

Children of Spanish-speaking moms watch less TV

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Young children of Hispanic mothers whose dominant language is Spanish spend less time in front of the TV than children whose mothers speak mostly English, according to research led by investigators at Johns Hopkins Children's Center and published in the February issue of *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine*.

Although the study was not designed to answer why the children of Spanish-speaking mothers watch less TV, the researchers believe it might be a reflection of a cultural perception of the value of television. Another explanation might be lack of programming targeted at young children and toddlers on the main Spanish-language channels Telemundo and Univision and minimal Spanish-language content on U.S. channels.

Past studies have compared the TV-viewing habits of white and Hispanic youth, but this research is believed to be the first analysis of variations within Hispanic households and one that points to subtle but important differences in this population, the investigators say.

"Our findings show that what language mom speaks is a greater predictor than ethnicity alone of how much time a young child spends in front of the TV, a nuance that [public health](#) experts should recognize if they are to succeed in reducing TV time among these children," says lead investigator Darcy Thompson, M.D. M.P.H., a pediatrician at the Johns Hopkins Children's Center..

Better understanding of the cultural, language and socioeconomic

variations within the Hispanic community can help public health experts design more targeted public health campaigns, Thompson says.

Reducing TV time became a public health priority when recent studies found that the more time a child spends watching TV, the more likely she is to develop sleep disturbances, attention problems and obesity.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than one to two hours a day of cumulative exposure from TV and other media, including movies, Internet, video and computer games. Hispanic children, who make up one-fifth of all children in the United States, have the highest obesity and overweight rates among preschoolers of all ethnic groups.

Surveying 1,332 Hispanic and white mothers and their children, ages 4 months to 3 years, the researchers found that on average, children of English-speaking Hispanic moms spent nearly two-and-a-half hours watching TV, compared to about 90 minutes for children with Spanish-speaking mothers. The difference was especially pronounced in children older than 1, with those in English-speaking Hispanic homes spending nearly 60 percent more time watching. The difference disappeared when researchers compared TV viewing hours among those younger than 1.

When researchers combined children of Hispanic mothers with either language preference and compared them to the children of white mothers, they found that both groups spent on average about two hours watching TV. But differences started to emerge when the researchers compared these groups separately. One-to-two-year-olds with English-speaking Hispanic mothers spent nearly 60 percent more time watching TV than the children of white mothers. By ages 2 and 3, children of white mothers appeared to catch up to children of English-speaking Hispanic mothers, while [children](#) of Spanish-speaking mothers spent 30 percent less time [watching TV](#).

Provided by Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions

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