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Young Screens: preliminary findings on Australian children's digital technology use at home and education and care settings

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Widespread access to mobile touchscreen devices (tablet computers and smartphones) has allowed young children to engage with screens in a variety of settings. Findings from a 2017 nationally representative survey of Australian children's screen time use, showed that parents reported an average weekly screen time of 14.2 hours for under 2 year olds and 25.9 hours for 2 to 5 year olds.(1) Additionally, over a third (36%) of Australian preschool-aged children were reported to have their own mobile touchscreen device. While these findings are useful to understand the amount of time young children spend using screen devices, there is little data on the purpose of use for screen technology and on how home screen use compares to screen use in education and care contexts, particularly for mobile touchscreen devices.

This presentation describes preliminary findings from Young Screens. Young Screens is a national survey focused on young children's (aged birth to 5 years) amount and use of (purpose) screen technology at home via parental report and in education and care contexts via educator report. Preliminary findings from 226 children (parental report on 190 children and educator report on 36 children) suggest children's average weekly screen technology use was higher at home (10.9 hours) than at the education and care service (1.2 hours). Children's screen technology use was dominated by television in both home and education and care contexts. While tablet computers and mobile phones were reported as the second most used devices at home, desktop and laptop computers were reported as the second most used devices within education and care services. Watching entertainment videos and educational activities were the dominant purposes of use for tablet computers and mobile phones at home, while playing games and watching videos for entertainment were the dominant purposes of use for these devices at education and care services. The dominant use of tablet computers and mobile phones for watching entertainment videos in both home and education and care contexts suggests that children may be missing out on the affordances of this newer interactive touchscreen technology to be used for more than the consumption of content.

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1. Rhodes A. Screen time and kids: what's happening in our homes? detailed report. Melbourne, VIC: The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne; 2017.