

Study assesses TV viewing and verbal interactions among low-income parents and infants

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Mothers in low-income families seldom speak to their infants while the children are watching television or videos, which most do on a daily basis, according to a report in the May issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

“There has been a dramatic increase in television programming directed toward young infants,” the authors write as background information in the article. “This has occurred despite recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics that children younger than 2 years should not watch any television. Much of this programming is marketed toward parents as ‘educational,’ despite limited data to support this assertion.”

Alan L. Mendelsohn, M.D., of the New York University School of Medicine, and colleagues assessed 154 mothers and children of low socioeconomic status between 2005 and 2006, when the infants were an average of 6.6 months old. Mothers reported how much television their infants watched, along with the type of programming, whether they were watching with the child and whether they talked to the child during the viewing.

Over one 24-hour period, 149 of the 154 mothers (96.8 percent) reported that their infants watched television or videos, for a total of 426 exposures. These included 139 exposures (32.6 percent) to educational

programs oriented to young children, 46 (10.8 percent) to non-educational programs oriented to young children, 205 (48.1 percent) to programs aimed at school-aged children, teenagers or adults and 36 (8.5 percent) to unknown programs. Mothers reported verbally interacting with their infants during 101 (23.7 percent) of 426 separate exposures to programs.

“Consistent with our first hypothesis, interactions were most commonly reported in association with educational content, especially among programs that had been co-viewed,” the authors write. “However, approximately half of the exposures consisted of programs not intended for young children; these were not associated with frequent interactions even when they were co-viewed.”

“Our findings are important because parent-infant interactions are associated with long-term developmental-behavioral outcomes,” they conclude. “Verbal responsiveness is frequently seen in association with reading and playing with toys. Given the large amount of media exposure and low frequency of reported interactions, additional study is needed to determine whether media exposure can facilitate interactions of sufficient quantity and quality to be associated with benefits for young children.”

Source: JAMA and Archives Journals

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