
EDITORIAL

1994

1994 is the International Year of the Family (IYF) and the slogan is: "Building the smallest democracy at the heart of society". A Secretariat has been created in Vienna, Austria, to promote worldwide participation with the Committee for Marriage and Family Life of the South African Welfare Council acting as the National Co-ordinating Committee for the IYF.

We are invited to plan for and participate with others through the IYF newsletter, SA Family Mirror¹. Enquiries may be directed to: Dr E W Harvey, Project Leader, National Plan for Family Life, Private Bag X828, Pretoria 0001.
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SA Family Practice and the Academy will be glad to receive ideas from readers about things we can do as family physicians towards promoting the IYF in 1994.

One of the largest obstacles to democracy in South Africa is our culture of violence. We hit first and then ask what's the problem! This is true at a national and at a micro level, that of the family. Even if a resolution of political disagreements were to remove all political violence, we still remain in a violent society.

The bulk of the non-political interpersonal violence we see in our casualty departments and surgeries is home and family related. Building the smallest democracy takes time. We need to raise a new generation that has been enculturated into families and a society that solves difficulties between people in non-violent ways. Without this there will just be no democracy however much we sloganeer about it.

In a recent JAMA article² Centerwall reviews the relation between television and violence. Massive increases in rates of violence 15 years after the introduction of television in several countries are attributed to the influence of television on small children. Perhaps one of our contributions to the IYF could be to introduce a discussion on television viewing habits of toddlers and pre-school children into the consultation, just as we talk about the use of seat belts as a health promotion concern. How many of your patients use the "electronic babysitter"? A clear message about television may prevent our being woken up at night to care for someone with a bullet wound through the chest 15 years later. Is this an idealist's pipe dream? Only those who can think in terms of the future, in terms of years, and not days, will have the patience to work with families for the future that we may not be there to share.

Let us all contribute to making the IYF a momentous one in South Africa, even if the dividends are difficult to predict and slow in coming.

Sam Felsen

References:

- 1 SA Family Mirror 1993; 1: No. 1. Newsletter IYF 1994
- 2 Centerwall BS. Television and Violence: The scale of the problem and where to go from here. JAMA 1992; 267:3059-63.