

# Children's TV time is closely linked to parents' viewing habits

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The amount of time children spend in front of TV, phone and computer screens is closely associated with their parents' own habits, with much higher weekend viewing than during the week, a new study has found.

Researchers at the University of Bristol analysed the amount of time [children](#) aged five and six spent watching television, playing video games and using computers, tablets and smartphones – activities associated with a range of [health problems](#), including obesity.

The study showed that 12 per cent of boys and eight per cent of girls in this age group watched more than two hours of TV on a weekday, with 30 per cent of [parents](#) exceeding this threshold.

Figures were much higher at weekends, with 45 per cent of boys, 42 per cent of girls, 57 per cent of fathers and 53 per cent of mothers watching more than two hours of TV each day.

Children were at least 3.4 times more likely to spend more than two hours per day watching TV if their parents watched two or more hours of TV, compared to children whose parents watch less than two hours of TV.

The study, funded by the British Heart Foundation and published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, analysed questionnaire responses from 1,078 families across 63 primary schools in Bristol as part of the B-PROACT1V project.

High levels of screen-viewing have been associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease in adults, while children who spent a lot of time watching a screen are at an increased risk of obesity.

Professor Russ Jago, from the Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences in the School for Policy Studies at Bristol University, led the study.

He said: "We know that excessive screen-viewing is not good for children's health. What our data shows is that some young children spend too much time watching TV and using other screen viewing devices with much more TV watched at the weekend than during the week.

"Children are much more likely to spend high amounts of time screen-viewing if their parents spend a lot of time screen-viewing. The study results therefore suggest that there is a need to find ways to help families reduce the amount of time that children and parents spend screen-viewing."

Dr Sanjay Thakrar, Research Advisor at the BHF, which funded the study, said: "Spending too much time watching TV or playing computer games can have a real impact on heart health.

"This study set out to see how parents influence screen viewing in [young children](#), and the results highlight that any guidance related to excessive screen viewing should involve both parents and children."

**More information:** 'Cross-sectional associations between the screen-time of parents and young children: differences by parent and child gender and day of the week' by R. Jago, J. Thompson, S. Sebire, L. Wood, L. Pool, J. Zahra and D. Lawlor in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*

Provided by University of Bristol

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