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An evidence-focused literature review

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HOW DOES THE TIME CHILDREN SPEND USING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IMPACT THEIR MENTAL WELL-BEING, SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY? AN EVIDENCE-FOCUSED LITERATURE REVIEW.¹

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ABSTRACT

Based on an evidence-focused literature review, the first part of this paper examines existing knowledge on how the time children spend using digital technology impacts their well-being across three dimensions; mental/psychological, social and physical. **The evidence reviewed here is largely inconclusive with respect to impact on children's physical activity, but indicates that digital technology seems to be beneficial for children's social relationships.** In terms of impact on children's mental well-being, the most robust studies suggest that the relationship is U-shaped, **where no use and excessive use can have a small negative impact on mental well-being, while moderate use can have a small positive impact.** In the second part of the paper, the hypothetical idea of addiction to technology is introduced and scrutinized. **This is followed by an overview of the hypothetical idea that digital technology might re-wire or hijack children's brains; an assumption that is challenged by recent neuroscience evidence.** In conclusion, considerable methodological limitations exist across the spectrum of research on the impact of digital technology on child well-being, including the majority of the studies on time use reviewed here, and those studies concerned with clinical or brain impacts. This prompts reconsideration of how research in this area is conducted. Finally, recommendations for strengthening research practices are offered.

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