



▼ OPINION

ELECTRONIC MEDIA USE AMONG PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN – AN ALARMING GLOBAL TREND

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Dear Editor,

Uncontrolled electronic media use by children has become a social problem in almost all parts of the world. Electronic media has both positive and negative impact on child's health. American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended no more than one hour of high-quality media exposure (television/computer & laptop use, digital versatile disc/video, mobile phones and other electronic games) per day for preschool aged children. In United States of America, average time spent by preschool children exceed 2.5 times the recommended limits.¹

Early childhood electronic media exposures are associated with poor outcomes in several indicators of well-being of health. Unlimited and uncontrolled use of electronic media by children especially preschool children leads to negative developmental outcomes such as speech delay, linguistic issues, poor communication skills, mental deprivation, aggressive behaviour, low self-esteem, attention problem, sleep disorders, obesity, orthopedic issues like reduced thoracic kyphosis and lumbar lordosis, decreased angle of inclination of the thoracolumbar spine, and pelvic asymmetry because of prolonged sitting and unsuitable body postures, refractive errors, deafness and even hematopoietic system cancers. Early electronic media exposure in preschool children has been found to be associated with 1.2 to 2 times higher occurrence of emotional disorders like major anxiety attacks, depression or bipolar disorders.^{2,3}

Study has shown significant association between child's electronic media use with parent's own screen

time use. Furthermore, early over exposure to media results in habit forming and overuse in adult life, premature thinning of cortex and lower cognitive functions. Parental control to limit and monitor the amount of time spent towards electronic media, increasing family time, restricting use of electronic media in home, parents being the role model, using alternate recreation activities. Health education should be directed to caregivers based on the solutions to face this formidable challenge posed by electronic media use by preschool children.^{4,5}

World Health Organization issued a first ever guidelines on physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep for children under 5 years of age. For children under two years of age, screening time is not recommended at all and they should be involved in various types of physical activities for majority of the time in a day. For children of age more than two years, it was recommended to have digital screen time no more than one hour per day. Tummy time of 30 minutes per day for not yet mobile infants was encouraged. For children between one to two years, 180 minutes involving various types of physical activities at any intensity including moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity per day was suggested. And for children between three to four years, 180 minutes involving various types of physical activities at any intensity with at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity spreading throughout the day was recommended. During sedentary hours, reading and storytelling by a caregiver was suggested.⁶

To conclude, preschool children should be involved actively in various types of physical activity spreading throughout the day to save our future generation from getting into a part of a global epidemic of obesity and related disorders. Parents should also play a role model by reducing their digital screen time.

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