

# The role of digital technology use among families with infants during the COVID-19 pandemic

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## Background and Aims

- Infancy is known to be a sensitive period for attachment security and child development, and a time of being susceptible to changes within and outside of the family unit.
- This study aimed to explore how families with infants were affected by COVID-19 restrictions, including:
  - family routines,
  - relationships, and
  - technology use (smartphones and tablet computers)

## Method

- 30 families of infants (9-15 months) recruited from The ORIGINS Project
- Interviewed by audio or video call
- Audio recordings were transcribed
- Thematic data analysis using NVivo
- Second researcher review
- Member checking of results summary

## Findings

**COVID-19 restrictions enhanced family relationships:**  
*"We've become more attached because we've had to stay at home together"*

**COVID-19 restrictions prompted reflection on family schedules:**  
*"Coronavirus reaffirmed the need for healthy habits & finding a nice balance"*

**COVID-19 increased parental stress:**  
*"It became very stressful because we were worried"*

### Perceived influences of COVID-19 restrictions on family interactions

**Devices enabled communication with family:**  
*"We had a number of family birthdays over Zoom"*

**Devices enabled activities to continue:**  
*"Even our physio exercise classes were on Zoom"*

**Devices were a source of disrupted interactions:**  
*"I was spending more time on my phone than with him [infant]"*

### Role of devices during COVID-19 restrictions among families interviewed

## Discussion and implications

- Overall, participants described more advantages than downsides of device use during COVID-19 restrictions.
- Nature of screen use was important rather than simply amount of screen use. Device use for communication and continuation of activities enhanced connectedness whereas less purposeful use led to increased distractions.
- Findings will be of value in providing useful information on wise technology use during future pandemic restrictions.

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