

Multi-centered investigation of pre-school children's screen time and digital game playing habits

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Abstract

Aim

Early childhood is a critical period for the acquisition of healthy habits. The American Academy of Pediatrics revised screen-media recommendations to emphasize the critical role of parents on children's use of technology that is part of everyday life. In this period, parents are advised to limit children's screen (television, video, computer, video game) time, help them to choose the right media and monitor their children. With the widespread use of the Internet, the use of digital games between children and young people is increasing day by day. The useful and harmful effects of playing video games, especially on children and adolescents, are being discussed. The purpose of our study is to investigate the screen time and playing video game habits of children aged between 2 and 5 years and to examine the attitudes of parents in this area.

Material-Methods

Our study was designed as a cross-sectional descriptive study. Our work was approved by Hacettepe University Faculty of Medicine Ethics Commission (02.01.2018). The study was carried out in 6 centers in 3 provinces; between 10/01/2018 and 10/03/2018. Parents who applied to these centers and had children between the ages of 2 and 5 were included in the study.

Results

In study, 674 pre-school children and their parents were recruited. The mean (SD) ages of the children were 3.6 (1.0) years and 51.6% were male. The rates of availability in the households are 99% for smartphone, 74.6% for computer and / or tablet and 6.8% for the gaming console. 89.2% of the households had internet connection.



In a limited number of families (6.1%), neither mother nor father had social media connections.

The mean (SD) age at which children started to use screen were 17.8 (9.9) months, but only three of them had no screen contact. 19.7% of the children were using screens for over four hours.

27.2% of the children were playing digital games. The rate of playing digital games in boys was 30.0% while it was 24.2% in girls ($p = 0.095$). The age at which children begin to play digital games is 2.7 (1.0) years. There was a positive correlation between the age at which the children started to contact with screen and the age at which they started to play digital games ($r = 0.22$, $p = 0.003$).

Conclusion

In our study, it was determined that the screen usage was very frequent in pre-school period, and this age group seems to carry risks in terms of adverse effects of screen contact in large scale. The early age of the first screen contact causes the earlier age of digital gaming. This relationship between digital gaming and screening should not be overlooked in the approach to risk. It has been determined that the rate of playing digital games is higher in boys in preschool period as in other age groups, and the neurological, biological and psychosocial factors that make up this difference need to be elucidated.

Key Words: Pre-school, screen, digital games, video games