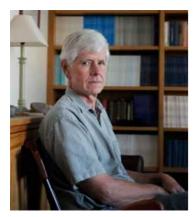# Violent video games linked to risk of crime, alcohol abuse

WASHINGTON, USA: Violent video games glorifying antisocial characters could increase teenage gamers' risk of criminal and other risky behavior like smoking and alcohol use, a US study claims.

Dartmouth University's Jay Hull warns that video game players may become what they are pretending to be. Image: Valley News

These adult-rated games also affect teenage users' self-image, according to the study by Dartmouth College researchers published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

A previous Dartmouth study published in 2012 had already found that such video games could incite teens to drive carelessly. Other studies have linked violent video games to adolescent aggressiveness and violence.

"But this latest study is important because it is the first to suggest that possible effects of violent video games go well beyond violence to apply to substance abuse, risky driving and risk-taking sexual behavior," Dartmouth Professor of Paediatrics and Co-author James Sargent said.

"In fact, youths who play these types of video games may identify themselves to the antisocial protagonists they feature," he said.

We are what we pretend to be

"With respect to playing deviant video game characters, we feel it best to follow the admonition of Kurt Vonnegut in 'Mother Night:' 'We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be'," said Lead Author Jay Hull, who chairs Dartmouth's Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences.

For the study, researchers questioned 5,000 randomly chosen US teenagers over a four-year period who were contacted by telephone.

Among the factors they examined were playing three violent video games glorifying violence, "Grand Theft Auto," "Manhunt" and "Spiderman", and other mature-rated games. The study found links between games of this nature and changes in a broad range of high-risk behaviors.

"This is due, in part, to changes in the users' personality, attitudes and values, specifically making them more rebellious and thrill-seeking," the study said.

Researchers found the effects to be similar for both men and women and strongest among those who played the most or played games with antisocial protagonists.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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