

A Survey Of Mothers About The Challenges They Face And The Actions They Take To Reduce Their Children's Mobile Phone Usage. A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Mobile addiction among children is a growing concern, and it's easy to point fingers at parents for not setting strict rules or for allowing too much screen time. Not all parents willingly allow their children to use mobile phones excessively—many are genuinely concerned about their child's health and well-being. However, we often overlook the daily challenges parents face in trying to control or limit mobile usage. Their efforts are frequently underestimated or misunderstood. This qualitative study investigated mother's concerns about their child mobile use, challenges they are facing to stop that. We tried to explore what their kids watch in mobile, average length of engage in mobile, when kids need mobile, worry of mothers, opinion of mothers in regard to cause of mobile addiction in children, what challenges do you face in trying to reduce or stop your children's mobile addiction and finally how they are trying to stop mobile addiction.

Methods: Individual interviews were held with 120 mothers residing in Khed Taluka, District Ratnagiri, Konkan region, Maharashtra, India and they had children aged 6 to 10 Years. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, then inductive analysis and interpretation by the research team distilled the key ideas and illustrative quotes.

Results: Participant demographics are presented in Table 1. Participants were predominantly were in age group between 36-45 (43%). Majority 38% of children were aged 10 years. Out of 120 families 90 % families had multiple homes in their home and all those are smart phones. All families had television in addition to this 19% had Laptop/Desktop and 21 (12%) has tablet available in home. In duration of mobile phone usage per day in hours 50 % use 1-2 hours uses mobile. Maximum children that is 50% use mobile phones for games.

Overall, children mobile use has become significant issue to the parents and really parents are worried on how to avoid it and implementing their own strategies to combat this problem. To avoid mobile use majority parents obstacles are their own family members like in some families husband, in some other families grandmother and grandfather, father and mother in law are problems. Mothers shared what their children watch commonly in mobile, length of engage in mobile, commonly when their kids ask mobile, what are really worries about their children future, other than what else they use other than mobile, what are the major causes of mobile addiction, what are the challenges of mobile use, how to avoid it, and what abnormal findings they have found in their child.

Conclusion:

Mothers are often doing their best to fight against their children's mobile addiction, constantly trying different strategies and approaches to manage the issue. However, this is not a battle she can win alone—addressing mobile addiction requires the support and involvement of the entire family.

Keywords: Mothers, Children, mobile addiction, screen use, challenges and actions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mobile, a compact size electronic equipment conquered the mind of all citizens of modern world including the young children. Yes, there is no person in the world who has untouched this handset. In the last ten years mobile phones are become integrated part of our daily lives. It has become more popular than any other media because of its compact size, portability, content streaming capabilities, interactive features, and cost-effectiveness. Mobile technology is developing rapidly, other than communication now mobile has become primary tool for shopping and for online transactions.¹

India has had landline phones for over 100 years, but their ownership remained limited. In 1999, 7% of Indian households owned a landline phone, and by 2005 it had peaked at 14% of households today, less than 1% of homes have landline phones. Mobile phone ownership, on the other hand, took off rapidly, and democratised phone ownership in a way that landline phones were never able to. In 2008, there were 346 million registered mobile SIM cards in India. Between 2008 and 2024, this number more than tripled.² There are now over one billion active SIM cards^[4] in India for a population of nearly 1.4 billion people.³ With 81 mobile connections for every 100 people, India is 160th out of 208 countries in terms of mobile phone penetration.⁴ Vietnam and Bangladesh are among the countries with more SIM cards than people, and in the world as a whole there are now more SIM cards than people.⁵

In India Comprehensive modular survey: Telecom 2025, says Approximately 97.6 percent male and 95.2 percent female, in the age group 15-29 years, reported use of a smartphones during the January – March 2025. In rural area around 79.2 percent males and 75.6 percent females in the age group '15 years and above' own a smartphone among those who own a mobile phone. Whereas, in urban area the percentage estimated at around 89.4 and 86.2 percent for male and female, respectively, for the 15-29 age group.⁶

In today's digital world our children use phones limitlessly and they are slowly becoming addictive is a call for concern. In this technology-driven world, we spend most of our time with our mobile phones. The evolution of phones and technology developed rapidly and now everyone in our house has their smartphone, we have so many apps which are useful for us which make our life easy where we can pay our bills, order food online, book tickets for travelling etc. But the problem is serious only when we misuse and use our smartphones limitlessly. The problem is we adults use our phones all day and it is sad that even children are also addicted. This smartphone is affecting the growth and development of children when they use it without limits.

Giving the mobile to the kids and stating that we only give them for 1 hour or two doesn't help says some doctors. Because the doctors say there are proven facts that smartphone addiction in children develop anxiety and low self-esteem, and also in a few cases there are very young children i.e. ages from 2 years to 6 years develop communication problems.

Some of the serious issues other than communication and unresponsiveness are behavioural problems, addiction, sleep disturbances, eye problems, and problems with the nervous system and it is scary that they can develop tumours because of cell phone radiation. Due to virtual classes we parents should give smartphones to them and also in some schools homework is being sent on whatsapp, so it is practically not possible to reduce the screen timing or stopping phone usage altogether. There are certain ways the parents can try to distract the use of mobile phones and engage their children in some other activity.⁷

Prolonged screen time during early childhood is linked to detrimental effects, including increased sedentary behaviour, obesity, disrupted sleep patterns, and developmental issues.⁸ A study conducted in Ujjain, India, found that headaches were significantly associated with the use of mobile phones. To prevent such harmful effects various guidelines have been provided by different countries.⁹ According to a study, only 15% of parents reported that their pediatrician engages in discussions about media use with them.¹⁰

A limited number of studies have been conducted on what are the challenges facing by mothers in regard to avoid mobile addiction of their children, and what are techniques are applying by mothers to reduce screen time. Hence, this study was conducted with the aim of finding out the mother's challenges they face and the actions they take to reduce their children's mobile phone usage.

Methodology:

We aimed to explore the challenges in Managing Screen Time and actions taken by mothers to avoid mobile phone usage in Indian scenario in Khed Taluka, District Ratnagiri, Konkan region, Maharashtra, India, using a general inductive qualitative approach to explore their subjective. Individual interviews were conducted face-to-face with 120 mothers having children aged 6 to 10 Years. A senior nursing researcher conducted the interviews using a semi-structured questions to allow for flexibility and novel points to be explored. The interview guidelines and prompts were developed by the research team to cover a range of key issues related to the research questions, while also allowing flexibility to explore issues not before canvassed in the literature.

Participant recruitment:

Prospective participants were mothers of children aged 6 to 10 years who were included by snowball sampling. Participant criteria included mothers who are having concerns about the screen use of their children. Researchers spoke to participants to outline the study, check they met criteria, and ask if they wanted to join an individual interview. All participants were provided with an information sheet that outlined the background to the study, the research process, and how the information would be used. Participation was voluntary and a written informed consent agreement was signed prior to taking part in an interview. The research project and all documents had been given ethical approval by the ethics committee.

Data collection:

120 individual interviews were conducted who have children 6-10 years at 10 Vadis of Khed Taluka, District Ratnagiri, Konkan region, Maharashtra, India. Interviews were approximately 30-40 min duration. Topics explored included mothers observations of their children screen use, challenges in managing screen time and actions taken by mothers regarding that. They were also asked about their attempts to avoid/reduce those challenges that promotes children screen usage, Finally, they were asked about what they would find helpful in an intervention designed to assist mothers with managing children screen use. Interviews were held in person, at a participant's home.

Data analysis:

All interviews were recorded and transcribed word-for-word. A general inductive approach guided the analysis, aiming to draw out meaning from complex discussions by developing key themes directly from the raw data, without applying rigid theoretical frameworks. The coding process involved carefully reading the transcripts, identifying relevant sections of text, assigning them to initial categories, refining these categories to reduce overlap, and identifying central themes that captured the main insights. To ensure the reliability and credibility of the analysis, several measures were taken, such as team discussions to refine the coding system, reaching consensus on key categories, reviewing the final analysis, and summarizing the main findings for presentation in this article.

Results:

Participants Socio-demographics:

Sr. No.	Characteristics	Number	Percentage
1	Age of mother		
	26-35	41	34
	36-45	51	43
	46 and above	28	23
2	Age of child in years		
	6 -7	58	35
	8-9	45	27
	10	63	38
3	Total No. of phones in home		
	One	62	51.7
	More than one	58	48.3
4	Type of mobile phone usage		

	Smartphone	108	90
	Basic phone	12	10
5	Other gadgets available in home		
	Laptop/Desktop	34	19
	Television	120	69
	Tablet	21	12
6	Duration of mobile phone usage per day in hours		
	<1	10	8
	1-2	60	50
	3-4	32	27
	5 and above	18	15
7	Purpose of using mobile phone		
	Study	39	24
	Entertainment	39	24
	Communication	38	22
	Games	50	30

Participant demographics are presented in Table 1. Participants were predominantly were in age group between 36-45 (43%). Majority 38% of children were aged 10 years. Out of 120 families 90 % families had multiple homes in their home and all those are smart phones. All families had television in addition to this 19% had Laptop/Desktop and 21 (12%) has tablet available in home. In duration of mobile phone usage per day in hours 50 % use 1-2 hours uses mobile. Maximum children that is 50% use mobile phones for games.

Overall, children mobile use has become significant issue to the parents and really parents are worried on how to avoid it and implementing their own strategies to combat this problem. To avoid mobile use majority parents obstacles are their own family members like in some families husband, in some other families grandmother and grandfather, father and mother in law are problems. Mothers shared what their children watch commonly in mobile, length of engage in mobile, commonly when their kids ask mobile, what are really worries about their children future, other than what else they use other than mobile, what are the major causes of mobile addiction, what are the challenges of mobile use, how to avoid it, and what abnormal findings they have found in their child.

An overview of each topic is discussed, with illustrative verbatim quotes (with filler words “um” etc. removed for readability). There was a lack of marked differences between the interview and mothers responses, or by culture, economic status and other factors which are hidden, so we present the data here collectively with no identifiers.

2. WHAT THEY WATCH IN MOBILE?

Many mothers reported that children aged 6–10 most commonly engage with **cartoons, YouTube shorts, and video games** on mobile phones. Out of these entertainment maximum that is 70% of children engaged both in cartoon and shorts, where remaining 20% interested in animal shows and in built mobile games and 10% engaged in video games. In case of cartoons many mothers don't know why children like cartoons, but some expressed that they watch due to their bright visuals, fun characters, and easy-to-follow stories and many mothers concerned is that children would like to watch which are familiar and watch it repeatedly the same once in every two days without boring. In Case of shorts youtubes, mothers are very much worried about this in this most of their kids would like to see animals related shorts which are funny and quick.

“My child always wants to watch cartoons on the mobile, especially Motu Patlu, and he insists on watching the same episode every day. I don't understand what he finds so interesting about it. Whenever I ask him why he likes it, he doesn't respond at all while watching”

1. What is the average length of engage in mobile and others?

Most mothers reported that children typically spend 1 to 2 hours per day on mobile devices during school days for entertainment purposes, while during holidays, this usage often exceeds 3 hours. In addition to recreational use, children also spend an average of 1 hour daily on mobile phones for learning or school-related activities.

"My child uses the mobile for at least an hour every day, and it really frustrates me, I don't know what to do"

2. When kids need mobile?

Most children tend to ask for mobile phones right after waking up, often wanting to watch something immediately. After returning from school, they typically request mobile time as a way to relax. Many mothers shared that one of the most challenging times is during travel, when children frequently become restless and insist on using a mobile device. Another major concern expressed by mothers is during mealtimes—especially dinner—when both children and other family members often demand either a mobile phone or television. They find it particularly difficult to feed their children without using screens as a distraction.

"When my daughter comes home from school, the first thing she asks for is the mobile. I tell her to change her dress first and then she can watch. But after some time, when I ask her to stop, she always says, "Just one more episode and then I'll stop." She keeps repeating the same thing, making it very hard to get her to stop watching."

3. What mothers are worried regarding health problems mobile usage?

Most mothers are concerned that constant mobile phone use may lead to vision problems, mental health issues, poor academic performance, and physical health problems.

"I'm concerned that using the mobile might affect my child's eyesight, so I reduce the screen brightness. However, as soon as I step away, he turns the brightness back up again"

4. What else children use if there is no mobile?

When mothers take away mobile phones from their children, the kids often turn to other gadgets like laptops, televisions, or video games. However, if there's a power outage and none of these electronic devices can be used, children usually spend their time playing traditional games or resting until the power returns.

"If I take away the mobile, my child switches to watching cartoons on the TV. If I stop both the mobile and TV, then he moves to the laptop and watches downloaded movies. I just don't know how to keep him away from all of these screens."

5. What, in your opinion, is the cause of mobile addiction in children?

Mothers indicated that several factors contribute to mobile addiction in children, including parents being too busy to spend time with them, parental encouragement to use mobile devices, lack of discipline at home, insufficient homework, limited opportunities to play with friends, absence of strict household rules, online academic content provided by teachers, using devices to keep children occupied and reduce disturbances, and to calm children during feeding times.

"My main issue is that my husband uses his mobile in front of our child, especially during study time. It's very hard to prevent this, so I suggested that my husband come home only after our son finishes his homework"

6. What challenges do you face in trying to reduce or stop your children's mobile addiction?

Some contributing factors to children's mobile use include unavoidable academic content shared by teachers online, parental support for mobile usage, nuclear families with a single child, children's reluctance to stop using mobile devices, and parents using their own phones in front of children during study time.

"Another major obstacle is my father and mother-in-law, as they always side with my child. If my son keeps asking for the mobile phone, they give it to him without saying anything."

7. What tricks you use to avoid mobile use?

I hide the mobile phone before my children return from school and give them various reasons to avoid using it. I've enrolled them in tuition, music, and karate classes to keep them engaged. At times, sometimes I beat physically to take the phone away. I've set fixed hours for mobile use and established strict rules, such as no one using a phone in front of the child. I allow limited screen time each day, actively engage with my child during travel, and encourage participation in physical activities.

"Everyday between 6pm to 9pm I stopped using mobile until he complete his homework"

8. What behavior you observed in your child after mobile use?

They will be silent for few minutes, lack of patience, irritability, very less talking, won't listen parents words, throwing tantrums, late night sleep, late get up.

“After using mobile for half an hour or more than that my daughter becomes lazy and become mum for minimum two hours”

3. DISCUSSION

Mothers shared genuine and real-life concerns about their children's mobile phone use, including the challenges, worries, and issues they face. They also discussed the practical strategies and techniques they use at home to help prevent mobile addiction.

The participants' main concerns focused on several key areas: the type of content their children watch on mobile devices, the duration of usage, specific times when children feel the need to use mobiles, health issues related to mobile use, factors contributing to mobile addiction, difficulties in limiting screen time, and the strategies they employ to reduce mobile usage.

In the current study, a significant proportion of children primarily used phones for playing games 50 (30%), which is consistent with findings from a study on Mobile phone use by young children and parent's views on children's mobile phone usage, in this study where maximum children smart mobile devices for gaming(49%).¹¹

In the present study 60 (50%) children use mobile for 1-2 hours daily, in contrast to this a systematic review found that primary and middle school students aged 6 to 14 years 46.4% of them had screen time within the range of ≥ 2 h per day.¹²

Mothers expressed that maximum of their children request for mobile after they return back from the school and they are facing very difficult during Sundays and school holidays. In supporting to this a researchers found that from 358 primary school students (Grade 4 and 5), especially on holidays, children were likely to be 12 minutes less active each day, 27 minutes more sedentary, and have more than an hour extra of screen time.¹³

Through social media, mothers have learned that mobile addiction and increased screen time can lead to vision issues, mental health problems, poor academic performance, and physical health concerns. This has made them anxious and fearful that their own children might face similar effects. As a result, they are doing their best to limit their children's mobile phone usage. A research done among 196 children (boys and girls) from middle schools with an average age of 12.99 ± 0.81 years. On Effects of smartphone addiction on cognitive function and physical activity in middle-school children. The study results says that the interaction effects between physical activity and smartphone addiction on reaction times showed statistically insignificant ($p = 0.25$) differences, showing that physical activity's effect on reaction times did not depend on smartphone addiction levels. The non-addicted children had significantly higher physical activity levels than the addicted children, indicating that smartphone addiction reduced physical activity.¹⁴

In the study mothers pointed towards several factors contribute to mobile addiction in children, including parents being too busy to spend time with them, parental encouragement to use mobile devices, lack of discipline at home, insufficient homework, limited opportunities to play with friends, absence of strict household rules, online academic content provided by teachers, using devices to keep children occupied and reduce disturbances, and to calm children during feeding times. Simalar study says that, the causes of smartphone addiction are primarily consisting of three major factors: internal factors, emotional factors, and social factors. Internal factors can induce the excessive use of smartphones through boredom proneness and significant loss of people. Emotional factors might associate with smartphone addiction since it can be a strategy or method that people use to overcome mental stress and relieve pressures. Social factors are the most significant factors of smartphone addiction as it directly related to the function of smartphones as a tool for people to maintain their social relationships.¹⁵

4. CONCLUSION

This study provides up-to-date insights into the challenges mothers face and the steps they take to limit their children's mobile phone use. The parents provided rich insights about responding to children screen use from their concerned perspective. Followed by global pandemic currently to all individuals mobile use has become inevitable gadget, now it's not only communication aid but unfortunately becomes life of many individuals. As a result, parents now face an added challenge in their lives — figuring out how to prevent their children from becoming addicted to mobile phones. Most of these challenges vary greatly from one family to another, and this interview truly highlighted the concerns that parents are facing.

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Conflicts of interest:

There are no conflicts of interest. Institute ethical committee clearance obtained.

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