

ACCM MEDIA RELEASE FOR AUGUST 27/8

International Commission on media violence finds all viewers affected

A special Commission set up by the International Society for Research on Aggression has found that 'every viewer or player is affected in some way' and that 'exposure to media violence is one risk factor for increased aggression in both the short and long term'. The Commission's findings are published in the Sep/ Oct issue of the journal **Aggressive Behavior**. To access the full report please visit www.israsociety.com .

Australian academic Dr Wayne Warburton, one of the Commission's 12 international authors, says 'the members took a fair and balanced look at the existing research. They found that exposure to a range of violent media can act as triggers for aggressive thoughts and feelings already stored in the memory. If these aggressive thoughts and feelings are activated over and over again through repeated exposure to media violence they can become chronically accessible and therefore are more likely to influence behaviour. Other well demonstrated effects include desensitisation to violence, and changes to the way people view the world. Interestingly, the best designed studies found these effects most strongly. The Commission noted that such effects should not be seen as surprising – most people believe that advertising can change our thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and the same sorts of processes are implicated in the influence of media violence'.

Prof Elizabeth Handsley, President of the Australian Council on Children and the Media said, 'The Commission's findings are just the kind of evidence on which Australia's classification system should be based'. She continued, 'The present system is based on concepts like offence and confusion that have no basis in science. The research tells us which kinds of violence raise the risk of an adverse influence on children at different ages, for example glamorised violence. The criteria should be revised to reflect this knowledge. This would enhance the standing of the classification system as a provider of accurate information about content and impact'.

Professor Handsley said, 'Parents are finding it harder and harder to monitor their children's media use. Government needs to act to ensure that parents are well informed about the risks from violent and fear-provoking content, and have easy access to information about content in films and games and the likely influence on thoughts, attitudes and behaviour at different age levels'.

ACCM Vice President and child psychologist Dr C Glenn Cupit said that the Commission's broad findings were not new but deserved prominence as they came from an international group of scholars all with a track record of research into aggression. Further it was time that the long-perpetuated myth that 'the jury was still out on the impacts of media violence' was debunked. He said 'as long ago as 2000, the Australian Psychological Society reported that media violence increased the risks of the use of aggression to solve conflict and of desensitisation to the use of violence. Action is well overdue'.

ACCM is a unique national community organisation, which strives for a media environment that supports the health, safety and wellbeing of Australian children. It is committed to promoting healthy choices and stronger voices in children's media. ACCM delivers the free *Know Before You Go* movie review service for parents and to date has reviewed over 700 movies. The reviews inform parents about movie content and the likely impacts on children at different ages and stages. www.childrenandmedia.org.au

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