Scotland Moves

Technoference harms health and development in early childhood

Research Digest



University of Strathclyde Glasgow

What the research study did and found; Scottish context

A systematic review by Toledo-Vargas et al. (2025) examined whether 'technoference'—i.e., parental use of technology in the presence of their young child—was associated with adverse developmental outcomes..

Higher levels of technoference were associated with poorer cognitive performance, higher levels of internalising and externalising problems, less secure attachment, and higher levels of screen time among young children. Another recent systematic review found that one of the strongest predictors of screen time in children aged 3–4 years was parental screen time (Azevedo et al., 2026).

Early childhood development has a major influence on later health and educational outcomes and contributes to entrenched socio-economic inequalities in those outcomes. Families should be supported to reduce technoference. Despite its role in children's health, screen time has received little attention in Scottish public health policy (Tomaz et al., 2024). Policymakers should take action to address screen time in early childhood in order to support young children's health and development.

Toledo-Vargas et al. (2025). Parental Technology Use in a Child's Presence and Health and Development in the Early Years.

Scotland Moves Research Digests

Scotland Moves research digests are summaries of potentially transformative recent research studies, covering important health behaviours (physical activity, screen time, sleep, diet), outcomes (obesity, physical fitness, motor competence, physical literacy, early childhood development), influences on those behaviours and outcomes (policy, community and environment, family and peers, schools), and inequalities (by age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status).



Contributors



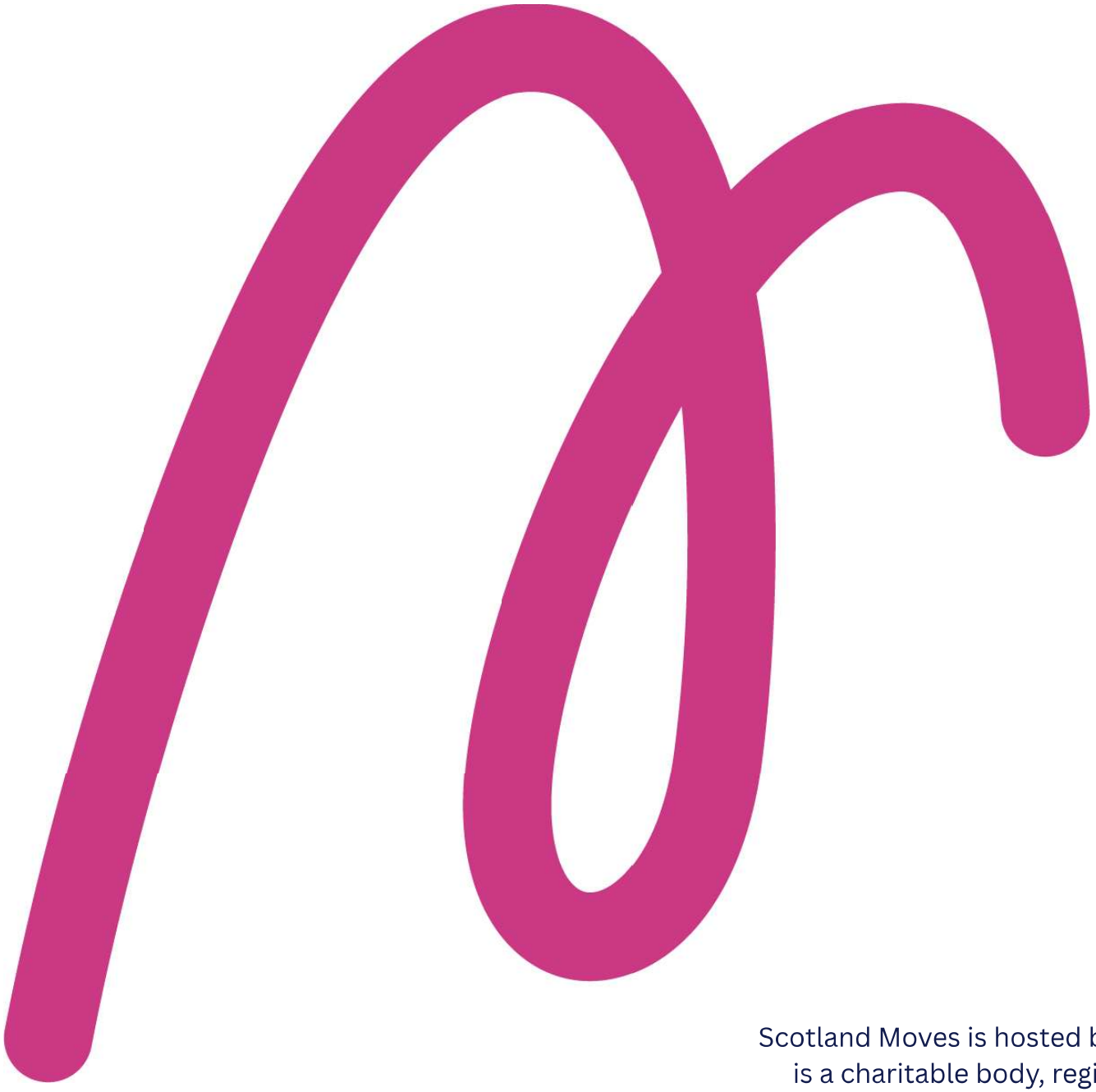
Professor John Reilly



Dr Farid Bardid



Dr Paul McCrorie



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