

## In a world of physically hyper present and mentally absent parents

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To study the perception of children regarding the smart phone usage and quality time spent by their parents at home. **Methods:** After obtaining permission from the school authorities, the teachers and parents of the school going children were briefed in detail about the study and the informed consent and an assent consent was obtained. Out of a total of 180 children aged between 8 to 14 years randomly selected 100 participate in the study. The piloted questionnaire consisting of 25 questions covering various aspects like the time the children spend talking to their parents, their opinion about smart phones etc. was administered. **Results:** A total of 100 children from Pondicherry were included in final analysis. The female to male ratio was 1.44. Majority of the Parents were literate (98% of the fathers and 93% of the mothers). Among the parents all the fathers were working, however only 11% of the mothers were working. 41% of the children felt that the time spent by parents with them doing their favourite activities is inadequate. 34% of children felt that the time parents spend with them has decreased after they acquired a smart phone. 57% of children wished that their parents spent more time with them. 34% felt that the quality time spent with their parents has been affected by smart phone usage by parents. Mean and proportion used in categorical and continuous variables. The chi square test was used to find statistical significance. **Conclusion:** The quality time spent by children with their parents has been affected by smart phone usage. Children long to spend more quality time with their parents.

**Keywords:** Smart Phone, Children, Parents, Interaction, Quality, Time

In the current generations parents have become busier and workload has increased. Technology has been reduced to a small and much more convenient smart phone. Also a lot of the times parents bring their work home, but at what cost? Smartphone use may be

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harming children's social development. A growing child, whose feelings are often unnoticed, ignored, or even simply not understood by his or her parents receives a powerful message from them often leading to “personality disorders” in adult life. There is substantial evidence now about the health risks and negative influence from use of excessive technology. Parent-child interactions at meal times show a protective effect on the child's health like obesity, asthma and adolescent risk behaviours. If parents do not spend quality time with their children then there will be an indirect affect on their children's lives! My study was designed to learn the child's perspectives regarding the smart phone usage by parents.

### **MATERIALS & METHODS**

This was a cross sectional study done among 8- 14 year old children at a private English medium school, Pondicherry over a period of two months. The sample size was taken as 100 (randomly chosen sample).

**Inclusion Criteria:** Children with at least one working parent who owns a smart phone.

**Exclusion Criteria:** Children who couldn't complete the questionnaire.

After obtaining permission from the school authorities, the teachers and parents of the school going children were briefed in detail about the study and the informed consent and assent consent was obtained. Out of a total of 180 children aged between 8 to 14 years randomly selected 100 participate in the study. The piloted questionnaire consisting of 25 questions covering various aspects like the time the children spend talking to their parents, their opinion about smart phones etc. was administered. Mean and proportion used in categorical and continuous variables. The Chi square test was used to find statistical significance.

### **RESULTS**

A total of 100 children belonging to schools from Pondicherry were included in final analysis. The female to male ratio was 1.44. Majority of the parents were literate ( 98% of the fathers and 93% of the mothers). 58% of the fathers were educated till at least till high school where as 55% of the mothers were educated till at least high school. Among fathers only 29% were unskilled whereas among mothers 89% were unskilled. Majority (92%) of the children had at least one sibling.

*Table no. 1 Demographic details of the families*

S. No	Item		N ( %)
1	Gender	Male	41 (41%)
		Female	59 (59%)
2	Father's education	Educated	98 (98%)
		Illiterate	2 (2%)
3	Mother's education	Educated	93 (93%)
		Illiterate	7 (7%)
4	Occupation of the father	Unskilled	29 (29.0%)
		Semi-skilled	22 (22.0%)
		Skilled	49 (49%)
5	Occupation of the mother	Un-skilled	89 (89%)
		Skilled	11 (11%)
6	Siblings	No siblings	2 (2%)
		Siblings	98 (98%)

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Among the parents all the fathers were working, however only 11% of the mothers were working.

**Table no. 2 Child's Perspectives on Parents**

S no.	Question	Yes	No	Don't know	
1	Would you say your parents spend more time with you than his/her smart phone? (n=100)	68%	32%	0%	
2	Do your parents know at least one close friend? (n=100)	62%	36%	2%	
3	Do you get to discuss with your parents extracurricular things that happen at school? (n=100)	84%	16%	0%	
4	Do your working parents stay home on the weekends?	Father (n=96)	(73.92) 77%	(22.08) 23%	0%
		Mother (n=13)	(100) 100%	0%	0%

According to the perception of the child only 61% of the parents know at least one close friend of the child. 80% of the children felt that they could discuss extracurricular things that happen at school with their parents. 38% of the children felt that parents spend more time with smart phones than with them. More than 1/5<sup>th</sup> (23%) of the working fathers did not stay at home on weekends, whereas all the working mothers stayed at home during the weekends.

38% of the working fathers brought back office work home. 41% of the children felt that the time spent by parents with them doing their favourite activities is inadequate. About 26% were neutral. If We Include Neutral Then Almost 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Felt That Parent-Child Interactive Time Is Inadequate. 34% of children felt that the time parents spend with them has decreased after they acquired a smart phone. 57% of children wished that their parents spent more time with them. 34% felt that the quality time spent with their parents has been affected by smart phone usage by parents. 47% of the children felt that smart phones are a necessity. There was no statistically significant difference ( $p= 0.443$ ) between the fathers education status and the time spent with their children.

**Table no. 3 Child's perspectives on time spent by parents with them**

S no.	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
1	Would you say your parents bring back work home?	Father (n=98)	(3.92) 4%	(44.1) 45%	(12.74) 13%	(28.42) 29%	(8.82) 9%
		Mother (n=13)	0%	(4.03) 31%	(1.04) 8%	(5.98) 46%	(1.95) 15%
2	Would you say that you feel that the time you spend doing favourite activities with your working parents is inadequate? (n=100)	4%	29%	26%	36%	5%	
3	Has the amount of time you spend with your parents	8%	56%	2%	16%	18%	

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S no.	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	changed after they acquired a smart phone?					
4	Has there been a moment where you wished your parents would spend more time with you? (n=100)	3%	39%	1%	30%	27%
5	Do you think your quality time with your parents is affected by smart phone usage? (n=100)	2%	59%	5%	21%	13%
6	Do you feel that there is a necessity of a smart phone? (n=100)	6%	41%	15%	37%	1%

There was no statistically significant difference ( $p= 0.671$ ) between the mothers education status and the time spent with their children.

### DISCUSSION

In the development of a child, the quality time spent is important. There is increasing perception that the time spent with parents has been constantly declining over time and this has been attributed to various factors like working parents, professional activities, ever increasing technologies, smart phones, internet, television etc. due to this many children feel ignored and uncared for. Children belonging to the age group of 8-14 years who have at least one working parents who use a smart phone was the main focus of the study.

My study has helped to understand the feelings the children have towards parents who have smart phones. In my study children felt that their parents spent more time with smart phones that with the children themselves. 41% of the study children felt that the time spent by parents with their children further decreased after the parents bought a smart phone. On the issue of whether the parents need a smart phone at all, the children's opinion was divided with 38% feeling that it was not at all necessary. Majority of parents spend less than 5 hours with their children in a day. American academy of paediatrics has recommended at least 6 hours of quality time in a day that has to be spent by parents with their children. My study has brought out these important aspects of smart phone usage among parents and its effects on children.

### CONCLUSION

2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the children felt that parent-child interactive time is inadequate. 34% of children felt that the time parents spend with them has decreased after they acquired a smart phone. 57% of children wished that their parents spent more time with them. 34% felt that the quality time spent with their parents has been affected by smart phone usage by parents. 38% of the children felt that smart phones are not a necessity.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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