

# 'Heavy Use'

## **Bedroom TV makes kids emotionally numb: study**

Sharon Kirkey, National Post, CanWest News Service, October 01, 2007

Putting a television in the bedroom makes children emotionally blunted, a large new study shows. Researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who analyzed data for 2,707 children found 5½ year olds are more likely to have behaviour problems, disturbed sleep and "less emotional reactivity" if they have a television in their bedroom than those with TV-free rooms.

Forty-one per cent of the kindergarteners studied had a bedroom TV. The study is published today in the journal Pediatrics. The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends limiting daily television watching to one hour or less for preschoolers and two hours or less for early school-aged children. Children's TV viewing habits have already been linked with obesity and even higher cholesterol, and more than 1,000 studies have found heavy doses of TV violence increase aggressive behaviour in children, especially boys.

In the new study, researchers analyzed data from a national U.S. study that enrolled families starting in 1996. Children were followed from birth and their parents queried when their children were 2½ and then again at 5½ years of age. When the children were aged 30 to 33 months, 16% of parents said their child was watching two hours or more of television daily. By age 5½, 15% were watching two hours or more daily. Twenty per cent of parents said their children watched two hours or more of TV daily at both 2.5 and 5.5 years of age -- which the researchers dubbed "sustained exposure."

The team didn't see any effects on behaviour or social skills for early TV exposure only. But there were more behaviour problems in the "sustained exposure group." As well, children who were watching heavily at five years old had fewer social skills. "It affected co-operation, it affected self-control," said lead author Kamila Mistry.

Five-year-olds with televisions in their bedrooms had not only more sleep problems, but in a surprising finding the children were also less "emotionally reactive." For example, they weren't as moody or bothered by changes in routine as other children. The team speculates that having a TV in the bedroom dampens "the intensity with which children react to stimulation."

"The one thing that was really stunning is the statistics in this study: one in six kids are viewing more than two hours of TV at 2½ and 5½ years," Ms. Mistry said. "One in five kids viewed more than two hours of TV at both time points. There are a lot of kids that are sustaining this heavy use over time." "But kids who discontinue that heavy use, the impact is very different in terms of behaviour problems later on." "We need to be thinking about what that means and educating parents about the effects of TV." She said children who started out early watching a lot of TV but who then later cut down were not at risk of behaviour problems when they were older.