# Children and Advertising in Sri Lanka

## Report of Consultative Meeting

**Centre for Policy Alternatives**
**&**
**UNICEF**

**1ST August 2003**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) in collaboration with UNICEF organised a half-day consultative meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka on Children and Advertising in Sri Lanka on 1st August 2003. This consultative meeting was held to examine the complex interaction of relations between advertising, media and children – a topic on which there was very little informed debate in Sri Lanka. Recognising the market imperatives of advertising and also the need to safeguard the best interests of children, participants at the consultative grappled with the need to sensitise marketers and advertisers on the need to adhere to certain basic guidelines which are laid out in international covenants laying out the Rights of the Child.

This report gives a synthesis of the discussions which took place at this meeting.

Mr. Sunanda Deshapriya, Director and Head of the Media Unit at CPA, speaking first, said that there was very little awareness amongst media personnel in Sri Lanka on Child Rights. Although there is a vast body of international research and guidelines for the media (by organisations like the International Federation of Journalists – IFJ) this information was not well known by journalists, mainly because there is a distinct lack of enthusiasm for ethical and non-sensational reporting. There is a pressing need to develop a child friendly media, he said. Mr. Deshapriya also said this need was felt by activists, media personnel, parents and even children themselves.

Mr. Sanjana Hattotuwa, Research Associate and Coordinator, Media Unit, CPA, who spoke next, based his presentation on the concept note which is reproduced at the end of this report. Flagging several key aspects of children and advertising, the object of the presentation was to give a framework for the group discussions.

In the plenary discussions that followed, it was agreed that a study looking at Children and Advertising would also have to look at promotions and other marketing strategies as well. Some participants also felt there was a need to look at the entire spectrum of media and not just advertising when examining its effects on children. However, it was agreed that while a number of interventions and studies had concentrated on other aspects of the media, there research on children and advertising in Sri Lanka was abysmal. As such, it was also agreed that while a holistic perspective of the media was of pivotal importance in any study or intervention, a more focused examination of the impact of advertising on children was necessary as well.

## REPORT OF WORKING GROUP ON PORTRAYAL OF CHILDREN IN ADVERTISING

The participants in this group came from diverse backgrounds and included media personnel, nutritionists, child rights activists, advertisers and marketers including members of the Accredited Advertising Agencies Association (4A's), clergy and civil society activists.

The discussion centred on the following topics:

1. The way children are portrayed in advertisements today: Is it unethical?
2. Are the techniques/approaches adopted in advertising beneficial or harmful to children?
3. How can they be improved?
4. What practices / codes exist currently to govern the portrayal of children in the media? Are media personnel / advertisers aware of these codes?

5. Are new codes necessary?
6. What possible measures are needed to encourage adherence to these standards?

It was agreed that advertising does have an impact on children, but that this impact could be negative or positive. It was recognised that advertising could be very suggestive. Participants also agreed that there was a constant tussle between commercial interests and moral imperatives and between market forces and the best interests of children. Given this reality, some said the introduction of any kind of voluntary self-regulation or guidelines would not be easy in Sri Lanka.

Others said that while Government Line Ministries should also employ creative advertising to counter some of the negative effects of spurious advertisements, the problem was that there was not enough money to spend on effective advertising and marketing campaigns.

Members of the Accredited Advertising Agencies Association (4A's) spoke of the association's new code governing laying out self-regulatory guidelines for all its members. However, the commitment of ad agencies to any code of ethics was questioned as well as the need to focus specifically on children.

Some thought that there needed to be greater coordination between grassroots NGOs and CBOs to combat the ill effects of advertising on children, while others said that the onset on private electronic media was the harbinger of the degeneration in advertising standards in Sri Lanka. Government intervention and strict advertising codes were thought to be one possible answer to engender a child friendly media in Sri Lanka along with public spaces in print and electronic media where advertising agencies and marketing campaigns could be put under scrutiny and subject to public debate.

It was generally agreed that marketers and advertisers needed to look more closely at the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Recognising the suggestive power of advertisements which often took undue advantage of the credulity of children, participants stated the need for a coherent set of guidelines for the advertising and marketing industry in Sri Lanka. The voice of children was also flagged as important to ascertain exactly what they felt about advertising. Further study into the effects of irresponsible advertising and the resulting negative effects on children was needed. Furthermore, acknowledging that testing the veracity of client claims fell upon advertising agencies, many felt that agencies needed to take care not to create advertising and marketing campaigns that beguile children.

The National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) was said to be working on a set of new laws that would backstop other interventions to safeoguard the rights of children. Other said that while national level legislation was desirable, the problem was with enforcing the law.

Some came up with the novel idea about a live television talk show where advertisements and marketing campaigns were subject to scrutiny and debate on air. Schools needed to address this issue as well. The 4A's said that it intended to setup a website where the public could air their grievances about a particular advertisement or marketing campaign, which the 4A's would then take up with the relevant agency provided it was already a member.

Coupled with this, others thought that regular columns in the print media fostering public debate on the effects of advertising in general and on advertising and children in particular, could engender a more child friendly media by stimulating greater awareness about the issue.

The need for a advisory body comprised of marketers, advertisers as well as child rights activists and civil society stakeholders was keenly felt by the group. This body could regulate or advise agencies and other actors based on proper standards in advertising. They could also stimulate public discussion on the effects of advertising on children and build a constructive dialogue between marketers, advertisers on the one hand and children, parents, lobby groups, child rights activists and civil society stakeholders on the other which would lead to more self-regulation. This body could also be modelled after the organisations like the Advertising Standards Authority in the United Kingdom – an independent, self-regulatory body for advertisements, sales promotions and direct marketing.

While the sensitisation of all stakeholders to the complexities of the problems was acknowledged by everyone present, it was also thought that any solutions and recommendations also had to take cognisance of the realities on the ground.

## REPORT OF WORKING GROUP ON IMPACT ADVERTISING ON CHILDREN

The participants recognised that no actual study had been done on advertising and children in Sri Lanka. They also recognised that there was very little awareness on issues that needed to be taken into consideration when targeting advertisements for children or when including children in advertising or marketing campaigns. As such, the group felt there needed to be an awareness raising campaign following a concrete study done on the topic.

To this end, they felt, current trends in advertising and marketing needed to be scrutinised in order to determine their possible impact on children. Furthermore, an examination of studies on this topic done in other countries, as well as desk research on existing codes of ethics – both in Sri Lanka and internationally – needed to be done in order to facilitate a more child friendly media.

There was a consensus that after this initial research, a more structured and focused workshop, involving all the key stakeholders including marketers and advertisers, needed to take place in order to discuss how best to formulate and introduce voluntary self-regulation based on a code of ethics that governed advertising in Sri Lanka.

However, it was also recognised that a code of ethics should not stifle the creativity of ad agencies and marketers. Some felt the need for an arbitration body which advertisers and marketers could go to if they felt they were being unfairly targeted for criticism.

It was re-iterated that the 4A's already had a basic code of ethics that governed its partners and that it provided a starting point for reform in the advertising and marketing sector.

Some spoke on the need for a Broadcasting Authority, made up of people not in advertising and not politically biased, who would oversee the enactment of a code of ethics on a day to day basis. Others, however, strongly disagreed and said that a body which vetted advertisements regularly simply could not work since similar attempts in the past had failed as well.

However, there was no objection against a body which was constituted to examine unethical advertisements and marketing campaigns and which could then inform relevant authorities and agencies to take action against those responsible.

## PLENARY

Some participants asked what the yardsticks or standards would be to measure the suitability or unethical nature of an advertisement or marketing campaign targeted for children in response to the 4A's code of ethics in advertising. The 4A's replied that the code of ethics was voluntary and that they were in favour of self-regulation as opposed to a regulatory body. With the code of ethics in place, the 4A's went on to say, the general public could now communicate directly with the them to inform them of a advertising campaign that they had reservations about.

Some participants spoke of the need to look at direct marketing and advertising campaigns which did not use print or electronic media – like for example direct marketing practices employed in rural areas and advertising using posters, banners and flyers. While a code of ethics could in fact lead to a greater responsibility in mainstream marketing and advertising companies and agencies (and then on to a more child friendly media) the point was made that one should also look at how to bring these other forms of advertising and marketing into a standards based framework. In answer to this, it was pointed out that a code of ethics would cover all media and all forms of marketing and advertising.

Stimulating public debate on the effects of advertising on children through greater public awareness of the code of ethics and standards in advertising and marketing was also recognised by many as the bedrock for a child friendly media.

The lack of any laws pertaining to the portrayal of children in the media was seen as a problem by some participants, who said that the lack of national legislature to govern advertising and marketing had resulted in many unethical practices.

Speaking of the Consumer Protection Act and its possible use in curtailing unethical practices in advertising and marketing towards children, many felt that it would not be of much use and that the Consumer Protection Authority would be hard pressed to find the resources to deal with such complaints.

Many participants felt the need for continued dialogue on this topic and the need for a coherent and comprehensive study. To this end, the point was underscored that advertising and marketing agencies needed to be part of this research. In response 4A's iterated their support for a study on children and advertising. In addition, participants identified the following groups and organisations that needed to be consulted in the study:

1. College of General Practitioners
2. Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM)
3. Save the Children (SCF)
4. UNICEF
5. Parents
6. Housewives Association
7. Working journalists covering print and electronic media, in both the government and private media.
8. Owners and publishers of media organisations – electronic and print
9. Trade Unions

10. The children themselves

Participants expressed the need for a 'champion' – an organisation or individual who would carry through the study and the implementation of its recommendations to as many stakeholders as possible.

Pursuant to these discussions, the following characteristics for the proposed study were developed. These guidelines incorporate the salient points brought up in the in consultative meeting, will form the bed-rock for a study on concentrating on the impact of Advertising on Children in Sri Lanka.

## Objectives of the Project

- Raise awareness amongst advertisers and the general public on the importance of regulations and guidelines on the use of children in advertising.
- Encourage local CBOs and NGOs to take up issues related to the use of children in advertising.
- Encourage media organisations to have a better understanding on international guidelines on the use of children in advertising.
- To develop networks of aware and informed CBOs, NGOs, groups, partners and individuals for engagement on future activities related to children in advertising.
- To gather data on information provision from workshop participants (CBOs, NGOs etc) to inform future project design for interventions in this area.
- To formulate a set of self-regulatory guidelines for the media and advertising personnel on the use of children in advertising.

## Timeline

September 2003 – February 2004

## Work Plan

- The study will be conducted over a period of four months, from September 2003 to December 2003.
- Desk research will be conducted in order to draw from existing studies and research on children and advertising.
- Media monitoring, covering print and television advertisements, will be conducted for four months, beginning September 2003.
- A workshop in Colombo to which media personnel, child rights activists and members from the advertising community will participate. This will be held in January 2004.
- The preliminary project report will be presented at this workshop. The discussions of the workshop will feed into the final report, which will be ready by February 2004.

## Implementing Agency and Partner

The implementation agency will be the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) in partnership with UNICEF.

The meeting ended with all of the participants assuring CPA and UNICEF of their continued support in any further study looking in the effects of advertising on children in Sri Lanka

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# Consultative Meeting on Children and Advertising in Sri Lanka

## A brief concept note

Children live and grow up in a commercial environment where they see and hear a lot of advertising. Although advertising to children is a sensitive issue, there is nothing wrong per se about it. Advertising has positive effects on the economy that benefit society, including children. Advertising revenue, for example, helps fund quality children's programmes. Advertising revenues support feed into efforts by many actors to engender a healthy and independent media, viable TV production and a free and independent press. These media all provide products and services that help inform and educate children.

Nonetheless, commercial marketers - including advertisers, advertising agencies and the media – should acknowledge that children do constitute a very special audience. Children have a limited capacity to evaluate the credibility of information in advertising. Therefore, many marketers should adhere to self-regulatory codes and standards that specifically prohibit any exploitation of the inexperience or natural credulity of children. In other words, these marketers should act with great responsibility to protect children from any advertising or marketing practices that would cause them harm. This is true regardless of the medium - newspapers, magazines, radio, television or the Internet.

Some self-regulatory standards are clearly detailed in the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Marketing Codes and Guidelines, in particular in Article 14 of the ICC International Code of Advertising Practice[1] which states[2]:

- Advertisements should not exploit the inexperience or credulity of children …
- Advertisements should not understate the degree of skill or age level generally required to use or enjoy the products …
- Price indication should not be such as to lead children … to an unreal perception of the true value of the product …
- Advertisements should not contain any statement or visual presentation that could have the effect of harming children … mentally, morally or physically …
- Advertisements should not suggest that possession or use of a product alone will give the child … physical, social or psychological advantages over other children … or that non-possession of the product would have the opposite effect …
- Advertisements should not undermine the authority, responsibility … of parents
- Advertisements should not include any direct appeal to children … to persuade their parents or other adults to buy advertised products for them.

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[1] See Article 7 of the ICC International Code of Sales Promotion; Article 3 of the ICC International Code of Direct Marketi ng; Article 6 of the ICC International Code of Sponsorship and Article 6 of the ICC Guidelines on Advertising and Marketing on the Internet.
[2] For full text of the Code see
http://www.iccwbo.org/home/statements_rules/rules/2003/Compendium%20Children%20and%20Young%20People.asp

The argument repeated in existing literature on advertising to children assumes that television commercials create wants in children, who then pester their parents for the advertised product. The parents, apparently helpless to refuse, succumb to the demands of their children and purchase the product. If they do not give in to their children's demands, the argument goes, parent-child conflict is
the inevitable result. This 'standard argument' assumes that commercials create wants because young viewers do not understand advertising and are therefore particularly influenced by it. [3]

However, as international research has shown[4], there is a complex interaction of relations between advertising, media and children that cannot be under-estimated or glossed over. It can be strongly argued that there is thus no straightforward one-way linear influence of an advertisement aimed at children and of their acceptance of it. That influence is dependent on how a child negotiates the meaning of the ad, in turn determined by a number of variables such as family, caste/class, religion, school, and community.

In the case of Sri Lanka, there has not been any discussion on ethical standards of advertising, or the effect of advertising on children.  We need to recognise:

1.  The special sensitivities involved in communicating to children
2.  The various stages of development the child undergoes in its social environment
3.  The lack of experience the child has and its limited capacity to assess the credibility of messages it receives from the media
4.  The importance for caution when appealing to the imaginative capabilities of younger children
5.  The decisive roles of parents and their responsibility in the upbringing of their children and
6.  The reality that advertising plays a natural and integral part of any child's intellectual growth and the need to ensure that children understand the reality of the world in which they live.

Perhaps one of the best ways to protect children from what adults fear will harm them - alcohol and drugs, violence, pornography, or advertising - is to set an example by our own behaviour, and to talk with them and encourage them to talk with us about the subject. The evidence is consistent in showing that the effects of the media are minimized when parents talk to their children about them[5]. Whether we like it or not, media education begins at home.

What needs to be engendered in Sri Lanka is the freedom to advertise products to children within a clear framework of law, backed by codes of practice and self-regulatory processes that are continuously reviewed to ensure that they meet the proven expectations of parents, regulators, and society.

Media Unit
CPA

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[3] For further discussion, see Jeffrey Goldstein, Ph. D, "Children and Advertising: The Research", Commercial Communications, July, 1998
[4] See Goldstein, ibid
[5] See B. Young, Television advertising and children, Oxford University Press, 1990

# CHILDREN AND ADVERTISING – A BACKGROUND NOTE

### Why we need to know history

In a world of confusion the search is for order, a sense of relevance and a sense of balance. In this search the first task is to appreciate the historical setting of human rights and the CRC. As G.K. Chesterton said

> The disadvantage of men not knowing the past is that they do not know the present.
> History is a hill or high point of vantage, from which alone men see the town in
> which they live or the age in which they are living.

The subordinate position of the human being to private property today is directly attributable to a historical process which commenced with the scientific and industrial revolutions in Western Europe. This pattern of organised exploitation had its logical conclusion with colonialism – the subjugation of entire nations to serve the needs of an integrated global capitalist order. In psychological and economic terms the Third world is still in the grip of colonialism.

The psychological mindset of the European male that made such exploitation possible is dualism, the assertion of separation between self and others and 'us' and 'them.' It asserts autonomy to the exclusion of inter-dependence. Holism on the other hand is inclusive and it accepts both autonomy and inter-dependence. Societies may be based on either dualistic or holistic principles. In general insecure societies are based on dualism whilst secure societies are based on holism. Progressive societies are those which move away from dualism towards holism in a measured but natural way.

Third world societies were originally inclusive and holistic before the colonisers came. The colonisers destroyed the natural economies of theses societies by driving the peasant out of traditional lands and turning them into wage labourers for developing plantations. Even after independence these nations found that they were dependent on the same capitalist global order. Economic policies that were not balanced by appropriate social policy led to a de-humanised form of capitalism that created internal colonies of marginalized people. Children are one sector within this marginalized group.

### Why human rights?

'Human rights' is a recent development in the history of mankind. It asserts the obvious and seeks to restore a portion of humanity who lost their human status with the proliferation of power (in economic terms) that accompanied the decline of monarchies and the rise of a capitalist middle class. Thus the short answer to the question posed is exploitation of man by man in a manner and scale hitherto unprecedented in human history. The following extract from the Manifesto of the Communist Party[6] written in 1848 rings remarkably true of globalised capitalism today.

> The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal
> patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley ties that bound
> man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man

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[6] Marx, Karl and Engels Frederick (1848) Manifesto of the Communist Party, English Edition p 53.

and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious favour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. In one word for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked shameless, direct brutal exploitation (Emphasis added.)

The original approach to human rights based on the French and American Declarations of the 18th century sought to protect the individual against the State without addressing the issue of capitalism. After the Second World War, Bills of Rights adopted the world over likewise recognised individual rights in opposition to State power. These rights were based upon an assumption of relative socio-economic equality. This assumption apart from being a downright falsehood in the Third World actually served to continuously erode the quality of existence of the marginalized within, including women, the aged, the disabled, children and young persons, the poor, the displaced, indigenous peoples, minorities etc. Moreover in the form in which it was stated human rights failed to unify the people around human values. Secondly reluctance on the part of States to undertake the commitment of economic resources to social development ensured that the basic structure of exploitation remained undisturbed.

## Why the CRC?

The CRC too asserts the obvious – that children are human beings. But it is a document that makes full use of the potential of children as a humanising force to unify and integrate (rather than segregate) adults in a common endeavour to ensure their survival, development and protection. Secondly the framers of the CRC were well aware of the continuing threat posed by capitalist forces to mankind and the environment. They were also mindful of the rich philosophical traditions of the world – the wisdom of ancient fore-fathers and mothers that enabled them to live in harmony with the environment and with one another and wanted to promote the inclusion of these systems to enrich future approaches to both human rights and development.

This broad approach threatens the status quo and the major challenge for what may be termed the human needs movement is to persuade people all over the world to give up their destructive lifestyles and turn inwards to their families and loved ones. With its specific focus on human relations within the family and the duty of the state to play a positive role in regard to family health the CRC marks a watershed in human history. However society in seeking to protect the weak often overlooks the fact that their welfare depends upon the security of the strong. Hence the neglect of the family unit and the interests of parents by legislators and policy makers in Sri Lanka, even after ratification of the CRC in 1991.

A united and caring family is the basic building block of a united and caring society. This underscores the need to promote family autonomy by direct forms of assistance. Article 18.2 of the CRC provides that,

> For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

Family unity, integrity and security is the shield that protects the children within its fold. Conversely alienation, disintegration and insecurity lets in extraneous elements that prey and thrive on these weaknesses. This is a fundamental dynamic that is true, not merely for individuals and families but for communities and nations as well. Accordingly unity and exploitation are values that stand opposed to each another. Exploitation can only thrive where there is disunity. We will now examine the individual internal processes of integration and disintegration with reference to psycho-social theory.

## Why we need to know psycho-social theory

The CRC is based on sound principles of human psycho-social development. It is essentially an invitation to focus our attention where it matters: on the growing minds and hearts of children. Hence the importance of keeping in sight the pre-eminence of mind and heart and the centrality of psycho-social development in understanding the processes by which children become secure, insecure or dysfunctional in their inter-personal relations.

## ATTACHMENT THEORY

Attachment theory is a theory of personality development in the context of close relationships (Howe 2001:194) and it has helped researchers piece together a powerful connection between the nature of parent-child relationships and the different psycho-social pathways children take as they grow up. Infants begin their social life very early. Starting off with an indiscriminate social responsiveness they recognise their parents by 2 or 3 months and begin to respond preferentially to them (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment refers to the general pattern of parent-child interaction which ensues when the baby communicates a physical or emotional need to the caregiver.

### Secure Pattern

The caregiver who relates to and understands the behaviour from the baby's perspective establishes a sequence that may be enacted thousands of times during infancy. The baby thus acquires a sense of security, trust in his caregiver and a secure attachment whilst the caregiver acquires a sense of competence and security in his/her role.

### Insecure Patterns

A second category of babies find that their attachment behaviour consistently produces the opposite desired. Their parents intrude to either control or deny their feelings and reject their behaviour. However they seem to respond best when the baby is quiet and undemanding. These babies de-activate their attachment system. They learn to regulate emotion by suppressing it as the optimum strategy for achieving proximity to the caregiver without being rejected. Not being able to make sense of what they feel, they rely on what they know - that people are available when they are undemanding and self-sufficient. (Howe et al 1999:61). They are classified as avoidant. A third category of babies experience their caregiver as unreliable and inconsistently responsive. The child is not rejected but not all of his behaviours are accepted, and as in the case of avoidant babies the carer's own psychological needs tend to govern her involvement. As Howe et al point out (1999:89) 'There is love for the child but as far as the infant is concerned, it is hard to win and in scarce supply.' Inconsistent mothers are sometimes comforting, sometimes angry and sometimes ineffective. Unlike the avoidant child this infant cannot mentally predict and establish a connection between what he does and the maternal response and he falls back on emotion. This they do by raising the level of attachment behaviour in order to break through parental inattention and insensitivity. Thus yelling screaming and temper tantrums are eventually rewarded with attention and relative security is achieved (Howe et al 1999:89, 90). They are classified as ambivalent as they develop a deep sense of uncertainty about self-worth and the availability of others. Avoidant and ambivalent infants retain their anxiety and insecurity in relation to the parent (thus carrying a psycho-social risk) but they share, together with the securely attached, an organised system which effectively enables them to achieve proximity and maintain contact with the parent. Consequently they will be able to maintain functional relationships with others despite their distinctive styles of interaction (George 1996). But infants within certain dysfunctional care-giving relationships are unable to devise a coherent defence. Such infants remain in a state of heightened and unregulated distress and arousal precisely for the reason that its cause originates from the caregiver. This takes place where the parent is either abusive or emotionally withdrawn (due, either to a psychiatric condition or heavy drug or alcohol abuse). According to Howe et al (1999:122) this classification may also be superimposed on one of the three secure attachments, whichever 'best fits', the disorganised style coming into play at times of stress and emotional low points.

Attachment behaviour is 'proximity seeking' in that it is designed to ensure caregiver availability either for protection from danger, provision of food or emotional warmth and social interaction (Howe et al 1999:15). Paradoxically a secure attachment has a liberating effect, providing a 'secure base' for the child to explore, learn and adapt to his psycho-social environment. Conversely a child whose attachment behaviour is not generally responded to with sensitivity and acceptance develops a state of insecurity which inhibits exploration, play and social learning.

Attachment relationships provide the child with a set of general assumptions about his self worth and the availability of others to provide him with care and protection, and they become his mental property, an internal working model, which in turn affects relationship style and social competence. This model constitutes his 'personality.' The model may be modified or even disconfirmed if others begin to react (positively or negatively) in ways that it fails to anticipate. Nevertheless, with time it becomes resistant to change even though change is always possible in the context of close relationships (Howe et al 1999:21, 41).

Child abuse and neglect

Issues of abuse and neglect are now understood to be synonymous with psycho-social developmental risk and the attachment theory provides a holistic focus to family functioning. First, it is now recognised that 'the essential element in child abuse is not the intention to destroy a child but rather the inability of a parent to nurture his offspring' (Newberger, 1973). Secondly, despite the early attention to observable physical effects, it is the psychological consequences that are the unifying factor in all types of maltreatment (Garbarino & Vondra 1987). An allied point is that forms of maltreatment generally overlap so that a child may have experienced more than one (Aber & Cicchetti 1984). Thirdly, several researchers (Giaretto 1976, Herman & Hirschmann 1977) have noted that the occurrence of sexual abuse suggests general family dysfunction and they contend that it is this dysfunction rather than the abuse per se that accounts for psychological outcomes for the child. According to Erickson et al (1989) this could be said in regard to other types of maltreatment as well. They point out that 'maltreatment is not an isolated event within an otherwise normally functioning family' but that it 'represents a pervasive, persistent pattern of interaction within a home environment that in many ways fail to foster the child's healthy development.'

a. Lessons from attachment theory

The theory affirms non-separation or holism by revealing a direct connection between self-esteem (in the sense of security) felt internally and its outward manifestation of social competence and trust in others. Securely attached children have achieved balanced development with cognition (mind) and emotion (heart) supporting each other. They display a positive and balanced attitude towards self and others. Avoidant children rely on cognition to the exclusion of emotion whilst ambivalent children rely on emotion to the exclusion of cognition. The former are characterised by over-reliance on self and the latter by an over-reliance on others. These two categories in their mild forms are socially functional while retaining a degree of anxiety in their relationships due to a negative self-consciousness. Disorganised children are socially dysfunctional, need the most love and care and are the least socially equipped to win it from others.

Parent-child communication starts from birth; and the attainment of different levels of social and communication skills by the growing child bears a direct reflection on the inter-personal style of the main caregivers. An invaluable lesson of attachment theory is that close relationships are the locus of both psycho-social destruction and their reconstruction

b. Promoting resilience

This section on psycho-social principles would be incomplete without a reference to the concept of resilience. This suggests that children may, and indeed sometimes do thrive in less than ideal conditions for some reason. It is now well accepted that children's responses to psycho-social adversity can reveal enormous variation.

Here again we see the interplay of genetic and environmental influences on development. There are both risk and protective factors involved in the life of every child and it is the meaning attached to those factors over time that determines outcomes. Achievement of a positive outcome notwithstanding exposure to psycho-social risk is attributed to resilience, a broad phenomenon which has many roots including the 'self-righting nature of human experience'. It may both influence and be influenced by interpersonal relationships both within and outside the family. Resilience concepts complement the attachment theory and the potential for resilience resides in every child and within most social contexts.

Hence we need to recognise both protective and risk factors and understand their significance in promoting resilience in the developing child. Specifically the participation needs of children must be understood within a framework which keeps in sight the need to address and counter-act specific risk factors (eg. an alcoholic father, negative peer influences, unsettled neighbourhood, economic hardship) and the need to support specific protective factors (eg a talent, interest or positive relationship) in the lives of individual children. This would ensure a match between needs and responses.[7]

### The in-built societal bias in favour of the socially competent

The capitalist ethic of competition, especially in Sri Lanka as a Third World nation is based upon a false assumption of equality. Consequently it has an in – built bias in favour of socially competent adults and children in every sphere of life. When the basic needs of those who are socially inept and incompetent in organising themselves within a competitive environment are ignored a process of social exclusion and alienation sets in, which leads in time to social disintegration. Child abuse and neglect is simply a specific manifestation of social alienation of families and communities who struggle for their survival and existence in a society within which caring for others, more than resources, is in short supply.

As a general proposition both social competence and social incompetence, in their varying degrees, get transmitted from parents to children. The advantages and disadvantages they bring will generally survive, from generation to generation within the same families – irrespective of the conventional class divide. The insecure patterns are the negative vicious cycles in society which need to be identified and addressed through an organised and competent process of direct and positive intervention. Within this context advertising is a negative force that poses a clear obstacle to the normalisation of family relationships which are either insecure or dysfunctional. This requires a detailed explanation.

### Psycho-social effects of advertising on growing children

We shall adopt the following working definition of 'advertising' for the purpose of this discussion.

> Messages transmitted by the media that cause confusion between needs and
> wants and which also tend to promote the cultivation of greed and envy.

There is a differential impact on children exposed to advertising depending on their psycho-social classification. It could be predicted in general that secure children, being both balanced and realistic would be the least affected. Insecurely attached children have a lop-sided view of reality and so will tend to interpret advertising more subjectively. Avoidant children who minimise relationships will interpret messages without any emotional input whilst ambivalent children will do so without any cognitive input. In either case selfishness and alienation which are characteristic traits of insecurely attached children will be reinforced by advertisements as defined above. Disorganised children who are the furthest removed from reality will not have a consistent mode for making sense of advertising. Their interpretation of these messages will tend to be totally unrealistic. The old adage 'we see things not as they are but as we are thus rings true for advertising as well.

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[7] Rutter, Michael (1999) Resilience concepts and findings: implications for family therapy, *Journal of Family Therapy* **21**:119-144.

Children who are insecurely attached lack self-knowledge – the direct route to understanding the thoughts and feelings of others. In proportion to their lack of self–knowledge will be found the ego – the constant companion of human insecurity. The ego is present even in children who are securely attached – though it plays a minimal role in their thoughts feelings and actions.

Consequently the use of child models in advertisements and their subsequent exposure poses a psycho-social developmental risk through the artificial enhancement of juvenile egos. Sri Lanka as a whole is an insecure society, a state of affairs which cannot be alleviated unless its children are spared of exploitation in the media for commercial gain.

A psycho-socially informed interpretation of the CRC will not permit the dilution of the best interests of children (even the securely attached ones) to accommodate the so called 'market imperatives of advertising.' An economy that marginalized poor rural and urban mothers and left them without a safety net which they forged on their own by working in the middle east and an economy that relies on the earnings of those same mothers as the highest foreign exchange income should no longer be in a position to dictate market imperatives that encroach upon child development. That is a lesson we cannot afford to re-learn at the expense of another generation of our children. The advertisement (which invades the homes of insecure families to deepen their insecurity) is the single most powerful agent of the globalised capitalist economy. This economy is not based on an ethical foundation. What can ethical standards of advertising achieve within such a system when there is widespread moral confusion and human beings are routinely used to serve 'market imperatives.' There is no law on this matter precisely for the reason that the human being has no significance for the economy except as a consumer.

When sufficient time is wasted in the name of a vague and amorphous concept of general deterrence through child abuse prosecutions (and reporting them) we do not need to waste any more resources on indirect measures that address manifestations of the problem rather than the causes and conditions that sustain it. According to David Korten[8]

> We do not have a globalized economy because of some historical inevitability. We have it because a small group of people who have enormous political and economic power chose to advance their narrow and short term economic interest through a concerted, well-organised and well-funded effort to re-write the rules of the market to make it happen. In other words economic globalization came about as a consequence of conscious human choices. It is the right, indeed the responsibility, of those who were not party to those decisions to reclaim the power we have yielded to those who have used it against the public interest and to make different choices.

One of those different choices involve helping and caring for marginalized families and their children. There is no way of doing this other than to follow the direct methods prescribed in article 19 of the CRC – family support and child protection. Negative approaches to social control (whether they take the form of laws, regulations, standards or guidelines) rely on external sanctions, are reactive and only address the external manifestations of an underlying social disease. Exclusive reliance on such measures are characteristic of ignorant, insecure and frightened societies. This argument applies to all negative responses to perceived 'threats' to the social order (or the prevailing economic order) such as child abuse which may take the form of sexual abuse, exploitation by the media and pornography.

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[8] Korten, D (1996) 'The failure of Bretton Woods' in *The case against the global economy,* Sierra Club, San Francisco.

The holistic approach is more challenging but it makes sense. It relies upon a thorough investigation of causes and conditions that sustain a state of affairs in an open and non-judgemental manner so that there is a clear identification of the causes that need to be addressed and tackled. In the end there is no substitute for education of the media itself and empowering it to champion the human being as opposed to private property and capitalism. This is a process that must be undertaken after obtaining a clear understanding of the phenomenon of advertising in its context. The context would include economic, social, cultural, professional and psychological aspects which would all run into one another.

Sajeeva Samaranayake

Child Protection Officer

UNICEF

[All views expressed are personal to the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNICEF]

# AGENDA

## Consultative Meeting on Children and Advertising
## 1st August 2003, JAIC Hilton

9.00am -        Introduction and purpose of meeting

9.15am -        Presentation of concept paper

9.30am -        Tea Break

9.45am -        Group Discussion

Group 1
Portrayal of children in advertising

Group 2
Impact of advertising on children

11.00am -        Reporting of group findings

11.30am -        Plenary discussion

12.30pm -        Options for further research and way forward

1.00 pm -        Lunch

# DETAILS OF ORGANISATIONS

## Centre for Policy Alternatives

Who we are

Media freedom, the public's right to know and the individual's fundamental right to freely hold and express opinions are inextricably linked with good governance and democracy. The Media Unit in CPA was constituted to further CPA's objectives of formulating policy options to inform and shape the practice and culture of governance in Sri Lanka. The Media Unit examines hopes to engender a socially responsible media by examining the content and form of media coverage, and by publishing 'Media Monitor', a journal highlighting problems with media reportage in Sri Lanka.

The Media Unit has worked with International Media Support (Denmark), IMPACS (Canada), the PressWise Trust (UK) and a number of Sri Lankan media institutions, including the Free Media Movement (FMM), the Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA) and the Editors Guild in its interventions in Sri Lanka.

What we do

In 2003, the Media Unit hopes to engage in activities related to the Freedom of Expression, a national advocacy campaign for the Freedom of Information, Suicide Sensitive Journalism, a handbook for Conflict Sensitive Journalism and a project that will look at helping NGOs and civil society organisations engage with mainstream media more effectively.

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# UNICEF

## Who we are

UNICEF believes that the protection of children is crucial to their survival, health, and well-being. Unfortunately, millions of children are exploited, millions are abused, millions are victims of violence. Every day, they are bought and sold, imported and exported like consumable things. Children are forced to be soldiers, prostitutes, sweatshop workers, servants.

Abuse, exploitation and violence – disgraceful as they are – usually occur in private. They are often elements in organized crime and corruption. Only time reveals the consequences: children uneducated, unhealthy and impoverished.

UNICEF believes that everyone has a responsibility to see that children are safe. We work with individuals, civic groups, governments and the private sector to help create protective environments for them. Healthy, nurturing surroundings allow children to resist abuse and avoid exploitation. Caring environments fortify children against harm in the same way that proper nutrition and good health care fortify them against disease.

## What we do

UNICEF is scaling up its response to address the rights of children and women affected by armed conflict and to meet the immediate needs of returning IDPs and host communities. In the transition towards peace, UNICEF has focused its strategic response on three key sectors affecting women and children in the conflict-affected Northeast; education, water and sanitation, and child protection (including underage recruitment, mine risk education and psychosocial care and support).

In collaboration with the World Health Organization, UNICEF will also support maternal and child health recovery in areas of high return. UNICEF's strategic focus supports the Government of Sri Lanka's Quick Impact Project proposals and is in line with the Joint Strategy between the Government and the United Nations, where UNICEF is identified as the focal point for education and water and sanitation and a key agency for protection, mine risk education, health and nutrition.

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