Utilising Modern Technologies and some Indicators of Mental Health in Pre-school Children in Croatia

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## Sample

Data were collected during 2016 and 2017 on the convenience sample of 655 children - 18 months to 7 years of age (M=5; SD=1.2), who attended kindergartens in various rural and urban environments in the Republic of Croatia. The sample consisted of approximately the same proportion of boys (53%) and girls (47%).

## Implications For Parents About

Parenting guidance / support

# Abstract

Although a number of studies have been conducted over the past decade on the association between screen time and developmental outcomes in children, most studies mainly deal with the problem of obesity and physical fitness of children, while the studies on the association of screen time and mental health are rare, and there is especially a lack of research concerning internalized problems in children. Early detection of psychological problems is one of the foundations of later successful prevention and treatment, and some research shows that as many as 20% of children, including kindergarten children, exhibit certain psychological difficulties, and also that certain behaviours of preschool children are associated with various mental disorders and problems in adulthood. The aim of this research was to examine the correlation between total screen time and some indicators of the mental health of children - emotional reactivity, anxiety/depression, somatic problems, withdrawal, sleeping problems, attention problems, and other problems, in a sample of Croatian children attending kindergartens. We also examined moderating effects of child’s involvement in other activities, such as physical activity, playing with peers, overall outdoor activities, and time spent in other activities. In this paper, potential risk and protective factors related to screen time were investigated in preschool children, with a focus on their mental health.

# Outcome

"Researchers analysed the moderating effects of activities of children in the workweek (physical activity, playing with peers, outdoor activity) and the total time children spent with their parents in order to examine the correlation between screen time and some developmental outcomes.
Outdoor activity presented as statistically significant on the Anxiety-depression scale. The time parents spent with their children did not present as significant in the correlation between developmental outcomes and screen time, as well as the time spent playing with peers. Children with highest levels of anxiety-depression are those who spend more screen time, but also spend more time in outdoor activities, while children with lowest levels of anxiety-depression spend much time outdoor and little screen time. There is a moderation effect on the correlation between physical activity and screen time relating to Withdrawal, for children younger than 6. Children with high number of screen time hours and low physical activity present with highest levels of withdrawal. However, withdrawal subsides, which is not the case in children who spend little screen time. Physical activity reduces the levels of withdrawal in such children and has protective ability in cases of increased exposure to screen time." Bagarić et al, 2021, 72-73