

# **The influence of screen time and screen activity on socio-emotional development in 5-year-old children: Findings from a nationally representative Irish cohort study**

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## **Abstract**

The present research focuses on the influence of both screen time and various screen activities (television, video or educational games) on the socio-emotional development of 9001 Irish 5-year-old children using a nationally representative birth cohort study. Parents were asked about their children's screen use and various family factors, while socio-emotional development was measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Hierarchical multiple regression models examined the influence of screen use factors on externalised, internalised, and prosocial behaviour, while controlling for environment and family factors. Engaging in two or more hours of screen time per day had a small negative influence on all three of the socio-emotional scales. Mostly playing video games also related to increased internalised and externalised behaviour for this cohort. While the screen use variables made a significant contribution to the regression model, even after family factors were accounted for, the effect sizes were small in comparison. The results of this study suggest that screen time, activities, and wider ecological factors are all important to consider in future screen use research to provide a more nuanced understanding of screen time's unique role in early development. The findings provide evidence-based guidelines for researchers, caregivers, educators, practitioners, and policymakers.

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