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Association of excessive use of electronic devices with musculoskeletal symptoms, vision, psychosocial health, and activities of children and adolescents in Hong Kong

*MAN HONG ANDREW SIU*¹, *SHARON M.H. TSANG*², *GLADYS L.Y. CHEING*²,
*ANDREW K. C. LAM*², *PETER C.K. PANG*², *MARK P. JENSEN*³

¹Brunel University London, United Kingdom

²The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR, China

³University of Washington, USA

E-mail: andrew.siu@brunel.ac.uk

Background: The excessive use of electronic devices among young people has become a growing public health concern in recent years. Excessive device use could lead to musculoskeletal pain and symptoms, vision symptoms, psychosocial health, and disengagement from daily activities. **Method:** This cross-sectional survey used both online and paper forms to collect data from primary and secondary school students. The data collected include basic demographic information, frequency and duration of electronic device use, musculoskeletal symptoms, vision symptoms, psychosocial health, and their time use in daily activities. **Results:** 1,058 children aged 9–17 years participated. Sixty-one percent of the participants spent more than 2 hours per day using electronic devices during school days, and the percentage increased to 78% on weekends and holidays. Excessive electronic device use was associated with increased prevalence and severity of musculoskeletal symptoms (ρ 's=0.28–0.33, P 's<0.001), vision symptoms (ρ 's=0.33–0.35, P 's<0.001), and poorer psychosocial health (ρ 's=0.38–0.47, P 's<0.001). Secondary school students reported greater device use and higher severity of symptoms than primary school students. **Conclusions:** Excessive electronic device use was associated with increased prevalence and severity of physical and psychosocial symptoms, and the symptoms are more prevalent in older than younger children. The findings suggest that early identification and intervention is needed to manage the risk of developing problematic internet use or gaming disorders in children. We shared the study results with the participants and parents in workshops and recruited those at risk to join group motivational interviewing programmes.

Keywords: electronic device use, health effects, symptoms, children, adolescent