Screens, Stress, and Sanity: A Modern Parenting Challenge

CONTEXT LAB

Ariana Martinez, Amaya Robinson-Black, Stephanie Estrera, and Rasheda Haughbrook, PhD
Department of Psychology, Florida State University

CONTEXT LAB

Background

- Excessive screen time in children has been linked to decreased physical activity, impaired cognitive development, and lower academic performance (Robidoux et al., 2019)
- While prior research has examined socioeconomic and environmental influences on screen time (Carson et al., 2010), recent findings leads us to believe there is a correlation between screen time and parenting stress (Seguin et al., 2021)
- High levels of stress may lead to lower parental engagement (Ma et al., 2022) and increased reliance on electronic devices as a coping mechanism for managing children's behavior (Jusienė et al., 2025)

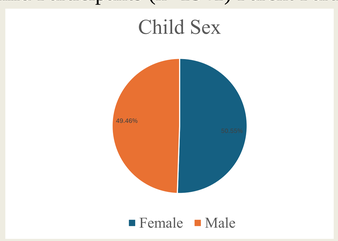
Research Questions

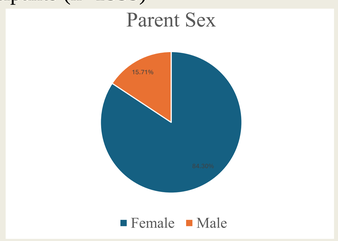
1. What is the correlation between parenting stress levels and the amount of screen time their children engage with?
2. After controlling for parental income and educational attainment, does parenting stress uniquely contribute to increased screen time?

Method

Data Source: University of Michigan's Panel Study of Income Dynamics

- Child Participants (n=1541) Parent Participants (n=1535)





Child Measures

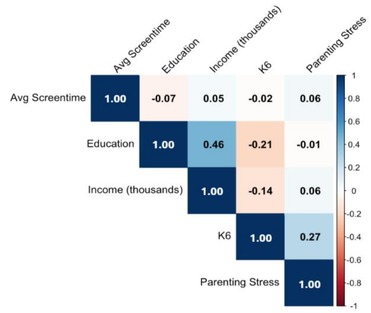
Child Screen Time: Operationalized as total time spent on computer/cellphone activities and watching shows/movies on one weekday and one weekend day.

Parent Measures

- **Parenting Stress:** Assessed using parent responses from the PSID household interview
  - 7 items measuring parenting-related stress (e.g., "Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be")
  - 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all true to 5 = Completely true)
- **Psychological Distress:** Measured using the K-6 Non-Psychological Distress Scale
  - 7 items assessing emotional distress in the last 30 days (e.g., "Feel depressed?", "Feel hopeless?")
  - 5-point Likert scale (0 = None of the time to 4 = All of the time)
- **Parent Education**: Measures highest level of education (e.g., High School, Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate).
- **Family Income**: Total 2018 family income collected in 2019, including taxable and transfer income from various sources (e.g., Social Security, business losses).

Results

Figure 1
Correlation Matrix of Measured Variables



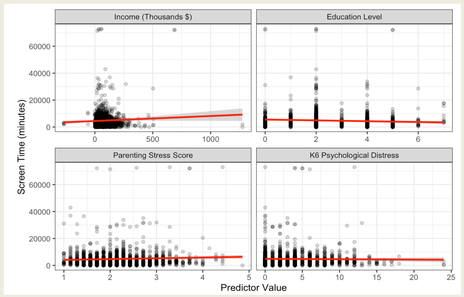
- **Parenting Stress & Screen Time:** Positive association (r = 0.058)
  - Higher parenting stress predicts more screen time.
- **Education level & screen time:** Negative association (r = -0.065)
  - Higher education level predicts less screen time.
- **Income & screen time:** Slight positive association (r = 0.049)
  - Higher income is linked to slightly more screen time.
- **Psychological distress (K6) & screen time:** No significant relationship (r = -0.016).

Measures & Descriptive Statistics

Measure	Mean	SD	Range
Screen Time (seconds)	4776.85	6734.14	0-72,970.71
Parenting Stress	2.17	0.67	1.00-4.86
Education Level	2.49	1.44	0-7 (HS-Doctorate)
Family Income	82.91	88.61	-267.9-1275.0
Psychological Distress (K-6)	3.57	3.83	0-24

Results

Figure 2
Relation Between Predictors and Children's Screen Time



- Regression Model: Statistically significant (**F = 6.106, p = 7.154e-05**): Parenting stress had a significant positive influence on children's screen time.
- **R^2 = 1.65%**: The model explains only 1.65% of the variance in screen time, suggesting that other unmeasured factors likely have a larger influence.

Discussion

- Providing better parental support systems like affordable childcare and mental health services could help reduce reliance on screen time as a coping mechanism.
- Further research is needed to explore how indirect mechanisms like parenting behaviors or home environment might influence screen time.
- Self-reported data and a cross-sectional design limit causality and may introduce bias.
- Findings align with research showing that parental engagement influences children's screen time (Ma et al., 2022).

Future Directions

- Explore parental screen habits and peer influences to explain more variance.
- Conduct longitudinal studies and examine cultural factors in parenting stress and screen time.

References & Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Dr. Haughbrook and the Context Lab for encouraging and supporting us throughout this project. We would also like to express our deep appreciation for our mentor, Stephanie Estera and her contributions to our work.

Scan for References