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Endangered childhood: Impact of smart phone on children

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Abstract

Social change is an alteration in the social order of a society. Human development and social change entail the major socio – political and technological changes that have taken place around the world. One of the most common of such changes is the growth in the use of smart phone that has resulted in certain serious and devastating effect on children.

Due to lack of good parenting time, children today are engaged more and more in electronic gadgets, especially on smart phones rather than depending on friends or outdoor games for recreation. Instrumental aggression is the most common type of aggression in childhood.

In India, almost 9 out of 10 children now have smart phones. Smart phones are psychologically addictive. Some children are so obsessed that they are simply unable to stay without the smart phone for a moment. Evidence suggests that smart phone cause disrupted sleep, low self- esteem, depression and higher rates of attempted suicide. A study reveals that children who used their smart phones for three or more hours in a day were 1/3 more likely to feel hopeless or consider suicide, rising to nearly ½ times in the case of those who used such devices for five or more hours a day. It is the duty of parents to realise how dangerous smart phones are for their children and to take necessary action to safeguard them.

Keywords: Physical impact, psycho – social impact, educational impact, ill effects of smart phone, parental role

Introduction

Due to lack of good parenting time and social change, children these days are engaged more and more in electronic gadgets, especially smart phones, rather than depending on friends or outdoor games for recreation. Instrumental aggression (aggressive behaviour used as a means of achieving a goal) is the most common type of aggression in childhood. Children use instrumental aggression to gain access to smart phones.

The smart phone may be considered as a weapon of social change. Social change is a process that entails alteration of the structure and functioning of a particular social system.

In India, almost 9 out of 10 children now have a smart phone (Arora, 2019) ^[2]. Smart phones are psychologically addictive. Some children are so obsessed that they are simply unable to stay without the smart phone even for a while. Some evidence suggests that smart phones cause disrupted sleep, depression and higher rates of attempted suicide and low self-esteem. Some researchers have found that children who used their smart phones for three or more hours in a day were 1/3 times more likely to feel hopeless or consider suicide, rising to nearly ½ of those who used such devices for five or more hours a day.

In this respect, Jean Piaget is appropriate. According to Piaget (Berk, 2004) ^[4], children are born with a very basic mental structure (genetically inherited and evolved) on which all subsequent learning and knowledge are based. The concrete operational stage is the third stage in Piaget's theory of cognitive development. This period spans the time of middle childhood. It begins around age seven and continues until approximately age 11.

This stage is characterized by the development of logical thought. While their thinking during this stage of development is an important transition between earlier stages of development where kid will learn about abstract and hypothetical thinking. Children at this age become more logical about concrete and specific things; they still struggle with abstract ideas.

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Another theory regarding smart phone addiction is Erik Erikson's psychosocial development (2004), from infancy to adulthood. He points out that personality develops in a predetermined order through eight stages of psychosocial development. During each stage, the person experiences a psychosocial crisis, which could have a positive or negative outcome for personality development. It involves psychosocial needs of the individual (psycho) conflicting with the needs of society (social).

The fourth stage is Industry vs. Inferiority (2004) occurring during childhood between the ages of five and twelve years. Children will learn to read and write, do sums do things on their own. Child's peer group will gain greater significance and will become a major source of the child's self-esteem.

If children are encouraged and reinforced for their initiative, they begin to feel industrious (competent) and feel confident in their ability to achieve goals. If this initiative is not encouraged, if it is restricted by parents and teachers, then the child begins to feel inferior, doubting his own abilities and therefore may not reach his or her potential. Some failure may be necessary so that the child can develop some modesty.

If we had a new gadget and we knew that it was very dangerous for children, we would never allow complains to see it to them. Smart phones offer them contact ability, a pocket camera, music, map if they get lost and GPS to find them and many more options.

Discussion

Effects of Smart phones on Children

Excessive use of smart phones disconnects children from basic needs (such as sleep, nutrition, fresh air and physical activity), as well as higher needs (such as sense of belonging and meaning of life). They could also still use social media at home. The following are the ill effects of smart phones on children (Anderson, 2018) [1]. Smartphones alter the parent child relationship. They cause children to get less sleep. They don't give kids the time to reflect upon or learn about the consequences of activities. Smartphones impend children's ability to learn and they cause an addiction. They have a negative impact on the child's mental health and they directly cause obesity and behavioural problems and also desensitize children to violence.

1. Health Hazards of Smart phones: Today's children are growing up in a radio- frequency environment. The radiation emitted by smart phones can have adverse effects on children. Children absorb more than 60 percent of the radiation into the brain than Adults (Imafidon, 2015) [11]. Their brain's thinner skin, tissues, and bones allow them to absorb the radiation twice than the grown-ups. Their developing nervous system makes them more vulnerable to this 'carcinogen'. A 2008 study by Dr Gaby Badre found that children who used their cell phones extensively experienced more sleep disruption, restlessness and fatigue than children who limited their cell phone usage. Too much screen time can result in digital eyestrain, which can include burning, itchy, or tired eyes (Imafidon, 2015) [11].
2. Effect of smart phones on Academics and Hobbies: Children are addicted to mobile phones. They play games, chat and talk to their friends on their mobile phone all the time. The effect of smart phones on children's academic performance can be very noticeable. Children reduce the time they spent on their homework. Academic results suffer due to poor preparation or fatigue from using their smart phones well into the night

(2015).

3. Inappropriate Usage of Internet: Use of cell phones can lead children to engage in inappropriate behaviours. They can easily check sites that show harmful and shocking content. This can result in leaving the child scared and confused. Exposure to such material at a young age can also result in body image issues. Texting and sending inappropriate pictures has also become common among teens. The images go in the wrong hands, giving others access to the private photos. Children can also access pornographic sites from their multimedia devices (2015).
4. Aggressive Behaviour and Effect of Smart phones on Family Life: As mobile phones are keeping the brain continuously busy without any rest; kids tend to be more annoying. They tend to become more violent and irritated even by normal discussions. This hampers their social life. The worst case is that children stop communicating with their family all together. Children can feel the need to constantly check for messages. They become irritable when they stay away from their smart phone for any period (2015).

Summary

Parental Role

Mobile phones can provide children a sense of safety, support and control over their lives. To be able to contact parents, friends or other family members at any time give peace of mind to both children as well as their parents. Mobile phones allow parents and their children to manage instances of missed school buses, forgotten sports bags etc. with ease.

The best advice is to limit the time children spend on the phone (Chen, 2010) [5]. If children insist on having a mobile, encourage them to always use the speakerphone or keep the phone away from their head when they speak. A child's brain is too sensitive to withstand the effects of smart phone radiation. Not let children carry their mobile phones to school. Not to leave mobile phones in children's bedroom at night. Manage screen time for children and prevent them for smartphones.

It should come as no surprise that smart phones and tablets have now replaced basketballs and baby dolls on a child's wish list. Elementary school-aged children start asking, or let us say begging, for these forms of technology before they can even tie their shoes.

This raises the question of how mobile technology, typically found in smart phones, affects childhood brain development (Anderson, 2018) [1]. This topic has been creating a lot of debate among parents, educators, and researchers. Unfortunately, smart phones are relatively new and a lot of the gathered evidence is unclear or inconsistent. This means that it is important for parents to consider the potential effects smart phones can have on childhood psychology and development.

Role of Society and School

A lot of research has been conducted over the years to understand how children learn (Elizabeth, 2011) [7]. There are many theories circulating, but Jean Piaget (2011) might be the most respected in the education field. He was one of the first scholars to study how a child's brain develops. His cognitive development theory explains how learning is a mental process that reorganizes concepts based on biology and experiences. He deduced that children learn the same way — their brains grow and function in similar patterns, moving through four universal stages of development.

Dr. Jenny Radesky of Boston Medical Centre (Baggini, 2017)^[3] became concerned when she noticed the lack of interaction between parents and children. She observed that smart phones and handheld devices were interfering with bonding and parental attention.

Conclusion

However, there is no concrete proof that mobile technology is necessarily and definitively linked to adverse outcomes. Smart phones and technology do offer benefits to our children. Here is a quick rundown of the benefits technology can offer to our youth (Imafidon, 2015)^[11]:

A child is more capable of handling rapid cyber searches, making quick decisions, developing visual acuity, and multitasking. Games help develop peripheral vision. Visual motor tasks like tracking objects or visually searching for items is improved. Internet users tend to use decision-making and problem-solving brain regions more often.

Many experts and educators feel that interactive media has a place in a child's life. Smart phones and tablets can foster learning concepts, communication, and camaraderie.

Here are a few recommendations to make the most of the time spent on a smart phone (William, 2018)^[18]:

- Children under two should not be using screens or electronic devices.
- Play with children and interact with them face-to-face.
- Make sure smart phones do not interfere with opportunities for play and socializing.
- Limit screen use to one or two hours a day. This includes smart phones, TV, computers, etc.
- It is all right to use a smart phone as an occasional treat.
- Model positive smart phone use.
- Encourage family meals and communication.
- Look for quality apps that promote building vocabulary, mathematical, literacy, and science concepts.
- Keep smart phones out of the bedrooms.

Health officials seem unable to agree on the impact smart phones and similar devices have on developing brains (Arora, 2019)^[2]. Studies contradict each other and new benefits to technology are uncovered regularly.

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