



**Australian Council on
Children and the Media**

MEDIA RELEASE

Australia's national classification scheme has *reel* problems Parents say PG is a 'poor guide'

MORE than 75 per cent of Australian parents of young children say the PG category for films, games and apps is too broad.

And 88 per cent of them think an age-based system would be more useful to them than the present one.

These are the findings of an online survey conducted between July and October this year by the Australian Council on Children and the Media.

ACCM President **Prof. Elizabeth Handsley** said today: "Well over 600 parents and carers, from all states of Australia, have responded, and most emphatically told us that the NCS does not give them sufficient information to judge whether cinema films and computer games and apps are suitable, especially for their young children."

She continued, "a further problem arises with the M classification. Many M movies (especially superhero ones) are promoted to young audiences via linked toys and other goods. 80 per cent of respondents thought that too many young children are exposed to M films, and 68 per cent supported the introduction of legal force at age 12."

ACCM has long advocated for the introduction of an evidence-and age-based system using classification categories such as G, 5+, 9+, 12+, 16+ and 18+, and in which categories from 12+ up would have legal force.

ACCM intends to present the survey outcomes to a federal government review expected soon, as evidence of strong support and need for change.

ACCM cites The Netherlands' well-established Kijkwijzer system as a successful example of such a scheme which is much appreciated by parents.

ACCM has strong expertise in this field having supported parents for 17 years with its *Know Before You Go* child-development-based movie reviews, and for 5 years with its *Know Before You Load* app reviews (which additionally signal simulated gambling behaviour).

FOR INTERVIEW:

Prof. Elizabeth Handsley 0448 898 185

For background or to organise an interview, contact Barbara Biggins 0403 005 736



Background

About ACCM

ACCM's reviews are prepared by persons with child development expertise and provide information about the content of the movie or app and give an age-appropriate recommendation. Movie Reviews can be found here: <https://childrenandmedia.org.au/movie-reviews/> and App Reviews here: <https://childrenandmedia.org.au/app-reviews/>

ACCM's campaign for age ratings can be found here: <https://childrenandmedia.org.au/taking-action/current-campaigns/classification>

About the survey

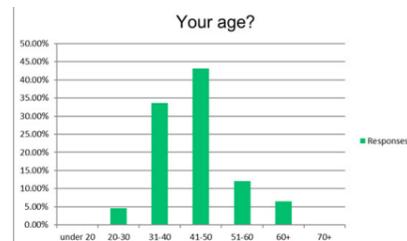
The survey questionnaire was available online, and participation promoted via prominent parenting, and children and young people's health and welfare, sites including HealthEd and Gen Next, Steve Biddulph's Raising Boys and Girls, Justin Coulson, ACCM, and education newsletters and facebook pages.

The survey results were gathered between July and October and results analysed in early November. 623 responses were received. The questionnaire can be found here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Y7CTFSR>

The survey respondents came from all states of Australia

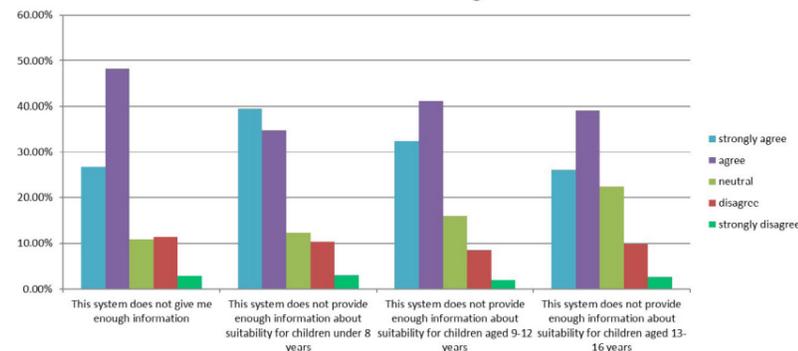


And were mostly between the ages of 30 and 50 years



Summary of survey results:

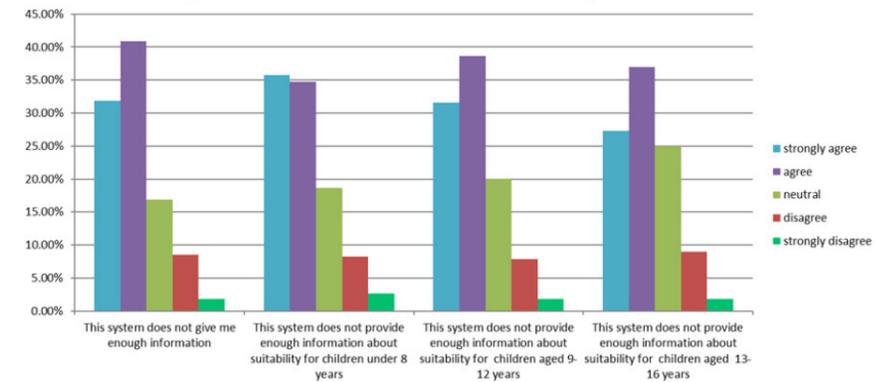
Thinking about children in your care, how useful have you found the classification system when considering the suitability of movies they might watch? Please indicate your degree of agreement or otherwise with the following statements.



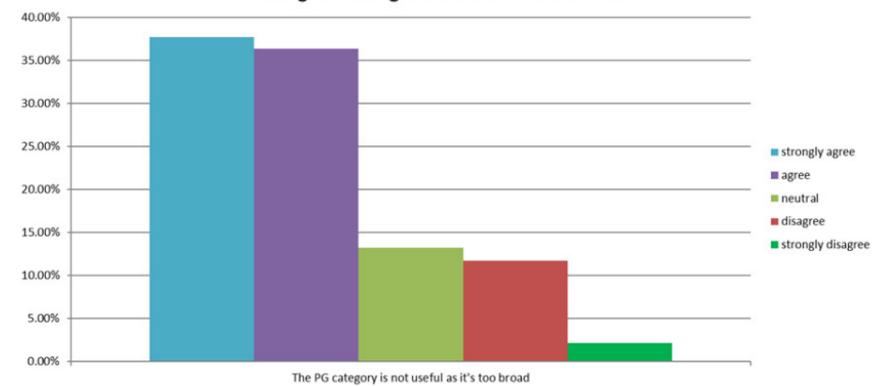
cont. next page



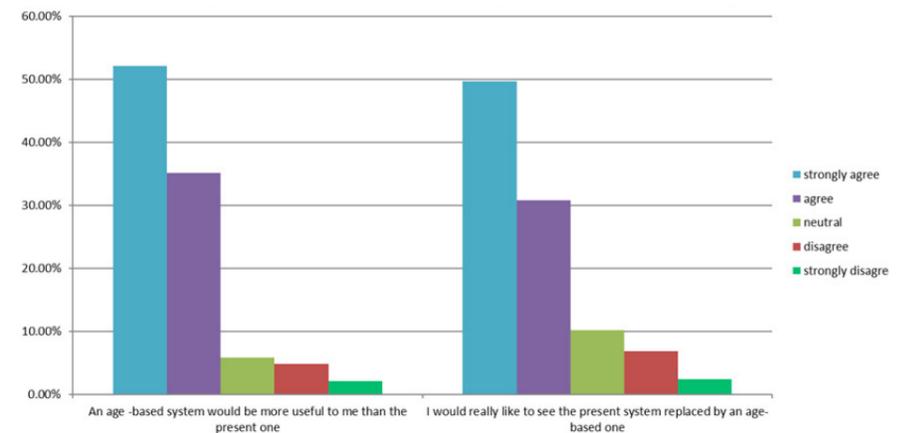
Thinking about children in your care, how useful have you found the classification system when considering the suitability of games and apps they might play? Please indicate your degree of agreement or otherwise with the following statements.



Thinking about children in your care, how useful is the PG classification when considering the suitability of movies they might watch, or games and apps they might play. Please indicate your degree of agreement or otherwise.



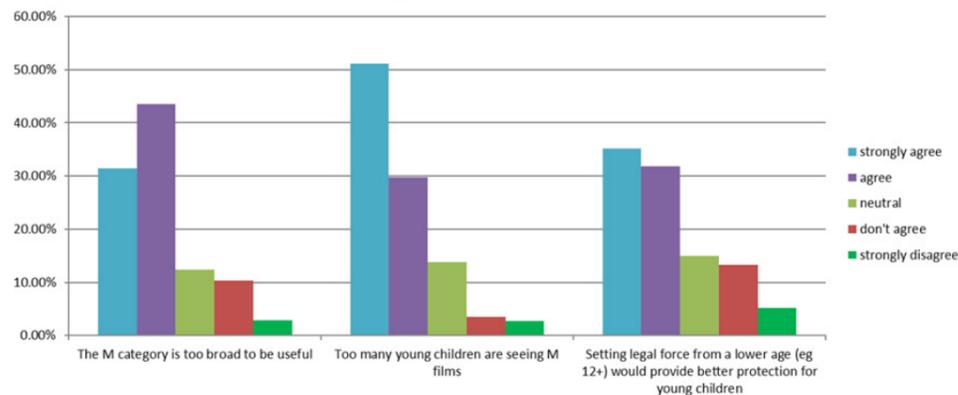
Some countries have classification systems that provide advice about age-appropriateness of movies and games. eg suitable for All, 5+, 9+, 12+, 16+ where, for example, a 5+ indicates age suitability for those 5 and over. Do you think that such a system might be useful to you when considering the suitability of movies, games and apps for children in your care?



cont. next page



The classifications G, PG and M for movies, apps and games are all advisory. Only the MA15+ and R18+ have legal force. This means that children of all ages can legally see M movies even though they are not recommended for those under 15 years. Please indicate your agreement or otherwise with the following statements.



What parents said...

About PG classification

The PG classification is WAY TOO BROAD!!! I took my children (aged 4 and 7) to see "Dumbo" which was fine but then took them to see "A dog's journey" which was also classified PG and had to walk out half way through the movie! It is completely inappropriate for children that age (drug and alcohol use, aggressive teenage relationships, car accidents) (and that was only in the half of the movie I saw!!!) How can they both have the same classification??? Absolutely ridiculous!!!

The new lion king movie was PG but very scary. Almost needed to be PG+

I have found PG a problem when it has included death (e.g. "Pete's Dragon" and "The Good Dinosaur") and scary incidents, in terms of tension and characters in danger, rather than the view of scary as spooky. Both of the movies mentioned above contained such scenes.

Some PG have very upsetting scenes and/or frightening scenes that may only be short but have a huge impact on children and require parents to explain and comfort children these are sometimes unexpected in the broad PG classification

Even g rated movies have things in them that scare my kids and they can have nightmares for months about them. When toy story has scary ventriloquist dolls and is PG and thought to be suitable for kids etc what is going on? There needs to be more warnings about things that will scare kids.

When trailers for m rated movies are shown when you go for a pg movie is appalling

As far as I am concerned PG simply means 13 and under and that is a ridiculous rating to exist considering the vast developmental differences between a 3 yr old and a 13 year old. The G rating is NO better. I'm appalled at the failure of the government and regula-

cont. next page

tors of Australia to realise or care about this fundamental flaw in the rating system that is there to "protect" children from undue distress, trauma, exposure and other unnecessary damage.

PG rating can vary far too much these days with added perhaps adult humour or content. The unintended scary theme or elements of movies need to be identified. A child cannot un-see what they have seen and should be protected.

"PG" does nothing except say that most adult people would find this OK, but we can't let 5 year olds watch it so we can't give it a "G" rating. It doesn't say anything about what could be of concern - what good is it to say "contains adult themes" when I want to know which ones? Death? Rape? Homosexuality? War trauma? Abuse? Violence? Suspense? There is a difference and I want to know!

What is classified as PG is broad and seems to be getting broader. What might be considered as low level violence/sexual material to a 13 year old may be quite confronting to a 7 year old. Also films rated PG because of "low level" violence can still be very scary for young children who can be easily frightened by what is implied - just the background music to a scene can engender anxiety/fear. PG classification is far too broad - it needs to be broken down into at least two subgroups to distinguish between 8/9 and 12/13.

As an early childhood teacher for many years and now a grandmother, I think there needs to be more awareness in the community and especially for new parents of how unsuitable many PG movies or games are for children especially those below school age. I also think the information needs to be displayed in a highlighted way, bigger and bolder. I think the age system would be better and clearer statements like 'not suitable for children under 5'

PG is tough. You've no idea until you're watchin

About M classification

I work in a developmental and behavioural clinic as an allied health professional. There are a significant number of children on my caseload (>85%) who are exposed without any parental concern to M and MA content in films who are having anxiety, sleep disturbance, aggressive behaviour and learning difficulties which appear linked to this exposure.

Many children (50%) under 12 are using games including Grand Theft Auto, Call of Duty etc. it is concerning just how many under 7 are using these games.

Children watching M movies has a trickle down effect on schools & society. It impacts upon mental health, behaviours, criminal justice, health care etc.

It's time the government implemented a better system. Parents throughout Australia who care, are grappling with how to better protect their children's childhood, having lost all faith in the existing classification system.

lots of kids watch M 15+ at home and as a counsellor, I see many kids with anxiety issues caused by watching horror movies. parents don't understand that these inappropriate shows can cause so much distress and once they have seen it, it cant be unseen

Merchandising of M-rated movies to young children should be regulated better. eg. Lunchboxes of violent movies for kids

Legal enforcement would send a stronger message to families who do not understand the impacts of exposure to this content.

cont. next page

Additional comments, including about mobile phone apps

Gaming, especially online gaming, is probably the most concerning issue for most parents these days, and especially in our household. We can limit their time on games, but we can't stand over them every minute and watch what's happening, nor hear conversations. Better ratings for games would remove some of the anxiety for parents and possibly even kids.

The classification of advertisements also need to be considered. Particularly for apps, often ads may play which are not PG rated during a game for children. Simple mathematics games which are great for kids often have this problem.

I work to support children in schools and believe the exposure of some to be problematic. I come across children in Prep and Year 1 who play, or at least watch violent video games and become obsessed with them. They play act this or use these strategies, threats or the on-line language with their peers.

I have come across many who do not differentiate reality from fantasy and talk about characters as their friends. Some are sexualised early by what they watch.

We need to do what we can to protect our children.

With a very young child, I've found managing and navigating his media quite difficult - you need to do a surprising amount of research to find things that are safe for him to watch (and don't lead to long, awkward conversations about sex, death and why that thing they said was funny - which a small child has an amazing ability to hone in on). Maybe as he's older the rating system will be more useful, but right now it's definitely not.

ACCM Know before you Go is a fabulous resource!

Please find ACCM. Their reviews are most useful even if the classification system was improved. It helps if you want to avoid particular kinds of content regardless of classification for example loss of a parent themes.

ENDS