

Role of Parental and Other Risk Factors in Smartphone Addiction among Preschoolers

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Abstract

A smartphone is a term for distinguishing mobile phones with advanced features from basic feature phones. This term was basically introduced in the market for a new class of mobile phones that provide integrated services from communication, computing and mobile sectors such as voice communication, messaging, personal information management applications, and wireless communication capability. That is why; this device is the most used gadget today. Due to advancing technology, most of the metro city families switching from landline to smartphones. Both parents have mobile phones; a child has access to it since a very young age. Due to developments in IT sector, most of the urban schools adopting the concept of e-learning and digital class. Modern smartphones currently include all the features of a laptop including web browsing, Wi-Fi, and 3rd party apps which allow children to access the internet, communicate, and entertain themselves anywhere and anytime and they use it as their constant companion. Adults use the smartphones for official or entertainment purpose, the addiction among the children is also on the peak. This excessive use can lead to various musculoskeletal, psychological, and visual problems which can affect the health of an individual. There are various causes which lead to smartphone addiction in children. Among all the causes, role of parents is very important and suggested as the main cause for the addiction. In this review, we will discuss various causes of smartphone addiction in preschoolers.

Keywords: Addiction, Preschoolers, Smartphone

BACKGROUND

Recently, smartphone is rapidly spreading among people. The number of smartphone users in India is expected to grow by 15.6% to reach 337 million in 2018, according to the report. Surprisingly, it is the highest estimated growth rate posted by any country in the world.^[1] Due to the introduction of cheap phones which are 50% cheaper than the original price of smartphones, more and more people started to use smartphones. Smartphone has become indispensable tool in everyday life and mobile tool that everyone can easily approach. Children can easily contact smartphones to use and they use them as toys. Furthermore, with the dramatically

rapid development of media games, learning packages, and educational applications for young children, opportunities for using mobile devices have been growing, children usage time has become increasingly longer, and child target users of mobile devices are becoming younger.^[2,3]

A survey conducted by the GSM Association and the Mobile Society Research Institute within NTT DOCOMO Inc., Japan, reported that in India, the mobile phone ownership rate in children is 57%. The age when mobile phones are first acquired peaks at 15 and increases again when children reach 16 or 17. About 40% of Indian children make more than 11 calls a day and 80% make more than six calls a day. The internet mobile phone usage rate is 18%. About 14% of children use social networking and “mini-blogs” from their mobile phones. However, among children who use mobile internet, the rate goes up 76%. The number of social networking contacts and “mini-blogs” is 70 on average [Figure 1].^[4]

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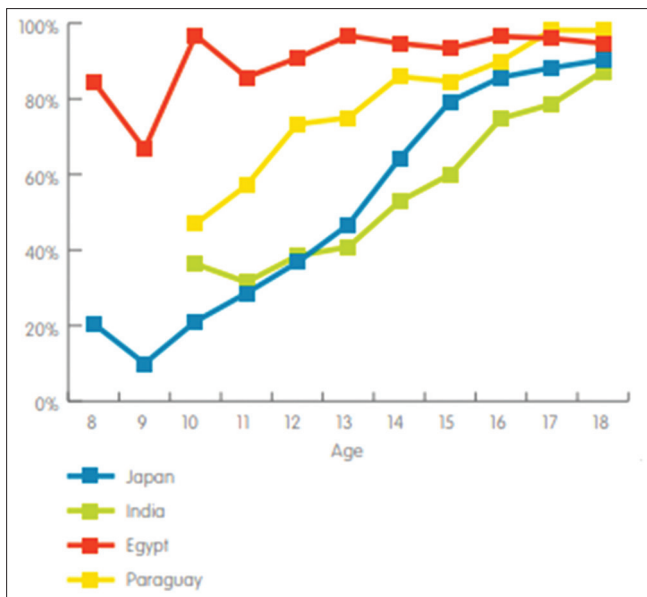


Figure 1: Children use of mobile phones – An international comparison 2011

A recent survey found that the proportion of children using mobile devices for over an average of 1 h/day was 15% among elementary schoolers and 48% among junior high schoolers.^[5] Children can access mobile devices at any moment for various purposes such as games, homework, chatting, and surfing the internet. From traditional media such as television and video games to new media including not only home computers but also mobile devices such as smartphones and digital tablets, media are an increasingly dominant force in children lives.^[6,7] Media devices are expected to play an increasing role in daily life, even among young children. The increasing amount of time that children spend using mobile devices has raised concerns about the influence of digital technology use on the health of developing children.

CAUSE

There are several studies about smartphone addiction among adults. However, researches related to studies regarding smartphone addiction among early childhood are hardly found. Because it is recent change in the trend, few academic reports are reported. There are a number of causes which result in smartphone addiction in the preschooler. Causes have been discussed below:

Role of parents

It has been observed that parents with low income and low education have the possibility that children have problem.^[8,9] When parents' education is low, knowledge of harmful effects of smartphone addiction is also low; hence, it is easy to provide smartphone to their children, which results in higher smartphone addiction rate. Parents with poor income cannot afford expensive smartphone, so their children smartphone addiction rate might be low. However, adults' smartphone adoption rate has reached almost 90%, and non-adoption group

is limited to old-aged group, so almost all low-income parents have smartphones. They lack resources to raise their children, so they easily let their children use smartphones same as game addiction of children.

Smartphone is a device which young people easily use and adopt pervasively. Younger parents tend to have more generous adoption attitudes about smartphone and higher usage frequency. As a result, their children have higher chance of contact and using smartphones, therefore, having higher smartphone addiction rate like internet addiction of children.^[10]

Children from dual-income family have longer time alone and due to lack of parent's amount of time to take care of their children; they are generous about the requirements of their children.^[11] Therefore, they easily let their children use smartphones, resulting in higher smartphone addiction rate.

In addition, parents' attitude toward smartphone or usage behaviors is likely to have influenced children smartphone addiction rate same as internet addiction of children. When parents have more positive attitudes toward smartphone, they let their children use smartphone more easily, resulting in higher rate of smartphone addiction. Furthermore, if parents themselves are heavy users of smartphone or addicted to it, their children have higher chance to be exposed to smartphones, resulting in higher smartphone addiction rate.^[12]

ROLE OF CHILDREN

Children variables affecting child smartphone addiction are child's age, gender, and number of siblings and whether they attend education institutions or not. The lower child's age is, mental development is incomplete and easily immersed, having higher possibility of smartphone addiction.

In addition, boys tend to have more curiosity about tools and needs for trial. Furthermore, boys tend to be more distractive and lack of self-control,^[13] so they have higher possibility of addiction to smartphone. While higher number of siblings means higher possibility of interacting with other people, lower number of siblings means more time spending alone, resulting in higher possibility of addiction to digital tools like smartphones.^[14] In addition, when a child attends education institutions such as preschool or kindergarten, they are likely to be under teacher's control and have more time to interact with peers, resulting in lower smartphone addiction rate. On the other hand, children not attending any education institutions have more time alone at home and due to lack of parent's resources, they have higher possibility of smartphone addiction.

CONCLUSION

Smartphone is surely a good device which made our lives rich. However, this tool can be a threat to our children, the future of humanity. Parents and the society should strive to minimize the side effects of this without cease because children are the most valuable future resources that cannot be replaced with anything else.

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