


Three Minute Article for Parents

Screen time of Sri Lankan pre-schoolers

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Electronic screen device usage and excessive screen time among children have become substantial health problems in many developed countries. It is becoming a significant and important problem in developing countries like Sri Lanka too. Due to this, a regional consensus group recently developed guidelines on the recreational screen time of children in their early years¹. This consensus group recommends limiting recreational screen time to less than one hour per day for pre-school children. Although this and many other guidelines are in place, conformity with these guidelines has not been adequately studied, especially in Sri Lanka.

We conducted a survey among 340 pre-school children in ten randomly selected preschools in a sub-urban region of Sri Lanka, the Homagama Medical Officer of Health area. The intention of the study was to identify the patterns of screen device usage and screen time among pre-school children².

We found that 96% of pre-school children used some form of an electronic screen device and 63% used smartphones. Of the children who used electronic devices, 60% of them exceeded the recommended screen time limit of one hour per day, while in 21% of them, the screen time exceeded two hours per day. Notably, 51% of them commenced screen device usage before their second birthday. Higher paternal education, maternal employment and being the only child, were significantly associated with electronic device usage.

In conclusion, our study revealed that screen time exceeded the recommended daily limits in a majority of pre-school children. Parents should take all necessary steps to limit the recreational screen time of their children during the pre-school years. This advice to parents is provided, based on scientific evidence, to mitigate the undesirable effects of the use of excessive screen time in Sri Lankan children.

References

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