

## EXCESSIVE SCREEN TIME DELAYS DEVELOPMENT, SAYS STUDY

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

Excessive screen time results in delay in development of language. File | Photo Credit: [R. Ashok](#)

Too much exposure to television or mobile phone screens for children below the age of five could be detrimental to their development, a study by Chennai-based researchers has found.

The study assessed the performance of the children and their understanding of commands from their mothers, and found that children who had been exposed to several hours of television or mobile phone screens exhibited an inability to comprehend what they were being told.

Samya Varadarajan, the lead author of *Prevalence of excessive screen time and its association with developmental delay in children aged <5 years: A population-based cross-sectional study in India*, which was published recently in the journal *PLOS One*, said the study tried to understand the association between excessive screen time and developmental delay in children below five years of age.

The study was done in 2019, but Dr. Varadarajan, an assistant professor of community medicine at Sri Ramachandra University, said it could be extrapolated to the current scenario, where children are forced to rely on online classes during the pandemic.

As much as 70% of the 718 children aged six months to five years, who were studied, had been exposed to excessive screen time, the study found.

Most children had been introduced to screens as early as when they were six months of age, and a majority of the children had been exposed to television screens before they turned a year old. Excessive screen time (ST) results in a delay in development of expressive and receptive language. Children learn to express themselves by imitating their parents or caregivers. By the age of three, they start speaking a lot of words. But those exposed to too much ST are unable to do so.

“We have taken eight parameters to understand the development of the child. We say there is a developmental delay when the child is unable to understand what the mother is saying. When the mother says ‘Come here and sit down’, she is issuing two commands. But the child manages to understand just one command. That is a developmental delay,” Dr. Varadarajan explained.

The study found that children exposed to ST tried to imitate the slang they picked up from watching television. They used inappropriate words and were unable to understand simple commands.

Though the study was done before the COVID-19 pandemic, she said the results would only be starker now.

Schools could have online classes, but for children below the age of five, it should be more activity-based instead of having them watch the screen, she said.

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Dr. Gagandeep Kang speaks to us about ZyCoV-D, the world's first DNA vaccine that is set for roll out in India

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