

Relationship between Parental Child Safety Measures and Technology Usage Among Children

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Abstract

*The aim of the study was to find out the level of child safety measures used by parents of 6th - 9th grade children and the level of technology usage among 6th - 9th grade children. It also focused on studying the effect of family earning type on Parental Child Safety Measure. Relationship between technology usage of children and Parental Child Safety Measures was another aspect that was explored. The study was conducted in Mumbai with a sample of 110 Parents of 6th - 9th grade children, using Purposive sampling technique. A self-structured questionnaire with a reliability of 0.78 was used. Parents used moderate level of safety measures with their children. Mostly children used smart phones for less than two hours and especially for the entertainment purpose. The results indicated that dual earner families used more safety measures ($t=8.57^{**}$, $p=.00$) as compared to single earner families. Results also suggested no statistically significant correlation between Child safety measures used by parents and technology usage of children.*

Keywords: Child Safety, Child Sexual Abuse, Technology Usage, Awareness, Prevention, Single and Dual Earner Families

Introduction

Traditional families have changed over time, though men still play an instrumental role in the family, women have shifted from an expressive role to a more instrumental one. The economic system has facilitated this freeing of women from household chores and their entrance to the labour market. Therefore, women's share of the labour force has increased in almost all the countries. Along with this the family structure has changed over time, where more Indian's are moving into nuclear

households. Hence, the world has seen an emergence of dual earner nuclear families.

The world, has not just witnessed a change in family structure, but also the rapid proliferation of information and communications technology (ICT), is an unstoppable force, touching virtually every sphere of modern life and childhood is no exception. With close to 3.5 billion users worldwide, the Internet has become a key public infrastructure that has the potential to connect people (Roser, Ritchie, &

Ortiz-Ospina, 2020). While bringing many benefits to the society and being conducive to innovation, children's learning and development, the fast paced technological innovation and increasing accessibility of ICTs also provide new pathways to sexual abuse and exploitation of Children.

There is evidence that these crimes are continuing to increase and develop in step with technological advances. Changing the behavior of both perpetrators and victims is both challenging and expensive and there is little evidence of what works to reduce these crimes (Quayle, 2020). Online predators now have a wide range of new and easier options for committing serious violations against the rights of the child (UNICEF, 2017).

According to the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), in 2020 1,32,676 uniform resource locators (URLs) contained child sexual abuse material. IWF analysts, in the year 2020, processed about 2,99,600 reports, a 15 percent hike from 2019 (IWF, 2021). Child Sexual Abuse (Hereafter, CSA) is "any completed or attempted (non-completed) sexual act, sexual contact with, or exploitation (i.e., non-contact sexual interaction) of a child by a caregiver, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (Murray, Nguyen & Cohen, 2014). When this material is videotaped or picturised, it is called child pornography. The accession, possession, distribution, production, advertisement or making available child pornography or child sexual abuse material; or procuring or grooming a child to engage in sexual activity; or sending indecent communication, is

considered as Online Child Sexual abuse (Capaldi, 2017).

In 2019, 46 percent of the victims of such abuse were 10 years old or younger (IWF Annual Report, 2020). Over the past decade, the role of technology in facilitating sexual offences against children has significantly evolved; as has the world's understanding of sexual offending behaviour and the manifestation of these activities on the Internet (Cybertip, 2016). Although there has been increased attention to victim services, investigation, prosecution, and incarceration, there is a need for all sectors of society to demonstrate an increased commitment to, and investment in, the primary prevention - activities that are directed at the general population and attempt to stop maltreatment before it occurs - of child sexual abuse and exploitation. (National Coalition To Prevent Child Sexual Abuse And Exploitation, 2012).

The universal approaches to primary prevention for child safety include parent education programs and self-help and peer groups, 24 hour crisis care programme (Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota, n.d.). Parents are the immediate family of the child and thus, his/her primary stakeholders and they constitute an important target audience of primary prevention of CSA. Studies have found that parents who participate in prevention programs are more likely to discuss CSA with their children and those discussions are more positive (Rudolph, Zimmer-Gembeck, Shanley, & Hawkins, 2018).

As abuse today, happens on a virtual platform, with realistic harms, the

prevention also needs to be at par. In India, many applications and softwares, aid parents to create a safe environment for the child online, like eKavach, IT Act, 2000 & Cyber Law India and Safe Browser. Also apps like CHIRAG, Shishu Surakhsha and Child Rights Monitor have been launched by various state governments across the country, to safeguard children.

In 2020, CyberTipline received 21751085, an increase of 28 percent from 2019 (National Centre For Missing And Exploited Children, 2020). As per a review conducted by Kloess and colleagues on "Online Child Sexual Exploitation" in 2014 found that Eighty-two percent of young children between the ages of 9 and 11, as well as 95 percent of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 16 have used Internet in Sweden in 2006, of which 32 percent reported to have received online sexual solicitations.

As per the IAMAI & Kantar IMRB survey as on December 2016, the overall internet penetration in India was around 31 percent presently. Analysis of 'Daily Users' revealed that both in Urban and Rural India, the younger generations were the most prolific users of internet. As per a more recent report India has 504 million active internet users and of the total internet population 71 million were between 5-11 years of age (Livemint, 2020).

Rationale

The world in the past few decades has witnessed digitalization; however, the anonymity of the internet has led to its own share of adverse effects. It helps its

users to have a wider reach, and thus the abusers have moved to an online platform, to share images and videos of CSA and also groom children online. As internet usage amongst the youth is experiencing a sharp growth, they have become more vulnerable to online CSA. It thus becomes important for parents to take due measures to safeguard children online. The traditional roles of women have also shifted, thus leading to the emergence of dual earner families. Therefore, the study focused on exploring the parental child safety measures against online CSA with respect to family earning type and also the its relationship with technology usage of children.

Objectives

1. To find out the level of Parental Child Safety Measures of 6th to 9th grade children
2. To know the usage of technology among 6th to 9th grade children
3. To find out the effect of family earning type on Parental Child Safety Measures for CSA with use of technology
4. To observe the relationship between Parental Child Safety Measures for CSA and technology usage among children

Hypothesis

H01: There is no statistically significant difference between the level of Parental Child Safety Measures with respect to single and dual earner families

H02: There is no statistically significant correlation between Parental Child

Safety Measures and technology usage of children

Methodology

Operational Definitions

Parental Child Safety Measures: The strategies parents use to safeguard children against online child sexual abuse.

Single Earner Families: The families in which only one partner is earning.

Dual Earner Families: The families in which both the partners are earning.

Children: Children who are studying in 6th to 9th Grade

Technology Usage of Children: Reported time of technology usage by children, per day. Like access to smart phones, tablets and computers etc.

Sampling procedure

The study was conducted in Western Suburbs of Mumbai. A self-devised questionnaire was administered to 110 parents of 6th -9th grade children using purposive sampling technique.

Tool

A self-structured questionnaire with a reliability of 0.78 was used to assess the Parental Child Safety Measures and the technology usage of 6th -9th grade children. It was validated by three experts from the field of Child Sexual Abuse and who had research experience.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed using a statistical software. Statistics such as percentage,

Mean, Standard Deviation, independent samples t-test and Bi-variate correlation (Pearson's correlation) were used to analyze the data and draw inferences.

Results and Discussions

Demographics of the participants

The average age of the children in the sample was 12.8 years. Majority, i.e. 73.63 percent & 53.63 percent of the mothers and fathers respectively belonged to the age group of 35-45 years. Majorly (36.36 percent) monthly income of the sample was above 75,000 rupees. Most i.e. 37.27 percent & 36.36 percent, of the fathers and mothers, in the study were graduates, respectively. Almost half (50.90 percent) of the participants were belonged to nuclear families. More than half of the families were single earners i.e. 54.5 percent, whereas 45.4 percent were dual earners.

Parental Child Safety Measures

Figure-1 suggests that majority of the parents used moderate level of child safety measures to prevent online child sexual abuse i.e. 66 percent of them. A review by Wurtele and Kenny (2010) stated that number of studies have been conducted which showed that parents tried to educate their children about Child Sexual Abuse.

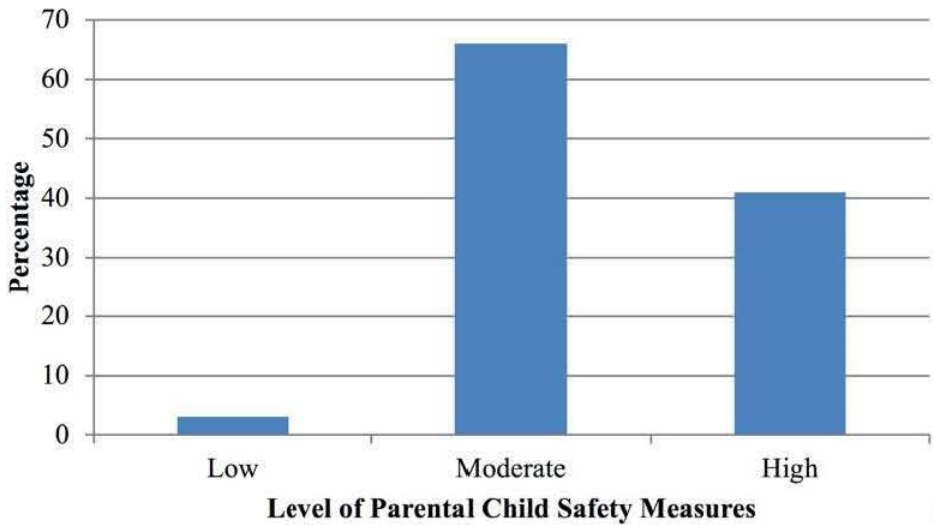


Figure 1: Percentage of the Level of Parental Child Safety Measures

Yet another review by Rudolph (1027) and colleagues stated that two studies have focused on parental protective behaviours, other than communicating with children directly about CSA risks. These two studies demonstrate that parents use a variety of protective

practices (e.g., supervision, monitoring, and involvement) to create the external barriers that may keep their children safe from CSA, of which direct discussions of abuse prevention in the home are only a small part.

Level of Technology Usage

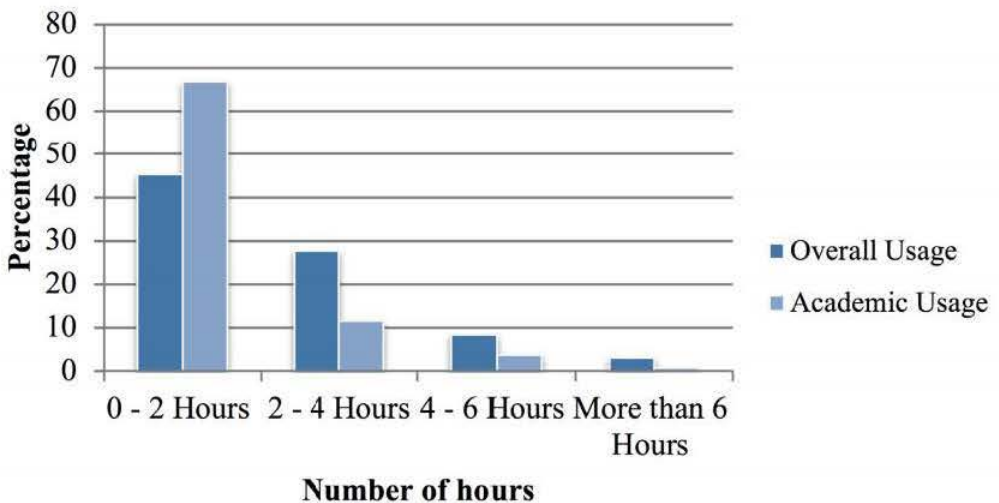


Figure 2: Percentage of children using smart phones for academic and other purposes per day (in hours)

Figure-2 suggests that most children used smart phones for less than 2 hours. More academic usage was seen for less than 2 hours, whereas overall usage was dominant between 2-6 hours. A study conducted at the Aligarh

Muslim University, on college students, showed that 63 percent respondents used their phones for 4-7 hours daily, thus supporting the current findings (Agha, 2018).

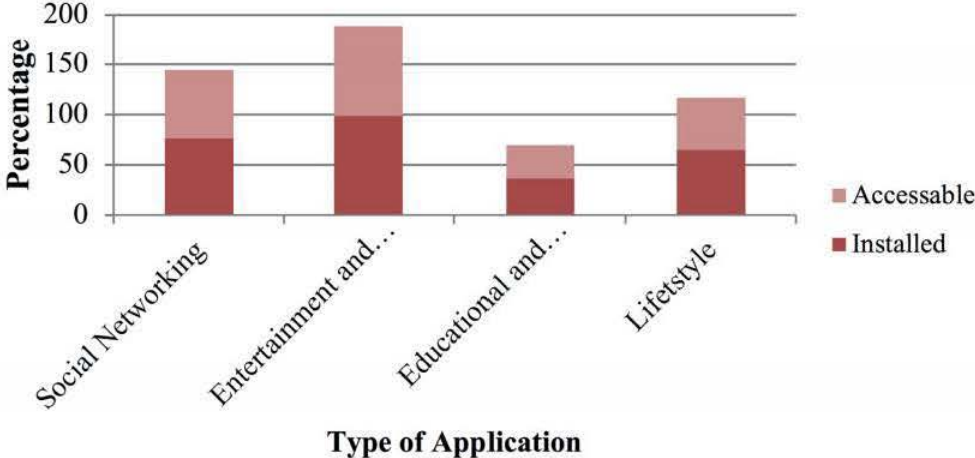


Figure 3: Percentage of children having various types of applications open installed and accessible in their smart phones

Figure-3 suggests that most children had entertainment applications both installed as well as openly accessible, followed by social networking applications, followed by lifestyle apps.

The least used applications were the educational applications. However, the difference between the application in terms of being installed and accessible wasn't stark.

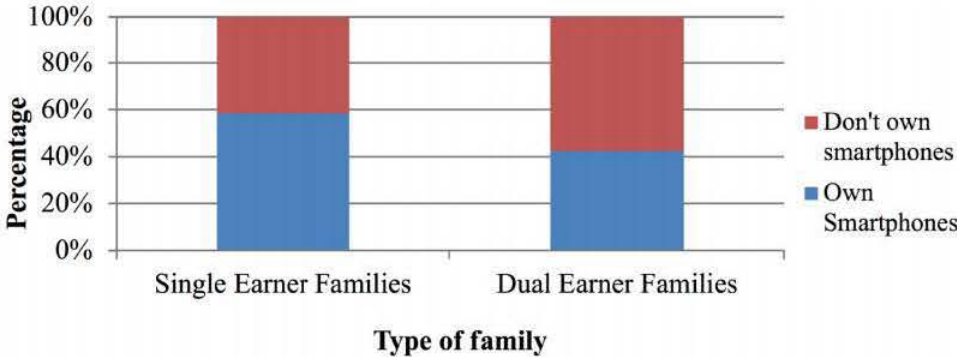


Figure 4: Percentage of ownership of smart phones among children of single and dual earner families

However, Figure-4 suggests that more than 50 percent children owned smart phones in single earner families, whereas only 42 percent children in dual

earner families owned smart phones. This might be due to less availability of the parents at home most of the time in dual earner families. Also many a

times parents use too much of digital tool to manage time with their children right from the early years, which is also reflected in the study done by Kabali et al (2015), who stated that 70 percent of parents gave children digital devices

when doing house chores, 65 percent to keep the child calm in public places, 58 percent to keep their child occupied while they ran errands and 28 percent parents used mobile devices to put their child to sleep during early years.

Table-1: Mean, SD and t-value of Parental Child Safety Measures with Respect to Working Status of the Family

Working Status	N	Mean	SD	t value	Level of Significance
Single Earner	84	32.59	5.49	8.57**	.00
Dual Earner	26	36.00	3.98		

**Significance at $p < .00$ level

Table-1 suggests that there was a statistically significant difference in parental child safety measures with respect to family earning type. Thus, null hypothesis has been rejected. The mean difference suggested that dual earner families use more child safety measures, to safeguard their children against online CSA, as compared to single earners. Although, figure 4 depicted that more smart phones were owned by children in single earner families, single earner families used less safety measures. The reason for the same might be the dual earner parents are exposed more to the changing

world. A study conducted by Preethy and Somasundaram in 2020 found that Majority of the working parents were aware of the various factors that could result in child abuse and nearly half of them had taken proper steps to prevent such untoward occurrence in their families. Another study conducted by Alzoubi, Ali, Flah & Al-Natour in 2017 found that employed mothers had a higher awareness of CSA and recognized signs and symptoms of CSA more than other mothers. The higher awareness and unavailability both could possibly put them more on guard as they are not able to supervise the child all the time.

Table-2: Pearson Correlation Coefficient and p-value between Parental Child Safety Measures and Technology usage by 6th -9th grade children

	Parental Child Safety	Technology Usage
Parental Child Safety	1	- .02
Technology Usage	- .02	1

*Significant at $p < .05$ level

Table-2 suggests that there was no statistically significant relationship between parental child safety measures and technology usage. There was a very weak negative correlation which suggests that as parental child safety measures increases, the technology usage of children decreases. Thus, the proposed null hypothesis had been accepted. As seen in figure-2, children spent more time using smart phones, for purposes other than academic and as indicated in figure 3, there wasn't much difference between the mobile applications being installed and the ones being accessible by children, which suggests that parental controls might not be as stringent, and thus didn't increase with increasing usage of technology. The findings of a research by Shin and Li, in 2017, suggested that parental mediation was not a function of the time spent by children on digital technology, thus supporting the current study. It alternatively, suggested that parental engagement in digital activities might be related to the mediation they provide, as they then understand the potential hazards of technology usage along with the barriers that they might face.

Conclusion

The current study suggested that most parents used only moderate level of child safety measures. The children in the current study had more overall technology usage i.e. for entertainment and social purposes, as compared to academic usage. The second highest

applications accessible to children were those of social media. The results also suggested that there was no significant correlation between technology usage of children and parental child safety measures. However, it was found that dual earner families used more parental child safety measures, as compared to single earners.

Limitations

The Sample size and inclusion criteria in the study, limits the ability to generalize the research findings. More importantly, as all the participants lived in Mumbai, the results had geographical limitations. Moreover, there can be a possibility of gender bias as majority of participants were females. The technology usage of children has been reported by parents, however, in dual earner families, parents might not be able to supervise their children's screen time, all day, which might lead to inaccurate reporting.

Recommendation

A larger representative sample with equal number of male and female participants would be suggested for a further research in order to make generalization possible and minimize gender bias. Also, participants from various socio economic backgrounds must be considered. Semi structured interviews and other qualitative data must be considered to justify the results. Inclusion of parental engagement with technology and the data about child's technology usage must be collected from the child as a self-report.

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