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The Digital Environment and Children's Psychosocial Health

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Over the years, media has grown drastically and has a greater impact in modern society. In this digital era, with its ability to deliver information, education, and entertainment, media and technology have become an integral part of an individual's everyday life. The media has different forms, including print (newspapers, magazines), electronic (TV, movies, and radio), and hybrid forms (video/DVD, videogames, the Internet, smart phones, etc.). Of all the forms of media, the most commonly used is the internet, which is accessed by people of all ages, from children to the elderly. Childhood is a crucial stage in human development process, which is a sensitive developmental phase characterized by rapid psychosocial growth. During this period, the environment surrounding the child plays a decisive role in shaping emotional regulation, social competence, self-concept, and behavioral patterns. While appropriate media exposure could support learning, creativity, and social awareness, prolonged and unguided exposure can be associated with several psychosocial challenges. These challenges include emotional distress, behavioral problems, impaired social relationships, and difficulties in attention and self-regulation. Hence, understanding the psychosocial implications of media exposure and the protective role of parents and institutions is essential.

Exposure to Media and Technology and Psychosocial Issues

Media and technology play a crucial role in children's everyday lives, significantly shaping how they learn, interact, and develop their identities. The rapid expansion of digital platforms, including smartphones, social media, online gaming, streaming services, and virtual learning environments, has significantly increased children's screen exposure from an early age. Unlike earlier generations, children today engage with media interactively, continuously, and often independently.

Although now supplemented by digital screens, television still continues to influence children's psychosocial development. While not all TV programmes are harmful, there is strong evidence of the negative effects of exposure to violence, inappropriate sexuality, and objectionable language. Children who watch television often miss out on important activities like playing, reading, and socializing, which are crucial for their physical, mental, and social development. There is a link between children increased aggressive behaviour and their exposure to violent television content. Children may also develop fear and anxiety, perceiving the world as a dangerous place due to the violent content they consume (Smith and Ferguson, 2019). Additionally, excessive television viewing can detract from essential activities like playing and socializing, contributing to developmental issues and potentially influencing the rise in childhood obesity (Pieper, 2022). Overwatching television might be detrimental to learning and academic success. Some shows might promote reckless behaviour when watched. A child's postural development may be impacted by how much time they spend in front of computers and televisions. Spending too much time on television can result in obesity, a lack of social skills, and addictive behaviour. Even though its uncommon,

certain kids with seizure disorders are particularly vulnerable to episodes brought on by a flickering television screen.

Technological innovations, such as video games and digital gaming platforms, offer a range of developmental opportunities alongside potential psychosocial risks. Certain age-appropriate games can enhance skills like coordination and problem-solving. However, excessive gaming, particularly if it involves violent or highly competitive content, has been linked to various negative outcomes, including increased aggression, impulsivity, emotional dysregulation, and problematic addictive behaviors. Additionally, children who engage in excessive gaming may face social isolation, decreased family interaction, and challenges in forming peer relationships. High gaming frequency correlates with poor social skills and decreased family interaction (Imran *et al.*, 2022). Solanki (2024) highlighted that Excessive gaming, especially violent games, is associated with increased aggression, impulsivity, emotional dysregulation, and addiction. It can lead to social isolation, decreased family interaction, and challenges in peer relationships, impairing frustration tolerance and emotional control, contributing to behavioral issues.

Among all the variations of media, the most prominent and powerful media influencing children's lives is the internet and social media. Along with various benefits, the internet and social media also come with detrimental effects if not used properly. The Internet, which is comparable to a sizable personal library, has a big potential to give kids and teenagers access to instructional materials. The online platforms provide access to educational resources and global connectivity, although they also expose children to various psychosocial risks such as cyberbullying, online harassment, body image dissatisfaction, social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), and reduced self-esteem. Frequent exposure to idealized images and online validation metrics can distort children's self-concept and impede their identity development. Increased screen time is associated with heightened anxiety and depression, particularly due to negative social comparisons on social media (Hoge *et al.*, 2017). Children may experience emotional instability and social isolation, exacerbated by mobile phone addiction and limited self-regulation skills (Nabijonovna, 2024). Farooqi (2025) found that prolonged screen time is linked to sleep disturbances, which can further contribute to anxiety and depressive symptoms. Additionally, excessive internet use has been associated with anxiety, loneliness, sleep disturbances, and depressive symptoms. The absence of editorial oversight and the widespread presence of misinformation further complicate children's cognitive and emotional growth, particularly as their critical thinking skills are still developing.

Role of parents and institutions in addressing psychosocial issues

Parents play a central role in buffering children against the negative psychosocial effects of media and technology. Early establishment of healthy screen habits, content monitoring, and age-appropriate media use is crucial. The exploration of media and discussion of its educational worth should be promoted among families. It is important to teach kids to evaluate and think critically about the information they consume. Parents can assist youngsters in separating fact from fiction, especially when it comes to violence and advertising. Excessive screen time (>1 hour/day) is associated with lower cognitive performance and language skills in children (Schwarzer *et al.*, 2021). Families might wish to think of more engaging and original methods to spend time together. Children who consume a lot of media have worse cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional abilities. Frequent parent-child interactions are linked to improved cognitive, motor, and social-emotional skills (Schwarzer *et al.*, 2021). Engaging in shared activities reduces behavioral difficulties and enhances prosocial behavior in children (Poulain *et al.*, 2019). High levels of media consumption among mothers are strongly correlated with high levels of media consumption among children, but not directly with consequences for children's development. Public health initiatives should work to improve media management and awareness among parents and kids alike.

Educational institutions also serve as critical protective systems. Schools can address psychosocial risks by incorporating media literacy and digital citizenship into the curriculum. Media literacy equips students with skills to access, analyze, and evaluate media messages, fostering critical thinking about the information they consume (Hunt, 2023). Viewers' interpretations and mental constructions of what they see moderate the impact of the media on attitudes and behaviours. Giving students the ability to track and analyse media information should be a major component of such courses. Such education enables children to critically evaluate online content, recognize harmful digital behaviors, and develop empathy and ethical responsibility in online interactions. Research indicates that a lack of media literacy can lead to stress and anxiety among students, highlighting the need for robust media education to support mental well-being (Rojas-Bahamon and Arbeláez-Campillo, 2024). Teachers should have easy access to continuing education programmes on media education and should be well-versed in media literacy in order to provide media education to their pupils effectively. Media is used by teachers as a teaching tool, and they also encourage and practise critical, thoughtful watching. Teachers at all grade levels, from elementary to secondary, utilise their influence and personal examples to introduce children and their parents to engaging, non-violent, and non-stereotypical media while also sharing their own passion for them. Teachers can identify early signs of psychosocial distress, such as withdrawal, aggression, or attention difficulties, and provide timely support through counseling or referrals. Schools, in collaboration with families, can promote positive digital engagement and ensure consistency between home and educational environments.

Conclusion

Media and technology play a critical role in shaping the psychosocial development of children in contemporary society. While these tools present significant opportunities for educational enrichment and social interaction, excessive or maladaptive exposure is linked to various psychosocial challenges, including elevated aggression, anxiety disorders, diminished self-esteem, social withdrawal, and behavioral disturbances. To address these issues, it is crucial to implement informed parenting strategies, robust institutional frameworks, and comprehensive media literacy initiatives. Such measures can effectively mitigate the adverse effects associated with digital overexposure. Therefore, adopting a balanced and mindful approach to media consumption is imperative for promoting optimal psychosocial development in children navigating the complexities of the digital age.

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