

Brain in delay on mobile phones

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EARLY results from the world's biggest study into the effect of mobile phones on brain function suggest phones may affect critical decision-making processes. Swinburne University researchers will soon publish the results of a pilot study that measured reactions and brainwaves of subjects exposed to phone emissions. The researchers have already embarked on an extended version of the study to check the results.

The study is one of three investigations into the effect of phones on humans, drawing on a \$213,000 National Health and Medical Research Council grant, and is set to appear in the Journal of Clinical Neurophysiology. Professors Con Stough, Andrew Wood and Rodney Croft are heading the research. Professor Wood said the researchers tested whether "your reactions to stimuli may be a bit delayed or . . . altered", at the same level as drinking coffee or smoking cigarettes. But he said the implications could be significant for people, including business executives, involved in negotiations and decisions on mobile phones. "If the effect is substantial then we'd need to know the magnitude of the effect so that people doing these sorts of deals are not adversely affected," he said. While past studies showed "conflicting results", the latest investigation aimed to clarify the research, he said.

PhD student Denise Hamblin, of Prahran, based at the university's Hawthorn campus, said the research results showed brain responses to sound stimuli were slowed by "milliseconds" while using a mobile phone, with measurable effects detected in decision-making parts of the brain. So far the study suggests the effect disappears 15 minutes after exposure ends. Ms Hamblin said the study tried to mimic "normal use". The Swinburne University study has now been expanded from a test group of a dozen subjects to 120, while the scope of the research will look more closely at mental and visual tasks, and the lingering effect. Ms Hamblin said she expected to finish the broader study by the middle of next year.

Meantime, the university is seeking volunteers for a study into mobile phones and sleep. Again, the study of 60 subjects will be the world's largest to date, and is a joint effort between Swinburne University, the Alfred Hospital and the Mitcham Private Hospital's Eastern Sleep Disorders Laboratory. Postgraduate student Sarah Loughran, of Richmond, said the investigation would test whether mobile phones disrupted sleep patterns or the body's biological clock.

For information, phone the Centre for Neuropsychology on 0403 175 447 or 9214 8867.