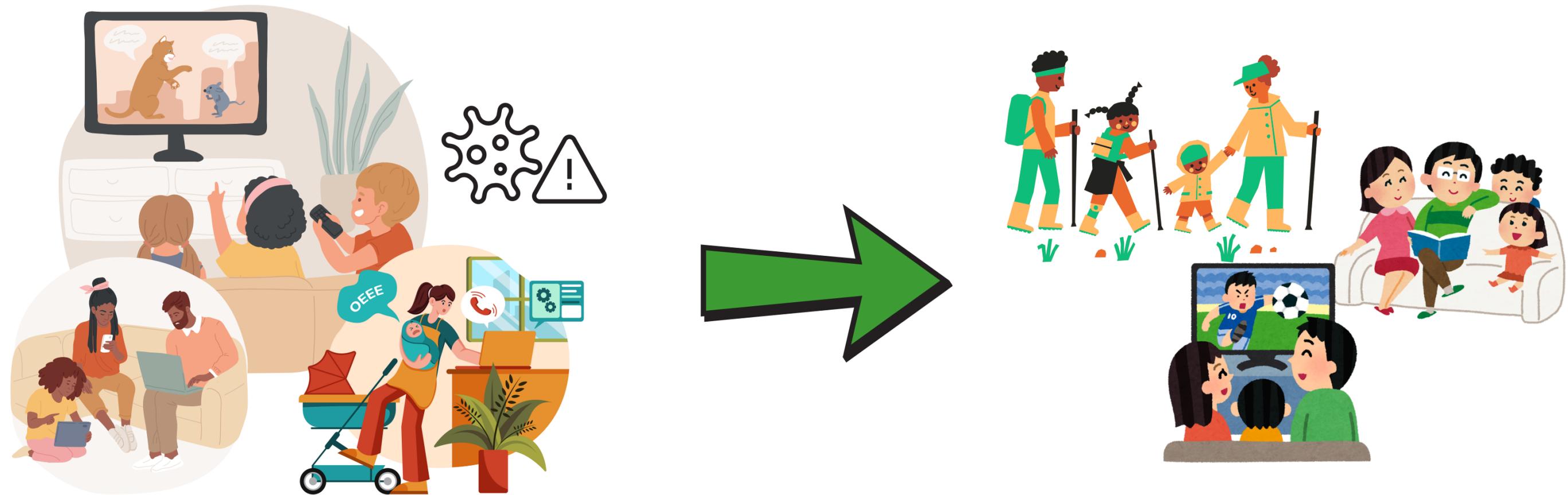


From screen reliance to digital balance: Parental perceptions of pre and post-pandemic screen habits of young children



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Background



During the pandemic: significant increases in young children's exposure to digital media

Bergmann et al. (2022)
Binet et al. (2024)
Eales et al. (2021)

Time Debt

Binet et al. (2024)

Developmental delays

De Bruijn et al. (2023)
Fitzpatrick et al. (2023)



Background

Developmental delays

- Language delays
- Weaker physical health
- Reduced interpersonal skills
- And poor self-regulation

De Bruijn et al. (2023)
Fitzpatrick et al. (2023)
Simonato et al. (2018)
Okenwa-Vincent et al. (2025)



Objectives of the study



1- Understand parental perspectives on the circumstances surrounding screen use, including its purposes, influences, and content types.



2- Investigate how parents make sense of an increase in their child's screen use during the pandemic.



3- Describe parental strategies and household rules regarding screen use.

Methods



Participants

N = 326 caregivers
Mean age = 4.5



Data collection

Online questionnaires (Qualtrics)
Same open-ended question at each wave



Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis - Braun & Clarke (2019)
NVivo software

“We would like to know in your own words the role that screen media (for example, watching videos and movies, playing games or using apps, using video chat) has played for you during the COVID-19 crisis. Please describe your experience.”

Results

Purposes of screen use:

- Screens as a behaviour management tool

“Additionally, using screen time before supper, as a reward was helpful for encouraging X to listen well during the day” (Mother of a girl)

- Screens for entertainment during and after the crisis

“Watching TV [...] has been the most efficient way to keep them occupied and quiet while I met with students or did online meetings and sessions.” (Mother of a boy)



Results

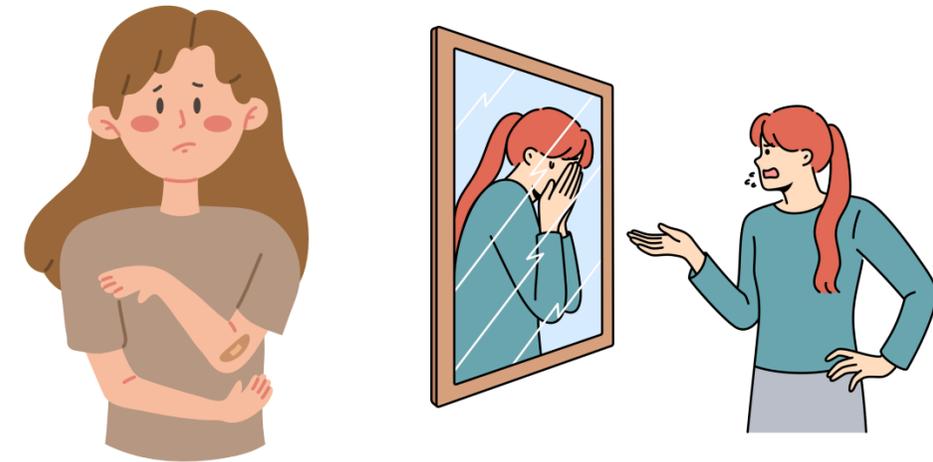
- Balance between screens and other activities

“We try to balance it out with outdoor play, reading and drawing so the kids don't get glued to their video game consoles, ipads and the TV.” (Mother of a girl)



- Parental perspectives and feelings

“It's been harder on my self-esteem since I never wanted to be the mom that put her children in front of the TV to occupy them.” (Mother of a boy)



Results

- Contextual factors

“We were using our cellphones, tv, etc a lot more as it was still winter and we could not do much outside or go anywhere. As the weather improved and restrictions lessened then I found we were using everything at our "usual" pace.” (Mother of a boy)



- Effects of screens on self-regulation

“Negative behaviours immediately after we turn it off (scream, tantrum, beg for more). If we dont give her screen for a few days we notice a more mellow and cheerful child.” (Mother of a girl)



Implication

- Drawbacks of using screens for relaxation and behavior management
- Advocate for workplace flexibility
- Integrate children in daily chores
- Make more time for free play and unstructured activities



Conclusions

- From essential supports to ongoing challenges, screens required continual effort and clearly defined limits throughout the pandemic and beyond.



“On a positive note, since the COVID 19 crisis, we have intentionally tried to reduce screen time and direct him into various other activities. So, even though I am not very satisfied with his "screen-free" time, its a huge cut-down. That shows better behaviour too.” (Mother of a boy)

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