

Screen media use and ADHD-related behaviors: Four decades of research

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Abstract

The diagnosis of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) among children and adolescents has increased considerably over the past decades. Scholars and health professionals alike have expressed concern about the role of screen media in the rise in ADHD diagnosis. However, the extent to which screen media use and ADHD are linked remains a point of debate. To understand the current state of the field and, ultimately, move the field forward, we provide a systematic review of the literature on the relationship between children and adolescents' screen media use and ADHD-related behaviors (i.e., attention problems, hyperactivity, and impulsivity). Using the Differential Susceptibility to Media effects Model as a theoretical lens, we systematically organize the existing literature, identify potential shortcomings in this literature, and provide directions for future research. The available evidence suggests a statistically small relationship between media and ADHD-related behaviors. Evidence also suggests that individual child differences, such as gender and trait aggression, may moderate this relationship. There is a clear need for future research that investigates causality, underlying mechanisms, and differential susceptibility to the effects of screen media use on ADHD-related behaviors. It is only through a richer empirical body that we will be able to fully understand the media-ADHD relationship.