



Associations between screen media parenting practices and children's screen time in Lebanon



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ABSTRACT

This study examines whether screen media parenting practices (i.e. using screen media as tools for punishment or reward and setting limits on screen time), and alternate non-electronic activities are associated with children's screen time. Participants were parents of 4770 children who were six to eleven years old. Using a survey questionnaire, they reported their children's average daily amount of screen and non-electronic activities times, and their screen-related parenting practices. Odds ratios were computed using logistic regression. Children whose parents reward good achievement/behavior by allowing screen time, punish bad achievement/behavior by prohibiting screen time, and allow screen time to keep them quiet are more likely to exceed the daily screen time recommendation of a maximum two hours. Screen-related home rules, physical activities and other alternate activities associated negatively with exceeding recommended screen time limit. Our study suggests that there is a need to develop effective strategies and intervention programs to educate parents to avoid screen-related parenting practices that increase their children's likelihood of exceeding the recommended media time.

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1. Introduction

With the advancement of technology, screen media use is extensive. Today, screen media broadly include television (TV), computers and screen-based devices. Notably, children's screen media time is not only increasing at an alarming rate (Øverby et al., 2013; Rideout et al., 2010), but it is also starting at a very young age (Plowman et al., 2010; Vandewater et al., 2007). In fact, studies have yielded unprecedented figures. For instance, one study reported that the percentage of infants who systematically watch TV increased drastically from 40% to 90% by the age of 2 years (Christakis and Zimmerman, 2007). Another study reported that 68% of toddlers use electronic devices on a daily basis (Duch et al., 2013). Additionally, screen media are dominating the lives of American youth, with an average screen time of greater than seven hours per day (Rideout et al., 2010). The wide span of affected vulnerable ages could be explained by rapid advances in technology and the availability of a myriad of new devices at more and more affordable prices accompanied by the huge variety of very sophisticated, entertaining and addictive video games.

The mesmerizing effect of screen time is problematic. Studies show that children who end up excessively engaged in screen time not only achieve poorly academically (Gentile et al., 2004; Hawi and Samaha, 2016; Jackson et al., 2011; Lepp et al., 2014; Leung and Lee, 2012), but are also prone to a wide range of impairments such as the development of increased aggression (Gentile et al., 2011; Gitter et al., 2013), social reclusion (Veenhof et al., 2008), violent delinquency and anti-social behaviors (DeLisi et al., 2013), depression (Tortolero et al., 2014), anxiety (Feng et al., 2014) and poor

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psychological well-being (Kim et al., 2009; Page et al., 2010; Samaha and Hawi, 2016). Malikhao and Servaes (2011) argue that American youth intense exposure and consumption of the new media systems have negative effects on their sexuality and may increase their health risk behaviors. Several studies have examined problematic Internet use and its impact on children (Hawi et al., 2015; Hawi, 2012; Tsitsika et al., 2014). Also, screen media use negatively affects children's physical health (Colley et al., 2013; Salmon et al., 2011; Serrano-Sanchez et al., 2011; Strasburger et al., 2010; Tremblay et al., 2010), in particular obesity (Atkin et al., 2014; Laurson et al., 2008; Must et al., 2007; Stamatakis et al., 2013), diabetes (Dunstan et al., 2010; Goldfield et al., 2013), high blood pressure (Martinez-Gomez et al., 2009), higher BMI (Arcan et al., 2013; Fulton et al., 2009; Jackson et al., 2011), cardiometabolic and heart diseases (Altenburg et al., 2012; Berentzen et al., 2014; Grøntved et al., 2014; Mark and Janssen, 2008), and sleep irregularity (Thompson and Christakis, 2005).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommended "limiting children's total media time to ≤ 2 h/day of quality programming" (American Academy of Pediatrics: Children, adolescents, and television, 2001). Furthermore, many international health organizations have set guidelines for the amount of physical activity per day and recommend that children be active for a minimum of 1 h/day (Department of Health and Ageing-Australia, 2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010; World Health Organization, 2010). Amongst those who should observe the implementation of these recommendations are parents or guardians. Existing studies show that the most effective way to decrease children screen time is to target parents for behavioral change (Carson and Janssen, 2012). However, to achieve behavioral change, there is a need to examine how parents can control screen media use of their children. This may lead to parent-focused interventions whose implementation may reduce children's screen time.

Screen media parenting practices are defined as the set of parental behaviors or interactions with their child that influence the latter's screen media use (O'Connor et al., 2013) in terms of the three dimensions recommended by the AAP guidelines: amount, content and context (American Academy of Pediatrics: Children, adolescents, and television, 2001). For example, parenting practices include setting rules that limit total viewing, content restriction and viewing context (co-viewing with parents, no screen in bedrooms, etc. . .). Recent studies on parenting practices assessed parental rules and their associations with children's screen time (Barr et al., 2010; Carlson et al., 2010; Gingold et al., 2013; Goh et al., 2015; Hawi and Rupert, 2015; Jago et al., 2011; Ramirez et al., 2011). Other studies investigated screen media use and its associations with parents viewing (Jago et al., 2012, 2013), mealtime (Gingold et al., 2013; Hardy et al., 2006), homework completed (Hardy et al., 2006; Ramirez et al., 2011) and with alternate activities (Gingold et al., 2013).

Existing literature doesn't address the associations between children's screen time and screen media parenting practices in relation to child's discipline. In this work, we examine whether screen devices are being used by parents as disciplinary tools (reward, punishment, and keeping children quiet) and if these practices are associated with screen time. Some parents permit their child to use screen media as a reward for good achievement. Other parents prohibit their child from using screen media as a form of punishment. However, modifying children's behavior by either rewarding with a desired object (Kohn, 1999; Puhl and Schwartz, 2003) or withholding it gives the object more value and it becomes more desirable. Additionally, we examine the relationships of media time with non-electronic activities (physical activity, reading, playing non-electronic games, etc. . .), parental rules, parents' awareness of games' content, and children's timely completion of homework.

2. Methods

2.1. Sample

Participants were parents of six to eleven years old children who were recruited through private schools randomly selected from regions geographically distributed across Lebanon. This age bracket forms one of the most vulnerable groups to screen time's implications (Barr et al., 2010). The main reason is that children in this age bracket are not yet ready to use their mental operations to understand the undesired outcomes of screen media (Littlefield-Cook et al., 2005). The ethics committee at Notre Dame University – Louaize approved the study procedures. After a written consent was obtained from schools' administrators, 7500 survey questionnaires were distributed to children in open peel and seal envelopes. The questionnaires were distributed in either English or French depending on the official school's language of curriculum. A total of 4960 survey questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 66.1%. After data cleaning, removing anomalies, and removing inconsistent responses, the final sample size was reduced to 4770 participants (50.3% males) which accurately represents the target population of private schools.

3. Measures

3.1. Dependent variable: screen time

Research involving children relies on parents to report data. In contexts similar to ours, most studies have parents report screen time-related data (Barr et al., 2010; Jago et al., 2011; Ramirez et al., 2011). In our study, parents reported their child's average time of watching TV after school (TV_S), and on non-school days (TV_NS), and the average time of using screen-based devices after school days (Devices_S), and on non-school days (Devices_NS). The formula for the computed average daily screen time was $((TV_S + Devices_S) * 5 + (TV_NS + Devices_NS) * 2) / 7$.

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