

7 novembre (The Guardian)

[We cannot turn away from suffering, but I can no longer watch the news coverage from Israel and Gaza | Simon Jenkins | The Guardian](#)

We cannot turn away from suffering, but I can no longer watch the news coverage from Israel and Gaza

[Simon Jenkins](#)

Right now we have tabloid television, not broadcast news, offering a ghoulish voyeurism and simplified spectacle

Tue 7 Nov 2023 07.00 CET

For the first time in my adult life I cannot watch – or read – the news. Its presentation makes me profoundly upset. For over a week I have not read, heard or watched the [news from Israel/Palestine](#). I am afraid doing this has made me feel better. I have asked around and many other people are doing the same.

I would normally consider it shocking to not know what is going on elsewhere in the world. We owe it to common humanity not to ignore inhumanity, wherever it occurs. We should listen and at least sympathise, even if to no concrete purpose. The obligation on journalists is more specific; it is to supply the requisite information, which can be unpleasant to collect and convey. I have visited war zones and found it harrowing. Unspeakable horrors are occurring somewhere on Earth all the time. The media may have space for only so much. When did you last hear about [Sudan](#), the Democratic Republic of Congo – or even Ukraine? But the effort must be made, not dodged.

Now we have the most intensive, 24/7 coverage of extreme violence that I can recall. The evening news coyly says scenes are “too awful to show” and then that “viewers may find some scenes distressing”, as if to draw us from whatever else we are doing. This is tabloid television, offering a ghoulish gloss on what news should be about, which is facts and their informed interpretation. Yet it is assumed that we cannot handle this, and instead are given endless vox pops with people on the ground. We need something to stir the emotions. In this respect, television is in a different league from radio and the print press.

Horror fuels a dangerous instinct, that of blame. Since every vox pop from Gaza must be preceded or followed by one from Israel, viewers are drawn into arguments fuelled by heat not light. There is no history or background. Tearful victims get more time than decision-makers or experts. And after the blame comes the overwhelming sense of impotence. What can we do? Should we shout, march, write, shut up? Mostly we feel sad and return to our lives, pretending nothing has changed. Or at least most of us do.

Psychologists tell us how to cope with bad news when it affects us personally. They advise us to analyse it, assess the risk, seek a way forward and take action. But that is when it is personal and we have some agency over events.

The evils of the outside world are in a different mental sphere. We can do nothing directly about them and must remain spectators of other people’s agony. During Covid addictions to “doomsurfing” and “doomscrolling” soared. People obsessively monitored news of the disease by the hour. This led to sensations of fear, sadness and anger, and an [increase in cases](#) of depression and trauma. As with bad news generally, its appeal was said to be an evolutionary response to potential danger – humans crave a warning.

There must be a limit. It is one thing to be reminded occasionally of the suffering of others, and of our own impotence when it comes to changing the world around us. I cannot see that relentless real-time depictions of horror is instilling any virtue. We – and our children – are expected to witness screaming, bleeding, angry people, night after night. This cannot increase public understanding of what is happening, only add to anger, discord and mental distress. I want to watch the news; what is being shown is something different.

Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist