



Growing up in a digital world

The harmful consequences of children's excessive exposure to technology

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The tiny hands of a seven-year-old can barely hold an eight-inch tablet, but Riana had practice. The packed schedule of her working parents meant that since she was less than a year old, her only friends at home were her digital devices. Her days were spent watching videos online or playing games. As Riana grew older and got enrolled in school, she discovered that she had a difficult time making friends. Years went by and Riana became more and more isolated. Her only friends were

the strangers she had met online. Her parents began to notice changes in her behavior, including her habit of spending late nights crying. At the mere age of 14, Riana's world was shrouded by drug abuse and an intent for suicide. Her parents could only regret showing negligence during her developing years, since it had caused damage beyond repair.

This is a petrifying reality as we head towards "Digital Bangladesh" and see the rise of "digital" babies. Most of us are aware that excessive use of technology can have adverse effects, but just how

much does it affect young, developing minds?

Rafiath Rashid Mithila, Head of Early Childhood Development Programme, BRAC International, explains, "Overexposure to screen time has negative effects on the physiological, social, mental, and physical development of children aged below five years, as found in many research studies. Of course parents always want the best for their children and would never consciously put their children at risk. But since the usage and impacts of technology are rising, we, as parents and caregivers, need to educate ourselves

on the nitty-gritty harmful effects of overexposure to digital devices and nurture our kids accordingly. There are cyber predators out there, and a lot is happening in the cyber space which we might not even be aware of."

To paint a picture of the kind of child psychology cases that exist in Dhaka city due to the overexposure of technology, Dr Farzana Islam, Specialist and Head, Child Development Centre, Apollo Hospitals Dhaka, shares, "Children below the age of five are brought to our centre due to

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