



**Global
Parenting
Initiative**

Parental Perspectives on Navigating Digital Perils:

Strategies, Challenges, and the Potential for Digital Interventions in Ensuring Online Child Safety

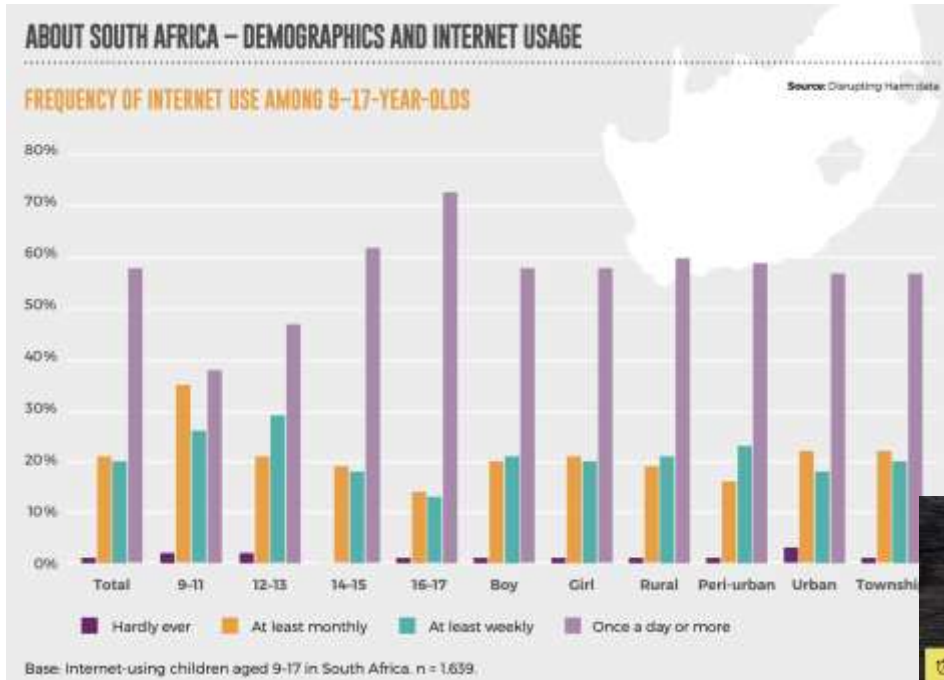
Shallen Lusinga, PhD

Background: Online Child Safety



- With **increased internet use**, it's crucial to both maximise children's online opportunities and minimise risks (Livingston et al., 2017).
- Recognising how opportunities and risks interact in specific contexts **helps children benefit more from ICTs** (SA Kids Online, 2016).
- However, as online risks grow, **it becomes harder** for governments, public officials, and parents **to protect children from harm** (ECPAT, INTERPOL, & UNICEF, 2022).
- **Most research** on online harms and risks such as OCSEA **focuses on high-income countries** (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021).
- Systemic issues in other countries put children at greater risk of online victimisation and limit their access to proper support (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021).

Study Context



ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF, 2022

This article is more than a year old

23 May 2023

RIGHT TO PRIVACY OP-ED

FPB works to combat increases in child online sexual exploitation

vulnerable children in global digital space



12 Jun 2024

The recent surge in child pornography cases in South Africa underscores the urgent need for robust measures to combat child online sexual exploitation.

Search

08 Sep

Share

Knowing your children's social media life is a crucial part of modern parenting

DM168

ONLINE THREAT

This article is more than 3 years old

Sextortion — frantic teens trapped by blackmailers on social media

Suicide of Limpopo teen highlights urgent need for a social media policy for schools

Study Context



Objectives: To investigate (1) strategies and challenges parents face in navigating teens' online safety in low- and middle income countries and (2) the willingness of parents to adopt digital interventions to reduce the risks of online child harm.

Location: Mpumalanga, South Africa (Ehlanzeni & Nkangala)

Approach: Inductive and deductive reasoning*

Main study: ParentText Optimisation study



Data Collection



Sampling technique:

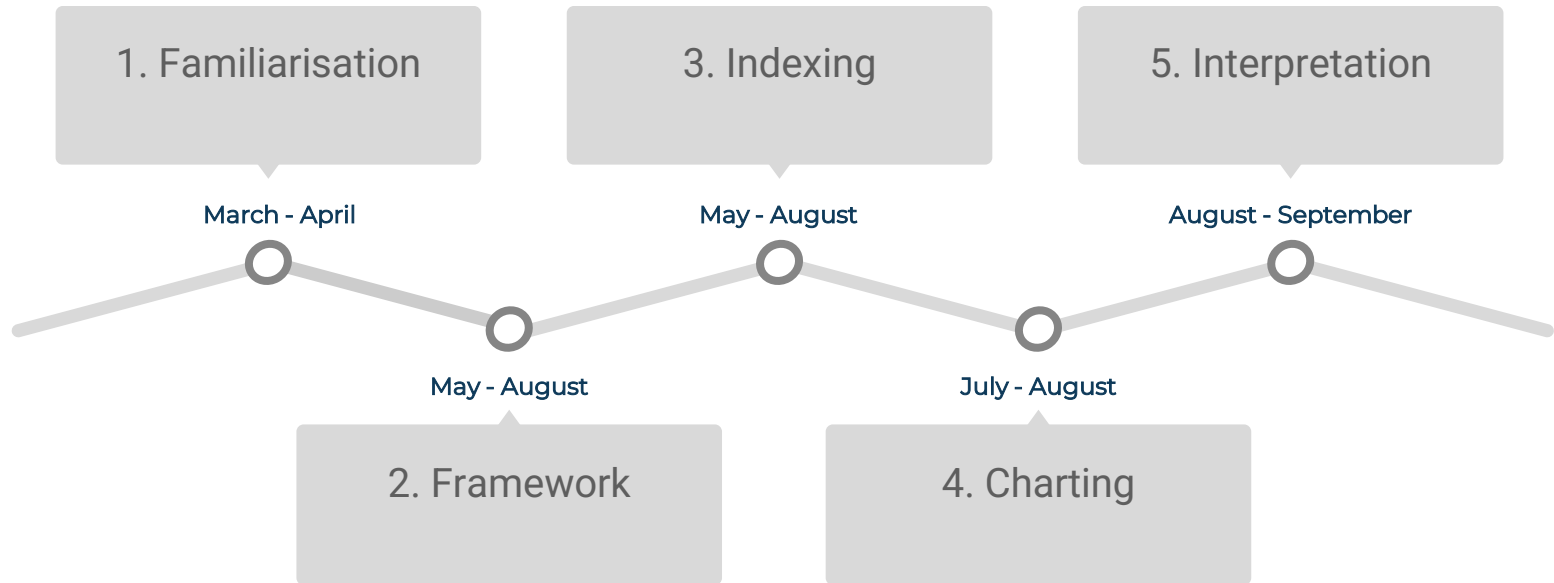
Purposive sampling to ensure even distribution of conditions, districts and level of engagement

Data collection: In-person focus group discussions

Caregiver Data	
Data Collection Method	10 FGDs
Number of participants	94 Caregivers
Sex	89 females; 5 males

Data Analysis Process

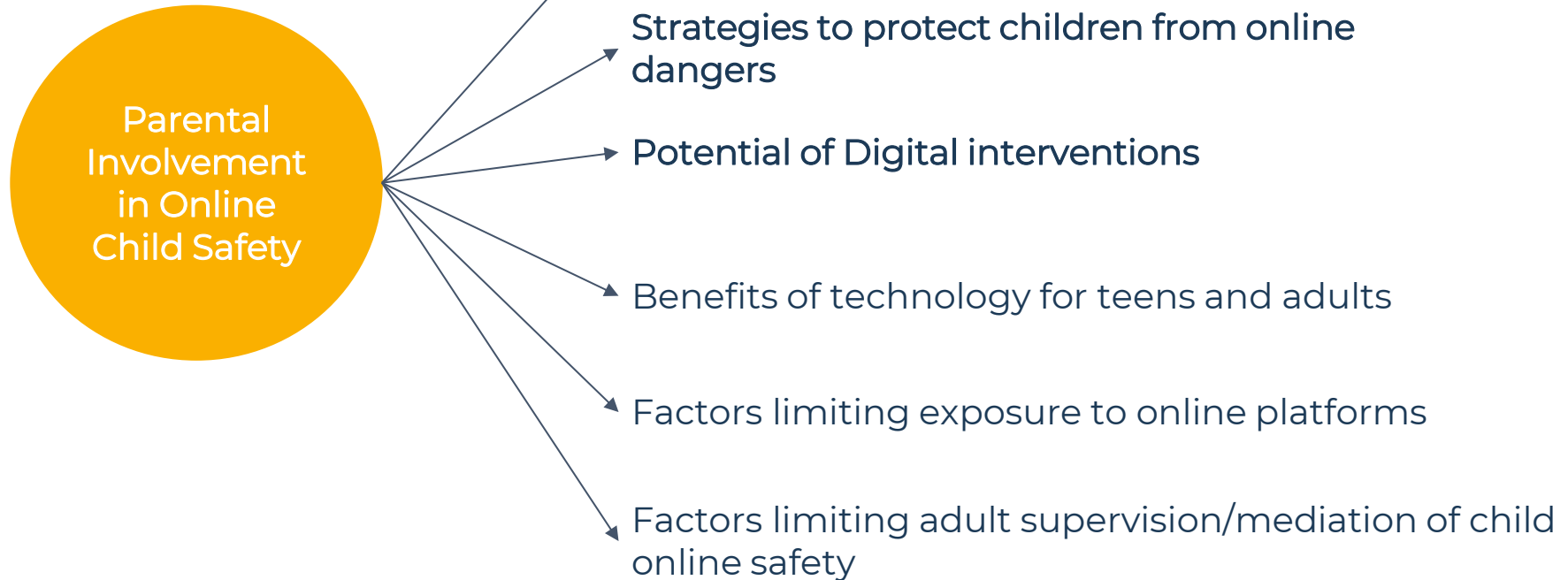
Framework Analysis



Caregiver Themes

Themes	Number of Sub-Themes
1. Family dynamics, relationships and communication	4
2. Challenges and Barriers to Engaging in ParentText	5
3. Enablers/Supporters to Engaging in ParentText	6
4. Programme benefits and impact	10
5. Parental Involvement in Online Child Safety	6
6. Mental Health Support	5
7. Improvements and Future Directions	3

Caregiver Themes





Findings



Risks and exposure to harm online



cyberbullying, scams, online threats, and exposure to inappropriate content

“I have seen that on my child’s WhatsApp. It seems like they had gossiped about each other at school then the other child sent my child messages to threaten them by telling them they will find them, and they are going to show them when they meet.” (P2, FGD 2)

“We are scared of these online issues as we always hear of scammers. We are scared of that. As you can hear that far they took a girl because of work related. That is why we are aware.” (P10, FGD 5)

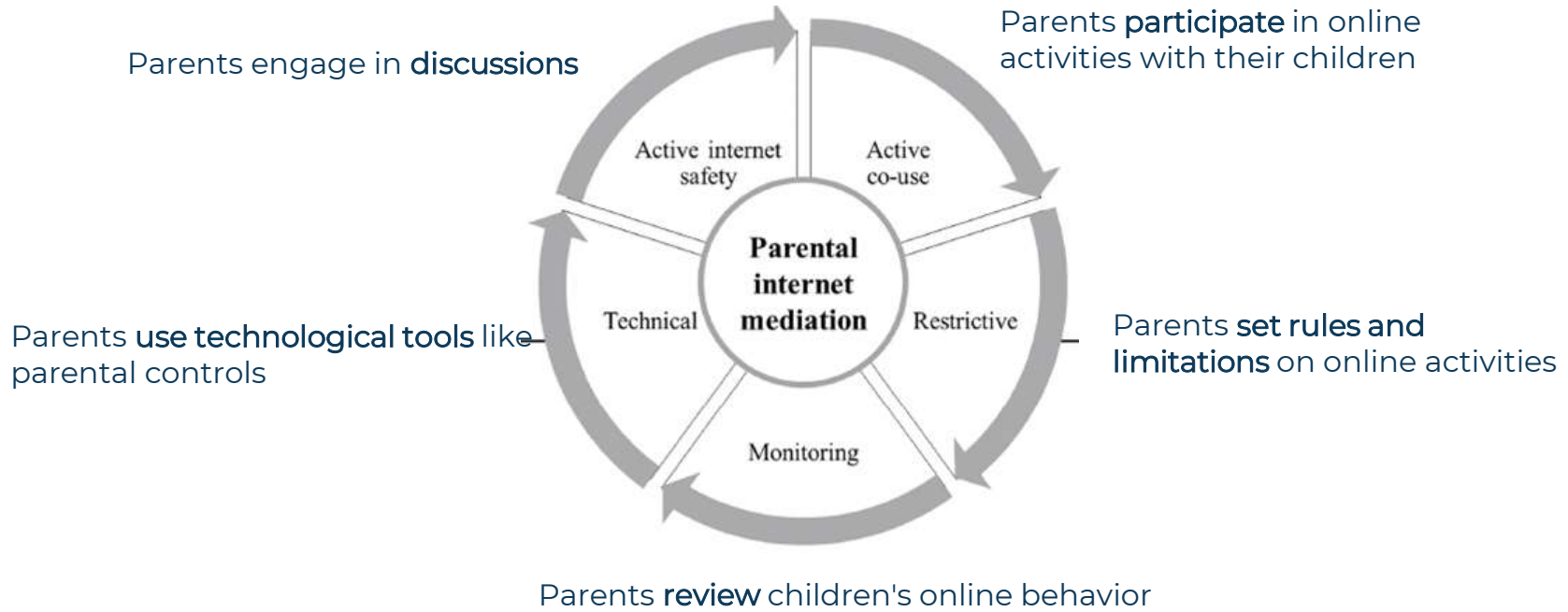
Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse



“You know Facebook, how it is like, your child can be trafficked... I know one child where she heard that models are needed and then she went there where she became abused sexually, they took her phone and threw her into the field, and she was lucky because she came back home alive” (P5; FGD 3)

“I know someone from my community who died because of the internet. She was recruited by her friend to use the internet. Her friend texted her and asked her to go out with her... On their way, the other girl was texting other people to alert them where they are. Then they met with those strangers... They took that girl to their car, and we found her dead. They took her body parts that they wanted, and the funeral was painful. (P5, FGD 9)

Parental Mediation Theory



Strategies to protect children from online dangers



Active mediation

“My husband bought [her] a smartphone. What I did was to sit her down and explain to her... I told her... I advised her that she should use her phone to make calls only, for schoolwork purposes and maybe WhatsApp...” (P2, FGD 2)



“It is important to alert them... as time goes on, some will request a picture, after it will be hurting... so I should have sat down and told her that she should have a limit.”
(P9; FGD 3)

Strategies to protect children from online dangers



Restrictive mediation

“I never buy them data... and that’s it because they can be tempted and use it for other things.” (P6, FGD 6)

“...for online safety, they must use parent's phones for homeworks. Strictly I do that. I will buy my child a phone if they grow up. They rather use xiporipori just to receive calls. For homework, they will use my phone.” (P4, FGD 1)



“I prefer my child to use WhatsApp only, Facebook it’s a danger zone. You know Facebook, how it is like, your child can be trafficked” (P5; FGD 3)

Strategies to protect children from online dangers



Co-viewing mediation

“My teen was having phone and I ended up taking it because she was having boyfriends by then so now if she want to google something from school, I come closer to her then we start to google together after that I take my phone” (P3, FGD 4)

“When my teen borrows my phone, I came closer to them, to see what they want to google. I don't leave them alone... I also want to assist them if there they don't understand it” (P4, FGD 4)

Strategies to protect children from online dangers



Monitoring

“we have to talk to them and also monitor everything on their phones. Make it a point that three days don't pass by without checking your child's phone..” (P3, FGD 2)

“...if s/he wants to download, I check first if whether the things they are downloading are safe or not. If they are not safe, I decline” (P10, FGD 5)

Strategies to protect children from online dangers



Technical Mediation

“...if she wants to download an email, it also report to my phone. She does not have any chance. It is because everything the child can download, will report in my phone. I am the one to approve or not” (P2, FGD 5)

“...there is this thing of restricting something like porn on the phone as a parent since as you are the one who bought the phone, you can do that” (P5; FGD 3)

“I agree with parental control, but we have to always remember that children are smarter and some of them can do anything to get rid of the app” (P6, FGD 6)

Potential of Digital interventions



“digital intervention is good for parents who... couldn’t find time to attend all the meetings” (P5, FGD 6)

“Digital intervention is needed in our community... The children who have been part of ParentText are now very different from those who were not part of this programme...”(P2, FGD 13)



“For example, they can have friends on Facebook, and they ask them... questions to get full information to track them down and kidnap them... **Digital intervention can help people in our community, they just need to be taught**” (P6, FGD 6)

Barriers of Digital interventions



“Using the **local languages** and the the Chatbot things to teach, to **help older people**. Young ones don't have problem and they can be happy. (P4, FGD1)

From 35 to 65 years old. Those ages are the ones to participate. **Those with the language barrier are from 50 upwards**. With the others they are better as many they went to school.” (P5, FGD1)

“I have a smartphone, but my challenge was data.” (P7, FGD 6)

“*Children can hide things in the phone that you can't get meanwhile the phone is yours.*” (P4, FGD 1)

Recommendations



- More nuanced ways of investigating and addressing online child safety.
- There is evidence that digital interventions can impact behavioural outcomes.
 - Promote Digital Interventions for Families
 - Enhance Parental Engagement
- Expand Research to Low-Income Contexts
- Develop Comprehensive Online Safety Policies

Implementation & research partners



Partners



Donors



Interagency partners





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