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TODDLERS AND TV: EARLY EXPOSURE HAS NEGATIVE AND LONG-TERM IMPACT

WANT KIDS WHO ARE SMARTER AND THINNER? KEEP THEM AWAY FROM THE TELEVISION SET AS TODDLERS. A SHOCKING STUDY FROM CHILD EXPERTS AT THE UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL, THE SAINTE-JUSTINE UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL RESEARCH CENTER AND THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, PUBLISHED IN THE ARCHIVES OF PEDIATRICS & ADOLESCENT MEDICINE, HAS FOUND THAT TELEVISION EXPOSURE AT AGE TWO FORECASTS NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR KIDS, RANGING FROM POOR SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT TO UNHEALTHY HABITS.

"WE FOUND EVERY ADDITIONAL HOUR OF TV EXPOSURE AMONG TODDLERS CORRESPONDED TO A FUTURE DECREASE IN CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT AND SUCCESS AT MATH, INCREASED VICTIMIZATION BY CLASSMATES, A MORE SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE, HIGHER CONSUMPTION OF JUNK FOOD AND, ULTIMATELY, HIGHER BODY MASS INDEX."

THE GOAL OF THE STUDY WAS TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT OF TV EXPOSURE AT AGE 2 ON FUTURE ACADEMIC SUCCESS, LIFESTYLE CHOICES AND GENERAL WELL BEING AMONG CHILDREN. BETWEEN THE AGES OF TWO AND FOUR, EVEN INCREMENTAL EXPOSURE TO TELEVISION DELAYED DEVELOPMENT.

A TOTAL OF 1,314 KIDS TOOK PART IN THE INVESTIGATION, WHICH WAS PART OF THE QUEBEC LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT MAIN EXPOSURE. PARENTS WERE ASKED TO REPORT HOW MUCH TV THEIR KIDS WATCHED AT 29 MONTHS AND AT 53 MONTHS IN AGE. TEACHERS WERE ASKED TO EVALUATE ACADEMIC, PSYCHOSOCIAL AND HEALTH HABITS, WHILE BODY MASS INDEX (BMI) WAS MEASURED AT 10 YEARS OLD.

"EARLY CHILDHOOD IS A CRITICAL PERIOD FOR BRAIN DEVELOPMENT AND FORMATION OF BEHAVIOUR," WARNS DR. PAGANI. "HIGH LEVELS OF TV CONSUMPTION DURING THIS PERIOD CAN LEAD TO FUTURE UNHEALTHY HABITS. DESPITE CLEAR RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS SUGGESTING LESS THAN TWO HOURS OF TV PER DAY -- BEYOND THE AGE OF TWO -- PARENTS SHOW POOR FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS OF SUCH EXISTING GUIDELINES."

ACCORDING TO THE INVESTIGATION, WATCHING TOO MUCH TV AS TODDLERS LATER FORECASTED:

•A 7 PERCENT DECREASE IN CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT;

•A 6 PERCENT DECREASE IN MATH ACHIEVEMENT (WITH NO HARMFUL EFFECTS ON LATER READING);

•A 10 PERCENT INCREASE IN VICTIMIZATION BY CLASSMATES (PEER REJECTION, BEING TEASED, ASSAULTED OR INSULTED BY OTHER STUDENTS);

•A 13 PERCENT DECREASE IN WEEKEND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY;

•A 9 PERCENT DECREASE IN GENERAL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY;

•A 10 PERCENT PEAK IN SNACKS INTAKE;

•A 5 PERCENT INCREASE IN BMI.

"ALTHOUGH WE EXPECTED THE IMPACT OF EARLY TV VIEWING TO DISAPPEAR AFTER SEVEN AND A HALF YEARS OF CHILDHOOD, THE FACT THAT NEGATIVE OUTCOMES REMAINED IS QUITE DAUNTING," SAYS DR. PAGANI. "OUR FINDINGS MAKE A COMPELLING PUBLIC HEALTH ARGUMENT AGAINST EXCESSIVE TV VIEWING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND FOR PARENTS TO HEED GUIDELINES ON TV EXPOSURE FROM THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS."

SINCE TV EXPOSURE ENCOURAGES A SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE, DR. PAGANI SAYS, TELEVISION VIEWING MUST BE CURBED FOR TODDLERS TO AVOID THE MAINTENANCE OF PASSIVE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HABITS IN LATER CHILDHOOD: "COMMON SENSE WOULD HAVE IT THAT TV EXPOSURE REPLACES TIME THAT COULD BE SPENT ENGAGING IN OTHER DEVELOPMENTALLY ENRICHING ACTIVITIES AND TASKS WHICH FOSTER COGNITIVE, BEHAVIORAL, AND MOTOR DEVELOPMENT."

"WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT THIS STUDY IS HOW IT CONFIRMS SUSPICIONS THAT HAVE BEEN OUT THERE AND SHOWN BY SMALLER PROJECTS ON ONE OUTCOME OR ANOTHER. THIS STUDY TAKES A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH AND CONSIDERS MANY PARENTAL, PEDIATRIC AND SOCIETAL FACTORS SIMULTANEOUSLY," SHE ADDS.

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

SCIENTISTS CREATING STAR TO SOLVE ENERGY WOES

GIANT LASER WILL ZAP MINI-SUN INTO EXISTENCE

SCIENTISTS ARE PLANNING TO USE THE WORLD'S LARGEST LASER TO ZAP A TINY STAR INTO EXISTENCE ON EARTH. THE PROJECT AT CALIFORNIA'S LAWRENCE LIVERMORE NATIONAL LABORATORY AIMS TO CREATE NUCLEAR FUSION BY FIRING THE GIANT LASER AT HYDROGEN ISOTOPES. THIS WOULD, THEORETICALLY, CAUSE A MINIATURE SUN CAPABLE OF FILLING ALL THE WORLD'S ENERGY NEEDS TO BLINK INTO EXISTENCE FOR AN INSTANT.

THE STAR WOULD BE MICROSCOPICALLY SMALL AND ONLY EXIST FOR 200 TRILLIONTHS OF A SECOND. THE CONTROLLED FUSION EXPERIMENT POSES NO DANGER WHATSOEVER TO THE PUBLIC. IF THE EXPERIMENT, SET TO GO AHEAD THIS SUMMER, IS A SUCCESS, SCIENTISTS SAY THAT NUCLEAR FUSION PLANTS EXTRACTING VAST AMOUNTS OF ENERGY FROM SEAWATER COULD BE JUST 20 YEARS AWAY.

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ABROAD

TV MYSTIC LINGERS IN SAUDI JAIL

CAIRO — THE SORCERER STILL HAS HIS HEAD

FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS, ALI HUSSAIN SIBAT OF LEBANON HAS BEEN HELD IN A PRISON IN SAUDI ARABIA, CONVICTED OF SORCERY AND SENTENCED TO DEATH. HIS HEAD IS TO BE CHOPPED OFF BY AN EXECUTIONER WIELDING A LONG, CURVED SWORD.

HIS CRIME: MANIPULATING SPIRITS, PREDICTING THE FUTURE, CONCOCTING POTIONS AND CONJURING SPELLS ON A CALL-IN TELEVISION SHOW CALLED “THE HIDDEN” ON A LEBANESE CHANNEL, SCHEHERAZADE. IT WAS, IN EFFECT, A MIDDLE EASTERN PSYCHIC HOT LINE.

“SORCERY IS THE ABILITY TO INFLUENCE MATTERS THAT AFFECT PEOPLE’S LIVES THROUGH THE USE OF SPIRITS,” SAID ABDULAZIZ ALGASIM, A RETIRED SAUDI JUDGE. “IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PROVE SUCH AN ACT EXCEPT THROUGH CONFESSION, AND CONFESSIONS ARE SUSPECT.”

THE AUTHORITIES SAY THAT MR. SIBAT CONFESSED.

SEVERAL TIMES IN RECENT MONTHS, MR. SIBAT’S LAWYER, HIS WIFE AND HIS FOUR CHILDREN WERE TOLD HE WOULD, ANY DAY, BE ESCORTED TO A PUBLIC SQUARE FOR HIS BEHEADING. AND SEVERAL TIMES, THE EXECUTION WAS POSTPONED AFTER AN OUTCRY FROM INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS AND THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT.

MR. SIBAT’S ODYSSEY THROUGH THE SAUDI JUSTICE SYSTEM BEGAN IN 2008, WHEN HE TRAVELED TO THE KINGDOM TO PERFORM WHAT IS CALLED AN UMRA, OR A MINOR PILGRIMAGE, IN THE HOLY CITY OF MECCA. HE WAS ARRESTED IN A STING OPERATION STAGED BY THE RELIGIOUS POLICE, MEN WITH LONG BEARDS AND ANKLE-LENGTH GOWNS WHO TECHNICALLY HAVE NO AUTHORITY TO ARREST BUT WHO WIELD TREMENDOUS POWER IN THE CONSERVATIVE KINGDOM. HE WAS JAILED AFTER AGREEING TO GIVE A WOMAN A POTION SO THAT HER HUSBAND WOULD DIVORCE A SECOND WIFE.

THE RELIGIOUS POLICE SAID THEY RECORDED THE TRANSACTION.

SHORTLY AFTER HIS ARREST MR. SIBAT APPEARED ON A SAUDI TELEVISION TALK SHOW AND CONFESSED TO SORCERY. “MOST OF MY TREATMENTS WERE WITH HONEY AND SEEDS,” HE SAID. “YOU WOULD PUT THE CHARM IN THE HONEY AND DRINK FROM IT.” SINCE THEN, HE HAS REMAINED IN PRISON, AND IN 2009 HE WAS SENTENCED TO DEATH. HIS LEBANESE LAWYER, MAY EL-KHANSA, SAID THAT HE CONFESSED ONLY BECAUSE HE WAS ASSURED THAT IF HE DID SO HE WOULD BE RELEASED. THERE HAVE BEEN SOME INDICATIONS HE WILL BE SPARED BY KING ABDULLAH AND LET GO, SHE SAID, THOUGH THAT REMAINS UNCERTAIN.

“IT’S BEEN TWO YEARS OF THIS MENTAL ANGUISH,” SAID HIS WIFE, SAMIRA RAHMOUN, DURING A TELEPHONE INTERVIEW FROM THEIR HOME IN THE BAALBEK AREA OF LEBANON. “TWO YEARS OF TORTURE. THEY ARE KILLING AN INNOCENT MAN, AND THEY ARE SLOWLY KILLING A WHOLE FAMILY.”

THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE PUBLIC OUTCRY IN SAUDI ARABIA OVER THE CASE, WHICH IS CONSIDERED RATHER ORDINARY, ACCORDING TO POLITICAL EXPERTS IN THE CAPITAL, RIYADH. BUT THE INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION AND CRITICISM HAS CAST A HARSH LIGHT ON THE ULTRA-RELIGIOUS SIDE OF SAUDI ARABIA AS THE KINGDOM IS WORKING TO IMPROVE ITS REPUTATION, ESPECIALLY IN THE WEST.

THE CASE HIGHLIGHTS NOT ONLY THE POPULAR BELIEF IN MAGIC AND SORCERY — BY NO MEANS UNIQUE TO SAUDI ARABIA — BUT ALSO A LEGAL SYSTEM THAT CRITICS SAY OPERATES IN SECRET AND FUNCTIONS WITH LITTLE OVERSIGHT, DUE PROCESS OR EVEN WRITTEN LAWS. SAUDI ARABIA’S CONSTITUTION IS THE KORAN. ACCORDING TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, MR. SIBAT DOES NOT EVEN HAVE A LAWYER IN SAUDI ARABIA. (MS. KHANSA IS IN LEBANON.)

“THE JUDGES THINK THEY ARE THE INTERPRETERS OF GOD’S WORD, AND THIS IS THE WHOLE PROBLEM IN SAUDI ARABIA,” SAID IBRAHIM AL-MUGAITEEB, DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST SOCIETY, AN INDEPENDENT MONITORING GROUP IN THE KINGDOM. “WE HAVE ENORMOUS NUMBERS OF EXAMPLES WHERE THE SAME CASE WAS JUDGED RADICALLY DIFFERENTLY BETWEEN TWO JUDGES.”

MR. SIBAT APPEARED ON LEBANESE TELEVISION EARNING $700 A MONTH TO ANSWER CALLERS’ QUESTIONS, OFFER ADVICE, CAST SPELLS OR RECITE INCANTATIONS. THE SAUDI TELEVISION ANCHOR WHO INTERVIEWED MR. SIBAT SHORTLY AFTER HIS ARREST DESCRIBED HIM AS A “NOTORIOUS SWINDLER.”

BUT FRAUD, WHILE A CRIME, IS NOT PUNISHABLE BY DEATH, SAID MR. ALGASIM, THE RETIRED JUDGE. ONLY ACTUAL SORCERY IS A CRIME.

“YOU HAVE TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN ACTS THAT CHEAT OR DECEIVE PEOPLE FOR MONEY, WHICH DESERVE TO BE PUNISHED, AND DEALING WITH MAGIC,” HE SAID. “THERE IS NO MECHANISM TO PROVE IT, AND ANY CONFESSION IS OPEN TO DOUBT, ESPECIALLY IF SOMEONE CONFESSES IN PRISON.”

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FAMOUS QUOTES

QUENTIN CRISP (1908 - 1999) 90 YEARS.

CRISP WAS AN ENGLISH WRITER AND RACONTEUR. HE BECAME AN ICON OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE 1970'S AFTER PUBLICATION OF HIS MEMOIR, THE NAKED CIVIL SERVANT, BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC HIS DEFIANT EXHIBITIONISM AND REFUSAL TO KEEP HIS SEXUALITY PRIVATE.

CRISP RELATES: "WHEN I TOLD THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND THAT I WAS AN ATHEIST, A WOMAN IN THE AUDIENCE STOOD UP AND SAID:"

"YES, BUT IS IT THE GOD OF THE CATHOLICS

OR THE GOD OF THE PROTESTANTS

IN WHOM YOU DON'T BELIEVE?"