

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The major sources of data for the study were, questionnaires from the parents of 388 children, home observations of sub-sample of 40 children and their parents, interviews of these 40 parents and the focus group interviews with the preschool teachers

The results are presented in three sections :

* Television Viewing Pattern

Preschool children in Indian urban homes mainly view television within their homes, together with their families. Television viewing pattern of a child gets constructed through the viewership of all the family members. Besides duration and content of television viewing, the emerging television viewing pattern of preschool children in the study is formed on the basis of onset of television viewing, period (in years) of television viewing for children, placement of television sets in the home, coviewers, outcome of television viewing, variables that influence the duration and content of television viewed. Both, the responses of parents on the questionnaires (N=388) and the home observations (n=40) form the source for this section.

❖ Regulation and Mediation of Television Viewing of Children by Parents.

There are research evidences to indicate that parents influence media use of their children. They are role models for children to emulate. They expose (or do not expose) children to television, and encourage or regulate their viewing, both duration and content. Besides these, the way parents mediate the television content for their children is also important as it influences comprehension of program content by children and also 'protects' them from extreme influences of television. This section is mainly based on interviews with parents of the sub-sample of 40 children and is supported by home observations.

❖ Teacher's Views

This section is based on the focus group interviews with teachers. Their opinions and views about value of television for children, interest of children in television programs, and its possible detrimental effects are discussed.

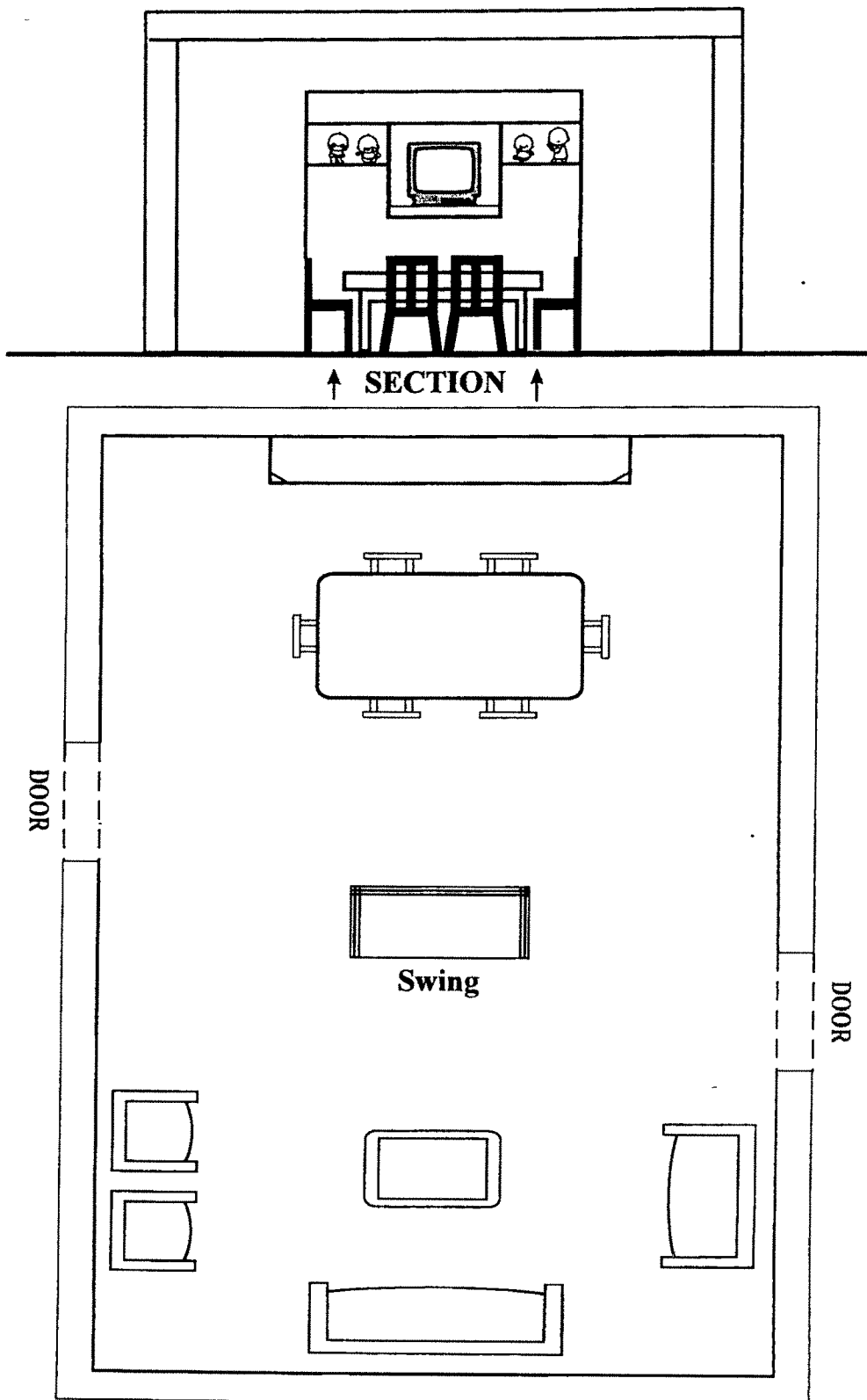


Figure 4. Placement of television set

Television Viewing Pattern

Ownership of Television and Onset of Viewing (N=388)

As expected, most of the children (97.9%) possessed a television set since an average period of 8.459 years. This particular sample group therefore had grown up with presence of the television in their homes. Majority of the homes (82.73%) possessed a cable connection since 3.121 years. Only 21.9% children had a video at home, and except for few who viewed it during the vacations, none of the children viewed it.

Placement and Number of Sets (n=40)

Television sets are prominently placed in middle class Indian homes. Of the 40 homes visited, in 38 homes television was present in the main drawing room of the house. Of these 38 homes, only in one home it was put in a closed cabinet, opened only to view specific programs. In the other two homes television was placed in the bed room. Furniture in the drawing room of all homes was arranged to make it convenient to view television from all positions in the room. Children and the father, occupied the most comfortable and prominent place to view the television. In almost all homes television was placed at eye level and children manipulated the switches themselves. In very



Figure 5. Children viewing television

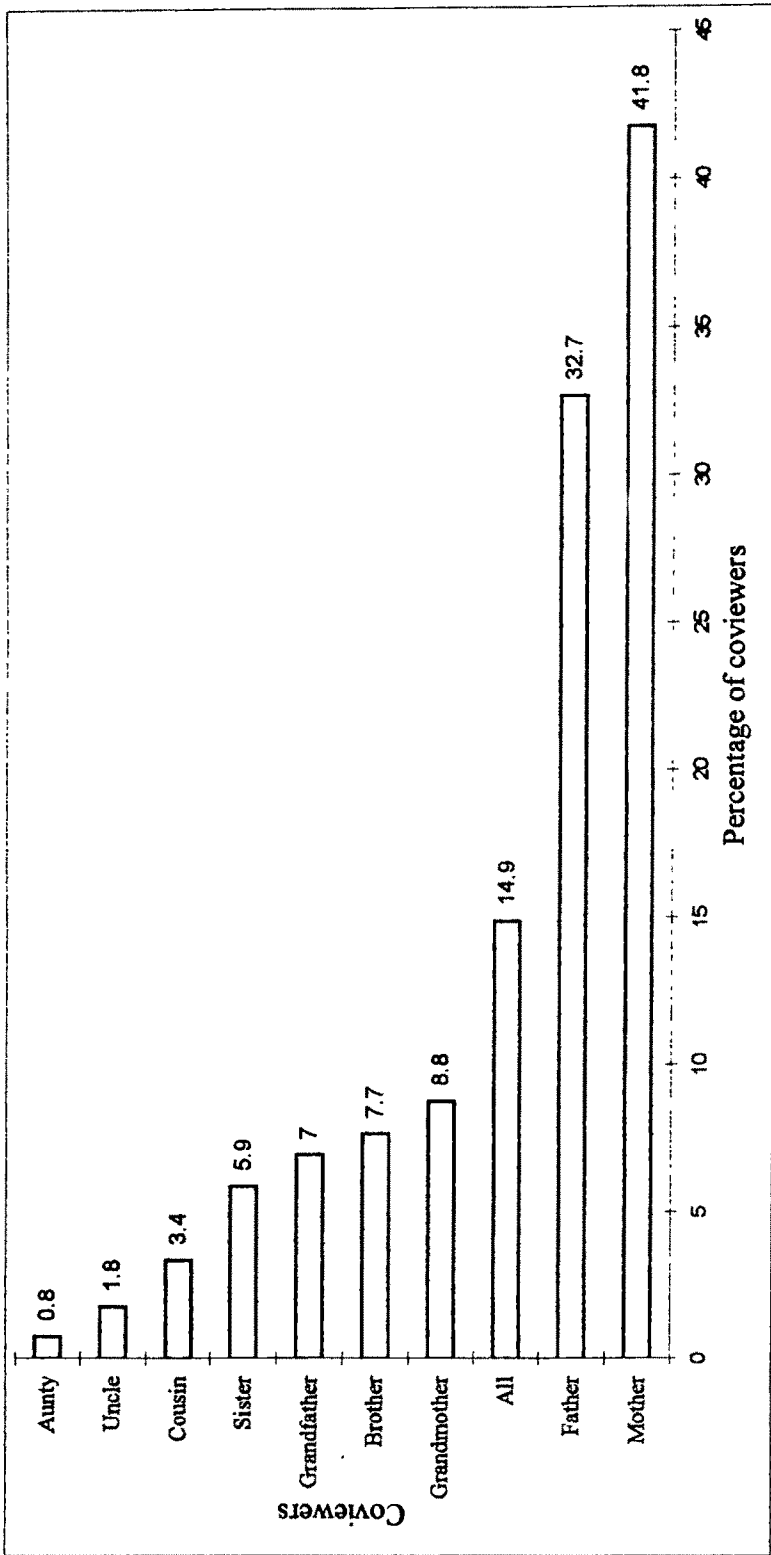


Figure 6 Coviewers of children (N=388).

few homes where it was placed high they climbed on stools and chairs to switch on the television. Except for one, all homes had only one colored television set.

Position of Viewing Television (n=40)

Observations revealed that children viewed television in various positions. Majority sat cross-legged on a chair/bed/sofa. Very few were viewing television in a sleeping/lying down position, that too mainly in the afternoons, and few others just stood in front of the television to view it. Some children, especially girls, were found sitting in laps of fathers or grandfathers. One child was riding his tricycle around the room, watching television when he was facing it.

Coviewers

The mother (41.8%) was the coviewer for majority of the children, followed by the father (32.7%), and all family members (14.9%) (Figure 6). Fifty eight percent (58%) of the parents responded that their children never viewed television alone, whereas 42% reported that their children viewed it alone.

Observations revealed that of the 40 homes, in only four homes children were found watching television alone and that too not all the time. Even for these four children, family members would be

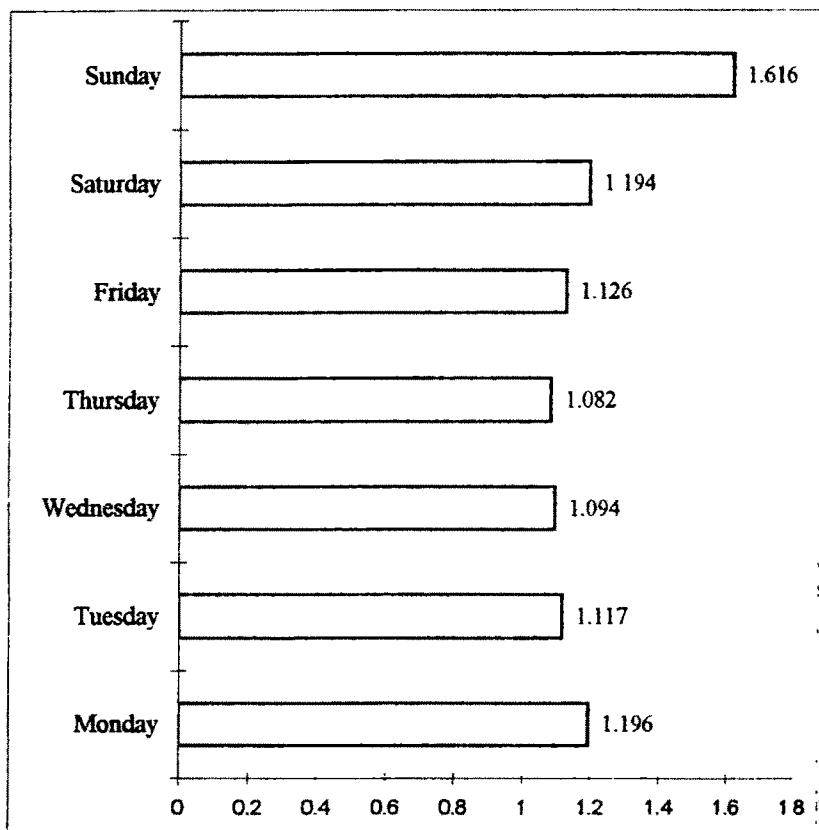


Figure 7. Weekly hours of viewing (N=388)

walking in and out of the room, even sitting in the room but not participating in television viewing activity. In all other cases children were viewing television either with the siblings, mother, father or grandparent.

Thus, television is placed in the main drawing room and preschool children view television at least with one of the family members present, mostly the mother. Besides these, the two main aspects that constitute television viewing pattern are the duration and content of television viewed. The results for the same are presented herewith.

How Much Television Do Children View (N=388)

The duration of viewing ranged from “no viewing at all to viewing for 60.3 hours per week”. The preschool children on an average viewed television for 8.589 hours per week with maximum viewing on Sunday (16.16 hours) and minimum on Thursday (1.082 hours) (Figure 7).

All family members (29.6%), mother (28.6%), and father (28.4%) were regular television viewers.

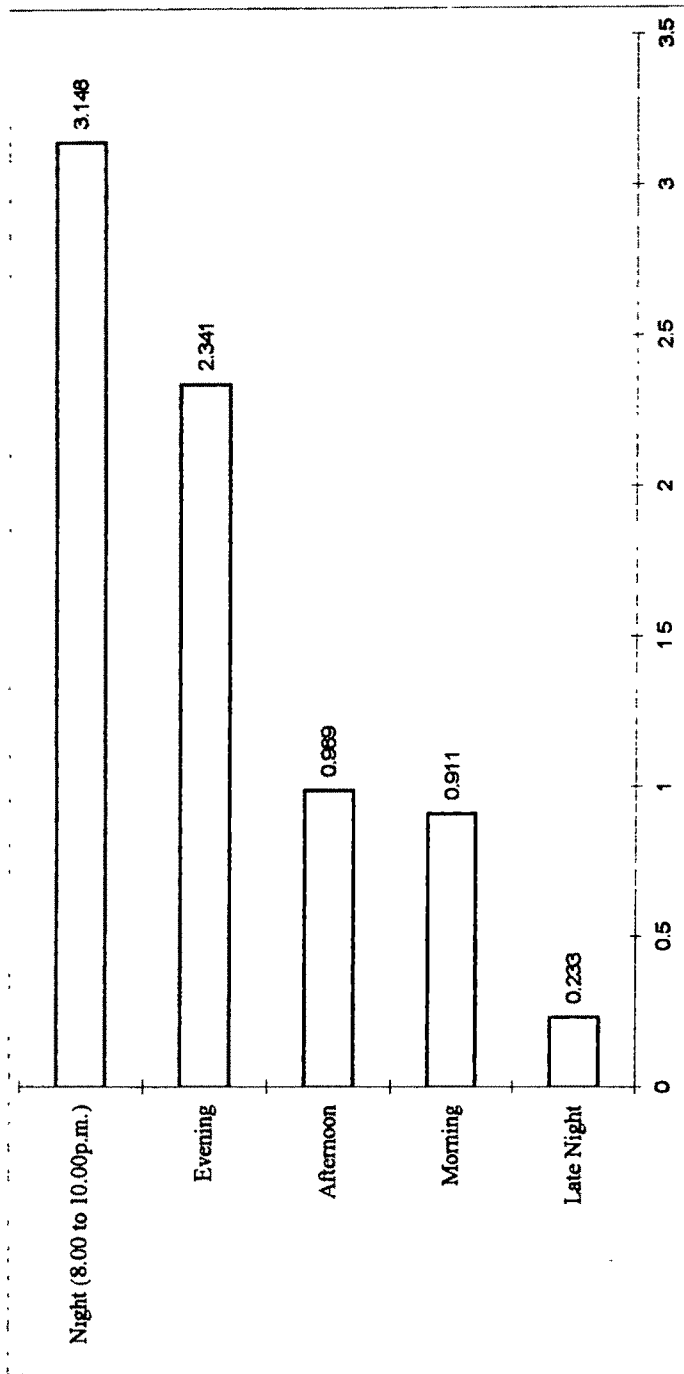


Figure 8. Time preference in viewing (N = 388)

As reported by the parents, the children viewed television for maximum hours at primetime between 8.00 to 10.00p.m. (3.148 hours/ day), followed by viewing in the evening hours (2.341 hours/day). Minimum viewing was during the late Night (10 p m. onwards) i.e. 0.233 hours/day (Figure 8).

What Do Children View

As reported by the parents, Cartoon Network and Discovery were favorite channels of the children. The channels most preferred

Table 2

Channels Viewed by the Children and Their Families (N=388)

Channel	Children (Percentage)	Ranking	Family (Percentage)	Ranking
Cartoon Network	28.4	1	4.1	9
Discovery	27.1	2	11.1	4
Zee T.V.	18.0	3	43.6	1
Doordarshan	14.7	4	18.3	2
Sony	5.7	5	12.4	3
Sports	3.6	7	7.7	5

by the family were Zee TV and Doordarshan. A look at Table 2 reveals that though the first two preferred channels of children are different from the family's preference, the next three choices of channels correspond to the first three choices of the family.

Generally, fathers (56.7%) and mothers (49.5%) decided which channels should be viewed. Some children (33.8%) were also given a choice to choose the channel. It is thus not surprising to find that the channels viewed by children were a result of combination of their own and parents' choice.

Table 3
Programs Viewed by the Children and Their Parents (N=388)

Programs	Children (Percentage)	Ranking	Parents (Percentage)	Ranking
Cartoons	89.7	1	19.6	8
Commercials	64.2	2	26.0	6
Children's programs	54.1	3	19.1	9
Songs	52.6	4	34.0	4
Sports	49.5	5	31.4	5
Serials	34.5	6	46.9	1
Educational Programs	30.7	7	24.2	7
Films	27.3	8	38.4	3
Plays	25.5	9	16.8	10
News	21.1	10	42.3	2

Children preferred to view cartoons (89.7%), commercials (64.2%), and children's programs (54.1%) whereas, serials (46.9%), news (42.3%), and films (38.4%) were viewed more by the parents. Some of the favorite programs of parents like serials, films and film songs, also had a substantial viewership of children (Table 3).

A small percentage of children viewed programs alone and mainly they viewed cartoons (32%). Other programs viewed alone by children were the Discovery programs (4.9%), songs (4.1%), serials (3.4%), and film programs. Two to three children viewed antakshari (0.5%), children's programs (0.8%), and sports alone (0.8%).

The home observations corresponded to the results of the questionnaire. It was found that the popular channels being viewed were Cartoon Network, Doordarshan, Zee TV. Other channels were Zee Cinema, ATN, Gujarati (YES), Home TV. In four cases children were surfing the channels rather than viewing a particular one. In 14 cases children were viewing cartoons, followed by movies, and then

film songs, serial, news in equal proportion. The serials were religious like Jai Veer Hanumaan, and comedy serials like Hum Paanch

Reaction of Children to the Programs (N=388)

Besides what the children view, a major concern is how do they view. Are they passive viewers or an active audience participating in the viewing process ? Data revealed that while viewing television programs children actively participated by asking questions (81.7%), imitating the actions (56.2%), and commenting (52.3%) on the content of the program. Thus, these children are cognitively active as they interact with the program content and also participate in choosing the channel and program of their own interest.

Factors Affecting Children's Television Viewing

Literature indicates that duration and content of viewing by children get affected by other variables. The personal social variables such as age, gender, ordinal position, absence or presence of a brother/sister may influence duration and content of television viewing. Family variables such as type of family, education and occupation of mother and father, also may influence the television viewing pattern of children. Other variable thought to be important was presence or absence of cable connection. Some of these

Table 4
Mean Difference in Duration of Viewing for Selected Variables
Mann-Whitney μ

Variables	Means (sd)	Mean Rank	Z	2-Tailed P
<u>Gender</u>				
Boys	8.810 (8.144)	196.31	-3.719	.7100
Girls	8.327 (8.552)	192.37		

**Cable
Connection**

Yes	9.156 (8.563)	185.95	-1.0872	0.2769
No	7.544 (7.045)	170.76		

Family Type

Joint	7.888 (7.456)	179.98	-1.8143	0.0696
Nuclear	9.457 (9.121)	198.92		

Variable	Mean (sd)	Kruskal- Wallis H	Degrees of freedom	P value
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Grade

Nursery	7.419	9.804	2	0.0074*
Jr. K.G	8.154			
Sr.K G	10.44			

variables though may not influence directly, may operate as mediating variables in influencing television viewing pattern of the preschool children.

Data was therefore analysed to see whether these variables make any difference to the viewing pattern. The analyses revealed that none of these variables except grade in which children were studying affected significantly the duration of viewing. However there were some specific differences which were interesting to note.

Grade and Age

Duration of viewing vis-à-vis grade to which the child belonged i.e. Nursery, Junior K.G., or Senior K.G. indicated significant difference at 0.0074 level (Table 4). Specific mean scores reveal that children of senior K.G. viewed for longer duration as compared to children of Nursery.

It is interesting to note that the younger children (2½ - 4½ years old) viewed less television as compared to the older two groups (Appendix G). The duration of viewing increased for 4½ - 5½ years old and then again decreased for the 5½ - 6½ year olds. The decrease in viewing for the oldest group can be due to several

reasons like academic requirements of preschool, parents stress on doing well in academic activities, become more conscious of the content viewed as children grow older and start understanding more, or children themselves becoming more interested in other activities.

Thus with increasing age and grade there is an increase in duration of television viewing per week for children.

Gender

Table 5
Gender Differences for Programs Viewed (N=388)

Programs	Boys (Percentage)	Girls (Percentage)	Total (Percentage)
Cartoon	50.5	39.2	89.7
Sports	31.4	18.0	49.5
Serials	18.6	16.0	34.5
Films	15.7	11.6	27.3
Songs	29.1	23.5	52.6
Plays	12.9	12.6	25.5
Children's Programs	29.9	24.2	54.1
Educational Programs	15.2	15.5	30.7
Commercials	34.3	29.9	64.2
News	11.1	10.1	21.1

Programs Viewed Alone

Programs	Boys (Percentage)	Girls (Percentage)	Total (Percentage)
Antakshari	0.5	-	0.5
Cartoon	19.8	12.1	32.0
Children's Program	0.5	0.3	0.8
Film Programs	1.3	0.5	1.8
Serials	2.1	1.3	3.4
Songs	2.6	1.5	4.1
Sports Program	0.5	0.3	0.8

The Mann-Whitney U test (Table 4) did not reveal significant difference between hours of viewing for boys and girls. Though the viewership of boys was more than that of the girls. More boys (35.1%) exercised choice of channels and viewed programs alone. Thus though duration of viewing did not significantly differ for boys and girls, they did differ in terms of viewing preference and use of television set.

Education and Occupation of Parents

Education of parents influences the kind of home environment and opportunity that parents provide to the children. The home environment in turn is likely to affect the children's

television viewing. Occupation of parents may have implications for their availability at home and this too in turn may influence viewing of television by children

The results were not significant for mean duration of viewing per week with reference to education and occupation of parents. However, specific mean scores revealed that children of fathers and/or mothers with higher education level viewed less television as compared to the other children (Appendix G). Children whose mothers are educated only upto school level viewed television for maximum hours

Specific mean scores for occupation revealed that children whose mothers were working outside home viewed television for a longer duration (10.52 hr./week) as compared to children of mothers who were housewives (8.19 hrs./week) (Appendix G). Assuming the women who were less educated were at home, it explains that the presence of the mother, irrespective of education, positively contributed to television viewing of children. Education of parents and occupation of mothers thus seems to influence duration of television viewing of children.

Other Variables

Ordinal position, presence or absence of a brother/sister, and type of family did not reveal any significant difference in the means hours of viewing per week for the children (Appendix G). Though specific mean scores revealed that children in nuclear families viewed more television as compared to children in joint families

Presence or absence of cable connection was also considered as a variable. The mean difference though not significant revealed that children who have cable connection view for longer duration (9 156 hrs./week) as compared to children who do not have a cable connection (7 544 hrs./ week) (Table 4)

Responses of Children

The sub-sample of 40 children were interviewed to gain information on their favorite program, and favorite activity.

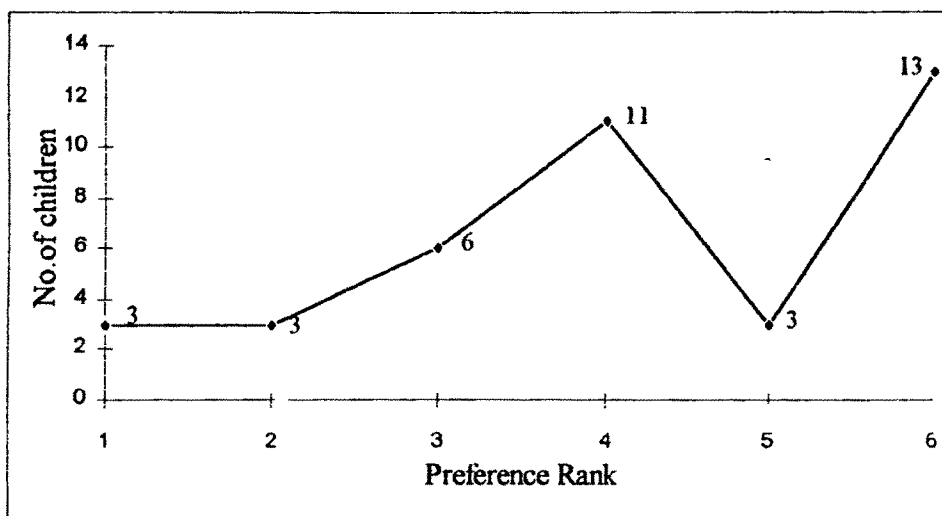


Figure 9. Popularity of television (N=40)

As mentioned in the methods section the children were shown a set of six cards depicting various activities and told to pick up their most favorite activities in order of preference. The results revealed that;

- ☆ Playing in the garden was the most favorite activity with maximum children ranking it first.
- ☆ Television viewing was the least favorite activity with very few children ranking it 1st. It was also ranked 6th and least favorite by maximum number of children
- ☆ Other than the ones presented, looking at books and listening to stories also emerged as favorite activities.

This leads us to understand that even though television viewing is not a favorite activity children indulged in it for want of a

better choice. Some children commented that given a choice they would rather not view television but play or view books. But since it was not available and the television was on, they viewed it.

The responses of children about their favorite programs matched with responses of parents about the same. Cartoons(n=16), Commercials (n=14), Serials (6), Religious Programs e.g. Jai Veer Hanumaan (6) were their favorite programs. Discovery (5), Film songs (4), and Comedy Serials like Hum Paanch (3) were mentioned by few others. Five children said they did not like to view anything on television.

General interaction revealed that they could identify the character (This is Tom), a program (this is gharsansaar serial), an advertisement, a product (tooth paste, soap). They could also relate specific actions (A was pulling B's saree, he was hitting her). Very few children could relate the story of an episode (5) or of the serial (3).

Though all children actively selected their favorite activity from the picture cards, few children responded to the questions about their favorite program and its content. Especially the children from Nursery grade were not interested in answering. Conversation with them mainly revolved around their school activities, toys/games, friends, or some special visit. Their conversations too reflected their lack of interest in television programs.

Outcome of Television Viewing

Review of researches and literature voice concern about the indirect effects of television viewing, implying displacement of other useful activities due to television viewing. This reallocation of time may lead to less time spent in play, reading, and in social interaction with family and friends (Condry, 1989; Huston, Watkins, & Dunkel, 1989, Khurana, et al., 1987; Winn, 1985).

Preschool children on the other hand use a lot of imagination and need opportunities for meaningful play. They learn through first hand experience and manipulation of objects from the environment. It is believed that television has a potential in drawing children away from activities like play, reading, outings, etc.

To understand role of television in the lives of children information was obtained from parents on time spent in play and studying.

Responses of parents (N=388) revealed that everyday the child spent 1.31 hours in studying at home, 1.23 hours being by himself/herself, and 2.13 hours in playing with others. This was besides the hours he/she spent in school daily (3½ hours) and almost 1.22 hours of viewing television. Television viewing for this group of children (N=388)

did not displace their play time. On the otherhand only 22.9% of the children were exposed to story books on a daily basis. Leafing through 'children's special' section of the newspaper was also not common. Television therefore is one entertainment media to which majority of the children are exposed to on a regular basis.

Another concern related to indirect effects of television is decrease in social interactions between family members. It was observed that social interactions in middle class homes guide the television viewing. Families try to match dinner time with television time, so that all family members can view it together and do not have to spare special time for it. With arrival of guests/neighbours/ friends into the home, television set is switched off as a sign of respect. At the sametime few parents did report that television guided their routines. For e.g. Children insisted on viewing particular serials before going out. As a result, in one case parents recorded the program to be viewed later. Thus indirectly parents encouraged television viewing.

Observations indicated that children conversed with family members more when the television was not on. During the viewing time "the viewers" concentrated on the programs and less conversation took place. While not viewing television, children were actively conversing with parents.

Television viewing for this group of preschool children has not displaced play. Exposure to storybooks is quite less. Television reduces conversation among family members. Social routines influence television viewing and are influenced because of it.

Regulation and Mediation of Television Viewing By Parents

This section is based on extensive interviews conducted with either parent. For most of the children, both the parents of the 40 children were present and both participated in the interviews. The objectives of the interviews were to understand parents' own beliefs and opinion about impact of television on children. How and why do parents take certain decisions ? What do they perceive as their role in regulating and mediating television viewing of their children ?

Researches indicate that parental regulation and mediation of children's television viewing is an important determinant of television viewing behavior of children.(Pinon, Huston, & Wright, 1989; Singer, et al., 1988; St. Peters, et al., 1991). Regulation and/or monitoring of television viewing is understood as actions of parents to regulate the duration and content of television viewed by children. Mediation of television programs refers to interactions parents have with children

during coviewing which help children comprehend the program content better.

Contemporary literature indicates that the interest in regulation and mediation of television stems from the concern that children for most of the time view television alone, and that they view television indiscriminately in terms of duration and content. As is evident from the results of this study, the preschool children do not view television excessively. On an average they view television for 1:22 hours per day, less than their total play hours (2.13 per day), and very rarely does the child view programs alone. It is therefore reasonable to assume that parents were not concerned about their children's television viewing.

Seventy seven percent (77.5%) parents expressed satisfaction about the duration of television viewing of their children. However, one must acknowledge that possibly because parents are active mediators children do not view television excessively. A small percentage of parents (6.44%) were concerned that their children were viewing more television. In view of these results it would be appropriate to look at the results on regulation and mediation aspects of television viewing.

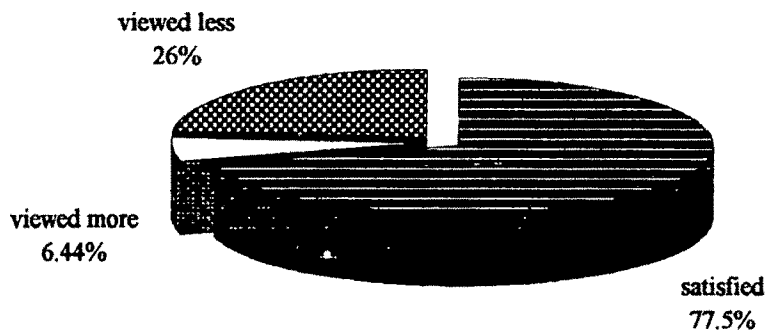


Figure 10. Parents' satisfaction about duration of viewing of their children (N=388).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Television Viewing

Regulatory behavior of parents is related to their opinions about television as a medium and its influence on their children. An indepth understanding of why parents regulate the way they do is essential. On the basis of parents' responses on value of television, four categories evolved ranging from television as advantageous to disadvantageous (Figure 11).

According to 35% of the parents television is both advantageous and disadvantages. Twenty five percent parents reported that television was advantageous and the same number of parents (25%) reported that it was neither advantageous nor disadvantageous.

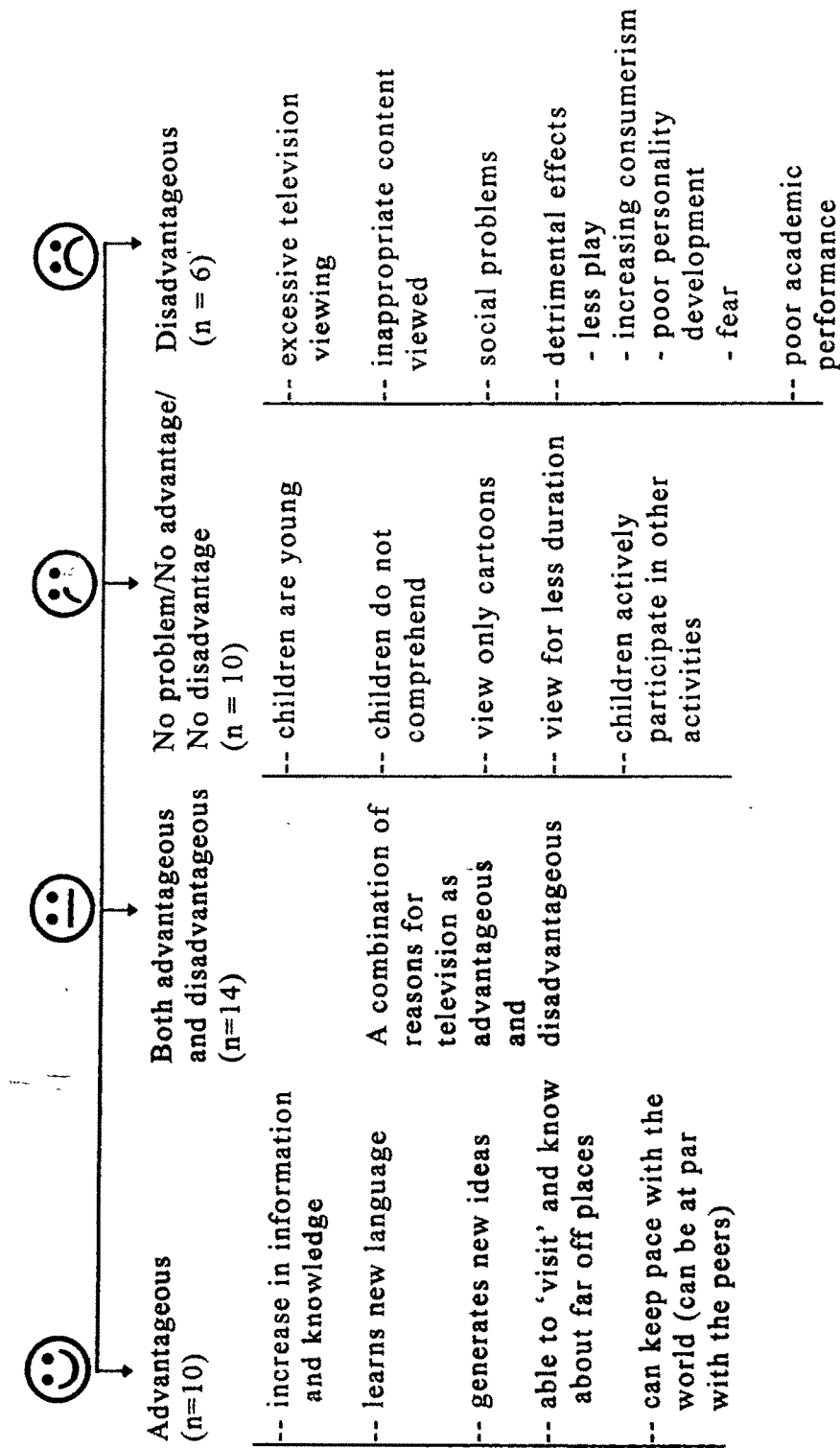


Figure 11. Opinions of parents about advantages and disadvantages of television viewing (N=40).

Fifteen percent (15%) parents had only negative opinion about effects of television and thought it to be disadvantageous.

Advantages of Television

Parents' responses indicated that in their opinion television is advantageous because it helps children gain information and knowledge, and children learn other languages like hindi and english. According to Uses and Gratification theory (Dominick, 1987) this fulfilled the cognitive need of children. Television also fulfills the need for diversion and stimulation as parents respond that it provides stimulation, exposes children to new and different places, things, events, and gives them ideas to handle problems.

Following are some of the specific advantages mentioned by parents,

- ☆ children would be exposed to social issues of injustice, lying, stealing, beating, etc.,
- ☆ children would learn strategies of defending themselves, outwitting people, and generally would become active and clever,
- ☆ children would be able to 'see' and know about different places of the world. The middle class parents cannot afford to take

their children to distant places and hence television is a good substitute,

- ★ the exposure that television provides would help the child to be at par with the peers. According to one parent if the child would not view television “he/she would be two steps behind in the society.” (Jamana karta be dagla pachal rahi jaay)

Thus, television according to parents would make their children better informed and clever.

Disadvantages of Television

Parents attributed negative influence of television to longer duration, and inappropriate content. Detrimental influences on children both direct and indirect were a cause of concern for the parents.

Parents felt that excessive viewing prevented children from engaging in other activities for e.g. play. They sat ‘senseless’ before the set. The content of programs viewed i.e. commercials, violence, and romantic scenes had a negative influence on children. The major disadvantage mentioned was due to commercials which led to consumerism. This created a problem as financially parents could not meet all the demands and they felt that all the demands of

the children should not be met. "Just now demands ruffles and pepsi, later his demands may increase."

Surprisingly violence and use of abusive language were mentioned by only two parents, for the majority it was not such a major concern. They did not think that children indulged in any violent play, or fought abnormally. The concern was that over a period children may learn to be more aggressive, and that some young children were scared by viewing violent programs.

Parents believed that children are too young to get exposed to intimate and romantic scenes. A mother was very concerned as she felt that due to viewing such scenes her twins started sitting in dark corners, trying to enact "love scenes." From then on television viewing was completely supervised and limited. Explanations were provided to the children too.

Children asked questions about sanitary napkins or intimate scenes which embarrassed the parents. Another social problem was that television guided their routines and social activities. e.g. going out, visiting friends. The visits had to be organised so as not to coincide with a popular program

For middle class Indian parents academic success is a major expectation. Parents felt that viewing too much television led to poor performance in school. Children refused to do home work and routine work. This would lead to poor habit formation and would influence children's performance at a later stage. Few parents cited

Some comments of parents

- * Just now not harmful but if habit continues as he grows older, will lead to bad habits
- * Vyavasthit Juve to nukshaan nathi kartu. Ani pachal ganda thai jaay to beeji activity na rahe
(Viewed in correct proportion it is not harmful but if child becomes crazy about it then would have no other activity)
- * if sees good serial it is good otherwise it is "poison"
- * Bhagwan no paad maniye chiye (We thank god) that our child is not interested

examples of families where academically excellent students started failing in school. They attributed this to excessive television viewing. Such instances increased their anxiety.

The disadvantages mentioned by the parents were more of a concern for the future. Except for the increase in consumerism due

to the commercials, the other disadvantages were not so much of immediate concern to them.

Ten parents felt that television was neither advantageous, nor disadvantageous, because they felt children were too young, could not comprehend the content, viewed cartoons only and that too for limited duration. At the sametime these children were actively participating in other activities, and did not have to concentrate on studying at this stage, so television would not influence the children's academic performance. Thus according to these parents, television did not pose a problem nor was it advantageous for the children.

All these results together revealed that according to the parents advantage or disadvantage of television mainly depended on age of the child, duration of viewing, quality of content viewed, academic performance, and influence of television on children.

Rules for Television Viewing

Only 6.44% parents felt that their children viewed television excessively. For majority of the parents therefore duration of viewing of children was not a cause for concern. Also majority of the parents view television as both advantageous and

disadvantageous. Very few parents ($n=6$) viewed it as disadvantageous only. These perception of parents would influence the regulations parents had for their children's television viewing. Majority of the parents (85%) reported not having any rules for television viewing of children.

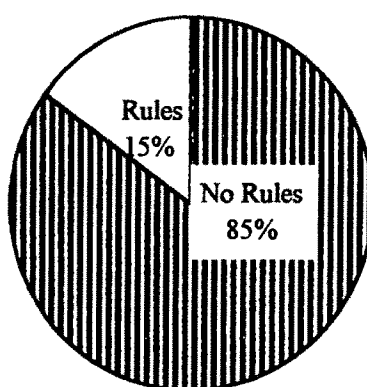


Figure 12. Rules for television viewing ($n=40$)

The parents felt that rules were not necessary as children were very young and did not view for a long time. The children did not sit constantly before the television. Even during their favorite programs they kept on moving from one place to another. This observation of parents matches with the home observations and the viewing pattern that have emerged. Home observations revealed that more than 50% children were not viewing television.

Though majority of the parents claimed there were no rules, parents did guide children for appropriate viewing. The types of regulation that occurred in the homes of preschool children, as reported by the parents were;

- * limit the time children spent in viewing television,
- * switching of the television with arrival of guests,
- * not having cable connection in the home,
- * completing homework or studying for an hour before viewing television. This was applicable to the senior K.G. children.

According to the parents, they themselves should be responsible for regulating and mediating television viewing, as well as involving children in other activities. Observation and responses of parents also revealed that as the mother (or another adult) was constantly present in homes, even when no rules were reported, continuous, informal, spontaneous regulation was on. At times mothers would ask the children themselves to switch off the television if they felt the child was viewing for a long time. Parents thus encouraged children for internalization of rules, and involved the child in actual regulation leading to self-discipline.

While viewing television if the parents felt that an inappropriate scene or program was telecast they changed the channel, switched off the TV set, and diverted the child's attention from that scene/program (Figure 13). More than 50% of the parents believed that their children did not view inappropriate programs.

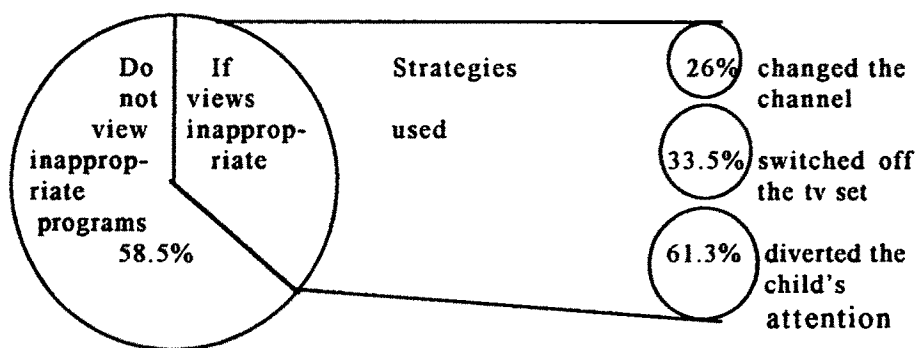
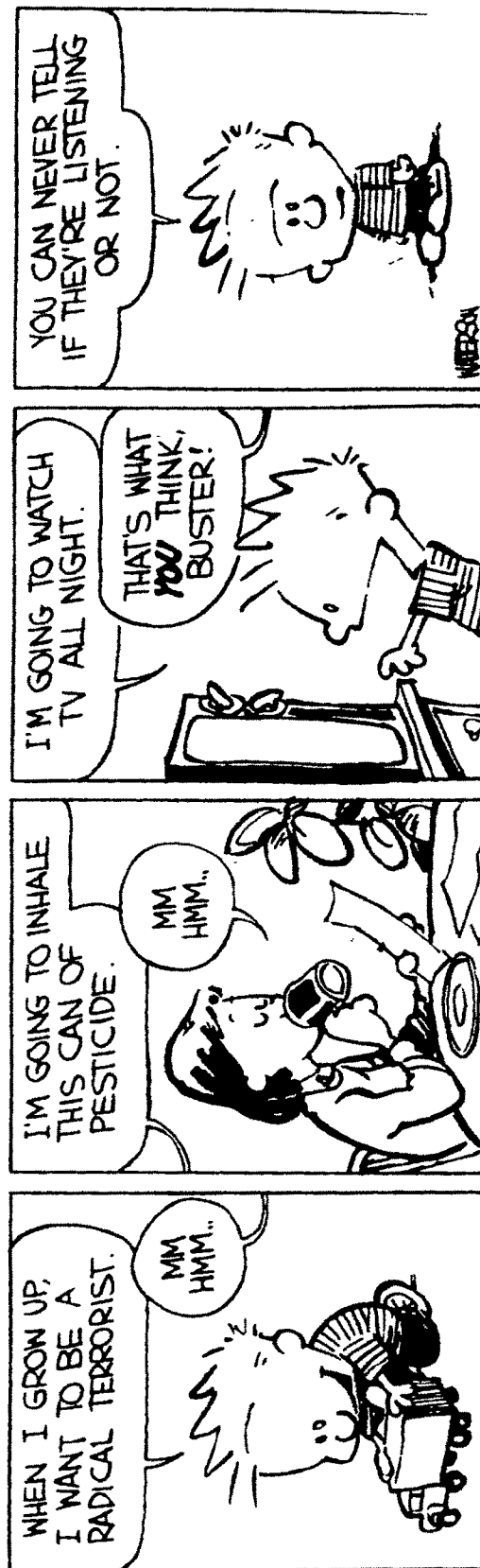


Figure 13. Strategies parents use to regulate TV viewing.

When the parents tried to distract children in any of the above mentioned ways, 51.5% of the children realized the change that had taken place. At this 23.2% would either cry or sulk and 18.8% of the children would still be adamant to watch the program. On coaxing or being distracted they complied. Others would accept the change without any comment.

It is evident that generally the regulation was more in form of directives from parents rather than strict rules. Rarely any arguments or conflicts were reported over implementing these



Watterson, B. (1988). The essential calvin and hobbes. USA, Kansas city: Andrews and McMeel.

Figure 14. Informal regulating by the mother.

rules. The television viewing of children and its regulation and mediation is thus not a laissez-faire affair with parents. Parents have given a thought to it though they may be not very conscious about it. Like for every other aspect of a child's development parents do guide the children for positive television viewing habits. They seem to be doing both the tasks of coviewing (as is evident from the results on "coviewers"), and regulating the quality of content and duration of viewing for their children.

Mediation of The Content Viewed

Another concern with television viewing is whether parents mediate the content viewed by children. Coviewing itself is not enough and what parents do while viewing it together with their children becomes extremely important. During the actual viewing situation the interaction between parents and children was not very encouraging. Discrepancy exists between the actual observations and responses of parents.

As reported by parents children reacted in varied ways while viewing the telecast programs. Mainly they asked questions, (n=21, 56.8%), and remarked on the scene or the character (n=14, 37.8%). Some children viewed television exclusively without talking or

displaying any expressions or reactions. Most of the time one or the other family member would respond to the child appropriately (n=33, 89.1%). This could be in the form of explanation to a question (n=10, 27%), expanding on a story (n=2). When the children danced or copied an action other family members would encourage them, praise them 'Are wah' and clapped for them (n=6, 16.2%).

Observations on the contrary revealed that there was less television related interaction. Children would at the most laugh, or jump, or repeat a dialogue, or identify an object. This happened in very few homes. Family members would just respond by a grunt or in mono syllable. In one exceptional case the grandfather was encouraging children to identify the scenes/pictures "what is this ?" "Look at the tanker", "which is this advertisement ?" and so on. Children were enthusiastically interacting with him.

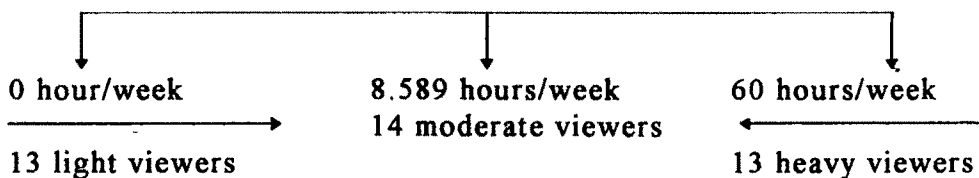
Thus observations revealed that on the spot mediation of program content by the parents was comparatively less. Parents reported that television was not a topic of conversation for children at other times of the day. It seems that parents too do not feel it is important to talk about these programs, especially as children are young.

Mediation has to be looked upon as all those activities and interactions that parents have with their children which lead to positive viewing. In this respect definition by Leichter seems all encompassing. Leichter (1979, cited in Kytömäki, 1998, pp.51) defines mediation as the wide spectrum of educational processes involved, defining it as comprising the way in which the family screens, interprets, criticizes, reinforces, complements, counteracts, refracts or transforms the material seen.

These families and especially parents screened, reinforced, complemented and transformed the material seen. Parents tried to encourage children to view those programs which they considered appropriate, informative and which would transfer culturally appropriate values. Programs on Discovery channel, religious programs and sports were encouraged. Grandparents told other related religious stories to the children and talked about bravery, moral values, respect for elders that was depicted in these serials. If we consider mediation from a broader perspective these set of parents are active mediators.

Profile of the Viewers

Researches on television viewing reveal that generally children are categorised as heavy, moderate, and light viewers based on the duration of television viewing (Gerbner, et al., 1981; Goldsmith, 1987; Packard, 1988; Shastri, 1992). For the present study, based on their duration of viewing per week as reported by parents, a sub-sample of 40 children was selected, and categorized as heavy (13), moderate (14), and light viewers (13). The moderate viewers were those whose duration of viewing concentrated around the mean duration of viewing per week. The heavy and light viewers were selected from the extreme end of the continuum.



Subsequently home observations were carried out to study the viewership patterns and categories of preschool children. Home observations of these children revealed that the viewership categories do not emerge as heavy, moderate, and light. Two main categories emerging are **viewers** and **non-viewers**. These profiles of viewership describe whether children actually view television or

not, what and how much do they view, the process involved in viewing, and parental mediation and regulation of children's television viewing.

The Non-viewers

Observations revealed that 50% of the children i.e 20 (out of 40) were not viewing television. Within this group two patterns of non-viewers have emerged. The first group of non-viewers (n=12) were children who did not view television primarily due to regulation and mediation of television viewing by the parents. The second group of non-viewers (n=8) were children who did not view television primarily by choice.

For the first group of 12 children, it was observed that television viewing was not an important family activity. Television sets in the homes of these children had not been switched on and they therefore were not viewing television. Parents believed that television viewing does not provide special benefits to children as they are young, and therefore do not comprehend program content. Instead of television viewing, parents involved children in other activities and experiences.



Figure 15. Activities of children

The second group of non-viewers were eight children in whose homes the television set was on but they were not interested in viewing it. The children exercised their choice of not viewing television and actively engaged in other experiences. Parents of these children did not encourage them to view television.

Instead of viewing television children were involved in various activities like playing in the garden, on the swing, with toys with friends, coloring/drawing, looking through books, following the mother/ sister around the house, conversing with family members, helping in household chores, etc. Some were busy eating, swinging with the grandfather, helping mother to take care of younger siblings. Other than these, children and families were visiting family, friends or going to parks, or going to the temple with the grandmother, and therefore not found at home.

Thus family of these 20 children neither showed/indicated any focussed/clear interest nor gave prominence to television viewing. In fact they were found actively encouraging children in conversation, activities, and experiences.

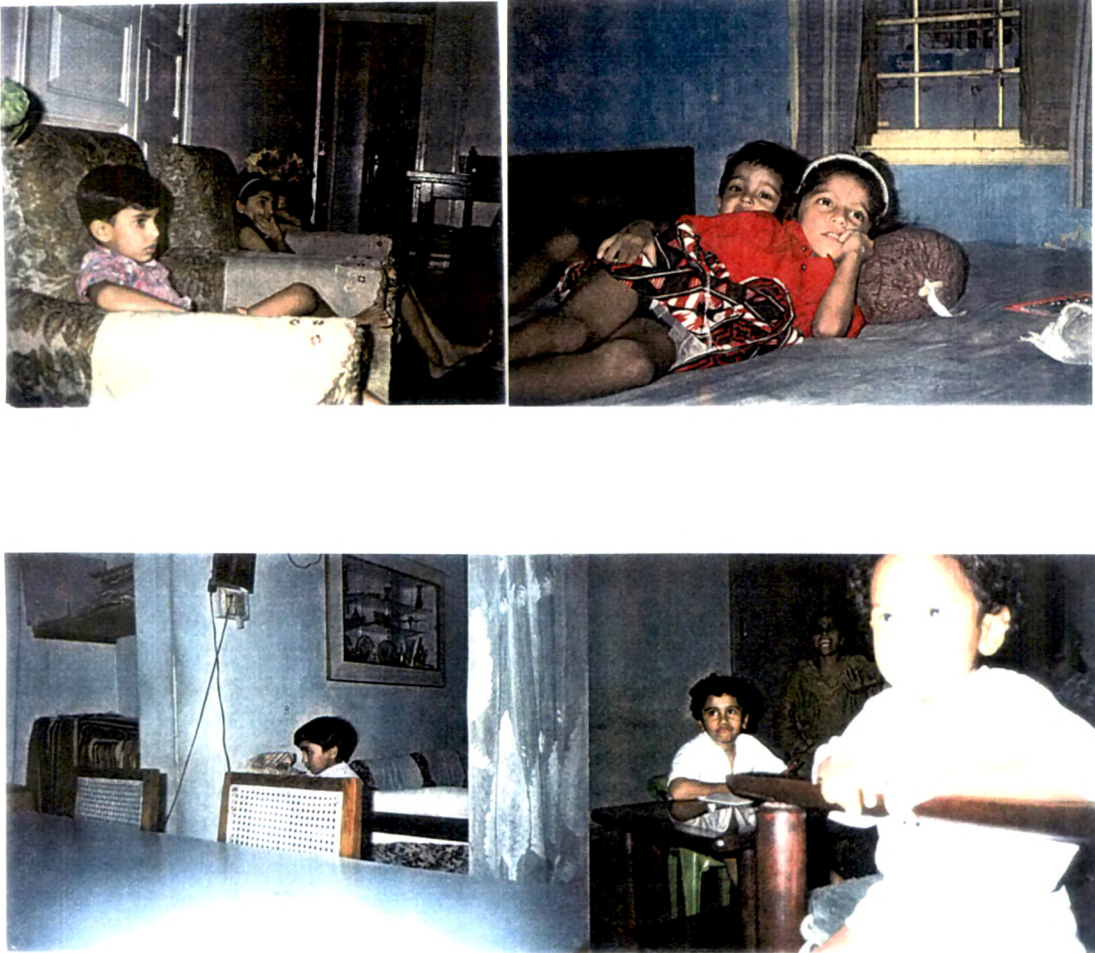


Figure 16. Heavy viewers: wide eyes, stooped shoulders

The Viewers

Based on the observations it was found that 50% of the children (20 out of 40) belonged to the group of viewers. This came through in parents' responses as well as home observations. Within this group there were variations in consistency and exclusiveness of television viewing.

A group of 12 children were found viewing television during each home visit. Most of the time they viewed television exclusively. Generally less conversation took place between these children and their parents while viewing television. For this group of viewers therefore television was a serious activity. Four of the children were so engrossed in television viewing that they did not register presence of any other person. Their attention was on the television, eyes glued to it, without blinking, head a little forward (Figure 16).

The remaining group of eight viewers was engaged in several activities while viewing. They were found riding on the tricycle, eating, drawing, etc. They did not view the television programs continuously. They got easily distracted and engaged in conversation about television program and about general topics. During the

home visits sometimes they were found playing instead of viewing television.

The home observations on viewership reveal an important point. There was a discrepancy between responses of parents and home observations about duration of viewing by children. This could possibly be due to parental perceptions of television viewing of children. Generally when the television set is on, and the child is around parents assume that children are viewing television. This was not true all the time. In fact the present group of children, for most of the time, were engaged in activities other than television viewing. Therefore for determining duration of television viewing of preschool children actual observations served as more reliable source of information

The emerging profiles have to be viewed with reference to the needs, characteristics of preschool children which are different from those of the adults. Therefore their nature of television viewing too is different. Few points/characteristics which need to be considered are;

- ☆ they are not independent viewers in terms of having specific choices or control over daily life activities.

- ☆ parents are more in charge of daily life activities of children. Parents guide the children and decide for them what is good or bad.
- ☆ developmentally preschool children are at a different stage than older children. They are neither ready to make specific choices nor capable of controlling their lives. Their attention span is less, they are interested in activities more than experiencing vicarious ones. Their comprehension of program content too is limited.

To summarize, the profiles reveal that children can be grouped into viewers and non-viewers. Fifty percent of children do not view television and the other group of 50% children have started viewing television. This is the right time for parents therefore, to guide their children for positive television viewing.

From The Teacher's Viewpoint

The other important socializing unit besides the family is the school. Teachers in schools play an important role in children's lives/ development. It is therefore pertinent to know about their views on influence of television viewing on preschool children. This section includes opinions of teachers about television viewing

for preschool children, influence of television viewing as reflected in the children's behavior in the school, and what teachers do in school to guide children towards positive viewing.

Opinions of Teachers

All the teachers reported that television viewing has advantages as well as disadvantages for preschool children. The advantages as reported by the teachers were that children gained new information, learnt new language e.g. hindi/english, learnt about days of the week and to tell time at an early age, and learnt new dances. They also felt that exposure to horror shows reduced fear of 'ghosts'.

The disadvantages of television viewing as observed by the teachers were; poor habit formation e.g. eating only if the television was on, myopic vision, and slow in learning. They felt that television viewing has resulted in less free and imaginative play, and decrease in socialization.

Television Viewing as Reflected in the School

Influence of television extends beyond the home. It would be interesting to find if the influence of television is reflected in

children's behavior in the school. As reported by the teachers the influence of television was evident in conversations of children and in their play.

Table 6
Television Viewing Reflected in the School

	Nursery	Junior K.G.	Senior K.G.
Programs liked	commercials and programs with child characters e.g. Rasna	Cartoon network, fascinated by horror shows	Discovery, cartoon programs, cricket match, religious serial
Conversation on	<p>* commercials (name the brand of pencils, shampoo), Cartoon network, Discovery channel</p> <p>* very few children sing jingles or title song of a popular children's serial e.g. Jungle Jungle pata chala hai...</p>	<p>* cartoons and name the movie they have seen</p> <p>* sing jingles</p>	<p>* fights in movies, news, one minute show</p> <p>* suggest to teacher to see a particular movie. Can name actors/ actresses. Call each other by that name.</p> <p>* sing jingles and film songs</p>

	Nursery	Junior K.G.	Senior K.G.
Play	imitate dances and actions	imitate dances and action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * dramatic actions and scenes using available props e.g. boys use blocks as guns and enact scenes from 'Border' * are aware about antakshari game - the concept and rules

Children's topics of conversation included programs they viewed, some specific scenes of interest, and jingles of commercials. With increase in age, conversations of children indicated shift in verbal expression (Table 6).

During their play the children imitated actions and danced. The girls especially danced the Bhangda or Western dance, and the boys enacted war scenes. They would act as Hanumaan or the soldiers from the film 'Border.'

An interesting point to note is that based on their observations of children, the class teachers could correctly categorise almost 95% of the children as viewers and non-viewers

Role of Teachers

Activities in school, planned or unplanned, may encourage children for positive television viewing. All the teachers reported being concerned about influence of television on children and therefore tried to promote positive television viewing habits.

During informal conversations and group talk they suggested specific programs and channels to children to be viewed, which they felt were beneficial for them. Sometimes, homework was to view specific news, or the republic day parade and report it in the

Teachers come to know about how much and what children see when

- * the children are sleepy in school - a late night movie
- * act like Hanumaan, and Ravana
- * speak dialogues "Jay Shree Ram"
- * know the commercials by heart
- * relate what they have seen
- * parents share concern with teachers about children's excessive viewing.

class the next day. Newspapers were also used for the same. Games played in the class like antakshari or 'one minute' in turn encouraged children to view it on the television.

During parents' meetings teachers suggested strategies to parents for regulating television viewing of their children. They emphasized covieing with children, providing alternate activities; regulating for duration of viewing of children, and not to view television during meal times.

Thus, like the parents, the teachers also view television as having both positive and negative influence. They strongly feel that parents need to play an active role in regulating children's television viewing.

The results can be summarized as follows :

- * Children viewed 8.589 hours of television per week
- * They watched Cartoon network and Discovery channels.
- * The preferred programs were cartoons, commercials and children's programs
- * Generally children did not view television alone. Mothers are the main coviewers for many of the children, followed by the father, and all the family members.
- * In majority of the cases the father exercised choice of channels.
- * Majority of the parents were satisfied with the time spent in television viewing by their children.

- * Majority of the parents felt that television was advantageous or it was both advantageous as well as disadvantageous, depending on age of the children, duration and quality of content viewed, academic performance, and influence of television on children
- * The strategies parents used when they felt children were viewing an inappropriate program were switching off the television set, changing the channel, or involving the child in another activity.
- * Except television this group of preschool children are hardly exposed to any other media
- * The variable which significantly influence the duration of television viewing of children is Grade in which children are studying Though not significant education of the parents and occupation of the mother, do influence duration of viewing of children
- * Children's behavior in school reflects the influence of television viewing.
- * Teachers believe that television is both advantageous as well as disadvantageous for children.

When the results are viewed in totality a positive profile of television viewing of preschool children emerges. The preschool child views television for little more than an hour daily. Besides television viewing the children play and do other routine activities and go to school. Television viewing takes place in the main room where people are moving about and other routine activities of the home are taking place. Rarely is the child a lone viewer. Other people especially the mother accompanies the child while viewing television program. The mother regulates and mediates for both duration and quality of programs viewed. Teachers in school guide the children, as well as parents, for positive television viewing.

A conceptual framework was presented earlier based on review of researches and theoretical information about significant variables related to television viewing pattern and its outcomes. Based on the results of the present study, the emerging conceptual framework of television viewing of preschool children has become more focussed. It includes specific independent and mediating variables, as well as outcomes/influences of television viewing. Both the frameworks are presented herewith.

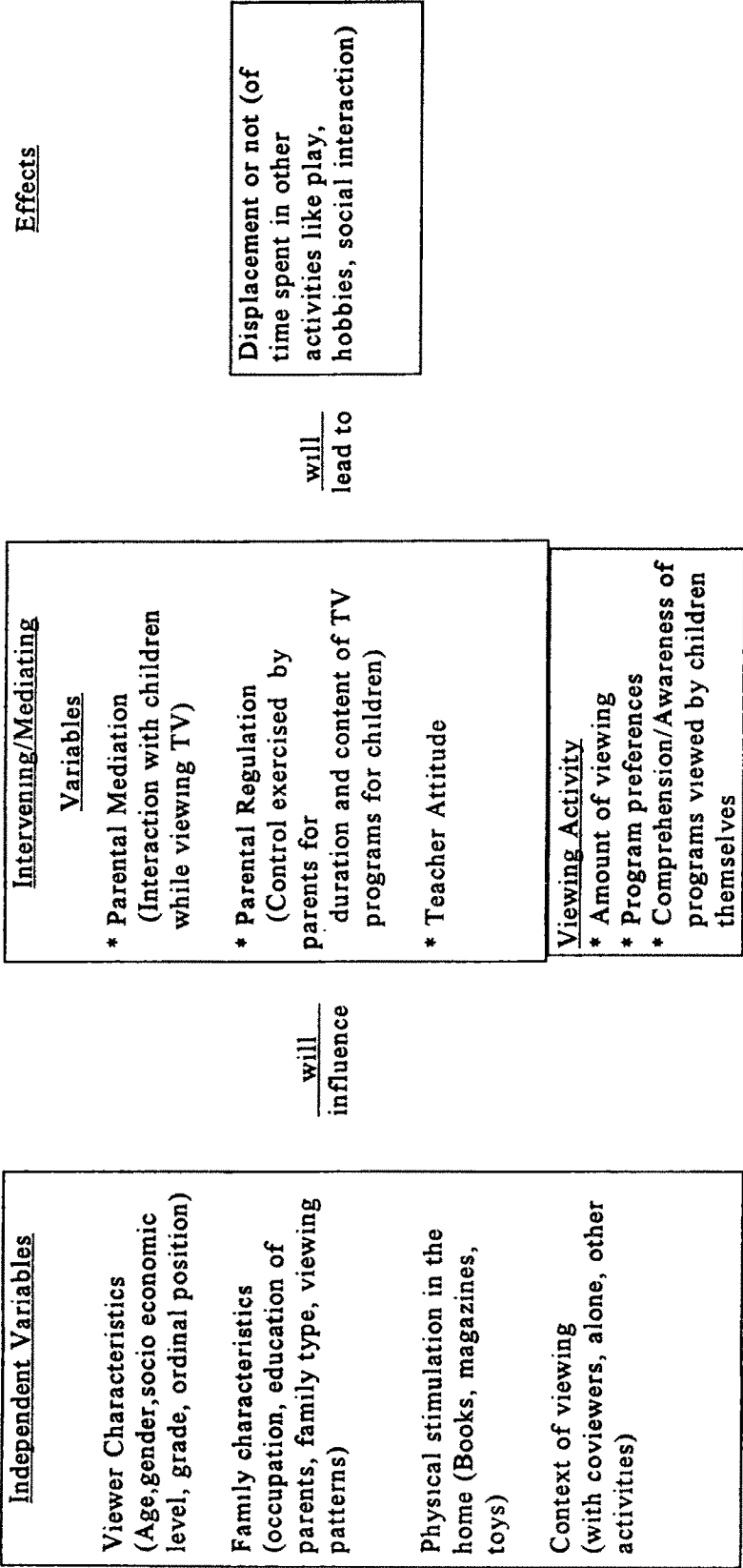
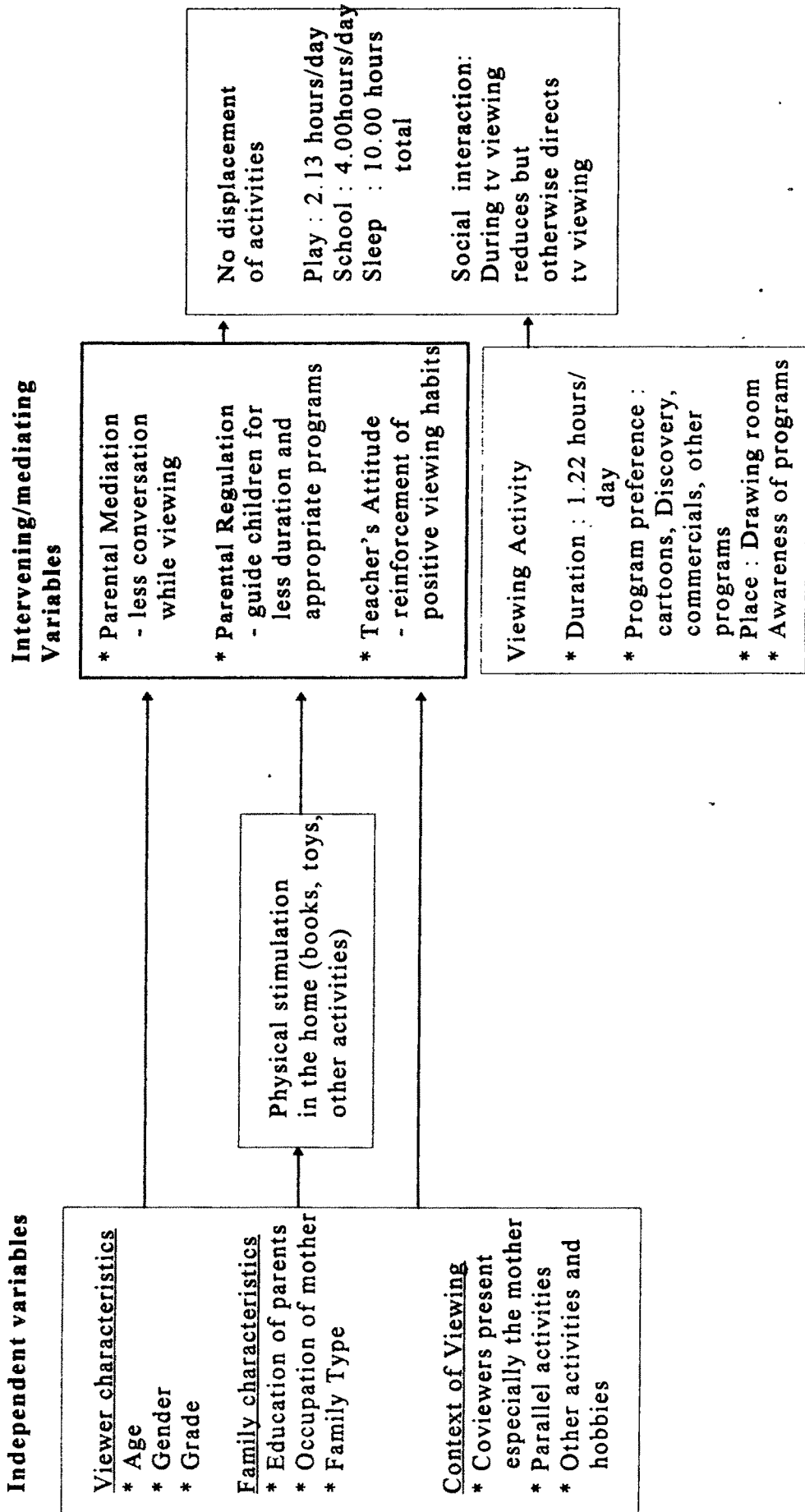


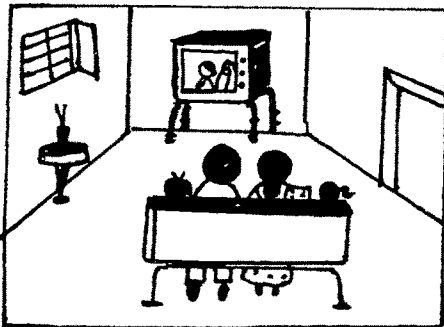
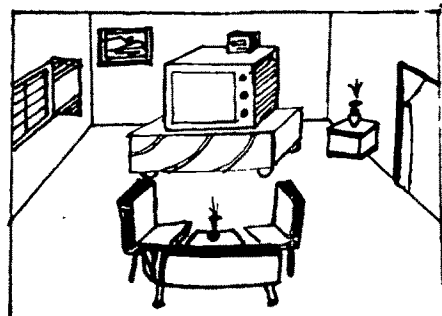
Figure 1 Framework for television viewing of children.

Based on the results of this study, the television viewing of preschool children can be summarized thus;



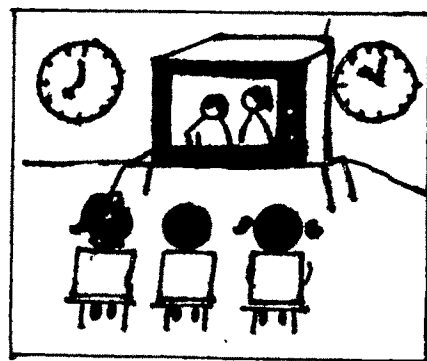
What does this research on “Home Television Environment of Preschool Children (3-6 years)” tell us ?

In majority of the households one television set is the norm, and the television set is prominently placed in the main room.

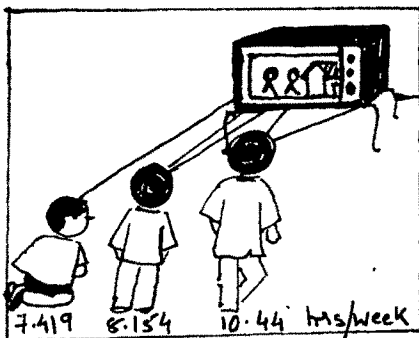
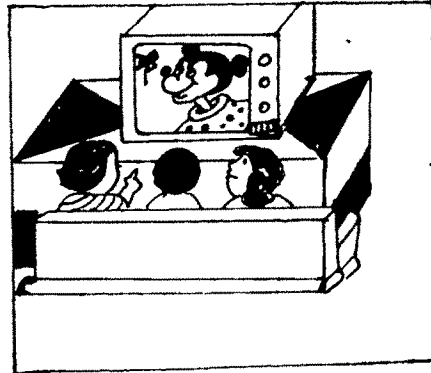


All family members sit together to view television. It is a family activity.

Children watch 1.22 hours of television daily with primetime as the most popular time-slot.

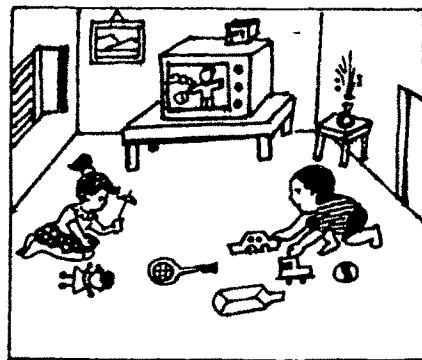


Favorite programs of preschoolers are cartoons and commercials.

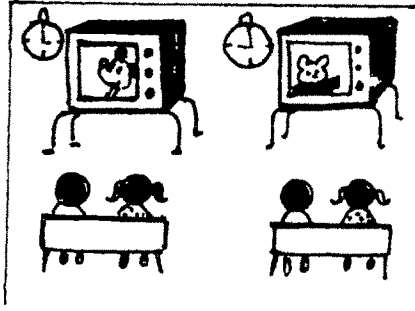


As children grow older they watch more television.

Television ranks low among preschoolers as their favorite activity and as a topic of conversation.

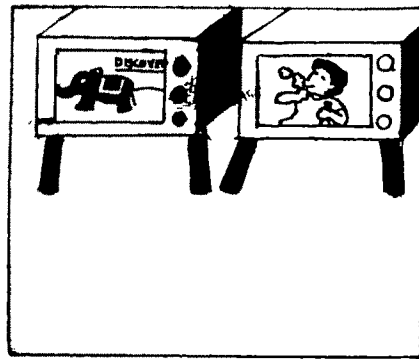


Parents are more concerned about what their children watch rather than how much they watch.

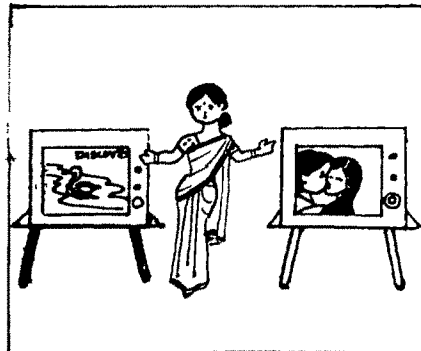


Parents are highly involved in their children's television viewing.

Parents are concerned about influence of television, at the sametime weigh the advantages.



Teachers view television as having both positive and negative influence on children.



Discussion

Children are part of a socio-cultural matrix and their development takes place within a context. The individual child, other persons in the environment, the social and physical environment, and the larger socio-cultural-political milieu all together interact with each other and within themselves, which influence a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Miller, 1993) Television programs are part of the child's exosystem - the larger society, as programs are developed and telecast by people who do not come in direct contact with the child. This research conceives of the exosystem as 'given' and attempts to understand children's viewing as part of their micro, meso, and macrosystems.

While reviewing the results on television viewing of preschool children, and parents' involvement in regulating and mediating television viewing of children, two points emerge which merit reflection;

- * How much and what kind of television is good television ?
- * What role do parents play in encouraging positive television viewing of children ?

How much and what kind of television is good television ?

Television viewing for children generally creates a debate with majority of the people - professionals, parents, teachers, - revolving around its detrimental effects on children. They observe that television viewing is detrimental for children because of the time spent in viewing and the kind of programs viewed. Yet, we have to acknowledge that television has become an integral part of middle class daily lives and there is no getting away from it. The important question therefore is "How much and what kind of television is good television?"

The answer to this question is relative and depends on several other factors like, age of the children, for how long do they view television, kind of programs they view, other activities children get involved in, role of parents, and the context in which all these happen.

The way children make use of the television set and understand the program, to a great extent depends on the age of the children. Children of different ages bring different information processing skills to the television viewing situation (Wartella, 1980)

It is therefore, necessary to understand the cognitive abilities of preschool children and their understanding of the social world

Characteristics of Preschool Children

According to Piaget children in the age group of 2 to 7 years are in the preoperational stage. They are egocentric, concentrate only on superficial features of an event, have limited capacity to handle complex information and lack flexibility of thinking (Kuppuswamy, 1984). Preschool children acquire use of symbols which include deferred imitation, symbolic play, mental images, drawing, and early language. Their thinking is egocentric and they reason by using concrete examples (Keats, 1985). The child learns adult roles and experiments with many roles through imaginative play (Seedonrasmee, 1985).

These children are striving for independence and also need to be in close contact with an adult. Their interests are expanding and they start participating in specific activities. Peer interaction increases with a shift from parallel play to group play. With better coordination of gross and fine muscles, preschool children like participating in vigorous games and activities that require finer coordination, precision and concentration. While language

development is rapid, their ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy is limited

Keeping these characteristics of preschool children into consideration, one can assume that television attracts children with its visual and auditory appeal. Theorists and researchers argue that heavy television viewing may displace play, reading, outings, and other useful activities of children. Children are exposed to programs which reflect thought processes and imagination of an adult. Television exposes them to a world full of violence. Preschool children on the other hand need opportunities for play, for interacting with people and environment around. Television seems to delimit this opportunity (Levin & Carlsson-Paige, 1994)

Contrary to what the western review suggests, the results of this research indicate that on an average preschool children view 1.22 hours of television per day. This is supported by several other Indian researches which report that children view television for little more than an hour per day. Preschool children from the city of Baroda view television for approximately one hour and 20 minutes per day (Shah, 1996, Mushtaq, 1997). Manrow (1990) reported that 6-12 year olds of Baroda city viewed television for 1.6 hours on

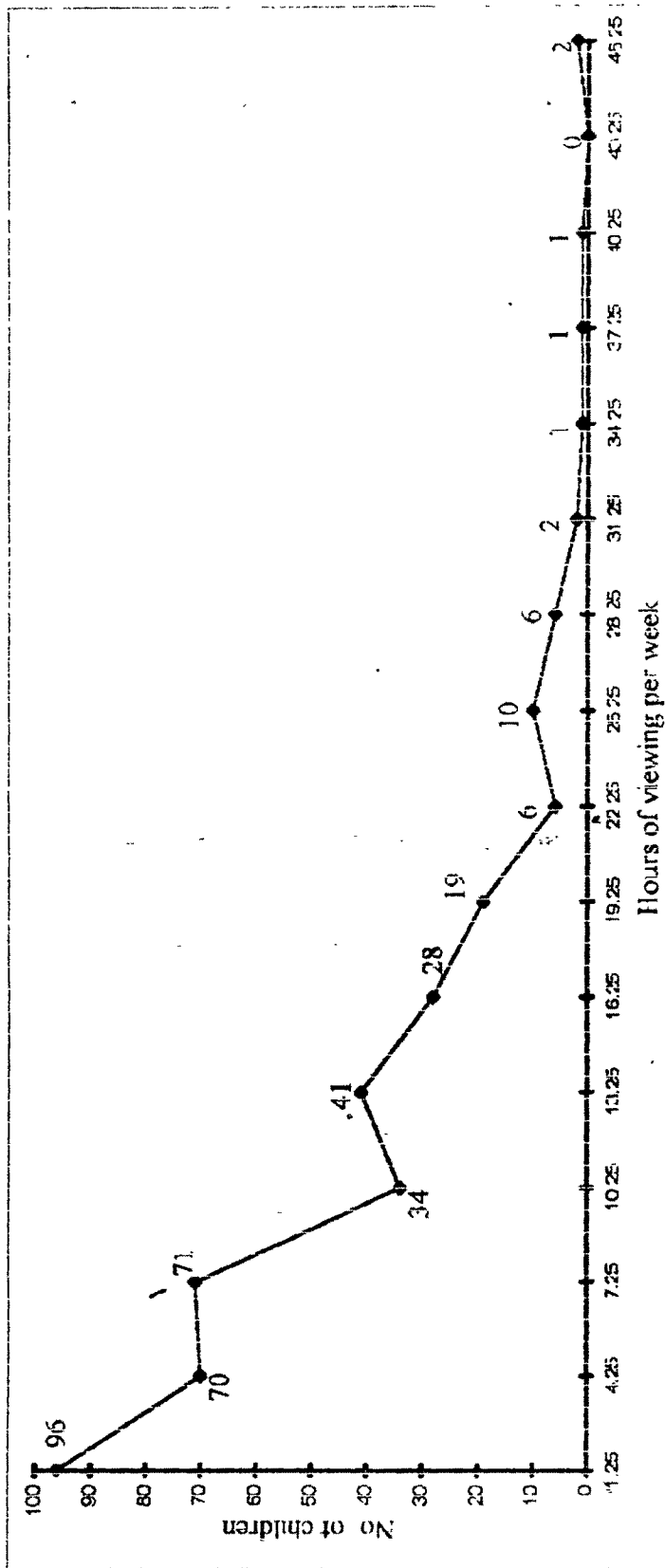


Figure 17 Distribution of 388 children for duration of viewing.

week days and according to Shastri (1992) they viewed for 1.45 hours per day. The researches by Balasubramanyam and Kiranmai (1990) and Abrol, et al., (1991) report similar results for children of Delhi. It seems therefore that Indian children are moderate television viewers.

For the present research the standard deviation (8.326) indicates extreme variation in duration of viewing of children (Figure 17). The results indicate that majority of the children were either not viewing television or were viewing it for a very brief duration. These results are corroborated with the home observations which revealed that 50% of children did not view television. Parents report on television viewing of children more often indicated that the television set was on and children were around.

As against this, Western researches report higher duration of television viewing by children. Preschool children spend 2-4 hours daily viewing television (Beere, 1990, Huston, et al., 1990, Levin & Carlsson-Paige, 1994). In Japan, the average television viewing hours for children between 2-6 years of age are more than two hours per day (Kodaira, 1990).

Age and Gender

Within this group of preschool children, the results indicate variations in duration of viewing. Younger children view television for less time as compared to the 4½ and 5½ years old. Similar trend has been observed in the earlier Baroda studies by Shah (1996) and Mushtaq (1997). This could be because as children grow older they comprehend programs better which generates a positive interest in viewing, leading to increase in duration. It can also be due to 'attentional inertia' i.e. the longer a person has been looking at a television program, the longer she/he will continue to keep looking, without turning away (Anderson & Lorch, 1983, cited in Fishbein, 1984). A study by Anderson, Choi and Lorch (1987) indicated that there is a greater possibility of attentional inertia in children aged 3-5 years. Thus with increasing years television viewing can become a regular habit.

The preschool children in this study are not spending unreasonably long duration in viewing television. The immediate concern at this point is not excessive viewing but inculcating positive viewing habits so as to get maximum advantage from this powerful medium. Such a concern is reported by parents also. They believed that amount of television viewed by their young children

was appropriate but they would have to regulate the duration of viewing as children grow older

Gender differences in viewing preferences did emerge with more boys than girls viewing all the programs. By age 4 or 5 sex preferences in viewing are evident (Hustan, et al, 1990, Singer & Singer, 1981). Boys watch more television than girls, but that difference occurs primarily for programs with masculine sex - typed content and form - cartoons, action adventure shows, and sports (Alvarez, Huston, Wright, & Kerkman, 1988)

Research on preschool children by Shah (1996) and Mushtaq (1997) reveal similar results. Gender differences for duration of viewing are not significant though boys prefer cartoons, films, and sports program as compared to the girls. Gender differences are reflected in choice of programs, and use of television and not in duration of viewing, indicating social nature of emerging differences. In the present study though age and gender of children influence children's viewing, they do not completely explain individual variations.

Kinds of Programs Viewed By Children

The content viewed by children forms a critical aspect of television viewing pattern. Besides the duration, viewing specific content influences children. The preschool children in this study preferred to view Cartoon Network and Discovery Channels and their favorite programs were cartoons and commercials. Their choice to a great extent was influenced by their parents. Children therefore viewed programs which were meant for them as well as adult programs. These findings are consistent with other research reports.

Cable systems also influence the content and duration of viewing. Multiple channels are available to families at affordable rates and that means more choice of programs available to the families. Children who had cable connection viewed television for longer hours as compared to children who did not have cable connection. Research by Huston, et al., (1983), Huston, Wright, Kerkman, & St. Peters (1990); and Truglio, et al., (1996) indicated that heavy viewing was associated with availability of cable TV. At the same time it leads to more focussed viewing. With the advent of cable and satellite television in the region of Marathwada, Maharashtra the children's duration increased from one to six hours of viewing per day (Dharurkar, 1997).

In this study, the preschool children who had cable connection could access the Cartoon network, Discovery channel as well as view cartoons aired by Zee TV and Doordarshan. The other group had just the options offered by Doordarshan. As a result the program 'Shaktimaan' featured much more as a favourite with children who did not have cable connection. Observations, also revealed that these children viewed general programs more than the children who had cable connection. Research by Atkin, et al, (1991) reveals that cable television results in more viewing sanctions as well as more unsanctioned viewing for children.

Children in the age group of 3 to 6 years prefer cartoons (Beere, 1990; Kodaira, 1990). Cartoons, commercials, and film based programs have been found to be the most popular among Indian children (Manrow, 1990, Mayuri & Mohite, 1992, Mushtaq, 1997; Phatak & Singh, 1986, Shah, 1996, Unnikrishnan & Bajpai, 1995). Effects of cartoons, sesame street and situation comedies on children's peer interactions and toy play revealed that cartoons dramatically depressed social interactions. The image of 'mesmerized' children, with no active involvement held true only for cartoon viewers (Agenta, Stoneman, & Brody, 1986). The content

viewed and its effect also get influenced by the characteristics of the children. Preschool children being young have limited comprehension. Often they may not be able to make a distinction between real life and reel life. Also, imitation is an important strategy of learning for these children. Television, as mentioned before, is a socializing agent for children, and a lot of unplanned learning occurs while viewing television.

Many of the cartoons and serials that children view are characterized by violence, fights, use of weapons. Commercials especially, show "daredevil stunts" such as jumping from one moving train on to another. In make-believe play situations, children may imitate these stunts which can harm them. Research by Greer, Potts, Wright, & Huston (1982) indicated that preschool children who saw high salience commercials (with high action, rapid change of scene and character, cuts and pans) had a tendency for more aggression, and less imaginative play.

Commercials, the second most favorite of children create problems between children and parents. Children demand the advertised products and feel dissatisfied if parents do not buy it for them. The advertisers deliberately target at children. One-fourth of

our country's population is below the age of 14 and one-fifth of all consumer goods are targeted at them. This is worth about a 1000 crores (Manral, 1996). Commercials of icecreams and soft drinks, and ofcourse toys and household products like washing machine, cars and even mobiles are targeted at children. The underlying message being that a father and a mother who use and provide these products are the ideal parents. Thus in addition to consumerism, distorted family values are imparted to the child.

An analysis of the content viewed by children is not really encouraging. Parents need to be made aware of evaluating the content of programs that children watch. They themselves need to realize the hidden messages that television programs deliver imperceptibly. Only then will they be able to make a just selection for their children. From the programs which are telecast, only limited ones are of good quality. This has implications for production of good quality programs.

Other Activities of Children

Much concern is expressed due to the probable indirect influence of television viewing on children. Many young children spend more time in viewing television than in school, play or

interacting with others (Levin & Carlsson - Paige, 1994) Preschool children on the other hand learn through first hand experience, actively doing things and interacting with people and peers around. Excessive television viewing may be at the cost of displacing the activities which are supportive of development.

Besides television viewing, these group of preschool children were engaged in quite a few experiences. The sub-sample of 40 children spent maximum time in sleep, 7.6 hours at night and two hours in the afternoon. School was for about 3.6 hours, and total play, both indoor and outdoor was for 3.5 hours. If television viewing is for 1.22 hours it still leaves almost five hours of the day unaccounted for. This time was spent in playing, socializing with mother or siblings, and few children pursued their hobbies. According to the mothers, their children "played for the whole day." It also suggests that one hour of television viewing for young children does not displace other important activities and so it can be considered as reasonable viewing time. The duration of viewing does not emerge as an immediate cause for concern.

The Emerging Context of Viewing

Besides the duration and content of viewing, and age of children, the context in which the viewing experience occurs need to be considered. Indian children view television within the family setup in the drawing/main room of the house. The family members, education and occupation of parents, placement of the television set, activities in the home, all influence the viewing behavior of the children.

Education and occupation of parents create a context which in turn influences television viewing of children. Researches on adult subjects have shown association between advanced education, high occupational status, and high income to relatively low television use (Condry, 1989; Huston, et al., 1992). It was therefore not surprising to find relationship between parents' education and occupational status with children's duration of viewing. Children of highly educated parents viewed less television. Other researches indicate similar trend. Heavy viewers of television have mothers who are less educated. Parents with higher education have higher level of awareness about effects of television and therefore regulate television viewing of their children more. It is also seen that, these

parents provide a more stimulating home environment, engage a child in other activities, at the sametime monitor television viewing

Mothers who provide better quality home environments had higher levels of education, intelligence and self esteem (Baharudin & Luster, 1988). Variable of parent education therefore influences the kind of home environment and opportunity that the parents provide to the children. It therefore in turn affects children's television viewing.

Occupation of parents influences television viewing indirectly or as a mediating variable as the child is left without the main caretaker. The results revealed that children of mothers who worked outside home, viewed more television. The children in this case were taken care of at home by either grandparents and or relatives or were looked after by the neighbours. In one case the girl had a school going elder brother. The neighbour opened the house for them and the brother and sister spent the afternoon together, without parents at home. In these situations children's activities are less monitored and therefore they "pass the time" by indulging in television viewing. Television viewing, is an important leisure time activity for the grandparents, indirectly leading to more television

viewing for children Grandparents are indulgent and do not restrict grandchildren for any activity All these lead to flexible regulation and more, indiscriminate television viewing.

This result is different from that of the Western homes, where children of mothers who worked outside view less television (Pinon, Huston, & Wright, 1989, Webster, D.B et al., 1982) This is explained mainly because of well organised established support system in form of day-care centres The program provided in these centres restricts television viewing of children

The other important aspect of the context is the placement of the television set Television takes a prominent place in the room with all the furniture placed so that it is comfortable to view from different positions in the room According to Leichter, et al., (cited in Gallegos-Butters, 1998) there are symbolic meanings associated with the placement of the television sets in the home If the television set is placed in a high traffic area, it will be greatly used as against if placed in an out-of-the-way place.

This does not have much bearing in the Indian situation because; the drawing room in the home is not an exclusive living room, but a multipurpose room. It is a high traffic area as family

members are engaged in several activities, moving in and out of the room. Neighbours, tradesmen knock at the door and generally there are activities going on. Most of the rooms are small in size and hence there is not much choice in terms of the placement of the set.

The other advantage of the television set being in the main room is that it avoids exclusive television viewing by children. Any adult around monitors the viewing of children. During the home visits, in one of the homes, it was observed that the mother was cooking, and walking in and out of the room, the child would be playing in the room with friends, the grandfather was reading newspaper, and the television was on. In another home mattresses were being stitched right there, with the mother and the mother-in-law conversing with the man who had come to make the mattress. The television was on, but the child was interested in the mattress making process, occasionally glancing at the television.

Such a situation therefore, does not lead to concentrated and continuous viewing. Hence the situation in the Western homes i.e. placement of the television set in a high traffic area, which creates a concern, for this group of children creates a positive situation.

Drawing from research as well as theory, television viewing for preschool children can be considered as good television viewing when,

- * children view for appropriate duration,
- * the content is appropriate to their level of development,
- * displacement of other activities, due to television viewing is minimal

In promoting/introducing positive television viewing, especially for preschool children, family members specifically parents play a crucial role. To a great extent this positive viewing is sustained because of continuous involvement of parents. What are parents doing in this situation ? What do they consider as good or bad television ? How do they monitor and mediate television viewing of children ? This is the next issue for consideration

What role do parents play in encouraging positive television viewing of children ?

Another concern that ensues, with professionals and teachers is the role of parents in regulating and mediating television viewing for their children. The questions that arise are,

- * are parents controlling for children's viewing time ?

- * are they monitoring the programs their children watch ?
- * do they view television together with their children ?

A related issue is what they do during coviewing. Are they explaining the program content, clarifying queries that children have, helping them to discriminate between good and bad actions/characters ?

Western researches on these issues give a pessimistic picture. Preschool children view more than 2+ hours of television daily, mostly alone and view programs which have excessive violent content. Television is often used as a baby-sitter. Even when parents are present they neither regulate the content and duration nor do they mediate the program.

As different from this, television viewing in India is a family activity. All family members sit together before a single television set, in the main room of the house. This situation needs further examining. The discussion focusses on results related to coviewing, parental mediation, opinion of parents, and parental regulation.

Coviewing

In India television viewing is more of a group activity, with all family members watching television together (Yadava & Reddi, 1988). In the present study there was high amount of coviewing with all family members, mother and father, being the viewers most of the time. This trend is also seen in the earlier researches on preschool children by Shah (1996) and Mushtaq (1997), and with school children by Manrow (1990) and Shastri (1992).

Analyses of the type of programs parents and children coviewed revealed that children viewed general programs with parents and child-oriented programs like Cartoons, Discovery alone. Coviewing occurs during primetime when general fare or adult related serials are aired. Maximally viewed channels by children are Cartoon Network and Discovery but the next three channels, Zee TV, Doordarshan, and Sony are the parents' favorite. Thus when parents are viewing children join them. Their choices are also guided by what parents are viewing.

Parents' own choices and viewing habits serve as a model and provide early exposure to children. The amount and kind of television viewed by children to a great extent depends on the

amount and kind of television viewed by the parents. The type of programs covieved by parents also has an impact St Peters, M et al., (1989) report that coviewing general entertainment programs with parents was negatively associated with children's visual and auditory attention to television, preference for print media, and prosocial behavior. Coviewing informative programs with parents was positively related to children's attention to television and use of print.

The kinds of programs viewed by these children leaves much to be desired. It is extremely essential .therefore that parents especially view programs of children's choices with them and help them to interpret the content and understand the consequences of the actions of the television characters

A positive aspect to coviewing is that parents know what and how much their children are viewing and accordingly guide them As reported earlier, when mothers felt that children were viewing television, for a long time they would immediately direct them towards play. When they felt an inappropriate scene was being aired, they changed the channel or diverted the child's attention A mother reported "I take the child to the kitchen saying come I have

something nice for you to eat.” The nursery grade child followed the mother without any comment.

Is coviewing situational or are parents consciously regulating television viewing of children ? An understanding is necessary therefore about why do parents behave the way they do ? Which factors influence their regulating and mediating behavior ? A comprehensive view of what all parents do to regulate and mediate television viewing of children is necessary. Extensive interviews and observations provide an insight into what rules do parents have, what is the daily routine of the child, what actions of parents lead to regulation and mediation

Parental Mediation

Though the presence of parents is important, even more important is what parents do during the viewing situation. When the adults viewing together with the children comment on the program, interpret the content for the children, and answer their questions it becomes a worthwhile experience for children. In a study, Atkin and Greenberg (1977) reported that parents comments during coviewing can reduce the negative effects of physical and verbal aggression and increase the effects of altruism and affection. Singer, et al , (1988)

revealed that parents' report of television media is positively correlated with television comprehension. Abelman (1987) found that parents of gifted children talked to their children about television and explained about television as a mediating device

As reported by parents of these preschool children 56.8% of the children asked questions and parents responded appropriately to them. At the sametime, as reported by them, television conversation initiated by parents was minimal. Observations also revealed that there was less conversation between children and parents when the television viewing was on as compared to the times when television was not on. A reason as suggested by Gantz and Weaver (1984) is that the form and content of television may serve to minimize rather than facilitate communication among co-viewers.

For preschool children in this research, coviewing is more situational rather than a deliberate and planned strategy on the part of parents to share a learning experience. Prima facie, it seems that as family members sit together to watch television, it brings them closer and they share an activity. On the other hand in terms of conversation, the family is moving away from each other. Two divergent trends can be observed in family interactions as a result of

the presence of television. In some families the interaction increases, but in some homes though families physically come together, social distance between the family members increases (Yadava & Reddy, 1988), as it occurs in this study.

At the sametime parents/grandparents elaborated on the mythological stories, and repeatedly told them to children. They also provided explanation to children about "Horror shows" and how these ghosts on television screen are real people and not "ghosts". Therefore, though not deliberately, some form of mediation does occur, though a conscious effort on part of parents is necessary.

Parental Regulation

Majority of the parents (85%) reported not having any rules for the children. The review too indicates that parents of preschool children report having no rules for television viewing of their children (St. Peters, et al., 1991). This is quite reasonable if we consider parents' opinion about television. In fact majority of the parents (45%) felt that television was advantageous for children, or it was both advantageous and disadvantageous (35.6%) and therefore it is reasonable to assume that they would like their children to view television. A mother of a girl urged the investigator

to coax her daughter to view television as she felt that the child was missing out on information and entertainment

The results on 'rules' and justification for it need to be understood. On the one hand parents report that there are no rules and then they also report that "we have no cable connection" as we do not want our children to see any other channel but Doordarshan. Thus rules set by parents are more implicit and therefore are not perceived as rules.

Even for the same situation the responses of parents varied. For e.g. one parent said they had no rules as they did not have any cable connection. Another parent said that they had a rule and that was to have no cable connection. So the concept of rules, and the rules themselves varied with each parent.

Though obvious limits are not set, some kind of regulation is on. When asked "what do you do when the child is sitting in front of the TV set for a long time?" The mothers answered that if the child has been sitting for a long time she would tell him/her "to switch off the set and go off to play." For some children, time restrictions were set, for e.g. go to bed at a particular time, evening time was 'news time' for the father, in the mornings and evenings children were not

allowed to view, and homework had to be completed before television viewing. All of these strategies would curtail children's television viewing.

The parents reported that if an inappropriate scene/program was telecast, they distracted the child's attention or switched off the TV i.e. prevented/restricted the child from viewing television. This was probably not viewed by parents as restriction, rather it was viewed as more normal parenting strategies. Children too did not react to it strongly and in fact followed the parents suggestions.

The reasons for no rules, which was reiterated by parents was that their children viewed reasonable television and did not view inappropriate programs. Hence actually when the parent said there were no rules they believed that **no rules were necessary for their children**. A very important point to remember for these families are that parents especially mothers were present for most of the time. They therefore may not feel the need for rules. As and when necessary, mothers spontaneously regulated children's viewing.

One can therefore conclude that encouraging positive television viewing of children by parents involve;

- ✦ coviewing with the children,
- ✦ regulating their content and duration through spontaneous involvement, and
- ✦ mediating television viewing of children, both on-the-spot and at other times of the day.

Hence, for this group of parents television is not a very specific, important phenomenon to be dealt with differently. As they would guide children naturally and normally for other activities, they also guide the children for positive television viewing. Parents have their own ideas about children, television process, and its influence on their children, and they use these to regulate and mediate children's television viewing. In addition, this group of children are actually not viewing television excessively and so in reality television may be serving more as a positive reinforcer than as a detrimental force. The caution expressed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), for majority of the children is not necessary as television has still not displaced other activities from the child's life. Parents are the mediators as suggested by Vygotsky (Miller, 1993) helping children make decisions about positive television viewing. Though to begin with less duration of viewing, and presence of coviewers seems

situational, it is reasonable to believe that parents are consciously helping children to regulate and mediate television viewing

Conclusion

Television has become an integral aspect of family life. In Indian middle class homes, in non-metropolitan cities it has become integrated into the social lives of families without disturbing the general network of people and their relationships.

Preschool children view television for a reasonable time of 1.22 hours per day in their own homes together with their family members. Exposure to television to a great extent depends on the parents. The duration and content of television viewing of children is influenced by what and how much the parents watch. It is also influenced by the opinion that parents have about television as a medium.

Parents of the preschool children actively regulate and mediate television viewing of their children. Majority of the parents are satisfied by the time spent by their children in television viewing. To them television is both advantageous and disadvantageous, on the one hand providing more information, on the other hand increasing

consumerism. Though parents are satisfied with their children's viewing at this stage, this balance between television viewing and other activities should be sustained as children grow up. Parents who are active regulators and mediators of television viewing have children who view for less duration.

Children are also cognitively active. They make choices of what and when to watch and understand the content being telecast. Besides television viewing, preschool children go to school, play (indoors and outdoors), engage in social interactions, and have hobbies. So television for this children is just one of the routine activities. Children themselves have emerged as strong advocates as they clearly indicate that television is least on their priority and most of them view it in absence of an alternative.

Implications

Television is part of the child's microsystem from birth. Children get used to this technology and grow with it. Like use of any device, use of television too has to be looked at with caution. The low duration of television viewing by this group of children suggests that television is one of the interesting activity in their lives. Besides television they play, interact socially, engage in

hobbies. Adults especially parents in their lives provide other opportunities to them for their healthy growth and development. This has a direct implication for parents. In order to ensure that television does not become a regular habit, parents should provide other age appropriate opportunities to their children which are equally attractive as television. This would create a positive use of television as it will also become one of the stimulating activities in the child's life.

At the sametime, results on content of television viewed by children need to be looked into. Children view cartoons, commercials, and other adult programs which may have detrimental effects on them. Children get exposed to violent content, romance and love scenes, at an early age. With limited comprehension ability they get a distorted view of the world and may imbibe wrong values. This has implications for parents, producers, and policy makers. Parents need to be aware about the content of the programs and should guide their children to view good programs. It also reinforces the role of parents as mediators. From the time the child is young, parents should discuss the programs that the child is viewing, help the child understand good and bad programs.

Producers of all programs, especially of programs specifically made for children and commercials do know that children are their major audience. They should modify their program content to suit the needs and characteristics of young children. At this stage, when many local city level channels are being established, new Gujarati channels are coming up, it is extremely essential that professionals and researchers share their concern, and disseminate research results, and advocate for production of better programs. Professionals or interested people should get together and evaluate the programs telecast and rate them. Parents should be made aware of these ratings, they should be regularly published in newspapers to help parents make appropriate selection.

Finally, the last implication is for researchers. Studying any phenomenon in its total context definitely provides a better understanding. Television viewing is a family phenomenon. It should be therefore studied in the context of family situation. All family members, their daily life activities, role relationships and availability of all the media, influences their television use. If studied in this holistic way it would definitely provide better insights which would ultimately help in understanding the development of children better.

Recommendations

- * It is necessary to have a strong advocacy movement to impress on producers to develop better quality programs for children. This would reduce the complete reliance on borrowed cartoons and film based programs.
- * As television is within the family context, the context changes for children of low and high socio-economic homes. Researches with these group of families and children will give a comparative idea of the phenomenon and help us gain better insights.
- * Longitudinal studies to understand developmental changes in television viewing pattern of children, and its causes and effects are needed.
- * Influence of television on play behavior, social interactions, and language development of children should be studied