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VIOLENCE AND DRUGS ON TELEVISION
THE CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT APPROACH
TO PREVENTION

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT

- * Violence in major network prime time dramatic programs decreased slightly in 1992 and 1993, but "reality" shows brought violence up to its previous level.
- * Women, youth, older characters and ethnic minorities, especially Latino/Hispanics and Asians, as well as poor people, are underrepresented on television; many of the same groups have more than their share of negative characterizations ("villains"), failures, and relative victimization.
- * The violence and inequities of prime time are intensified in Saturday morning children's programs.
- * Violent programs get a generally lower Nielsen rating than non-violent programs aired at the same time. However, violence "travels well" on the world market, enabling producers to recoup domestic deficits through highly profitable overseas sales.
- * Portrayals of the use of alcoholic beverages and of tobacco declined but portrayals of other drugs increased.

* The visibility of ATOD use is not matched by the portrayal of serious consequences. Addiction for all major characters and for all time periods studied is below 1 percent.

* Women, young people, African-Americans, and especially African-American women, are shown as more addiction-prone than most other characters.

* Female smokers and female alcoholics pay a disproportionately high price in negative characterization and failure.

* Users of alcohol and other drugs are more likely than other characters to be portrayed as involved in violence and as paying a higher price in relative victimization.

* Female alcoholics pay the highest price. The victimization ratio of female alcoholics is about twice that of males, and the fatal victimization ratio of female alcoholics is nine times that of males.

* Heavy viewers are generally more likely to express feelings of gloom and alienation, the "mean world syndrome," than comparable groups of light viewers.

* Victimization on television and real world fear are highly related, even if contrary to facts. Viewers who see members of their own group have a higher calculus of risk than those of other groups develop a greater sense of apprehension, mistrust, and insecurity.

* Current television programming, the mainstream of the common cultural environment into which today's children are born, poses serious problems by cultivating an unequal sense of vulnerability and mistrust, a generally lower degree of concern about smoking, health, and nutrition, and the homogenization of outlooks.

* The Cultural Environment Movement (CEM) was launched in 1991 to confront these problems and advance a new approach to health promotion, violence reduction and substance abuse prevention. CEM is a grass-roots organization and coalition working to lighten the burden of damaging formulas driving much television program production.

* Mailings, meetings, and media publicity generate a constant flow of inquiries, contributions, and expressions of interest in affiliation. At the time of this report, nearly 3,000 individuals and 100 organizations have expressed such interest. A specific action plan will be developed and ratified by the affiliated groups at a forthcoming national "Founding Convention."