



Parents actively supervise their children's use of electronic entertainment, a study conducted by the ABA and the Office of Film and Literature Classification shows.

Families and electronic entertainment

Most parents and guardians actively supervise their children's use of television, video and computer/video games according to the results of a major national research study by the ABA and the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC).

The study, *Families and Electronic Entertainment*, also found most parents believe their children achieve a reasonable balance between electronic entertainment and other activities. The study looked at how children and teenagers spend their leisure time, parental concerns about electronic entertainment, and what household rules and routines apply to television, video and computer/video games. It was

launched on 27 June by the Federal Attorney-General, Daryl Williams QC, at Parliament House, Canberra.

The study found parents are concerned about the use of electronic entertainment by their children, but are more concerned about their children's well-being with respect to education, personal safety and security and quality of life than they are about electronic entertainment.

Parents concerns focused on television first, followed by videos and computer/video games. The high level of rule making for television relates to the high use by children and teenagers, with one-third of their leisure time being spent watching television.

The content of television pro-

grams was of more concern to parents than the content of computer/video games. One reason for this is the greater realism of programs on television. Younger children were subject to more rules and supervision than those who were older. Girls and boys were subject to the same level of supervision.

Parental knowledge and comfort with computers was not related to the existence of rules and routines about computer/video games. In fact, mothers and female guardians, who were generally less computer literate than the males in the study, were the main household rule makers. Mothers were also identified as the major rule makers in research conducted by the ABA in 1993 ('Cool' or 'gross': *Children's attitudes to violence, kissing and swearing on television*, available from the ABA and Commonwealth Government bookstores, \$10).

discussions were held in Sydney, Brisbane and Tamworth.

The quantitative research stage consisted of an Australia-wide survey in which one parent and one child or teenager aged 8 to 17 years from each household was personally interviewed. The survey was conducted with 743 parents and 743 children and teenagers. The sample was randomly selected and representative of Australian households with 8 to 17 year olds. The survey was conducted in June and July 1995 during the school term.

The survey instruments included a questionnaire for parents, a questionnaire for children and teenagers, and a time-use diary completed by 500 children and teenagers over three days.

Keys Young Pty Limited was commissioned to conduct this research.

Major research results

Research method

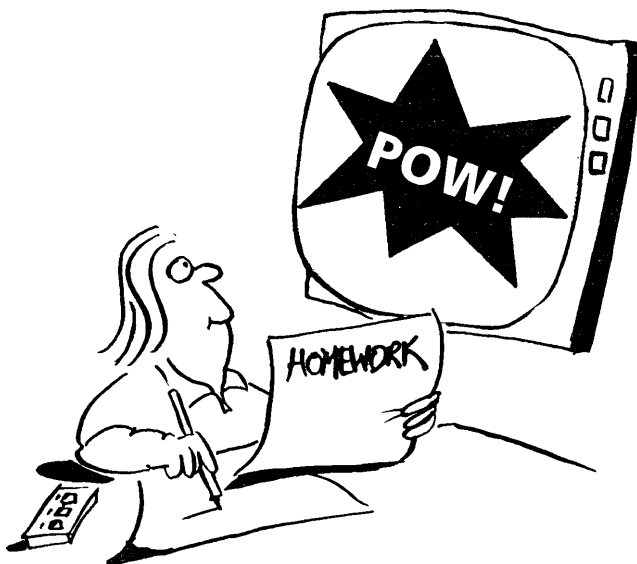
The *Families and Electronic Entertainment* study was a two stage project consisting of qualitative and quantitative research into attitudes and behaviours of children, teenagers and parents.

The qualitative research stage consisted of ten focus group discussions. The groups comprised approximately eighty parents, children and teenagers. The

Parental concerns

When asked to indicate their top concern in relation to their child's well-being, the most common response by parents was education (35 per cent), then personal safety and security (25 per cent) and quality of life (13 per cent). Electronic entertainment was of concern for 6 per cent of parents.

A majority of parents was not concerned about the amount





of time their children spent watching television and videos or playing computer/video games. Of those parents who were concerned, most were concerned about television (32 per cent), followed by computer/video games (15 per cent) and video (9 per cent).

Most parents (75 per cent) held the view that their child had achieved a reasonable balance between electronic entertainment and other activities.

Household ownership of electronic entertainment equipment

Households with children and teenagers were more likely to have higher ownership of a range of electronic entertainment equipment. The majority of households had a television (100 per cent), a radio, cassette or CD player (96 per cent), a video player (93 per cent), a personal computer (59 per cent) and a TV-linked games machine (58 per cent). Modem ownership in households with children and teenagers was 7 per cent.

Seventy-five per cent of children and teenagers had a radio, cassette or CD player in their bedroom, and 25 per cent had a television. More boys had televisions, TV-linked games machines and hand-held video games in their rooms than girls. The proportion of children and teenagers with electronic entertainment equipment in their bedrooms increased with their age.

Leisure time

Time was spread over a range of different leisure activities with television taking up the most with 33 per cent of leisure time.

Non-electronic entertainment activities came next, they included going to places (11 per cent of leisure time), homework (11 per cent), general play (10 per cent) and playing sports

(8 per cent). Other forms of electronic entertainment included listening to music on radio, CD or cassette (7 per cent) and playing computer/video games (5 per cent).

Boys spent significantly more time watching television, playing sports and playing video games than girls. Girls spent more time reading, listening to music and writing letters.

Family rules about electronic entertainment use

Eighty-two per cent of parents had rules about when television could be watched by children and teenagers, and 79 per cent had rules about what could be watched. Seventy-five per cent of parents had rules about when computer/video games could be played, and 56 per cent had rules about what games could be played.

The most frequently mentioned time-based rules for television viewing and computer/video game playing were having to complete homework first and not being allowed to watch or play after a certain time or bedtime. The principal reasons for having these rules were to encourage time for other activities.

The most frequently mentioned rules about content were not being allowed to watch or play anything with too much violence, fighting and sexual content. The principal reasons for having these rules were perceptions that programs and games could have a bad effect on the child and that bad habits, language and ideas could be picked up. Younger children and teenagers had more restrictions and were subject to greater supervision.

Family routines around electronic entertainment use

Routines refer to general monitoring actions undertaken by parents. They include keeping an eye on what children and

teenagers are watching and playing, filtering the selection of computer/video games and talking about the content of television programs. Many routines are unspoken and informal.

Most parents said they engaged in routines around electronic entertainment at least 'some of the time'.

There was a high level of agreement between parents and children about the rules and routines applying to the use of electronic entertainment. In households where perceptions about rules did not match, there was a tendency for children and teenagers to report fewer rules than parents. The study supported an explanation that children and teenagers were not fully aware of all the monitoring actions of parents.

Factors impacting on rules and routines

The classification systems were valued and used by many parents to select age-appropriate television programs, videos and computer/video games for children and teenagers.

Fifty-seven per cent of parents said television programs were selected together with the child, while 39 per cent selected computer/video games together.

Computer and video games

Approximately the same proportion of children and teenagers used computers for the purpose of playing games (68 per cent) and typing (67 per cent). Girls used them more for typing and boys used them more for playing games.

The highest proportion of children and teenagers who played computer/video games said they were 'sort of into' computer/video games (54 per cent). The remainder were equally divided between being 'really into' (24 per cent) and 'not really into' (22 per

cent) computer/video games.

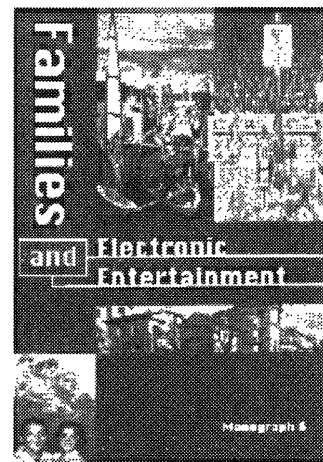
Platform games were the most popular (34 per cent). This genre was followed by combat games (10 per cent), strategy games (10 per cent), simulation games (9 per cent) and educational games (9 per cent).

The majority of children and teenagers found out about new games through friends (58 per cent). Younger children were more likely to indicate their family as their source of information.

Many of the popular games had a G classification. Reasons for liking computer/video games included being fun, challenging, competition and having good graphics.

Conclusion

In an environment of co-regulation of electronic entertainment by government, industry and parents, it could be argued that the role of government in this area has been achieved at an appropriate level. However, it is in the area of newer technologies where government may have a valuable role to play, such as the provision of education materials and information to assist parents.



Copies of *Families and Electronic Entertainment* are available from the ABA, price \$20. Phone (02) 334 7700.