

Original Research Article

Media parenting in rural part of India and its impact on children-a cross-sectional study, a media-parent study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Media and gadgets are increasingly used in urban areas and rural pockets, among adults and children as well. Excessive use of media has its own negative consequences. Aim of the present study is to address, role of media in parenting practices, children's daily activities and school performance. The objectives are to assess the pattern and reason for media use by children and the parental attitude and ability to regulate media handling by their children iii) the impact of media usage on school performance.

Methods: It was a qualitative cross-sectional study included 200 children <18 years, visiting the hospital for outpatient services. A pre-designed questionnaire was used for data collection.

Results: The analysis of the parent and the child media usage was done in relation to socioeconomic and demographic parameters. The mean age for child media exposure was found to be 6.4±3.8 years. The media use on school-days was 1.9 against 2.7 hours on the holidays. The media contents were mostly cartoon and mobile games with television and mobile being the commonest mode. Poor school performance was associated with media use of ≥2 hours in school days [HR=1.38 (95% CI=1.01-1.89), p=0.04]. Many parents knew about few bad consequences of media but not able to regulate due to lack of awareness.

Conclusions: Proper media parenting is now an unmet need everywhere. Non-educational media content for entertainment purpose during school-days should be discouraged. Interventions like parental media education with involvement of paediatrician, school teacher and psychologist is needed.

Keywords: Media Parenting, Children, Media, School performance, Media education

INTRODUCTION

Television, mobile, computer, video games, and other internet-enabled devices have become a requirement of daily life. This media use and gadget has now changed from luxury to necessity. Further trend is towards abuse than use. Now the young minds are getting more exposure to media technology in their home, surroundings, and school, which has been described by Kilic et al.¹ The childhood is to have a good physical

activity, environmental exploration, and social interaction, which are all inevitable learning process of life. Early childhood is a period for rapid brain development where adequate time should allocate for play, sleep, learning for handling emotions, and to build relation.²

Exposure to media, easy availability, and parental provision for use by the child is increasing day by day, which led to the replacement of daily activities, social

interactions, and cognitive learning.³ Media overuse contributes to various health risks like obesity, sleep disorders, aggressive behaviour, and attention disorder resulting in language delay in preschool and school beginners.⁴ The use further led to issues like cyberbullying, sexting, Facebook depression, social anxiety, and risk-taking behaviours.⁵ Parents are the first line of control and contact for their children so the use of media by parents and the provision of it for children play an important role.⁶ Over the time, use of media, gadgets, and internet facility are available in remote areas too, but parental awareness is lacking about use and misuse leading to increasing involvement by family members as well as exposure to kids. Socioeconomic background, occupational status of parents, availability of gadgets, and timing of use supposed to influence child's activities as well as school performance.⁷ Focussing media concerning children, paediatricians are in a unique position to start conversations about media use related to psychosocial challenges and health issues of children with parents in clinics and educate families regarding healthy media use and habits.⁸ Earlier mostly urban area-based studies oriented to media impact on children had been conducted like Christakis and Jancey et al, of com-making communications work for everyone.⁹⁻¹¹ But there is a paucity of rural based studies about parental regulation in media handling of their children. The present study was conducted to address such issues, keeping the following objectives i.e., to assess (i) the pattern, duration; types of media screen exposure and reason for use of media by children (ii) the knowledge, attitude, and ability of parents as a media mentor for their children and (iii) impact of use of media on school performance.

METHODS

The present study is a qualitative cross-sectional study carried out in the rural center of SGT medical college hospital and research Institute, a tertiary care teaching hospital that caters mostly to the rural and semi-urban areas in Gurugram district of Haryana state in India. Consecutive parents attending the hospital facility, willing for participating in the study were enrolled from November 2018 to October 2019.

A total of 200 children (<18 years age) were included. Those suffering from chronic debilitating illness, requiring special assistance/attention (child with mental retardation, cerebral palsy), or with no access to any form of media and absence of a valid consent were excluded. A structured questionnaire was prepared considering all parameters as below and the parents with children were interviewed after due consent. The questionnaire consisted of Socio-demographic profile; Media availability, parental and children's pattern and purpose of media use; knowledge, attitude, and practice of parents regarding media handling by children; media impact on physical activity, school performance, and overall development.

Statistical analysis

It was a cross-sectional study design and was conducted from November 2018 to October 2019. The cross-sectional data was represented as proportion, median with inter-quartile range and mean \pm 2SD. The categorical data were compared between the two groups by using the Chi-square test. The continuous data were compared using Student's t-test or Mann-Whitney test. The logistic regression was applied to determine the predictors of poor school performance in children. The significance was considered at a 5% level of probability. Analysis was performed using SPSS for Windows version 22.0.

RESULTS

The study enrolled 200 children among which males being 58% with mean age of 6.4 ± 3.8 years and ranging from 2 months to 18 years. The age distribution of the study group was dominated by older children (6-11 years) 36% followed by young children (3-5 years) 29.5%, infants and toddlers (<3 years) 25.5%, and adolescents (12-18 years) in 9% (Figure 1A).

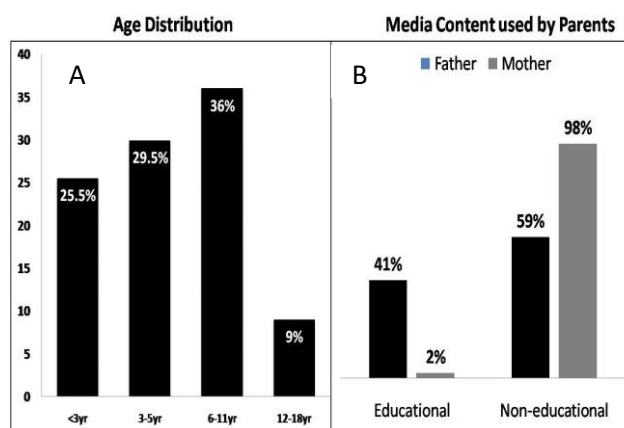


Figure 1: (A) Age distribution of the children, and (B) media content used by the parents of children enrolled.

Socio-economic-demographic parameters and media exposure of parents

Despite rural setting the illiteracy noted in only 2.5% of fathers and 6% of mothers. The fathers had a formal school education in 42.5%, followed by graduation or above in 28.5%, higher secondary in 26.5%. Similarly, among mothers 51.5% had a formal school education, 23% had higher secondary and only 19.5% had graduation or above. As far as occupation was concerned, fathers were mostly employed (85 vs. 4.5%, $p < 0.001$) with mothers being a homemaker. Family income was marginal with an estimated average monthly income of $\leq 25,000$ Indian rupees in 68.5% cases and only 5% had an income of $> 50,000$ rupees monthly.

Despite average education and income, all of them had any form of following media at home like mobile, television, radio, computer, and combination. Mobile phone and television were the most common home available gadgets (73.5%). Media-gadget used by the parents at home was mostly a combination of mobile phone and television (82.5%). At home average daily time spent with media by father was 2.9 ± 2.5 hours and that by mother was 2.3 ± 1.7 hours. Working parents used media mostly during mealtime and bedtime whereas mother who was homemaker mostly used it during household activities and mealtime. When the contents of media used by the parents were analysed, 74.5% of mothers and 32.5% of fathers used media at home for movies, serials, music further another 13% of mothers and 10.5% of fathers were frequent user of mobile games that may have bad impact on kids (noneducational items) (Figure-1B). The sports channels and kid's educational channels were used at home by 15% of fathers and only 2% of mothers (educational items) (Table-1).

Table 1: Details of the parents.

Parameters	Number	%
Education of father		
School non goer	5	2.5
Formal education	85	42.5
Higher secondary (10+2 standard)	53	26.5
Graduate and above	57	28.5
Education of mother		
School non goer	12	6.0
Formal education	103	51.5
Higher secondary (10+2 standard)	46	23.0
Graduate and above	39	19.5
Occupation of father		
Professionals	9	4.5
Associate professionals	94	47.0
Traders	69	34.5
Unskilled and semi-skilled	19	9.5
Unemployed	9	4.5
Occupation of mother		
Employed	30	15.0
Homemaker	170	85.0
Parental income per month (INR) (Lac)		
<0.25	137	68.5
0.25-0.50	53	26.5
0.51-1	9	4.5
>1	1	0.5
Available media at home		
Only mobile	15	7.5
Only television	4	2.0
Both of above	147	73.5
More than 2*	34	17.0

*any of gadgets like-Mobile, Television, Computer, Radio etc

Media handling by children

Table 2: Details of the children.

Parameters	Number	%
Education status of children		
School non-goer ^a	55	27.5
Pre-primary ^b	48	24.0
Primary ^b	65	32.5
Upper primary ^b	27	13.5
Secondary ^b	3	1.5
Higher secondary ^b	2	1.0
Program seen by child		
Learning material ^c	11	5.5
Sports	2	1.0
Cartoon	57	28.5
Mobile and video game	53	26.5
Movie, music, serials etc.	28	14.0
Combination	49	24.5
Use of social media		
Personal gadgets for children	6	3.0
Use of internet facility	75	37.7
Use of social media	19	9.5
Social media account		
Self	02	10.5
Parents	17	89.5
Timing for media use		
Meal time	25	12.7
Bed time	18	9.0
Both	18	9.0
Any time (no fixed timing)	138	69.3
Duration of media use during school days (n=145) (hr)		
< 2	74	51
>and=2	71	49

a. School Non-goer: infant and toddlers (<3 year), few are (<5 year) not yet started schooling b. Pre-primary (playgroup, LKG, UKG), Primary education (standard 1st to 5th), Upper primary (standard 6th to 8th), Secondary (standard 9th and 10th), Higher secondary (standard 11th and 12th) education. c. Learning Material: math/scientific information/art and crafts etc.

In this study the children exposed to media at an average age of 2.5 ± 1.9 years with the earliest being 2 months and 36.5 % of children were exposed before their 2nd birthday. Three% of children with age ranging from 14 months to 13.5 years had their personal gadgets (mobile phones, video games, and computers). Two third of the children had chosen their media content and in one third by parents (Figure 2). The cartoon channels were highest consumed content 28.5%, followed by mobile and video games 26.5%, movie, music and serials 14%, learning materials 5.5%, sports events 1% and a combination of above was seen by 24.5% of children. Average hours of media consumption by a child in school days were 1.9 (± 1.4) against 2.7 (± 2.0) hours in holidays. Forty-nine% (98/200) of total children had >1 hour of daily screen exposure irrespective of holidays. Again 49% (71/145) of school-going children had ≥ 2 hours of screen exposure

during school days. Multivariate analysis showed that below-average school performance increased by 1.38 times (HR=1.38, 95CI=1.01-1.89, p=0.04 correctly classified in 78%) among the children using media for ≥ 2 hours in school days. About media timing 12.7% of children were used during mealtime, 9% during bedtime, 9% during both mealtime and bedtime and the majority (69.3%) were used at any time of the day. In context to social media 9.5% (19/200) children of age range 5 years to 16 years 9 months were using it (Facebook-1, Whatsapp-18). Among social media users, 10% (2/19) were of ≥ 13 years of age and having own account and rest 90% (17/19) were using parent's account (Table 2).

Parental regulation on children's media use (media parenting)

The majority of parents use media at home for them and kids randomly, only 19.5% of parents follow few rules like restricting access to television and mobile at limited time. Forty-three % of children were using media under supervision (either of the parent or caretaker was in the background with knowledge of media content) whereas 40% had an irregular supervision (present in the background but unaware of the content) and 17% exposed to media without any supervision depicted in (Figure 2). Parental crosschecking of social media posts of their children was done only in 36.8% whereas 63.2% had not. On analysis for the reason behind media exposure to kids by parents, 31.5% for entertainment, 10% on demand by child, 6% cases to calm down the child, only 3% for learning purpose, and 1% due to parental interest to keep the kid busy as they couldn't engage with them (Table 3).

Parental knowledge attitude practice towards media use and its impact on children

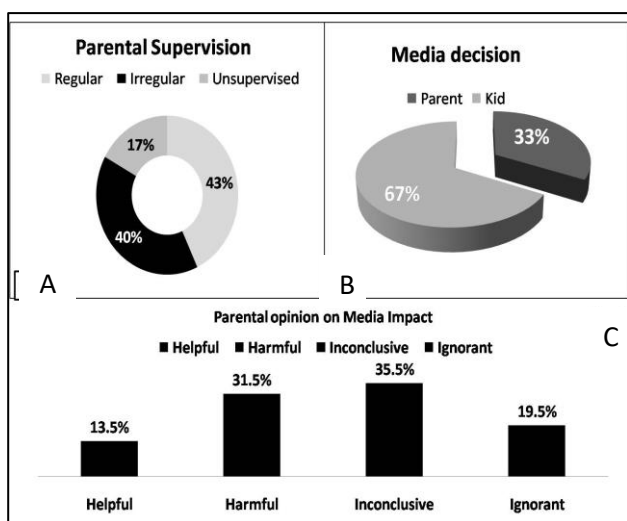


Figure 2: (A) Parental supervision of the media use by children, (B) media use and content decision by kid or parents, and (C) parental opinion about impact of media use on their kids.

As per the analysis it was found that 92.5 % of parents were unaware of the minimum age of a child to introduce media and all were unaware of the minimum age to begin social media (which is 2 years and 13 years respectively as per the latest American academy of pediatric guidelines). There were varied opinions regarding the impact on the physical and mental health of a child by media use like 31.5% believed harmful, 13.5% opined helpful, 35.5% inconclusive answers and 19.5% of parents were ignorant about this. The majority of parents pointed out that media use may have a bad impact on study, visual problem and sex-related issues (Table 3).

Table 3: Knowledge, attitude and practice of parents towards media use by child.

Parameters	Number	%
Impact of media use on the physical and mental health of a child		
Harmful	63	31.5
Helpful	27	13.5
No idea	39	19.5
Depends upon use	71	35.5
Impact of media use on school performances		
Yes	176	88
No	11	5.5
No idea	13	6.5
Are you aware of the minimum age to introduce media to a child?		
Yes	15	7.5
Don't Know	185	92.5
Do you need strict them by rule?		
Yes	39	19.5
No	161	80.5
Do you need to crosscheck while using social media (n=19)?		
Yes	7	36.8
No	12	63.2
Do You prefer a personalized gadget for kids?		
Yes	2	1
No	198	99
Reason for providing media to the child		
Entertainment	63	31.5
Learning	6	3.0
To calm down	12	6.0
Busy parent	2	1.0
Demand of Child	20	10.0
Any 2 or above	61	30.5
Any 3 or more of above	36	18.0
Parental use affects the kid's media use seeking attitude-are you aware?		
Yes	11	5.5
No	189	94.5

Effect of media on children

This study observed following physical, mental, and cognitive impacts among 36% (n=200) of the children using media like 18% had behavioral problems (anxiety,

depression, aggression, temper tantrum, nocturnal enuresis), 5% had poor school performance, 4% had speech abnormality, 3.5% had sleep disorder, 3% had attention deficit, and 2.5% had hyperactivity and rest 64% were normal. Outcome abnormalities were analysed in children of <5 years (n=80/200) and ≥ 5 years (n=120/200) abnormality present in (27/80) 33.8%, 95% CI (23.2%-45.5%) of children in <5 years age group. Analysis of the effect of media use on school performance was shown (Table 4).

Table 4: Impact of media use on school performance of child.

Parameters	Time in hours (Mean \pm 2SD)	
Media use in school days	1.9 \pm 1.4	
Media use during holidays	2.7 \pm 2.0	
Physical activities in school days	1.6 \pm 1.1	
Physical activities during holidays	3.3 \pm 2.2	
Media use and categorization of school performance (children 5 year or more)		
Parameters	Good and average (n=93)	Below average (n=25)
Media use in school days (median, range)	1.5 (0-6)	2 (0-6)
Media use in holidays (median, range)	2 (0-9)	3 (0.5-9)
Physical activity in school-days (median, range)	1 (0-6)	2 (0-5)
Physical activity in holidays (median, range)	2 (0-12)	3 (0-7)
Multivariate analysis		
Hours of media use in school days HR (95%CI)	1.38 (1.01-1.89)	p=0.04 correctly classify 78%

DISCUSSION

The rapid urbanization, improvement in socioeconomic status, and availability of the facilities like media and gadgets for daily use in rural areas of our country are welcome steps. But changing trend of use of media from necessity to luxury is trouble for kids.¹² Again use of media also had negative impacts not only on adults but also on children as has been noted by several previous studies and committee statement (Bickham, Jat, and Muduli et al American college of pediatricians statement, Hosokawa et al.¹³⁻¹⁷ On the other hand, easy availability of gadgets and excessive use as replacement for physical and social interaction led to poor school performance which is a major concern as stated by Misra et al.¹⁸ However, this fact was known to parents even in rural

outlets but lack of parental guidance becomes a major problem for school-going children.

The family income, education, or parental occupation was not a deciding factor for media availability at home as well as exposure to kids as shown in the current study. Regarding the minimum age for ownership of a personal gadget is hardly known in current literature. Some suggested a guarded opinion for the provision of a dumb mobile with limited capacity for contacts when the child resides away from home for a special purpose. But this study revealed that the mobile phone was provided by the parents as early as 14 months of age for entertainment as replacement to unavailability of time by the parent for their kid. This gives a strong message to the paediatric fraternity as well as the parents to change their perception as well as attitude and foster two-way communication of kid which is much needed for the upbringing of the kid at a tender age. When we analysed the minimum age of exposure to media by a child, it's too disappointing. As suggested by many societies and a series of publications Bozzola et al council on communications and media, the minimum age for media screen exposure to a child should be at least 2 years or above.^{19,20} The present study showed nearly 36.5% of children were exposed before they had completed the 2nd year of life and as early as 2 months for entertainment. This is something further delaying the social interaction of kid when is in rapidly growing and needs urgent attention from the neurodevelopment and cognitive growth prospect. After early and easy media availability next is its impact, the present study showed that the children used more hours of media at home in the holidays than on school days, which itself suggests that the gadgets became a replacement option for physical activity or peer relationship development as stated by Anderson et al.²¹ Present study also showed an inverse relationship between screen-time and school performance by multivariate analysis, showing >2 hours of screen-time during school days lead to 1.38 times (p=0.04, correctly classified in 78%) increased risk of poor school performance. Earlier studies like Fetler, Arya, Ennemoser, Efron, Schmidt and Gaurav et al in urban settings also showed similar results.²²⁻²⁷ So the present study is an eye-opener for serious consideration as India is a rural dominated country and media user is going to increase over time, unlike saturated developed countries. The point needs to be emphasized here that media parenting as far as the use of media by children is concerned. The study showed, two-third of children themselves decided the media content without any absolute knowledge about the healthy and appropriateness of the chosen one. In fact, half of them using that like young adults or follow what other family members using. It implies that knowingly or unknowingly parents and close family members play a role model for media handling of their own children.

Again, it's of great concern for parents exposing their kids to media with the intent for soothing or replaces some demand or activity, urge for parental media literacy.

So extra media caution by the parents as well as designated parent-child media free interaction is essential for kid's physical and mental development. A gross lack of parental knowledge and awareness regarding media concerning children in rural context is evidenced here. The current study had a major strength in being the first of a kind to address the concern of media use in a rural setting and brought the transparency of all these above facts. The limitation of the study is the small sample size, single center study with questionnaires graded upon subjective response, but this is due to the lack of existing objective evaluation parameters. Despite being unique, a larger sample size, community-based study with an intervention package will be of help as far as media parenting is concerned. To conclude-In current digitalized scenario no one can prevent children to handle and go through the media. Being parents, the main role is how safely and guardedly they help their children to navigate this modern world through various unwanted media hazards but simultaneously make them competent and responsible digital citizens by utilising all the positive aspects of media gadgets. So Proper media parenting is now not only the need of the hour but also an unavoidable activity in day-to-day life for each parent irrespective of their socio-cultural, educational, occupational background, way of living, and place of living. Non educational media content for entertainment purpose during school-days should be discouraged. For this, a multitude of approach starting from paediatrician, school teacher, psychologist to policymakers, media awareness program is needed for fostering the media parenting and prevent the media related hazards on children in long-term prospect.

CONCLUSION

In current digitalized scenario no one can prevent children to handle and go through the media. Being parents, the main role is how safely and guardedly they help their children to navigate this modern world through various unwanted media hazards but simultaneously make them competent and responsible digital citizens by utilising all the positive aspects of media gadgets. So Proper media parenting is now not only the need of the hour but also an unavoidable activity in day-to-day life for each parent irrespective of their socio-cultural, educational, occupational background, way of living, and place of living. Non educational media content for entertainment purpose during school-days should be discouraged. For this, a multitude of approach starting from paediatrician, school teacher, psychologist to policymakers, media awareness program is needed for fostering the media parenting and prevent the media related hazards on children in long-term prospect.

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