



Are parents sharing too much online? The hidden risks for children

EU-funded researchers are investigating how parents' online sharing is reshaping childhood, privacy and identity, and the long-term consequences for children growing up online.

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The internet is now woven into everyday family life, shaping how children learn, play and connect with others from an early age. But alongside these opportunities, new risks are emerging, sometimes from an unexpected source: parents themselves.

Every day, parents share millions of photos and videos of their children on social media. This growing practice known as “sharenting” has become a normal part of parenting in the digital age.

Dr Anna Brosch, a researcher at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland, studies how social media is reshaping childhood, including the growing trend of sharenting.

“We want to find out how big the problem is, how many parents share information about their children, especially on social media,” she said.

She is now leading a four-year EU-funded research effort called the GUARDIAN project to explore the issue across Europe and East Africa. The initiative was launched in January 2025 and will wrap up at the end of 2028.

Understanding the risk

By combining data, interviews and cross-cultural analysis, the researchers aim to better understand the motivations behind sharenting and the risks it may pose, and to help shape policies that protect children's rights in the digital world. This is especially important because content shared online can persist indefinitely.

“Everything that parents post is visible online and stays on the internet forever,” said Brosch.

For many parents, posting photos of their children can be a way to share experiences, seek validation or present an image of family life. With the rise of influencers, sharing images or videos of children can also become a source of income. Some children have even become “micro-celebrities” themselves.

At a global level, [UNICEF](#) reports that more than one-third of young people across 30 countries have been cyberbullied, with one in five saying it has caused them to skip school.

Other risks are also widespread. A survey by [WeProtect Global Alliance](#) found that more than half of young people had experienced some form of sexual harm online during childhood.

The findings also highlight gender differences, with 7 in 10 girls reporting they had received sexually explicit content from an adult, compared with 4 in 10 boys.

According to the [EU Kids Online survey](#), carried out among children aged 9 to 16, about 1 in 10 children say they never feel safe online. And it turns out that parents are not always a source of protection.

In the majority of the countries surveyed, up to a third of children said their parents had posted something about them online without asking first. Between 3% (Lithuania) and 29% (Romania) reported asking their parents to remove such content.

Building a safer digital culture for children

Brosch and her team are developing a Sharenting Scale, a research tool to measure how often parents post about their children online, as well as the types of content they share and their awareness of the potential risks.

They are also planning to hold focus groups with parents and children aged 5 to 14 to explore why families share this content and how children feel about it. The team is currently awaiting completion of an ethics review before this work can begin.

A key goal of the project is to raise awareness among parents. Brosch and her colleagues have already begun engaging with schools to discuss the risks and encourage more responsible online behaviour.

One of the main concerns is loss of control. Once a photo or video is shared online, it can be copied, reused or manipulated by others. Images, particularly of naked children, may be misused by pornographic websites or paedophile networks.

“Once you post something on the internet, you lose control of it,” Brosch said.

It is also becoming easier to identify locations through images, raising concerns about safety and tracking. Even seemingly harmless posts can reveal personal details about a child’s life, routines or environment.

As children grow older, these digital footprints can have lasting consequences, leading to embarrassment, bullying or harassment over content shared years earlier. More fundamentally, sharenting raises questions about autonomy and identity.

“When kids grow up, they have an identity of their own. But they can start to wonder how that identity was influenced by their parents’ posting on social media without their consent,” said Professor Stephen Muoki, a researcher and professor of Christian history at Pwani University in Kilifi, Kenya.

Muoki is closely involved in the African part of the GUARDIAN research.

A global and cross-cultural issue

Sharenting is not limited to one region or culture. While the EU has strong frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Digital Service Act, these do not specifically address parental sharing of children's data.

"Each country has different views on sharenting," said Brosch. "For example, in Poland, there are no rules to stop parents sharing information about children."

In some places, parents are considered fully responsible for decisions about their children's data, making regulation complex and difficult to enforce.

The GUARDIAN researchers are taking a comparative approach, examining practices in Europe and East Africa and working closely with Muoki and his team at Pwani University.

Muoki stressed the importance of comparing sharenting across cultural contexts. As he sees it, with the rise of social media, the world has become a "village" and looking at phenomena like sharenting in isolation is no longer enough.

"As you make a policy in Kenya, you need to be aware of the global perspective, and what is happening in Europe," he said. "This collaboration is very important."

Informing policy and awareness

Beyond research, the project aims to contribute to policy discussions. By gathering evidence on the scale and impact of sharenting, the researchers hope to support policymakers in developing measures that better protect children online.

"We will be able to inform what societies and policymakers do with regard to ensuring safe access," said Muoki. "And then we need to ensure that this information is widely shared."

The findings will also be shared with local communities, including educators and religious leaders, to raise awareness and encourage behavioural change. In contexts where formal regulation may be difficult, community engagement can play a crucial role.

In Kenya, where religion plays a prominent role in society, educating through religious networks can be a way to reach more people, according to Muoki.

At the same time, researchers stress that responsibility often lies with parents, even when children are old enough to express their preferences, as social norms and family dynamics can make it difficult for them to refuse being featured online.

"When a child grows up surrounded by social media, it feels normal," Brosch said. "That's why it needs to start from parents."

A growing challenge

As digital technologies continue to evolve, so too do the risks facing children online. From cyberbullying and misinformation to privacy violations and exploitation, the digital environment presents complex challenges that require coordinated responses.

Sharenting adds another layer to this landscape, blurring the line between protection and exposure. While sharing moments of childhood may seem harmless, the long-term implications are only beginning to be understood.

By shedding light on this issue, the GUARDIAN researchers aim to ensure that children's rights are protected, not only from external threats, but also within everyday digital practices.

In an increasingly connected world, safeguarding children online will depend not just on laws and technologies, but on awareness, responsibility and informed choices – starting at home.

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- [GUARDIAN \(CORDIS\)](#)
- [GUARDIAN project website](#)
- [European strategy for a better internet for kids - BIK+](#)
- [EU online privacy and safety policy](#)