

The ABA is looking at what children like to watch on television.
Milica Loncar and Linda Sheldon, ABA Research Section, report.

'Super wickid and mad' or 'dum and discusting'? Kids views on TV programs

The ABA is in the second stage of research into children's attitudes to television.

For the first stage, in 1993, the ABA conducted research into what on television concerns, bothers or upsets chil-



Milica Loncar, ABA conducting focus groups in Perth

dren and the degree to which rules and routines exist in the home.

To provide a counterpoint and a balance to this research, a secondary stage commenced in 1995. This stage will focus on what children like to watch on television and will explore some of the



positive issues relating to children and television. Together, the two stages of the research project will provide comprehensive data about children's viewing habits, their likes and dislikes and their concerns about television in Australia.

The consultative and the qualitative part of the research for this second stage have commenced. The consultative stage,

conducted in January 1995, involved structured in-depth interviews. Participants included producers, directors, writers, editors, network representatives, children's authors, senior executives of children's organisations and child development experts. Ongoing consultation with main stakeholders will be a key part of this research.

The qualitative phase began with focus group discussions. Linda Sheldon and Milica Loncar designed and facilitated the groups. To date, 10 focus group discussions have been conducted with children aged 5 to 12 years (i.e. grades 1 to 6). The groups were conducted in Sydney (4 groups), Hobart (3 groups) and in Perth (3 groups).

The next stage will be to conduct 'affinity groups' in schools in metropolitan Sydney and indepth interviews with parents.

While group discussions are not intended to provide representative data about a wider population, it was considered important the focus groups had a diversity of participants. Therefore, the ABA's Research section instructed the recruiters to sample a mix of children on the basis of different school systems (State, private and religious schools including Catholic), ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as ensuring that the groups were conducted in a range of suburban locations. It also thought it important to include children from different areas, such as Perth and Hobart.

One of the objects of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (s.3(j)) is, 'to ensure that providers of broadcasting services place a high priority on the protection of children from exposure to program material which may be harmful to them'. Research from the child's perspective help the ABA to ensure this objective is fulfilled.

This gives the ABA a responsibility to consider children's interests in relation to broadcasting matters. It also manifests itself in both the ABA children's television standards and matters that are to be taken into account in the development of codes of practice. Therefore, the commercial television industry code of practice provides for a high priority to be placed on safeguards that ensure the protection of children from exposure to potentially harmful programming material. The safeguards include the classification provisions, and the consumer advice and warnings given before and during programs.



The first stage of the ABA's research considered the views of 1602 primary school children aged 8 years to 12 years in NSW on the subject of what concerns them on television. The views of parents were also considered in this research and a matched sample of 500 parents of the children was included. The results of the research were published in the monograph, *Cool or Gross: Children's attitudes to violence, kissing and swearing on television*, available from the ABA on (02) 334 7881. ☐



Linda Sheldon, ABA, conducting focus group discussions in Perth