Parenting in the digital age

We look in detail at data from a report by the London School of Economics

The report

Parenting has always had its difficulties, but perhaps family life is made more taxing these days when even very young children are so digital-savvy and parents and carers are working hard just to try to stay in touch. This is the subject of the latest report on Parenting for a Digital Future (2019) from social scientists Dongmiao Chang and Sonia Livingstone at the London School of Economics. Their research is based on responses from a nationally representative sample of 2,032 parents of children aged 0–17 years. What did they find out?

Families online by socioeconomic group

Predictably, perhaps, families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are slightly more digitally advantaged in terms of parental internet use to support their children (Figure 1). Other trends are perhaps a little more surprising.

Parental gender and ethnicity

Figure 2 shows that mothers are more likely than fathers to use online sources to help their children. The report also argues that mothers were more likely to agree that they knew where to get information and advice online to deal with ‘parental dilemmas’. Interestingly, British South Asian parents were also more likely to think that they were doing a good parenting job, followed by white and then black parents. What influences do you think might be in play here?

Mothers also seemed more knowledgeable about available online information and more satisfied about their life situation and the support they said they received from family and friends.

When do parents worry most?

Parental concern about the impact of online activity seemed to be highest for children at college or university levels (see Figure 3). Parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds mentioned more concerns about this online impact than those from lower classes. Why do you think this might be the case?

Advantaged parents reported more disagreements with their children than less advantaged ones over screen time, but no more conflicts over what their children actually do in terms of internet/phone use than those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Nor is there an ethnic divide in this respect. In short, digital culture produces new parental challenges, and socioeconomic and ethnicity factors do still matter, but this sample of parents seem to be resourceful and more than up to the task.

Reference


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