TV and video games link to emotional and behavioural problems among young boys

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Credit: Paul Brennan/public domain

New research from the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute has found

a link between different types of electronic media and mental health among young children.

Led by Dr Lisa Mundy, the 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). It was published today in *Academic Pediatrics*.

"This is an important age group to study, because it's the age at which children's use of media begins to escalate," Dr Mundy explains.

"It's also an age at which children are highly sensitive, due to the huge biological, psychological and emotional development, which occurs during this phase of life," she adds.

Researchers found that there were specific types of electronic media associated with these 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 in part due to the way boys and girls consume and use media, even from a young age.

"It may be that the electronic media causes emotional and [behavioural problems](#) – or it may be that children with these problems spend more time using electronic media," Dr Mundy explains.

"What's important to note is how the nature of the media affects the experience," she adds. "W e know that at this age, playing video games tends to be a solitary experience, whereas watching TV 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), a unique cohort 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.

"While the amount of 'screen time' in a day is important, our results suggest it's not the only factor at play – the type of media matters too, and future interventions targeting specific media and gender differences in use would be most effective," Dr Mundy says.

More information: Lisa K. Mundy et al. The association between electronic media and emotional and behavioural problems in late childhood, *Academic Pediatrics* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.acap.2016.12.014](#)

Provided by Murdoch Childrens Research Institute

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