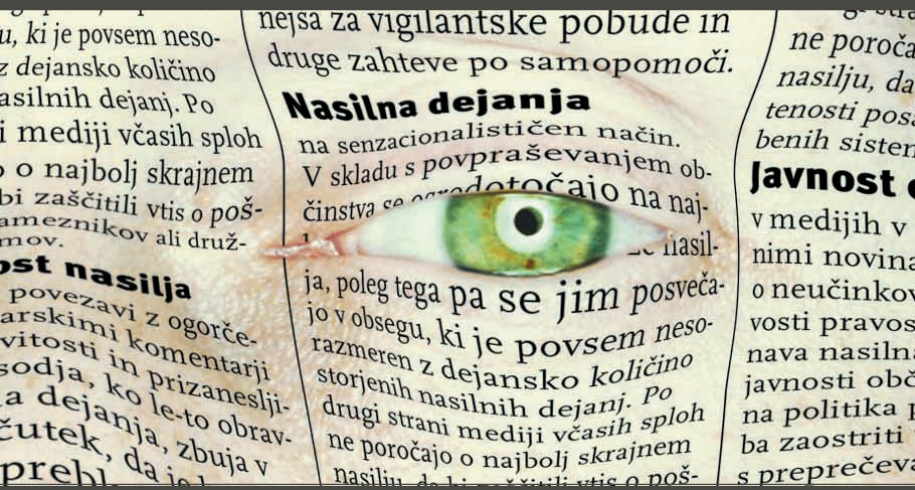


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# VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA

*The Extent and the Influence  
of Violence in the Media in Slovenia*



DRAGAN PETROVEC

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# VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA

*The Extent and the Influence of Violence in the Media in Slovenia*

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## SUMMARY

The media report on crime in a sensationalist manner. Following popular demand, they focus on the most spectacular representations of violence, to the extent, which is totally out of proportion with the actual amount of violent crimes committed. On the other hand, the media at times do not touch upon the most extreme forms of violence, in order to protect the illusion of integrity of certain individuals or social systems.

The overexposure of violence in the media, accompanied by outraged journalistic commentary on the inefficiency and leniency of the justice system in dealing with violent offenders, makes the public feel that the punitive policies are too mild and that there is a need for stricter measures to prevent crime. The public, feeling threatened and let down by the system, becomes more susceptible to vigilantist initiatives and other demands for self-help.

In light of these findings, the survey analyses the reporting on violence in Slovene print and television programmes. The results have shown that POP TV programming contains a significantly greater share of violent content and content depicting accidents than the programming of SLO 1, reflecting an obvious difference in the editorial policies. *Slovenske novice*, the highest selling Slovene daily, shows a 19 per cent share of violence in its content. Disregarding the supplements, the content of which is virtually always neutral or non-violent, violence makes for 29 per cent of the entire content of *Slovenske novice*. The front pages of *Slovenske novice* show an astonishing 66,7 per cent share of violent content. Comparatively, *Dnevnik* contains 8,6 per cent of violent content, while *Delo* contains 3,1 per cent.

Even though the survey has shown an overwhelming amount of violence in the Slovene media, the author feels it inappropriate to resort to censorship, seeing that in a world, interwoven with electronic systems and networks, it is impossible to dam the flow of information. There is a need for a cultural framework, within which the media audience will be able to distinguish between the good and the bad. The author understands the difficulties in trying to create such a framework. The process is hindered by the audience's voyeuristic interest in violent content, as well as economic interests of its providers.

The author concludes by offering a partial solution. He proposes the establishing of expert bodies within television stations and newspaper publishing houses, which would deal with the representation of violence in the media.

## INTRODUCTION

The world seems to be filled with violence. Reports on crime are found in all the various media – in newspapers, on television and recently also on the Internet. The mass media follow the imperatives of market laws. Since crime reports attract audiences, it often happens that the actual extent of crime is far less than one would conclude on the basis of the quantity of text and pictures dedicated to it. Graef writes that in certain print media the share of reports on a specific type of crime may be as large as 50%, while the actual structure of that type of crime accounts for, say, only 6% of total crime (Graef 1992). While it is obvious that the world is in reality imbued with violence, the media present only one part of it, the part that is most spectacular and sells best. This sensationalist approach may create an impression that the rate of certain crimes is ten times higher than statistical data actually show.

It is also true that there are instances of extreme crimes which do not receive much attention. Moreover, these crimes are sometimes systematically overlooked in order to perpetuate myths and legends about the honesty of particular individuals or social systems.

According to Noam Chomsky, the media avoid writing about what should actually be written about if they wanted people to know what happens in reality.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to crime news, the media also carry commentaries on the response of the judicial system to violent crimes, with some authors openly expressing their shock at the negligence of investigating authorities about taking suspects into custody, or about the incomprehensible lenience of courts which pass mild, sometimes suspended sentences, for serious crimes.

The public thus has an impression that the penalty policy is too soft and that everything relating to the prevention of crimes should be made more strict. In line with this logic, the police should have more authority and defendants and prisoners essentially fewer rights and privileges. Moreover, the impression of threat created by such writing frequently triggers in citizens the urge to rely on self-help. The apparent failure of the judicial system to deal with the situation gives rise to initiatives

<sup>1</sup> A Canadian documentary about Noam Chomsky featured on *TV SLO 1* on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001, showed how media adapted facts about the events in East Timor, the site of some of the most horrible crimes in the past decades.

for neighborhood-watch groups and sows the seeds of 'vigilantism', such as happened some years ago in Ljubljana.

When the supply of domestic crime runs short, the media readily reach for news items from foreign countries. As far as Slovenia is concerned, foreign crimes are in general more macabre than domestic ones, and the implication here is unmistakable - it is only a matter of time before similar events will happen in Slovenia.

In the course of reading this book, those readers with expert knowledge in the field of crime may conclude that it lacks theories about the influence of media violence on the audience. This topic has been the subject of many works, all of which have demonstrated that a link between the two does exist. Therefore, I take this hypothesis as proven and focus on media presentation of crime and the response of the audience. However, I do occasionally refer to certain theories, but only to support my arguments.

Among the more recent works dealing with the subject of media violence let me mention "On Media Violence" by James Potter (Potter 1999). Potter lists a number of theories which attempt to explain the influence of the media and their messages on the shaping of behavioral patterns in viewers. Among them are biological, environmental, cognitive and interactional theories. All of these lead to the same conclusion that media violence does have an influence on the recipient. Three lines of influence are the most salient:

- a) a viewer takes over aggressive behavioral patterns i.e. learns to react in the same way;
- b) frequent confrontation with violence in the media reduces a viewer's sensitivity to violence;
- c) many viewers become afraid (Potter 1999: 25).

Many studies cited by Potter confirm the direct influence of media violence on the increase of violence in society. For example, when television content of an expressly violent character intruded into certain areas, the extent of real-world violence in those areas also increased (*ibid*: 41). In the next chapter I give a brief overview of the findings of several studies on the effects of media violence.

## REPORTING ON AND RESPONDING TO CRIME

### FINDINGS OF SELECTED STUDIES ON MEDIA VIOLENCE

According to a study conducted by journalists (K. Holland, *CNN*; <<http://www.cnn.com>>) published in May 1999, the majority of Americans are convinced that the state should do more to limit the amount of violence on television, in films, in music, on the Internet and in video games. The greatest importance is attributed to regulations pertaining to the Internet. As many as 65% of respondents supported censorship on the Internet.

In another study of media violence by Melanie Brown published by the Australian Institute for Criminology (Brown 1996), the author drew several main conclusions.

1. Viewing of violence is related to an increase in aggressiveness, reduced sensitivity to violence and increasing fear of crime.
2. Media violence may influence violent crime, but it is not the only reason for violent behavior; there are many other factors influencing violent behavior.
3. Some people may imitate the violent behavior they see on television or video.
4. The relationship between viewing violent behavior and violent behavior itself is a two-way process: aggressive people watch violent scenes more frequently than others, and people who watch violent scenes are more frequently aggressive.
5. Children are most susceptible to violent scenes, followed by young adults; men are somewhat more susceptible than women.
6. Despite the potential influence of media violence on violence in real life, it is not quite clear whether this influence is very important compared to other possible influences, such as family circumstances, domestic violence and abuse, influence of parents, poverty, education, racism, cultural disintegration or drug taking.

Some researchers draw attention to the important differences in the extent of crime among different groups of viewers which are similarly exposed to violent scenes. Freedman (Freedman 1994), for example, says that children in Canada

and in the United States watch practically the same contents, yet the number of murders and the extent of violent crime in Canada are in general far below those in America. Children in Japan watch perhaps the most dreadful content, although mainly in the form of animation, but the rate of violent crime is almost negligible (Freedman 1994).

Overall apprehensions about the effects of media violence also address the issue of suicides. Several studies have shown that the number of suicides increased after the publication of a detailed report on suicide complete with description of ways to commit it. Some have found similarities between a mass murder in 1987 in Hungerford, England and a massacre in the Australian town of Clifton Hill. The two tragic events occurred only 10 days apart.

Any policy aiming to set limits on violent content in the media, while taking into account the likely influence of violent scenes on individuals in society and conceding that violence has different effects on different people, meets with two challenges. The first is how to raise the awareness of the audience about the influence of violent content, and the second how to avoid introduction of mechanisms that could trigger unwanted behavior in more susceptible viewers.

In general, censorship is not seen as a good solution. The public has the right to be informed. In addition, censorship creates a myth of the "forbidden fruit," which then becomes even more attractive and, moreover, encourages the emergence of a black market. The Australian system, for example, is based on advice and classification, where viewers are informed about the nature of the broadcast. It is the responsibility of television companies to take care that the program is balanced in this respect.

In 1993 a bill that was intended to reduce violent content on television and the radio was put forward in the US (Television and Radio program Violence Reduction Act). Those who proposed it had established that television and radio programs were bringing ever more violence into American homes. Extremely violent content accounted for more than 25% of prime time programming. The Academy of American Pediatrics established that in the 1980s the amount of violence during prime time tripled. Children's programs have become particularly violent. A study conducted at the University of Pennsylvania showed that children's broadcasts included more than 30 violent acts per hour (Violence on Television Initiative, p 2). Furthermore, statistical measurements showed that by the time

the average child left elementary school he/she had seen more than 8,000 murders and 100,000 other violent acts on tv . So, citing the opinion of various professional associations, among these medical, judicial, psychiatric and pediatric, that television violence had a harmful influence on children's behavior, the proposers of the bill required restrictions on television and radio programs with violent content, while taking into account freedom of expression.

The above initiative proved to be a virtually impossible attempt to find the balance between freedom of speech, a right defined by the First Amendment and considered almost sacred by Americans, and censorship (probably inevitable) of harmful contents.

Another initiative for the regulation of violence on television (Violence on Television Initiative) dates from 1995. It drew on similar statistical data, according to which the average young person sees 200,000 violent acts and 40,000 murders by the age of 18. The initiators reached an agreement with the three American companies that spend the biggest sums of money on advertising (The Department of Defense, The Postal Service and Amtrak) about a common advertising policy. It included a uniform definition of violence. This initiative did not cover documentaries, news and sporting programs. The authors made a point of stressing that their project was not a case of censorship but involved voluntary agreement with federal agencies about the conduct that would best serve the interests of American citizens. The initiative was supported by several associations such as Americans for Responsible tv, the National Coalition on tv Violence and the National Education Association.

A 1996 study mentioned by Petersik (Petersik, T.: Media Violence and Media Influence, <<http://www.ripon.edu>>) found out that 57% of all television broadcasts included violent contents. In addition, almost half of children watch television alone or with friends, without parental attendance. According to the National Television Violence Study conducted in 1994-95, 57% is a kind of "industrial norm" for violence in television programs. But differences in the proportion of violence between programs are conspicuous, with the relevant share on certain channels being as high as 85%. In order to be able to estimate the extent of violence in television broadcasts, researchers participating in this project reviewed a number of serials, films, musical spots, children's programs, news and so on.

They examined content that encouraged aggressive behavior and similar attitudes. They also studied how this reduced viewer sensitivity to real-life violence and measured their fear of becoming victims of criminal acts. They scrutinized the content on 23 channels over a 20 week period, between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. This amounted to 119 hours of programming per channel, i.e. approximately 2,500 hours of programming in total.

Their main conclusion was that the manner of presenting this type of content on television presents a risk for viewers. The three starting hypothesis of the study were confirmed: viewers learn aggressive behavior; they become less sensitive to violence; they also become more fearful of becoming victims of violence.

The debates on media violence drew responses from a number of prominent figures, among them Attorney General Janet Reno, who stressed that young viewers should receive appropriate education and should have it explained to them that there is no room on the streets and in the classrooms for what they see in films. Yet she also pointed out that we cannot expect that young people will behave appropriately unless we take care that they are suitably guided (Violence in the Media 1999).

In 2001 the American Academy of Pediatrics drew attention to a number of studies on violence in the media (Some Things You Should Know About Media Violence and Media Literacy 2001). Among other things, they pointed out that aggressive content increases children's appetite for more violence. It creates an almost unique addiction which is then transferred to real life.

Still others expressed apprehensions that these initiatives led to the curbing of freedom of speech. The First Amendment Ombudsman responded, in an article titled "Pinning a Label on Violence in Media," in which he criticized senators McCain and Lieberman who persisted in their attempts to restrict freedom of speech and expression. The guardian of First Amendment principles thought that particularly unacceptable was any uniform criterion for assessing violence. What would be a proper criterion to measure the nature, context and intensity of violence in various media and other products offered on the market? And how to define a suitable minimum age for buying products with violent content? In addition, stressed the Ombudsman, such a law would require the recalling of hundreds of thousands of products from the market, including



video tapes, games and CDs. In his opinion it would be impractical, expensive and unconstitutional, as it actually represented an attempt to define violence across a wide spectrum of media without taking into account the circumstances and contexts in which such violence was shown. Furthermore, it represented an attempt to regulate public speech, an approach that courts abandoned years ago (McMasters 2000).

In contrast, the conclusions of the study described in the Ljubljana daily *Delo* in April, 2000 (Slabe 2000) were almost optimistic. A Duesseldorf-based expert in communication Peter Sicking established that the Germans were increasingly abandoning the habit of watching television. Among the reasons they stated three seemed to be the most important: the majority of broadcasts were imbecile (never-ending Cosbys and Esmeraldas); they contained too much violence and too many advertisements.

Despite the limited optimism inspired by the findings of this study, a considerable part of the population continues to be a violence-loyal audience.

A number of studies have concentrated on the influence of media violence on children. In the study titled "Media Violence: A Demonstrated Public Health Threat to Children", Rowell Huesmann and Jessica Moise, psychologists at Michigan University, compared responses by the state or responsible persons in various situations with a common denominator (Huesmann, Moise 2001). They compared the link between lung cancer and cigarettes to children's exposure to television violence. In several carefully led experiments, children who were shown violent films had their behavior observed following the viewing. At least one hundred such studies were conducted in the past forty years, and all have demonstrated that some children behaved more aggressively after viewing violent content. They vented aggression on other children or on objects such as toys. The results were the same across the board, regardless of the country from which the children came, their race, gender or intellectual abilities.

Huesmann and Moise also mention a Scandinavian study in which five- and six-year-olds were divided into two groups. The first watched violent content and the second non-violent. The researchers, who later observed both groups while playing, did not know who in the group had been exposed to violent scenes and who had not. But they could conclude this without much difficulty, because children who had been

shown violent scenes beat other children, shouted at them, threatened them and intentionally destroyed their toys more frequently than other children (ibid: 2).

These experiments further showed that children who habitually watch violent programs more often understand violence as a way of dealing with conflict. Also some longitudinal studies have confirmed that the children who spent the most time in front of the television watching violent content frequently ended up in court by the age of thirty.

Undoubtedly, the effects of violence on children are at least the following: it increases aggressive behavior; reduces sensitivity to the consequences of violence; it makes children distrustful, since they expect other children to behave in a similarly aggressive manner; a child who is aggressive finds justification in the similar behavior of television heroes; the violence which they confront activates their existing aggressive thoughts and wishes (ibid: 4-5).

In June 1999, President Clinton and some members of Congress requested a report that should have answered two questions. The first was whether the entertainment industries were advertising products with violent content that required parental caution (these are products that earn high profits since the share of children among buyers is high). The second question was whether advertisements were particularly targeted at children and teenagers. In September 2000, the Federal Trade Commission published a report showing that both answers were clearly positive. The FTC Report 2000 pertains to all three branches of the entertainment industry – film, music and computer games. The producers of these products make special efforts to attract young buyers, particularly those under 17. Even though many companies adopted internal ratings systems based on the level of violence, these are frequently circumvented.

On the basis of selected samples of films, music and electronic games, the Commission concluded that 80% of films rated as violent were targeted at children under 17, as were advertisements for these products. All musical samples with similar violent messages were also targeted at a youthful population. Among electronic games that were rated as 'mature' for violence, 70% were targeted at children under 17.

Similarly, there were no obstacles for children who wanted to buy products declared as having violent content. The researchers further established that children in the age group 13 to 16 had no problems entering cinemas

showing films with violent content. Children in the same age group could freely buy computer games labeled as 'mature' 85% of the time.

The Commission issued several recommendations for industries making products with violent content:

- a) codes should be adopted to prohibit target marketing to children, and sanctions for the violation of these codes defined;
- b) control over the sale of these products should be implemented, and access for children should be limited;
- c) parents should be informed about the meaning of product ratings and about the reasons for rating certain products "explicit".

In an article published in *Delo's* supplement *Ona* (She), Tina Horvat summarized one of the most recent studies on television violence in Slovenia (Horvat 2001). In this study, researchers monitored broadcasts on Kanal A between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. when most children watch television. During this period, they could see two murders, eight shootings, four brawls, six assaults, five discarded and speeding cars and so on. Horvat also mentions another example revealing an extreme lack of taste. On March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2001 around 6 p.m., TV3 showed a postmortem complete with corpse lying on the table, scalping, opening of the skull and removal of the brains. After several minutes of the autopsy, one could see that the corpse belonged to a child (ibid: 17).

The same study has shown that approximately half the audience feels uncomfortable while watching violent scenes, while only 5% enjoy them. Some among those responsible for programming gave a very interesting explanation of their programming policies. In their words, they respect the wishes and needs of the audience and accordingly, they adapt programs to reflect these needs rather than change habits. To put it differently, it is not the television companies who decide what we will watch, but the majority audience (ibid: 17).

Such statements reveal a simplified understanding of democracy and utter ignorance as regards issues of co-responsibility for the shaping of general culture and civilized behavior. To see democracy mainly as providing a space for the free commodity market, supply and demand, and prices based on these principles, is to revive the early stages

of capitalism that were characterized by a rather unscrupulous striving for profit at anyone's expense. Those who participate in the shaping of the cultural environment, or at least those individuals who are responsible for showing violence in the mass media, are either ignorant about or simply do not want to know that public opinion and democracy in themselves cannot ensure civilized social environment. The situation in Slovenia is comparable to one in Great Britain where some time ago the public demanded re-institution of the death penalty in the wake of some horrible crime. If the decision had been left to democratic principles and taken by referendum, it would have been seen as a victory for democracy. But the Parliament clearly indicated to the public that it would not re-introduce the death penalty despite the extraordinary brutality of the crime. The most important aspect of this message was the accompanying remark that parliament was not the mechanical representative of people's wishes. A parliament is a body whose role is clearly to shape public opinion and thus influence the shaping of culture.

By contrast, the study mentioned in Horvat's article suggested that we have to do with a one-way process (and in this specific example it was a one-way process) in which television is a tool in the hands of citizens who are given the opportunity to present the desired (violent) content as they please (in accordance with aggressive instincts lurking within us all).

Another frequently heard excuse is that anyone can turn off the TV or choose another channel. Although apparently acceptable, such statements are in fact misleading. The problem is that part of the audience comprising the young population becomes accustomed to violence and does not reject it as certain adults do. In addition, each of us harbors some inexplicable drive that propels us towards bad things rendering us unwilling to resist. Violence arouses a mixture of feelings. On the one hand, we are repelled by it, but on the other, it holds some voyeuristic attraction despite the traumatic results that follow. Below are responses to two works of popular culture that prove this hypothesis.

Several years ago we could see in Ljubljana a documentary entitled "Savage Man, Savage Beasts". The documentary showed a tourist who was attacked and torn apart by lions while on safari. In addition, there were shots of white hunters chasing black people and castrating one of them. These violent scenes were precisely the reason that

the movie attracted large audience. Viewers responded differently. The majority were quite shocked; some said that they could not sleep for days after, while others, although not many, recounted scenes in an anecdotal manner.

A similar mood prevailed after the screening of the Japanese movie "In the Realm of the Senses." The movie's attraction lay in its bloody end more than in its erotic scenes. In the final scene, the woman lacerates her lover and cuts off his penis, which is then held before the eyes of the audience for some time.

There are certain situations in which consumer-protective statements like the one found in Horvat's article stating that "no one can rise above the audience and decide in its name what they will watch" (ibid: p 17), make it painfully obvious that careful judgments are extremely important when shaping the cultural space and deciding who participates in the process. Statements like the one above are based on popular democracy and have nothing to do with true democracy. Democracy implies "deciding for oneself" as much as "not causing harm to others." But the problem is who should decide what kind and extent of violence are still acceptable, where the limits should be set and which groups of viewers should be excluded from viewing violence.

Finally, the findings of the Slovene study contradict the statements of television program editors that the audience dictates the choice. As a matter of fact, the majority of Slovenes, almost 80%, are convinced that Slovene programming contains excessive violence. Among the stations offering the greatest share of violent content are *POP TV* and *Kanal A*. Furthermore, 88% of Slovenes are convinced that children are excessively exposed to television violence (ibid: 18).

An increasingly number of viewers complain about violence in news broadcasts. *POP TV*'s answer is that professional journalists do not embellish events and do not moralize; they neither invent nor conceal tragic events. The number of violent scenes in news programs corresponds to the number of actual events that must be reported (ibid: 19).

#### SEVERAL EXAMPLES FROM THE US

On many occasions the judicial system in the US has been faced with the need to make delicate judgments about the influence of particular works on specific crimes. In the

American legal system an individual who engages in activities which he/she can reasonably expect will bring harm upon others, may be held responsible by the court for causing such harm. Movies are particularly notorious in this respect. "Natural Born Killers", a film by Oliver Stone released in 1994, was blamed for causing more than ten killings that followed precisely the movie murder pattern. In 1995, Patricia Byers became the victim of a woman who shot her in the neck. The latter explained that she viewed Stone's film over and over before the act and took LSD just before she committed the crime. Byers filed suit against the offender, Stone himself and the Warner Brothers company, claiming \$ 20 million in damages. She blamed the director and the company for distributing a movie which they knew would encourage, or should have known could encourage crimes (Davidson 1997). The court did not uphold her charges. It referred to the First Amendment which prohibits restrictions on freedom of speech and the press.

The Paladin Press faced similar charges after they published a book titled "A Manual For Independent Hired Murderers". In 1993, a hired murderer closely followed all 27 instructions in the manual. The surviving members of the family brought charges against the publisher. They claimed that the publishers had been aware that the publication, marketing, sales and distribution of the book would enable criminals and potential offenders to use it for the planning and execution of crimes in the manner described therein. Nevertheless, the court thought that the First Amendment prevented them from upholding the allegations.

In the notorious case of *Zamora v. Columbia Broadcasting System*, the perpetrator was a young man who shot an elderly neighbor. The prosecution maintained that the underage offender was "completely subliminally intoxicated" by television violence (ibid: 6). This interesting definition points to singular psychological processes. "Subliminal" indicates effects that work at the subconscious levels of the mind. According to the prosecution, television violence imperceptibly pervaded the young man and led to horrendous reactions. Their formulation calls to mind the effects of radioactivity, which are imperceptible until present in excessive quantities. They come to light only once critical mass has been reached.

In certain circumstances the public, the profession and the state administration readily unite efforts and pool resources in the struggle against delinquency. In its December

2000 issue, "Science Quarterly" featured several articles about new crime policies. One of the issues dealt with was the death penalty for underage offenders (the title ran "Putting Kids to Death"). Their conclusion was that the public expressed sufficient support for this policy. Certain articles indeed drew attention to the dual effect of such sanctions. While they are supposed to have an intimidating effect (even though this effect is extremely difficult to measure or prove), they also contain a "brutalizing" element.

#### SEXUAL CRIMES AS FEATURED IN SLOVENE MEDIA

Sexual crimes attract special attention. As regards reports about sexual crimes, it is possible to argue that the manner of writing tells a lot about the author as well as the editorial policy of a newspaper, which either encourages a special style of writing or simply allows it. Below are some examples of a problematic style of writing.

I will begin with an article carried by the Ljubljana daily *Dnevnik* on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2000. It described the sexual violence of a father who abused his six-year old daughter for several years. Even thinking about this kind of behavior may be unpleasant and painful and may stir a variety of emotions in readers, such as hostility and aggression towards the perpetrator. In this article the main court hearing and the resulting sentence were summarized in several paragraphs. Most controversial was the following description:

He then took off her shorts and underpants and undressed himself. He placed himself behind her back, pushed his sex organ between her thighs and gratified himself. (Grabnar 2000).

The question here is whether it is necessary, when reporting sexual abuse, to serve to the readers details of the act, and what purpose is served by giving such details.

Another article published in *Delo* on the same day under the title "*Girl forced to wash the cloth which father used to wipe himself after ejaculation*" was even more graphic; it contained further details and was almost pathologically precise from its title to the last line.

Later he began to gratify himself several times a week. Whenever his wife worked the nightshift, he pursued his disgusting practice day

after day, until 1997 when he began to touch her and asked her to shake her bottom. In the following years he used to wake her up during the night, undress her, push his sex organ between her legs, and since she did not want to shake her bottom, he forced her onto her knees to perform oral sex. At that time she already knew that the whitish fluid was called sperm, since her cousin had told her that, and her father sometimes demanded that she wash the cloth which he used to wipe himself after ejaculation. (Cvetek 2000c).

Anyone browsing through the crime watch sections in the Slovene newspapers will soon realize that graphic descriptions are characteristic of certain journalists, and two names in particular are usually found below articles describing the sexual abuse of children. The item cited below was featured in the March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2000 issue of *Delo* titled "Father began to itch when his daughter was eight".

Even before she turned fourteen, her father forced her to massage his naked body including his sex organ. The girl had to undress too so that he could freely explore the child's body with his hands. He reached climax with her help; on some occasions he ejaculated all over her breasts and face. He kissed and touched her, and she had to return his caresses by manually gratifying him while the insatiable father relished the view of her naked body. (Ropac 2000).

Descriptions of this kind are likely to elicit, in addition to other emotions, excessively aggressive feelings towards the perpetrator. Another *Delo* item on sexual abuse in the September 17<sup>th</sup> 1998 issue titled "Seven years in prison for a grandfather who abused his granddaughter for six years" read as follows:

The loving grandfather turned into a monster and touched his 6-year old granddaughter; this year he forced her into sexual intercourse, stealing all of her dreams of beauty.

Grandfather's dirty games began in September 1992, when the girl, who at that time was not yet seven years old, first entered elementary school. Initially, the lascivious pensioner was satisfied with innocent games, but over years he became more demanding. This year he went so far as to deflower her and later had sexual intercourse with her several times. The girl, who already had her period, luckily did not conceive. The grandfather pushed his sex organ into the child's mouth, and when on one occasion



she resisted, he hit her and threatened that she must not tell anybody what went on. Between March, when he deflowered her and ejaculated in her vagina and June 6<sup>th</sup>, he had intercourse with her at least four times.

His dirty acts therefore escalated until he deflowered her, and, although he knew that the girl had her period, ejaculated into her vagina. The grandfather thus robbed her of all her dreams about a prince on a white horse and about all the beautiful things girls dream about. Instead he destroyed her childhood and deflowered her. (Cvetek 1998).

Even when writing about acts that involve much less sexual violence, events can be described in such a way as to cause strong hostility and aggressive feelings towards the perpetrator. The journalist that signed the article reproduced above also covered an instance of physical violence involving less aggressive sexual abuse, yet the manner of writing was not less sensationalistic. The item was entitled “*Father’s disgusting joke*”.

A 39-year-old man who neglected, tormented, beat and touched his daughter will spend two years and four months behind bars. The happy childhood of a seven-year old girl turned into hell after the death of her mother in 1991. Her father started to neglect and even beat her brutally. He spent all of his money on drinking, and in the autumn of 1997 he began to itch and started to touch his 13-year-old daughter. He defended himself by saying that he was just joking. According to her testimony, he slid his hand over her breasts while she was washing dishes without paying any attention to her pleas. Moreover, he started masturbating in front of her, and demanded oral sex from her. He continued this disgusting practice and touched her body and private parts at least twice a month. (Cvetek 2000).

The same style of reporting continued throughout 2002. In the article “*Sex and smacks*” the same journalist reported a case which ended in acquittal. Despite this, she described in detail how the couple first hugged, then discarded some clothing and finally made love. She continues by explaining that the young man could not reach climax because the girl pinched and squeezed him and even hit him, since “such were her sexual habits”. On that specific day, he took off her underpants, lowered the car seat and descended on her. He pulled her pants, she struggled, pushed him away and pinched him, but he was stronger. (Cvetek 2002a).

In an article titled “Six years of suffering behind home walls” (with the sub-title “Mother concealed her own blood”), one can read about a girl who day after day suffered her father’s harassment, touching, kisses and demands that she rub his “masculine pride”. This began when she turned nine, and he expressed his love by touching her, rubbing, and masturbating in front of her. When she turned thirteen, this father ruthlessly deflowered her. (Cvetek 2002b).

While one cannot but agree that sexual offenders follow the basest instincts, it is also possible to ask whether the descriptions of sexual abuse point to certain pathological instincts (of course, different from those pursued by sexual offenders). Or could it be that these authors are driven by a wish to elicit a specific (perhaps pathological) response in readers. Do morbid scenes hold special attraction for readers? Can one talk of a special kind of “voyeurism” from a safe distance? Whatever the answer, it seems that reporting in this manner reveals a unique pathological state. In contrast to various crime experts, for example, medical staff, criminologists, prosecutors and judges, reporters do not come into close contact with violence. While it is understandable that a part of the violent, criminal and morbid world should be exposed to the public eye, it also seems that the media find it extremely difficult to set the limits beyond which reporting should not go. There are several reasons for their inability to impose restrictions. Media democracy makes it difficult to accept any idea involving censorship (except in relation to classified information). But it also seems that by acting in the name of the right to be informed, many things that get the green light have far worse consequences than they would, had a minimal level of self-censorship been in place. Regardless of which personality theories we resort to when explaining individual responses to descriptions of extreme violence, it is an irrefutable fact that a considerable number of “balanced personalities” are irresistibly attracted to “passive participation” in extreme violence. The article about the uncovering of a Russian-Italian pedophile network featured in *Delo* on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2000 under the title “1,700 caring fathers to appear in court” well illustrates this assertion.

Two Italian television channels received from police and investigators video tapes showing how policemen, disguised as smugglers of pedophile material, led the buyers of pedophile tapes up the garden path. They also added some truly horrific images shot by Russian

producers of this material in a villa near Moscow. Two to twelve-year-old children were raped and often killed.

When the national television channel showed just few of these scenes on its prime time news program, the writers and editors of television news were immediately suspended.

The investigators made use of the Internet to track down apparently blameless citizens who ordered the images of naked children at a price of 2 million lira; for images showing sexual abuse they had to pay 15 to 20 million lira; images of rape, many ending in the child's death, were worth 40 million lira. The Italian newspapers wrote that the majority of customers buying these tapes belonged in the category of respected and irreproachable citizens, mainly prosperous married men and apparently caring fathers. (Hočevár 2000).

This report clearly shows that some are prepared to part with a considerable part of their property to get hold of the most horrendous scenes. And can anyone deny pathological traits in the personalities of these consumers of evil?

The confiscation of these video tapes and the pedophile scandal were also covered by Television Slovenia on prime time news on September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2000. The commentary placed stress on the disputable detail that the footage showed the faces of children who were victims of sexual crime. The scandal was thus regarded as even greater, because the victims could be identified. But no one asked whether it was suitable to show children as objects of sexual violence. Would it have been perfectly acceptable if naked children had been shown with the usual black rectangle concealing the eyes?

The Slovene national channel could not resist the temptation to show the image of a naked child taken from the Internet. Was this motivated by the need to raise awareness about this escalating type of violent crime? Did they expect that the image would have a preventive effect? Was it sensationalism that led to their decision? Or, does it speak of the specific, perhaps pathological, instincts of certain journalists?

The broadcast "TV Tednik" (TV Weekly) on the national television channel referred to the same pedophile scandal in its program dedicated to the protection of children on December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2000. It summarized a part of the judgment that referred to the image of a child with a bottle in its anus and an erect sex organ. The journalist then asked how the court could possibly pass a suspended sentence if

the perpetrator's inclinations were obvious to everybody around him. Once again we can pose the ethical question of why one should mobilize negative emotions in the public and direct them towards the perpetrator, on the one hand, and towards the judicial system as a whole, on the other.

Still another paper that seems to hope to boost circulation by exploiting stories about pedophilia is the Ljubljana weekly *Nedeljski dnevnik*. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001 television commercial was aired in which a journalist invited readers to buy *Nedeljski dnevnik* by summarizing an article about a daughter who was abused by her step-father. This article had the title "Youth lost in the step-father's bed" (May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2002, p. 4) and carried descriptions that went into details similar to those mentioned earlier.

She was stiff with fear when he started to touch her and rub his sex organ against her body. One year later he deflowered her in a hotel room, and from then on occasions of sexual intercourse were even more frequent. He forced her into sexual intercourse even during her periods. The girl suffered immensely but did not say a word to her mother.

Another men abused two boys who were most delicate and vulnerable. Sexual abuse took different forms. He first undressed and touched them, then he kissed their sex organs, and when this failed to satisfy his sexual lust, he pushed a finger into the anus.

It is necessary to add here that these convicts are relegated to the bottom of the social ladder even while serving their time in prison and are treated with disgust even by fellow prisoners. (Grušovnik 2001).

The above article is another example of reporting that goes into anatomical detail. Is it by chance that all such items in all newspapers mentioned are written by women? One can identify the same pattern mentioned earlier, in which the suffering of the victim is contrasted to the perversity of the perpetrator. Pedophiles are found at the bottom of the social ladder even in prison subculture. But it is difficult to imagine how a non-violent pedophile (of course, we do not want to understate the consequences of sexual abuse affecting children's psychology) could be looked down upon, from the position of 'blameless' moral stance, by someone who, though not a sexual offender, did kill people in cold blood during robbery.

An essentially different description of sexual violence written by a different journalist and titled “*Six and a half years for sexual deviant*” was published in *Delo* on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2002.

He initially engaged in mean sexual acts three to four times a month. When the defendant turned 15, he coerced her into sexual acts of various kinds as often as three times a week, until she confided in her aunt. (Škerl 2002).

In my opinion this is one of the rare correctly written items, one which does not arouse the reader’s aggression, the feeling of threat and need for revenge and does not call for strict sentences or elicit similar unconstructive responses. But nevertheless, it gives necessary information about the criminal offense and the essential circumstances in which it occurred, which should suffice.

The temptation to show violence is lasting. The next example contained a different kind of violence. On March 18<sup>th</sup> 2002, the first channel of tv Slovenia, in its 7 o’clock news, showed the arrest of a Chechen soldier who had been seized by Russian forces and before that had been identified on the basis of a video tape recorded by the Chechens on some previous occasion. This tape showed a Russian soldier being tortured by two Chechens. One of them held him by the legs, while the other cut off his head. The television footage ended at the moment a Chechen placed a knife on the neck of the Russian soldier.

One among the most obvious “contributions” to the spread of violence was a broadcast by Studio City on May 21<sup>st</sup> 2001. The broadcast dealt with public executions in countries still practicing these. My critique of this broadcast is aimed at the exposure of the audience to violence, since documentary footage of an execution does not differ much from live footage (unless the scenes date from the remote past). What one should be aware of in such examples is that violence mobilizes viewers’ emotions, instincts and passion for violence. This statement was later confirmed when 28% of viewers that participated in the voting expressed a wish to attend an execution.

Apart from violent scenes, popular program makers often readily include cruel scenes that are, in my opinion, inserted for purely commercial reasons. For example, the *SLO 1* news program on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2000 featured a report about disaster at sea which included close-ups of corpses washed ashore on the Italian coast, making one

wonder whether these journalists had ever heard anything about respect for the dead and their relatives.

The broadcast "Odstiranj" (Unveilings) on the national television channel on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2001 addressed the topic of child care and the problems parents have with live-in nannies. In America, several systems intended to verify the suitability of a live-in nanny are in use, ranging from letters of recommendation to surveillance using hidden cameras inside houses. As an introduction to this debate, we could see the documentary footage generated by hidden surveillance cameras. Among these we could see a nanny who hit a ten-month old baby in the head each time she passed the playpen. When she had to change its diapers, she pulled the baby roughly out of the playpen, thrust it on the ground and continued to hit it while changing its diapers.

The question I would like to pose in connection with this footage is as follows: wouldn't one scene illustrating the circumstances and followed by verbal descriptions suffice? Is it necessary to show so many brutal scenes until the viewer begins to feel an extreme need for revenge after seeing the nurse hit the child ten times in succession?

The child's mother spoke of her feelings on seeing the video footage of the nanny's conduct. She admitted that at that moment she was capable of killing. Her testimony provides one of the most valuable proofs of the potential consequences of showing violent scenes. Every viewer who could identify with her probably approved of her feelings. And that is the core of the problem. By showing violence we incite feelings that could lead to aggression. The resolution of problems, including crimes, is thus entrusted to the public, capable only of lynching, instead of being left to democratic methods that gained ground throughout the development of culture and civilization.

Some time ago the Slovene media carried a notice that video tapes showing the violence that occurred during the recent Balkan conflicts were on sale at high prices. The price of a product is determined by demand, so if anything is indisputable it is the fact that we are passionate consumers of violence and of all types of horrible things. What prevents us from attaining an even worse pathological state is the fact that most of us do not have enough money to afford morbid pleasures.

In the majority of cases, reactions to violence are directed at the perpetrators of violent acts. One illustrative

example from Slovenia involved a case of sexual violence committed by a Rom. The victim was an underage Roma girl who got pregnant and gave birth to the child before she reached the age of consent. The court carefully considered all the circumstances and even engaged experts on Roma culture and their way of life. They explained that this pattern of values and traditions was a characteristic trait of the Roma community. It is customary for them that young women get married and become mothers at an early age. One element that contributes to this tradition is their biologically determined maturity, which they reach earlier than non-Roma women. Such a way of life and formation of the family has been known for decades.

Nevertheless, the high-profile media reporting on this case mobilized the public. The feminist association organized a protest in Ljubljana, at which one could see banners reading “What would you do if someone did it to your own daughter?” (the message was intended for the judge).

Public reaction reflected two types of aggressive feelings. The first was channeled towards the perpetrator, who in the popular opinion should have received an exemplary punishment for the simple reason of improving the safety of all young women who were potentially threatened. The second type of aggression was directed at any judge who would dare pronounce a mild sentence (and eventually, the judge ruling on this case demonstrated courage and professionalism in his approach).

#### RESPONSE OF THE SLOVENE AUDIENCE TO VIOLENT CRIMINAL ACTS

The instance of reporting that triggered the greatest number of responses in the recent past was that about the torture of cats, dubbed the “cat scandal,” which filled the pages of all Slovene media for quite a long time. Once the journalists had communicated every piece of information they could get hold of, it was time for public opinion to be heard. It is difficult to recall any public outrage of the same proportion that was triggered by aggression against human beings. Most frequently, those who responded supported their arguments by saying that this was a case of violence against powerless beings who could not resist their torturers. What was ignored was the fact that many violent acts are directed against people who do not have any chance to defend themselves, particularly children or adults who

cannot, for various reasons, resist the overwhelming force.

In the said example of animal torture, the media were filled with reports abounding in details. The perpetrators were three high school students who kept journals recording their acts. They even gave names to their victims with these names more or less reflecting the method of torture used. The media meticulously reproduced these journal records, so that the brutal and utterly violent treatment of animals that lasted for several months was fully revealed.

Responses varied. Some stressed that these arrogant and aggressive perpetrators should be handled in a way that would bring to light the reasons behind their acts, particularly since none had the kind of difficult past that might elucidate their behavior. However, such voices were rare. Much more numerous were cries for lynching. Judging by journalistic reports, the atmosphere in the environment where the perpetrators lived matched the morbidity of public demands. Below is a brief survey of some letters published in *Delo's* supplement *Ona* (She) on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000, clearly illustrating the mood that prevailed among one part of the public.

I'd like to appeal to all citizens of Tržič and all people who know those torturers and their parents to make their names public. Point a finger at them and expose them to public shame, because a moral society does not need to tolerate such criminals nor handle them politely. It is believed that these torturers will get a three-month prison sentence at the most. As if that could be of any help for such scum. I really don't know what psychiatrists and psychologists can do in such cases, since nineteen-year olds are too old for education. These are cases for a madhouse. They should be immediately expelled from school, so that they do not waste taxpayers' money. Let their parents, who brought them to this world, shoulder the burden. People should not preach that parents should not be attributed sole responsibility. Like father like son. These parents obviously produced three Slovene "children" too many (quotes by the author of the letter, D.P.), in fact, three instances of scum. What is going to become of them in the future? (Šelih 2000).

The title of another letter signed by Lea Eva Müller, a well-known animal rights activist, is also sufficiently illustrative. It reads "Human creatures – nature's mistake".

This is an instance of horrible torture of innocent beings bestowed on us by nature. My question for the beginning is: what have these



peaceful, delicate and modest animals done, and to whom have they done anything to deserve such torture by human creatures? I publicly protest against such education as received by the three evildoers from Tržič. Therefore, my requirements are as follows:

1. all media should publish the photos, names and addresses of these three human failures who tortured cats for more than a year so that death eventually came as a relief. Name also the school they attended.
2. The Ministry of Education should introduce into Slovene educational institutions courses on applied ethics and the welfare of animals.
3. Our virtuous people of Gorenjska, who only care about the pleasant image of their houses, should take care, despite their well-known thriftiness, that the cat population is sterilized and castrated. By doing so they will prevent excessive, undesired numbers of cats. They do not do this because they think it a waste of money, time and effort; so evildoers exploit the excessive animal population to commit massacres.

I want to express my gratitude to the employees of the Kranj police station for their quick and drastic measures. My praise also goes to *POP TV* which showed with such authenticity that horrible example of torture, because till now it could not even be mentioned in public.

It would be most just if the torturers were handed over to animal protectors who would settle accounts with them quickly and without hearings or taking into account potential extenuating circumstances. (Müller 2000).

In terms of insult, these letters exceeded many other comparable items that have appeared in the Slovene media since media freedom and democracy prevailed (and there have been many such). Aggression is directed not only towards the perpetrators but also towards the parents who “obviously produced three instances of scum too many and would have done much better if they had chosen indoor plants instead”. The subjects of criticism included the parents, school (which should be named), educational institutions, the Ministry of Education, in short, everyone who could be arbitrarily related to the offenders. A just punishment would be one that would be pronounced and executed by animal protectors (or, to be more precise, they would “settle accounts” with offenders) in a quick procedure, without court hearings or extenuating circumstances.

Is it difficult to imagine that in a real (or imagined) situation the outraged authors of these letters would actually behave in the manner promised in their letters. A number of experiments and an extensive body of experience

testify that a leap from public anger to actual lynching is extremely fast, that it takes place without moral reservations and is often made with pleasure, even passion.

Another article dealing with animal torture titled “A heart of stone?” appeared in *Delo* on January 26<sup>th</sup>.

The offender earned a three-month prison sentence for sadistic torture of a dog who died in hellish pain. He wrapped a rope around the dog’s neck, dragged the suffocating animal past the shop, kicked it and on top of that punched it. Then he broke a wooden stick in two and forced a 20 centimeter long bit through the dog’s mouth up its throat. But the evil young man was not yet satisfied, so he pushed the longer part of the stick up the dog’s anus causing it serious internal injuries, and then walked off leaving the dog in pain. The intensely suffering animal was found by children. Even the policeman, used to all kinds of scenes, felt shivers down his spine when he realized, from the description of its injuries and from the photos, what the poor animal had gone through. (Cvetek 2000:b).

Magazines that do not feature crime watch sections or similar pages turn these news items into essay-like stories. The weekly *Jana* titled “The Bloody hands of Enis Muratović” covered the same story as the *Delo* article mentioned above. It was illustrated with a photo showing the defendant arriving at court escorted by two policemen and obviously handcuffed (one wonders why his face in the photo was hidden given that his full name was published; is this some kind of false morality?). The account of bestial torture is laced with glimpses of the court room, descriptions of the judge, the jury and the hearing itself and speculations about the offender’s childhood. The novelistic descriptions of participants (“*the public defender is a smart woman, with neatly brushed hair and big golden earrings*”) occasionally divert attention from the brutal act. Of course, this article was correspondingly longer than the one in the *Delo*, in which a detailed account of the brutal act itself constitutes the basic structure of the text.

*Delo*’s article is brimming with adjectives, adverbs and syntagms serving to delineate, as faithfully as possible, the perpetrator’s character, which is contrasted to the suffering of the victim, for example “bestial”, “hellish pain”, “sadistic torture”, “evil young man”, “powerless animal”, “walked off carelessly”, “horrible pain”, “unbearable pain”, “tiny quadruped.”

An illustrative example of the mood that prevailed within professional circles was provided by *Delo* on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2000. The article “Support for violence related measures” was signed by initials only (A).

The Association of Teachers in Slovenia expressed their support for the autonomy of the teacher’s assembly when deciding on educational measures which, owing to the emergency situations and the serious implications of the case, cannot meet all formal legal procedures. This means that teachers are obliged to react quickly and with determination. The association strives for greater autonomy of schools and teachers in educational decisions, which in their opinion can be achieved only by reducing the paternalism of the state over them. Such paternalism renders schools and teachers irresponsible, disinterested and without initiative.

This stance of the teachers’ association is an excellent illustration of the impact media reporting of violence has on the shaping of professional public opinion. Educators obviously dismissed professional principles that require (just as in court) an understanding of circumstances before one can make a final judgment or condemnation. This made it all the easier for them to reject the formal procedure on the grounds that it was just an obstacle in serious (therefore, according to them, urgent) cases. But the formal procedure, which they see as personifying the state’s paternalistic approach, ensures that everyone respects certain established rules. And if rules are violated by young people, this by no means justifies the same behavior on the part of educators.

References to law and order seem to be indispensable whenever one feels that his/her rights have been threatened. But as soon as another person’s rights are involved, and that person has caused harm to us, we readily overlook the principle of law and order. In so doing we don’t care at all that it is precisely such arbitrary accusations, taking of justice into one’s own hands and appeals for lynching that make the state of law and order lose face. While individual appeals for a drumhead court-martial in readers’ letters can be understood, the initiative of the teachers’ association is truly alarming, since it violates fundamental principles.

A similar attitude was seen in the panel discussion *Intelekta* that was broadcast on the national radio in March 2001. Some participants expressed their support for the death penalty for pedophiles in Slovenia; a telephone survey during the broadcast showed (should we

say surprisingly?) that 61% of respondents supported the death penalty while others suggested other forms of harsh punishment, say, hard forced labor or castration.

Some years ago a rape in an elementary school caused much agitation among the Slovene public. The suspect was a boy of Roma nationality and the victim a girl in grade five. Most media staged a lynching of the young Rom. Experts' calls to show respect for the principle of innocence fell on deaf ears. Since the suspect was younger than 14 and could not be prosecuted in court, the Minister of Education appointed two lawyers, one psychologist and one pediatrician, all renowned scientists and practising professionals, to give their opinion. Each of them worked independently without being aware of the others' methods or findings. All arrived at the conclusion that there was insufficient evidence to substantiate allegations against the Roma boy. The documentation they presented even suggested that the offender was another unknown person. Yet their expert opinion, indeed adequately presented in certain media, could not take the blame off the supposed offender in the eyes of the public. Long after the incident, media continued to accuse the school, its heads and the state in general for their failure to punish the offender. For example, in January 1998 *Delo* featured an article titled "Girls go to toilets in pairs only".

The reason is the rape that occurred in February last year in the school toilet. The offender still goes to school and the victim remains at home for the second week. The state sleeps as if it had a clear conscience. It has been almost one year since the girl was raped, but the school, the Ministry of Education and other bodies did not do anything to protect the victim from confronting the offender on a daily basis. Supported by the "Parents Initiative Committee" they hope that this sad story will finally be resolved. The story is really sad. A thirteen-year-old pupil who lives in a nearby Roma settlement in Šmihel took the eleven-year-old girl by surprise in the school toilet, forced her into a cubicle so that she fell over the toilet seat and raped her.

While investigators accomplished their task quickly and thoroughly so that it was soon known who ended the girl's childhood in such a disgusting way, the public prosecutor explained that only a court was authorized to make judgment. Yet it is clear who would sit in court under well-founded suspicion if only he were older than 14.

The enraged parents established the Parents Initiative Committee for the protection of the rape victim and collected more than one thousand signatures in a petition to relocate the rapist to another school. The state and its institutions nevertheless continue to behave as if they had clear conscience. (Lindič-Dragaš 1998).

Obviously, public anger unleashed by the media can last for months. Even if things had radically changed during this period and the case ended in acquittal, or someone else was identified as the offender, the circumstances for the initial, ready-at-hand suspect would not change for the better.

In this case the lynching cannot be blamed on the *Delo* journalists only. The tabloid daily *Slovenske novice* led the way with other media taking up its comments. So, for example, the editor of *TV Tednik* (TV Weekly), Darko Marin, opened the program with a story about the rapist saying that circumstances at the school remained unchanged. Such behavior imprints a stigma that will pursue the Roma boy, now already a young man, throughout his life.

#### REALITY TV – DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE OF VIOLENCE AND HORROR

On January 23<sup>rd</sup> the Ljubljana daily *Dnevnik* featured an article about the editorial policies of US television stations titled “Feeding the audience with other people’s misfortunes.” It said that American television viewers preferred live violence over expensive films. The subtitle ran “The more blood, the better” and it was presented as a motto of editors and producers of local TV stations. The article summarized the footage about a young woman who died of overdose. It explained that viewers could see the investigators searching the apartment and her parents arriving at the site of the tragedy. This broadcast was described as one among many shown on local television channels whose camera crews are always the first to arrive on the scene. As a result, it often happens that relatives see the victim on television before they are informed about the event by the police.

Reality TV has been moving into Europe. For example, SAT1 shows documentaries about various types of violence in a program titled *Echt – wahr* (Authentic). In November 1999 it showed a brawl in an American penitentiary between a group of prisoners and guards. The extremely brutal fight was shown twice in a row, so that each detail

could become indelibly imprinted in the viewer's memory. The next feature was about a boy who attempted to light a rocket like one used for home firework displays, but it went out of control, exploded in his hand and seriously injured him. The explosion was shown four times in slow motion (this broadcast had nothing to do with warnings against the use of crackers during festive seasons).

POP TV employed a similar concept in its broadcast about dangerous animals. It showed an attack by a bull terrier which had been set on a visitor by its unbalanced owner. The video was equipped with a notice that the scenes were unsuitable for sensitive viewers.

On October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1998 *Kanal A* showed a documentary by Reality tv (recorded by an anonymous person using a video camera) in which the Mexican police seized a suspected delinquent (drug trafficker) in a street raid. After they placed him in the position for searching and the man was leaning on the police car, a policemen shot him in cold blood and then waved a gun, obviously not one belonging to the suspect, but intended for later use to prove that the man was killed in self-defense.

Of course, Reality tv is nothing but an attempt (a successful one) to attract mass viewers by offering something new and shocking, something that is not counterfeit or faked. Everyone knows that it really happened. Tragedy, blood and crime have never been so close to us.

## THE INTERNET

The Internet is the first ever system to offer literally every home on the globe, among other things, the most horrible forms of crime richly illustrated with graphic material. The Internet is a space in which the human imagination feeding on base instincts knows no limits. It is true that certain pages with prohibited content are hunted and that providers of pornographic pedophile materials are occasionally tracked down. But it is also true that different countries have legislations of varying degrees of strictness. In addition, the principle of free expression in many places has priority over the potential harm to individuals, including vulnerable groups such as children or teenagers.

It is not hard to find Internet pages whose authors boast content that would be banned from any other site. Another popular form of self-advertisement is claiming the most horrendous, odious, repulsive, violent or shocking images on the Internet. Since many page owners boast the same excess, this type of content is obviously abundant.

Despite regulations valid in Europe, it is practically impossible to limit the provision of this kind of content to European Internet users. American providers protected by the constitutional right of freedom of expression kindly host web pages with utterly violent content and it seems impossible to prevent European users from responding.

The weekly *Mladina* carried an article in its issue No 35 (August 28<sup>th</sup> 2000) titled "Racism to every village" (Cerar 2000). The author concludes that the spreading of racism and hate over the Internet is much more dangerous than dissemination of images of sexual practices. He mentions an auction on Yahoo in which approximately 1,200 Nazi objects were on sale, ranging from imitation ss daggers to a device for the production of Cyclon B, a gas that was used to exterminate Jews in concentration camps (ibid: 45). A former Ku Klux Klan leader established the web page that the author describes as the most impressive of all racist-oriented pages. The owner had concluded that the costs of Internet advertising were minimal while reaching millions. His page includes links to various racist web propaganda sites directed against Jews and black people (ibid: 46).

In the same article Cerar writes that one can hardly find any major skinhead page without references to the activities of skinheads in Slovenia. The Slovene skinheads' home page includes praise for General Leon Rupnik, a

Fascist collaborator during World War Two (ibid: 46). This page was also the subject of Marko Zorko's satirical column in *Delo's* Saturday Supplement on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2000 (Zorko 2000). But none of these warnings, either satirical or serious in tone, seem to be able to wake up state authorities and bring them to give consideration to this phenomenon and respond to the hate that some people harbor against fellow citizens.

There is no imaginable form of extreme violence that is not represented on the Internet. Some pages exploit the tragic events and unspeakable cruelties that occur in conflicts. So one can find documentary images of tortures and rapes committed by policemen and soldiers in East Timor, or photographs shot by American secret agents in Kosovo of the rapes of young girls and children.

When real images run short, page owners resort to presumably faked scenes of violence, but their impact on users is not any weaker than if one were viewing a documentary. Even with documentary images one should ask whether these are aimed at raising the awareness of the public and prompting measures to be taken against violence in general. Unfortunately, it is much more likely that what we have here is a skillful marketing of evil which never seems to run short of consumers.



## THE JOURNALISTIC CODE AND MEDIA VIOLENCE

The Association of Journalists in Slovenia adopted its previous code soon after Slovenia gained independence in 1991. In October 2002 a new code was adopted with some of its provisions being more loosely defined than in the first version. Both deserve a brief review at this point.

In the previous code, the reporting of violence was indirectly addressed in several articles. The arguments used by journalists when defending thorough reporting of violence were probably rooted in Article 1 of the 1991 code which read:

The journalist's fundamental duty is to provide truthful and genuine information to the public. (Code 1991).

The explanations by TV companies' spokesmen such as "the scenes of tragedies and wars cannot be embellished or purged of violence" (*Ona* 2001), obviously invoking the first article of the code, are also moot when viewed in the light of some other articles of the same code. Article 8 stated:

The journalist protects human integrity and a person's privacy against unjustified and sensationalist disclosures in public. He/she is particularly cautious when writing about accidents, family tragedies, diseases, children and underage persons. When he/she writes about judicial matters, the principle of "innocent until proven guilty" must be observed. The praising of crime, terrorism, violence and inhumanity is incompatible with the principles of this Code.

This article was accompanied by guideline 8.1. which refers to the mentioning of names and publication of photographs.

The mentioning of names and the publication of photographs of victims or offenders in reports about accidents, investigation or judicial procedures is not justifiable in principle. The journalist must always weigh the interest of the public against the right of the individual.

The provision contained in the first article should be understood as a fundamental provision where the principle of truthfulness is comparable to the principle of substantive truth in criminal law. But even when observed, this provision still leaves sufficient room for various styles of reporting without distorting the truth, so the makers

of the code felt the need to add restricting clauses. A sensational disclosure of someone's privacy in itself is not untruth, but it is generally unethical. This is the reason why Article 8 narrows the scope of the fundamental provision so that it cannot be understood as giving full authority to describe anything that happened in reality.

The new code adopted in 2002 did not introduce stricter rules as regards reports on violence, offenders and victims. Moreover, it gave in to the pressure from market laws. The previous guideline referring to the publication of names and photographs was replaced with the provision stipulating that "*the journalist must employ caution when mentioning names or publishing photographs of offenders, victims or their relatives*" (Article 21). In other words, the more precise text was replaced with a loose provision which gives more freedom to journalists in delicate situations. In addition, one searches in vain for any norms in this code that place limits on excessive presentation of crime (the previous code did not differ in this respect).

The practice in Slovenia often departs from recommendations in the code. One principle that is definitely observed is the right of the public to be informed. Yet journalists freely interpret and bend this principle to accommodate current needs, so it eventually boils down to infinite freedom in which anything that can be captured by the camera or hand is presented to the public.

It is interesting that even Resolution 1003 of the Council of Europe referring to ethics in journalism does not devote much attention to violence, although it does not circumvent it either (Resolution 1003). It stresses the importance of information and communication for the formation of a citizen's personal attitudes and for the development of society (ibid). The resolution also addresses the issues of "Conflict situations and special protection." Society occasionally finds itself in conflict or experiencing tense situations due to terrorism, discrimination against minorities, xenophobia or war. In such circumstances, the mass media have a moral obligation to protect democratic values, to show respect for human dignity and to seek peaceful, tolerant solutions. Therefore, the media must oppose violence, hate speech and conflict and must reject any type of discrimination based on culture, sex or religion.

Taking into account the special influence of mass media – particularly television – on the attitudes of children and young people, it is necessary to avoid broadcasts, messages

or images that praise violence, exploit sex or consumerism or deliberately use unsuitable language (ibid).

It is obvious that basic acts do address the regulation of violence in the media, but provisions are extremely loose. As a result, editors have a free hand when shaping editorial policies and it seems that the latter could be restricted only by applying the provisions of criminal law. Penalties and legal force are generally not seen as suitable methods for regulating human relations, so both are considered to be the *ultima ratio*. However, in this case it is limited to the violation of the relatively well defined right of privacy. Yet criminal law does not include elaborate norms to determine at which point a certain type of violence in the media becomes dangerous for the individual or when it encourages the individual towards violent behavior.

A report by Manuel Encabo accompanying the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on ethics in journalism is also worthy of attention (Encabo 1993). Encabo writes about the close relationship between information and ethics. In his opinion, all mass media i.e. publishers and journalists, sooner or later confront an ethical decision of vital importance. They can convince viewers and listeners to switch to their transmitter or channel, or to read their newspaper by using all of their knowledge and power. But they can also choose to win their trust by providing carefully chosen and unbiased information and ethical opinion (ibid: 65).

Therefore, the choice between information as a means and information as an objective in itself, that is to say, between commodity and public service, is eventually reduced to the choice between man as a means and man as an objective. Those who treat humans as a means to achieve something exclude ethics from their acts or intentions (ibid: 65).

The huge ethical responsibility shouldered by mass media also arises from the fact that the reader or the listener cannot correct deviations from the truth in the information process because his/her knowledge about reality comes mainly from the media (ibid: 66).

It is true that the mass media operate in accordance with business purposes, meaning that they strive to attract as many users as possible. The number of listeners, readers or viewers is often expressed in terms of market share. This is the point at which information and communication are in danger of succumbing to distorted images that are mediated in a manner reminiscent of the Wild West. In this

battle, victory goes to the one who is more aggressive and who fires first (ibid: 66).

In Encabo's opinion, these are the reasons why information should not be treated as a commodity. Information is a fundamental right and it is not in the possession of the mass media or the ruling power. Yet freedom of information in the mass media is not unlimited. In accordance with the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of Europe in 1970 (R 248) the duty of the press and other mass media is to fulfill their tasks with a feeling of responsibility towards the community and individual citizens. The scope of this responsibility includes respect for human dignity and for the vulnerability of children and young people, who should be protected against programs, messages and images with violent content.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS  
IN THE PROGRAMS OF *RTV Slovenia*

The document "Professional standards and principles of journalistic ethics in the programs of *RTV Slovenia*" was adopted in 2000. It regulates certain areas in more detail than the code of journalists. Among the fundamental areas covered were versatile and balanced reporting, monitoring of political life, programming standards, relations with the state administration, respect for the values supported by viewers and listeners, and interventions into programming (censorship).

Article 1.8 bearing the title "Justice in reporting" (Professional standards 2000: 14) specifies that the journalist must respect the personal integrity of an individual. The broad concept of just conduct and protection of integrity is thus left in part to personal judgment, since this article is not accompanied by any comment or more detailed explanation. This deficiency is partly remedied in other articles which include more specific examples. For instance, Article 5.10 (Crime Watch) specifies that succumbing to sensationalism is not permissible. In addition, television and radio can cause fear among people of becoming victims of crime (ibid: 40). The makers of the rules attempted to find a balance between these side effects and the fundamental role of journalists by inserting a provision stating that one should strive not to cause groundless panic among people, while making people aware of the dangers of violent acts. However, even in this area the right to be informed

must not affect the right to privacy (ibid: 40). Finally, article 5.10.1.1. is the one that we can safely argue is the most frequently violated. It stipulates that the principle of “innocent until proven guilty” must be strictly respected.

The provision referring directly to violence says that it is neither ethical nor professional to show powerless victims of violence and accidents, nor close-ups of bloody faces and body parts or similar; these scenes can only be shown from a distance so that victims cannot be identified (ibid: 41).

Two articles address pain, suffering and violence. Journalists are warned that they must be cautious when showing scenes of torture; and if they decide to show them anyway, the scene should not be prolonged unless there is good reason. Images of suffering can be shown only when absolutely necessary in order to make the significance of the message understandable to the public (ibid: 58). The code also stipulates that news programs on RTV *Slovenia* should not include unnecessary scenes of violence. These may be broadcast when constituting an essential part of real life or an event presented in the program (ibid: 58).

It is obvious from this brief review that journalists have enough freedom when deciding how much violence and what type of violence should be presented. Of course, written rules cannot determine the scope or content of images of suffering, pain or violence. These standards are shaped through practice and among many who should contribute to the process the smallest role should be played by viewers as consumers of violence. In the case of mass media, which share responsibility for the shaping of culture in a specific social environment, their voice should be stronger than consumer demands. We are all aware that some concepts, for example one about a specific social environment, have become utopian. In a time of satellites and electronic communications when any individual can view, for relatively little money, more than one hundred television programs produced in the most varied cultural and non-cultural environments across the world, it is illusionary to dream about an isolated island free of violence. Yet national media, whose audience ratings are not negligible despite global competition, have the option of choosing whether to encourage the culture of violence through a sensationalist approach, or to resist sensationalism and with it violence, which is its most loyal companion. To resist an editorial policy that exploits violence means to resist the temptation to reap an easy, guaranteed and generous

profit. So expectations once again prove to be illusory. Those media that aim to attain high circulation or ratings without violent content would need to mobilize creativity and imagination in journalistic reporting and invest considerable effort, that is to say, methods that go beyond cheap but effective recipes.

## MEDIA OMBUDSMAN

In 2000 several proposals for an ombudsman who would be responsible for the area of public information were put forward. In an article about the media ombudsman, Jernej Rovšek, one of the deputies of the Human Rights Ombudsman in Slovenia, mentioned a proposal by Sandra Bašić Hrvatin, a researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences, who suggested the establishment of a Press Council which would fulfill the role of a media ombudsman. The press council would be shaped by the representatives of the media industry, journalists' association and civil society. In Rovšek's opinion, this initiative was good, but it was a pity that it limited itself to the American model of ombudsman. Its role is primarily to mediate in conflicts between journalists and editors, in situations when, for example, the editor refuses to publish an article by the journalist. Accordingly, such a body would not be a true media ombudsman, but an institute that would reflect the internal commercial policy of the media.

Rovšek also stressed that the media have great power, so it is not unusual that they are called the "fourth estate." Certain individuals in Slovenia frequently find themselves powerless in the face of unjustified allegations in the media or violations of their individual rights. In practice, the legal protection of the constitutional right of privacy and right of correction is frequently not efficient. An allegation featured on the front page in bold type often leaves an indelible blemish on the individual. Judicial procedures are long and costly. Socially vulnerable groups, people from the social margins and minorities (e.g. Roma) are particularly affected.

Rovšek's proposal somewhat differs from Hrvatin's proposal. In his opinion media guardianship should be implemented through the institution of the media ombudsman. The latter should be appointed by a press council consisting of the representatives of media owners, civil society and the journalists' association. The media ombudsman would examine individual cases of violations of human rights on the part of the media. The media would be obliged to respect and publish its adjudications. If any medium had objections to these adjudications it could file a complaint with the press council which would make the final judgment. This concept of media ombudsman would be similar to that used in Sweden.

The Council of Europe gave similar proposals. Resolution 1003 (July 1993) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe includes a chapter titled “Ethics and Self-regulation in journalism” (Mediji 1996: 83). This resolution proposes the establishment of self-regulatory bodies or mechanisms comprising publishers, journalists, media users’ associations, experts from the academic world and judges. They would be responsible for issuing resolutions on respect for ethical precepts in journalism. According to this proposal, these bodies could publish research on the truthfulness of the information broadcast by the media which would serve as a barometer of credibility to be used by citizens as a guide in assessing ethical standard achieved by individual media (ibid: 83).



## MEDIA AS AUTHORITY

“Information and communication play a very important role in the formation of citizens’ personal attitudes and the development of society and democratic life. “ This line is found at the very beginning of Resolution 1003 (R 1003: 1993). Do media shape public opinion? Is that justified? In Encabo’s opinion, the media’s main objective is not to educate the public nor to publicize or create public opinion (Mediji 1996: 70).

But it would be difficult to argue that in reality media do not shape public opinion. In his work “States of Denial,” Stanley Cohen writes, among other things, about the media monopoly over the shaping of cultural space and our mental images of human suffering (Cohen: 2001). In the chapter “Images of Suffering” he deals with television which introduces into our intimate environment the sufferings of others. The agony of distant people penetrates the consciousness of privileged viewers, comfortably and safely ensconced by the tv. The term “distant” here has a dual meaning. It is not only that these people are geographically distant, but their suffering is distant as well, in the sense that we cannot imagine that so much evil could ever descend on us or our immediate circles.

Another important factor is involved here: distance prevents us from identifying with the victim. Whenever the media bring crime home to us, our first response is that of a potential victim. Therefore, it is not surprising that public surveys seeking to discover how people respond to spectacular news about crimes show overwhelming support for the death penalty or similar harsh punishments for offenders.

Cohen uses the term “unforgettable icons of suffering” for some historical images of human suffering. One such icon is the photo showing a terrified child with raised hands facing a Nazi pointing a gun; another is a tragic symbol of the Vietnam war – a naked and burnt girl running away from napalm flames; still another deeply moving image is a documentary scene in which a Vietnamese military police officer points his gun at the head of a young man, and a moment later the man is shot on camera and collapses to the ground.

If these images were once seen as epitomizing evil, today they are remembered only by those who have a special interest in history. A superficial overview of the documented violence of a later date would show that the escalation of

media violence quenched all those images that were once seen as deeply shocking; they disappeared over time in a sea of bloody graphic and textual messages, photographs and footage.

Manca Košir and Rajko Ranfl (Košir, Ranfl 1996: 84) have concluded that, according to some surveys, children prefer to watch action movies, serials and horror movies. Cultural space is saturated with violence. Editors and journalists try to convince those who oppose media violence that such a state is an inevitable consequence of the fact that there is more violence today than in the past.

Can media be perceived as an authority? The answer is "yes". The power of the role model among children is so strong that they perceive the majority of images as something that is worthy of imitation especially if that enables them to dominate their peers. In the case of adults, we gradually accept certain media as "our media" in such a way that we identify with their predominant orientation. The media could thus be divided into several groups (all classifications are entirely subjective): some bear the trademark of domesticity (in Slovenia these are the weeklies *Jana* and *Nedeljski dnevnik*); some sell because of their distinctive political orientation (e.g. *Mag*, *Demokracija*, former *Republika* and *Slovenec*, and *Družina*), and some for their more or less neutral reporting on daily events (*Delo*, *Dnevnik*). In addition, there are a number of tabloid magazines and papers like *Slovenske novice* and *Lady*. Each medium with a distinctive concept targets a specific segment of the population. If a reader perceives the greater part of a specific medium's content as being close to his/her own views, principles and emotions, he/she may eventually become completely biased. This gradually leads to the adoption of viewpoints and values promoted by that medium. The critical distance necessary for assessing the descriptions of events and phenomena thus diminishes. "My" newspaper invariably makes true reports and offers the most suitable answers to complex social events or conflict situations. So once we accept a medium as satisfying our needs it acquires the power of an authority. We become addicted. We buy only a certain type of newspaper and avoid those whose concept or political orientation is contrary to our view of life. Similarly, we do not watch television channels pursuing distinct, one-sided editorial policies even though it would be good to confront several opposing views.<sup>2</sup>

On January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2001, the radio broadcast *Intelekt*a hosted a discussion about asylum seekers and refugees in Slovenia. In addition to various health-related concerns expressed by some participants (refugees as carriers of various infectious diseases), and conspicuous xenophobic attitudes (“crowds of refugees throng Slovenia”), one participant expressly stressed that it was the media itself which contributed most to the creation of a refugee-hostile atmosphere in Slovenia. Otherwise, the picture was similar to the one we evident some years ago when people resisted the construction of a drug rehabilitation center or Roma settlements in their neighborhood. If, as Encabo maintains, the task of the media is not to shape public opinion, that undoubtedly happens as a side effect. If readers identify with a certain medium and accept it as their own, it is not surprising that they internalize the majority of viewpoints of the medium as their own beliefs.

The same could be said for violence. Readers soon internalise the approach taken by the media and their understanding of punishment and “settling of accounts” with criminal offenders.

<sup>2</sup> According to the findings of Mediana, an institute for media research, (*Dnevnik*, January 19th, 2001; *Delo*, January 19th, 2001) *Nedeljski dnevnik* is one of the most widely read newspapers in general, and the most widely read weekly, with 476,000 regular readership. This is one quarter of Slovenia’s population. The most widely read daily is *Slovenske novice* followed by the Ljubljana daily *Delo* and the Maribor daily *Večer*. *Slovenske novice* has regular readership of 300,000 or 18% of the total population. *Delo*, with its 222,000 readers, occupies the second place; *Večer* occupies the third place with 202,000 readers. Other popular weeklies beside *Nedeljski dnevnik* are *Lady* and *Jana*. A simplified explanation would be that Slovene readers opt for domesticity on the one hand, and violence and scandals on the other. Similar results have been obtained for TV stations. *POP TV* with its more than 940,000 regular viewers is convincingly the most popular TV. Its audience is larger than that of both national programs taken together (*TV SLO 1* and *TV SLO 2*). These two channels of *TV Slovenija* have more than 700,000 viewers. These latest results are not much different from those obtained one year ago. The daily *Slovenske novice* itself published the results of another survey showing that it is still the most widely read newspaper (it has been heading the list for several years now). This sample included 107 print media, 52 radio programs and 31 television programs. *POP TV* remains the top television program, and its audience rating in percentages is 52.5% (*Slovenske novice*, January 21st, 2000)

## A COMPARISON OF PRIME TIME NEWS PROGRAM VIOLENCE ON POP TV AND TV SLO 1

We compared the shares of violent content on *POP TV* and *TV SLO 1* prime time news programs. Our aim was to establish the differences in the extent of news coverage that brings into people's homes violence, crime, scandal, suffering and serious accidents.

Several approaches are possible when making such a comparison. One is to include more programs than we did, and assess the share of films, serials, cartoons, documentary footage or other broadcasts with violent content. The results thus obtained would undoubtedly suffice for a comprehensive picture of violence in the media. But such a project would have been too demanding for our limited financial, technical and human resources. So we chose a different approach. Assuming that the prime time news program reflects the fundamental cultural policy of the editorial board, we felt that by establishing the extent of violence in these broadcasts we could obtain a sufficient basis for critical assessment.

### METHODOLOGY

Our sample included 114 prime time news programs between February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2001, regardless of daily events. Each newscast on a specific channel was compared to a corresponding newscast on another channel on the same day. This enabled us to establish similarities or differences in the coverage of the same events, as well as the various degrees of importance attached to these events. Our findings show that certain events were not represented on both stations, while some were accorded differing lengths of time; accompanying images also varied greatly, as did accompanying comments. The focus of our research was on two categories of content: one was expressly violent content, or content related to crime, or to scandals which arouse fear of crime, and the other was news about accidents. This required very careful assessment, because a report about a criminal offense does not necessarily arouse fear of that type of crime.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For example, news about Slobodan Milošević's life in detention was categorized as neutral content. On another occasions, when references to Milošević were illustrated with archive footage of protests and police beating the protesters, the news item was categorized as 'violent content'.

We made calculations of the number of minutes and seconds accorded to each news item defined as violent. We then compared these counts with the total length of the news program in seconds; the results are accurate to one decimal place.

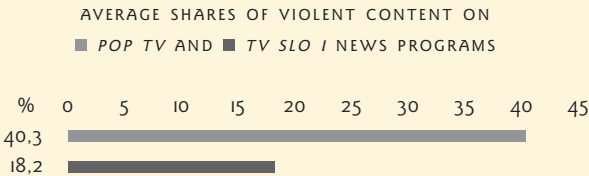
RESULTS

The results show an obvious difference in editorial policies of these two television stations. On POP TV, the share of violence and accidents is considerably higher. The tables below show the share of such content in percentages relative to the total length of news programs. Only in seven examples of 57 altogether, was the share of violent content higher for TV SLO 1. To put it differently, the share of violent content on POP TV was higher than that on TV SLO 1 88% of the time.

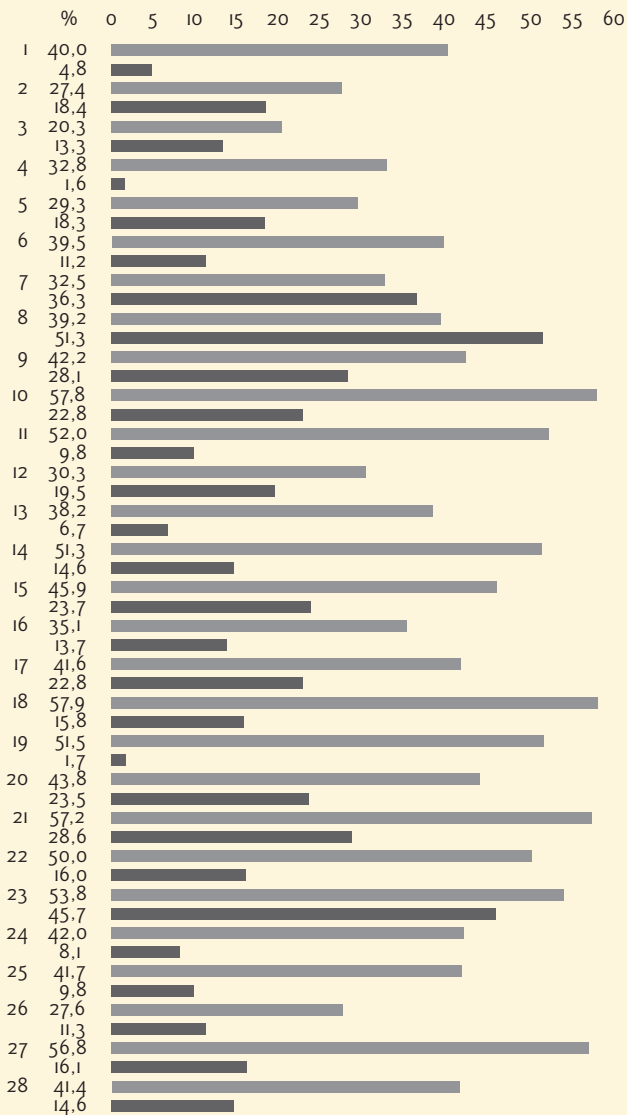
The differences in shares are conspicuous, as shown below.

- 41.4 : 14.6
- 59.4 : 17.8
- 48.1 : 13.4
- 40.3 : 0
- 37.1 : 0
- 60.8 : 11.4
- 54.7 : 11.8

The average share of violent content on all POP TV news programs included in this sample was 40.3%, compared to 18.2% for TV SLO 1.

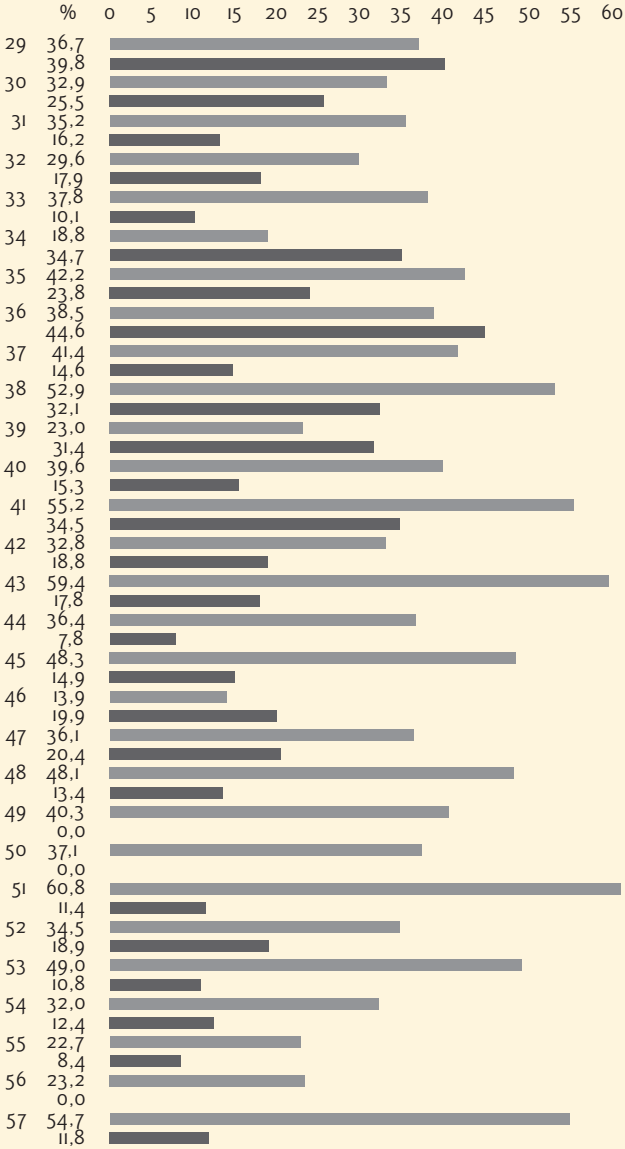


COMPARISON OF PRIME TIME NEWS CONTENT  
WITH REGARD TO VIOLENCE SHARE  
( ■ POP TV ■ TV SLO I FROM 1 TO 28)



Light gray bars show violence share in percentages on POP TV news programs, and dark ones on TV SLO I programs.

( ■ POP TV ■ TV SLO I FROM 29 TO 57)



Light gray bars show violence share in percentages on POP TV news programs, and dark ones on TV SLO I programs.

## THE SHARE OF VIOLENCE, CRIME AND SCANDAL IN THE MOST POPULAR SLOVENE TABLOID

### METHODOLOGY

*Slovenske novice* is the most popular daily tabloid with the highest circulation in Slovenia (300,000 copies). We selected criteria for assessing violent content in *Slovenske novice* in a manner similar to that described above.

*Slovenske novice* also includes a thematic supplement that only rarely features crime, violence or scandal related news items. Accordingly, we made two comparisons and calculated the share of violent content twice: first including the supplement, and then excluding it. The sample consisted of 100 randomly chosen issues in the period 1999–2000.

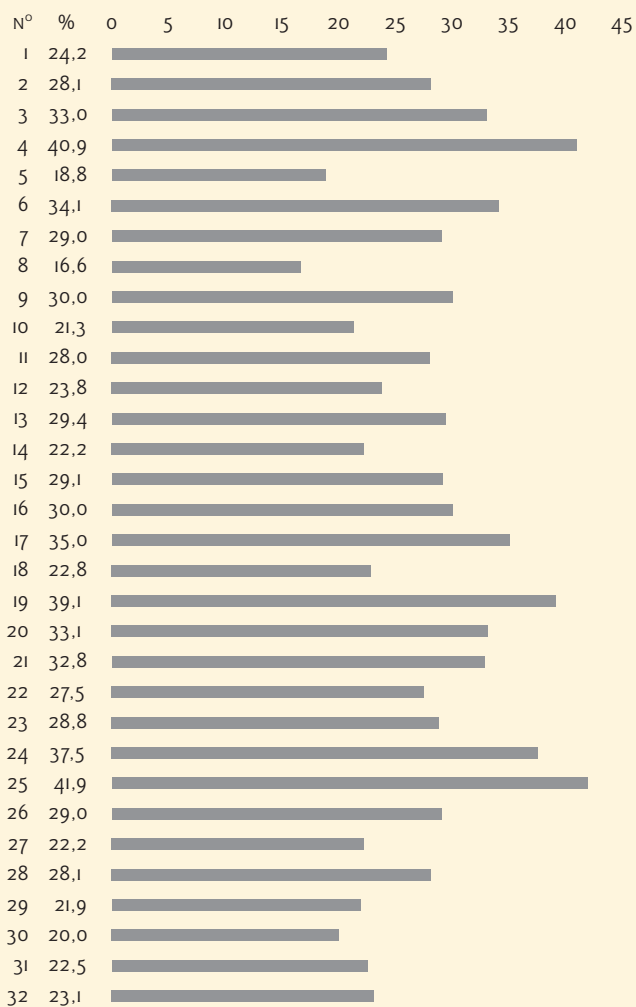
### RESULTS

The share of violent content in *Slovenske novice* including its supplement (which is almost invariably neutral and free of violence) is 19.6%. When the supplement was excluded, this share rose to 26.9%.

Individual bars show the share of violence (in percentages) in individual issues of *Slovenske novice*.

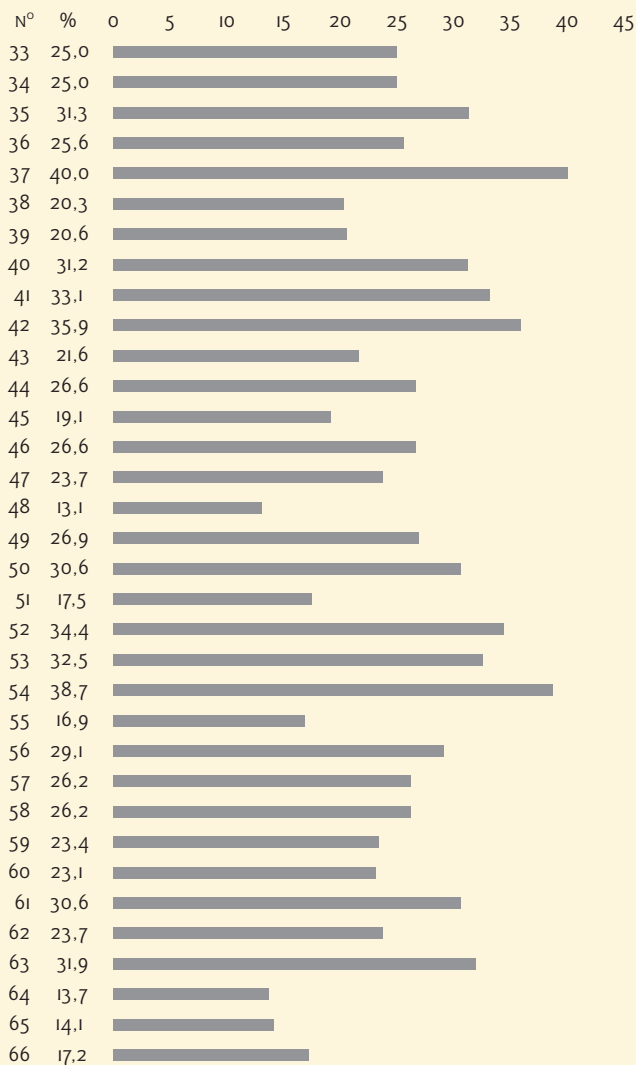


*SLOVENSKE NOVICE* EXCLUDING SUPPLEMENT  
 SHARE OF VIOLENT CONTENT  
 (FROM N° 1 TO N° 32)



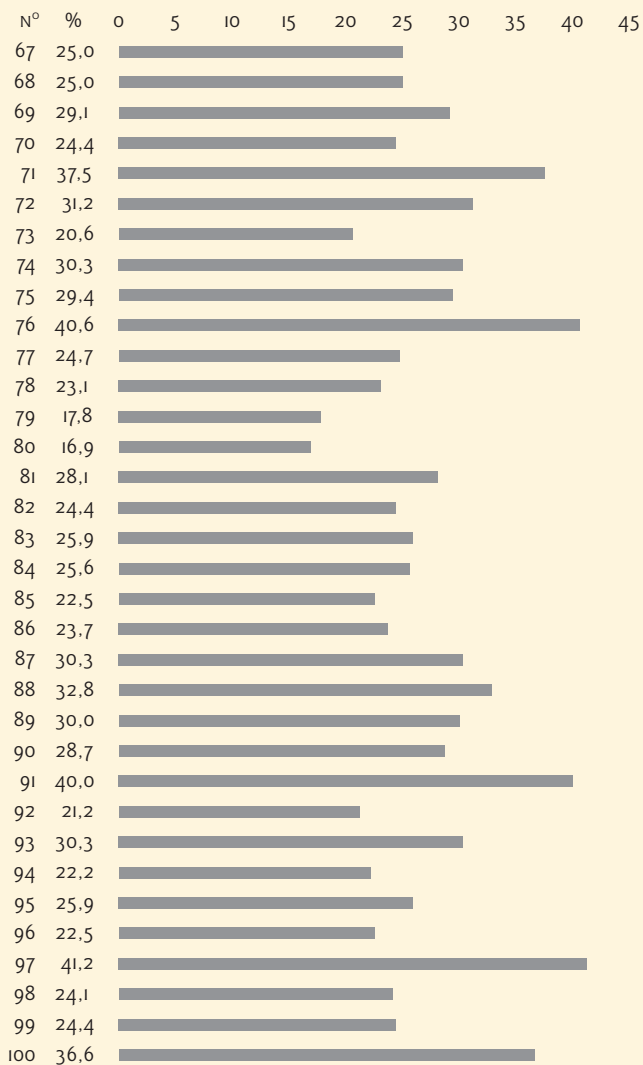
Individual bars show the share of violence (in percentages) in individual issues of *Slovenske novice* excluding supplement.

(FROM N° 33 TO N° 66)



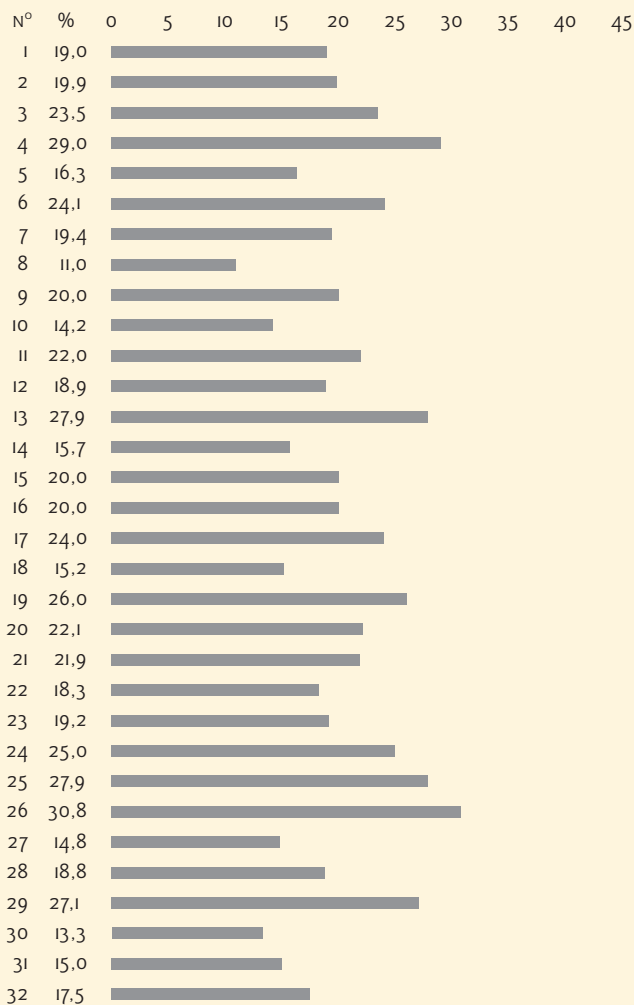
Individual bars show the share of violence (in percentages) in individual issues of *Slovenske novice* excluding supplement.

(FROM N° 67 TO N° 100)



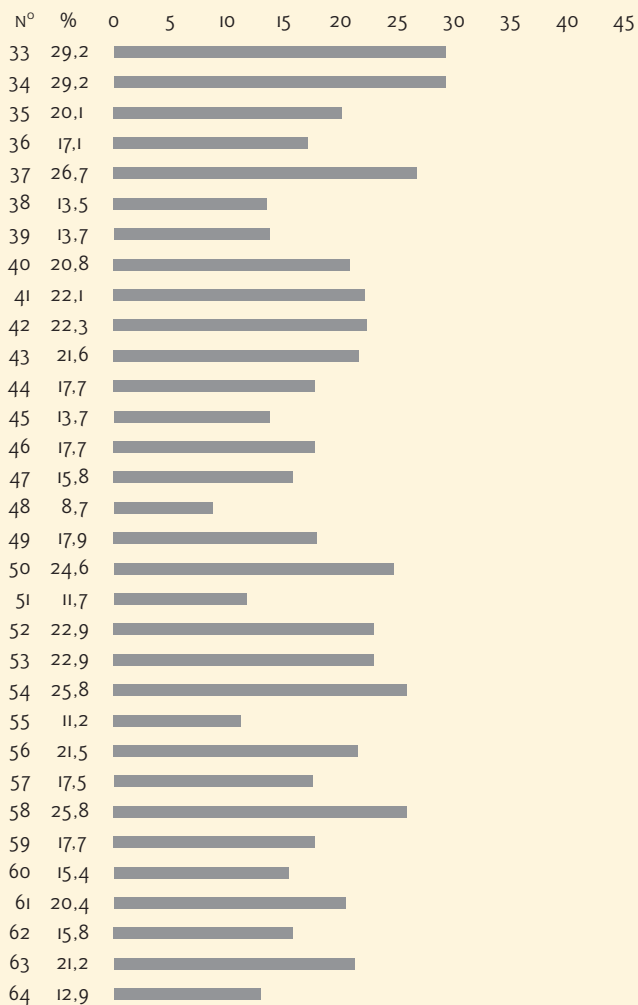
Individual bars show the share of violence (in percentages) in individual issues of *Slovenske novice* excluding supplement.

*SLOVENSKE NOVICE* INCLUDING SUPPLEMENT  
 SHARE OF VIOLENT CONTENT  
 (FROM N° 1 TO N° 32)



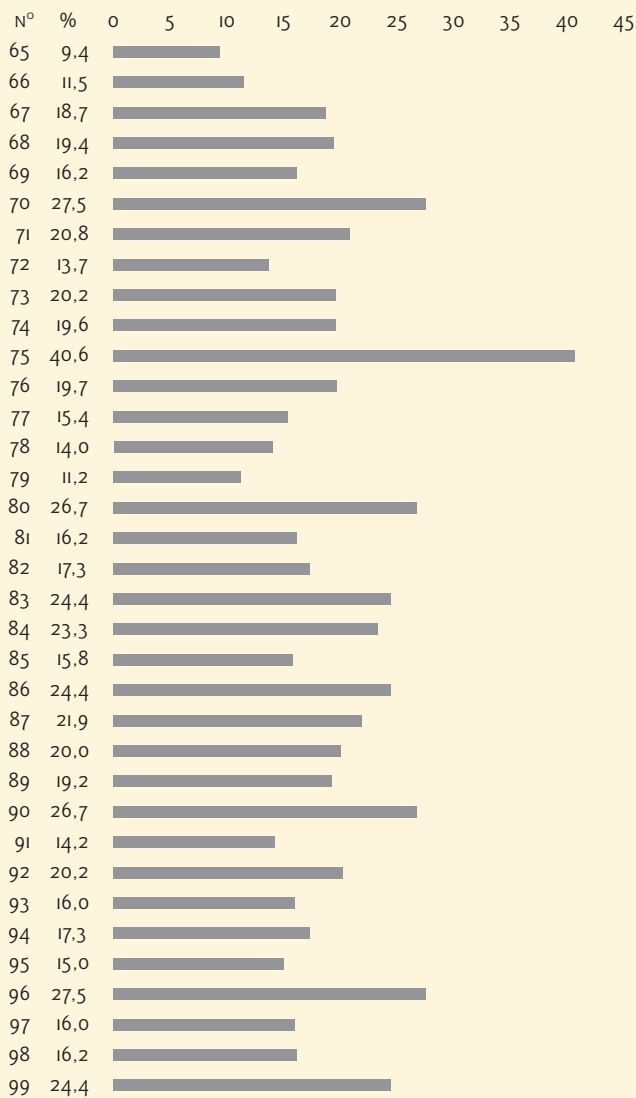
Individual bars show the share of violence (in percentages) in individual issues of *Slovenske novice* including supplement.

(FROM N° 33 TO N° 64)



Individual bars show the share of violence (in percentages) in individual issues of *Slovenske novice* including supplement.

(FROM N° 65 TO N° 99)

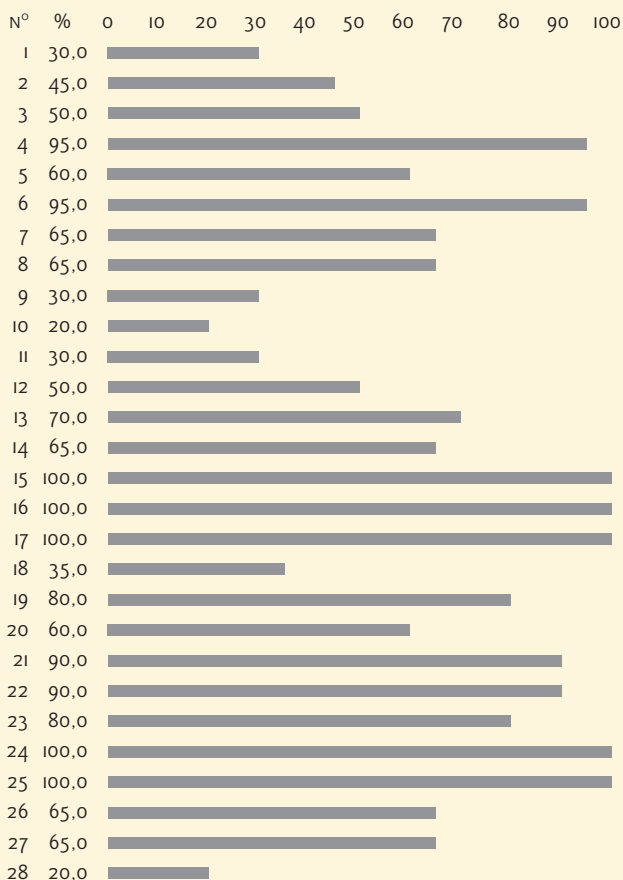


Individual bars show the share of violence (in percentages) in individual issues of *Slovenske novice* including supplement.

FRONT PAGES

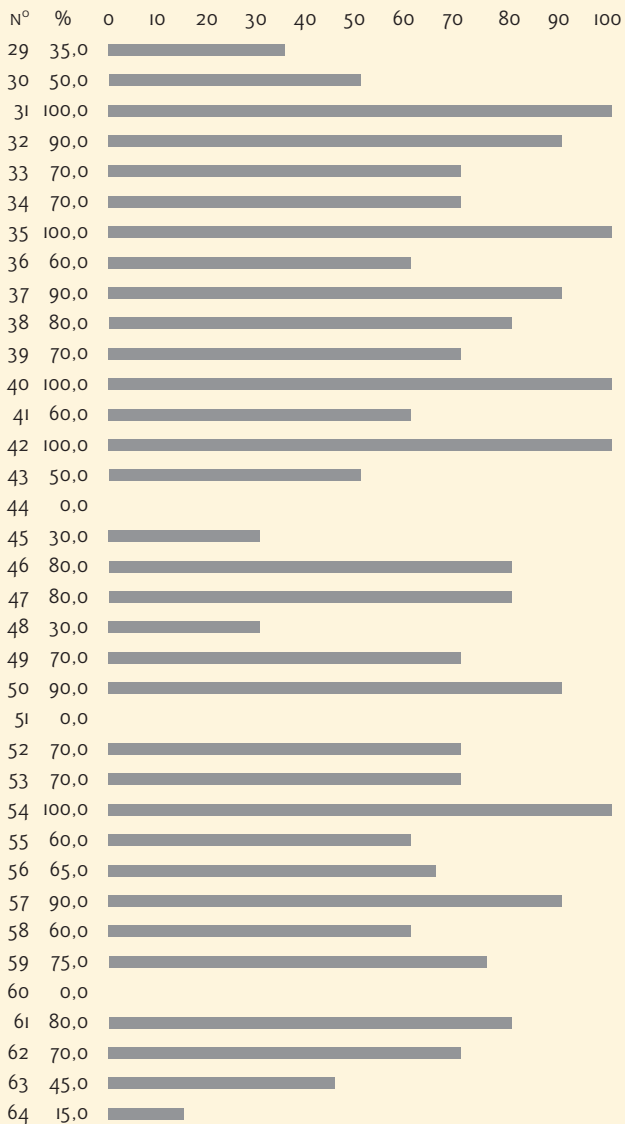
A peculiar feature of *Slovenske novice* is its front page structure which was the subject of separate analysis. The share of violence, crime and scandals on the front pages in our sample was as high as 66.7%. Individual columns show the share of violence in percentages on individual front pages.

SLOVENSKE NOVICE FRONT PAGES  
FROM N° 1 TO N° 28



Individual bars show the share of violence in percentages on individual front pages.

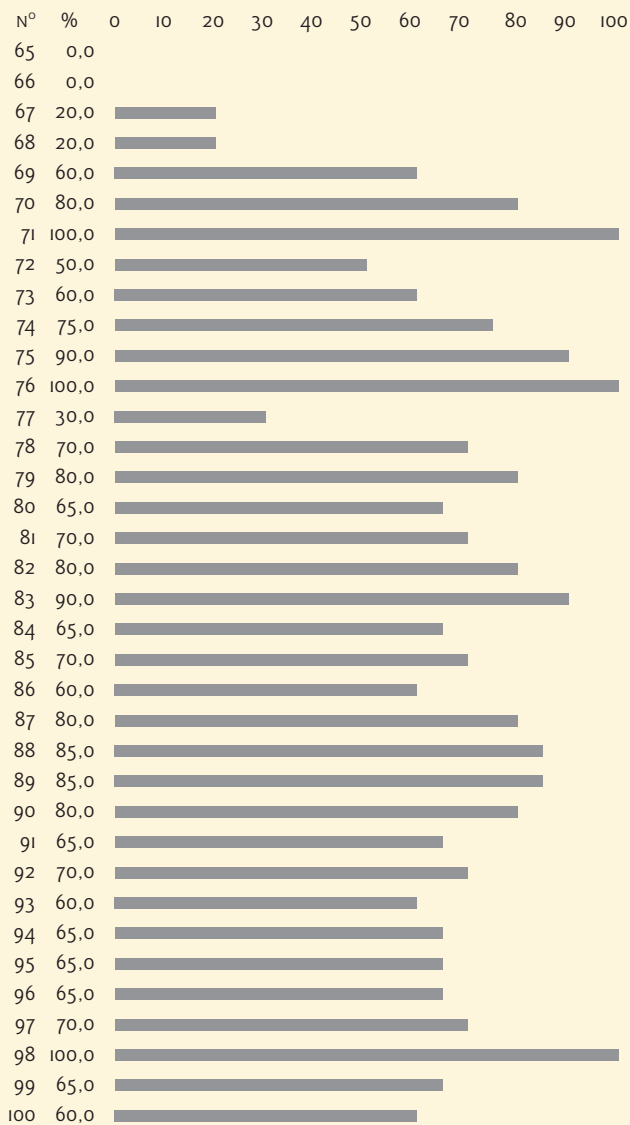
FROM N° 28 TO N° 64



Individual bars show the share of violence in percentages on individual front pages.



FROM N° 65 TO N° 100



Individual bars show the share of violence in percentages on individual front pages.

Our analysis of banner headlines (i.e. headlines printed in red or black, or those stretching across the front page, usually printed in italics in a separate frame) has shown that the front page features the most sensational, violence-related titles intended to attract reader's attention. Headlines of this type account for as much as 79% of all headlines. The term "tragedy" appears ten times. Other terms frequently used in headlines are "horrible", "fearsome" and "bloody". The titles in our sample were as follows:

Tragedy (death in flames)  
Tragedy  
Sad  
Stabbed (son bleeds to death in mother's lap)  
Tragedy  
Living (domestic tragedy)  
Trapped  
Fateful (16-year old boy victim of meningitis)  
Orphans (they heard the shots that claimed their parents)  
Jealousy (man stabbed by a Russian who lost his temper)  
Tragedy (first killed his wife, then shot himself)  
Accident (skier dies)  
Mortgage (fraud)  
Scandal (political crime)  
Horrible (killer left corpse in a bath tub)  
Burnt down (child saved from flames)  
Bold (theft)  
Reproaches (crime within the police)  
War (firecrackers)  
Tragedy (son and father dead)  
Debauched (policeman abused underage girl)  
Death (army boat ran over swimmer)  
Pain (village mourns following three deaths)  
Massacre (12 killed)  
Slaughter (wolves again on a killing spree)  
Night event (policemen drives through red light and hits pregnant woman)  
Down the river (icy cold Soča river claims its fourth life)  
Cadavers (tons of chickens spread stench across Ig)  
Shocking (sleeping man run over on camping site)  
Fall (death and accident in a flying family)  
Coma (74-year-old drunk woman driver hit girl)  
Lies (crime – fraud)  
Fearsome (bound man dragged behind car)

Bargains (crime)  
Fearsome (Soča claims its sixth life)  
Dioxin (inspectors' poisonous lies)  
Concealed (capsized school bus was hidden)  
Nerves (exchange of words followed by knife play)  
Tragedy (Czech rafters drown in the Soča river)  
Meningitis (one child plays, the other still critical)  
Death (story ends)  
Bacteria (crying over spilt milk)  
Missing (no trace of Primož)  
Tragedy (father and daughter on a motorbike race to death)  
Panic (deadly bacteria hits Celje)  
Ruthless (parents tortured and robbed)  
Scandal (robbing sisters, paying the parents)  
Responsibility (kids can be changed, doctors cannot)  
Heroin (white-death scare on the drug-infested coast)  
Illegal immigrants (smugglers caught in a trap)  
Tumor (how ill is Drnovšek)  
Poisonous (dioxin chickens on our plates)  
Sad (escaped to death fleeing from blue light)  
Grgar (death in abyss during race)  
Tragedy (bus carrying school children hits train)  
Outcome (two thieves caught, money in the bank)  
Tragedy (wife covered in blood, husband dead)  
Horrible (beaten to death in broad daylight)  
Violence (18-year old crushed man's skull)  
Court (Slovene remains in foreign prison)  
Action (bank robbers in the hands of justice)  
Unsolved (the biggest burglaries sink into oblivion)  
Brawl (beaten to death in front of a disco)  
Robbed (tied up for 15 hours in his own house)  
Explosion (concrete hail falls on Šoštanj)  
Street children (blood-smeared school children)  
Fate (German pilot crashes on Pohorje)  
Knife (brother stabbed sister?)  
Bloody (shot in the head came out of the dark)  
Explosion (mines for wealth)  
Horrible (corpse left behind in bath tub)  
Man shot (escaped from Kresnička, seized in Bellevue)  
Tragic (young doctor plunges to death from Kukova špica)  
Osluševci (four dead at unprotected level crossing)  
Horrible (cries pierced the night following death dance)  
Bloody (murder victim comes from cursed house)  
Arrogant (driver and friends robbed hitch-hiker)

The next group comprises ten titles; these refer to scandals with a hint of criminal offense.

Forcible removal  
Divorce  
Crisis (fallen angel)  
Concoctions (fake wines)  
Pain (price of medicines)  
Himalayas (11 alpinists with long faces)  
A Koper woman found by Rome TV  
Beauty queen (bare breasts stirred up London)  
Denouement (tentacles in Zavrč scandal spread as far as Beijing)  
Browsing (house search at TV Janez)

Only 15 headlines carried neutral, sometimes even encouraging, messages. These appeared when, for example, a particular sporting event overshadowed all other events including crime news. Some news items deal with adventures that would have ended in tragedy but for some unexpected hero.

Sailors (navy rescues shipwreck victim)  
Nuclear power plant for sale  
Christening (eighth child)  
Hero (father wrenched from the grip of icy death)  
Cash (Špela lays golden eggs)  
Sky (solar eclipse)  
Fantasy (sport)  
Welcome (Balašević in Slovenia)  
Fairy tale (dreams come true)  
Achievement (from Mt. Triglav in pair for the first time)  
To London (Slovenia's beauty queen)  
Rescuer (boy rescued from icy water)

The front page often includes other titles pointing to violent acts other than the one that is highlighted and accorded the largest print. Some of the headlines below appeared on the front page following the main headline, while some were featured on the next page.

Rape and cruel killing in front of daughters  
Sex with an underage girl and a pet dog on top  
Brutal rapists  
Monster – whimpering murderer killed one hundred innocent children  
Rapes and killings

Gun blasts at children  
Horde of special forces invaded the village  
Wanton Ivone found mangled, hanging  
Croats killed with machine guns  
At least 100 rape victims  
45 youths trampled  
Naked teacher seduced student into sex  
Postojna weapons for 200 terrorists  
Man raped and strangled  
Children kill children  
Homeless son killed father  
Blind with jealousy killed wife in front of daughter

Certain comments are targeted against the judicial system which is seen as recklessly lenient. For example, the article titled “He pushed his finger into her vagina and rubbed his erect penis against her body” deals with a sexual offender who was not retained in custody by the investigating authority. The headline is designed to attract attention – it was printed in red letters two centimeters high.

Another headline seems to be intended to give the impression that court rulings are incomprehensibly mild. It runs “Suspended sentence for torment”. In an article with the title “Is it a punishment?” the author comments on the two-year sentence given to a pedophile. In journalist’s opinion, the sexual pervert received a two-year prison sentence only because of his polished appearance! The article dealing with a “ruffian held in custody” also shows indignation at the judicial system.

The shocking descriptions of some offenses are similar to those found in *Delo*. The headline reading “Russian ripper carved live bodies” includes the following passage: “... cut off the head, ripped the upper part of the corpse, tore out the heart and placed it between her spread legs.”

The headline “Postojna weapons for 200 terrorists” leads to an erroneous conclusion or association suggesting that 200 terrorists got hold of guns stolen from the Postojna army barracks. This amounts to a distortion of truth, because while the number of stolen guns would indeed have sufficed to arm 200 men, there was no evidence that these guns were intended for any specific persons.

The choice of photographs also indigates a degree of sensationalism devoid of any feeling for those affected or involved, or respect for the dead. Such is the photo of a mother beside her dead son accompanied by the caption

“Broken mother by son’s corpse”. The article titled “Rapes and killings” is illustrated with a photo of a bloody corpse. A report on firecrackers comes with a photo of a mangled hand, the kind of image that once used to be limited to forensic medical textbooks. The story about a rugby player who ordered the killing of his girlfriend is illustrated with five photos. Accidents are accompanied by photos whenever possible, as in the case of a swimmer run over by a boat. If a photograph of the corpse is not available, then the wreckage of a car or something similar is shown in detail, and from an angle that is likely to inspire horror in readers. The headline “Wanton Ivone found mangled, hanging” is illustrated with two photographs. A photo of a skull is shown next to the news about Croats who were killed with a machine gun. As far as *Slovenske novice* is concerned, it seems that on those days when one good news item overwhelms all other events (for example, the singer Balašević’s concert in Slovenia), at least one other bad or shocking piece of news must be found at any price, and if necessary, borrowed from the foreign press.

Even if an article has a humanitarian note, a shocking image is often inserted, for example, the photo accompanying the article about Doctors Without Borders showing a child missing a leg.

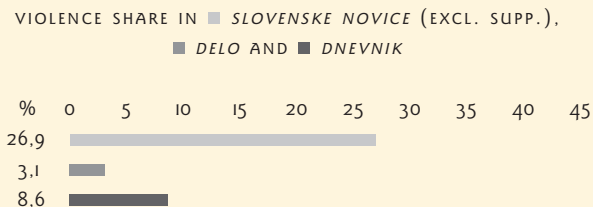
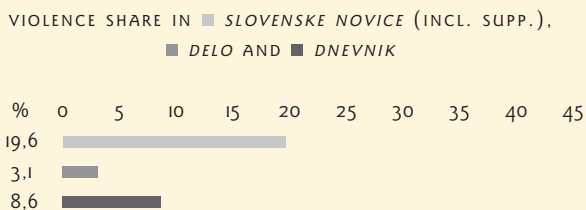
The headline “Parents tortured and robbed” is followed by a photograph of parents covered in blood. News from Kosovo is invariably published along with photographs of corpses. Three photographs accompany the headline “Children kill children”. A photograph showing a corpse illustrates the article “Jumped out of despair.” The article “Time bomb and an axe” includes a photograph showing some people and bloody knives. “Vectra – a coffin for three” is illustrated with a photo of the corpse taken from close up. The article describing the accident of a school bus that crashed into a train includes a photograph of children smeared with blood and covered corpses lying on the ground. Similarly, the reporter could not resist the temptation to show a blood-stained subway when writing about a murder that took place there (“18-year old crushed his skull”). A photo of the victim accompanies the article titled “Rape every 26 minutes”. Similarly, a story about new-born babies in a refrigerator is accompanied by a photograph, and the same issue carries another photograph of a corpse illustrating the item about death in a motorbike accident. “Torture room in a basement” comes with two photographs.

A story about circumcision in Africa is also illustrated. Certain images are particularly unbecoming, for example, a close-up of a head covered in blood accompanying the story titled “Shot in the head came out of the dark”. In the same issue one finds two other photographs showing blood stains on the wall. *Slovenske novice* also publishes news about horrible crimes and accompanying pictures borrowed from foreign papers. This method boosts circulation figures when domestic supply of crime news runs short.

COMPARISON OF VIOLENCE IN *Slovenske novice*,  
*Delo* AND *Dnevnik*

Our comparison of violent content in *Slovenske novice* and *Delo* has shown that violent content in *Delo* accounts for 3.1% of total content, while in *Slovenske novice* it constitutes up as much as one-fourth to one-fifth of the paper. Statistically speaking, this means that the share of violence in *Slovenske novice* is seven to eight times higher than that in *Delo* (which also features a regular Crime Watch section).

The results of a random survey of the daily *Dnevnik* shows an 8.6% share of violent content (including accidents and scandals that contain elements of criminal offenses). The results of the comparison of *Slovenske novice*, *Delo* and *Dnevnik* are shown in the following graphs.



This sample included randomly chosen issues of *Delo* and *Dnevnik*. We compared the violence share in these two papers with the average calculated for 100 random issues of *Slovenske novice*, once including and then excluding its supplement.



## CONCLUSIONS

The abundance of violence described in this study probably suggests the need for censorship. Even those foreign countries which we justifiably consider as the most developed in terms of democratic principles and respect for human rights, and which we sometimes view with envy, occasionally make use of censorship to restrict violent content. For example, Sweden is known for its liberal approach to sexuality, but it banned the movie "Bonnie and Clyde" on the grounds of violent scenes. They obviously concluded that the showing of erotic or pornographic content is considerably less harmful for citizens than violence.

The supporters of electronic censorship actually miss the point. While V-chip (violence chip) advocates believe that this technological solution could prevent children or teenagers from viewing violent content, they forget that it would not reduce its extent but only shift the focus to a different age group. Moreover, they overlook the fact that violence could cause as much harm to adults as it does to children, only in a different way. Children are susceptible to a shocking experience and they cannot rationally process certain scenes as fictitious images. As a result, violent scenes could cause nightmares or lead to aggression aimed at peers and the like. Adults, on the other hand, can react to violence in a much more violent manner than children. Conspicuous images of terrorist attacks and their consequences can arouse in those adults who hold the levers of social power a wish to have revenge or to take similar measures.

In a modern world buffused with the most varied electronic systems, limiting access to violence-related information seems impossible. But striving for a culture that distinguishes the good from the bad, to use a pathetic, hackneyed phrase, seems to be realistic. The shaping of such a cultural and civilized environment is not a short term project, but one that lasts for years or decades. Many conflicting interests stand in the way on the road leading to such culture. Any approach aimed at reducing violence inevitably reduces profits for certain corporations, media and television companies, and certain other interested parties. Can references to democracy and market laws always be the main principle? Certain limits must be set. The state is aware of such limits in certain areas, so it tailors relevant legislation to ensure that these limits are observed. For example, it knows that people cannot decide

on taxation issues, since everybody would like to live in a country without taxes. Does our striving for European values and a developed democracy (also quite pathetic) require that we offer to the consumers anything that sells well? Or, to put it differently, is it permissible to prohibit or restrict the free flow of goods, which in our example amounts to violence-related information. Wouldn't such a restriction be in contravention of the most fundamental right of free access to information? Consumers are free to choose whatever they find suitable. Anybody can avoid violence, or most of it, by ignoring certain broadcasts or newspapers. But overwhelmingly high demand for this type of content forces the media to play the role of loyal servants meeting the wishes of citizens. The media thus carry anything that makes readers happy.

This is one side of the coin. If we are allowed a mild exaggeration, we could also say that drugs too make a great part of the population happy. Were they generally accessible, their use would undoubtedly increase, and along with it their adverse effect. Can the fight against alcoholism serve as an exemplary experience? A referendum on alcoholic drinks would undoubtedly yield results supporting consumer free choice.

Violence provides a similar example. Media companies offer a number of variously convincing explanations. They maintain that the media offer what readers want, or rather demand, while referring to the right to be informed. In addition, the media present the truth, the naked truth, in all its various dimensions. Therefore, the media cannot be blamed because reality is as it is. On the contrary, it is only right that people know what happens in reality. It is not difficult to substantiate these claims, because the audience rewards the media with high ratings. The more truth (violence) media present, the higher the ratings. However, democracy has its limits. An influence is invariably a two-way process. The task and the mission of the media do not require that they fulfill consumer wishes as best they can. The media should be equally aware that they influence public opinion and should make contributions to the shaping of general culture. This task is difficult and, more importantly, not particularly profitable in the short run.

It seems that violence operates in the same way as radioactivity. Initially it is imperceptible, but once we begin to feel its effects, the consequences can already be serious. What should one do to resist the temptation? Does the

struggle against violence lead to a puritan society that will only conceal passions which will eventually erupt in some other, no less destructive, form? That is possible, but that is not what we advocate here.

Expert panels within television and newspaper companies could be of some help. These could address the problems of violence presentation and marketing. Such bodies should address violence as a general problem and define policies in addition to dealing with specific examples. Many discussions accompanied the recent Balkan wars, in which the limits of documentary presentation were not clear. On the one hand, one could identify a wish to present the horrors and thus to prompt a suitable response from those who were able to prevent or limit these horrors, but on the other, sensationalism often prevailed.

Furthermore, institutions related to the media or crime policies, ranging from scientific institutions to professional associations, should also participate in the discussion about violence in public forums. On this road, of course, assuming that some are willing to take it, one can expect a number of obstacles.

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