

Parents' Views on Mobile Phone Use: A Qualitative Interview Study on Parents with Children from 0-5 Years of Age in Norway

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Abstract

Mobile phones have become almost ubiquitous, including the lives of parents of young children. This paper examined the question of how parents with young children living in Norway perceive their phone usage. Twelve parents were interviewed individually about situations and for what purposes they used their phones, whether they had discussed mobile media with others and how they felt about it. Interviews were analyzed thematically. Parents reported using their phones mainly for information seeking and communication and networking in their role as parents. Mobile phones were evaluated as positive or helpful to parents. However, situations that were deemed to require parents' focused attention, such as playing or book-reading were considered inappropriate for using mobile phones, as were mealtimes. Situations in which children were occupied with playing or watching TV were considered acceptable for using mobile phones. Visits to the playground seemed controversial and situational. Being present emerged as a major theme of good parenting and even though brief and important usages of the phone were considered somewhat acceptable while with children, many parents reported feeling guilty about their usage. Several usage reduction strategies were described such as muting the phone or certain notifications or putting the phone away. Despite national guidelines recommending the topic, the majority had not received information about parental screen use from health care personnel. In contrast, many had discussed the topic with friends and family members, sometimes controversially. The results are briefly discussed in light of the previous research and the societal conditions in Norway.

Keywords: preschoolers, mobile media, parent-child interaction, ethnotheories, child-focused interaction, Scandinavia

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Introduction

The presence of mobile phones has become almost ubiquitous. In 2023, 96% of Norwegians between 9 and 79 years of age own a smart phone (Statistisk sentralbyrå, n.d.), including caregivers of small children. Studies around the world have shown that many parents (44-79%) used their phone while spending time with their children at the playground (Abels et al., 2018; Bury et al., 2020; Elias et al., 2020; Hiniker et al., 2015; Mangan et al., 2018; Ochoa et al., 2021), in eateries (Elias et al., 2020; Kiefner-Burmeister et al., 2020; Ochoa et al., 2021; Radesky et al., 2014) or health care waiting rooms (Abels et al., 2018), indicating that it is a common pattern in parents.

Using a mobile phone while spending time with a child is a powerful distraction from the child reducing the quantity, quality, and timeliness of parents' reactions (Abels et al., 2018; Radesky et al., 2014). Excessive parental mobile phone usage may, therefore, be related to infants' problems in developing a good relationship with their caregivers which may have long-term effects on them, as, for example attachment, theory proposes (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969; De Wolff & van Ijzendoorn, 1997). Children often react distressed to distracted parents (Kildare, 2017; Stockdale et al., 2020) and concerns about children's safety arise (Elias et al., 2020).

Research also suggests that parents' media use is related to child behavior problems (Mc Daniel & Radesky, 2018), specific delays in language development (Sundqvist et al., 2021) and social skills, for example establishing joint attention (Krapf-Bar et al., 2022). To explain these effects, researchers have put forward the *displacement hypothesis*, suggesting that interactions between parents and their children are substituted by media use (Coyne et al., 2014). Children may also miss out on developmental opportunities in other ways while parents are using their phones. Because of its small size and privateness, parents' use of a mobile phone makes it very difficult for children to understand and join into the activity, an effect which has been labeled „bystander ignorance” (Raudaskoski et al., 2017). The child is thereby robbed of opportunities to share the caregiver's attention or imitate their actions and experiences asynchronous emotional expressions (Raudaskoski et al., 2017). Another issue can be parents interfering with the child's developing ability to regulate emotions by letting the child use the phone or other media, for example to distract their children from distress or keep them calm (Elias & Lemish, 2021; John et al., 2023; Radesky, Peacock et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2022).

In contrast, there are also some potential positive sides to using mobile phones. Mobile phones help to build and maintain social networks (Rettie, 2008) which may be particularly important for new parents (Belsky & Rovine, 1984). Using their phones can provide parents with relief, social support, parenting advice and might help some to control their aggressions towards their child (Torres et al., 2021). Apps can provide information on child development to parents and deliver parenting

interventions, for example, on how to promote young children's health (DeWitt et al., 2022). Mobile phones can also provide educational opportunities for children (Rideout, 2014). Additionally, mobile phones can be used jointly by parents and children which can create a shared enjoyable experience (Wood et al., 2016) and may afford children with more agency than some other joint activities (Griffith & Arnold, 2019).

Considering this complex situation concerning the usage of mobile phones, it is not surprising that parents have divergent views on the topic. Some parents are serene about using their mobile phone when they are spending time with their children as long as their children are safe and happy (Hiniker et al., 2015). However, others feel that they are less connected or inattentive to their children when they are also using their phones (Hiniker et al., 2015; Kushlev & Dunn, 2019). Several studies have highlighted that there are parents, and this seems to be the largest group, who experience tensions, conflicts, or cognitive dissonance over their use of mobile devices (Hiniker et al., 2015; Johnson, 2017; Radesky, Kistin et al., 2016). Some of them try to devise strategies to use their phone less, for example by leaving it at home when visiting the playground with their child, but struggle with keeping their standards (Hiniker et al., 2015). Some explain that using their phones for work enables them to be with their children for longer periods of time (Radesky, Kistin et al., 2016).

How guilty parents feel might, therefore, differ depending on the way they use their phone (Torres et al., 2021). Similarly, parents' views might also be related to the cultural and societal context. For example, it might be less acceptable to use mobile media when spending time with children in places that reduce the necessity to engage in work and family obligations at the same time. Norway can be considered such a place as parents are provided with extended parental leave and affordable day care (OECD, 2023). Norwegian parents have a right to 12 months of full time, or up to three years part time paid parental leave. Daycare attendance for young children is funded so that no family has to pay more than 6% of their income for day care per child. In 2022, 93.4% of children between 1-5 years of age in Norway attended day care, the vast majority of them have fulltime places of 41 hours or more per week (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2023).

The goal of this study was, therefore, to explore how parents in Norway reflect on their own mobile phone use: concerning purposes and situations, changes with development and societal norms, including any information transmitted by the public health care system (see Helsedirektorat, 2017/2023). Children and their parents are invited for 14 consultations between birth and school entry (Helsenorge, 2023). The national guidelines for professionals in the infant healthcare program includes a strong recommendation to address parent-child interaction in every consultation, including information on the usage of screens and mobile phones (Helsedirektorat, 2017/2023). Parents are to be informed about the „interruptions, increased distraction and less attention to the child” screen usage and mobile phones can lead to and are

to be encouraged to make „simple rules” and develop „good habits” for their use of mobile phones and social media (Helsedirektorat, 2017/2023).

Our study sought to also discuss the positive and acceptable aspects of mobile phone use among parents, aiming to provide an alternative perspective to the predominantly negative narrative in Norwegian media. Media coverage, influenced by a TV segment (NRK, 2016) and two articles in the Norwegian Nursing Association’s journal (Hansen et al., 2017; Jensen, 2017), has largely portrayed parental mobile phone use as problematic. One article claimed that „mobile phone use can be a silent form of neglect” (Jensen, 2017), without citing existing research. Another group of authors acknowledged some research but still cautioned against potential negative impacts on emotional availability, parent-child interactions, and stressed infants (Hansen et al., 2017). They also lamented parents’ lack of knowledge about „possible harmful effects” of mobile phone usage (Hansen et al., 2017). Media headlines echoed: „Parents, put away the phone!” (Eriksen, n.d.) (or „Parents’ use of mobile phones can damage the interaction” (Ditlefsen, 2018). Our study aimed at gaining an in-depth insight into parents’ view taking both positive and negative aspects into consideration.

Method

Participants

Twelve parents (six male, six female, including one couple) aged 29–48 participated in the study. Seven of them had one child between two and five years of age, four participants had two and one participant had three children in this age range. Some parents additionally had older children, up to 15 years of age. Eleven participants owned a smartphone, one father owned a mobile phone without smartphone functions but had access to his wife’s smartphone when she was home. Two fathers and one mother were originally not from Norway but had lived there for several years and were fluent in Norwegian, in which the interviews were conducted. The study was approved by The Research Ethics Committee at the Institute for Psychology at UiT The Arctic University of Norway and the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). A requirement for participation was that parents had at least one child between 0 and 5 years of age. Participants were recruited through the interviewers’ social networks (five participants), online postings (three participants), approaching parents at a playground (two participants) and snowballing (two participants). Participants did not receive any compensation for participation.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted individually by the second or third author either digitally using a videotelephony-app (eight) or in person (four) in the fall of 2021. The study was explained to the participants and consent was established before the

start of the interview, followed by an assessment of demographic information. Interviews lasted 30-60 minutes and loosely followed an interview guide (see Appendix) containing main and follow-up questions developed by the research team beforehand following the research questions described above. Interviews focused on parents' daily use of mobile phones and particularly as parent. Participants were encouraged to reflect on these behaviors and whether/how they had changed when becoming a parent and with the child's development. Interviewers tried to probe for individual and societal norms and included questions on exchanges between parents and recommendations by the health care system.

Analysis

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was done mainly on a semantic level incorporating both inductive and deductive elements. The interviews were initially analyzed by the second and third author as documented in Augustson & Klepaker (2021). Disagreements in the analysis and interpretation of the data were discussed and resolved by the team of authors. The team reanalyzed, recontextualized and rephrased some of the results for this publication.

Results

The results will be presented in three sections. The first section is a description of how and in which circumstances parents report using their phones. The second section deals with „being present” which was identified as a major parenting theme and whether and, if so, how this can be reconciled with using a mobile phone. The final section is about exchanges with the health care system and parents' social network.

Using the Phone as a Parent of a Small Child

Parents with small children use their mobile phones for a variety of tasks beyond parenting, including communication, social media, news, shopping, and entertainment. Some parents avoid work-related activities when with their children. For example, Aron¹ stated: „When I am done at work, I don't think of checking e-mail.” Others find it beneficial to stay connected to work at home; Marthe: „I get more peace of mind when I have looked a bit over things in relation to work.”

In their parenting role, parents frequently use their phones to gather information on child development (for which some used apps), health, child-related events, or directions. They generally view mobile phone usage as having positive aspects in

¹ All participants' names are pseudonyms.

parenting. Some parents also used the phone for educational purposes with their children. Lars explained: „We often pick up our mobile and google and show a picture; ‘This is what a platypus looks like’.” Communication and networking were also mentioned, for example, apps to communicate with day care/leisure clubs, communication with other parents, and joint (video) conversations with distant family members. Some also talked about taking pictures or videos.

While few had any thoughts on changes in their phone use throughout the child’s development, some tried to document their child’s development, for example first steps or learning to ride a bicycle. This served as a personal memento and to update with distant family or on social media. The latter was quite controversial, however. Morten explained: „I dislike all parents of young children who post pictures of their children online, also my friends. Such a weird ‘bragging’ thing.”

Children also occasionally used parents’ devices on their own for education or entertainment. In contrast, other parents tried to shield their children from their mobile phones. For example, Aron stated: „We never showed him anything. No, we have tried to keep him away”. Espen explained: „While one of us is with the child, the other one can sneak away for a few minutes to check something on the mobile”.

Changes When Becoming a Parent

Parents reported very different reactions in terms of their mobile phone use when becoming a parent, which could be related to different initial phone use levels. Some participants reported that they had *decreased* or made an effort to reduce their mobile phones use. As Silje stated: „You TRY to use your phone less than before.” Some are busier as parents, for example Lars: „I use it [the mobile phone] less than before, but that has rather ‘natural causes’ than that it is a conscious choice. (smiles) It is just that there is so much else happening.” Several also pointed out how little time they have on weekdays with their children between picking them up from daycare and bedtime.

Some parents felt that their phone use was *unchanged*. One mother also noted that she *increased* her mobile phone usage as the phone is important to help her organize her children’s lives, for example by communicating with the daycare or the sports club. Stine explained: „It is easier than the [information] sheets that come from the daycare; they post it [the information] directly there [in the app]. I think that is much better than a note in the bag.”

Situations

Participants were asked about using their mobile phone in different situations or during different activities with their children and how they perceive the societal norms around this. Participants agreed that it is generally inappropriate and socially unacceptable to use phones during interactive activities like playing or reading

bedtime stories to children. Using phones at mealtimes, especially dinner, was also frowned upon. As Silje explained: „Of course, when you sit around the table and eat or talk or do something such as playing a game or drawing or..., I don't think it's ok [to use the phone]”.

One participant felt that there may be more social acceptance for phone usage during dinnertime than he personally deemed appropriate. Lars: „I would think that the threshold for what is socially accepted is lower, but there are many good conversations during meals that may not happen as well if you are sitting with the phone.” Several admitted to occasionally breaking this rule. Anna stated: „We also have a rule that we do not use mobile phones or screens during meals. And that also applies to me and my husband. But we can forget sometimes.”

In contrast, situations in which children were absorbed in their own play or watching TV were seen as opportunities to use their mobile phones by most parents. For example, Andreas states: „If he is relaxing in front of the TV or something like that, it can happen that I take the mobile in that situation”. One parent did not feel it was ok, arguing with the little amount of time they spend with the children anyway, one said that they use their phone despite their children protesting. Silje: „I think that it is more acceptable when they get to watch children's TV, even though I have been told [by the child] 'But you are not watching the film'.” One parent also expressed conflicted feelings. Ida: „I notice that maybe I should watch more with them and talk about what we watched [instead of using the phone]... But it's limited how interesting it is sometimes”.

The scenario of spending time with your children at the playground produced varying opinions. Some parents avoided phone use to be more engaged, for example, Valentina: „I don't usually take my mobile phone to the playground. I have found that to be the best, because then I actually get to be with them.” Other felt it was acceptable to use their phones if their children were playing independently. Ida: „You are allowed to sit down and see that now they are playing so well that you can look [at the mobile phone].” However, there was concern about parents becoming too absorbed in their phones, leading to inadequate supervision and potential harm. Lars: „the parents still just sit and look down at the mobile phone while they [the children] pretty much beat each other to death with rocks and sticks and mess with other kids”. There is also concern about children being unable to reach their parents. Marthe describes some situations:

A youngster who stands at the top of the climbing frame and shouts, who cannot get in contact. And, for example, the child who stands by his mother's leg and says „Mummy, mummy“ and she just goes „yes, yes” and „I will just...” all the time.

There is a perception that this could be detrimental to children's development. Silje: „If you are on the phone at all times, the child does not get that attachment.” Other participants were confident that (their) children react to their phone usage and

manage to get their attention. As Ida remarked: „They usually give notice and demand that we join when they want us to join... So it is not very often that we are allowed to just sit there.”

Parents' Circumstances

Several participants also brought up the topic of the Covid pandemic commenting on their children's increased screen usage and challenges of working from home. Anna: „Then you sort of had to use a monitor as a babysitter at home. Although it's not exactly ideal.” They commented on online meetings interrupted by noisy children or a child with a stomachache. Some participants also described how they themselves used mobile media more to keep updated.

Parents' mobile phone use may increase when parents feel bored, tired, or stressed. Marthe elaborates: „And I'm a bit of an impatient person, so then I kind of have to catch myself checking the online newspaper, while he bustles. So, I'm trying to do less of it, but I'm so incredibly bored.” Samuel comments on how the phone helps him recover:

If I'm very, very exhausted by the children, I can just say „Okay, now I'm just going to go out and sit for a bit” and then I sit for 15 minutes with my smartphone and get some rest with entertainment.

Some also described how using the phone seems easier or is a way out when children are somewhat demanding. Valentina:

When it rings, just: „Easier to take it”. And then there's something about having had a long day at work and actually being a bit exhausted, and then you're about to enter a new role-play. So, you think it's easier to pick up the phone and get a little out of it.

Some also mention the mobile as a way to make good use of their unpredictable time. Samuel gives an example:

My son pooped ... when we were on our way out, and my wife changes him and gives him new clothes and „whatever“, then 10 minutes can easily pass where you just stand and wait, so it's good to pick up the phone and check some e-mails. So, in that way it gives a good balance; that if you hadn't had a smartphone, you would have just stood and waited for 10 minutes and gotten annoyed and done nothing.

Some cautioned that they are unaware of the observed parents' reasons and circumstances which might be challenging. As Lars puts it: „I'm not with them 24 hours a day, so there may be a good reason why that person sits like that [with a phone] during the entire playground stay.” And Valentina speculates. „those who sit with that mobile phone... are also those who have small networks of people around

them. They have no relief relationship with an aunt or someone they can ask to take them [the children].”

Being Present - a Major Parenting Theme

The Tension Between Using Mobile Media and Being Present

A topic and concern that appeared in many interviews was that of „being present” („til stede”), attentive, concentrated or focused on the child. The mobile phone was seen as a distractor in this context. For example, Espen explained: „I sort of try to be completely aware and present where one is all the time. That’s perhaps one of the advantages of not having a smartphone.” Most felt that it is part of being a good parent to be present in this sense in their children’s lives. As Morten stated: „You think you’re a bad person, at least I do. When I choose away the children, being present in the children’s lives.” Not everyone agreed that being focused on the children defines a good parent. Samuel stated:

I feel that my children need security from me. As long as I am consistent, give them love and I am there for them when they need it.... So, I feel that is really the most important thing for them.

He observed that it did not make a difference to his children when he used his phone but argued that this might also be an effect of having several, very active children who play with each other and keep each other entertained.

Stine on the other hand described that her younger child showed very aversive reactions towards her parents’ using their phones. However, she also raised the question whether using the phone is actually different from other activities that parents engage in. When comparing knitting to using the mobile phone she said: „[during knitting] I was as much in that zone as I am when I use my mobile phone, that you concentrate, and then you zone out a little what is around you.”

In the context of using a mobile phone and not being present, some parents argued that constant presence may not actually be a good idea either. Valentina:

But if the children play nicely with the others, it is a great way for the children to develop and begin to know themselves without you interfering. And it doesn’t matter to me if some parents are sitting and actually looking at... their mobile phones.

While there seem to be situations that do not require parents’ constant presence, participants were concerned about excessive phone use and that parents who are involved in their phone might neglect their children’s supervision, for example on the playground (see also section „Situations”). Morten described another situation he had found himself in:

So, I pick up my phone to check it, and he gets to stand there and scream a bit. Then he disappeared within half a minute. Then I had to go look for my son who had gone far away.

Prioritizing Quick Messages and Important Content

The urge to be present in their children's lives led many parents to delay mobile phone use until after their children's bedtime. Ida: „You manage to put all other things on hold” However, Silje countered: „Can't postpone everything until the kids have gone to bed, then you won't get to sleep yourself.” Participants also acknowledged exceptions when immediate responses were necessary, such as for group work or answering a partner's query about shopping and differentiated between the duration and purpose of phone use, tolerating brief checks and important tasks. Marthe for example commented: „It happens that I read e-mails. ... I feel it is more allowed since it is work-related. ... What I think is worse is with such entertainment things”.

Despite these intentions, some admitted to occasionally getting absorbed and regretting it afterwards. Lars: „If you're tired and bored, it's very easy to lie down on the sofa and surf on your mobile, and then you realize after half an hour, 'Maybe I should have done something sensible instead'.”

Belief-Behavior Discrepancies and Usage Reduction Strategies

Many participants struggled with the high expectation of being fully present for their children, leading to feelings of guilt when they found themselves using their mobile phones more than they believed they should. This discrepancy between belief and behavior was a source of self-criticism and a perception of being a „bad” parent. Silje put it this way: „You get a bad conscience and know that now you are a bad mother”. Marthe suggested using others as a daunting example: „I kind of think of the parent who is scrolling while pushing their child on the swing. I think about others that it is inappropriate, so then I have to sharpen up. I can't do that, act that way”.

Participants described that they had come up with phone use reduction strategies. Some had rules for usage but as discussed earlier, some found it difficult to follow them. Therefore, some had devised other strategies. They put away their phones, muted the phone or turned off certain notifications or chose not to engage in certain social media. Marthe described her routine when returning from home: „Right inside the door we have a shoe cabinet, so I put it [the phone] on top of it, so I don't have it on me or with me when I get home from work.”

Morten explained how he has tried to regulate his usage:

I have deliberately chosen to remove almost all the apps, Facebook and messenger and apps that can give notifications. I have deliberately made it a bit cumbersome for myself. To go on Facebook, I have to log into the website.

Most found these methods effective, while others still struggled with the urge to respond to their phones. Valentina: „If I see it ringing, I think 'I'll probably have to pick up that phone', and then I try not to pick it up, but I know I'll pick it up.”

Others seemed to feel that their usage was in tune with their standards. Espen, for example, did not own a smartphone and was, therefore, not particularly in danger of being drawn in. On the other hand, there were also parents who use their phone but felt their usage is not overly problematic. Ida: „I don't think I'm terribly unhealthy". And Samuel stated: „I feel that I have sacrificed so much for my children that if I have some time on my mobile, it is well deserved“.

Exchanges with Others

Information From the Health Care System

Eight participants could not remember having received information from the health care system or other public services about their media usage. However, two of them mentioned being aware of information regarding families and media. Espen claimed: „We tend to seek such information ourselves. We have looked at a report on children and screen use, which is perhaps the one that is mentioned most frequently". Two parents reported having talked about children and screen time with the public health nurse, but not their own screen time. Marthe explains that thinking about children's screen use has also affected her own. „So, it is the case that if you are concerned about children's screen use, then you will have to be more observant of your own screen use, especially around the child.”

In contrast, only four participants clearly remember having talked about parental screen time to either the public health nurse or in daycare. Silje says: „I feel mobile phone use is often a topic with the public health nurse when you are there... But then it's like when the kids get older, you don't get that reminder as often". She also reports having been shown a video in which a child's reaction to their distracted mother is shown which she found very striking. She stated that „of course, it works [to create awareness], but then you kind of forget about it.” The others were told to mind their usage or the importance of being present for the child was highlighted.

Family and Friends

Few participants encountered opinions on mobile media use that significantly differed from their own. Lars described a full range of behaviors, positioning himself in the middle:

I have friends who are extremely conscious of mobile phone and tablet use, ... where you have to leave your mobile phone in the hallway when you come to visit. Other friends of mine are completely at the other end; if they are busy with their mobile phone or tablet, they are busy with that, and then they have informed the children that they must wait until the parents have finished with that, and then it is the children's turn afterwards.

Several participants had not talked to friends about using mobile media. One stated that his timing for starting a family had not been aligned with his friends'.

Samuel stated that it is not an important topic to his friends, who „have much more significant problems.”

However, mobile media usage did surface as a potential source of conflict, particularly between partners or with extended family members. Disagreements arose over all aspects mentioned in previous sections, such as the amount or situational appropriateness of phone use. Morten: „it is a discussion between me and my wife. How much mobile phone you use in everyday life when you try to be present in the reality we are in now. We argue a lot about it.” Lars describes a disagreement in an acquainted couple about media content:

The man in that relationship was so frustrated because he thought his wife was using her mobile for such brain-dead things. When he used his mobile phone, he thought it was for sensible things like e-mail or looking up things or something else productive, while she just played Candy Crush and the like, which is just nothing.

Espen who did not have a smartphone and felt like „the last dinosaur” because of that said: „It is a bit different how we do this, compared to the rest of the world, in a way.” This also led to tensions with the grandparents who used their phones while visiting which Espen considered inappropriate. There were others who commented on extended family members’ mobile phone use as well which they perceived as excessive.

Discussion

To the parents of small children in Norway interviewed for this study, being present emerged as a major parenting ideal. They saw mobile phone usage as an impediment to fulfilling this goal. They described situations that entailed active participation from parents, such as playing with or reading to the children, that they found unacceptable as an arena for using their mobile phone. In situations that required less attention from their side, in cases in which they used their phones only briefly or for important things, they were more lenient. However, they also experienced guilt and bad consciousness for being inconsistent and this despite them finding mobile media positive and helpful in their daily lives as parents. To help them reduce their phone use, parents had devised different strategies, such as putting the phone away or turning notifications off or silent. Surprisingly few had received information from the healthcare system, but many had discussed using mobile media with their friends and family members, sometimes controversially.

The results replicate earlier findings that there are both parents confident in their (non) use of mobile media and many parents who are conflicted and devise strategies to control their usage (Hiniker et al., 2015). Many may experience a certain degree of cognitive dissonance (see Johnson, 2017) and justifying short and important usages, as well as when children are busy with TV or play could be an attempt to reduce this.

The two sides of the mobile phone seen and described by parents in this study, reflect the research. On the one hand, parents perceive it as distracting to the parents and endangering the relationship and therefore several parents try to shield their children from mobile phones completely. Few parents in this study talked about concrete developmental effects of parental distraction, such as behavioral issues, language delays or delays in social development that have been shown in previous research (Krapf-Bar et al., 2022; Mc Daniel & Radesky, 2018; Sundqvist et al., 2021). However, their concern about being present seems to tie in well with developmental theories, like attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1978), that emphasize the necessity of being aware and reacting promptly and appropriately to the child's signals. Some parents report children's protest and were concerned about children's safety which is another aspect reflected in the research on mobile phones' effects (Elias et al., 2020; Kildare, 2017; Stockdale et al., 2020). A „bystander ignorance” (Raudaskoski et al., 2017) does not seem to be a concern for parents in our study.

On the other hand, mobile phones can be a helpful tool that makes organizing a family, getting information, communicating, and managing challenging states, such as boredom or tiredness, easier. While some of these uses have been reported as positive earlier (for previous research results see Rettie, 2008, and Torres et al., 2021), the apps that help organizing communication between families and institutions seem like a newer development that has not received research attention, yet and that, as many of the usages of the mobile phone, causes some ambivalence. Educational and joint uses that our interview partners mentioned have also been reported as advantageous in previous research (Rideout, 2014; Wood et al., 2016).

Some of the results seem to directly reflect the society these families live in, for example, that work-related context was a rather small topic in the interviews. This is in line with social policies (e.g., OECD, 2023), that protect parents to some degree from the necessity to juggle work and family life while at home. The topic of COVID-related challenges seems to support the idea that job-related multi-tasking is not common in non-pandemic times. Almost universal full-time daycare makes the time spent with children after daycare limited and particularly precious, which may be related to the request for parental presence. Parents stressing the small amount of time they can spend with their children seems to indicate that they believe in the mobile phone as a „displacement” for time spent together (Coyne et al., 2014). There does not seem to be any concern regarding their children's „bystander ignorance” (Raudaskoski et al., 2017) by the parents. Interestingly, the majority of the interview partners had not received any information on their phone use from the public health system or could not remember it, even though there are clear recommendations about this (Helsedirektoratet, 2017/2023). The discrepancy in healthcare guidelines and parents' awareness about receiving information about their own mobile phone usage and its effects, raises questions for pre- and interventive efforts, and if further/more

focus and follow-up and improving communication regarding the topic could be beneficial.

A shortcoming of the study was the small sample of volunteers that may have been particularly prone to reflecting their mobile phone usage critically and may, therefore, not represent the general population. Background variables, such as gender, profession, parents' origin, or children's age may influence parents' perceptions and could not be studied systematically in this study but should be included in future research. As this study is based on parents' self-reports, it does not illuminate parents' behavior or children's views which would also be interesting research questions for the future.

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Appendix

Interview Guideline (translated from Norwegian)

For many, smartphone use is an indispensable part of everyday life and is becoming more and more widespread. With areas of use from work, school, leisure and for more social or entertainment activities, we are increasingly concerned with having the mobile phone available. When one becomes a parent, it often becomes more difficult to use it in the same areas you previously did. We wonder how this is for you.

1. What do you use your mobile phone for on a daily basis?
2. In your role as a parent of young children, have you made any changes in your areas of use?

If so, which ones?

- Have you had to change your mobile phone habits or have had to regulate your own mobile phone use in some manner? In what ways and how did you do it that way?
3. What would you say has been the „most important“ area of use in your role as a parent?
 - Have there been any particularly positive consequences of the accessibility you have via mobile, that has helped/simplified the family situation during this period?
 4. Has „mobile phone use as a parent“ been a topic that has been brought up when you were at the health center or possibly during home visits from the midwife/nurse?
 - If so: What did you talk about then?
 5. When you spend time with the child, in which situations do you think it is more acceptable to use the mobile phone and in which situations is it not acceptable? Why do you think so?
 - Have there been situations where you felt you had to „multitask“ when giving attention to the mobile phone, when you were doing something with your child?
 - Are there situations where you felt that you used your mobile phone too much or got carried away and got a bad conscience?
 - In what ways can your mobile phone use benefit the child and your interaction?

- Have there been situations in which play/interaction with the child has been interrupted because you gave attention to the mobile phone? In what way?
6. Has the topic of mobile phone use been raised in social contexts with other parents of young children?
- If yes, have opinions come up that differ from yours?

Which ones?

- Does it happen that you think other parents mobile phone use excessively?

How does that look?

- Has it happened that others have pointed out your mobile use?

If so, did you agree with what was said?

7. What do you think is the socially accepted use of mobile phones among other parents of young children?
- What do you think are the norms in society in general?
 - What would others think if you were on your mobile phone in certain situations? (the playground, playing, meals, TV, the bus, breastfeeding, etc.)
8. Have different developmental milestones in your child (EXPLAIN) led to you using the mobile phone less or more in that period? (crawling, walking, language, learning)
- If yes: Why?
 - If the participant(s) have several children between 0 and 5 years of age: Is there a difference in how much you are on the mobile phone with each of the children?
 - If yes: In what way?

