

A Study on the Opinions of Parents Regarding Television Watching Habits of Their Children in the Four-Six Age Group

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to examine the opinions of parents on television watching habits of their children. The sample of the study consists of 120 children between the age of 4-6 who were attending a private kindergarten, affiliated to the Ministry of Education, in Ankara. The viewing television habit by Ozdemir was used to collect the data. The results revealed that children watch television for an average of 2-4 h a day; they prefer watching TV between 17:00 and 21:00 h they like watching cartoons most; they stay silent while watching TV and they would rather watch TV than go outside. Furthermore, mothers stated that there usually is a character the child wants to imitate. This character is usually a cartoon character and there is an event or a person that the child dreams in his/her sleep after watching TV.

Key words: Television and child, television watching habit, early years, parents

INTRODUCTION

Communication has an important place in a child's life. People convey their knowledge, thoughts and emotions to others by means of communication. Communication plays an important role in meeting the requirements by enabling people interact with others (Chang, 2000; Troseth, 2003; Onder and Balaban-Dagal, 2005).

Television, which enables people to communicate with each other by using sound and symbols, has an important place in early childhood period. Research proved that television contributes to visual, cognitive and social development of children in this period (Oktay, 1999; Troseth, 2003; Onder and Balaban-Dagal, 2005; Straker *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, some research indicated that negative traits of cartoon characters, which attract children's attention most, cause children to acquire some negative behaviour when television use is not controlled (Strasburger, 1992; Barr and Hayne, 1999; Geogery *et al.*, 2006). Television is also an element that determines children's behaviour. Children do not only get into communication with their parents and people in their immediate surroundings, but also with the television. However, the communication between the child and the television is limited to the stimulants from the television only. It is observed that especially children between 2 and 6 have more interest in the sound effects and images.

Onder (1999) and Ozdemir (2006) pointed out in their studies that there is absolutely one television set at homes and that the number of homes with two TV sets is increasing.

Children watch many television programmes at early ages. Owing to its visual and auidial properties, television provides an effective learning environment by appealing to many sensory organs (Chang, 2000; Aktas, 1997; Yalcin *et al.*, 2002). Considering its many properties, both positive and negative, television watching should be controlled very well. Parents bear an important role in this control. Thus, this research aimed at studying the opinions of parents about the television watching habits of their children in the 4-6 age group.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study domain is composed of the mothers of children of 4-6 age group, attending independent kindergartens, affiliated to the Ministry of Education, in Ankara. The sampling of the study consists of the parents of 120 children of 4-6 age group, attending Sevgi Anaokulu, which has been selected randomly from among said kindergartens.

A questionnaire, which contained items about the opinions of parents on television watching habits of their children, was used as a data collection tool in the study. The items in the questionnaire were about the following:

The gender of the child, the age of the child, the educational level of the parents, the state of having a television set at home, the average duration of the child's watching TV a day, the h when the child prefers watching TV, which programmes the child watches, what the child does while watching TV and whether there is a character whom the child wants to imitate or not. The questionnaire was administered to the mothers individually by the researchers, which took about fifteen minutes. Some of the data obtained as a result of the research have been presented verbally and the rest have been presented in tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The distribution of children according to their ages, genders and parents' educational level are presented in Table 1.

In Table 1 shows that there is an equal distribution of children according to their ages: 54.0% are girls and 46.0% are boys. A large proportion of the parents are university graduates; 58.0% of the mothers and 53.3% of the fathers are determined to have received higher education.

The parents were asked how many TV sets they had at home. 57.3% of them stated that they had two television sets at home and 81.3% stated that they were against keeping a TV set in the child's room.

According to the information in Table 2, 49.33% of the children watch TV for 2-4 h on average, whereas 39.33% do so for less than 2 h. The ratio of those who watch TV for 4-6 h is 11.34%.

The most developed sensory organ that the child can use to perceive the outside world is the eye. Today, one of the tools affecting the sense of sight of the child is television. Although, the interaction of the child with the television begins at very early ages, it is difficult to state that there is a conscious TV watching until the age of two. The age of the child, the educational level of the family, the number of TV channels, the broadcasting h and variety and the control of parents can affect the TV watching duration of the child. Furthermore, mother's state of working, child's attending a kindergarten and having an elder or a younger brother or sister are factors that are also influential on the child's duration of TV watching (Gungor and Ersoy, 1994).

Ozdemir (2006) determined that the ratio of the children who watch TV for an average of 2-4 h a day is the highest and that the ratio of those who watch TV for more than 4 h is the lowest. Nicole *et al.* (2007) have proven that children watch TV for more than 2 h a day.

In their study, Cimen and Baran (Cimen and Baran, 2001) determined that the mean scores regarding the

social development of children who watch TV for less than one hour were the highest.

As can also be seen in Table 3, the majority of the children, as much as 60%, watch TV between 17.00 and 21.00 h. The percentage of those who watch TV from 21.00 to midnight is the lowest by 4%. The distribution of percentages regarding children's TV watching hour indicates that children most commonly watch TV after coming home back from school and that parents are more controlling about their children's watching TV after a certain hour at late h.

Yalcin *et al.* (2002) determined that children prefer watching TV with their children. Ozdemir (2006) found that the ratio of the children who prefer watching TV between 17.00-21.00 h is higher than the ratio of the others. This finding has parallels with the results of our study.

When the programmed types that children watch are examined, as shown in Table 4 it is observed that children like to watch cartoons most (35.55%), followed by commercials (15.85%) and comedy films (15.35%). While, the percentage of the children who watch documentaries is 10.23%, the ratio of those who watch contests is the lowest by 3.84%.

The parents were asked what their children did while watching TV. 13.3 of the parents stated that their children had snacks, 40.7% said that they talked with the people around them, 51.3% stated that the children stayed quiet, 22.7% said that they played and drew pictures and 9.3% stated that their children asked questions and made comments. In her study, Aktas-Arnas (2006) concluded that the proportion of children who snack and stay quiet in front of the TV is high. Fitz Patrick *et al.* (2007) determined that children usually like to view TV together with their families in the evening dinnertime, to stay quiet while watching TV and to watch TV only.

The parents were asked the following question: Do you think your child may prefer watching a programme she/he likes to going out and having fun? 24.7% of the parents stated that their children preferred to stay at home and watch TV, while 25.3% said that they sometimes preferred to go out. Fifty percent of the parents, on the other hand, stated that their children preferred going out to watching TV.

Another question asked to mothers was that Is there a character that your child wants to imitate? This question was answered positively and negatively by the 78.0 and 72.0% of the mothers, respectively.

As Table 5 also indicates, 34.6, 10.3, 43.6 and 11.5% of the children like to watch film or serial stars, sportsmen or sportswomen, cartoon characters and models or singers, respectively. Geogery *et al.* (2006) showed in their study that children identify themselves with cartoon

Table 1: The distribution of children according to their ages, genders and parents' educational level

Age	N	(%)
Age 4	50	33.3
Age 5	50	33.3
Age 6	50	33.3
Total	150	100.0
Gender		
Female	81	54.0
Male	69	46.0
Total	150	100.0
Educational Level of mother		
Middle school	14	9.3
High school	49	32.7
University	87	58.0
Total	150	100.0
Educational level of father		
Middle school	14	9.3
High school	56	37.4
University	80	53.3
Total	150	100.0

Table 2: Children's average duration of watching TV a day

Average duration of watching TV a day	N	(%)
Less than 2 h	59	39.33
Two to 4 h	74	49.33
Four to 6 h	17	11.34
Total	150	100.0

Table 3: The distribution regarding the time of the day the children watch television

TV watching hours	N	(%)
07.00-12.00	37	24.67
12.00-17.00	17	11.33
17.00-21.00	90	60.00
21.00- midnight	6	4.00
Total	150	100.0

Table 4: The distribution of children according to the types of the TV programmes they prefer watching

Type of TV programme	N	(%)
Adventure/horror films	35	8.95
Comedy films	60	15.35
Cartoons	139	35.55
Contests	15	3.84
Commercials	62	15.85
Documentary	40	10.23
Educational programmes	24	6.14
Children's serials	16	4.09
Total	391	100.00

Table 5: The distribution of children according to which character they watch on TV

Type of the character	N	(%)
Film or serial star	27	34.60
Sportsman or sportswoman	8	10.30
Cartoon character	34	43.60
Model or singer	9	11.50
Total	78	100.00

characters most. The results about whether the child dreams any event or person in sleep after watching TV revealed that 76.0% of the mothers stated that their children had dreams in their sleeps, involving an event or a person watched on TV.

In the research conducted Ozdemir (2006) it was determined that a large proportion of children were not influenced by programmes watched on TV.

The mothers were asked whether they thought if the television was an informative invention, whether good or bad and the answers were yes, partly and no, at the rates of 36.0, 58.0 and 6.0%, respectively. Ozdemir (2006) established that parents partly agree that television is an informative invention, whether good or bad.

RESULTS

The research results indicate that the majority of the children who participated in the research like to watch TV for about 2-4 h and most of them do so between 17.00 and 21.00 h. Moreover, most children like watching cartoons most, followed by commercials and then comedy films. In general, the children like snacking while viewing TV and they sometimes prefer watching TV to going out and having fun. A great many children imitate a TV character, which is usually a cartoon hero or a serial character. In addition, parents involved in the research see television as an informative tool, whether good or bad.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the early childhood period, the interests and comprehension ability of children differ. The programmes broadcast on television should be prepared by aiming at the interests and skills of children. Thus, children's programmes should be selected carefully. Particularly preschool children remember what they learn through seeing and hearing, so educative child programmes should be utilized in order to contribute to the mental development of them. Parents should help their children acquire the habit of programme selecting and turning the television off as required, in addition to carrying out social activities with them. Parents should also raise awareness in their children about the selection of the programmes to view. Additionally, the programmes that are broadcast during the h that children watch intensely should be controlled and the programmes prepared for children should be inspected by experts. The television programmes prepared for children should not only be of high quality, but the characters in them should also have positive traits.

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