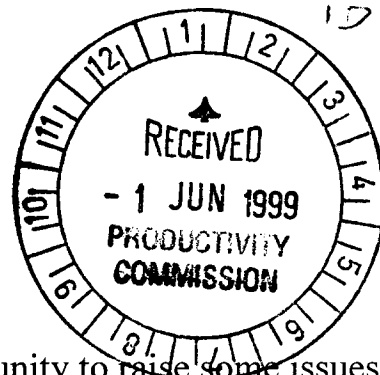


SUBMISSION



First I would like to express my appreciation at the opportunity to raise some issues which I believe are relevant to one of the Commission's enunciated policy guidelines. This refers to having 'overarching concern for the wellbeing of the community as a whole, rather than just the interests of any particular industry or group.'

As the Director of Mental Health Services for the Central Sydney Area (an area which extends from the city to Homebush Bay), as a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Sydney, and a child and adolescent psychiatrist of many years standing (responsible for the establishment and service provision of many programmes for vulnerable young people), I would like to present some concerns which are shared by many professional colleagues in diverse disciplines involved in the development and wellbeing of Australians, particularly the young.

The prospect of further deregulation of media ownership and the opening of the field to foreign participants, particularly in regard to implications for television and its impact on children and young people is of considerable concern.

Despite the episodic critics of the present system, who attempt to persuade decision makers towards deregulation, (arguably to serve their own ends), the current system has served the Australian people well. Whilst in no sense imposing a climate of censorship, the current model has allowed the development of an attitude, I believe, of open enquiry, of social justice and responsibility, and an accurate awareness of Australia and of the wider world. (This perception has been referred to in envious terms by colleagues from North America and Europe.) This is a positive model despite the presence of some content, (mainly on commercial media), the like of which has been shown in a number of prestigious studies to exacerbate dangerous behaviour and social problems in vulnerable individuals.

Abandonment of the cross-media ownership laws together with the unrestricted entry of foreign players, particularly the large media-industrial conglomerates, is very likely to impose on Australian audiences, an escalation in such material with risk of deleterious consequences.

These “consequences” have been preoccupying eminent researchers in the U.S.A. for several years, and before we are persuaded to abandon the current safeguards in the name of enhanced economic competitiveness, consideration of recent published studies is appropriate.

In the October 1998 Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Singer et al, social scientists have written on “Viewing Preferences, Symptoms of Psychological Trauma, and Violent Behaviours Among Children Who Watch Television.” They refer to a recent National Television Violence Study which analysed the amount, nature and context of televised violence in the American context for the years 1994 through 1995. Some of the relevant findings include these facts

1. The majority of television programs contain some violence
2. Perpetrators go unpunished in 73% of all violent scenes and violence is rewarded almost as often as it is punished.
3. 47% of all violent interactions show no harm to the victims, and only 16% of all programs depict long term negative of violent behaviour.
4. One in four violent interactions on television involve the use of hand guns.
5. Only 4% of all programs espouse an anti violent theme.
6. Public broadcasting channels present violent interactions least often (11% of the programs), while premium cable channels present violent programmes 85% of the time.
7. Movies are more likely than other types of programmes to depict violence in life like settings (85%) and to include blood and gore (28%).
8. Only 13% of reality based programmes depicting violence present alternatives to violence.

The Professor of Communications at Boston University, Carol Rivers, suggests that teenagers in the inner city community are especially vulnerable to the media's glorification of brute force. (Hollywood vs America).

I quote directly from the Singer paper which refers to the American Psychological Association Report Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response (Washington DC 1993) "There is no doubt that viewing of televised violence increases the likelihood that aggressive attitudes and behaviours will subsequently be adopted by the child viewer." Scientific and academic support for these and related conclusions have come from the American Academy of Paediatrics, the American Medical Association, The National Institute of Mental Health, The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, The US Public Health Association, The National Parent-Teacher Association, The US Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence and the National Education Association.

From the respected film critic Michael Medved, in his book Hollywood vs America (Harper Perennial 1992) comes a chilling description of his perception of the contemporary relationship between the American entertainment industry and its recipients. "As a nation, we no longer believe that popular culture enriches our lives. Instead, tens of millions of Americans now see the entertainment industry as an all-powerful enemy, an alien force that assaults our most cherished values and corrupts our children. The dream factory has become the poison factory."

Of course, this expression of deep disillusionment was voiced long before the tragedies of Columbine High and other recent school shootings. It is noteworthy that adult viewers are also affected according to a University of Washington Study by Dr Brandon Centerwell. He asserted in the Journal of the American Medical Association that prolonged exposure to violent TV programmes in the US produced 10,000 extra murders every year.

Medved comments “In a stunning display of corporate arrogance, the major entertainment conglomerates disregard the conclusion of all the leading researchers and continue to insist that their work has no harmful impact on society.”

Already in the Australian context, concerns are being expressed regarding the increasing vulnerability of our youth with behavioural problems such as conduct disorder and emotional problems such as depression affecting as many as one in five. Violence against self, that is suicide and drug use, particularly amongst young Australian men is amongst the highest in the world.

It may be argued that deregulation and the opening of markets will bring economic riches to some - the few - but the cost to the wider community may be incalculable.

It does well to recall the words of the 18th Century English Statesman Edmund Burke who noted that the greater the power, the more dangerous the abuse.

Recently I was invited to participate as a delegate at the NSW Drug Summit whose procedures provided a rare opportunity for the community at large to become more familiar with this wide spread and destructive problem. Very moving were the

accounts of various users regarding their addiction and the lives of disadvantage and degradation which in many cases preceded the habit, but in almost all are the inevitable consequences. We should note the stark statistics of the rising death rate, not only in the young, disaffiliated, disadvantaged poor, but also in the educated and well-employed and ostensibly trouble free ^{young} adults whose experimentation with mood altering substances has been repeatedly modelled as glamorous, sophisticated and indicative of success in many media portrayals.

Perhaps I am presenting too pessimistic a perception of possible consequences, but activities to date of our local organisations who seek further deregulation in order to expand their territories give little cause for confidence in altruism. Seemingly healthy competitiveness is swept aside as coalitions form to dictate with little, if any, consultation with consumers on what they should consume. A recent example of this was the reported presentation to this Commission by the commercial networks regarding Australian content, and their request for self regulation of this because they confidently “ know what the viewers want.”

Whilst the prime focus of the enquiry is on issues of media, we observe that the profits and power generated (in part at least) from these mega sources can flow on to diverse fields which may impact significantly on seemingly unrelated but critical areas such as the natural environment. For example, the Perisher Blue Ski Resort has announced that it is to build accommodation for 1300 people in the Kosciusko National Park despite the objections of the National Parks Association and other conservation groups.

Some international commentators (Dr Nawal El Saadawi - BBC) assert that the large media industrial conglomerates seek to unite the world into one market, requiring a standardised unified world culture, where the essence is the same even if the form varies slightly from place to place. The risk then lies in the creation of an apathetic and apolitical population, which is inimical to enhancing our unique and evolving Australian identity and to supporting our cultural diversity. The media of our time has an astounding capacity for concentration, centralisation and control, as a result of scientific and technological advances. It now has vast outreach to all parts of the globe. This also means that wealth, the means of production and trade, as well as political power can be concentrated and centralised in the hands of the few whose accountability is negligible.

The decision to present these concerns to the Commission was made with difficulty and only after considerable reflection on the issues at stake and my recollection of another message attributed to Edmund Burke "It is necessary only for the good man to do nothing for evil to triumph."

I would like to emphasise that this presentation is not a request for any greater control than exists at present, nor to prescribe a formula implying that the groups to whom I relate have the answers. Rather it is to emphasise the need to examine carefully, the dividends beyond the mere financial and economic in the short term which may appear to result from deregulation, but rather to guard and to preserve the valuable framework upon which we may continue to build, in the interests of our society particularly our young people.

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Michael Sauter
28 May 1999

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DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL MEDICINE
The University of Sydney
N.S.W. 2006

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Clinical Professor of Psychiatry
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BRIEF CURRICULUM VITAE

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(UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY) F.R.A.N.Z.P.
CLINICAL PROFESSOR OF PSYCHIATRY, UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**

PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

1993 - Present Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, University of Sydney
Senior Specialist in Child, Adolescent and Family Psychiatry
Director, Area Mental Health Services
Central Sydney Area Health Service
NSW Department of Health, Sydney

1987 - 1993 Director, Community Health Services
Central Sydney Area Health Service
NSW Department of Health, Sydney

1972 - 1987 Foundation Director Rivendell Child Adolescent and Family Service

1993 - Present Consultant to NSW Juvenile Justice Facilities

OTHER APPOINTMENTS

1971 - Present Fellow Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

1983 - 1992 Chairman, Council of The Women's College, University of Sydney

1990 - 1992 Member, NSW Women's Advisory Council

1991 - Present Chairman, NSW Juvenile Justice Advisory Council

1992 - 1995 Chairman, Metropolitan South West Region Customer Service Council,
NSW Police Service

1993 - Present Member of the Faculty of Community Child Health of the Australian College
of Paediatrics

1993 - Present Member, Steering Committee, NSW Transcultural Mental Health Unit

1994 - 1996 Member of the National Health and Medical Research Council Working
Party on Depression in Young People

1994 - Present	Member, Committee for Examinations, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
1994 - Present	Part-time Psychiatrist Member, Mental Health Review Tribunal
1994 - 1997	Co-chair, NSW Strategy for Aboriginal Mental Health (NSW Health Department Working Group)
1994 - 1998	Board Member, NSW Institute of Psychiatry
1995 - Present	Member, Telemedicine Steering Committee, (NSW Department of Health)
1995 - Present	Chairman, Australian Health and Development (Third World Health) Group
1996 - Present	Chairman, NSW Task Force on Children and Young People's Mental Health
1998	Chairman, Review of Arndell Child & Adolescent Service, Northern Sydney Area Health Service

AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

1971	Mother of the Year
1988	Officer of the Order of Australia A.O. For services to child and adolescent health, especially mental health

Research interests, presentations and publications in child and adolescent mental health include child and adolescent depression, issues affecting refugee and immigrant children, Aboriginal health issues.

Other interests, international affairs, Australian social and political history, the world's refugees, women's health, early Australian antique furniture, classical music, opera, Aboriginal art and growing camellias.

Long term interest in refugees and the people of Indo-China. Established outreach groups to assist young refugees to cope with re-settlement in Australia. Medical education visits to Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia and involved in the establishment of postgraduate medical training in mental health and psychiatry to Vietnam. Long term interest in human rights and better health for Australian Aboriginal people. Co-chair of NSW Mental Health Strategy for Aboriginal People. Currently involved in developing outreach specialist services to Aboriginal communities in NSW via telemedicine.