TV, video games, and young boys

New Australian research from the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute has found a link between different types of electronic media and mental health among young children, particularly boys.

This research is the first large population-based study to show clear links between the amount of time spent using TV and video games, and emotional and behavioural problems in late childhood (8-9 years). Lead researcher, Dr Lisa Mundy said that this was an important age group to study because it is the age at which children’s use of media begins to escalate and also because children at this age are highly sensitive, due to the huge biological, psychological and emotional developments which are occurring.

Researchers found that there were specific types of electronic media associated with problems among 8-9 year-olds.

Findings include:

- The use of video games among boys was associated with greater conduct and emotional problems. A boy playing an average of 2 hours per day per week is at 2.6-times greater odds of having conduct and emotional problems.
- Watching TV was associated with greater hyperactivity and inattention problems in boys. A boy watching an average of 2 hours per day per week (or 14 hours each week) is at 1.7-times greater odds of having hyperactivity/inattention problems.
- Girls of this age were not found to be affected in the same way.
- There was no clear link between computer use and emotional and behavioural issues.

Researchers noted that while electronic media use may have many positive outcomes, including as a tool for emotional regulation, different media may have different effects on the developing male and female brain. This is partly due to the way boys and girls consume and use media, even from a young age.

Dr Mundy explained that it may be that the electronic media causes emotional and behavioural problems, or possibly that children with these problems spend more time using electronic media. She pointed out that it is important to note how the nature of the media affects the experience. At the age of the children studied, playing video games tends to be a solitary experience, while television watching is more likely to occur with the family.

The research used the first wave of data gathered through the Childhood to Adolescence Transition Study (CATS), which is designed to track the health and social adjustment of children as they pass through puberty.

By studying modifiable factors, such as the use of electronic media, researchers will be able to develop interventions that can lead to better health for children and adolescents.

www.mcri.edu.au/media/12541

ACCM will be 60 years old in 2017!!

Help us celebrate by joining us at this one day conference

Tots and Tech: challenges for early childhood in a digital age

Friday 5th May, 2017, 9am-4:30pm
242 Telstra Conference Centre, 242 Exhibition Street, Melbourne

We will explore the potential benefits and downsides of media and technology use in early childhood. Conference themes include technology and physical health (incl. sleep), social/emotional wellbeing, and learning/play in early childhood

Confirmed speakers include:

- Professor Susan Edwards
- Dr Justin Coulson
- Dr Jordy Kaufman
- Dr Kate Highfield
- Dr Sarah Blunden
- Professor Leon Straker

childrenandmedia.org.au/events/accm-conference
Healthy media use in early childhood: what parents are up against.

This month over 2000 delegates from all over the world will gather for the annual Kidscreen Summit. Attendees will include children’s TV, game and internet content producers, broadcasters, toy companies and marketers and will include big companies such as Nickelodeon, Rovio, Pokemon, Nintendo, Viacom, Walt Disney, Google, Amazon, Sesame Workshop. Our own ABC will be there as well as 25 Australian production companies.

The conference organisers say:

It’s chock-full of keynote presentations, panel discussions and workshops exploring new strategies & trends, innovative ideas and practical business solutions that will help drive your business forward next year.

The emphasis does seem to be on how best to get your kid-product sold, but it’s not all about business. There’ll be a keynote showcasing …eye-opening research study exploring why and how [the industry is] unconsciously undermining the development of empathy and caring in today’s kids.

Children’s media environment is rapidly expanding, and parents are increasingly caught up in dilemmas around their children’s engagement with screens. Media outlets and product are vying for children’s attention, and seem often to be more intent on selling them something than providing a quality screen experience.

Parents are left mostly on their own to deal with issues such as:

- My young child needs to be dragged away from the iPad- he seems addicted.
- Do children need to keep up with the latest in technology to prepare for future work, and how do I keep up?
- Videogames are too violent, but they are all playing them.
- Some games are really interesting and engaging—how do I find what’s really educational?
- Where can I get reliable advice?

Parents are blamed if they give up the struggle, but where’s the evidence-based support that many want and need?

The Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM), and other early childhood professionals, believe that such support is crucial in the early years, and that all parents of young children should have access to reliable information and strategies for starting smart with screens.

ACCM is tackling many of these issues at its 60th birthday conference Tech and tots: challenges for early childhood development in a digital age, being held in Melbourne on May 5 (see P1). It has invited an impressive range of speakers to review the physical, social and emotional, and cognitive impacts of media use on young children, in presentations that should be of vital interest to early childhood professionals across a broad range of disciplines, researchers, policy makers and parent organisations.

References

Kidscreen Summit 2017
http://summit.kidscreen.com/2017/

A new book from Steve Biddulph

Steve, the author of the best-selling Raising Girls, says the aim of his new book is twofold:

‘Firstly, to help you understand how daughters grow and thrive, and to be confident in raising your own. To lay down the foundations of good mental health early in your daughter’s life, and to keep her strong all the way through.

And secondly, to enlist you in the new wave of feminism, fighting against a world that is so toxic to our kids.’

Phones go back to basics for kid safety

RHIAN DEUTROM

Mobile phone companies are adapting their products to cater to growing concerns by parents about children's online safety.

Parents, struggling to balance the allure of the digital era with the need to protect children, have turned to alternative devices to stay connected and safe.

This comes as research by Telstra found 24 per cent of Australian parents had planned to give their children smartphones for Christmas last year, most doing so for "safety reasons".

But many parents were concerned about giving a smartphone, with 54 per cent saying they worried their child would spend too much time on it and 39 per cent anxious about online safety, a Telstra spokesman said.

Melbourne-based company Kisa has a new made-to-order phone designed for children, with 10 pre-programmed contact buttons, a GPS tracker, contact and allergy details.

Director Dmitry Levin, who co-founded Kisa with Leon Kosher, said it allowed parents to stay in touch with their children but also "shield them from cyber bullying, inappropriate information and even sexting".

"The device removes these risks entirely so the only two things a child can do is make calls to a maximum of 10 nominated people and receive calls from those who have their number," he said. "We see our product as the first device to give to a child so they can show they're capable of carrying a device and so parents can be comfortable with the technology as well." Parents are also buying mobile wrist watches, such as Mooc and Moomee. The smartwatches have a SIM card and allow the user to call a limited number of people, such as parents and grandparents, and feature an emergency services button. The watch links to a parent's smartphone through an app.

Mobile giant Nokia has released "legacy phones" that eschew the touchscreen for push buttons, a long-life battery, classic games and sturdy casing. The company is rumoured to be releasing three other vintage-style phones at the Mobile World Congress next month.

Chief executive of the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association Chris Altman said the demand for "simply connect" to others without all the bells and whistles was growing.

"There are people who don't want to use the mobile broadband, they just want to be able to make calls and occasionally send a text message and there are now products that cater to that," he said.

However, Mr Altman said parents should not ignore the online world. "Parents are far better off introducing their children to technology in a measured way to help them understand the risks, rather than looking for a fix that will limit their exposure."

Acting Children's eSafety Commissioner Andrew Wright said many parents approached the department for advice. "Parents are ultimately best-placed to know when their child is ready to handle a smartphone and its associated risks, and using a phone with limited or no connectivity may be a good starting point," he said.

Screen time can help kids

PARENTS should concentrate on getting children to use technology actively rather than fighting a losing battle to limit screen time.

The NBN Digital Parenting Report 2017 found almost half of children go online after school to collaborate with classmates via video chat, and 57 per cent access homework tutorials.

Report author Dr Kristy Goodwin said screen time was "not toxic" when educational. "Children will continue to spend more and more time online, so rather than... trying to limit use of technology, I'd recommend parents try and prevent the 'digital zombie' effect by finding active ways for kids to engage," she said.

They included coding, designing web pages, educational chat forums and producing their own videos.

The report found primary school children did nearly two hours of homework online a day. Parental acceptance of the need for online homework had grown to 80 per cent, up from 76 per cent last year.

The Advertiser 21 Jan 2017

The Weekend Australian 14-15 Jan 2017
Tapping technology to keep kids safe

EXCLUSIVE
Cyber security firm
Family Zone is now expanding globally

GLENDA KORPORAL ONLINE

When a young friend of his niece committed suicide after a bullying incident in Perth, the Perth-based founder of Mo’s Mollies, Tim Levy, worried how he would feel if something similar happened to his son.

"I started thinking about my son who was becoming a digital user," he told The Australian.

"It’s my role to protect him and teach him how to think about digital safety." As a result, Levy got together with a friend and fellow telco executive Chris Swan to develop technology that allowed parents to introduce controls on what their kids could access with their phones.

"They had the idea of trying to develop programs that would allow parents to control what their kids could access on the home from computers, laptops, and mobile phones to iPads.

Their cyber security company, Family Zone, launched its first cloud-based products this year and listed on the ASX in August. Family Zone now has 4500 registered devices attached to its filtering platform.

After a $3.8 million deal last month when it bought the IP of cyber security company Cognos and Milnet, developed by Melbourne-based Robert Smyth, it is now expanding its business to schools in Australia and the US.

Levy says the combination allows parents and schools to work together to secure cyber security platform for their kids.

"We were doing cyber security in the home and Rod was doing it in the schools," he says. "By bringing the two businesses together, we have integrated the technology and can now approach the parents via the schools as well.

"Getting into the schools creates a sales channel to the home because the school is effectively endorsing the product.

"Sonar/MyNet has deals with more than 100 schools around Australia and its technology is being used by 47 schools in West Virginia. There are plans for co-founder Paul Robinson to move to West Virginia next year.

The company is expanding its international operations with a new deal with Philippine telco giant PLDT (the former Philippines Long Distance Telephone Company) to sell cyber security programs in the workplace.

Under the deal, PLDT will work with Family Zone’s cyber security software programs to its 75,000 small and medium enterprises and another 80,000 micro-business customers. Locally, Levy says, the plan is to pitch to more schools across Australia, with an initial focus on the 1200 private schools, and ramp up its US business. "Cyber security is something that parents grapple with all the time," Levy says. "It’s not an Australian problem or a US problem, it’s a global problem for all parents."

Levy says the company has a deal with a reseller in West Virginia who sells software to 26 counties in the state, giving it access to "many hundreds of schools."

The combination allows schools and parents to adopt the same standards on what their kids can access on the Internet, and also have access to the latest information about cyber bullying and
Tapping tech to keep kids safe in Family Zone

worrying new apps that allow kids to broadcast their lives to the world. “It’s the Kim Kardashian world of kids who are broadcasting their lives from their bedroom,” he says.

There is also a growing number of deceptive apps being developed that can include, for example, having something that looks like a calculator but, behind it, is a sexting app.

Family Zone is targeting other markets in the US where there is a strong concern about cyber security and children. Levy and Swan recruited San Francisco-based John Sims, a former senior executive with SAP and BlackBerry, to chair the company and help with its global expansion.

Sims says there are different internet filtering products available in the US such as Net Nanny.

But he argues that Family Zone’s products allow for a more comprehensive coverage across a range of devices and from the school to the home.

The product also allows parents to install settings on devices to set limits on availability of access during the day and potentially to take a closer look at what it being transmitted over social media.

“There is no one going after the market with as comprehensive a view as the Family Zone has taken,” he says.

“There are apps in the US and other places which have fragments of solutions. Some work on PCs or Macs and some only work on one kind of mobile device.

“From a parent’s point of view, it is very difficult to pick your way through it all.”

Sims is also instrumental in the next phase of helping the company negotiate deals with telcos that allows Family Zone to white-label its products which the telcos can sell to their customers under their own brand.

The company has just done a deal with a telco in The Philippines and is in negotiations with others in the region, including in Indonesia and Malaysia.

It is also starting to approach others in Australia and the US.

“Our initial focus has been on the Southeast Asian telcos, which we knew had big markets and were quicker at making decisions,” Sims says.

“It has been a phased approach, which made sense given the size of the company.”

Sims says he is not worried at the recent fall in the company’s share price — from a high of 35c in September to this week’s 20c.

He says the company is “exactly where we thought it should be at this stage” and the aim is to focus on all the potential opportunities now available to it.

“We are building the Australian business, building the schools business and building our relationships with international telcos.

“We feel good about what we are doing and the team needs to stay focused on its strategy.”

Not super models

THEY may seem like the perfect role models, fighting the bad guys and protecting the weak.

But it is not the noble deeds of superheroes – such as the Hulk or Superman – that many young children admire, it is their brute force.

Researchers found that youngsters who dress up as their favourite characters tended to be more aggressive but were no more likely to stick up for classmates who were being picked on.

The US scientists believe that kindergarten-age children are unable to pick up on the moral message in superhero programs and could only comprehend the aggressive themes.

The study was published in the Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology.

ABC expands streaming

The ABC’s web and app-based streaming platform iView will now carry live streams of the broadcaster’s linear channel services ABC2, ABC Me and ABC Kids, in addition to the ABC main channel and ABC News 24 services. Streaming linear channels is a growing trend, with the US-based Dish Network launching Sling TV and the US telco AT&T launching DirecTV Now, both of which offer linear channel streaming. Apple is also looking to launch a linear channel streaming service attached to its Apple TV. The ABC’s linear services are available now.
Is son game to beat his addiction

Q: I BELIEVE my son is addicted to video gaming. Where can I turn for specialised treatment?

A: Video gaming is a massive and highly lucrative industry. Developers know how to structure games to maintain engagement, as is the case with poker machines. Frequent but slightly inconsistent rewards and occasional wins keep the players engaged because the longer they play, the more money providers can collect.

Video gaming addiction could be more accurately called video screen addiction, given technology has allowed games to be played on mobile phones, tablets and other electronic devices.

In some cases, whole families including children are engaged in interactive phone-based games such as Mobile Strike or Game of War. These are often free to download but require participants to effectively “pay to win” — they spend real money to be competitive.

They also encourage players to devote large amounts of time to progressing to higher levels by completing set tasks. The latest Pokemon-finding game shows how engaged and receptive many people are to screen-based activity.

So it is not surprising that some individuals become addicted. Unsuspecting parents such as yourself may facilitate it by providing the necessary infrastructure, without which many games cannot be played.

However, by the time parents become concerned or aware of a problem it can be too late to easily resolve it. Also, there are significant social pressures on children and parents to have the latest and best technology to stay connected and keep up with their peers.

Many mental health professionals specialise in dealing with addictive behaviours. The principles for treatment of screen addiction are basically the same.

The issue is often that the individual does not perceive their behaviour as addictive and therefore harmful. Even if they do it may be the social forces to continue the behaviour that defeat the otherwise effective treatment protocols.

Your son can consult a GP with a view to obtaining a referral to a mental health specialist such as a clinical psychologist or make a direct referral to a community based service such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), a free community-based mental health service provided through SA Health’s Women’s and Children’s Health Network. See www.wch.sa.gov.au/camhs for locations and contact details.

Another organisation is headspace (headspace.org.au), an initiative of the National Youth Mental Health Foundation. For referrals call 1800 063 267 9am-5pm Monday to Friday.

US interest in router box offering parental control

EXCLUSIVE

David Swan
Start-ups

Local Sydney tech start-up KoalaSafe has landed its first US retail partnership at CES in Las Vegas, closing a deal it says will get it into 200 stores across America this year.

KoalaSafe sells a $99.99 US router box for parents, offering them a way to get back control of their home network. You plug the box into your home router and it creates a new Wi-Fi network specifically for kids, with parents able to create an internet co-sharing schedule, filter out inappropriate content and see what sites the kids have been to.

Chief executive Steve Pack told The Australian he wants to retain millennials from internet addiction, and realising this retail deal — with an unnamed partner — at the world’s biggest tech show was a big milestone. “This is where the deal gets done. People come here to do business, they come with an open mind and they’re ready to talk,” Mr Pack said. “I was a software engineer always waiting for that killer startup to come along.”

I was watching my nephew clearly obsessed with Minecraft, and my sister said if you could make a box that would turn the internet off at bedtime I would be your first customer.

“Eighteen months later we’re on Amazon.com, Walmart.com, and soon we’ll be on shelves across the US.”

According to Mr Pack, who received venture capital funding from Blackbird Ventures last year and was part of its Startmate accelerator program, parents who give their kids an iPad generally then have no subsequent control over what their children are doing. They’ll get into a game or a YouTube channel and spend hours staring at the screen, and parents often have to physically pull the device away followed by a shouting match, he said. “That isn’t how it should be.”

“It should be the kid instead saying ‘OK, it’s 3 o’clock, it’s time to do other things’.”

“A different story is that once the KoalaSafe product arrived in US stores, Australian retailers would quickly follow suit.”

“Aussie retailers are also more than willing to be the first mover,” he said. “I hate to think that it’s the truth, but Australia still looks to the US for leadership with a lot of these things.” The chief executive said he would encourage other Australian entrepreneurs to “take the plunge”, and said Australia’s were just as good if not better than anyone else in the world.

“There is still a lot of talent back home locked up in a few concentrated industries,” he said. “They just have to get out there.”

David Swan travelled to Las Vegas as a guest of KoalaSafe.
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Young girls’ responses to sexualised images

According to Curtin University researchers, girls as young as six may be recognising the sexualisation depicted in media images with concerning potential future consequences.

In the Curtin study, young Australian girls aged 6-11 were shown pictures of sexualised and non-sexualised girls the same age as them, in an effort to explore how they described and responded to sexualised and non-sexualised depictions of their peers.

By the age of 11, girls appeared to have assimilated distinct stereotypes about sexualised girls. Participants described sexualised girls as trying to look ‘cool’, ‘stylish’, and ‘attractive’ and associated external features such as clothing and make-up with personality traits such as ‘mean’, ‘bossy’, and ‘fake’.

The researchers said that this was concerning because considerable evidence demonstrates the psychological consequences of sexualisation in women and adolescents in the form of body shame, eating disorders, and depression.

By providing an understanding of how young girls respond to sexualisation, this study represented important exploratory work towards helping parents and teachers to deal with the problem. The results suggest that the implementation of media literacy programs in adolescence may be too late and that this issue should be addressed with much younger children.


TV viewing and family meals

A recent study published in the journal Appetite revealed that families eating dinner with the TV on tend to eat less healthy food and to enjoy the meals less than families who leave the TV off. However, children of TV-watching families were not more likely to be overweight or obese than children whose families did not watch TV during meals.

Researchers from the University of Minnesota analysed video recordings of 120 families that included a child aged 6 to 12. The families recorded two of their family meals using an iPad and reported to the research team what they had eaten and how much they had enjoyed it. The study team subsequently assessed the health of the meals themselves, whether a TV was being used and the emotional atmosphere of the meal.


Child targeted ads and breakfast choices

Breakfast cereals are the most highly advertised packaged food on child-targeted television in the US, and most ads are for cereals high in sugar. This study by researchers from New Hampshire examined whether children’s TV exposure to child-targeted, high-sugar breakfast cereal (SBC) ads was associated with their consumption of those SBC brands.

Five hundred and forty eight parents of children between three and five were surveyed about their child’s consumption of SBC brands, whether their child had watched any of 11 children’s channels in the past week and their child’s TV viewing time. Children’s exposure to child-targeted SBC TV ads was calculated by combining TV channel and viewing time with advertising data for SBC ads aired on children’s channels during the same timeframe.

Overall, 40.6% of children were exposed to child-targeted SBC TV ads in the week surveyed and the number of SBC brands children consumed was positively associated with their exposure to these ads. The researchers say that these findings support recommendations to limit the marketing of high-sugar foods to young children.


IARC classification tool approved for use in Australia

The Minister for Communications has approved the International Age Rating Coalition (IARC) tool for ongoing use in Australia following the successful completion of a 12 month pilot. During the trial, the tool was used to classify over 500,000 online, mobile and downloadable games that would not otherwise have been classified.

The Department and Classification Board will continue to monitor the performance and accuracy of the tool.

For more information about how the IARC tool works, see the Classification Board fact sheet