

Parents sound off on mobile device use by children

April 26 2015



Credit: Peter Griffin/Public Domain

Smartphones and tablets have become part of everyday life, but parents still worry that mobile devices may not be the best thing for their children, according to a study to be presented Sunday, April 26 at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in San Diego.

The scientific literature has not kept pace with how [technology](#) is

affecting family life. To help fill this gap, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 35 parents/guardians to learn about their views regarding mobile device use by themselves and their [children](#), including benefits, drawbacks and effects on family interactions.

Researchers interviewed caregivers of children younger than 9 years old individually or in groups of two to five. Participants included mothers (63 percent), fathers (26 percent) and grandmothers (11 percent) with a mean age of 38 years. One-third were single parents, 43 percent were nonwhite and 40 percent had a [high school education](#) or less.

Interviewers first asked standard questions about technology and parenting (e.g., what media-use rules parents had set, how mobile device use impacts child learning and behavior, and perceived risks and benefits). Follow-up questions further explored caregivers' statements, and discussion was encouraged among participants.

Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and three researchers reviewed transcripts for major themes.

"One of the striking things about these interviews was that parents thanked us for letting them take part ... for letting them vent their strong feelings and uncertainties about parenting and technology, and for letting them speak with other parents who were going through similar experiences," said lead author Jenny Radesky, MD, FAAP, assistant professor of pediatrics, Boston University School of Medicine, and developmental-behavioral pediatrician, Boston Medical Center.

Results showed that caregivers had a high degree of tension regarding technology. Many reported feeling that they needed to buy their children tablets to keep up with educational system and workforce demands.

Parents also worried about how strongly their children were drawn to

[mobile devices](#) and gaming, with some saying their kids were "hooked" or "addicted." They also were concerned that time spent on screens would hurt their child's social skills. Other parents worried that reliance on technology would make their child less creative or less of an independent thinker.

Many lower-income caregivers said it was difficult to stay on top of what apps or social media their children were using, and they did not feel confident in their ability to set limits on mobile device use.

Parents did see some benefits of mobile media use, including the ability to teach things their child would not have tried in "real life" (e.g., putting together a puzzle). They also noted that apps are less expensive than toys, devices help keep children calm when parents are stressed, and video chat apps can be used to connect with distant family members.

"Tech for young children is evolving faster than scientific research can study its effects, and this study helps pediatric providers understand the experience and concerns of a diverse group of [parents](#), so that we can give them the most relevant, and hopefully helpful, guidance possible," Dr. Radesky concluded.

More information: Dr. Radesky will present "Parent Views About Mobile Device Use Around and By Young Children: Implications for Anticipatory Guidance" from 8-10 a.m. PT Sunday, April 26. To view the study abstract, go to

http://www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view.php?nu=PAS15L1_2195.2

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

Citation: Parents sound off on mobile device use by children (2015, April 26) retrieved 4 May

2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-04-parents-mobile-device-children.html>

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