

Study: Children's screen time surged during pandemic

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Credit: Kampus Production / Pexels

Children have been spending almost triple the recommended amount of screen time during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new Western-led study.

Published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders Reports*, the research found that, on average, [children](#) had nearly six hours of [screen time](#) each day. Some children in the study were on their screens even longer, at a

staggering 13 hours a day.

"Our findings were very surprising," said Western education professor and Canada Research Chair Emma Duerden, who co-authored the study with Western researchers Diane Seguin, Elizabeth Kuenzel and J. Bruce Morton.

"It was almost three times as much as the recommended amount," Duerden said. The Canadian Pediatric Society recommends children over five years of age spend two hours a day on their screens.

Screen [time](#) includes, watching television, using computers, smart phones or playing video games.

Parents and children were challenged during the height of the pandemic in March and April 2020 because most in-person activities outside the home were canceled. Schools were closed, most parents worked from home and juggled domestic responsibilities while children were going to school online. In Ontario, playgrounds were also closed, leaving children without any [outdoor activities](#), said Duerden.

To participate in the study, parents with children between six and 12 years of age completed an [online survey](#), which compared their screen time and daily activities before and during the pandemic. They also completed a questionnaire to determine their [stress levels](#) and involvement in their children's activities.

The study found the more parents were stressed, the more time children spent on their screens.

Duerden said parental stress depends on individual circumstances. For example, parents can be stressed because they live in a small apartment, they may have financial concerns, or face unemployment. Although the

study did not look at these factors, the researchers hope to find these answers as well as determine the long-term effects of excessive screen time, with a new longitudinal study that's underway. The results will be available in spring 2022.

In the meantime, Duerden encourages parents to manage their children's electronics use, monitor what they're watching online and plan activities that don't use technology.

"We don't know the long-term effects of screen time," said Duerden. "However, if (kids are) sitting down watching TV and not doing any activities, such as exercising, eating [healthy food](#), reading or interacting with others, this may have an impact because we know these things are important for healthy brain development in children."

More information: Diane Seguin et al, School's out: Parenting stress and screen time use in school-age children during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Journal of Affective Disorders Reports* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadr.2021.100217](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadr.2021.100217)

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