school' and 'what's doing?' Thanks to the New Popeye Show."

Cartoons have also influenced children in their play and the clothes they wear. About 60% of the parents in the survey conducted by CAP have indicated that their children imitate superheroes when they play.

It is quite common to see children wearing T-shirts with their superheroes printed on them. T-shirts with cape - just like Superman's - are now available in the market. Several children have indicated that they were going to ask their parents to buy them these Superman suits. For those who already possessed them, they liked this suit very much.

Said one child, "I got Superman suit. When I wear it I try to fly. When I cannot fly I beat myself." When asked why he beat himself, "Because I want to fly like Superman."

Another child said, "I wear the suit and go outside and see what I can do."

These examples are sufficient to illustrate just how much an impact cartoons have on children and have influenced them in their thinking and behaviour.

VII SOME WORTHWHILE CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMES

Watching TV is the main leisure activity for most Malaysians, young and old. As such there should be a wide selection of programmes available for the audience as they relax before the TV set. Some might even say audience should have a right in deciding what should come on the screen.

We are particularly interested in the child audience. Children have their own right as an audience to watch the TV programmes made specially for them, like cartoons, adventure stories and educational programmes.

Most of the cartoons screened over TV Malaysia have proved to be violent. However, there are a few programmes which are suitable for children's viewing.

(a) Shirl's neighbourhood (N1) Monday : 6.12 p.m.

This programme is particularly suitable for children below eight years. It is educational but done in an appealing manner with songs, dance and things to do.

(b) Daktari (N1) Tuesday : 5.10 p.m.

This is an adventure programme with the main theme on preservation of animals. Usually the bad guys are the poachers and they get punished. The children get to see a variety of animals in their natural habitat. Through "Judy" and "Clarence" the children can also learn that animals can be friends.

(c) Camp Wilderness (N1) Tuesday : 7.20 p.m.

This is more of an educational adventure programme. Children can be introduced to outdoor activities such as camping, trekking, etc.

(d) Follow Me (N1) Wednesday : 5.40 p.m.

This programme provides an easy and interesting way to learn English.

(e) Happy Go-Round (N1) Wednesday : 6.15 p.m.

This is a colourful entertainment cum educational programme. The children can get to see historic places, museums, ancient art and the like. Very informative.

(f) Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids

This cartoon is about a group of kids learning to cope with everyday problems. It deals with issues such as friendship, cooperation, jealousy, competition, justice, etc. Basically, tips on growing up.

(g) Fat Cat and Friends

This is basically an educational programme for the younger children - learning to count, draw and describe. It is presented in an interesting manner with music, puppets, toys and of course, cuddly Fat Cat and his two pals.

VIII WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

The CAP TV survey shows that a serious re-thinking on the present selection of programmes is called for.

What should the government, parents and teachers do? Here are a few suggestions.

THE GOVERNMENT

The government has the biggest role to play in controlling TV violence because it has absolute control over what appears on the screen.

For a start, the Information Ministry should set up a Commission of Inquiry to carry out a comprehensive study of the effects of TV on the public, with special emphasis on children.

It should also set up a Selection Board comprising TV Malaysia officials, psychologists, teachers and consumer representatives.

This Board would draw up criteria for the selection of programmes, and advise on the types of programmes and specific programmes to be screened and to be taken off.

The present method of programme selection is quite a mystery to the public, and it is too important a matter to leave solely to TV Malaysia.

Arising from our TV survey, CAP suggests that cartoons and other programmes containing too much violence be taken off as soon as possible. "Detective programmes" should be screened after 10 p.m. if not taken off altogether.

On the other hand, it should be easy to select good, educational and interesting programmes as alternatives. And of course, there can be more local productions of children's programmes.

PARENTS

Parents can be another major factor in controlling what programmes their children see. However, many parents are either too busy with work or other activities to guide their children's TV fare.

Ideally, parents should be present when children watch TV so they can educate their children on what they view.

Parents should pay attention on how many programmes and what type of programmes their children can watch.

Unfortunately, many parents use TV as a means to "babysit" their children. As a result, many young children are "forced" (willingly, no doubt) to watch whatever programmes are showing for hours at a stretch.

Parents should make sure children do not become TV addicts. Indeed, valuable time is lost when a child passively sits and stares at the screen. Especially when most programmes are non-educational or positively harmful.

Children should instead be encouraged to cultivate healthier hobbies - being outdoors, playing games, reading, carpentry, music, etc.

TEACHERS

Teachers too can guide children on the good and bad aspects of specific programmes and on TV in general.

Discussions, debates and essays can be organised for students on the subject.

1X CONCLUSION

In this study we have seen that the effects of violence on TV on children is real with the Malaysian children. TV has influenced the child's imagination, his toys, his clothes and even his language. Children have a curious and imaginative mind which seeks to be fulfilled all the time. If not supervised this can be dangerous and result in injury and even death.

Children like to watch TV and have shown to be particularly attracted to cartoons and fantasy-action-packed drama. This may serve to fuel their active, imaginative minds. That is why they need to be educated and guided on what they watch on TV. This is where the cooperation of all adults, especially that of parents, teachers and government officials is needed.

Another point that needs to be noted is that children are always full of questions - about anything and everything. When it comes to fantasy and reality they need to be told the truth. They should know that in real life people cannot fly and that violence is wrong because it hurts people.

Finally, this study has indicated that a review and reform of TV in Malaysia is called for. It is hoped that this study will contribute to this process of review and reform.

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NOTES

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- (3) IBID
- (4) TV and Behaviour, National Institute of Mental Health; Volume 2.
- (5) According to Greenberg.
- (6) Methodology used here is similar to that used in the study, "Content Analysis of the Portrayal of Violence in Malaysian TV" conducted in Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1978.
- (7) "Content Analysis of the Portrayal of Violence in Malaysian TV" Mass Communication Department, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1978.
- (8) Eugene H. Methvin, TV violence : The Shocking New Evidence, Reader's Digest, February 1983 , Pg. 87.
- (9) The influence of the media is further highlighted in this example - 6% of the children said they would like "E.T. Bicycles" for their birthdays.

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What TV does to our children

Television violence and fantasy is having harmful psychological and physical effects on Malaysian children.

This new CAP study reveals that:

- At least four young Malaysian children fell to their death and 12 others were seriously injured trying to fly off buildings — in the TV style of Superman and the Greatest American Hero;
- Malaysian TV viewers are exposed to an average 4 killings, 24 guns, 14 gunshots and 38 physical blows a day;
- Cartoons such as 'Popeye' and 'Superman' are the worst culprits of television violence — and these make great impressions on children;
- Asked by CAP what they would do to a crook, 12 out of 50 children said they would 'shoot him dead'. Most of the others would 'box', 'beat', 'wallup' him, 'poke him with a knife', 'hit him with a bottle', 'hang him', or 'put him in a cage'.
- Guns and violent weapons top the list of children's favourite birthday presents. Other TV-influenced favourites: Popeye dolls, E.T. bicycles, Superman tee-shirts and suits.

Given the massive impact of television on children as revealed in the CAP survey, it is important that a Commission of Inquiry be set up to suggest criteria for the selection of programmes, and for an overhaul of our television system.

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) is a voluntary, non-profit organisation which fights for the rights and interest of Malaysian consumers through research, educational and representational activities.

The issues it takes up include basic needs (food, nutrition, health, housing, transport, etc.), food and product safety, environmental pollution and problems, the rational use of resources, specific problems of women, and business malpractices.

This is part of a series of CAP REPORTS aimed at providing the public with the results of some of the important areas of CAP's activities and issues. It is hoped that this series will generate public interest and awareness, and help contribute to changes towards a better situation for consumers.