

# YOUNG MEDIA AUSTRALIA

## Reducing Reel to Real Violence Parent survey Final Report May 2007

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## **Executive Summary**

In 2006, Young Media Australia (YMA) received funding from the Federal Attorney General's National Community Crime Prevention Programme (NCCPP) to develop an intervention for parents to assist them to reduce the exposure of children under the age of seven to media violence.

A parent survey was conducted in April 2007, with two objectives: (1) to assist the Consultative Committee to decide on the most effective parent intervention to encourage/inform parents about the impact of media violence on children under seven, and (2) to gather information about current parents' attitudes to media violence and its impact on their families.

The survey forms were distributed via the Community Consultative Committee, to parents from a variety of areas: that is two metropolitan State primary schools, one independent primary school, the Lady Gowrie Child Centre and various other child care centres belonging to the South Australian Association of Community Based Child Care Centres; Playgroups SA and the Salisbury Communities for Children project. The same survey form was also available from the YMA Website either for completion online. One hundred and twenty two completed survey responses were received.

Key findings about children's media environments are that:

- free to air TV (TV time) is clearly the largest amount of exposure time
- there is an average of 7.1 hours per week of media exposure
- nineteen per cent of children had at least one form of media in their bedroom, giving the young child a high level of freedom of choice for what they want to watch or what they want to play. Children under seven are not developmentally capable of making good decisions in this area.

An overwhelming majority of parents recognised that media violence is not good for their young children. They particularly notice that media violence can teach children to be aggressive, and make them more fearful of the world they live in. Parents are noticing the amounts of violence that are shown in many TV news programs, TV programs, computer games, video games, and they are noticing the negative effects of these on their young children. Most parents are already trying to set limits on the amount of media violence their

children are exposed to. However, the large majority of them are asking for more government regulation and controls on media violence, and asking for better education resources for teachers and parents.

In terms of their preferred methods of receiving more information, they most favoured a booklet, second a brochure and thirdly a web resource.

The report concludes with six recommendations:

- Give the highest priority for information resources, including the list of non-violent media alternatives, to product related to free to air television.
- Encourage parents to take charge of the media choices of their under sevens.
- Discourage the placement of TV sets and computers in children's bedrooms.
- Provide parents with more information about the impact of violence on children under the age of seven, and tips to avoid it.
- Provide information to parents through a booklet, brochure and / or web resource.
- Make further representations to government and industry about the high levels of concern of parents about the issue of media violence, particularly the marketing of violent movies to children through merchandising.

### **Acknowledgements**

Young Media Australia (YMA) gratefully acknowledges the funding of the Federal Attorney General's National Community Crime Prevention Programme (NCCPP) which is enabling it to conduct the *Reducing Reel to Real Violence* project.

YMA also thanks the members of the NCCPP Consultative Committee for their assistance in the development, distribution and analysis of the survey: Thanks also to Tim Kupke of the University of South Australia for his assistance with data entry and analysis of survey results.

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1. Background**

Research reviews (Anderson, Craig, et al., 2003; National Television Violence Study (1997-2000)) provide strong evidence that exposure to media violence causes increases in physical aggressive behaviour by children, adolescents, and young adults in the short term. These reviews also show that exposure to media violence has long term effects, increasing in the likelihood of seriously aggressive behaviour including physical assaults, spouse abuse and other types of crimes. Real life horror, such as in the news, increases children's perceptions that the world is a threatening place, and their fearfulness.

In December 2006 Young Media Australia (YMA) received funding from the Federal Attorney General's National Community Crime Prevention Programme (NCCPP) to develop an intervention for parents to assist them to reduce the exposure of children under the age of seven to media violence. Parents of young children in metropolitan Adelaide will be provided with an early intervention program, which may include an index to non-violent media to assist with their choices.

Early childhood care and education providers in metropolitan Adelaide will collaborate with YMA in the development of this early intervention program. Resources, which will be effective in encouraging and supporting parents to reduce such exposure, and which will enable them to gain easy access to non-violent media will be researched, tested, distributed and evaluated.

## **1.2. Parent Survey**

To assist YMA to develop the most effective intervention possible, and to discover current parental attitudes and behaviours around media violence, a survey of parents of children under the age of seven was conducted. This survey gathered data regarding the home media environment. For example, the number of TV sets and computers in the home, how much time children spent on TV, computer, internet or video games. It also surveyed parents' views about media violence, any impact that they perceive media violence has in their household, and what support, if any, they would like in dealing with this issue. The results of this survey are shown in the following sections of this report.

The main objectives of this survey were:

- 1) To assist the Consultative Committee to decide on the most effective parent intervention to encourage/inform parents about the impact of media violence on children under seven.
- 2) To gather information about current parents' attitudes to media violence and their families.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Survey design

The survey form was developed in consultation with the NCCPP project's Community Consultative Committee, consisting of eight early childhood educators, practitioners and community support groups. It was piloted at a number of child care centres and new parent groups before producing the final copy (see Appendix B). Each respondent was given an information sheet prior to the survey form (see Appendix A).

### 2.2. Sampling

The survey forms were distributed via the Community Consultative Committee, to parents from a variety of areas:

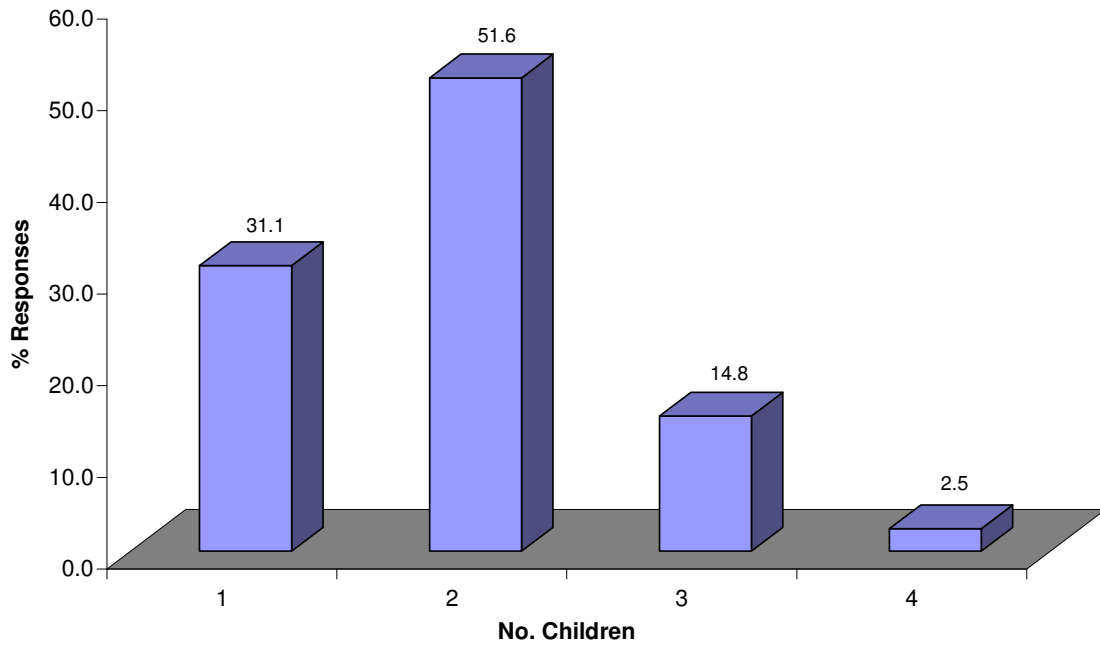
- **Early learning centres and junior primary schools.** Two metropolitan State schools: Hallett Cove South Primary School and Gilles Street Primary School participated, and one Independent school, St Peters Woodlands Grammar School.
- **Child care centres.** Through Lady Gowrie Child Centre and the South Australian Association of Community Based Child Care Centres.
- **Other community groups.** Playgroups SA and the Salisbury Communities for Children project.
- **Online.** The same survey form was available in two ways from the YMA Website (a) for completion online, and (b) available as downloadable .pdf file.

The total number of useable surveys returned in time for processing was 122.

### 2.3. Subjects

Surveys were only distributed to a family where there was a child aged 7 years or younger. All other families were excluded from the survey.

Figure 2.1 below shows the size of the families surveyed, according to how many children were in each family (No. children). The percentage of families surveyed with each family size is shown (% Responses). The average family surveyed had 1.8 ( $\pm 0.6$ ) (mean ( $\pm$ standard deviation)) children.



**Figure 2.1. Distribution of survey responses according to family size**

Figure 2.2 below shows the percentage of families surveyed according to their Socio-Economic Index for Areas 2001 (SEIFA index) for their postal area. The index of Advantage/Disadvantage was used in this analysis. The participants were grouped according to their quartile of the South Australian averages for this SEIFA index. “High” indicates those in the 75% to 100% quartile. “High-Med” indicates those in the 50% to 75% quartile. “Med-Low” indicates those in the 25% to 50% quartile. “Low” indicates those in the 0% to 25% quartile.

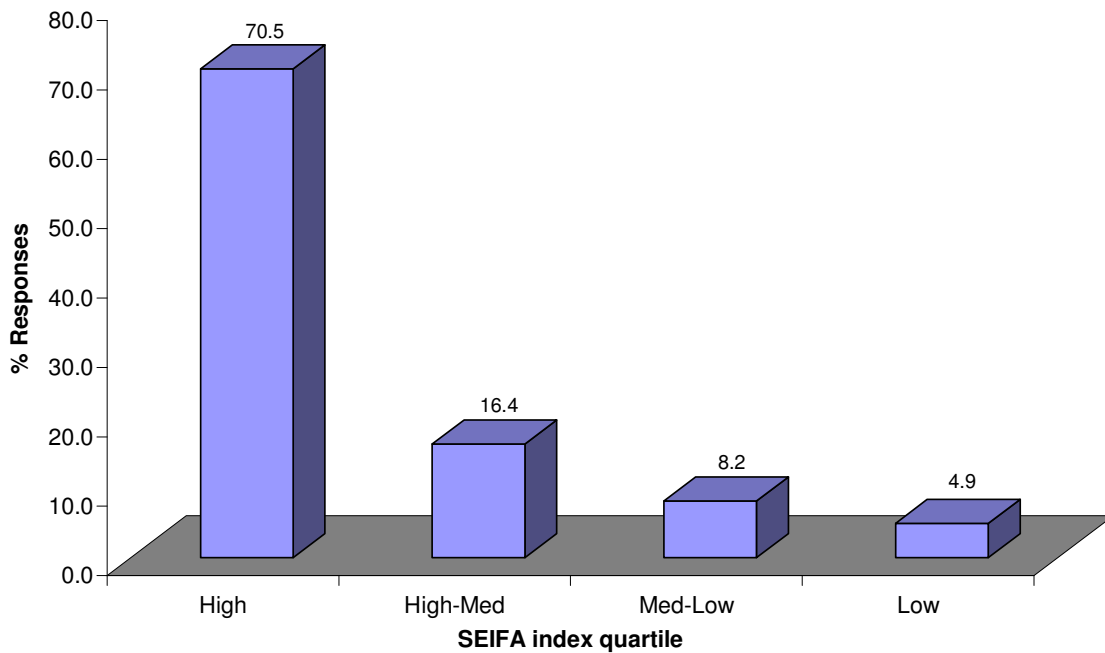


Figure 2.2. Percentage of survey responses in each SEIFA index quartile

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Media Environment

Over three-quarters of families have two or more TV sets in their home, and almost one-third of families have three or more TV sets. Figure 3.1 below shows the percentage of families (% Responses) that have each number of TV sets in their home. The number of TV sets on average was 2.2 ( $\pm 0.9$ ) TV sets per family.

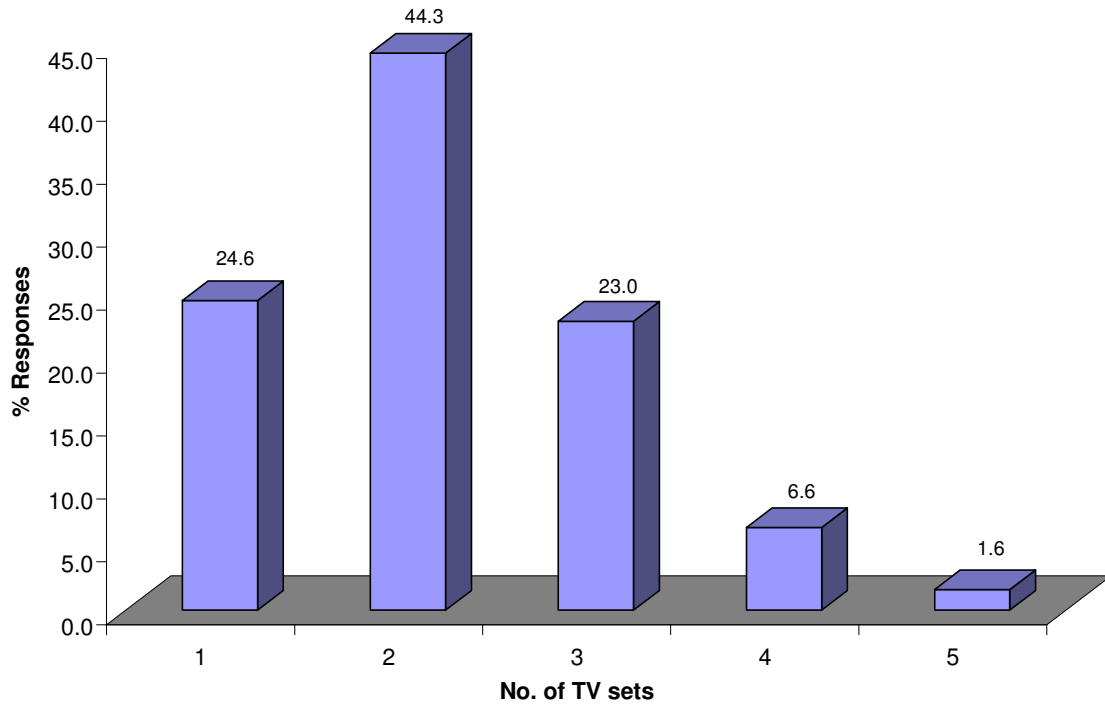


Figure 3.1. Number of TV sets in each family

Nearly every family has at least one computer in their household. Nearly half of all respondents have 2 or more computers in their family. Figure 3.2 below shows the percentage of families (% Responses) that have each number of computers in their home. The number of computers on average was 1.7 ( $\pm 1.1$ ) computers per family.

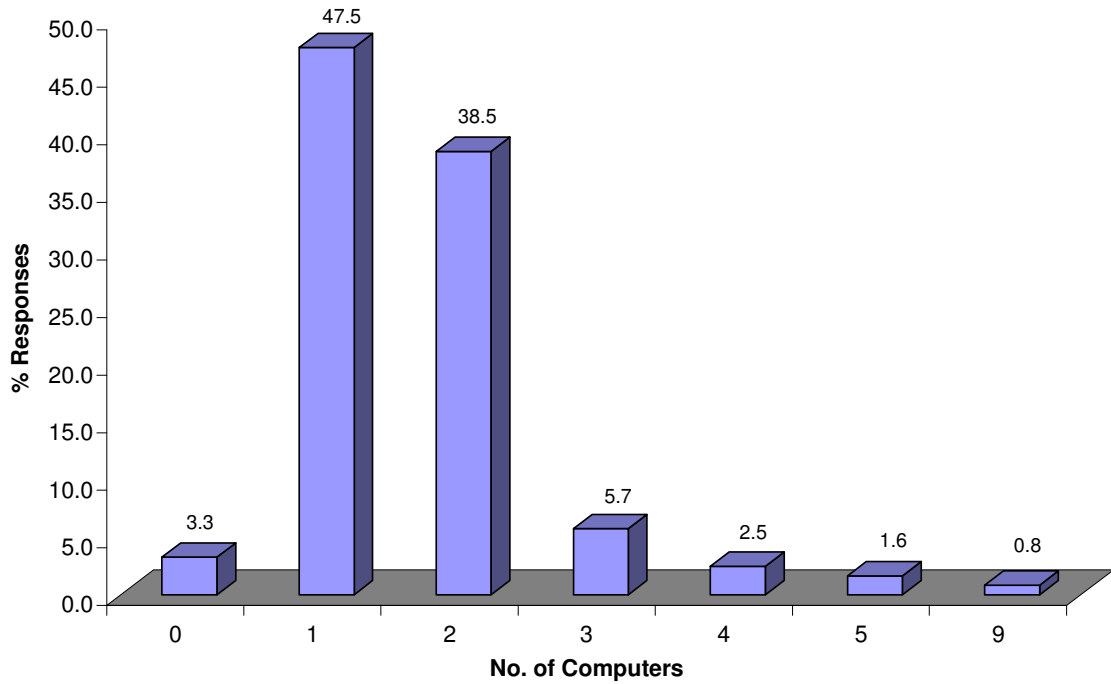
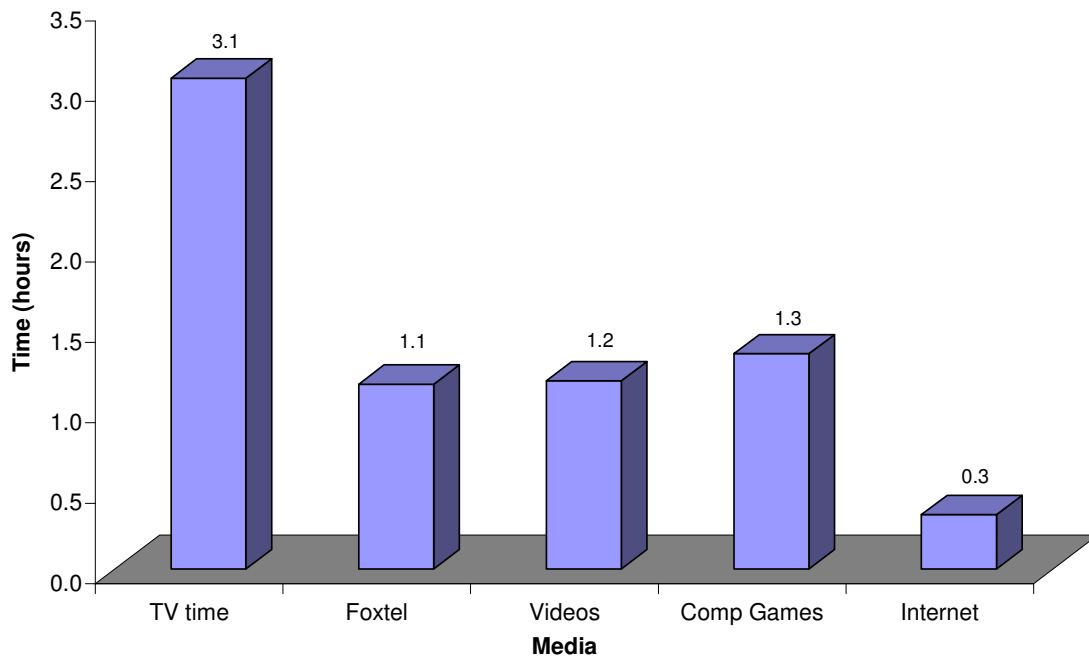


Figure 3.2. Number of computers in each family

### 3.2. Child under Seven years old

19% of children under seven had at least one form of media in their bedroom, including either a TV, video/DVD player, computer, internet access, or a game console. Many of these children had more than one type of media. Most common was the TV, followed by video/DVD player, computer, game console, and internet access.

The time spent watching different types of media was surveyed for the oldest child in the family who was under seven years of age. Figure 3.3 below shows the average amount of time (time (hours)) spent watching each type of media each week. The total average media time for these children under seven was 7.1 hours per week.



**Figure 3.3. Average weekly media time for children under seven**

### 3.3. Parents' perceptions of media violence

The following statements show the parents' views in relation to media violence in general and how it may affect their household:

- 95.0% of parents agreed to some extent or fully agreed that children can learn to be aggressive by watching violence on TV or in movies.
- 92.6% of parents agreed to some extent or fully agreed that children can learn to be aggressive by playing violent computer games.
- 92.6% of parents agreed to some extent or fully agreed that viewing violence can make children scared of the world they live in.
- 68.3% of parents disagreed or totally disagreed that when violence is shown as funny, or in a cartoon, it doesn't hurt children.
- 90.9% of parents disagreed or totally disagreed that so long as there isn't much blood and gore, media violence isn't a problem.
- 93.4% of parents disagreed or totally disagreed that so long as the hero is attractive and good triumphs over evil, media violence doesn't do any harm.
- 86.8% of parents disagreed or totally disagreed watching the TV news, including violent footage of world or local events, is not a problem for young children.

- 83.5% of parents agreed to some extent or fully agreed there is too much violence in the media.
- 95.0% of parents disagreed or totally disagreed that it is ok for their under seven year olds to be exposed to violent media.
- 73.2% of parents disagreed or totally disagreed their under seven year olds do not show any effects when exposed to violent media.
- 80.0% of parents disagreed or totally disagreed that it is, or would be, too hard to set limits to their children’s exposure to violent media.
- 95.8% of parents agreed to some extent or fully agreed that they try to limit the amount of violent media to which their children are exposed.
- 88.0% of parents agreed to some extent or fully agreed they are concerned when children’s viewing times are interrupted by violent footage, in news breaks or TV News promo’s.
- 61.2% of parents agreed to some extent or fully agreed that their under sevens have been affected by promos for scary movies.
- 86.1% of parents agreed to some extent or fully agreed that to help their children think about media violence, they talk about non-violent ways to solve problems.

The responses to question 3.8 (see Appendix B) were sorted into 4 categories as listed in Table 3.1 below along with a brief description of each category. In this question the parents were asked to write down anything that has changed the way they think about the impact of media violence on young children. The percentage of respondents that included that category in their answer (%) is shown in Table 3.1. A total of 34.1% of families responded to this question.

**Table 3.1. The categories and descriptions of the things that changed the way parents think about the impact of media violence on young children**

Category	%	Description
Violence	37.2	There’s too much violence – including TV, computer, video games
Explain	27.9	When violence is shown, we try to talk about and explain violence with children
Limit	25.6	We limit the amount of violence they watch
Own Child	9.3	Having my own children has made me realise how much media violence there is

### 3.4. Do parents need extra support?

- 95.7% of parents agreed that parents could benefit from extra support with media violence issues.
- 94.8% of parents thought it would be helpful, or helpful to some extent, to have more government regulation and controls on the amount of violent media.
- 98.3% of parents thought it would be helpful, or helpful to some extent, to stop violent movies being marketed to children on food packaging, e.g. Cereal packets, and with toy tie-ins.
- 95.7% of parents thought it would be helpful, or helpful to some extent, to make available a list of non-violent media and where to get them.
- 92.2% of parents thought it would be helpful, or helpful to some extent, to educate and give resources to child care centre staff and teachers, so that they can advise parents.
- 98.2% of parents thought it would be helpful, or helpful to some extent, to provide more information for parents about the impact of violent media, and tips to avoid it.

The best method for parents to receive more information was ranked in the following order on average:

- 1) Booklet
- 2) Brochure
- 3) Web resource
- 4) Teacher/Playgroup/Childcare
- 5) DVD or CD
- 6) Parenting course

27.5% of respondents were aware of the YMA movie reviews (Know Before You Go). Of these, 97% agreed that they have found them helpful, or helpful to some extent.

## 4. Discussion

This survey has shown that there are several types of media that young children are exposed to including TV, videos/DVDs, computer games, internet, video games, etc. In each of these areas there are always potential for media violence, depending on which channel is watched, or which game is played. Often the task of regulating these programs or games by the parents could be a difficult one.

Young children's exposure to media violence could be determined by:

- researching the media young children are involved with
- finding the amount of time spent with each media
- recording the program or game directly involved with
- calculating the amount of violence involved in that program or game

From this survey we cannot determine all of these factors, and therefore cannot be sure of where the most exposure to media violence is occurring for young children. However, we can determine the first two steps. Figure 3.3 shows that free to air TV (TV time) is clearly the largest amount of exposure time that these young children are getting to media. Also, overall having a media exposure time of an average of 7.1 hours per week shows that a significant amount of time for these very young children is now taken up by some form of media.

Children learn from whom or what they are interacting with, and if they are interacting with this amount of media each week, it's important that they are being exposed to media that will be beneficial for their learning.

19% of children respondents had at least one form of media in their bedroom. This gives the young child more responsibility and more freedom of choice for what they want to watch or what they want to play. Children of this age do not have the ability to make mature choices about what is a good- or bad-influence program or game to interact with. Giving the child this control allows them to more easily choose the "wrong" media without the regulation from parents.

## **5. Conclusion**

Parents' responses to the questions about media violence show that there is an overwhelming majority of parents following similar perceptions for each question. Overall, they recognise that media violence is not good for their young children and that they show some concern about it. They particularly notice that media violence can teach children to be aggressive, and make them more fearful of the world they live in. Parents are noticing the amounts of violence that are shown in many TV news programs, TV programs, computer games, video games, and they are noticing the negative effects of these on their young children. Most parents are already trying to set limits on the amount of media violence their children are exposed to. However, the large majority of them are asking for more government regulation and controls on media violence, and asking for better education resources for teachers and parents. They would like to receive more information about media violence firstly via a booklet, brochure or web resource.

## **6. Recommendations**

Six recommendations are made on the basis of the parent survey findings. These are:

### **Recommendation 1**

Give the highest priority for information resources, including the list of non-violent media alternatives, to product related to free to air television.

### **Recommendation 2**

Encourage parents to take charge of the media choices of their under sevens.

### **Recommendation 3**

Discourage the placement of TV sets and computers in children's bedrooms.

### **Recommendation 4**

Provide parents with more information about the impact of violence on children under the age of seven, and tips to avoid it.

### **Recommendation 5**

Provide information to parents through a booklet, brochure and / or web resource.

### **Recommendation 6**

Make further representations to government and industry about the high levels of concern of parents about the issue of media violence, particularly the marketing of violent movies to children through merchandising.

# Appendix A

## Information Sheet

# Appendix B

## Survey Form