Increasing screen time and gaming impact on children's mental health during the covid - 19 lockdown

By
Dr.Shruti A.Suthar
[M.A Gold Medalist, GSET, Ph.D]
Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology
**Uma Arts & Nathiba Commerce Mahila College, Sec : 23,
Gandhinagar.**

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 outbreak has posed major challenges across the world. Hundreds of billions of people worldwide are required to stay at home to protect themselves and prevent the spread of the disease. As of 25 April 2020, about one and half billion children have been out of school and as a result, many of them may be spending more time on screens to complete online events as part of home schooling, socializing with peers or playing video games given that outdoor activities may be restricted due to lockdowns. children can be particularly helpless to the harms associated with excessive screen time or gaming including unhealthy sitting lifestyles, exposure to harmful content (violent or sexual), misinformation about COVID-19, cyber bullying, increase of gaming disorder, or joining in online gambling. Different target groups have a responsibility to take urgent action to ensure online safety for children during the COVID-19 pandemic. These target groups contain: parents and guardians, school authorities, health and social care providers, digital technology and gaming businesses, and policy-makers.

Keywords: *Covid-19, Screen time, Gaming & Mental Health.*

❖ **INTRODUCTION:**

As a reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries have introduced steps such as spatial distancing and "staying at home" to control its spread and effect. The fear resulting from the disease, the 'lockdown' situation, high levels of doubt regarding the future, and financial uncertainty raise the level of stress, anxiety, and depression experienced by people all around the world. Psychoactive materials and other strengthening behaviours (e.g., gambling, video gaming, watching pornography) are often used to reduce stress and anxiety and/or to ease depressed mood. The tendency to use such materials and engage in such behaviours in an excessive manner as putative coping plans in crises like the COVID-19 pandemic is considerable. Moreover, the meaning of information and communications technology (ICT) is even higher in the present crisis than usual. ICT has been crucial in keeping parts of the economy going, permitting large groups of people to work and study from home, enhancing social connectedness, providing greatly needed entertainment, etc. Although for the massive majority ICT use is adaptive and should not be pathologized, a sub group of helpless individuals are at risk of developing problematic usage patterns. The present harmony guidance discusses these risks and makes some practical recommendations that may help diminish them.

The present guidance focuses on the assignation with information and communications technology (ICT) in the time of the COVID-19 crisis. On the one hand, ICT is a "saviour"; it pays vitally to distributing knowledge about the outbreak to wide sectors of the worldwide population, to an

extent not possible without such technology. Information flow is a main factor in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic (permitting persons to have instant access to reliable information, while permitting researchers with means for collaboration on a worldwide scale in the competition to develop a vaccine and efficient treatment strategies, for example). Studying and working remotely is possible due to the use of ICT. Keeping social contact remotely with friends and families to reduce psychological impacts of isolation, providing entrance to entertainment and even materials guiding physical exercise (e.g., live streaming home fitness sessions) are understood through ICT and represent strategies recommended by the WHO. Also, medical and psychological consultation and psychotherapy both in the case of addictive disorders and other mental disorders may be lead online when appropriate.

On the other view, the use of ICT also carries risks. While considered healthy when followed in moderation and for significant purposes, extreme use of specific online activities such as gambling, viewing of pornography, video gaming, social media use, shopping may lead to major problems and raise the risk of disordered or addictive use. Disordered use of the internet creates marked distress and/or important damage in personal, family, social, educational, professional, or other important areas of operational. Hence, keeping participation in these behaviours at enough and controlled levels, especially during the pandemic, is imperative. This is also important as the individual industries (e.g., gambling, gaming, and pornography) may boost their customers to spend longer times in these activities, such as by launching opportunistic marketing campaigns. Based on this background, we, a multidisciplinary and multinational group of experts in problematic usage of the internet make some practical recommendations that may help reduce risks of increased use of ICT devices and online activities. We ask experts and policymakers to convey these recommendations to their clients specially and to the general population more largely.

There is no hesitation about the fact that an increase in screen time leads to high digital eyestrain. Children are not diverse from adults when it comes to digital eyestrain. They can experience opposite effects in their eye sight which can vary from dry eye to eye strain to blurry vision, as well. A nonstop increase in screen time can also increase the chance of developing Myopia, which ultimately only growth further. While the indications are not permanent, they can be frequent depending on the child's screen time in the entire day. There are also other reverse effects of increased screen time which contains Fatness, conflicts in sleep cycle and challenges in one's educational performance.

❖ **Recent Study:**

In a latest ground-breaking study issued in *Preventive Medicine Reports,* researchers at San Diego State University suggest that more than one hour per day of screen time for children ages 2 to 17 is associated with lower mental health.

The study measured screen time by the joint use of TV, computers, electronic games, cell phones, and electronic devices. The most significant effects were found among 14 to 17 year old whose screen time usage was high, 7 or more hours per day. These users were double as likely to have been identified with depression or anxiety or required help for a psychological issue in the past year.

Research shows that social media and video games provide short-term escape from real life and offer valuable social engagement. In COVID-19, many media channels have reported their utility: Gaming might save your sanity during social distancing, I thought playing video games was unproductive until coronavirus, and Coronavirus Ended the Screen-Time Debate. Screens Won.

Digital game suppliers, such as Steam report a considerable increase in the number of day-to-day users over the past weeks: from 19 million in early March to a record high of 23.5 million in early

April. Mainly popular are social simulation games like the Animal Crossing series or Mine craft, which let players to build their own worlds alone or together with friends.

A latest body of high-quality study has established that for children the impact of screen-time on mental health and well-being is fairly small. Other factors, specifically parental support, family relations or adverse childhood experiences are more impactful than screen-time. This form of work includes large-scale analyses of more than 350,000 children, longitudinal study with children in UK, diary studies from UK, Ireland and the US. Little proof still exists in low-and-middle-income settings, where entree is more limited.

UNICEF's latest report growing up in a connected world states that while a small group of children will inevitably encounter opposite experiences when they use digital technology, this is not straight related to the *time* they spend online. Rather, when seeing such experiences, more attention should be done on what children do online, the *content* they encounter, and their life atmosphere and support networks in overall. Not too much, not too little, but just the perfect amount of screen time seems to be optimal for children.

❖ **Does Your Child spend much time on Screen?**

Here is widespread concern that children are getting too much screen time. Overdoing of screens is one of the main health concerns of parents in many of the industrialized, technological countries in the world. These concerns are shared by mental health experts and have resulted in a new analysis, Internet Gaming Disorder, that is included in the latest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V), the American Psychiatric Association codebook for clinical analysis.

% Increase in Time Spent
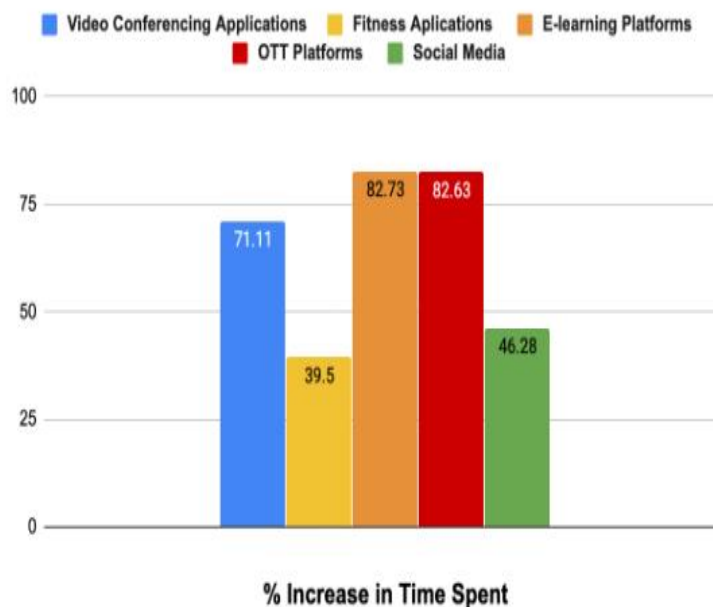
❖ **Internet Gaming Disorder during Covid:19 :**

Internet Gaming Disorder is defined as a "Situation for Further Study," meaning that it is not an "official" disorder in the DSM-5 but involved to support further attention and research. While there is significant controversy about this investigation and Internet Gaming Disorder is actually quite rare in children, problematic screen time is increasingly common.

Recent Study from Common Sense Media and the Research Centre designate that children are on screens about 9.5 hours per day, leaving little time for anything else. But does this mean that the

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vast majority of children and Adolescence are addicted to screen? What is clear to many children is that their screens are taking too much their time and energy. So how can we classify the signs of when children are too involved with screen time? And should you permit your children to play more video games during the lockdown of coronavirus?

One way would be to look at the symbols of Internet Gaming Disorder, a "Condition for Further Research" in the latest style of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

❖ **Warning sign of Internet Gaming Disorder (APA) :**
✓ Withdrawal indications when gaming is taken away or not possible (anxiety, sadness, irritability).
✓ Acceptance, the need to spend more time gaming to satisfy the desire.
✓ Lack of ability to reduce playing, unsuccessful attempts to quit gaming.
✓ Giving up other activities, loss of awareness in previously enjoyed activities due to gaming.
✓ Continuing to game even though problems.
✓ Deceiving family members & friends about the amount of time spent on gaming.
✓ The play of game to release negative moods, such as guilt & hopelessness.
✓ Taking risks, or having lost a job or relationship due to gaming.

❖ **Diagnosis of Internet Gaming Disorder (DSM-5) :**
DSM-5 recommends the following criteria to help define if children are displaying too much spending of screen with two critical points:
1. Developing factors are significant in recognizing excessive screen time: children need time for many other activities, and adolescents spending time on their screens for many of academic, social, and recreational activities needs.
2. Family sensibilities often define what too much screen time is? In this case, I am not speaking about conditions where parents do not provide any oversight, but instead where families see great value in surfing the internet, playing video games, and viewing television and movies as worthwhile educational activities.
Internet Gaming Disorder Addiction is a very serious psychological disorder that needs assessment by an addiction expert and intensive treatment. All through lockdown of coronavirus, we might want to relax our concerns about children who are relying upon gaming as an escape. Yet we need to remain observant when it is clear that children are overdoing it and showing clinical signs of addictive behaviour. If that becomes the case consider some of the strategies described, look into effective parental controls, and find other ways to reduce the stress that your children are experiencing.

❖ **Health risks of extreme screen time or gaming :**
✓ It changes healthy behaviours and lifestyles such as physical activity and sleep, and leads to destructive habits such as skip sleep or day-night reversal, malnutrition, headaches, neck pain, etc.
✓ It can inspire migration to gambling as some games have gambling. Signs of too much use of screen time or gaming. It is important to identify the signs of too much screen time or internet gaming, and take immediate action.
✓ It affects a person's skill to focus and complete school tasks.
✓ It negatively affects a person's relationships with family members and peers.
✓ It takes importance in a person's life style such as eating, sleeping, personal hygiene and exercise.

✓ It causes important changes in a person's mood or ability to control outbreak (such as physical aggression).

❖ **Parents and Guardians should do:**

✓ **Parental engagement & oversight:** Valid reservations around the content of some video games and a range of online risks that might befall children playing them can be mitigated by active parenting strategies. These consist of children about their online experiences, and observing their general mood and happiness as they play. Playing video games with children is a decent way to ensure that they stay safe.

✓ **Physical activity in front of screens:** Keep in mind that during a Covid-19 pandemic many children will not get the time of spend in physical activity that they are used to. We required new ways to help children remain active. With controlled outdoor movement, the World Health Organization (WHO) has suggested active video games and online Yoga classes as a way to stay healthy at home. This is a good purpose because it provides both physical movement and entertainment. This advice is beneficial both during the COVID-19 pandemic but also when life goes back to normal. WHO also offers concepts for stay home physical activity and Yoga that are not digitally driven, which is useful for families.

✓ Not recommended for 1 year old babies and should be limited to no more than 1 hour per day for children 2 to 4 years old. During isolation, quarantine or lockdown, it may be challenging to follow these guidelines for children 1 to 4 years, and manage excessive screen time or gaming in older age groups as well. So it is mostly important to permit children with knowledge and information about how to use internet safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

✓ Create a balance between online and offline events.

✓ Set clear instructions about screen time and how, when and where children can use the Internet.

✓ Communicate the limitations and rules clearly with children.

✓ Install the newest software updates and antivirus programmes on devices used by children, set the privacy to "high" and activate parental control features particularly for younger children.

✓ Motivated children to be active, including playing video games that require physical activity.

✓ Remind your children that watching television and doing online activity is one option for time pass activities and highlight other options for having fun such as cooking together, reading, board games, arts and crafts, dancing, gardening and exercising.

✓ Clarify why limitations around screen time and online activities are being relaxed, that any additional screen time is temporary and normal routines will resume once isolation, quarantine or lockdown ends.

✓ Maintain regular routines to sleep for children and encourage healthy eating.

✓ Self-monitoring and regulating one's screen time (such as the amount of time spent spending all devices with a screen such as a smartphone, computer, television, or video game) are essential.

✓ Reducing access by placing the smartphone someplace where it is not continuously available when engaging in technology free actions and turning off notifications and associated sounds on mobile devices may be supportive methods of such self-regulation. Frequently checking social media or watching the news about the Covid-19 pandemic may have a negative effect on mental wellbeing.

✓ Observing and regulating children's behaviour is also critical and it may best be done by involving them in making of rules. Moreover, parents are role models; thus, modifiable their own ICT related behaviours (such as social media use, aimless surfing on the internet) may help their children to establish controlled use as well. Parents are also encouraged to actively participate in the ICT related behaviours of their children (such as playing video games together with them). Such participation of the parents will help them control their children's usage. Using digital wellbeing apps (such as apps

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that provide feedback about the amount of time spent on different apps) can be helpful in raising awareness and self-regulation. Using analogue technical tools (such as wristwatches, alarm clocks) when possible instead of ICT tools may help prevent misuse in certain situations (e.g., checking the time on a smartphone might turn into the use of other applications such as social media sites due to the notifications seeming on the locked screen).

✓ Keeping in touch with friends, relatives via internet may help remove feelings of loneliness during physical distancing. ICT such as WhatsApp groups, social media groups, and online video games can be useful in maintaining meaningful relationships across physical distances.

❖ **School authorities should do:**

✓ Develop and update online safety guidelines to protect children enrolled in online home schooling and talk these guidelines with parents and guardians.

✓ Converse online code of conduct with students, with rules and policies about cyber bullying and address it directly according to these rules.

✓ Promote online counselling services for students.

✓ Provide training for teachers about online counselling and how to identify signs of exposure to online threats.

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