



Association of Screentime and Speech Delay among Pre-School Age Children – An Exploratory Study

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To the Editor: The use of digital media has increased exponentially in recent years, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic [1]. In this era of working parents, exposing kids to media is now considered the norm and part of parenting. Children under the age of 5 y are the most vulnerable population since these are the critical years for overall development of a child. Increased screentime during these critical years of development leads to adverse neurocognitive outcomes and speech delay [2]. The current study aimed to determine the association between screen time and speech delay in preschool-aged children in Tamil Nadu, India. A cross-sectional observational study was conducted with 150 children (112 boys & 38 girls) with a mean age of 34.30 mo (+/- 15.31 mo). A formal and informal speech and language evaluation was done and children with any sensory, structural, genetic and neurological impairments were excluded. An Indian-based tool – Assessment of Language Development (ALD) [3] was used during evaluation. Pearson Chi-square was carried out to the data set and results revealed significant association ($X^2= 22.253$; $p = 0.00$) between screentime and speech delay. The study found that children who had an average screen time of 6-8 h per day were more likely to have a history of speech delay and be diagnosed with Spoken Language Disorder. There was no significant association between screen time and modes of communication (verbal/non-verbal), however, a noticeable number of children with increased screen time had other primary modes of communication (pointing/

gestural) than verbal. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) (2016) recommends that screen time should be limited to less than 1 h per day for children aged between 2 to 5 y [4]. Supervised screen time is also recommended to monitor the type of content (educational/entertainment) and the duration of exposure. Parents should be mindful of their children's screen time and limit it to the recommended amount.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest None.

References

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