Parental concerns regarding young children and digital technology : an exploratory qualitative investigation in three European countries

Engl. transl.: Parental concerns regarding young children and digital technology : an exploratory qualitative investigation in three European countries

# Keywords

* young children
* digital technology
* parental concerns
* parental mediation
* media panics

# Details

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## Topics

* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Risks and harms
* Researching children online: methodology and ethics
* Literacy and skills

## Sample

The study was conducted in Belgium, Bulgaria,
Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia, Malta, The
Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Russia, Spain, and Switzerland. At least ten
families per country were selected using snowball and purposive sampling. Each
country aimed to address diverse family structures in terms of children’s ages and
gender, family composition, and income. Families with at least one child under
eight and at least one parent were included. In each family, at least one parent and a
child aged between six and eight years, using digital technologies at least once a
week, were interviewed.

## Implications For Parents About

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Creating a safe environment for children online

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

One of the effects of the development and widespread diffusion of digital
technologies is that in contemporary homes children are being exposed to those
technologies since birth. The present study aims to identify the general ‘climate of
concern’ and to map specific worries that parents have with respect to their young
children’s digital lives.
The study was theoretically framed by the intersection of parental mediation
theory with media panics theory, and relied on data collected in three European
countries (Portugal, Romania and Slovenia) as part of JRC project Young Children
(0–8) and digital technologies. The data were collected in 2015, through family visits,
this paper focusing on semi structured interviews that took place with parents.
The results show that parents of children under 8 years old are concerned about
health-related issues, screen addiction, exposure to age-inappropriate content, social
exclusion by absence or under use of digital media, concerns of losing opportunities for essential (non-digital) childhood experiences, bad school performance and learning the
“right” skills for the future. If some of these concerns echo public discourse on the risks
of technology, parents in our study trimmed these fears and adjusted them to their
current situation and their parental mediation practices.

# Outcome

Most of the parents tend to mild their concerns in the light of their own
experience with digital technology and their parental mediation strategies. Indeed
rare are the parents that categorically say that digital technology is entirely ‘bad’ or
‘good’ for their children under 8 years old.
Thus, parents in general contextualize their views about digital technology
(what, when, where). Most of the time the ‘good’ part of their account rely on
personal and direct experiences whereas the ‘bad’ part is mainly an echo of general
public fears and concerns. Accounts of real concerns are present in the interviews
when the family had to face a real and tangible problem like negative signs of
overuse of digital technology by one member of the family at a point that would
impact the well-being of the entire family or behaviour linked to the use of the
technology that would shock the family values.