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Kids slaves to video games

KIERAN CAMPBELL

VIDEO game-addicted kids are playing nonstop for days on end, dropping out of school and developing mental illnesses, top experts say.

Addicts include children as young as eight, and some parents are finding themselves being laughed at by GPs when they try to seek help.

Some of Australia's leading experts will speak out about the epidemic at a conference tomorrow and say the impact of technology on the minds of young children needs to be taken more seriously by health professionals.

Dr Philip Tam, a child and adolescent psychiatrist at Sydney University, said there were "probably hundreds or thousands" of children aged between eight and 14 with "significant problems" related to video game and internet use.

The most severe cases have resulted in children dropping their grades or out of school completely, while others are

becoming violent towards their parents and developing mental illnesses.

"I'm actually getting calls from all over Australia," Dr Tam said.

"I've been getting ... calls from all over Australia from parents willing to bring (their children) literally from Tasmania or the Gold Coast to come and see me (in Sydney) because they are so desperate."

Dr Tam, who will speak tomorrow at the Australian Council on Children and the Media conference, said he had treated one child who played video games for "about 60 hours nonstop, with no sleep".

Up to 10 per cent of children fall into the category of overusing video games and a small number of those children develop addictions, Dr Tam said.

"I've had kids that don't realise when they get into the zone that it's five o'clock (in the morning) when they finish gaming," he said.

"They play all night and by sunrise or by 11 or 12 they're so exhausted they go to sleep (and do not go to school).

"I'm seeing a child at the moment...in that situation."

Dr Tam said some child psychologists in Sydney dealt purely with gaming addiction but the overuse of video games needed to be taken more seriously by the broader health profession.

Dr Kate Highfield, a lecturer at the Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie University, said parents were confused about what apps to download for their children.

Most children under eight already exceed the recommended three-hour daily limit but that time could be productive if it was used the right way, she said.

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