



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Prevalence of excessive screen time and associated factors in adolescents



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KEYWORDS

Sedentary behavior;
Motor activity;
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Abstract

Objective: To determine the prevalence of excessive screen time and to analyze associated factors among adolescents.

Methods: This was a cross-sectional school-based epidemiological study with 2874 high school adolescents with age 14–19 years (57.8% female) from public and private schools in the city of João Pessoa, PB, Northeast Brazil. Excessive screen time was defined as watching television and playing video games or using the computer for more than 2 h/day. The associated factors analyzed were: sociodemographic (gender, age, economic class, and skin color), physical activity and nutritional status of adolescents.

Results: The prevalence of excessive screen time was 79.5% (95%CI 78.1–81.1) and it was higher in males (84.3%) compared to females (76.1%; $p < 0.001$). In multivariate analysis, adolescent males, those aged 14–15 year old and the highest economic class had higher chances of exposure to excessive screen time. The level of physical activity and nutritional status of adolescents were not associated with excessive screen time.

Conclusions: The prevalence of excessive screen time was high and varied according to sociodemographic characteristics of adolescents. It is necessary to develop interventions to reduce the excessive screen time among adolescents, particularly in subgroups with higher exposure.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Comportamento sedentário;
Atividade motora;
Obesidade

Prevalência de tempo excessivo de tela e fatores associados em adolescentes**Resumo**

Objetivo: Determinar a prevalência do tempo excessivo de tela e analisar fatores associados em adolescentes.

Métodos: Trata-se de um estudo epidemiológico transversal, de base escolar, com 2.874 adolescentes de 14 a 19 anos de idade (57,8% do sexo feminino), do ensino médio das redes pública e privada no município de João Pessoa, PB. O tempo excessivo de foi definido como assistir televisão, usar o computador e jogar videogames por mais de duas horas por dia. Os fatores associados analisados foram: sociodemográficos (sexo, idade, classe econômica, cor da pele), prática de atividade física e estado nutricional do adolescente.

Resultados: A prevalência de tempo excessivo de tela foi de 79,5% (95%IC: 78,1–81,1) e mais elevada no sexo masculino (84,3%) comparado com o feminino (76,1%; $p < 0,001$). Na análise multivariada, verificou-se que os adolescentes do sexo masculino, de 14 a 15 anos idade e aqueles que pertenciam às classes econômicas mais altas apresentaram maiores chances de exposição ao tempo excessivo de tela. O nível de atividade física e o estado nutricional dos adolescentes não se associaram ao tempo excessivo de tela.

Conclusões: A prevalência do tempo excessivo de tela foi elevada e variou com as características sociodemográficas dos adolescentes. Faz-se necessário desenvolver intervenções para reduzir o tempo excessivo de tela entre os adolescentes, particularmente nos subgrupos com maior exposição.

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Introduction

Sedentary behaviors are low energy expenditure activities (≤ 1.5 metabolic equivalent – MET), usually performed in a sitting or reclining position, including activities such as watching television, using the computer, sitting at school, on the bus, in a car, at work, talking with friends, among other similar activities.¹ The measure of the daily time that adolescents spend watching television, playing videogames and using the computer, called screen time, is one of the most often used methods to assess sedentary behavior in studies with adolescents.²

It is recommended that children and adolescents dedicate a maximum of 2 h a day to screen time.³ The report from the Health Behavior in School-Age Children (HBSC),⁴ carried out with adolescents aged 11, 13 and 15 years from 41 countries in Europe and in North America, disclosed that 56–65% of them spent 2 h or more per day watching television. Data from the National Adolescent School-based Health Survey (PeNSE),⁵ carried out with ninth-grade students from public and private elementary schools in all Brazilian capitals and the Federal District, showed that 78% of the students reported watching television for 2 h or more a day. A systematic review of studies with Brazilian adolescents showed that in 60% of the studies analyzed, the prevalence of excessive screen time was over 50%.⁶

Studies on excessive screen time among Brazilian adolescents have been almost always performed regarding time spent watching television, involving samples at young age groups and using different cut points.^{7,8} Moreover, in most cases, they were carried out in the south and southeast regions, reducing generalization of findings,⁶ due to the fact that these regions are economically more developed, which

promotes greater access to electronic devices (computer and Internet access), which would stimulate the adoption of sedentary behaviors.⁹ The National Sample Survey of Households (PNAD, 2013),⁹ showed that in the south and southeast regions the proportion of households with a computer is 52.9% and 56.5%, respectively, with Internet access being present in 44.6% and 50.2% of households, respectively. In the Northeast, this prevalence is lower, with 29.4% of households with a computer and 25.3% with Internet access.

The high prevalence of adolescents exposed to excessive screen time is a matter of concern because of its association with several health problems, such as overweight and obesity, alterations in blood glucose and cholesterol, poor school performance, decreased social interaction and lower levels of physical activity.^{10–12} It is also noteworthy the fact that excessive screen time in adolescence can persist into adulthood.¹³ However, the associations between excessive screen time measures and overweight/obesity in adolescents are still contradictory.^{14,15} These results may be related to the cut points used to define excessive screen time, as well as the employed measures (objective vs. subjective), the age groups of adolescents and the several study designs (cross-sectional vs. longitudinal).^{14,15}

Regarding the possible influences of excessive screen time on the physical activity levels of adolescents, the data are still insufficient to confirm the hypothesis that this behavior substitutes the time spent practicing moderate to vigorous physical activity.¹¹ When identified, the association between excessive screen time and physical activity levels of adolescents shows to be of low magnitude and varies according to the measure of physical activity used.^{1,2}

Information on the prevalence of adolescents in northeastern Brazil with excessive exposure to sedentary

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