

## **Perceptions of mothers towards children usage of electronic gadgets**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present paper is aimed to study the perceptions of mothers towards children usage of electronic gadgets. The sample of the study comprised of 200 mothers of preschool children selected from Hyderabad. The data was collected by using an interview schedule and mothers were primary respondents. The findings showed that nearly three fourth (73%) of preschool mothers are aware of experts recommended screen time for their children whereas, more than one fourth (27%) of the mothers do not have knowledge on experts recommendations. The results also revealed that majority of mothers belong to below 30 years age group, undergraduates and working have more positive perceptions towards gadgets usage of preschool children. While, mothers belong to above 30 years age group, post graduates and non-working are more concerned about children health issues and gadget addiction.

**Key Words :** Preschool children, Parents, Mothers, Perceptions, Gadgets, Usage, Screen time

### **INTRODUCTION**

A parent is the child's first teacher. Parental attitudes, beliefs, thoughts influence children in many ways. In the modern era, young children are becoming experts in using the technology. Numerous studies documented preschool children usage of gadgets and parental perceptions towards their usage. A study conducted in 2015 by Lieberman Research Worldwide found that parents approved the growing use of mobile technology in education, and most of them perceived that it improves children's quality of education.

Another study found that about half of parents consider once in a week computer use was appropriate for children, while the other half of parents in this study believed once per week was not frequent enough. They expressed that exposure to electronic technology is vital to child's development and future success (Hatzigianni and Margetts, 2014).

Some studies found the concerns of parents about

children usage, content and safety issues. According to Ofcom report (2017), parents expressed concerns about television content and the time their children spend watching television at home. Parents mentioned that they are worried about the increasing screen time of children.

New recommendations in the American Association of Pediatrics (2016) suggest that one hour of technology use is appropriate per day, inclusive of time spent at home and in early learning settings and across devices. Mothers play an important role in supervising and controlling children's gadget usage. The present research paper is aimed to study mothers' awareness on experts' recommendations and their perceptions towards children usage of electronic gadgets.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Sample:**

The sample of this study included 200 mothers of preschool children selected from 11 private preschools of Hyderabad, Telangana State. Table 1 shows the

general profile of sample distributed as per their age, education and occupation.

**Table 1 : Distribution of sample as per their age (N=200)**

| Sr. No. | Sample            | N (%)       |
|---------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1.      | <b>Age</b>        |             |
|         | Below 30 years    | 76 (38.0)   |
|         | Above 30 years    | 124 (62.0)  |
| 2.      | <b>Education</b>  |             |
|         | Under graduation  | 99 (49.5%)  |
|         | Post graduation   | 101 (50.5%) |
| 3.      | <b>Occupation</b> |             |
|         | Working           | 104 (48%)   |
|         | Non-working       | 96 (52%)    |

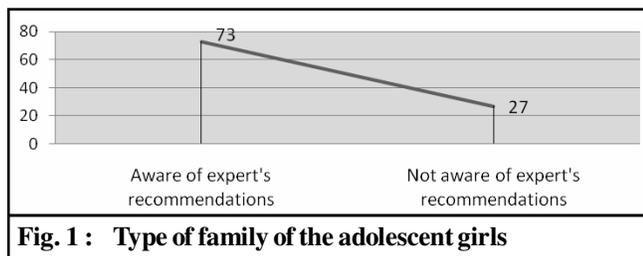
The Table 1 shows that 38% of the mothers belong to below 30 year age group and 62% of mothers belong to above 30 year age group. Nearly half (49.5%) of mothers are graduates and 50.5 % mothers are postgraduates. Forty eight per cent of mothers are working and fifty two per cent of mothers are home makers.

**Tool:**

A questionnaire on “Perceptions of mothers towards their children usage of electronic gadgets” was designed and used for collecting the data. The primary respondents were mothers of preschool children. The questionnaire contains 24 positive and negative statements with agreed and disagreed options. The test re-test reliability with the gap of two weeks is 0.73.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Between the ages zero to six, rapid growth of development occurs across different domains and it depends on numerous factors. Screen time is one of the major factors which influences children. Hence it is important to understand parents’ knowledge on children usage of electronic gadgets. Fig. 1 portrays mothers’ awareness on recommended screen time of preschool children.



The Fig. 1 shows that nearly three fourth (73%) of preschool mothers are aware of experts recommended screen time for their children. Whereas more than one fourth (27%) of the mothers do not have knowledge on experts recommendations. It is important for the mothers to know the suggestions and recommendations of experts like pediatricians and educationalists. According to their suggestions, limited screen time for preschool children is one hour per day. Parents co-view media with children will help them to understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them.

Although findings of various studies revealed the increased screen time among young children, there is limited data available on preschool parents’ awareness and perceptions. In this study, an attempt is made to know the perceptions of mothers towards children usage of gadgets. The results are presented in Table 1.

The Table 1 shows that majority (81.5%) of mothers agreed with the statement “*electronic gadgets influence children to develop language skills*”. They opined that when children watch different language programmes in the gadgets, they can pick up new vocabulary and learn new languages with ease. The findings reveal that 59% of mothers disagreed to the statement “*electronic gadgets influence children to develop reading and writing skills*”. Judge *et al.* (2006) found that children’s frequent use of computer programs for reading was negatively correlated with their reading achievement.

Almost all (97%) the mothers agreed up on the statement “*children’s time with electronic gadgets reduces their outdoor play time*”. Gachuru (2012) reported that majority (60%) of children in his study preferred to watch TV rather than play with friends and around 40% of children preferred playing with friends. Fifty eight per cent mothers accepted the statement “*electronic gadgets influence children to develop social skills*”. Co-viewing and parental interactions would be helpful for social development of children.

Nearly half (48.5%) of the mothers agreed and other 51.5% disagreed to the statement “*electronic gadgets influence children to develop emotional skills*”. Gani (2016) found the negative effect invoked by gadget on child’s socio-emotional skills. He stated that the habit of playing gadget will result in dependency behavior which can destruct child’s social and emotional development. It will cause lack of socialization in the community and this will be continued from childhood to adulthood. Majority (67%) of the mothers opined that “*electronic gadgets*

**Table 2 : Perceptions of Mothers towards Children Usage of Electronic Gadgets (N=200)**

| Sr. No. | Statement  | Agreed N (%) | Disagreed N (%) |
|---------|--|--------------|-----------------|
| 1.      | Develop language skills  | 163 (81.5%)  | 37 (18.5%)      |
| 2.      | Develop reading and writing skills   | 82 (41.0%)   | 118 (59.0%)     |
| 3.      | Reduce their outdoor play time   | 193 (97.0%)  | 7 (3.0%)        |
| 4.      | Develop social skills  | 116 (58.0%)  | 84 (42.0%)      |
| 5.      | Develop emotional skills   | 97 (48.5%)   | 103 (51.5%)     |
| 6.      | Develop cognitive skills   | 134 (67.0%)  | 66 (33.0%)      |
| 7.      | Develop gender stereotypic behaviour   | 159 (79.5%)  | 41 (20.5%)      |
| 8.      | Show aggressive and violent behaviour  | 162 (81.0%)  | 38 (19.0%)      |
| 9.      | Develop creativity   | 154 (77.0%)  | 46 (23.0%)      |
| 10.     | Develop moral values   | 94 (47.0%)   | 106 (53.0%)     |
| 11.     | Develop attention and concentration  | 109 (54.5%)  | 91 (45.5%)      |
| 12.     | Children spending more time with electronic gadgets creates health problems                | 173 (86.5%)  | 27 (13.5%)      |
| 13.     | Electronic gadgets create positive influence on children's academic performance            | 111 (55.5%)  | 89 (44.5%)      |
| 14.     | Commercial ads influence children to seek kids' products                                   | 160 (80.0%)  | 40 (20.0%)      |
| 15.     | Electronic gadgets create positive influence on children extra-curricular activities       | 80 (40.0%)   | 120 (60.0%)     |
| 16.     | Usages of electronic gadgets induce healthy eating habits                                  | 61 (30.0%)   | 139 (70.0%)     |
| 17.     | Usage of electronic gadgets disturbs children sleeping pattern                             | 154 (77.0%)  | 46 (23.0%)      |
| 18.     | Electronic gadgets play an important role in making children adapt to technological trends | 162 (81.0%)  | 38 (19.0%)      |
| 19.     | Computer based games diminish the time spent on indoor activities                          | 173 (86.5%)  | 27 (13.5%)      |
| 20.     | Electronic gadgets have lots of fun things to keep children entertained                    | 172 (86.0%)  | 28 (14.0%)      |
| 21.     | I am concerned that my child may become addicted to electronic gadgets in the future       | 143 (71.5%)  | 57 (28.5%)      |
| 22.     | I worry about my child's exposure to media during my absence                               | 141 (70.5%)  | 59 (29.5%)      |
| 23.     | Electronic gadgets have lots of educational content that teaches important lessons         | 155 (78.0%)  | 45 (22.0%)      |
| 24.     | Family's viewing of screen time has taken over the family time                             | 158 (79.0%)  | 42 (21.0%)      |

*influence children to develop cognitive skills*". Mothers expressed that interactive and activity based apps like puzzles, joining the dots, matching, guessing games etc. are helpful for their children to develop cognitive skills.

A greater percentage of mothers (79.5%) have agreed with the statement "*electronic gadgets influence children to develop gender stereotypic behaviour*". Eighty one per cent of mothers accepted that "*electronic gadgets influence children to show aggressive and violent behaviour*". Conners-Burrow *et al.* (2011) reported in their study that children's viewing of age-inappropriate content of television programs was related to their aggressive and hyperactive behavior problems.

Seventy seven per cent of mothers agreed with the statement that "*electronic gadgets influence children to develop creativity*". Fifty three per cent of mothers disagreed with the statement "*electronic gadgets influence children to develop moral values*". More than half (54.5%) of the mothers agreed and nearly half

(45.5%) of them have disagreed that "*electronic gadgets influence children to develop attention and concentration*". However earlier research indicated negative association between children television viewing and their attention. A longitudinal study found positive correlation between early television exposure and subsequent symptoms of attention problems at age seven (Christaskiks *et al.*, 2004).

Majority (86.5%) of mothers perceived that "*children spending more time with electronic gadgets creates health problems in them such as obesity, visual problems etc.*". Dietz and Gortmaker (1985) reported that each additional hour of TV viewing per week increased the risk of obesity by two per cent. More than half (55.5%) of mothers agreed and 43.5% mothers disagreed with the statement "*electronic gadgets create positive influence on children's academic performance*". When children watch educational programs, it will enhance their knowledge. Gadget usage and positive influence on children's academic

performance is depends on the content they choose.

Eighty per cent of mothers opined that “*commercial ads influence children to seek kids’ products*”. Mothers mentioned that often their children are influenced by the attractive ads and branded products. For the statement of “*electronic gadgets create positive influence on children extra-curricular activities*”, majority (60%) of mothers have disagreed. They mentioned that spending time for extra-curricular activities like swimming, dance, karate, music etc. is more fruitful for children than screen time. Seventy per cent of the mothers disagreed to the statement “*usages of electronic gadgets induce healthy eating habits*”. A study revealed that TV viewing is inversely associated with intake of fruits and vegetables, which receive little air time despite their potential to promote health in various ways and protect against weight gain (Boynton, 2003).

Majority (77%) of mothers perceived that “*usage of electronic gadgets disturbs children sleeping pattern*”. Eighty one per cent of mothers agreed the statement “*electronic gadgets play an important role in making children adapt to technological trends*”. Nearly eighty seven percentage (86.5%) of mothers accepted that “*computer based games diminish the time spent on indoor activities like board games, puzzles, reading books etc.*”. Such indoor activities will help children to develop fine motor skills, eye-hand coordination, reading and writing readiness. But due to increased screen time, time spent on indoor games has been reduced.

Eighty six per cent of mothers agreed with the

statement “*electronic gadgets have lots of fun things to keep children entertained*”. Around three fourth (71.5%) of the mothers have expressed that “*I am concerned that my child may become addicted to electronic gadgets in the future*”. As children are avid users of technology, mothers have expressed concerns that their children may get addicted to gadgets in the future. Nearly seventy one per cent (70.5%) of mothers also expressed concern about “*child’s exposure to media when children are with someone else at home without parents*”. Mothers are worried for two major concerns during their absences – increased usage and content monitoring. These two are important aspects in controlling children.

Seventy eight per cent of mothers perceived that “*electronic gadgets have lots of educational content that teaches important lessons*”. Educational programs and videos will make children to understand the concepts with ease and interest. Majority (79%) of mothers agreed with the statement “*family’s viewing of screen time has taken over the family time*”. Mothers have expressed that gadgets have occupied their family time like meal time, bed time, outings etc. Interestingly they have also shared that they feel incomplete without gadgets.

Thus it is evident that with the increased use of technology among families, most of the mothers have positive perceptions towards children usage of electronic gadgets. Mean perception scores of mothers towards children’s usage of electronic gadgets is presented in Table 3.

It is evident from the Table 3 that out of 24 items,

**Table 3 : Mean scores of below 30 years and above 30 year age group mothers on their perceptions towards children usage of electronic gadgets**

| Sr. No. | Statement   | <30 years (N=76) |      | >30 years (N=124) |      | t Value |
|---------|---|------------------|------|-------------------|------|---------|
|         |   | Mean             | SD   | Mean              | SD   |         |
|         | Electronic gadgets influence children to  |                  |      |                   |      |         |
| 1.      | develop language skills   | 2.87             | 0.38 | 2.71              | 0.58 | 2.34*   |
| 2.      | develop reading and writing skills  | 2.45             | 0.60 | 2.24              | 0.64 | 2.29*   |
| 3.      | develop social skills   | 2.68             | 0.52 | 2.40              | 0.66 | 3.33*   |
| 4.      | develop cognitive skills  | 2.79             | 0.57 | 2.57              | 0.70 | 2.38*   |
| 5.      | develop moral values  | 2.63             | 0.68 | 2.33              | 0.71 | 2.93*   |
| 6.      | develop attention and concentration   | 2.71             | 0.65 | 2.41              | 0.73 | 3.01*   |
| 7.      | Children spending more time with electronic gadgets creates health problems           | 2.00             | 0.61 | 2.22              | 0.68 | 2.37*   |
| 8.      | Computer based games diminish the time spent on indoor activities                     | 1.96             | 0.66 | 2.18              | 0.64 | 2.30*   |
| 9.      | I am concerned that my child may become addicted to electronic gadgets in the future  | 2.03             | 0.65 | 2.29              | 0.74 | 2.64*   |
| 10.     | Child’s exposure to media when children are with someone else at home without parents | 2.11             | 0.62 | 2.29              | 0.67 | 1.98*   |

the two groups differed significantly on 10 statements. Of these ten items, mothers of below 30 years scored higher on 6 items compared to the mothers of above 30 years. Mothers of above 30 years scored higher on the remaining 4 items than the mothers of below 30 years age group. The results reveal that mothers of younger age group perceived positive influence of electronic gadgets more than the mothers of above 30 years age group. Whereas, mothers of above 30 year age group perceived negative effects of electronic gadgets more than the below 30 years age group.

Mother’s education is another important aspect which influences child rearing practices. Mean scores of Undergraduate and Postgraduate mothers on their perceptions towards children usage of electronic gadgets is presented in Table 4.

The Table 4 shows that out of 24 items, the two groups differed significantly on 5 statements. Among these five items, UG mothers scored higher on 3 items and PG mothers scored higher in the remaining 2 items. It is evident from the findings of the above table that undergraduate mothers have more positive perceptions towards children usage of electronic gadgets as compared to post graduate mothers. While post graduate mothers perceived more on negative effects of gadget usage than undergraduate mothers. They opined that gadget usage leads to unhealthy eating habits and disturbance in sleeping pattern. Mean scores of working and non-working mothers and their perceptions towards

children’s usage of electronic gadgets are presented in the Table 5.

The results of the Table 5 reveal that out of 24 items, perceptions of working and non-working mothers did not differ significantly on 21 items. Whereas, working mothers have more positive perceptions that usage of gadgets is helpful for children’s creativity and academic performance than non-working mothers. The differences are significant at 0.05 level. In contrast, non-working mothers are significantly more concerned that usage of gadgets creates gender stereotypic behaviour among preschool children than working mothers.

Thus the findings from Tables 3, 4 and 5 revealed that mothers of below 30 years group, undergraduates and working have more positive perceptions towards gadgets usage of preschool children. Whereas, mothers belong to above 30 years age group, post graduates and non-working are more concerned about children health issues and gadget addiction.

**Conclusion:**

- The findings are evident that nearly three fourth (73%) of preschool mothers are aware of experts recommended screen time for their children whereas, more than one fourth (27%) of the mothers do not have knowledge on experts recommendations.
- Majority of mothers perceived that electronic gadgets are useful for their children to develop language, social, emotional, cognitive and creative skills.

**Table 4 : Mean scores of Undergraduate and Post Graduate Mothers on their perceptions towards children usage of electronic gadgets**

| Sr. No. | Statement  | UG (N=99) |      | PG (N=101) |      | t value |
|---------|--|-----------|------|------------|------|---------|
|         |  | Mean      | SD   | Mean       | SD   |         |
|         | Electronic gadgets influence children to                       |           |      |            |      |         |
| 1.      | develop reading and writing skills                             | 2.50      | 0.60 | 2.24       | 0.65 | 2.95*   |
| 2.      | develop moral values   | 2.51      | 0.75 | 2.31       | 0.64 | 2.01*   |
| 3.      | develop attention and concentration                            | 2.65      | 0.67 | 2.45       | 0.75 | 2.03*   |
| 4.      | Usages of electronic gadgets induce healthy eating habits      | 2.12      | 0.65 | 2.32       | 0.64 | 2.19*   |
| 5.      | Usage of electronic gadgets disturbs children sleeping pattern | 2.81      | 0.65 | 2.99       | 0.62 | 2.02*   |

**Table 5 : Mean scores of working and non-working mothers on their perceptions towards children usage of electronic gadgets**

| Sr. No. | Statement   | Working (N=104) |      | Non-working (N=96) |      | t Value |
|---------|---|-----------------|------|--------------------|------|---------|
|         |   | Mean            | SD   | Mean               | SD   |         |
|         | Electronic gadgets influence children to  |                 |      |                    |      |         |
| 1.      | develop gender stereotypic behaviour  | 2.21            | 0.77 | 1.97               | 0.57 | 2.53*   |
| 2.      | develop creativity  | 2.72            | 0.67 | 2.91               | 0.53 | 2.21*   |
| 3.      | Electronic gadgets create positive influence on children’s academic performance | 2.44            | 0.68 | 2.65               | 0.63 | 2.19*   |

– Mothers also perceived that gadget usage leads to gender stereotypic traits, health issues like obesity, visual problems, eating and sleeping disturbances among children.

– The results also revealed that majority of mothers belong to below 30 years age group, undergraduates and working have more positive perceptions towards gadgets usage of preschool children. While, mothers belong to above 30 years age group, post graduates and non-working are more concerned about children health issues and gadget addiction.

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