

Media addiction and its Potential Influence on Children in this Pandemic Circumstance

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound influence on daily life, with extensive steps being made to stem the virus's spread. Schools and other gathering places have been placed on lockdown for an extended period of time. Adolescents and Children are having to cope with a lot of stress in addition to developmental issues. Despite this, research shows that game addiction and internet use are on the rise, with negative consequences for psychological well-being. Social media is a continuously changing platform that allows young people to interact with one another, express themselves, and exchange a variety of information. It has spawned a new cultural paradigm that influences technology and business while also altering people's interactions. Social media is a two-edged sword as a tool. While it has numerous advantages, it can also have a negative impact on children. The goal of this study was to see how the lockdown has affected adolescent internet use by comparing their behaviour before the pandemic to their habits after the pandemic. Furthermore, the goal of this study was to look at the link between gaming addiction, internet use, and COVID-19 concerns.

Keywords: *Psychological Effects on Children, Impacts of Child's Social Development, Adverse Impacts of Technology*

The coronavirus epidemic has resulted in an unprecedented increase in screen time, stated Dr. Howard Taylor, Executive Director of the Global Partnership to End Violence. "With school closures and stringent confinement measures, more and more families are relying on technology and digital solutions to keep their children educated, engaged, and connected to the outside world. However, not all youngsters have the essential knowledge, skills and resources to keep themselves safe online." Screen-based technology has continued to enter children's lives since the last decade. According to a recent poll conducted by Common Sense Media - a non-profit organisation that provides entertainment and technology advice to parents, school students aged 8 to 12 spend over five hours each day staring at screens and teenagers spend more than seven hours each day on social media. This does not include time spent on screens for homework. Other Common Sense Media data support the spread of technology in young people's daily lives.

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More than half of the surveyed children (53%) have a smartphone by the age of 11 and nearly 70% have one by the age of 12. Children under the age of eight spend 39 minutes a day watching videos on the internet (YouTube, Tik Tok, and other sites), a figure that has doubled in recent years.

Physical distance measures restrict face-to-face connection, therefore rising rates of Social Media usage may be especially important to young people. Peer contact deprivation is especially difficult during adolescence, a developmental time in which peer influence and approval are crucial. In the face of these issues, Social Media might have a significant impact.

Responsibility of Schools

UNICEF together with its partners, Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), WePROTECT Global Alliance, World Health Organization (WHO), and World Childhood Foundation USA (Childhood USA), is releasing a new technical note aimed at urging governments, ICT industries, educators and parents to be alert, take urgent measures to mitigate potential risks, and ensure children's online experiences are safe and positive during COVID-19. Schools must update current safeguarding rules to reflect the new realities for children studying from home; encourage and monitor appropriate online behaviour; and continue to provide children with access to school-based counselling services.

Responsibility of Parents

Parents must ensure that children's gadgets have the most up-to-date software and antivirus applications; have open conversations with children about how and with whom they communicate online; work with kids to set ground rules for how, when, and where they can use the internet; be on the lookout for indications of distress in children that may arise as a result of their internet activities, and be aware with school district policies. For some children, the technology of remote learning may be available, but their learning is still disrupted due to the skill gaps or teacher or parental support. Learning capacity varies from child to child and distance education might not prove to be a very effective mode of learning for all but rather may create learning gaps.

Beneficial Effects of Technology

Learning may be done from a distance. Students can use computers, tablets, and cell-phones to stay connected to the classroom, although remotely. Many students have praised remote learning for its less organised style and flexibility to study at their own speed and on their own terms. For students who suffer from social anxiety, distance learning has proved to be a saviour.

Devices and other kinds of technology have been a social lifeline for many, especially youngsters, in an age of social distance. Young people have relied on screens to keep in touch with grandparents and other family members while playing video games online, as well as to communicate with pals. Studies have shown that being in touch with loved ones via social media and messaging platforms enhances mental and emotional wellness, especially during times of crisis.

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Adverse Impacts of Technology

Too much time spent in front of the screen is a cause of concern for youngsters. Before the epidemic, screens did not consume a large portion of young people's lives, as they did so during it. According to Qustodio, in the early days of the epidemic, youngsters spent an average of 97 minutes per day on YouTube, more than twice as much as they did in 2019. Too much screen time may have a number of negative repercussions, including eye damage, insomnia, anxiety, and even addiction to the device.

Physical inactivity and lack of exercise

While children of all ages spend several hours a day in front of devices, some studies show that they spend as little as four minutes outside engaging in physical exercise. COVID-19 has worsened the problem, resulting in school closures and the temporary suspension or termination of numerous sports groups and leagues, reducing children's social and physical possibilities. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, around 25% of children do not live in communities with sidewalks or walking pathways, which may limit their physical activity.

Children who spend two or more hours a week playing sports or participating in other organised physical exercise are less likely to develop mental health problems, according to research.

Vision Impairment

Screens cause a slew of visual issues. Extended screen time can make eyes weary and strained, especially if the lighting around the screen produces glare. Long periods of screen time can also cause eyes to become dry and irritated. Children's exposure to natural light is important for young children, yet screen time keeps them indoors. According to studies, UV light is necessary for good eye development and that spending too much time inside can lead to near-sightedness, which has become more common in youngsters over the last 30 years.

CONCLUSION

Child exploitation seems to be more likely.

According to UNESCO, the COVID-19 pandemic will have a severe impact on children in poor socio-economic groups, particularly girls. "We anticipate that widespread job losses and increased economic instability would exacerbate issues in poor countries. Increases in child exploitation, such as child labour, home abuse, early child marriages, and sexual exploitation, might be among them. Children may also be orphaned if they lose family members."

Effects on children with disabilities

According to Armitage and Nellums, people with disabilities must be included in the COVID-19 response. The authors point out that social isolation will erect further barriers by disrupting essential services such as nourishment, education, health care, and personal care. These might have a detrimental influence on handicapped youngsters, and it could lead to behavioural problems.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in our viewpoint, will have far-reaching, long-term consequences for children all across the world. Although some of these may be beneficial, we fear the negative consequences will be disastrous, affecting millions of youngsters in some manner or the other. In the post-COVID-19 age, international healthcare organisations, children's

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welfare organisations, and governments must collaborate to reduce the pandemic's impact on children.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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