

# Family Functioning During Mealtime Among Children with and without Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: The Role of Screenime



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## INTRO

- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is characterized by symptoms of inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity and is often associated with behavioral challenges that disrupt daily functioning (Overgaard et al., 2025).
- Families of children with ADHD report worse family functioning compared to families of typically developing (TD) children (Bhide et al., 2023), especially during shared activities like mealtimes (Matthews, Pigden-Bennett, Tavassoli, & Snuggs, 2025).
- Screen presence (e.g., TV, smartphones, tablets) has been associated with poorer family dynamics compared to no technology during mealtimes (Cimino & Cerniglia, 2025).
- Limited research has examined family functioning *and* screentime during mealtimes in families of young children with and without ADHD.
- The current study examines (**Aim 1**) mealtime functioning between families of children with and without ADHD and (**Aim 2**) whether screen presence during mealtimes relates to family functioning across groups.

## METHODS

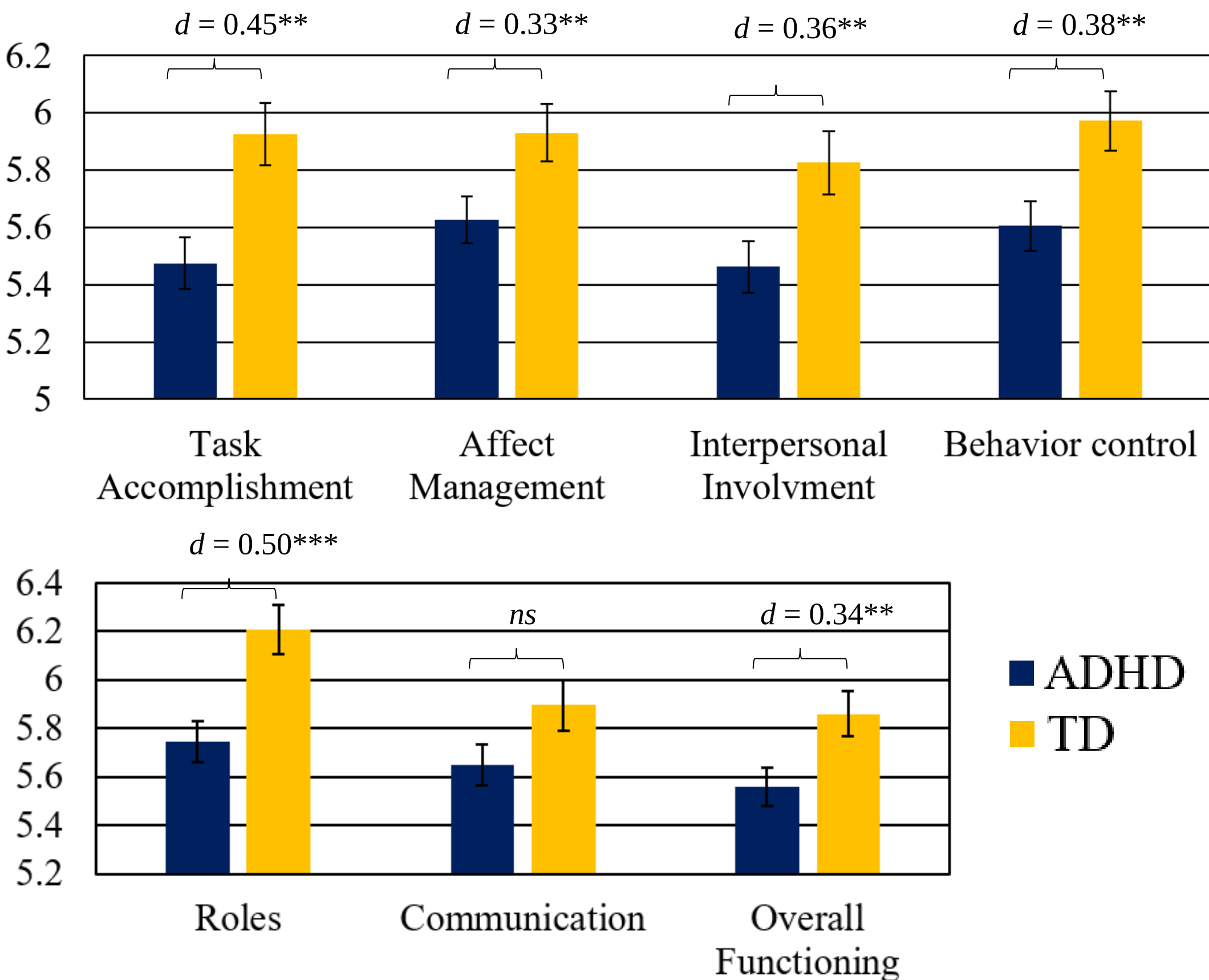
**Participants**  
223 children (67% males; Mean age =5.48 yrs. *SD* = 0.74 yrs, 81% Latinx)  
ADHD *n* = 127 (19.7% screen present)  
TD *n* = 96 (12.5% screen present)

**Measures**  
Mealtime Family Interaction Coding System (MICS; Dickstein, Hayden, Schiller, Seifer, San Antonio, 1994): The MICS taps into 7 domains (task accomplishment, communication, affective involvement, interpersonal involvement, behavior control, roles, overall functioning) that are coded on a 7-point scale (1 = very unhealthy to 7 = very healthy). Trained coders demonstrated acceptable inter-rater reliability across all domains (ICCs > .75).  
Screentime: Screentime was coded as whether a screen (e.g., smart phone, television, iPad, videogame) was present or not (yes/no).

## RESULTS

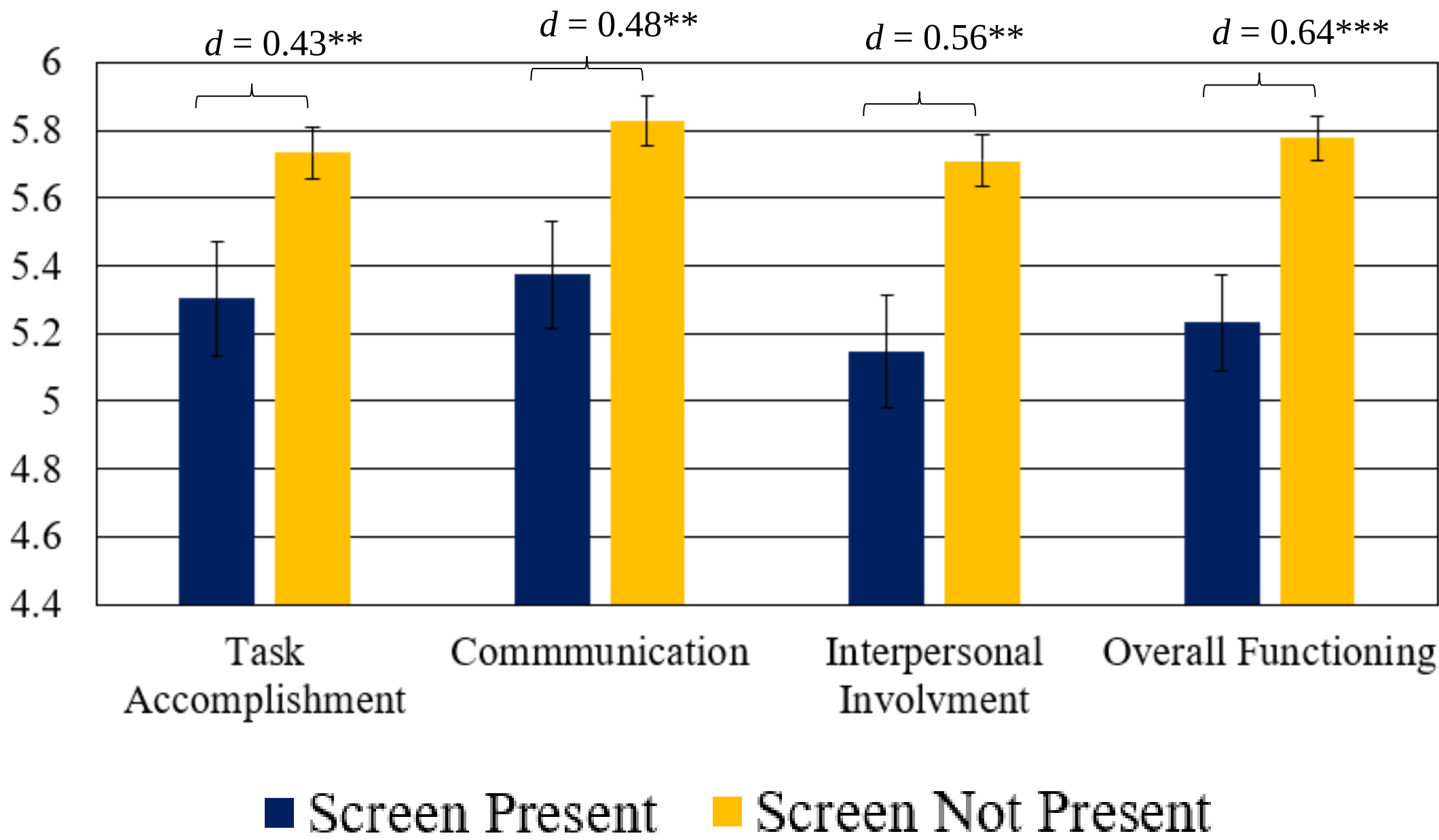
Across both families of children with and without ADHD, the presence of a screen during mealtime is associated with worse task accomplishment, communication, interpersonal involvement, and overall functioning

**Figure 1.** Differences in MICS Categories Between Families of Children with and without ADHD



Note. \*\*\* *p* < .001, \*\* *p* < .05. *d* = Cohen's *d* effect size indicates differences between the groups. MICS = Mealtime Family Interaction Coding System. ADHD = Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. TD = typically developing.

**Figure 2.** Differences in MICS Categories Between Families with and without a Screen Present During Mealtime



Note. \*\*\* *p* < .001, \*\* *p* < .05. *d* = Cohen's *d* effect size indicates differences between the groups.

## DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

- Families of children with ADHD displayed poorer mealtime functioning across multiple domains, highlighting mealtimes as a sensitive context for family challenges.
- While screen presence did not differ by diagnostic group, its presence was linked to worse functioning across several key areas, highlighting the potential impact of screentime on mealtime dynamics regardless of diagnosis.
- Interventions aimed at reducing screen use during mealtimes may strengthen family dynamics and promote healthier family interactions, regardless of child diagnostic status.
- Future work should explore the contextual factors that influence mealtime dynamics (e.g., symptom severity, comorbidities, and parental mental health) and how to support positive interactions, particularly in families of children with ADHD.



## CONTACT INFORMATION

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