Parents' most common concerns

Parents are most concerned that their children will contract ear infections, according to a study that appeared in the September 1991 Clinical Pediatrics.

Parents also are especially worried that their children watch too much television.

These two findings are among the many worries parents have about their children, according to the study. To investigate the concerns of parents, researchers handed out questionnaires to be completed by the first 100 parents waiting for their child's pediatric appointment in four medical settings. These settings included: three private practices in Utah and Santa Ana, California, and Rochester, Minnesota; and the Ambulatory Pediatric Clinic at Rhode Island Hospital in Providence.

Parents were asked to rate their degree of concern about 17 physical health issues, 16 psychosocial problems, seven possible injuries, four instances of victimization and four questions about parents' ability to provide discipline, affection, values and financial support.

Researchers found that 65 percent of the parents were concerned about ear infections. Adverse reaction to immunization followed with 57 percent, while common colds (51 percent) and cancer (50 percent) concerns were comparable.

Other health concerns mentioned include: sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), which concerned 47 percent of the parents, and Lyme disease, which concerned 44 percent of the parents.

Sixty-one percent of the respondents were worried that their children weren't eating properly and 46 percent worried that their children weren't eating enough. Other significant concerns were choking (43 percent) and food allergies (38 percent).

Respondents also were asked about social development worries. Leading the list was the high level of television watching (53 percent), followed closely by quality of day care (50 percent). Some 38 percent of parents cited drug use and lack of sleep as concerns.

Seventy-two percent of the parents surveyed shared an overall fear that their child would be kidnapped. One-third of the respondents worried "frequently" about the possibility of abduction, which made abduction the most frequently worry experienced by children. Results also found that three-fourths of the respondents worry that their children will suffer injuries from car accidents.

The study analysis also found that parents worry about their own contributions to their children's well-being. For example, 73 percent worry that they are disciplining their child appropriately; 56 percent worry about the adequacy of the affection their child receives; 55 percent are concerned about their own values and if they are positive role models for their child; and 66 percent are concerned about being able to support their children financially.

Researchers also compared parental concerns according to age. For example, when parents younger than 25 years were compared to parents older than 30 years, the younger parents had more worries about deafness, dehydration, their children not eating enough, choking, their children being too thin, and abduction. The older parents were more concerned with cancer, chemicals in food, too much television, proper values and morals, and exposure to environmental poisons.

Parents who didn't complete their high school education worried more than parents who went beyond a high school education, the study found.

Researchers compared their findings to data from the 1988 National Health Interview Survey. For example, 65 percent of the parents worried about ear infections; according to the data from the National Health Interview Survey, 57 per 100 children younger than five years and 11 per 100 age five to 17 years have acute ear infections in a year. Data from the survey indicates that 77.5 per 100 children younger than five years and 34.4 per 100 children five to 17 years have a common cold during the year. This can be compared to the Clinical Pediatrics study which found that 51 percent of the parents interviewed worried about colds.

Researchers also compared their findings to those of the 1989 U.S. Department of Justice National Incidence Study. For example, the Clinical Pediatrics study revealed that 72 percent of parents worried about their children being abducted; however, according to the justice department study, "there are 200 to 300 long-term kidnappings by a non-family member per year and another 3,500 to 4,500 short-term abductions per year. With 63 million children younger than age 18 years living in the U.S., the incidence of classic kidnapping by a non-family member is 1 in 200,000 to 300,000 and of short-term abduction is 1 per 15,000 to 20,000."

In the Clinical Pediatric Study, 50 percent of the participants worried that their children would get cancer.