

# ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND CHILD BEHAVIOUR

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## ABSTRACT

In today's society, electronic media are thoroughly integrated into the fabric of life, with television, movies, videos, music, video games, and computers, central to both work and play. While these media outlets can provide education and entertainment to children, many researchers are concerned with the negative impact electronic media is having on children. Media is used as a third parent or servant. Lot of aspects are important related to media exposure and child behavior. Media exposure affects the neurodevelopment, nutrition and health and academic achievements of the child. Parent education plays an important role in the behavior modification of the children.

**Keywords:** Electronic media, child behavior, nutrition, neurodevelopment

In today's society, electronic media are thoroughly integrated into the fabric of life, with television, movies, videos, music, video games, and computers, central to both work and play. While these media outlets can provide education and entertainment to children, many researchers are concerned with the negative impact electronic media is having on children. Children may be the most vulnerable between birth and school age to certain negative effects of media use such as obesity, aggression, fear and sleep disturbances. It is now not just kids in bad neighborhoods or with "bad" friends who are likely to be exposed to bad things when they go out on the street. A "virtual" bad street is easily available to most youth now in their very homes.

Media is used as a third parent or servant. It is very important, as both parents are working, mother in kitchen and father busy in reading or out for his work and the child is having remote in his hand and does not know how to select the programs and watches only movies or cartoons. Teenagers spend their lives immersed in electronic media. While doing homework on internet, they do instant messaging to their friends. They have television in background and listen to music on i-pod at the same time. Furthermore, time spent with media decreases the amount of time available for pursuing other more healthy activities such as sports, physical activity, community service, cultural pursuits, reading and family time. Background TV interferes with the toddlers' ability to focus on play. They do not discriminate between TV and real life events until preschool years.

## Neurodevelopment and learning

There is growing literature about impact of electronic media exposure on attention, memory, executive functions, language and communications, visual spatial processing, reasoning and social emotional functioning. Impact depends on the age and the content of the media. Media technology can be used effectively as a teaching tool in school but the results depend on how teachers use the technology and their own comfort level with the media. Attention to television appears to be closely related to the child's understanding of the contents. Content if designed correctly can enhance learning. Transfer of learning from TV is possible only if the child understands the contents, remembers it and sees it in relation to the new problem.

## Addiction to television

It can be identified as follows: using TV as sedative, indiscriminate viewing, loss of control while viewing, feeling angry with one self for watching too much, inability to stop watching, and feeling miserable when kept away from watching.

There are several issues related to media consumption by the children

## Time

It has been estimated that children in US watch about 4 hours of TV every day. If you also add in the time spent listening to music, playing video games and on the internet than a large portion of the child's day is spent in front of a television or computer rather than on healthier activities like interacting with others or

reading. Although data from India is limited, a significant portion of our children have considerable TV viewing per day i.e. > 2 hours/day. A typical child watches 15000 to 18000 hours of television by age of 18 years compared with attending 12000 hours of school. They spend more time using media than do engaging in any single activity other than sleeping. As children spend more total time watching TV, they spend a significantly shorter amount of time with friends and families as compared to those who don't.

### **Nutrition**

Children who spend a lot of time watching TV, playing video games or on the computer are more likely to be obese because they are not spending enough time playing or getting exercise. They also view thousands of commercials for unhealthy foods- snacks, sugary cereals and candy- which influence their eating habits. Studies have shown that there is nearly two fold increased risk of obesity for every hour spent daily playing electronic games or watching television.

### **Media and eating disorders**

The print media promotes an unrealistically thin body ideal that, in turn, is at least partially responsible for promoting eating disorders. Frequent reading of magazine articles about dieting/weight loss strongly predicted unhealthy weight control behaviors in adolescent girls.

Just as it is important that parents know the ingredients in food they may feed to their children, they should be fully informed about the content of the media their children may use.

### **Media and academic achievements:**

There is significant negative link between grades and media exposure. An academic achievement of children peaks at 1-2 hours of educational programming and declines with heavier use. ( more than 4 hours). Playing video games can have positive effects in developing visual spatial skills such as visual tracking, mental rotation and target localization. Gaming may also involve problem solving skills.

### **Sleep:**

The children having TV set in their bedroom watch one hour more than average. It leads to poor outcomes in academic, social and physical areas. Teenagers' use of Cell phones after bedtime contributes to poor sleep.

### **Media and behavior:**

Media have a powerful influence on health and behavior. Media violence exposure in form of murder

mystery movies, stories filled with violence and torture has a larger effect on later violent behavior. Children watching violence on TV or playing violent video games tend to be more aggressive are more prone to confrontation with their teachers, may engage in fights with their peers, and see a decline in school achievements. Girls experience more fear from media as compared to boys. Another study from India showed that vivid display of violence through media (9/11 terrorist attack) caused stress and depression in adolescents. To optimize children's social development and long term mental health, parents, teachers and pediatricians should discourage the viewing of violent television programs.

### **Risky behavior and sexual problems:**

Exposure to sexual content in music, movies, television and magazines accelerates adolescent sexual activity and increases their risk of engaging in early sexual intercourse. This content is shown to be normal, fun and exciting but without discussion of the risks of early sexual activity, pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections. In India, there are reports of messaging sexual contents through mobiles among school going adolescents. The media should be encouraged to provide more sexually healthy content.

### **Child as a consumer**

Advertising and product placement for cigarettes and alcohol as well as exposure to movie character smoking and drinking has increased under age drinking and initiation of smoking and is associated with positive beliefs about alcohol consumption. India faced a lot of controversy with the ban on on-screen smoking which was lifted later on. In particular, music exposure is associated with marijuana use while movie exposure is related to alcohol use.

### **TIPS ON MANAGING YOUR CHILD'S MEDIA CONSUMPTION**

1. Be alert of the shows your children see. Monitor all of your child's media consumption-video games, television, movies and internet. Just as it is important that parents know the ingredients in food they may feed to their children, they should be fully informed about the content of the media their children may use
2. Avoid using TV, videos or video games as baby-sitter. Simply turning the TV sets off is nearly not as effective as planning some other fun activity with the family.
3. Limit the use of media: TV use must be limited to no more than 1-2 hours per day. Discuss and make decisions on how much the child is allowed to play video games, listen to music, watch television . Set situation limits too: no television before school,

- during meals, or before homework. Enforce these limits and be consistent.
4. Keep television and video player machines out of your child's bedroom.
  5. Turn the television off during meals times.
  6. Turn television on only when there is something specific you have decided is worth watching. Don't turn the TV on "to see if there's something on"
  7. Don't make the TV the focal point of the house.
  8. Be active- talk and make connections with your children while the program is on. Co-viewing adult (parents) can make television viewing an active process and can facilitate learning from it. Take the time to discuss with your children the games they are playing or other media they are watching. Ask your children how they feel about what they observe in these video games, television programs or movies. This is an opportunity to share your feelings and grow closer with your child.
  9. Be especially careful for viewing just before the bedtime. Emotion invoking images may linger and intrude the sleep.
  10. Be explicit with children about your guidelines for appropriate movie viewing and review proposed movie choices in advance.
  11. Become media literate
  12. Limit your own television viewing. Set a good example. Be careful when children are around and may observe material from "your" program.
  13. Let your voice be heard to insist on better programming for your children.

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