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MEDIA RELEASE

Subject

New research: children at increased risk of mental health problems with long hours of video games: author to speak at Australian Children and Media Conference in March 2011

Associate Professor Douglas Gentile has found that up to 9% of children are playing video games for such extended periods that they are considered to be 'pathological' gamers. Results demonstrated that these children suffered higher rates of depression, anxiety, social phobias and received lower grades at school.

In a recent study, conducted in Singapore, a total of 3034 students in grade 3, 4, 7 and 8 participated over a two year period. The study considered children 'pathological' if they played video games for more than 31 hours a week, but interestingly "When they dropped below the pathological line (for gaming addiction) their depression decreased, their anxiety decreased and their social phobia decreased," said Dr Douglas Gentile, the leading author.

Dr Douglas Gentile, a psychologist at Iowa State University, and a leading expert on the effects of mass media on children will present at an important conference to be held in Sydney on March 1, 2011 called **Scared, sleepless and hostile: Children, violent/frightening media and public policy**.

Dr Gentile conducts scientific research on the positive and negative effects of media on children and adults, including such topics as media violence, video games, advertising, media ratings, and video game 'addiction'. By studying the effects of media scientifically, he provides parents, educators, and policy makers with data that can help improve children's outcomes.

At the upcoming conference Dr Gentile will present on **Researching the ratings: parents' views, issues, and the evidence base for greater effectiveness**, with reference on how best to classify video games. There are many problems with the media ratings systems as they currently exist. The systems lack reliability and validity, and equally importantly, do not provide the information that parents say they want. Perhaps more importantly, not all depictions of violence or sexuality are potentially harmful, but most rating systems do not differentiate between different types of depictions. Recognizing the problems with the existing systems allows us to design the next generation of rating systems.

This conference is timely as the Federal Government has announced an inquiry into regulation of the convergent media environment and a major review of the classification system for films and video games has been referred to the ALRC. The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee have announced its review into many aspects of Australia's classification system (closing date March 4).

Overall the conference will focus on violent and frightening media, impacts on children's sleep and anxiety levels, and policy responses including evidence-based classification systems. Other speakers include Prof John P Murray and Prof Ed Donnerstein from the US, and Australians Dr Wayne Warburton, Dr Sarah Blunden, Richard Eckersley, and Prof Elizabeth Handsley. The conference is jointly organised by The Australian Council on Children and the Media and the Children and Families Research Centre at Macquarie University.

For more information on the conference and speakers please visit www.childrenandmedia.org.au or contact the Australian Council on Children and the Media on 08 8376 2111, or Prof Elizabeth Handsley 0448 898 185 and/ or Dr Douglas Gentile email: dgentile@iastate.edu or 0011 1 515-294-8986 or and/or Dr Wayne Warburton on 02 9850 8643 or 02 9850 7257