

## Screen Time Of Child And Its Association With Parent-Child Relationship During Covid-19 Pandemic

Mruga Trivedi\*, Dr. Ashok Vala\*\*

\*Student, Indira Gandhi National Open University,\*\*Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Government Medical College, Bhavnagar

**Abstract:** Background: During the Covid-19 pandemic, schools have started online schooling which increased screen time of children that can have a negative effect on parent-child relationship. The current questionnaire based survey aimed to evaluate the increase in screen time of child and its association with parent-child relationship. Material And Methods: Hundred parents having children in standards 7-12 participated in the survey. The questionnaire evaluated the change in parent-child relationship (before and after online schooling began) based on four important parameters - parental worry about child, child's behavior towards parent, trust and communication and, quality of time spend together. Result: Out of 100 parents, 1) 26 were satisfied, 54 were neutral and 20 were dissatisfied with method of learning. 2) 44 found no noticeable effect, 22 found positive effect and 34 found negative effect on child's learning due to online classes. Out of 100 children, 1) 31 spent 1 -5 hours, 61 spent 5-9 hours and 9 spent more than 9 hours on screen. 2) Screen time of 69 – increased, 10 – remained same and 21 – decreased. 3) 11 were caught sleeping, 26 were found playing games, 37 watching videos, 24 surfing net and 30 using social media during online classes. Conclusion: The present study concludes that: 1) The screen time of child has increased due to online study. 2) Out of four parameters evaluated for parent-child relationship only parental worry was negatively affected i.e. increased due to increase in screen time, while other parameters like child's behaviour towards parents, trust and communication and quality of time spent together were not negatively affected. [Trivedi M Natl J Integr Res Med, 2021; 12(5): 21-27]

**Key Words:** Covid-19 Pandemic, Online Schooling, Parent-Child Relationship, Screen Time

**Author for correspondence:** Mruga Trivedi, Plot No. 375, Iscon Mega City, Near Water Tank, Bhavnagar - 364001. E-Mail: mrugatrivedi1308@gmail.com Mobile: +91- 7045529780.

**Introduction:** The current pandemic is expected to not only have enormous economic consequences but it is also having a devastating impact on global education. According to the latest figures released by UNESCO, as of 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, some 1.3 billion learners around the world were not able to attend school or university. World Bank has said that the COVID - 19 pandemic is causing more than 1.6 billion children and youth to be out of school in 161 countries. This is close to 80% of the world's enrolled students<sup>1</sup>.

In order to continue teaching-learning practices, schools have resorted to an imperfect yet quick solution to the crisis. Several schools have embarked on technological platforms to deliver online learning<sup>1</sup>.

The transition from classroom-based to online and other home learning was abrupt and unexpected. Parents along with their children are facing new opportunities and challenges<sup>2</sup>. Of which one of the most difficult challenges that the parent-child duo has had to navigate is regarding the screen time of children.

Covid-19 Pandemic And Screen Time Of Child: The lockdown has led to increased screen time for children raising concerns among parents according to a recent survey by OLX India<sup>3</sup>. With schools shut, online learning has become the new norm and kids are spending time on their devices for both connecting with their teachers at school, and for their own entertainment<sup>5</sup>.

According to the survey, there has been a 100 per cent increase in the screen time of kids since the lockdown started. 54 per cent of parents stated their children were spending over 5 additional hours online<sup>3</sup>.

This increased screen time of the child due to online schooling may have an adverse effect on the parent-child relationship.

Screen Time Of Child And Parent-Child Relationship: In the year 2010, Rosalina Richards, Rob McGee, Sheila M. Williams, et al had assessed Adolescent Screen Time and Attachment to Parents and Peers and concluded that screen time was associated with poor attachment to parents and peers in 2 cohorts of

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

adolescents 16 years apart. Given the importance of attachment to parents and peers in adolescent health and development, concern about high levels of screen time among adolescents is warranted<sup>9</sup>.

Adolescence And The Importance Of Parent-Child Relationship: Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and mental development that occurs between childhood and adulthood. Adolescents are known to be gangly, awkward and troublesome youngsters. This period of life is seen as a time of “storm and stress”. Parent-child relationships are among the most important relationships for adolescents<sup>6</sup>.

A positive and healthy relationship between parent and their adolescent children has an important influence in the development of self esteem and an overall personality growth/development of the child. According to a study by Mai Stafford, Diana L. Kuh, et al., it was found that higher well-being of child was consistently related to paternal care. This suggests that both mother-child and father-child relationships may have short and long-term consequences for positive mental well-being<sup>7</sup>.

How All These Factors May Affect Parent-Child Relationship? On one hand the child will be home during school hours. Also the time spent in going to and fro from school will be saved. This may give parents more time to spend with their children indulging in activities that their children like, thus strengthening the parent-child bond.

On the other hand, electronic devices like mobile, laptop, et cetera and internet connectivity have become a necessity. A child spends on anywhere between 2-10 hours per day on screen attending online lectures, completing homework, assignment, other projects and giving exams.

And with extreme reliance on any tool, there emerges a possibility of an abnormal dependence. Due to which many children may spend time on social media, playing video games, watching videos and such online activities, sometimes even at the cost of their studies?

This may be a source of frustration for the parents leading to worry and anxiety about their child's education and future. Parents may become increasingly suspicious and constantly try to monitor their child's online activities.

Children are already stressed by the disruption in their world and lives. They can feel anxious from the tension they feel around them which activates the brain's survival response against the high stress emotions that they are feeling<sup>2</sup>.

This may lead to the children acting out. Children may get easily irritated by the parents' constant interference in their lives especially in their online activities, in an age where they have just started enjoying freedom. All of this may lead to friction between the parents and their children, in turn negatively affecting their relationship.

Thus, it becomes important to evaluate the association between the screen time of child and parent child relationship.

Current Research: The current study aims to evaluate the total screen time of child after online schooling began and the associated positive or negative change in four important parameters of the parent-child relationship, namely;

- Parental worry about child
- Child's behavior towards parent
- Trust and communication
- Quality of time spend together

The study also evaluates the effectiveness of the two different methods of online teaching (viz., pre recorded videos and live lectures) employed by schools in terms of;

- Parental satisfaction
- Child's learning

Finally, this study aims to evaluate the change in child's screen time (apart from studies) after online schooling began and access different online activities of child during online class.

**Material & Methods:** The study was an observational cross sectional anonymous survey where a questionnaire was sent to 100 parents of children studying in class 7-12. Here the parents whose children had to shift to online classes as a result of Covid-19 pandemic were included in the study.

The Questionnaire Was Divided Into Five Parts As Follow: Part 1 and 2 (question 1-3) had Questions about parent and child. These questions were

asked to know the demographic details of the study population like the gender of parents and children, and the standard of children.

Percentage of parents of each gender was calculated (Table 1). Percentage of male and female in each standard was calculated (Table 2).

Part 3 (questions 4-6): Questions about Online Schooling. The three questions in this part were asked so as to evaluate the effectiveness of the two different methods of online schooling viz. pre-recorded video lectures and live lectures.

Percentage was calculated to evaluate the effectiveness of the two different methods of online schooling in terms of parental satisfaction and their effect on child’s learning (Table 3).

Part 4 (questions 7-12): Questions about screen time. Questions in this section were asked so as to know the total screen time of the child, change in screen time (apart from studies) and other activities done by the child during online classes.

Percentage of children with respect to their screen time was calculated (Table 4).

Percentage of children and the change in their time spent on screen (apart from studies) was calculated (Table 5). Percentage of children doing other activities during online class was calculated (Table 5).

Part 5 (questions 13-32): This section contained 20 questions about the change in relationship based on four parameters;

- Parental worry about child
- Child’s behaviour towards parent
- Trust and communication
- Quality of time spend together

There were five questions for each parameter with questions 13-17 about parental worry about child, questions 18-22 about child’s behaviour toward parent, questions 23-27 about trust and communication between child and parent and questions 28-32 were about the quality of time spend together. The questions were asked so as to evaluate the change in these parameters before and after online schooling began whether positive, negative or no change. Each of the 20 questions in this section had three options. For

questions 13-25, 31 and 32 Option (a) meant that the change was negative, Option (b) meant that there was no change, Option (c) meant that the change was positive. For questions 26-30 Option (a) meant that the change was positive, Option (b) meant that there was no change, Option (c) meant that the change was negative.

The overall change in each parameter was considered positive if, No. of positively answered questions > No. of negatively answered questions. The overall change in each parameter was considered negative if, No. of negatively answered questions > No. of positively answered questions. The overall change was considered as ‘no change’ if, No. of positively answered questions = No. of negatively answered questions, or if all answers had been marked as no change. Finally, the percentage of parents having overall positive change, no change or overall negative change in each of the parameters was calculated (Table 7). Institutional Ethics Committee clearance for the research protocol was obtained prior to the commencement of the study.

**Results:** Out of 100 parents responded 67 were male i.e. fathers and 33 were females i.e. mothers. (Table 1)

**Table 1: Demonstrates The Gender Of Parent (Respondent)**

Gender	Number/Percentage
Male	67
Female	33
Total	100

Out of 100 children 15 were in standard-7, 20 were in standard-8, 19 were in standard-9, 15 were in standard-10, 15 were in standard-11, 16 were in standard-12 (Table 2).

**Table 2: Demonstrates The Information About Children**

Standard	Gender of child		Total/Percentage
	Male	Female	
7	6	9	15
8	7	13	20
9	6	13	19
10	8	7	15
11	8	7	15
12	12	4	16
Total	47	53	100

Out of 100 parents, 54 were neutral, 26 were satisfied and 20 were dissatisfied with the method of online learning. Also out of 100 parents, 44 parents found no noticeable effect of

online schooling on child's learning students, 22 parents found positive effect and 34 parents found online schooling to have negatively affected their child's learning (Table 3).

**Table 3: Effectiveness Of Two Different Methods Of Online Schooling As Perceived By The Parent (Number And Percentage)**

Method Of Online Learning		Pre Recorded Videos (N=19)	Live Lectures (N=81)	Total/ Percentage (N=100)
Parental Satisfaction	Satisfied	4 (21%)	22 (27.1%)	26
	Neutral	10 (52.6%)	44 (54.3%)	54
	Dissatisfied	5 (26.3%)	15 (18.5%)	20
Effect On Child's Learning	Positive	5 (26.3%)	17 (20.9%)	22
	No Effect	8 (42.1%)	36 (44.4%)	44
	Negative	7 (36.8%)	27 (33.3%)	34

Thirty children spent 1-5 hours on screen, 61 children spent 5-9 hours and 9 children spent more than 9 hours on screen. (Table 4)

**Table 4: Information About The Total Screen Time Of Child (N=100)**

Hours Spend On Screen	Number/Percentage
1-5	30
5-9	61
≥9	9

Increase in screen time was observed in 69 children; it remained same in 10 and decreased in 21 children. (Table 5)

**Table 5: Number And Percentage Of Children And The Change In Their Time Spent On Screen (Apart From Studies).**

Time Spend On Online Activity (Apart From Studying)	No. Of Students/ Percentage
Increased	69
Remained Same	10
Decreased	21

**Table 7: Change In The Four Different Parameters Of Relationship (Number And Percentage Of Parents)**

	Parental Worry	Child's Behaviour Towards Parent	Trust And Communication	Quality Of Time Spend
Negative Change	54	27	26	31
No Change	23	23	26	24
Positive Change	23	50	48	55

**Discussion:** Due to the social distancing norms extremely necessary to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent imposition of lockdowns, schools had to shift to online teaching learning practices. Two main methods of online

Out of 100 children, 11 were caught sleeping, 26 were found playing games, 37 were watching videos, 24 were surfing through the net and 30 were using social media during online class. (Table 6).

**Table 6: Number And Percentage Of Children Doing Other Activities During Online Class. (N=100)**

Activity	Number/ Percentage
Sleeping	11
Playing games (on mobile/computer)	26
Watching videos	37
Surfing through the net	24
Using social media	30

While assessing the four different parameters of parent-child relationship, parental worry had negative change i.e. it increased (n=54), child's behaviour towards parent had positive change i.e. behaviour became better (n=50), trust and communication (n=48) had positive change i.e. it increased and quality of time spend also had positive change i.e. it increased (n=55) (Table 7).

schooling have been adopted by the schools viz. pre-recorded video lectures and live lectures. The current study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of these two methods of online learning as perceived by the parents in terms of parental

satisfaction and its effect on child's learning (Table 3). Parental worry about child, child's behaviour towards parent, trust and communication and quality of time spend together are four important pillars of any parent child relationship. The recent shift to online schooling due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent change in screen time of child has had a significant effect on the parent child relationship.

In the present study, out of the 100 parents that filled the questionnaire, 69% parents said that the screen time of their child (apart from studies) had increased. (Table 5) with 61% children spending 5-9 hours on screen (Table 4), which is more than the recommended screen time.

This finding is consistent with that of a survey conducted by OLX India which noted that the screen time of child had shot up by 100% since the first lockdown<sup>4</sup>. The present study also evaluated the other online activities done by the child during online classes (Table 6). 37% children were caught watching videos and 30% children were caught using social media while attending online lectures, which is alarming!

In a 1998 study, it was found that greater use of the Internet was associated with declines in participants' communication with family members in the household, declines in the size of their social circle, and increases in their depression and loneliness<sup>11</sup>.

Other studies suggest that exceeding the time limit for screen time can diminish the relationship between children and adolescents and their parents and friends.<sup>(12)</sup> Thus this study evaluated the parent child relationship through four different parameters as stated above namely; Parental worry about child, Child's behaviour towards parent, Trust and communication.

Quality of time spend together: In the current study, out of the four parameters that were evaluated, only parental worry was found to have been negatively affected due to increased screen time, where 54% parents said that they were more worried about their child than they were before, while 23% parents said that they were less worried (Table 7). This finding that parental worry about their children has increased is also consistent with that of a survey conducted by

'ParentsTogether' which found that average time spent online has doubled for kids during the crisis, and 85% of parents are worried about this increased consumption<sup>13</sup>. However, no such negative effect was seen in the other three factors viz. child's behavior towards parent, trust and communication and quality of time spend together, with majority of parents saying that these three factors had been positively affected in the last 6 months (Table 7).

This finding is consistent with a recent study of July, 2020 which found that, "While the Covid-19 crisis may have created unprecedented challenges for parents and children, it appears to have strengthened relationships for many families<sup>14</sup>." About a quarter of parents who participated in the July 2020 study reported that their relationship with their children had become better since the government's stay at home policy. Fewer than 5% reported it had become worse.

One of the main reasons for such a positive effect on parent child relationship despite the different challenges faced could be the findings of a September, 2014 research which suggests that, "despite its unpleasantness, pain may actually have positive social consequences, acting as a sort of 'social glue' that fosters cohesion and solidarity within groups<sup>15</sup>." Thus, it seems that during these difficult times, parents as well as their children are more forgiving of each other and that this cooperativeness has outshadowed the negative effects of increased screen time of adolescents on parent child relationship, as stated in earlier studies.

Limitations And Future Directions: This study was limited by a cross-sectional design and reliance on an online self-report survey that introduced the possibility of biased responding. Relatively smaller sample of 100 parents was used for the survey. Responses of children were not included in the survey, thus their perception remains to be known.

Despite its limitations this study generated some interesting results about how parents and their children are more compromising during difficult times and are willing to let go of things that come in the way of their relationship. This study led to an important conclusion that 'tough times bring people together'. Here, it was seen that the willingness to 'let go' and stick together out

shadowed the strains in the parent-child relationship that are normally experienced due to increased screen time of child.

Further studies with a larger sample size incorporating the perspectives of both children and their parents are required to determine the permanent effects of increased screen time on parent child relationship if online schooling becomes a norm instead of a substitute for in class learning.

**Conclusion:** The present study concludes that: The screen time of child has increased due to online study. Out of four parameters evaluated for parent-child relationship only parental worry was negatively affected i.e. increased due to increase in screen time, while other parameters like child's behavior towards parents, trust and communication and quality of time spent together were not negatively affected.

#### References:

- Jain M. Parents And Their Response To Online Learning In Time Of COVID-19. BWEducation. 2020.04. Available from: <http://bweducation.businessworld.in/article/Parents-And-Their-Response-To-Online-Learning-In-Time-Of-COVID-19-/26-04-2020-190236/>
- Willis J. Coping With Your Kids' Transition to Home and Online Learning. Psychology Today. 2020.03. Available from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/radical-teaching/202003/coping-your-kids-transition-home-and-online-learning?amp>
- Sheth H. 84 per cent parents concerned about children's increased screen time amid lockdown: OLX India survey. The Hindu Business Line. 2020.06.018. Available from: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/info-tech/84-per-cent-indian-parents-concerned-about-childrens-increased-screen-time-amid-lockdown-olx-india-survey/article31858727.ece#>
- Verma P. COVID-19 Impact: Screen time up by 100% for children. Economic Times. 2020.06.015. Available from: <https://m.economictimes.com/industry/services/education/covid-19-impact-screen-time-up-by-100-for-children/articleshow/76383951.cms>
- Parents worry as kids' screen time increases in lockdown, survey reveals. The Indian Express .2020.06.015. Available from: <https://indianexpress.com/article/parenting/family/parents-worry-as-kids-screen-time-increases-in-lockdown-survey-reveals-6460393/>
- Branje S. Development of Parent-Adolescent relationships: Conflict Interactions as a Mechanism of Change. Child Development Perspectives. 2018.01.024. Available from: <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/cdep.12278>
- Stafford M, Kuh DL, Gale CR, Mishra G, Richards M. Parent-child relationships and offspring's positive mental wellbeing from adolescence to early older age. The Journal of Positive Psychology. 2016; 11(3): 326-337. Available from: [doi: 10.1080/17439760.2015.1081971](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2015.1081971)
- Ellis W, McAleer B, Szakas J. Internet Addiction Risk in the Academic Environment. Information Systems Education Journal. 2015; 13(5): 100-105.
- Richard R, McGee R, Williams SM, et al. Adolescent Screen Time and Attachment to Parents and Peers. Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine. 2010; 164(3):258-262.
- Positive relationships for parents and children: how to build them. In Raising Children Network. Available from: <https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/connecting-communicating/bonding/parent-child-relationships> [Accessed 27th October 2020]
- Kraut RE, Patterson M, Lundmark V, Kiesler S, Mukopadhyay T, Scherlis WL. Internet Paradox: A Social Technology That Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well-Being?. The American psychologist. 1998; 53: 1017-31. Available from: [doi : 10.1037/0003-066X.53.9.1017](https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.53.9.1017).
- Kelishadi R, Qorbani M, Mohammad-Esmaeil M, Heshmat R, Ardalan G, Jari M. Relationship between leisure time screen activity and aggressive and violent behaviour in Iranian children and adolescents: the CASPIAN-IV Study. Paediatrics and international child health. 2015; 35: 305-311. DOI: [10.1080/20469047.2015.1109221](https://doi.org/10.1080/20469047.2015.1109221).
- Eng J. Parents Alarmed As Kids' Screen Time Skyrockets During COVID-19 Crisis – Here's What You Can Do. ParentsTogether. 2020. 05.004. Available from: <https://parents-together.org/parents-alarmed-as-kids-screen-time-skyrockets-during-covid-19-crisis-heres-what-you-can-do/>
- Perelli-Harris B, Walzenbach S. How has the Covid-19 crisis impacted parents' relationships with their children? University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research.

2020.07. Available from: [https:// www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/publications/526161](https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/publications/526161)

15. Bastian B, Jetten J, Ferris LJ. Pain as Social Glue: Shared Pain Increases Cooperation. *Psychological Science*. 2014.09.005; 25(11): 2079-2085. Available from: doi: 10.1177/0956797614545886.

Conflict of interest: None
Funding: None
Cite this Article as: Trivedi M, Vala A. Screen Time Of Child And Its Association With Parent-Child Relationship During Covid-19 Pandemic. <i>Natl J Integr Res Med</i> 2021; Vol.12(5): 21-27