

# Playstation thumb – a new epidemic in children

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**To the Editor:** Repetitive strain injury (RSI) is a painful condition, which can sometimes be serious, affecting the arms and hands. It results from repeated movements that damage tendons, nerves, muscles, and other soft-body tissues. Jobs ranging from meat packing to the playing of a musical instrument<sup>1</sup> can lead to this kind of injury as a result of the tasks performed. In extreme cases RSI can cause a person to become wheelchair bound.

With increasing use of computers at work, home, and school, injuries of the hands, arms, and shoulders are becoming common. Playstation thumb is a RSI resulting from continuous playing of playstation games for many hours and can manifest as pain in the thumbs and blisters on the tips of the thumbs. Other associated symptoms include pain, stiffness, swelling, numbness and tingling of the hands, wrists, elbows, shoulders, back or neck.

After reading a letter to the Editor in the *Lancet*<sup>2</sup> about a case of playstation thumb in a young girl in England, I did a survey of the extent of this problem at my school. The survey was done at the Crawford Preparatory School in Durban among 120 Grade 4 - 7 learners. Their ages ranged from 9 to 13 years. Thirty learners from each grade, an equal number of boys and girls, were interviewed using a list of 7 questions. Each participant was asked if s/he played playstation games and, if

so, how often and for how long, on average. I also asked everyone if they experienced any playstation symptoms including pain in the thumb or wrist and the presence of blisters.

My results show that more boys played playstation games regularly. Twenty-eight of the 60 boys and 17 of the 60 girls played regularly. However the boys had fewer symptoms of playstation thumb. Eight of the 28 boys and 7 of the 17 girls who played regularly had symptoms of playstation thumb. No one had serious problems or symptoms. Those who played more playstation had more symptoms, especially if they played for more than 3 hours per day.

Playstation thumb was common in this survey. Although RSI is not new, in the past it occurred mainly among adults. Today computers and computer games are creating new medical problems, such as playstation thumb, which are becoming common in children.

*Acknowledgement.* Thanks to my mother for showing me the letter in the *Lancet* and to Cheryl Baxter for advice on how to write this letter and for help with the musician reference. I did this survey as a science project for my school's Science Day.

1. Nourissat G, Chamagne P, Dumontier C. Reasons why musicians consult hand surgeons. *Rev Chir Orthop Reparatrice Appar Mot* 2003; **89**: 524-531.
2. Vaidya HJ. Playstation thumb. *Lancet* 2004; **363**: 180.

**Table I. Number of learners who had symptoms of playstation thumb**

Grade	Girls		Boys	
	Play playstation regularly	Have symptoms of playstation thumb	Play playstation regularly	Have symptoms of playstation thumb
4	5	1	6	2
5	4	2	6	1
6	3	1	5	0
7	5	3	11	5
Total	17	7	28	8

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