

## A study of parents perceptions about television viewing habits of their children

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#### ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to understand the perceptions of parents about the television viewing habits of their children. The study consisted of a sample of 30 parents with children aged between 3-10 years. An interview schedule having open-ended questions was developed with the help of available literature and subject matter specialist. The data thus collected were tabulated, and converted into percentage. However, as the study was qualitative in nature, apart from quantifying some of the data, it was described qualitatively in detail so as to understand and analyze the results in a better way.

#### INTRODUCTION

A television looks harmless enough - just a box with brightly coloured images flickering on a screen. It is such a helpful device. It can keep a naughty child occupied while parents go about their business. Television viewing among children has been a source of many debates and research, linking the amount of television and the type of programming to the physical health of the children, their mental health and their mental growth. People have blamed the television for children flinging themselves off roofs and risking their necks doing foolhardy stunts in an attempt to emulate superheroes and athletic models in advertisements. However, television needs not be viewed solely as a negative force. It has its advantages. Remember that even if a child is watching a good educational programme, he will not learn as much if he is watching alone. If he is watching with another child or an adult who makes comments or asks questions about the programme, this will help the child to bounce off ideas. Experts feel that the first 2 years of life are considered a critical time for brain development. TV and other electronic media can get in the way of exploring, playing, and interacting with parents and others,

which encourages learning and healthy physical and social development. As kids get older, too much screen time can interfere with activities such as being physically active, reading, doing homework, playing with friends, and spending time with family. Excessive television watching can impede language skills, which are best developed through reading and interactions with others in conversation and play. Hours spent watching TV also make risk-taking and social relationships difficult for many children.

Looking at the above facts a need was felt to conduct a research aimed at finding the parents perceptions about the television viewing patterns of their children. Therefore, this study was attempted with the objectives to understand parents views on television viewing habits of their children and to understand the effect of television viewing on children according to parents in different areas like :

- Child's behavior
- Child's health
- Child's performance in studies and
- Parent-child relationship

## METHODS

The study was carried out in Udaipur city of Rajasthan. The sample comprised of the parents of children aged 3-10 years. Through a preliminary survey, 50 respondents were purposively selected taking 30 respondents fulfilling the criterion *i.e.* parents of children aged 3-10 years. This research was based on a descriptive research design to obtain information of parents' perceptions of their children's television viewing habits. Researcher used interview technique for collection of information. In the light of objectives of the study the data was tabulated and converted into percentage. However, as the study, were qualitative in nature, apart from quantifying some of the data, it was described qualitatively in detail so as to understand and analyze the results in a better way.

## OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

As per the objectives of present study, the pertinent information has been categorized and reported under major following sections.

- Duration of television viewing and other patterns of children
- Effects of television viewing on children according to parents in various areas like-
  - Behaviour.
  - Health and playing games.
  - Education and
  - Parent-child relationship.
- Positive and negative effects of television as stated by parents.

### Duration of TV viewing:

The data as can be seen from the pie chart (Fig. 1) that out of the 30 parents, around 46.70% of their children watched television for about 3-5 hours daily. About 33.3% of the parents said that their children watched television for about 5 or more than 5 hours. Only 20% of the parents said that their children watched television for 2 or less than 2 hours. Television viewing tops the list of preferred activities among the Indian children. A survey by AC Nielson also showed that on an average, an

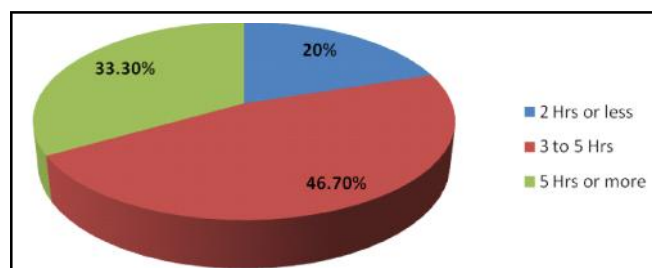


Fig. 1 : Duration of TV viewing (in %)

Indian child watches TV for about three hours on weekdays and 3.7 hours on weekends and the time spent in front of television increases with age (The Child, Branded, 2004).

### Types of programs viewed by children and parents' preferences:

It was found that about 66.67% of the children liked to watch cartoons. 16.66% of the children watched scientific and sports related programmes. It was also noted that about 10% of the children watched serials that are meant to be viewed by grownups. This was because the parents themselves watched those serials and also let their children watch the serials along with them. The data also revealed that all the 30 parents wanted their children to watch programmes with general knowledge, religious, sports, and historic content. All parents preferred channels like discovery, history, animal planet, ESPN etc. the most highly preferred reasons for their preferences were that the child gained academic knowledge and more simply the child gained pleasure.

### Reactions of children when asked to switch off the TV:

The data showed that 80% of the children showed various negative reactions and only 20% agreed easily when asked to switch off the TV set. The negative reactions that the children showed according to the parents were- crying, getting irritated, getting angry and not eating food, shouting, throwing temper-tantrums, refusing directly and becomes rude.

### Changes in demands:

Most of the parents felt that because of the commercials on television, their children's demands had increased and only 23.34% felt that there was no effect of the commercials on TV on the demands of their children.

### Effects of T.V. viewing on children according to parents in various areas:

#### Effects on behaviour:

83.30% of the parents felt that they had observed behavioural changes in their children due to television viewing (Fig. 2). To further elaborate on the kind of changes that the parents felt, the parents said that their child had become

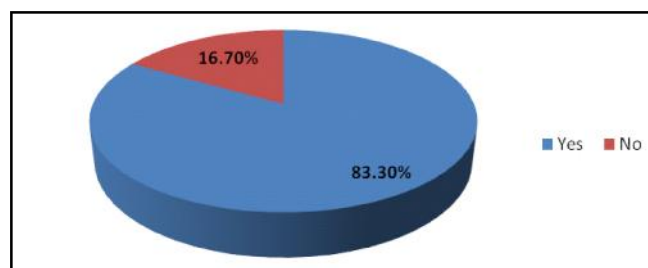


Fig. 2 : Changes in behaviour due to TV viewing (in %)

stubborn. Some of the parents also felt that the child had become aggressive.

#### Effects on health and playing games:

The pie chart (Fig. 3) and histogram (Fig. 4) posit the effects of TV viewing on children's health and physical activity: Most of the parents said that their child's eyes had gone weak and the child had to wear spectacles due to long hours of television viewing. Some even felt that the child was gaining weight as he/she was inactive for long hours sitting in front of the television. Also because of sitting for long hours, the child had started complaining of backaches. 56.60% of the parents felt that their child's playing time had considerably reduced as he was watching TV for more hours. TV use may displace physical activity but also increase caloric intake during viewing.

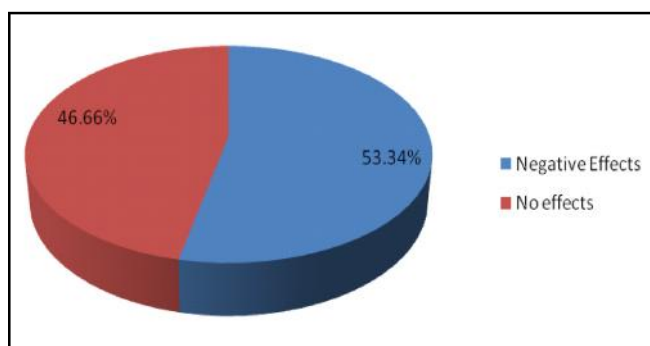


Fig. 3 : Effects on health (in %)

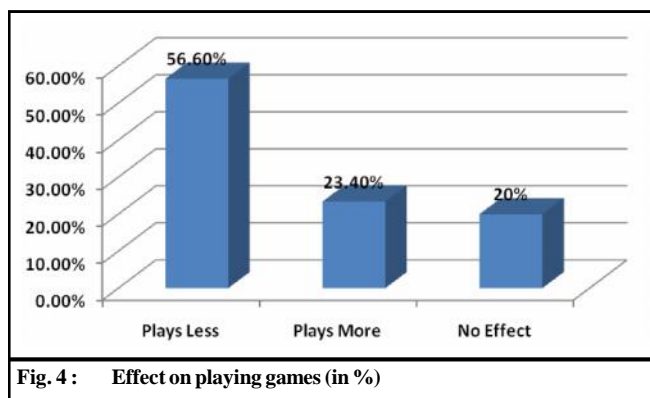


Fig. 4 : Effect on playing games (in %)

#### Effects on education:

The parents felt that because of increased hours of television viewing, their child had started lagging behind in studies. His/her grades were also getting affected in school. Moreover, they also felt that the child's concentration had also reduced while studying (Fig. 5).

Sharif and Sargent (2006) tested the relative effects of television, movie, and video game screen time and content on adolescent school performance and concluded that poorer

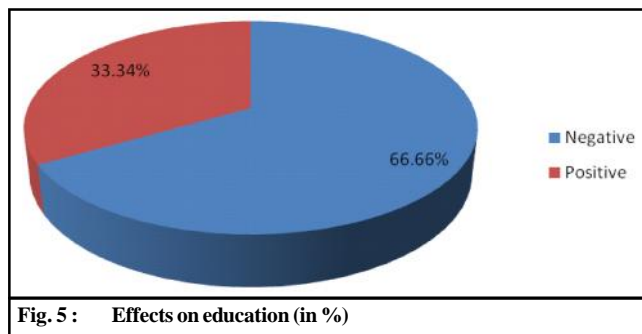


Fig. 5 : Effects on education (in %)

school performance increased with increasing weekday television screen time and cable movie channel availability and decreased with parental restriction of television content restriction.

#### Effects on parent-child relationship:

As can be seen from (Fig. 6) most of the parents *i.e.* 56.66% said that television viewing had not affected their relationship with their child. However, 43.34% of them felt that their relationship with the child was affected due to television viewing.

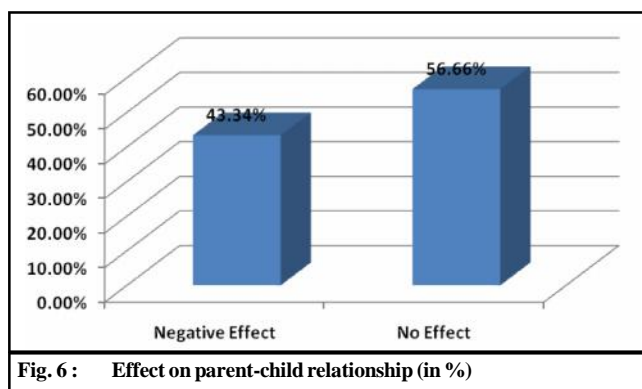


Fig. 6 : Effect on parent-child relationship (in %)

The parents said that as the child was glued to the TV for many hours, they were not able to spend a sufficient amount of time with them.

#### Positive and negative effects of television as stated by parents:

All the 30 respondents stated both positive and negative effects of television. Similar studies reveal both positive and negative effects of TV viewing on children like pre-schoolers who viewed educational programmes tend to have higher grades, were less aggressive and valued their studies more when they reached High School, according to a long-term study (Anderson *et al.*, 2001). Concerns about the negative effects of TV stemmed from research findings that children are exposed to some TV programmes that contain sex, violence, profanity, and objectionable contents.

**Conclusion:**

Television (TV) has its good side. It can be entertaining and educational, and can open up new worlds for kids, giving them a chance to travel the globe, learn about different cultures, and gain exposure to ideas they may never encounter in their own community. Shows with a pro social message can have a positive effect on kids' behavior; programmes with positive role models can influence viewers to make positive lifestyle changes. However, the reverse can also be true: Kids are likely to learn things from TV that parents don't want them to learn. TV can affect kids' health, behaviour and family life in negative ways.

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