

CHAPTER ONE

TELEVISION VIOLENCE:

FRAYING OUR SOCIAL FABRIC

Violence in Canadian Society

*The foundation for violence is there and strong. Women won't be safe, children won't be safe, and to some extent senior citizens won't be safe, unless we say, this is a line this culture won't cross. — Alan Mirabelli, Chairman, Alliance for Children and Television*³

There is a perception among many people that Canadian society is becoming more violent and that this increased violence is due to some extent to the amount of violent programming shown on Canadian television screens. As Professor Vincent Sacco, a criminologist who testified before the Committee reminded us, “*it seems we've always been somewhat concerned about the leisure and cultural preferences of youth. We were concerned about feature films in the thirties, about comic books and rock and roll in the fifties, and about video games, fantasy-role games, rap music and heavy metal music in the seventies and eighties.*”⁴ This part of the report is intended to shed some light on the issues of violence, on television and in Canadian society generally, through a review of the evidence given to the Committee and available research findings.

A. PUBLIC OPINION

*A few years ago it was possible to walk around anywhere on the streets of Montreal. Now, there are some neighbourhoods where women are afraid to walk alone after a certain time in the evening. This is not just because of violence on television. There are other problems as well. — Professor Florian Sauvageau, Director of Journalism Studies and Associate Fellow, “Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture” and University of Laval*⁵

The results of public opinion surveys are useful to assess the extent to which Canadians feel secure or threatened by violence; in effect, they provide a measure of the perception Canadians have of the level of violence in their society.

The most recent measure of the perception of violence in Canadian society was reported in the ninth annual Maclean's/Decima poll published on 4 January 1993.⁶ According to the survey of 1,500 Canadian residents 18 years of age or older conducted in November 1992, 33% of Canadians are afraid to walk the streets of their community at night alone. Only 24% felt this way in 1989.

According to the Maclean's/Decima findings, 51% of respondents keep their doors locked at all times, even when they are at home, and 60% are taking more precautions to protect their personal and household safety than they did a few years ago. Other survey results show that:

- 66% of Canadians think that the amount of violent crime in their community in the past five years has become “much worse” or “somewhat worse”;