Reviewer’s report

Title: Use of television, videogames, and computer among children and adolescents in Italy

Version: 2 Date: 5 December 2008

Reviewer: Moniek van Zutphen

Reviewer’s report:

General comment

The most interesting part of this paper, is in my opinion, analysing the determinants of media time. At this moment, this view is best described in the discussion section. It would be better to make this more specific in the objective and to redo the analysis according to this objective. When this is done most conclusions will probably hold and the paper could be interesting.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Background

1. The objective is not well defined. ‘Consequently, the purpose of this study was to evaluate common practices about TV/video, videogames, and computer among a large sample of children and adolescents in Italy and their relationship with different variables.’ Define what associations will be investigated.

Methods

2. The study population is from five schools in one region in Italy. In the paper the study is presented as representative for the whole of Italy. Please change this or give sound arguments why it can be considered representative. The representative problem is probably a bigger issue for the estimates of media time than for the associations being studied.

3. The description of the content of the questionnaire is not totally clear for me. A lot of questions are described in this section of the methods, but further on new variables appear. Are these composed variables or question included in the questionnaire? Please describe this more clearly. (This might be done by referencing to the table(s), but is not necessary.)

The eating questions have five answer possibilities. Please describe how answers are categorized for the analyses. Are often and always combined vs the other three answer possibilities? In the text always is used, while in the table routinely is used.

Statistics

4. The models are build with a stepwise procedure. This is a statistical way of model building, while an epidemiological way is preferred. In that case the
researchers decide (based on the research question, their knowledge/literature) which variables should be included in the model.

The stepwise procedure is in agreement with the non-specific objective of this study. By defining specific objectives, the models could be build more specific. Now it is also unclear which variables were used for the full model.

The description of variables in all different models is difficult to comprehend, because there is no rationale why these variables are included. This will be the case when you build the models yourself.

5. Parent’s working activity should be coded into two dummy variables instead of one variables with three categories.

Can the number of siblings be coded as continues variable? If not, this coding is probably reasonable because more then three siblings is not very common (although this can’t be seen in the table).

Results

6. Throughout the text always (ate lunch or dinner or watched TV in bedroom) is used. Is this really always? See also point 3.

7. In model 3-5 parent’s working activity is included in different ways. In all three models two dummy variables should be included. See also point 5.

8. The outcome of model 3 and 4 is essentially the same. Consider of both should be presented. Usually coefficients are more informative than OR. When there are arguments to include both models, they should include the same set of variables.

9. Model 1 and 2 are probably only useful when those outcomes influence media time.

10. On page 7 is stated ‘those from lower socio-economic level were significantly more likely to spend more minutes per day on TV viewing (Model 4).’ This is not in agreement with table 3, which shows for unemployed -27. Lower managerial is not included in the model, according to the table. This result is also stated in the discussion.

Discussion

11. The mean TV time is compared with the literature and the authors state this should be done with caution. However, the result that 75% watched more than 2 hours is also compared with the literature. This are essentially the same results and could be combined, so that this part is a smaller portion of the discussion.

12. Page 10. ‘presence of a TV in the bedroom, although no evidence was found to link this variable to the daily amount of time viewing TV.’ TV in the bedroom is not included in model 3/4. If you want to investigate this association, the variable should be included in the model. See also point 4.

13. Page 10. ‘but also in this case there was no significant relationship between
amount of TV viewing and parental control.’ Parental control is not included in model 3/4. See also point 12.

Conclusion

14. ‘important implications for designing effective school policy and preventive strategies from an integrated public health perspective.’ This is not in relation to the study, because none of the studied variables to influence media time could be changed by school policy or (in a lesser degree) public health prevention. This is also a problem in the abstract.

Minor essential revisions

15. Language throughout text use sports inactivity etc, playing videogames, computer use.

16. Page 3. ‘Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the messages conveyed by TV, videogames, and computers, which may influence their perceptions and behaviors. Indeed, a negative relationship exists between the amount of exposure and children and adolescents health status’. Which messages? Exposure to what?

17. Page 3. ‘recommended that the proportion of students in grades 9 through 12 who view TV for two or fewer hours should be 75%’. It might be better to reword this into the proportion who views TV for two or more hours should be less than 25%.

18. Page 3. ‘Thus, it would be useful to obtain such data particularly in the industrialized countries that have experienced a marked increase in the availability of these recreational instruments at homes.’ Such data is obtained in other countries. This is not the right place for such a sentence, if it should be included at all.

Methods

19. In the questionnaire are the questions about last week/month or normally? Please specify a time period.

20. ‘Each datum was measured on a five-point Likert scale and the possible responses were “never”, “rarely”, “sometimes”, “often”, and “always”.’ Please use question in stead of datum. Is this really a Likert scale or 5 answer categories?

21. ‘Health care professionals measured in the classroom height and weight with digital scales (weight to the nearest 0.1 kg) and a portable stadiometer (height to the nearest 0.1 cm) while they were not wearing shoes.’ Use the children instead of they.

22. Please clarify the difference between videogame and computer use. Is the computer also used for Internet/homework or is only leisure media time taken into account?'
Results

23. ‘Overall, 54.1% and 61% respectively always ate lunch or dinner in front of the TV’. Does this correspond with the 58% expressed in table 2?

Discussion

24. ‘In previously cross-sectional studies, lower prevalence were observed, because a TV in the bedroom was present in the 49.8% and 55.2% of children aged 11 and 12 years in the United States and 23.5% and 35% in the previously mentioned Belgium study’. Because shouldn’t be used in this sentence.

25. A potential limitation could be the difficulty to estimate the mean (media time).

26. ‘However, it has been proved that a selfadministered questionnaire is as valid for group comparisons regarding watching TV/video, playing videogames, or using computer.’ A reference is needed.

Table 1

27. Include age range when other ranges are included.

28. Please change the title. For example in Characteristics of study population (n=).

29. Could you include more than 3 siblings in table? Because this is used as variable in the analysis.

Table 2

30. Only showing results for ‘yes’ would make the table shorter and better to read.

31. What is meant by ‘videogames playing by oneself’?

Table 3

32. This table will change when the analyses are improved.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests