

PARENTAL CHALLENGES IN REGULATING SCREEN TIME OF CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

With a plethora of smart devices available and accessible easily to children today, screen time addiction among children is a fast spreading peril that is a cause of concern for parents and society. This study focuses upon the role of parents in understanding, identifying and controlling the increasing screen time among the children. A survey of 200 parents was conducted through interviews to investigate the variables under study and impact on the physical, mental, academic, emotional and overall growth of the children. Results indicate that almost thirty per cent of the children are unable to control the urge to take comfort in some form of smart device. Parents reported that screen time of children affected their child's physical, mental and emotional well being. Lastly, the suggestions for addressing the challenges are also summarized. To conclude, this study is a significant contribution towards addressing the emerging issue relating to technology addiction and excessive screen time usage of children.

Keywords: Technology Addiction, Gaming Addiction, Behavioural Impact, Parental Controls, Smart devices, Screen time.

1. Introduction

Technology innovation and penetration has resulted into the increase in the smart devices available to children. Social media and internet have added to the magical attraction for the children today. During the last decade, India has seen a considerable leap in digital transformation bringing along with it the exposure to screen time among the children. This study focuses upon the role of parents in understanding, identifying and controlling the increasing screen time among the children.

1.1 Review of Literature

Literature from various sources was reviewed to understand

The mention of 'technology addiction', 'internet addiction', 'gaming addiction' is incomplete without the names of researchers Young(2004), Young(2017) and Griffiths(2004) who coined these terms in the late 90s and continued with several studies in this direction. Griffiths (2004) explored five case studies of excessive computer usage to understand the concept and impact of technology addiction. Technology Addiction can be defined as the compulsive behavior to use the technology for entertainment and enjoyment purpose despite knowing the negative consequences of the same. It is considered as a form of addiction similar to the

substance abuse which grows beyond control if ignored. 'Screen time' refers to amount of time spent in doing the activities in front of the screen such as playing video games, watching T.V., working on a computer, laptop, tablet etc. Screen time is a sedentary. Internet addiction is also another term when the individual depends on the use of internet beyond the normal hours and feels the urge to continuously stay connected to the virtual world through different social media, over the top (OTT) media platforms etc. Smart devices are the devices which are used to access the internet, social media, streaming channels and the like.

Davies et al (2011) strongly mentions that the role of a parent is not only to provide technology to children but also to regulate the use of the same. He observed in his study that over the year's parents do feel a gradual loss of control over their adolescents regarding the use of smart technology. Duke and Montag (2017) studied the increasing addiction towards smartphones in children and the associated health risks involved. Singapore is considered as the world's 'smartest city' driven by the smart technologies deployed for overall smart living. With this background researchers Ebbeck et al. (2015) surveyed parents and caregivers to understand their views on children's access to and time spent in using the technological devices. The results were very

alarming. Parents reported being concerned about the risks of over exposure to screens and also found the children being emotionally and physically affected due to over exposure to screen times. Wang (2019) concluded that early and excessive exposure to digital devices is associated with behavioral and developmental problems in children. Gunter (2020) in his book observes that the interactive screen based entertainment is responsible for both pro-social and antisocial behavior and also impacts the cognitive and behavioral development in children.

Chaasikos (2016) argues that although technology helps to create and consume content, the newer digital media have their own benefits and risks to children. He has carried out an extensive review of literature to identify the potential benefits and risks of technology. Jensen et al. (2020) concluded that the overuse of digital media was negatively associated with the eating habits of children. Technology addiction or excessive screen time of children negatively impacts the academic performance, psychological state of mind and is a parental concern in general. (Jabbar (2019). Huang (2013), Redesky et al(2016), Mukhamedova (2020), So et al(2016), and fast becoming a lifestyle disorder. Kurviassih (2017). Parental concerns and practices to control the screen time result in resistance from children. Akter (2014), Stewart (2020), Wallace et al(2019). Studies from across the world are concerned about the problem though very few have probed the rate of addiction through the observations of the parents. In this context the present study is based on the following objectives:

- 1) To understand the forms of technology usage by the children.
- 2) To explore parents' awareness about screen- time addiction among their children.
- 3) To find whether parents use parental controls available for restricting screen time.
- 4) To understand the impact of increased screen time on child's performance and behavior.

Hypothesis

- 1) There is no significant relationship

- between level of screen time usage and physical discomfort experienced
- 2) Parents are aware of prevalence of technology addiction among children.
- 3) Parents exercise the parental control for regulating screen time of children.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

A sample of 200 parents having children up to the age of 18 was selected through purposive sampling, Primary data was collected by using structured schedule administered through personal / telephonic interviews so as to get accurate information. The questionnaire had different sections to gauge the time spent on technology, child's performance in academics, permission to access technology for different reasons, concern about use of technology, behavioral impact and physical impact due to technology usage. Secondary data was collected from magazines, periodicals, reports, journals, newspapers and the like. Data was cleaned and then analyzed using the SPSS 21.0 software and quantitative and qualitative techniques. Since study was based on qualitative method, this sample size of 200 respondents is adequate Cresswell (1998). A representative sample of 200 parents – 86 males and 114 females was considered for the study

2.2 Scope of Study

The respondents are selected at random from the city of Pune. Those parents having children up to the age of eighteen years are considered for this study.

3. Data Analysis and Results

3.1 The data collected through the interviews and semi structured questionnaire was processed and suitably analyzed. The results of the analysis are presented in this section by representing appropriately through tables and diagrams. Table 1 depicts the socio-demographic profile of the respondents.

| Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of respondents* | | |
|--|-----------------------|------------|
| | Number of respondents | Percentage |
| Gender | n | % |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|------|
| Male | 86 | 43 |
| Female | 114 | 57 |
| Qualifications | | |
| Upto HSC | 5 | 2.5 |
| Graduate | 104 | 52 |
| Higher Studies | 91 | 45.5 |
| Occupation | | |
| Service | 109 | 54.5 |
| Business | 62 | 31 |
| Housewife | 29 | 14.5 |
| Type of Family | | |
| Joint | 53 | 26.5 |
| Nuclear | 147 | 73.5 |
| Family Income (in Lakhs) | | |
| Less than 5 | 24 | 12 |
| 5 – 10 | 107 | 53.5 |
| 10 – 15 | 61 | 30.5 |
| above 15 | 8 | 4 |

**Source – Primary data from survey*

As seen in the table above, the respondents represent the middle income age group of parents who are educated upto graduation and above. Sample respondents are a balanced mix of parents – mothers and fathers and it is evident that almost 80 percent of them are either employed or having their own business with average annual income up to fifteen lakhs. Almost 70 percent of the families are of nuclear in nature. These variables helped to understand the environment in which the children are staying.

| | n | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----|----------------|
| Smart Devices accessed by Children | | |
| Mobile phone | 200 | 100 |
| Laptop | 179 | 89.5 |
| Tablet | 23 | 11.5 |
| Smart TV | 153 | 76.5 |
| Desktop / PC | 63 | 31.5 |
| Game Consoles | 0 | 0 |

Table 3: Time spent on different activity n(%)

| Activity | Number of Hours n (%) | | | | | Total |
|--------------|-----------------------|----------|----------|-------|---------|-----------|
| | Less than 1 | 1-3 | 3-5 | 5-7 | N/A | |
| Watching T.V | 46 (23) | 130 (65) | 17 (8.5) | 2 (1) | 5 (2.5) | 200 (100) |

| | | |
|--|-----|------|
| | | |
| Aware of prevalence of technology addiction among children | | |
| Yes | 187 | 93.5 |
| No | 13 | 6.5 |
| How dependent child is on Mobile / smart device? | | |
| Extremely | 5 | 2.5 |
| Very much | 87 | 43.5 |
| Slightly | 106 | 53 |
| Not dependent | 2 | 1 |
| Parents' Awareness of Parental controls | | |
| Yes | 152 | 76 |
| No | 48 | 24 |
| You ever used YouTube's parental controls | | |
| Yes | 70 | 35 |
| No | 130 | 65 |
| You have child access lock on your smart devices (mobiles, tabs, laptops etc) | | |
| Yes | 73 | 36.5 |
| No | 127 | 63.5 |
| Your child Owns laptop/ cell phone/ other smart devices | | |
| Yes | 65 | 32.5 |
| No | 135 | 67.5 |

**Source – Primary data from survey*

As observed from table 2, all the parents accept that their children have access to smart phones, laptops, smart televisions and personal computers at home. More than forty percent of the parents agree that their child is very much dependent on a smart device and internet. 93 percent of the parents are aware about the presence of technology addiction among children. Seventy per cent of the parents are aware about technology addiction and parental controls for regulating the use of smart devices by their children but only fifty percent of them actually use them.

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|---------|---------|----------|-----------|
| Online Gaming | 35 (17.5) | 31 (15.5) | 6 (3) | 6 (3) | 122 (61) | 200 (100) |
| Offline Gaming | 48 (24) | 60 (30) | 1 (0.5) | 1 (0.5) | 90 (45) | 200 (100) |
| Use of Smart devices | 61 (30.5) | 123 (61.5) | 5 (2.5) | 7 (3.5) | 4 (2) | 200 (100) |

**Source – Primary data from survey*

As evident from the above table 3, children are actively involved in use of smart devices in the form of watching television, gaming and internet.

Table 4: Activity away from smart devices

| Activity | Number of Hours | | | | | Total |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------|----------|---------|---------|-----------|
| | Upto 1 | 1-3 | 3-5 | 5-7 | N/A | |
| Playground / Outdoor | 77 (38.5) | 95(47.5) | 11 (5.5) | 3 (1.5) | 14 (7) | 200 (100) |
| Reading/ Studies/Hobby | 27 (13.5) | 148 (74) | 20 (10) | 4 (2) | 1 (0.5) | 200 (100) |

**Source – Primary data from survey*

Table 4 depicts the off screen activity of the children like reading books, cultivating hobbies, and playing outdoor games. It is alarming to note that the physical activity of the students is not as desired to be around two to three hours at minimum.

Hypothesis testing

Table 5: Screen time usage and physical discomfort

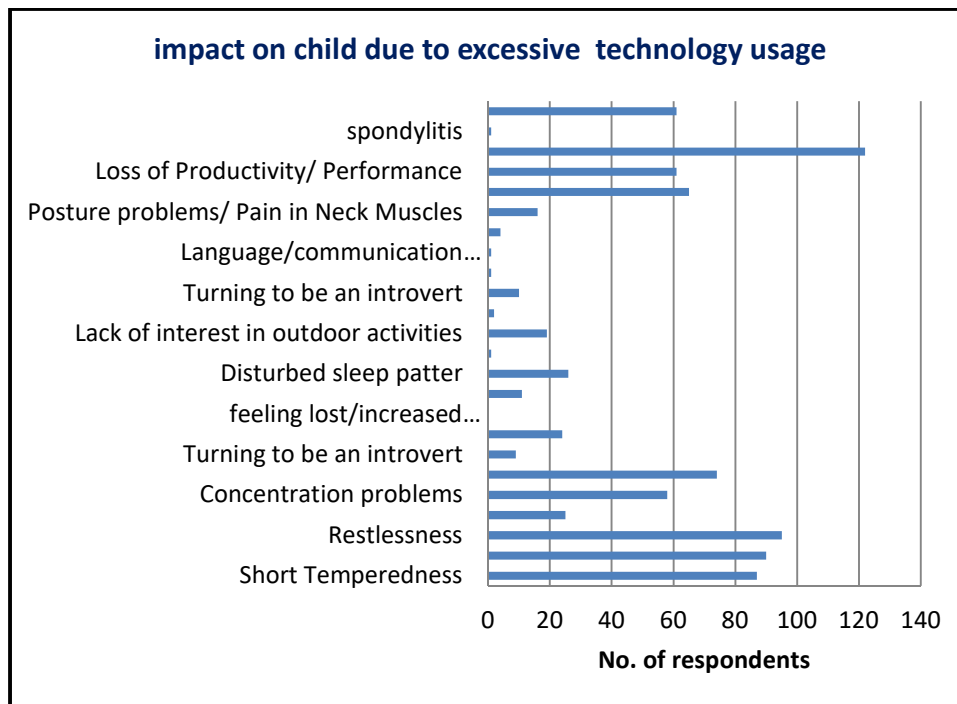
| Screen Time usage level | Physical Discomfort experienced | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|------|
| | Low | Mediun | High |
| Low | 18 | 15 | 10 |
| Medium | 33 | 40 | 27 |
| High | 12 | 17 | 28 |

Applying the chi square test of independence, the null hypothesis is rejected and we conclude that there us a significant relationship between level of screen time usage and physical discomfort experienced by suers.

Table 6: Hypothesis testing

| Hypothesis | p= 0.05 | |
|---|---|----------|
| There is no significant relationship between level of screen time usage and physical discomfort experienced | Chi square test 9.488 (table) 11.482 (calculated) | Rejected |
| Parents are not aware of prevalence of technology addiction among children | Z = 3.72 | Rejected |
| Parents are not aware of parental controls for regulating screen time of children. | Z = 7.94 | Rejected |

Figure 1: Impact of excessive use of technology on children.



From above figure it is evident that parents observe children suffering from physical discomfort and their performance in academics is also suffering. Higher the addiction to screen time, more is the impact in the form of depression, insomnia, lack of concentration, stress, temperament issues, etc.

4. Discussions

Though most of the parents are aware about the parental controls available they do not use it. Only 35 % use parental control features like restricting access to certain websites / apps, monitoring the amount of screen time, promoting the healthy habit in lieu of screen time. Most parents agreed on an average age when the child can be independently given access to smart device as 14 to 16 years. Almost thirty per cent of the children were found to face peer pressure to use social media platforms. A considerable number of children are watching TV for a long time. Also, it was observed that children with grandparents were found to use screen time less and only for necessary purposes. Almost 50 percent of the children are not able to devote time to hobbies, one of the reasons being over indulgence in social media. 20 percent of the children were found to be performing low in academics on account of over use of smart devices. Parents reported that they are very concerned about the child spending too much time online,

falling prey to cyber bullying, being exposed to explicit or violent content, falling into wrong relationships and privacy of their child. Also, parents have observed behavioral issues like short temperedness, depression, anxiety, eyesight problems and loss of productivity in their child.

Suggestions

- i) It is recommended for parents to use the different parental controls and tracking mechanism on the child's screen time usage, till he becomes conscious about responsible use of technology.
- ii) Parents must try to spend more time with the child and also encourage and involve them in outdoor activities, housework, exercises.
- iii) Parents must be in the friend list of their child on different social media platforms.
- iv) Children must be counseled about the ill effects of over use of technology and encourage them to harness the technology for welfare of the society.
- v) **Set rules for 'no screen time situations'** – such as at mealtime, in bed, before school or in the car. These times should be utilized for speaking with your children, discussing their day, preparing for their day and resting — not swiping, watching and tapping.

- vi) **Try to set daily limits** — it's okay to go over these limits every now and then when necessary, but treat this extra time as a privilege and not a right.
- vii) **Combine learning with screen time.** Limit the use of simple games or videos and replace them with apps or programs with some educational basis.
- viii) Make sure that screen time does not take precedence over or replace other important activities, such as exercise, outdoor activities, or reading.
- ix) **Create 'no screen time zones'** — particularly bedrooms for young children. If the digital screen is going to consume their attention, at least allow them to do it in the living room or in a family setting, as opposed to in isolation in their room.
- x) **Participate in screen time together!** Research shows that using apps or playing digital games together can be beneficial, as it encourages dialogue and

conversation — a vital element in the development of verbal skills.

5. Conclusion

Children hold the future of society in their hands, it is important to nurture them with good principles and guidance. What begins as a small distraction or entertainment for a toddler to an adolescent becomes an addiction later that may be for watching TV, playing online and offline games on the PC, mobile, laptop or a tablet. It is very urgent to address this issue as it may turn unmanageable later and result into loss of productivity for the society and economy as a whole.

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