



World Organization of the Scout Movement
Organisation Mondiale du Mouvement Scout



THEME: Violence on the screen (films, television, etc.) has a strong impact on young people. Based on the results of research carried out by WOSM, UNESCO and the University of Utrecht (Netherlands), this workshop examines the problem and proposes solutions to improve the situation. The place of the workshop within the kit is obvious, since violence is exactly the opposite of the education of young people in a spirit of peace!

DURATION: 2 hours (up to 2 1/2 hours)

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: up to 40

STAFF REQUIRED: minimum of two leaders, one to conduct the workshop and the other to handle the technical aspects (video player, TV monitor, flip-charts, exhibition, etc.).

BACKGROUND

Within the framework of the relations between WOSM and UNESCO, WOSM was invited in 1996 to join the Department of Information and Communication of UNESCO and Prof. Jo Groebel, a researcher from the University of Utrecht, in the Netherlands, to carry out international research into the "Perception of young people on violence on the screen". This research is one of the key aspects of UNESCO's "Culture of Peace" programme.

The target population selected was pre-adolescents 12-13 years of age. Three variables were used for the sample: urban-rural population, areas with high or low degrees of aggression, and equal numbers of boys and girls.



Violence on the screen

Media education, a relevant response

The selection of countries was made in such a way as to achieve the widest possible geographical and cultural representation. Europe was represented by Croatia, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain; Eurasia by Armenia, Tajikistan and Ukraine; Africa by Angola, South Africa and Togo; the Arab countries by Egypt and Qatar; the Indian Ocean by Mauritius; the Asia-Pacific region by Fiji, India, Japan and the Philippines; Latin America and the Caribbean by Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Peru and Trinidad and Tobago; and North America by Canada.





The results of the study have been widely disseminated through both WOSM and UNESCO networks. These results are obviously complex, but to highlight just a few:

- 93% of the 12-year-olds surveyed had access to a television and spent an average of three hours a day in front of it. Thus, TV is a major source of information and entertainment for the children surveyed.
- Sometimes, media characters are used by children to escape their problems; action heroes are most popular among boys, while girls look more to pop stars and musicians as examples.
- Television is the strongest single factor creating global heroes. "Terminator", the killer robot played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, is known by 88% of the children surveyed.
- The omnipresence of violence on the screen contributes to making the world more violent. About half of the children brought up in environments of violence, such as countries at war or crime-plagued areas, considered that Terminator was a role model for them.
- Even if violence has always been present in fairy tales as an attention-grabber for children, it is perhaps the combination of daily violence in real-life situations and the accumulation of violence on the screen that make young people feel attracted to violence as a natural outcome to a given situation or as a suitable way of solving problems.

It is interesting to note that this research study is unique for several reasons:

- It is the largest ever intercultural study on the role of media violence for children.
- For the first time, two countries living in war-like situations were included in the sample.
- The methodology used was also unique, as all the children involved (23 countries and 14 languages) answered the same standardised 60-item questionnaire.
- As the content of the questions was not culture-bound, cross-comparisons at international level were possible.



CROSS REFERENCE

Three workshops touch on the question of peace from this angle: "Managing our conflicts" (No. 9), this one, which deals with violence on the screen, and the next one: "Mines!" (No. 11). In addition, the "Religion: men and women of peace" workshop (No. 12) tackles the question of non-violence from the angle of "peace heroes", men and women who, inspired by a profound religious message, have tried to epitomise that message in their lives.

Free flow of information: this workshop deals with this treasure of peace.

KEY MESSAGES

- Violence has a very negative impact on the personal development of children and young people, on interpersonal relations, and also a strong negative impact on the community.
- Violence on the screen could be very harmful because:
 - It provides aggressive solutions to conflict situations and role models for young people to identify with.
 - It provides "techniques" for using tools associated with violent action.
 - It induces young people to relate violence in movies and violence in "real-life" situations.
 - It accredits the idea that "the world is violent" and that we have to be violent "to defend ourselves".
- Censorship and interdiction/prohibition are not the most adequate tools for eliminating violence on the screen. Media education is far more effective.
- Volunteer youth NGOs, and Scouting in particular, should play a significant role in this field.



PURPOSE/AIMS/OBJECTIVES

- To consider the extent of media violence in its different forms and its impact on young people.
- To help participants become more competent and critical media users.
- To envisage the role of Scouting in the field of media education, and individual and collective action that can be taken.
- To motivate participants to get personally involved in their respective Scout groups, districts, regions and national associations.

In addition, the workshop will provide participants with information on the results of the research study on "Violence on the screen" (see Background, above).

METHOD AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTIVITY

Preparation

In order to avoid lengthy explanations during the workshop, some of the findings of the research study (see Background, above) could be displayed – ideally in graphic form – on the walls of the tent or room where the workshop is taking place.

Required material:

- Flip-chart.
- Video player and TV monitor (or TV set) – and, of course, one or two electric sockets and extension cables of the right length.
- Video cassettes of films and video games. (NB: List of proposals to be sent to organisers well in advance.)
- Computer with capacity for CD-ROMs and video games (if possible).
- Means of displaying material on walls (drawing pins, sellotape, etc.).

Implementation

1. Welcome and introduction

The leader welcomes the participants and draws their attention to the panels or graphics displayed on the walls. (Those that have not had time to look at them may do so at a later stage.)

The leader mentions that the focus of the workshop is media violence and its impact on young people. He then asks if anyone has any personal experience of this. A few participants may react, but no substantial discussion is expected at this stage.

Duration: 10 minutes

2. Different types of violence: selected samples

The leader refers to the different contributions to show the importance of the subject and invites the participants to focus their attention on the question of violence.

Question: Is all violence the same? Does it have the same impact? In order to answer these questions, the leader invites the participants to watch a few film sequences selected for the workshop.

Suggestions: One film should contain "sadistic violence" (unfortunately, examples are very abundant), another "conventional violence" (such as a James Bond film), the next violence depicting a historical fact (e.g. Schindler's List), another violence with comic intention, and so on.

Excerpts of 3-4 minutes are enough, but the sequences should be carefully selected. No comments or discussion should follow the projection.

Duration: 30 minutes

3. Different types of violence: case study

The leader then invites the participants to split into several discussion groups to "assess" the sequences observed.

Small-group discussion

Suggested questions

The first level of questions should deal with the films:

- How do you distinguish between the different types of violence?
- How do you distinguish between reality and fiction?
- How do you rate/assess the difference between the "violence produced" and the "violence received"?
- In the appreciation of violence, how important is the context (day or night, a deserted place, music, silence, a build-up in the action, etc.)?





A second level of questions should deal with the circumstances surrounding the public:

- How harmful is the violence we see (refer to the different types mentioned above)?
- What are the conditioning factors (age, context, presence of peers, presence of adults, at home or at the cinema, etc.)?
- Why could it be harmful?
- In your view, does it have any impact on the behaviour of young people in real-life situations (anecdotes, personal experience, etc.)?

Duration: 30 minutes

Plenary session

4. Report and discussion

Each small group makes a brief report of the most important points of their discussion.

As the presentation progresses, the leader links, compares or contrasts the ideas presented by the groups in terms of the findings of the research.

Although there is no pre-established order, some of the headings could be:

- Importance of TV in the lives of children and young people.
- Media violence and its functions: distraction, media heroes, role models, etc.
- Link between media violence and real-life violence.
- Types of violence ("positive" and negative, etc.).

At the end, the leader invites the participants to return to their respective groups to tackle the second part of the session: What can be done?

Duration: 20 - 30 minutes

Small-group discussion

5. Suggestions for the future

Having examined the situation, the participants should now formulate a few suggestions for the immediate future: what can we do:

- In Scouting?
- At personal level: family, school/university, workplace, society in general (as a consumer, as a producer, as a "prosumer" = a mixture of consumer and producer, and so on)?

Another level of discussion could be:

- at national level
- at international level





Plenary session

6. Report and conclusions

The participants share the results of the small-group discussions. The most important points of the reports can be noted on a flip-chart. If there are enough points of consensus, some conclusions can be drawn and suggestions possibly formulated.

7. Commitment

Final comments. The leader stresses that the commitment and motivation of young people to carry out the ideas discussed when they get back home could be an important factor for improving the situation.

REMARKS TO LEADERS

A brief presentation of the research could be made at an appropriate moment: the idea and the partners, selection of countries, methodology used, results. However, it is even better if the findings are presented on the walls in graphic form (see Preparation above).

The selection of the films is quite crucial to the success of the workshop. The participants should be able to appreciate the difference between "sadistic" violence, conventional violence, violence which illustrates a historical reality, etc., and appreciate other elements involved. Ideally, the films should be viewed in advance by the leaders in order to select the sequences to be used.



SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP

In many countries there are organisations which have made a systematic effort in the field of media education. Why not join forces with them to study the problem and determine the best possible solutions in your country?

The research study suggests five categories of people who would be potential targets for co-operation: producers (can influence the content of TV programmes), politicians (establish media education programmes), pedagogists/educationalists (TV in schools and media education), parents (discuss TV programmes with children and young people), and YOU: become an active, critical consumer and ensure that your voice is heard!

In fact, the results of point 6 of the session could be considered as suggestions for follow-up, to be adapted and implemented in each country, depending on local conditions.

SOURCES

Research study "The UNESCO Global Study on Media Violence", a 25-page document which summarises the results of the research. Available in English and French from the World Scout Bureau, Geneva.

The document is also available in English and French on www.scout.org

