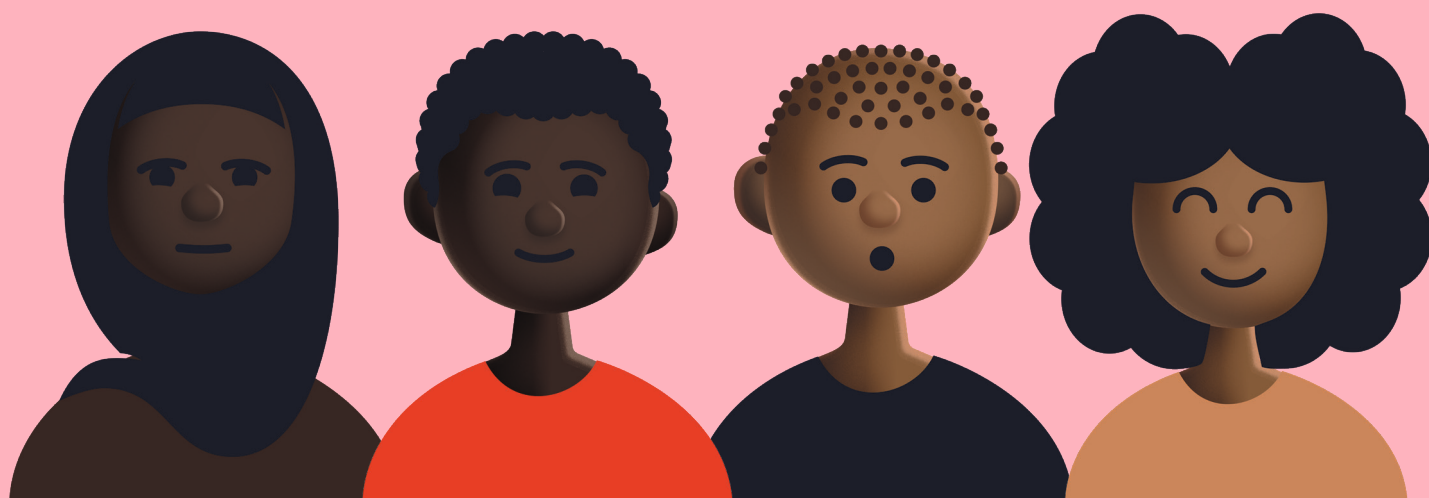


# SCROL

## Research Summary



**Nepal**



**SCROL**

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 Nepal. 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

Internet usage in Nepal reached 15.40 million users (49.6%) by January 2024, up 1.1% from 2023. Online engagement surged during COVID-19, with youth spending 10+ hours daily online, increasing from 7% to 24% (ChildSafeNet and UNICEF, 2020). While beneficial for learning, this brings risks through social platforms. The Internet Watch Foundation found child abuse materials on 250,000+ web pages in 2022, mostly self-generated through grooming. In Nepal, a 2020 UNICEF survey showed 20% of girls/young women and 10% of boys/young men experienced online sexual abuse. Parents struggle with digital literacy and language barriers, while cultural stigma hinders abuse reporting. The Act Relating to Children, 2018, lacks specific guidelines for addressing online violence against children.

## Research Objectives

1. To assess parents' and caregivers' capacity and engagement in addressing OSEC in Nepal.
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

This qualitative research was conducted in Kathmandu and Pokhara, Nepal. The study combined a comprehensive literature review with strict ethical standards, including informed consent from all participants. The research consisted of 12 focus group discussions (FGD) and 16 key informant interviews (KII), involving 112 participants in total. Participants included parents, children (ages 9-17), young people (ages 18-24), and NGO representatives. This methodology allowed researchers to gather in-depth insights into online child safety issues while maintaining contextual relevance. Before beginning the study, the research team obtained ethical approval from the Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC). All required documentation—including data collection tools, consent forms, timelines, and budgets—was translated into Nepali and submitted to the NHRC for clearance.

## Limitations

- The study was limited to urban and semi-urban areas, and findings may not be generalisable to rural regions.
- The sample size was small, and certain marginalised groups, such as out-of-school children, were underrepresented.
- The research relied solely on qualitative methods, and the absence of quantitative data limits the ability to generalize findings at the national level.



# Key Findings

## **Intergenerational Digital Divide:**

As first-generation internet users, parents struggle to understand and navigate their children's digital platforms. Many lack awareness of modern online risks such as grooming, sexual extortion, and cyberbullying. Meanwhile, children show high proficiency with platforms like Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram but often underestimate the associated risks.

## **Impact of Socio-economic Factors:**

A family's economic status significantly affects children's digital safety. Rural areas face particular challenges due to limited internet access and lower literacy rates, preventing parents from understanding and addressing digital risks. Economic migration disrupts family structures, reducing parental oversight and leaving children more vulnerable to online predators.

## **COVID-19 Impact:**

The pandemic increased children's online presence, exposing them to more significant online exploitation risks.

## **Intersectional Vulnerabilities:**

Marginalized groups face heightened online risks. LGBTQIA+ youth experience online hate, discrimination, and exploitation. Children with intellectual disabilities are more vulnerable while using digital platforms. Girls from lower socio-economic backgrounds face disproportionate online harassment and exploitation, often staying silent due to fears of victim-blaming and social stigma.

## **Cultural Norms and Communication Barriers:**

Cultural taboos about sexuality and exploitation prevent open family communication. Children hesitate to share their online experiences, especially those involving exploitation. Girls face additional constraints, fearing they will be blamed or lose access to digital tools if they report harassment.

## **Gaps in Legal and Policy Frameworks:**

Nepal's legal provisions—including the Act Relating to Children (2018) and Electronic Transactions Act (2008)—fail to address evolving digital crimes adequately. The absence of specific, enforceable guidelines for preventing online exploitation leaves families without proper support or justice options.

# Protective Factors



## **Individual Level Protections:**

Children with social media accounts set them to private, avoided interacting with strangers and only communicated with people who had verified profiles. They were cautious about accepting friend requests. OSEC is often reported to close ones like parents and siblings.

## **Family-Level Protections:**

Open communication between parents and children is crucial. Parents who foster trust and encourage dialogue are better equipped to protect their children from online risks.

## **Community-Level Initiatives:**

Community police, schools, and NGOs are vital in raising awareness about online safety. Collaborative efforts, such as awareness campaigns and training sessions, have proven effective in educating parents and children.

## **Institutional Support:**

NGOs and civil society organisations provide essential support services, including counselling, legal aid, and digital literacy training. However, their reach is often limited, particularly in rural areas.

# Risks Identified



*"A 13-year-old girl from a low-income household grew up in a broken family. Her father was working in foreign employment, her mother had eloped, and she initially lived with her 15-year-old brother in their relative's house. Lacking proper parental guidance, both siblings worked to support the household. This responsibility affected her education and took a toll on her mental health. Knowing her family's background and whereabouts, an adult male, whom she knew at the factory where she worked, befriended her on Facebook and lured her at night outside her rented place and then sexually abused her."*

**- Caregiver, Shelter Home, Pokhara**

**Sexting** (sending, receiving, or sharing sexually explicit messages) **and photo morphing** (altering images to create a new, modified version) were ranked as the highest-risk online behaviours.

**Online grooming, financial fraud, and exposure** to explicit content were prevalent threats.

**Social media, online gaming, and dating apps** were common platforms for exploitation.

*"A random white guy messaged me over Instagram saying, I want to be your sugar daddy, I will pay you weekly, you must do as I say and video call me when I want, you have to be available whenever I call you. He also asked me to send my bank details so that he could transfer the payment. I blocked him immediately, being aware of the possible consequences. Although I did not report it to the police, this incident has left me scared for a lifetime."*

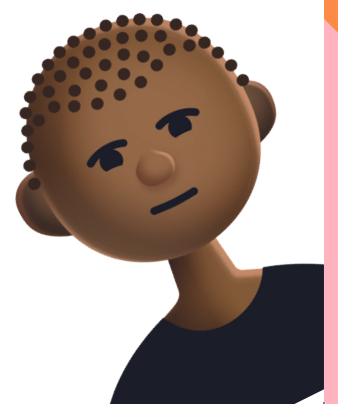
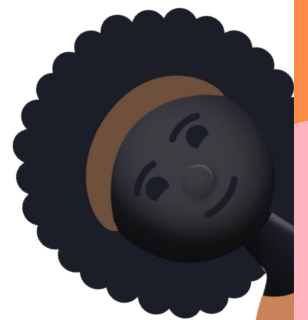
**- 18-year-old OSEC survivor**

# Key Recommendations

- **Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks:** Develop comprehensive national policies to address digital violence, including specific guidelines for preventing and responding to OSEC.
- **Law Enforcement:** Strengthen the capacity of Nepal Police at both central and district levels to handle cybercrime cases effectively and conduct child-sensitive investigations.
- **Incorporate Online Safety into education systems:** Introduce online safety programmes and digital literacy into school and college curricula as part of primary prevention efforts.
- **Enhance Digital Literacy:** Provide targeted digital literacy training for parents and caregivers to bridge the intergenerational digital divide.
- **Promote Open Communication:** Encourage families to foster open and trusting relationships, enabling children to share their online experiences without fear of judgment.
- **Expand Community Awareness Programmes:** Increase the reach of community-based initiatives to educate parents, children, and educators about online risks and protective measures.
- **Support marginalized groups:** Develop inclusive interventions that address the unique vulnerabilities of LGBTQIA+ youth, children with disabilities, and other marginalised groups.
- **Collaborate with Technology Companies:** Work with tech companies to implement safety-by-design principles, robust age verification mechanisms, and user-friendly privacy settings in collaboration and consultation with children and caregivers.

# Recommendations for further research

- Include a more geographically diverse sample, extending to rural and remote areas, and incorporate quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of OSEC in Nepal.
- Focus on the specific needs of marginalised groups, such as LGBTQIA+ youth and children with disabilities, to develop targeted interventions that address their unique vulnerabilities.



# Any questions?

Contact us!

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