

SCROL

Research Summary



Kenya



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Safety for Children and their Rights OnLine



Understanding Parents and Caregivers' Roles in Preventing and Responding to Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC)

This research study explores the crucial role of parents and caregivers in preventing and responding to Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC) in Kenya. As part of Terre des Hommes Netherlands' (TdH NL) broader Safety for Children and their Rights OnLine (SCROL) programme, which spans Cambodia, Kenya, Nepal, and the Philippines, this study examines how parental involvement affects children's vulnerability or resilience to OSEC. Collaborating with local partners, the research investigates parenting norms, digital challenges, and children's vulnerabilities, with special attention to marginalised groups.

Context

Kenya leads Africa's digital landscape with 63.9M mobile connections but faces significant gaps). While 40% of households have internet access, stark disparities exist: 90% of young adults use the internet versus 40% of those over 55, and women are 39% less likely to access mobile internet than men (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2024). The digital divide is concerning: 67% of youth (12-17) heavily use social media, while 48% of caregivers lack digital access and skills (ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF, Disrupting Harm in Kenya, 2022). This disconnect, worsened by COVID-19, has increased child vulnerability online. Economic pressures have pushed minors into online work, with disabled and impoverished children at the highest risk. Despite protective laws and organisational support, resource limitations and cultural barriers challenge online child safety efforts.

Research Objectives

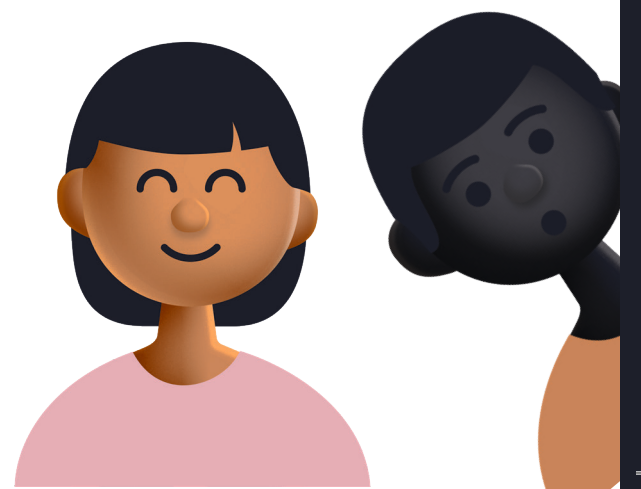
1. To assess parents' and caregivers' capacity and engagement in addressing OSEC in Kenya.
2. To understand how parenting and care norms and practices can impact children and young people's (CYP) risk or resilience to OSEC.
3. To understand what services, programmes, and support are available to parents and caregivers in relation to child protection generally and OSEC in particular.

Research Methodology

The research methodology followed rigorous ethical standards, beginning with approval from government-accredited institutions, including Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University (JOOUST) as the second ethical review board. Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was gathered through focus group discussions with 111 participants (including parents, children, and social workers) and 22 key informant interviews with various stakeholders. Secondary data analysis included a comprehensive review of Kenya's Cybercrimes Act (2018), UNICEF reports, and NGO case studies. The study also employed innovative participatory methods, where children mapped their digital footprints and expressed their understanding of online risks through creative means such as songs.

Limitations

- School calendar delays postponed child workshops.
- It was not possible to investigate questions related to diverse sexual orientations and gender identities due to legal and cultural considerations.
- Limited rural outreach left some communities underrepresented.



Key Findings

Parents' Digital Literacy Gap

- Many parents lack digital skills, while children dominate online spaces (e.g., TikTok, Instagram).
- Children teach parents how to use smartphones.
- Parents struggle to monitor online activity, leaving kids exposed to predators.

"I remember we were interviewing with some parents from Kisumu and Yore. They don't know anything about going online."

- Mother from Kisumu

COVID-19's Double-Edged Impact

- School closures led to more unsupervised internet use; some children were coerced into sharing explicit content.

"Neighbors offered laptops but showed kids pornography."

- NGO staff

"As a parent of a child with disabilities, the counselling helped me learn how to protect him online while understanding his unique challenges."

- Parent from Nairobi

"My children are in Busia with grandparents, and I can't control what they see online."

- Mother from Kisumu

Economic & Migration Pressures

- Poverty forces parents to migrate for work, leaving children with extended families who may not monitor online behaviour.

Community & NGO Interventions

- Childline Kenya's Helpline (116) helps report abuse.
- Shine Hope for Communities (SHOFCO)'s psychoeducation programs improved parent-child communication for OSEC survivors.
- The government's National Plan of Action (2022-2026) aims to block harmful sites and train parents.

Vulnerable Groups at Higher Risk

- Children with disabilities face bullying and exploitation due to limited digital safety knowledge.
- Slum communities experience extreme poverty, pushing children to seek risky online interactions.

Protective Factors



"When there are problems we discuss with pastors or imams, or religious women leaders, therefore we get adequate support from our religion."

- Mother from Kilifi

- Support networks through child protection services, local organisations and religious leaders, which provide essential resources and assistance to families facing online risks.
- Awareness and behaviour change initiatives through schools and communities, to promote prevention and reporting mechanisms.
- Safe spaces for children, such as community centres or supervised online and offline activities encourage safe socialisation and peer support.

Risks Factors



"I hate being monitored on what I do, sometimes when I am online maybe I am just browsing for school things or just chatting with friends."

- 15-year-old child from Nairobi

- Socio-economic challenges: poverty often limits parents' capacity to safeguard their children.
- Authoritative parenting that focuses on surveilling children and restricting access to devices and the Internet.



Recommendations

For Parents & Caregivers

- Participate in digital literacy workshops to effectively monitor children's online activity.
- Foster open communication about online risks.

For NGOs & Government

- Expand helplines (e.g., Childline 116) and community training.
- Enforce stricter penalties for OSEC offenders.
- Implement evidence-based services and programs to equip parents and caregivers with OSEC protection skills.
- Develop policies for online content promoters against having content that leads to OSEC.
- Integrate online safety into curricula.

For Tech Companies

- Enhance parental control features on apps.
- Reinforce work ethics against staff members participating in OSEC.
- The private sector should partner with NGOs or any stakeholders carrying out programs on parenting/caregivers' norms to fight against OSEC.

Recommendations for further research

Future research should explore sexual exploitation via SMS and other offline channels, particularly targeting children without smartphone access. Research is needed to examine how victims of online exploitation without proper support may perpetuate OSEC.



Any questions?

Contact us!

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