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Video Games Cut Into Teens' Reading, Studying

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Teens who play video games on school days read and study less than their non-gaming peers, a new study finds.

Teen video gamers spent 30 percent less time reading and 40 percent less time doing homework, according to the study, which is published in the July issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

And another study found that most 7th- and 8th-graders regularly play violent video games, often as a way to release anger.

The findings come on the heels of an American Medical Association decision last week that more research is needed into the impact of video games on adolescents' social and mental development. The group also called for parents to monitor their children's video gaming habits.

In the first study, researchers at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and the University of Texas at Austin collected diaries of weekend and weekday activities from almost 1,500 10- to 19-year-olds during the 2002-2003 school year. Just over one-third of the teens reported playing video games.

Four out of five of the gamers were boys. Gamers reported spending an average of 58 minutes playing video games on weekdays and one hour and 37 minutes playing video games on weekends. Girls reported playing for an average of 44 minutes on weekdays and one hour and four minutes on weekends.

Boys who played video games were less likely to spend time reading than their peers, while gaming girls spent less time on homework.

Despite the impact on reading and homework time, the data did not show that teens who played video games spent less time overall than their peers in activities with friends and family. Girls who played video games with their parents actually spent more time with them in other activities, the study found. Both boys and girls who played video games with their friends were also likely to spend time with friends engaged in other activities. But the findings were different when it came to teens who tended to play video games on their own. The researchers found that teens who played video games alone were less likely to spend time in other activities with friends. Boys who spent time playing video games alone on weekends were also less likely to spend time doing other things with their parents, the group found.

The researchers believe that further study is needed to understand the ways in which video games affect teens and their social development.

A second study, this time by a team at the Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, sampled 1,254 U.S. children ages 12 to 14.

Reporting in the July issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, they discovered that a third of boys and about one in 10 girls played video games daily. Two-thirds of boys and about one in four girls said they had played a violent or Mature-rated video game "a lot in

the past six months," the study found. *Grand Theft Auto* -- a Mature-rated game which is filled with scenes of gore, sexual content and drug use -- was the most popular game series among boys.

According to the researchers, many of these young gamers said they played video games to relieve feelings of anger or stress.

It doesn't necessarily follow that playing video games increases violent behavior, said lead researcher Cheryl Olson.

"Violent play is so common, and youth crime has actually declined, so most kids who play these games are probably doing fine," she said in a prepared statement. "We hope that this study is a first step toward reframing the debate from 'violent video games are terrible and destroying society' to 'what types of game content might be harmful to what types of kids, in what situations'?"

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