SCREEN TIME STRIVING WITH PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT GENERATION PRIORITIES

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Abstract

Screen activities include watching television, surfing on line or playing video games and are all of them associated with sedentary behaviour. A way to mediate the Y generation fascination for technology and the beneficial effects of physical activity are the exergames. The main critic against using these means in replacing traditional physical activities is that turns over more energy than sedentary gaming, but not as much as authentic sports. There is no doubt that children and young people will prefer the technology and its commodities, but they need to be encouraged to exercise, to control their posture and weight.

Keywords: Health, well-being, body weight, physical education, Internet addiction

JEL classification: I1, I31, O33

Problem statement. Screen activities include watching television, surfing on line or playing video games and are all of them associated with sedentary behaviour. In a Canadian study is sustained with data that children and teenagers (8-18 y) spend an average of 42 hours a week with media, versus 8.75 hours with physical activities. The preschooler’s risk of obesity jumps 6% for every hour of TV watched per day, 31% if the TV is in their bedroom (Epstein, 2008).

The authors of other Canadian extensive survey and a meta analysis of the topic conclude that relationships between sedentary behavior and health are unlikely to be explained using single markers of inactivity such as TV viewing or video/computer game use. Nevertheless they agree that “the total amount of time per day engaged in sedentary behavior is inevitably prohibitive of physical activity and the cumulative effect of multiple sedentary behaviors reduces total daily energy expenditure” (Marshall, 2004). A sedentary life has a proven influence over the children’s body weight.

The Internet is already taking a big share of our time, keeping us seated and staring many long hours (days if we are talking about gamers) at a screen. I don’t belong to the digital generation, but I work with young people and I fathom what an important change the Internet had made in their communication, learning and behaving patterns. We are talking already about a young generation surfing attitude related to learning and working and also about internet addiction. These constant exposures to the Internet have shaped how they search for and acquire information, how they learn and how they socially interact. In a short time they will

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not need to memorize any more information, because everything will be accessible in one click. In the same time it will be a challenge to act without technological backup. Handwriting will be as rare as a handmade lace and calligraphy will became an art like sculpture or ballet.

**Discussion.** Making an imagination exercise we can figure out how the new technology will affect our daily lives. People already work, shop, pay taxes and entertain themselves online, spending less time for transportation and having less interpersonal interactions. For holydays virtual travels in a personal paradise is already a project and feeling the breeze or a friend's handshake without leaving the room is an achievable dream. Domestic robots for housekeeping and easy conversations will be available on the Internet (where else?).

Meanwhile, because of Internet addiction, people could suffer a retrogression of imagination, memory and discernment. The sedentary behaviour, the indoor living in absence of sunlight and fresh air, in addition to unhealthy food will transform most adolescents into flaccid, wick adults with narrow shoulders, underdeveloped lungs, limited physical effort possibilities, but really quick in typing. This is not the most optimistic scenario, but in some points is a possible one.

Add to those technology use consequences the posterior musculature atrophy because the prolonged sitting position and the postural deficiencies associated with “text neck”. Bending the head forward and down in a hunched position over a device for typing or gaming causes a higher pressure in the spine. This pressure increases with every degree of head flexing; at 45 degrees, the head exerts 22.5 kg comparing with 5.5 kg in normal position (Hansraj, 2014).

Poor posture can have wide-ranging detrimental effects on our body, the most common being: shoulder, neck, and back pain, degenerative disc diseases, kyphosis, tension headache, restricted breathing, depression, increased stress and diminished levels of energy (Peper, Lin, 2012). A hunch posture compresses the internal organs restricting their function and making the body appear heavier.

A bad posture has not only physical consequences, but psychological also: an upright, open, expansive posture is associated with power, self confidence and good mood. When sitting in a collapsed position and looking downward to a smart phone or other screen device, participants in a study found it much easier to recall hopeless, helpless, powerless, and negative memories, than empowering, positive memories (Scutti, 2014).

The contemporary society creates a perfect paradox promoting beside this physical effortless life style, idealized bodies personifying everlasting youth and beauty. The manipulative use of Photoshop in advertising creates unrealistic images of ultra-thin women bodies and muscular, fit males.
As they grow up children are building a picture or image of themselves. This image develops through the things that they can or cannot do and by how other people see them. Poor opinion of their body can cause low self esteem and poor self confidence which is reflected in gestures, body language and behaviour. Constantly watching ‘perfect’ bodies can feed teenage insecurities over attractiveness and weight. Studies show that idealized body image contributes to eating disorders, steroid use, and plastic surgery with possible consequences on body dissatisfaction.

Often youth and children are the targets of advertising for high-calorie, high-fat snacks and sugary drinks. The goal of these ads is to sway people to buy these high-calorie foods, and often they do. Children are easily tempted by instantaneous pleasures, e.g. sweets, candies or chocolate bars, and they are not necessarily in a position to balance their short-term satisfaction versus their long-term consequences. Companies are exploiting this luck of self control and discernment by the way they provide information to consumers and, for children is not easy to understand the permeable boundaries between education, advertising and entertainment.

Research shows that exposure to food advertisements produces significant increases in calorie intake in all children and the increase is largest in obese children (Halford, 2007). The role of parents is to watch and balance the children's diet and therefore their personal example is decisive.

Researchers and physicians, and even non-specialists in PES domain recommend regular physical exercises for their substantial and sustainable health benefits. Physical activity favorably influences mental health and reduces the incidence and severity of diseases and pathological conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis and obesity (Pop, Ciomag, Dinciu, 2015).

A way to mediate the Y generation fascination for technology and the beneficial effects of physical activity are the exergames. The energy expenditure from exergaming is similar to skipping, walking or jogging on a treadmill (O’Louglin, 2012) being preferred by children who are already overweight or obese. The main critic against using these means in replacing traditional physical activities is that turns over more energy than sedentary gaming, but not as much as authentic sports, are mainly indoor activities and over time children lose interest in exergaming due to the repetitive nature of some of the games (Bailey, McInnis, 2011).

**Conclusion and recommendations.** Before and in parallel with formal education, children acquire life habits in family, tending to adopt the example of their parents. Therefore parents have an important responsibility in promoting a healthy life style in family and thereby giving a good example to their children. The effect of family life style is tracking more then one generation. Overweight and obesity tend to run in families (Pop, 2014). A child who has overweight parents, who eat high-calorie
foods and are inactive will likely become overweight too. However, if the family adopts healthy food and physical activity habits, limiting the screen activities, the child’s chance of getting postural deficiencies or being overweight is reduced.

A few concluding recommendations can lead to an increase in vigour and health for children of all ages and sizes:

- To implement a daily one hour program of organized physical activities in preschool institutions because is never too early to enable children with physical skills and positive attitudes for exercising;
- To encourage physical activities outdoors, during which air, sunlight and water can act to harden and strengthen the body’s health;
- To recommend a maximum of 2 hours of screen activities for children in primary school;
- To involve parents in adopting a healthier life style, being aware of the personal example they give their sons and daughters;
- To encourage the youngsters to set realistic goals and motivate them to keep their weight under control by combining diet and physical activities;
- To develop critical thinking which enable young people to choose exercises and practice methods suited to their age and individual goals;
- To signal up the detrimental effects of sedentary behaviours and prolonged sitting position and make clear that individuals are responsible for their own task success or failure.

**Need for further research**

There is no doubt that children and young people will prefer the technology and its commodities, but they need to be encouraged to exercise, to control their posture and weight. Further research is needed in order to correlate physical activity and screen-time viewing, including age, sex, and body composition.

**REFERENCE**


