

TV Exposure May Be Associated With Aggressive Behavior in Young Children

November 2 2009, by Keith Brannon

(PhysOrg.com) -- Three-year-old children who are exposed to more TV appear to be at an increased risk for exhibiting aggressive behavior, according to a new report co-authored by a researcher from Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

The report, which appears in the November issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, analyzed survey data from 3,128 mothers of children born from 1998 to 2000 in 20 large cities in the United States to examine associations of child television exposure and household television use with aggressive behavior in children.

“The study shows that there is an association between the number of hours that the television is on at home and early childhood aggression,” says co-author Catherine A. Taylor, assistant professor of Community Health Sciences at Tulane, who conducted the study with lead author Jennifer A. Manganello of University at Albany, State University of New York. “We also found that the number of hours a child directly spends watching TV is associated with increased aggression.”

The research is one of the few to look at television and aggression in very young children. The authors suggested that increased television use in the household could displace more positive childhood development activities and interactions with parents. Also, “it is possible that TV exposure may act directly to increase aggression by providing models for [aggressive behavior](#) or normalizing the behavior,” the authors state.

“Early childhood aggression can be problematic for parents, teachers and childhood peers and sometimes is predictive of more serious behavior problems to come, such as juvenile delinquency, adulthood violence and criminal behavior,” according to background information in the article. Various predictive factors for childhood aggression have been studied. These include parents’ discipline style, neighborhood safety and media exposure. “After music, television is the medium children aged 0 to 3 years are exposed to the most.” Although the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen media for children younger than age 2, studies consistently have found use of television in that age group.

According to study authors, “About two-thirds (65 percent) of mothers reported that their (3-year-old child) watched more than two hours of television per day.” On average, there were an additional 5.2 hours of household TV use per day.

Direct child TV exposure and household TV use were both significantly associated with childhood aggression, after accounting for other factors such as parent, family, neighborhood and demographic characteristics. “One explanation that could link both child and household TV measures with aggression involves the parenting environment,” the authors write. Households with higher rates of TV use may have fewer restrictions on children’s viewing habits such as exposure to unregulated television content. Increased household [television](#) use may also affect daily routines such as eating and communication patterns and may decrease time spent on other activities.

“Current American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations mainly suggest limitations for direct child exposure to TV and other media; however, our findings suggest that additional household TV use may also be an important predictor of negative childhood outcomes, such as early childhood aggression,” the authors conclude. “Future research in this area should consider inclusion of both of these TV variables along with

additional parent-child interaction assessments, observational assessments when possible, quality and/or content of TV programs and longitudinal analyses.”

Provided by Tulane University

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