

Do as I say, not as I show: Ads in parenting magazines don't always illustrate safe practices

October 23 2015

Readers with young children frequently turn to parenting magazines for tips on raising healthy kids. While these publications contain helpful articles, a new study found a surprising number of advertisements appearing in the nation's top magazines for parents showed images or products that contradicted health and safety recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Nearly 1 in 6 ads containing at least one offense.

In more than half of these cases (59 percent), the ads promoted messages that could put a child's life at risk, according to findings that will be presented at the 2015 AAP National Conference & Exhibition in Washington, DC. For example, some of the ads displayed images of infants sleeping on their stomachs. This conflicts with the AAP's recommendation that babies be placed on their backs for sleep to decrease the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), which is responsible for more deaths during the first year of life than any other cause in the United States.

The study looked at all advertisements for children's products from the two parenting magazines with highest U.S. circulation between 2009 and 2014. It evaluated how often [ads](#) went against AAP recommendations in a variety of categories.

"We had expected to see a handful of contradictions in the safe sleeping

category, as previous researchers had shown most pictures of sleeping infants in these magazines depicted unsafe positions, but we were surprised at the sheer number and breadth of categories where we found offenses," said lead author Michael B. Pitt, MD, FAAP, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, University of Minnesota Masonic Children's Hospital.

Examples included:

- Inappropriate use of medicines for unsafe age groups or medicines that have not been approved for use in children by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- Promotion of unsafe toys such as infant walkers and backyard trampolines
- Lack of helmets while riding bicycles or not wearing life vests on the water
- Ads with toddlers eating foods that the AAP has age-specific choking recommendations against

Dr. Pitt said the findings were cause for concern because repeated exposure to messages in advertisements is shown to change people's behavior related to health decision-making.

"On an individual per-ad basis, there were relatively few egregious contradictions. But our concern is that repeatedly seeing images in with unsafe practices—especially in a place where new and seasoned parents look for advice—can lead parents to assume these activities endorsed by the experts at the magazines and lead to unsafe practices at the home," he said.

"We suggest the editors consider basic screening of the content in their [advertising](#) to ensure the images and products comply with the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics prior to

publication," Dr. Pitt said. "Many of the offenses were in the imagery used, not the product itself, meaning that the magazines would not likely lose advertisers by implementing certain standards."

More information: Dr. Pitt will present the abstract, "Compliance of Advertisements for Children in Leading Parenting Magazines with American Academy of Pediatrics Recommendations over Five Years," at 10:30 am on Sunday, Oct. 25 in the Washington Marriott Marquis Independence Ballroom Salon E. To view the abstract, aap.confex.com/aap/2015/webpro...nary/Paper28811.html

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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