

Associations between screen time and early childhood development

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To prevent non-optimal developmental outcomes, international guidelines recommend the avoidance of digital media use under the age of two. This recommendation is, however, rarely followed. The aim of this study was to investigate the associations between screen time and early childhood development in a sociodemographically representative Hungarian sample. The study was conducted on a sub-dataset of the third and fifth waves of the Cohort '18 Growing Up in Hungary study (n=2078), among children (50.8% boys, 49.2% girls) aged 18 months (M=18.0; SD=0.8) and 36 months (M=36.8; SD=0.9) at the two waves. Mothers reported on children's screen time (on a typical day) and development (Ages and Stages Questionnaire-3). Only 14% of 18-month-olds used no digital media on an average day. 24.8% had a daily screen time between 1 and 30 minutes, 24.1% between 31 and 60 minutes, 19.3% between 61 and 120 minutes and 17.7% more than 2 hours. Screen time at 18 months predicted children's delayed communication, fine motor, problem-solving and personal-social skills at 3 years, both in bivariate analyses and in logistic regression models, adjusted for maternal education level, household's income, maternal marital status, child's sex and age, and a developmental delay of the child on the given area at 18 months of age. The results are in line with previous findings showing a high prevalence of media use in early childhood and its negative impact on children's development. A harm reduction approach should therefore be used to support families in developing media use habits that minimise developmental risks.

Are you currently an Early Career Researcher?

Yes, I am within 6 years of receiving my Ph.D.

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