

# When children kill children

**NO STRINGS ATTACHED**



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

*The key lies in what a child is exposed to and for how long. It is important for grown-ups to acknowledge that they are responsible for what their children watch or see.*

THREE teenage students of a madrasa who had kidnapped and murdered their classmate to get ransom from his family, stated to the police that they had been 'inspired' by a TV serial. The report that carried this grisly story did not give details on what exactly the TV serial had shown to influence these teenagers to become cold-blooded murderers but it does give an idea of how violent content on screen can have a deep impact on young minds. Aged between 14 and 15, the three abducted the victim, slit his throat and dumped him in a septic tank. Sounds eerily like a scene in a murder mystery series, doesn't it? The kind many children and adolescents have easy access to through television or the internet.

There may be of course other factors contributing to teen violence and crime, especially in a society where brutality is rife in real life and where criminals often dodge the legal system with influence and money. The teenagers, who felt no guilt as they slit their classmate's throat and asked his family for ransom after killing him while hiding him in a water tank, may well have been influenced by things other than a TV series. But if what they claim is true - that they were inspired by a TV series to commit this heinous act - it shows the impact media has on young minds. There have been other cases of teenaged victims being killed by classmates for money. Were they too encouraged by films that depicted cruelty and ruthlessness?

Abuse, violent environments, isolation and poverty are also attributed to criminal behaviour. But we cannot ignore the fact that

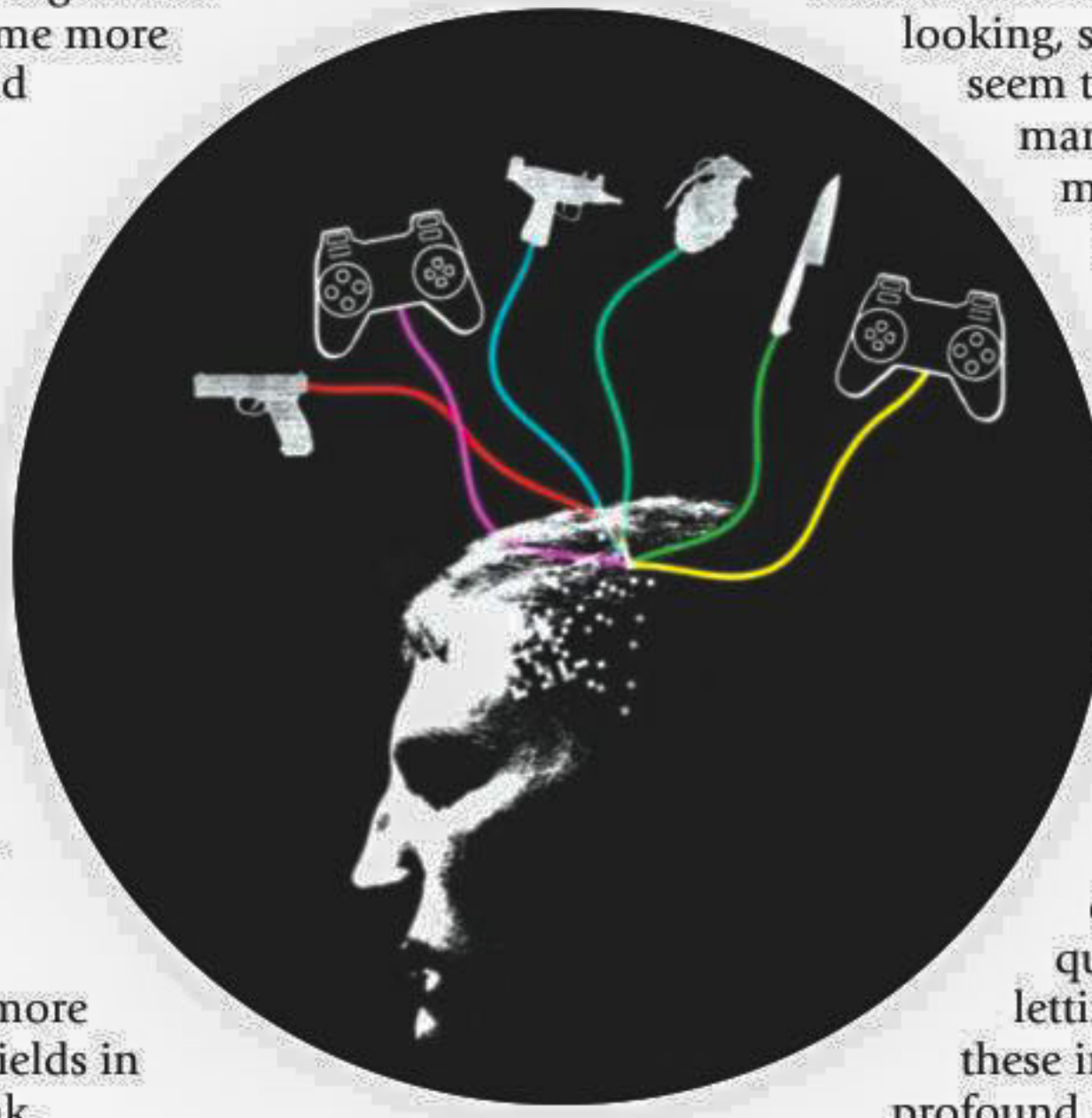
children have become more and more exposed to violence on screen. Whether it is a TV serial, movie, cartoon or the video games they play, there is always a certain amount of violent content. What is worse is that parents and guardians seem to be oblivious of the effects this exposure may have on their children.

Scientific studies have shown that continuously watching violent films have adverse effects on young minds. They tended to become more hostile, aggressive and insensitive towards violence or helping someone in pain. This is hardly surprising considering the fact that movies/television influence us in a way no other media can. They tell us what we should be wearing, what we should be eating and even how we should be behaving. And the younger we are, the more power such media wields in shaping how we think.

A study by the American Academy of Pediatrics has found that continuous exposure to violence results in the idea that violence is acceptable, that it can help solve problems. It also makes children believe and be resigned to the idea that the world is a harsh, sinister place. Watching violent scenes continuously reduces the shock value and hence, cruel acts do not seem all that cruel anymore and things like torture, brutal killings

are no longer as condemnable. Empathy is therefore reduced.

In many films, aggressive behaviour, even criminality, is glamourised. *Dexter*, an American TV series that became quite popular even in Bangladesh, thanks to cable TV, portrays an attractive serial killer who goes around killing and then cutting up individuals he thinks are the 'bad guys'. Bank robbers, assassins and mobsters are often shown as good looking, swanky men who seem to have it all and manage to get away with murder, literally. The protagonist in the TV series, *Breaking Bad*, is a fairly simple chemistry teacher who finds out he has cancer and decides to start making crystal meth to pay his hospital bills and make ends meet. Along the way, he turns into a ruthless drug peddler with no qualms about killing or letting people die. All these images can have a profound effect on children, creating a distorted notion of life and making the line between good and evil thinner than ever.



Even regular heroes in films are increasingly violent nowadays and they give the idea that violence is the only way to fight evil. The key lies in what a child is exposed to and for how long. It is important for grown-ups to acknowledge that they are responsible for what their children watch or see. Parents often

substitute the TV for a babysitter and are not concerned about what their kids are watching on TV or through the internet or when they play video games (often full of violent content) as long as they are occupied and in a safe environment.

It is therefore crucial for parents and guardians to limit the time children spend watching TV or movies on the internet or playing video games. Child psychologists recommend limiting TV watching to one or two hours. Parents must make an effort to spend time with their children and participate in their activities. Watching the films/programmes they watch or the video games they play will allow parents and guardians to know what their wards are exposed to and give them the opportunity to discuss the content with their children. There must be other outlets for children such as playing a sport, learning to play a musical instrument or going to music school, being part of clubs at school and hanging out with other children their own age.

Schools and madrasas where children spend a large or all their time have a special responsibility to make sure that they impart good values to their students outside the textbooks and scriptures. Teaching or preaching tolerance, kindness, honesty and compassion should be part of the curriculum. Teachers must be role models and mentors, not sadistic disciplinarians.

Children must be taught that violence is not the solution to conflict resolution - there are other, better, peaceful ways to resolve a problem. As parents and guardians, we must make concerted efforts to reduce children's exposure to violence on TV, internet and in video games. This includes monitoring and screening what they watch on screen for fun.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Editorial and Op-ed, The Daily Star.

## RIGHT TO INFORMATION

# THE PEOPLE'S LAW

FARID HOSSAIN

CHOWGACHA in Jessore district has the distinction of being the first in two historic events. The farming region on the bank of River Kapatakhyia is the birthplace of the Indigo Rebellion against the English colonialists. It is also known as the gateway of Bangladesh's 1971 liberation from Pakistan, as the area was the first Bangladesh territory to be liberated on November 23, weeks before our December 16 victory in the nine-month War of Liberation.

Over four decades later, Chowgacha became the first Upazila to host the country's first-ever RTI Camp aimed at making the people more aware of the 2009 law that has empowered citizens with the right to get any information they need from government organisations, NGOs and any institution that gets funds from the government and donors (local and foreign).

The five-day camp opened at Sighajhuli village (also a union) on August 22 at the premises of a secondary school named after Shaheed Mashiur Rahman, who was killed by the invading Pakistani troops during one of the several battles. The inaugural session was presided over by the Deputy Commissioner of Jessore and also attended by the Chief Information Commissioner, Secretary of Cabinet Division (Coordination and Reforms) and the UNO of Chowgacha. Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) organised the camp in support with Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) and JANAK, a voluntary organisation of local citizens who inform villagers about RTI and its role in ensuring citizens' welfare and improving their lives.

Speakers at the function had a common message: effective use of RTI Act will strengthen the practice of democracy at all levels of society by ensuring accountability of the authorities to citizens and making their activities transparent that, at the end, reduces (or ends) corruption. RTI is a tool that citizens can use to get information held by government agencies and NGOs that affect their lives. Citizens have many things to know from the government agencies and NGOs. They are entitled to know why doctors at government hospitals are not regular

in their duty; why a helpless widow doesn't get the benefits she is supposed to receive under the government's social safety network; what is the procedure that the managing committee of a school (that gets government funds) follows in the appointment of a head teacher and why a road broke down only months after it was built; where is the list of the vested property in the Upazila? Genuine questions that ideally require simple answers. But answers are not

government organisations and NGOs are required by the law to disclose information (except those barred by the law) on their own initiative instead of waiting for citizens to ask for them. Most importantly, RTI has provided citizens with the right to make the authorities accountable to them about the issues that affect their lives. In the process, there are two sides: the supply side where sit the government and NGOs, and the demand side which comprises the public.

information.

"RTI is a fulfillment of one of the commitments of the government," said Information Commissioner Nepal Chandra Sarker. There are, he added, three aspects of the law: pro-active disclosure, information received through petition and restrictions on giving certain information related to national security and relations with friendly countries.

In summing up the theme of the law, Chief Information Commissioner Mohammed Farooq says, "RTI is a means to ensure good governance."

What does good governance mean? It means rule of law, a transparent and accountable administration and a corruption-free society where taxpayers' money is spent fairly for the welfare of the people.

During the camp, 30 underprivileged people - day labourers, landless peasants, poor students - were first told how the use of RTI can change their lives for the better. In the next step, they were taught how to seek information from the authorities and what to do if the information is denied. This was done in an innovative and creative way through the use of music, games, videos and posters so the lessons became more attractive and easier to learn.

An immediate impact of the camp has been the submission of 38 petitions to various government offices, including the UNO, and some NGOs. The petitions have all been related to public services. One applicant, for example, wanted to get a list of a vested property in the Upazila from the land office, and wanted to know how it was distributed and who the recipients were. Another applicant wanted to know the amount of seeds the Upazila's agriculture office received last year and how they were distributed.

According to Hamidul Islam Hillol, a Senior Programme Officer, RTI has become a household word for the people of Chowgacha, thanks to the camp, which, says Hasibur Rahman, MRDI's executive director, is one of many all around the country.

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always available. There are officials who are either too afraid to provide information to the people or avoid giving it to hide corruption or irregularities. Some do it in abuse of their authority.

What is encouraging to note is that this time the government has come forward to break the culture of secrecy. That's why the RTI law has a provision of pro-active disclosure. This means

At the camp, Md. Nazrul Islam, Secretary of Cabinet Division (Coordination and Reforms), remarked that the supply is ready to meet the demand of citizens through the appointment of 22,000 designated officers who are tasked to deal with information-seeking citizens. It's now time to make the citizens aware of their rights and motivate them to seek the information and to ensure that authorities don't avoid disclosing

## A WORD A DAY

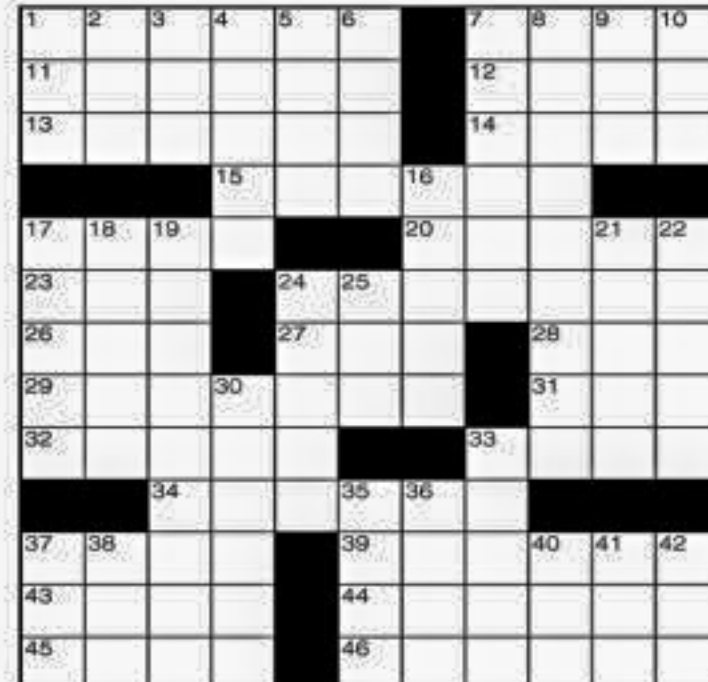


**SERENDIPITY**  
[,sɛr(ə)n'dɪpɪti]

*Finding something good without looking for it*

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- Raspy
  - Petty fight
  - Sell in a hurry
  - Script bit
  - Fit in
  - Poker payment
  - Ineffectual
  - Outlaws
  - Canal features
  - Commotion
  - Italian dessert
  - "You bet!"
  - Paint buy
  - D.C. baseballer
  - Swanky
  - Adam's mate
  - Car sticker
  - Wields
  - Gary of "Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy"
  - Horse feature
  - Chant
  - Plow pullers
  - Skilled shooter
  - Butte's kin
  - Device for winter sidewalks
- DOWN**
- Wheel part
  - Start of a count
  - Everything
  - Spots for shingles
  - Rational
  - Border
  - Downhill course
  - They're found among needles
  - Little laborer
  - Golf peg
  - Less than tactful
  - Howled
  - "Rolling in the Deep" singer
  - Rocket parts
  - Scoundrel
  - Locations
  - Burn with water
  - Skillet
  - Lead ore
  - To the time that
  - Overlook
  - "The King and I" heroine
  - Pop's wife
  - Chopping tool
  - Make a choice
  - Maiden name indicator
  - Make mistakes



## YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

PARTS LETUP  
EQUAL ARENA  
RUBBER BANDS  
KAY EYE TOT  
SPELL  
EMPTY SALAD  
BASE ZERO  
BRIEF REEFS  
LOTUS  
ALP RIM SIP  
GARAGE BANDS  
ONICE ARIES  
GAMES STPAT

## BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



## BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

