

# LITMUS TESTING OF BSA DECISIONS VIOLENCE

July 2020

This year's Litmus Testing research reports on what the public thinks about some of the BSA's recent decisions on programmes dealing with violence and the acceptability of violence in content generally. Research was conducted through four online focus groups (using Zoom due to the emergence of COVID-19) and a national online survey of 572 participants.

Key findings are outlined below. You can read the full report here:

 [Litmus Testing 2020 – Public attitudes towards violence on TV/Radio \[PDF\]](#)

## DECISIONS TESTED AND THE RESULTS

The majority of research participants agreed with the BSA's decisions for all four programmes:

Decision Tested	% rated the decision as acceptable / good / very good
<p><u><a href="#">Starboy</a></u> (2017-016) – 9:00-10:00pm (16C)</p> <p>Music video by The Weeknd depicting the singer tied to a chair and being suffocated</p> <p><i>Complaint not upheld</i></p>	78%
<p><u><a href="#">DailyMail TV</a></u> (2018-092) – 3:30pm (PGR)</p> <p>Item about a murder, pixilation, no warning</p> <p><i>Complaint upheld under good taste and decency and children's interests standards</i></p>	95%
<p><u><a href="#">MMA (Mixed Martial Arts): One Championship Weekly</a></u></p> <p>(2017-057) – 8:30am (Saturday)</p> <p>Highlights of fight show</p> <p><i>Complaint not upheld</i></p>	78%
<p><u><a href="#">Checkpoint</a></u> (2017-032) – 5:30pm</p> <p>Radio item reporting on kidnapping/assault trial, including recording of evidence of victim. No warning.</p> <p><i>Complaint upheld under good taste and decency, children's interests and violence standards</i></p>	90%

## PUBLIC OPINION INSIGHTS

Litmus testing participant responses highlighted the following key themes:

### Violence on television and radio:

- There is a lower tolerance for violence in programming where a power differential exists (eg violence against women and children), graphic or explicit violence (eg close ups or unnecessary detail, violence glorified or used as 'shock value') and violence with destructive emotional intent (eg racism, sadism, torture, random or anti-social actions).
- There is a higher tolerance for fictionalised violence, violence in a 'controlled' environment (eg sports) or violence serving educational purposes (eg public interest learnings, highlighting of issues).
- There is moderate tolerance for real-life violence. Some participants indicated that 'real' violence is more confronting, while others suggested that it provides learnings about society.
- When violence is a form of artistic expression (eg Starboy clip) responses differed depending on whether it was perceived literally (depiction of murder) or artistically (video represents strangulation of artist's ideas or a form of rebirth).
- Some suggest violent content can be justified:
  - in the context of it being pro-victim, ie where a woman is given a voice to tell her story (which may be part of her healing process)
  - where it provides learning opportunities for members of society to be more vigilant and ensure the safety of their friends and family.

### Parental responsibility:

- Respondents acknowledged the importance of audience choice and control, and ensuring audiences have the necessary information (eg warnings and programme information) to make a decision about whether to watch or listen.
- Some recognised an onus on parents and caregivers to ensure that children are not accessing inappropriate content later at night, eg: *'If you've got a kid up past 9pm-10pm and they're watching TV, I think that's on you.'*

### Audience advisories/timebands/tools:

- Two-thirds (65%) of people surveyed (ie 572 pax) do not use the electronic programming guide, classifications, warnings, parental locks or timebands to manage viewing in their household. This is an improvement over last year's results in which 70% indicated they did not use any of the tools, but needs further improvement.
- Many have 'expectations' that certain programmes would only be shown within certain timebands.
- Many are aware of the availability of parental locks but express 'low self-efficacy' in terms of being able to use them.

## BSA ACTIONS

As a result of this research, the BSA intends to:

- use the public's insights to inform our future decision making and review of the Codebook
- continue its focus with broadcasters to encourage and educate parents/caregivers to use the tools provided through the broadcasting standards system to protect children from inappropriate content
- continue to maintain [www.safeviewing.co.nz](http://www.safeviewing.co.nz) which provides tips for protecting children from content on television that may harm them.

### Viewers acknowledge different types of violence with different emotional responses

