

Dr Who is blamed over epidemic of spider fears among young children

Dr Who, the BBC's science fiction time traveller, "was probably responsible for an epidemic of spider phobia among young children" according to Dr Michael Hession, consultant psychiatrist to the Church of England's Children's Society.

A recent *Dr Who* series pitted large hairy spiders against the hero. Writing in the *General Practitioner* about nervous disorders among children, Dr Hession says fears and phobias are almost universal among young children.

Phobias, such as those of spiders, may have cultural or family origins, but that is not one of the more severe or disabling child fears, he says.

The BBC said last night that the spiders used in the series "were not like ordinary spiders". It added that Dr Hession's observation was the first time it had heard about the alleged effects.

Mrs Mary Whitehouse, secretary of the National Viewers and Listeners' Association, said yesterday that Dr Hession had underlined the warnings her organization had been giving

of the effect of *Dr Who* on very small children.

"The BBC admit that they have done no research whatever into the effect of television programmes on children under five and that this programme is really meant for the intelligent 10-year-old and over", she said. "Yet they persist in putting out *Dr Who* at 5.30 in the evening.

"We intend to ask the BBC as a matter of urgency to finance independent research into the effect of *Dr Who* in the under-fives, and, in the meantime, ask them to switch the programme to 6.30."