Chapter 24
Screen Addiction in Children and Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The use of technology is dominating the lives of young people in the current world. Screen addiction affects the mental and physical health of children and adolescents, ruptures their interpersonal relationships, and interferes with their academic performance. This chapter explores the supposed causality, the challenges, and further ways to remediate and treat screen addiction. Future studies should focus on screening this vulnerable population regularly in school settings and evaluate the effectiveness of psychological interventions to ameliorate the potential long-term effects of screen addiction. The stakeholders and society at large must keep in mind that screen addiction does not only affect children directly but also causes great upheaval in society.

INTRODUCTION

"10-YEAR-OLD KILLS SELF AFTER MOTHER TAKES AWAY PHONE"

Lucknow, 2022: A 10-year-old boy allegedly died by suicide in Lucknow after his mother took away the phone and did not let him play online games. According to the family, the boy had not attended school several days before and was constantly at home, playing video games on the phone (Times Now, 2022).

Childhood is a time that awakens nostalgia and fond memories among most of us. It is a time in life when learning and knowing, remembering, and experiencing are at their heightened best. Childhood is the prime time of growth and adventure, a time when an individual begins their journey of what life will truly become. The term 'childhood' brings back joy and a bittersweet longing for bygone times and makes for an escape from adult quagmire and quandary. A time of such beauty and awe, a time of ripening, has been coloured a grim crimson in recent times. Childhood as a conception has been explored in many diverse cultural forms. The emphasis and explanation of childhood have existed for millennia in Eastern collectivistic societies as compared to the West. Collectivistic cultures describe childhood as a time of flowering characterized by innocence- that includes learning, playing, and even mischief (Gulati, 2020). These cultures claim that the period of childhood ends upon gaining enough knowledge and experience to fulfill adult duties and lifestyle. Over the last decade, childhood has shifted from being a golden age of exploration through socialization and curious encounters with the environment to a stagnant constant engagement with the self and with the world's new 'best friend'- the Screen. Today's children are "digital natives" (Singh et al., 2021) and are born into the digital culture the world over. The world is seeing a dramatic change in child development and child psyche as compared to what they were, mere decades ago.

Erikson (1950), put forth the psychosocial stage of development of Industry versus Inferiority among children between 6-12 years of age. A realization of finality regarding the undeniable truth that there is no negotiable future within the safety of family leads to the development of 'industry'. Industry, Erikson described, as the "child's adjustment of the self to the inorganic laws of the tool world". A child's ego circumference during Industry includes his/ her tools and skills, and the "work principle" (Hendrick, 1943) teaches the child the pleasure of completion of work through unwavering attention and continual diligence. "The child's danger, at this stage, lies in a sense of inadequacy and inferiority" (Erikson, 1950). In case a child fails to use one's skills effectively, he/she loses the aspiration to identify with peers already practicing the said skills. It is at this point that society at large becomes instrumental in providing the child with an in-depth understanding of meaningful roles in its complete setup. "Many a child's development is disrupted when family life may not have prepared him for school life, or when school life may fail to sustain the promises of earlier stages" (Erikson, 1950). The tool used by children in the modern world is the screen, and the challenge faced by them is the inability to keep up with the demands of tools like the internet, gaming, and social media.

The population of India is experiencing a "demographic dividend", a concept which means that the 'working population' is more than the 'dependent/ non-working population'. The focus of the working population happens to be the emerging adult/ young adult population (Bloom, Canning & Sevilla, 2003). The existence of a largely 'young population' in the country poses a huge benefit to the human capital scenario in India. The children and emerging adults are the future of any nation. The assurance of a bright future comes only with the assured success of this young population. Hence, the protection of the quality of said human capital must be ensured by society. The social and intellectual development of children must be at par with the rapid technological development taking place in India. However, such a tally will face a downward slope if one variable becomes a slave to the other. In this case, the intellect of a child or adolescent becomes but a puppet on the strings of technology. Such a phenomenon is proving to be real and is doing so with unprecedented force.

The headline of the article initially mentioned was from a well-known newspaper publication in India. The article reported the death of a 10-year-old child by means of suicide. Upon investigation, the reason for the suicide turned out to be related to a behavioural addiction to internet gaming and the child's

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