

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Media Use and Depression: Exposure, Household Rules, and Symptoms among Young Adolescents in the USA

Bickham, D. S., Hswen, Y., & Rich, M. (2015). Media use and depression: Exposure, household rules, and symptoms among young adolescents in the USA. *International Journal of Public Health*, 60(2), 147-155. doi:10.1007/s00038-014-0647-6

SUMMARY: Adolescents currently use electronic media an average of approximately eight hours each day, and some research suggests heavy media use may be linked to depression. This study examined the effects of media use, parent media use rules, and depression levels among youth at baseline and a one-year follow-up. Findings suggest greater media use, particularly television and mobile phone use, may put youth at increased risk for depression.

KEY FINDINGS:

- High baseline mobile phone use was significantly associated with increased baseline depression; there were no other significant associations between baseline media use and depression.
- More television and mobile phone use, but not video game, music, or computer use, at baseline was related to higher levels of depression among youth at the one-year follow-up.
- Youth whose parents had rules about television use, but not video game use, had lower levels of depression at the one-year follow-up.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with military parenting programs to educate parents on the potentially harmful effects of high electronic media use in youth, particularly for television and mobile phones
- Facilitate after-school groups for military youth emphasizing activities without electronic media

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer education for military parents on youth access to electronic media and setting media use rules
- Provide after-school programs for military youth to promote social support and physical activity

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote additional research on media use and depression levels, specifically in military youth
- Encourage education for professionals who work in military youth programs around alternative activities to media use

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METHODS

- Young adolescents, ages 12-15 years old, were recruited from public schools, after-school programs, and summer camps in a small city near Boston.
- At baseline, youth completed mental health, parent monitoring, and media use surveys; media use was also assessed via time use journal logs and random, real-time electronic questionnaires.
- Associations between baseline media use, parent media use rules, and one-year follow-up depression levels were examined, controlling for race, sex, parent education, overall parental monitoring, and baseline depression levels.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 126 seventh through ninth grade youth, with an average age of 14.04 years. Youth were 53% male and 55% White.
- Sample size for each analysis depended upon the completion rate of each measure, with all measures being completed by between 92 and 125 of the 126 participating youth.

LIMITATIONS

- Since only parent media use rules regarding television and video games, not mobile phones, music, or computers, were collected, no conclusions can be drawn about whether or not parent media use rules for these devices would be beneficial.
- Entering media use into journal logs may have caused youth to think about and change usage.
- Media use was not collected at the one-year follow-up, so results could not take into account the effects of current media use at follow-up.
- Other factors (e.g., parent depression, child activity level) could have impacted the results and were not considered in the analyses.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Consider the effect of cyberbullying on youth media use and depression levels
- Examine which types of television content, such as violence or comedy, impact youth depression levels
- Compare the effects of media use among youth when used alone or with others present

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