

Parents' Sharenting Behaviors and Risk Perceptions: A Comparative Study of Mothers and Fathers

Ebeveynlerin Paylaşan Ebeveynlik Davranışları ve Risk Algıları: Anneler ve Babalar Arasında Karşılaştırmalı Bir Çalışma

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The act of parents sharing their children's digital materials on social media, known as "sharenting," has become increasingly common. This study aimed to evaluate and compare the shared parenting behaviors and risk perceptions of mothers and fathers and to assess the relationship between them.

Materials and Methods: The study was conducted with 320 parents of children aged 0-12 years who were admitted to the department of general pediatrics. Parents completed a questionnaire prepared by child and adolescent psychiatrists. Data on parents' social media usage, sharing behaviors, and risk perceptions were collected through the questionnaire.

Results: The findings revealed that 92% of parents had active Instagram/Facebook accounts, and approximately 70% shared their child's posts on these platforms. Most parents primarily shared photos of their children during special occasions to create a digital memory record. However, concerning trends were identified, including 19% of parents sharing the name/location information and 8.7% posting semi-nude photos of their child. 66% of parents believed that obtaining their child's permission before sharing was necessary; nearly half (49.8%) perceived sharenting as potentially risky. Notably, parents who did not consider sharenting risky were more likely to share semi-nude photos of their child. Differences between parents were observed, with mothers being more inclined to share their children's content ($p=0.003$) while fathers were more likely to have public accounts ($p=0.000$) and share semi-nude photos ($p=0.007$). Moreover, fathers exhibited significantly lower risk perceptions associated with sharenting compared to mothers ($p=0.029$).

Conclusion: These findings suggest that while sharenting has become an integral part of daily life for many parents, there is still a need for greater awareness regarding online privacy and the potential long-term consequences for children. Cultural norms, digital literacy, and parenting styles may all influence how parents approach sharenting. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the importance of raising parents' awareness of the potential risks associated with sharenting.

Keywords: Children, parents, risk, sharenting, social media

ÖZ

Amaç: Ebeveynlerin çocuklarının dijital materyallerini sosyal medyada paylaşma eylemi, "sharenting" olarak adlandırılmakta ve giderek yaygınlaşmaktadır. Bu çalışma, anne ve babaların paylaşımçı ebeveynlik davranışlarını ve risk algılarını değerlendirmeyi, karşılaştırmayı ve aralarındaki ilişkiyi değerlendirmeyi amaçlamıştır.

Gereç ve Yöntem: Çalışma, genel pediatri bölümüne başvuran, 0-12 yaş arası çocuğu olan 320 ebeveynle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ebeveynler, çocuk ve ergen psikiyatristleri tarafından hazırlanan bir anketi tamamlamıştır. Anket aracılığıyla ebeveynlerin sosyal medya kullanımı ve paylaşımlarıyla ilgili davranışları ve risk algılarına ilişkin veriler toplanmıştır.

Bulgular: Bulgular, ebeveynlerin %92'sinin aktif Instagram/Facebook hesaplarına sahip olduğunu ve yaklaşık %70'inin çocuklarının gönderilerini bu platformlarda paylaştığını ortaya koymuştur. Çoğu ebeveyn, çocuklarının fotoğraflarını genellikle özel günlerde dijital bir anı kaydı oluşturmak amacıyla paylaşmıştır. Ancak, ebeveynlerin %19'unun isim/konum bilgilerini paylaşması ve %8,7'sinin çocuklarının yarı çıplak fotoğraflarını yayınlaması gibi endişe verici eğilimler belirlenmiştir. Ebeveynlerin %66'sı paylaşım yapmadan önce çocuklarının iznini almanın gerekli olduğunu düşünürken, neredeyse yarısı (%49,8) sharenting'i potansiyel olarak riskli olarak algılamıştır. Önemli bir bulgu olarak, sharenting'i riskli bulmayan ebeveynlerin çocuklarının yarı çıplak fotoğraflarını paylaşma olasılığı daha yüksekti. Ebeveynler arasında farklılıklar gözlenmiştir; anneler çocuklarının içeriklerini paylaşmaya daha meyilliyken ($p=0,003$), babaların herkese açık hesaplara sahip olma

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ÖZ

($p=0,000$) ve yarı çıplak fotoğraflar paylaşma ($p=0,007$) olasılığı daha yüksektir. Dahası, babalar annelere kıyasla paylaşım ile ilişkili önemli ölçüde daha düşük risk algısı sergilemiştir ($p=0,029$).

Sonuç: Bu bulgular, *sharenting*'in birçok ebeveyn için günlük yaşamın ayrılmaz bir parçası haline gelmesine rağmen, çevrimiçi gizlilik ve çocuklar için olası uzun vadeli sonuçlar konusunda daha fazla farkındalığa ihtiyaç duyulduğunu göstermektedir. Kültürel normlar, dijital okuryazarlık ve ebeveynlik stilleri, ebeveynlerin *sharenting*'e nasıl yaklaştığını etkileyebilir. Sonuç olarak, çalışma ebeveynlerin *sharenting* ile ilişkili olası riskler konusunda farkındalıklarının artırılmasının önemini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çocuklar, ebeveynler, risk, paylaşan ebeveynlik, sosyal medya

Introduction

The advent of social media, following the rapid development of mobile phones and internet technology, allows people to upload their own material, respond, tag, or share other people's content. Parents are also greatly affected by this sharing trend, as expected. Parents' sharing of photos, videos and personal information of their children on social media platforms is called "sharenting," a term created by the combination of the words "sharing" and "parenting". This term was first used in 2012 by Leckart,¹ the author of the Wall Street Journal. The word "sharenting" is defined by Collins Dictionary as "the habitual use of social media to share news, images, etc. of one's children".²

Studies from different countries revealed that sharenting is quite common across the globe. The rate of sharenting was found to be 85% among Turkish parents, 75% among English parents, 74.2% among Czech parents, and 83.5% among Spanish parents.³⁻⁵ In the United States of America, 98% of mothers and 89% of fathers who have a newborn child uploaded their child's photos to Facebook.⁶ Research from the University of Michigan Mott Children's Hospital revealed that 56% of mothers and 34% of fathers shared their parenting experiences on social media. More than half of the parents shared photos of their children that may be considered embarrassing or inappropriate.⁷ In a study from Poland, 75% of approximately 25 thousand posts included children aged 0-8 years; the names of children were given in most of the posts, and 67.3% of the parents shared children's inappropriate photos.⁸

Parents share photos/videos/information about their children's special days (birthday, developmental milestones, graduation, etc.), health problems (illnesses, surgeries), family activities (picnics, travels, etc.), and parenting experiences on social media.⁴ They also share the child's cute or funny situations or photos that may be considered inappropriate (while the child was taking a bath or toilet training) and personal information such as the child's name, location, address.^{8,9} The main motivations underlying parents' use of social media are self-presentation, belonging, and social support.^{10,11} The phenomenon of sharenting can also bring some risks, especially concerning children, in addition to its benefits, such as establishing social relationships. However, most parents think sharing their children's photos on social networks does not pose any risk to their children.⁵ This indicates that many parents are either unaware of or underestimate the potential risks, believing that sharing their children's photos on social networks does not pose any harm.⁵

The Australian government's Safety Commission reported that nearly half of the photos published on paedophile sites were not sexually explicit but were everyday photos of children taken from social media sites.¹² Sharing the child's personal information, such as name, surname, address, and location may pose a danger to the child's safety. Another risk related to sharenting is "digital kidnapping", where strangers download photos of your child and present them on their own profile as if they were their own.¹³ While sharing is often done with positive motivations for parents, such as making social connections and staying in touch with family members, it should be kept in mind that it carries some potential risks to children's privacy. Digital materials that parents share without consent may harm the child's privacy, self-development, and the parent-child relationship, considering the child's psychology. It could even lead to feelings of annoyance, exposure to humiliation, or bullying in the future.^{5,14,15} In addition, when the mental health of the parents was examined, it was found that the act of mothers sharing photos that violated their children's privacy and included their identity information was positively associated with depressive symptoms.¹⁶ Another study found that motivations like "making one's presence felt" and "seeking acceptance" were associated with psychiatric symptoms in both parents and children.¹⁷

To our knowledge, there are a insufficient number of studies investigating parents' awareness of the possible risks of sharenting, their thoughts on the necessity of the child's consent before sharing, how parental risk perceptions affect their sharing behaviours, and compares mothers and fathers in terms of these parameters.

This study aimed to evaluate and compare the sharing parenting behaviors and risk perceptions of mothers and fathers and to assess the relationship between them. Factors influencing the frequency of sharenting were also examined, including parents' education levels, daily screen time, time spent on social media, privacy preferences for their accounts, and the motivations behind their sharing behaviors, such as creating a memory record or keeping in touch with family and friends.

Materials And Methods

The study was conducted from June 2023 to December 2023. Mothers and fathers with children between 0-12 years of age admitted to the general pediatrics department were invited to participate in the study. To ensure the study was representative of the general population, only parents who volunteered and

were able to complete the questionnaire were included. Child and adolescent psychiatrists designed a questionnaire that was administered anonymously; the study was conducted by the same group of psychiatrists. In cases where parents had multiple children under 13, they were instructed to answer the survey questions based on the youngest child. This approach aimed to minimize parental recall bias; to examine parents' current attitudes and habits; and to obtain more homogeneous data by standardizing parental attitudes, as age and developmental differences between children can affect sharenting behaviors. The questionnaire focused on Facebook and Instagram, as they are the most commonly used social media platforms today. Parents of children under 13 were included in the study, as the minimum age requirement for creating and using an Instagram/Facebook account is 13.

The questionnaire included various aspects related to sharenting, such as the child's age and gender, the parent's age and education level, daily screen time, and social media usage (Instagram and/or Facebook). It also examined whether the parent shared his or her child's photos/videos on social media the frequency of sharing, the types of content shared, the purpose of sharing, and the parent's privacy preferences for the social media account (private or public). Additional questions addressed whether the parent shared personal information, such as the child's name/address/location and semi-nude photos (e.g., swimsuit/diaper/underwear), whether a social media account or YouTube/TikTok account was created on behalf of the child.

To assess parents' risk perceptions regarding sharenting, two questions were included: "Do you think parents should obtain permission from their child before sharing their photos/videos on social media?" and "Do you think sharing your child's photo/video on social media is risky for them?" Parents who answered "yes" to the second question were asked an additional open-ended question: "What kind of harm do you think sharing your child's photos on social media could cause?" Parents who did not have a social media account or who did not share their child's digital materials were excluded from further questions about sharenting in the survey. The participants provided their consent and completed the questionnaire anonymously.

Ethics

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants and their parents. The research was found ethically appropriate by the Ondokuz Mayıs University Faculty of Medicine Ethics Committee with the decision dated 30.05.2023 and numbered 2023/154.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL). The ages of parents and their children did not follow a normal distribution as determined by the Shapiro-Wilks test. Therefore, the Mann-Whitney U test was used for comparisons. The chi-square test was used for analyzing categorical data. If the expected value of any of the cells in the 2x2 tables was less than 5, Fisher's exact test was applied. A continuity correction of the χ^2 statistic was

applied if the minimum observed value in one of the cells was less than 25 in the cell of the 2x2 table. Spearman's correlation coefficients were used to examine the association between sharenting frequency and other variables. A value of $p < 0.05$ was accepted as statistically significant.

Results

Sociodemographic Data

In this study, we included 320 volunteer parents (83.8% mothers, 16.2% fathers) with at least one child aged 0-12 years. The mean age of the mothers was 34.85 ± 0.34 years, of the fathers was 37.75 ± 0.36 years, and of the children was 76.97 ± 2.40 months. Of the mothers, 8.8% ($n=28$) were primary school graduates, 22.5% ($n=72$) secondary school, 19% ($n=61$) high school, and 49.7% ($n=159$) were university graduates. On the other hand, 8.1% ($n=26$) of the fathers were primary school graduates, 18.1% ($n=58$) secondary school graduates, 26.2% ($n=84$) high school graduates, and 47.5% ($n=152$) university graduates. Considering the sex of the participants' children, half were girls (49.4%, $n=158$) and half boys (50.6%, $n=162$).

Parents' Screen and Social Media Usage Characteristics

When the daily screen time of parents (excluding work) was investigated, it was learned that approximately 60% of them used digital devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and computers for 2 hours or more per day. A great majority of the participants (92.8%, $n=297$) reported that they had Instagram and/or Facebook accounts. The proportion of parents that had private accounts was 82.5% ($p=0.000$). The daily screen time of parents and other social media usage characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Parents' Sharenting Attitudes and Behaviours

Most of the parents using social media (69.5%, $n=207$) stated that they shared their child's photos/videos on social media. Among them, 18.4% shared, only on special days/celebrations, 12.6% 1-2 times a year, 38.2% 1-2 times a month, 20.3% 1-2 times a week, 9.7% 3-4 times a week, and 1% every day. Parents mostly shared photos of their children on special days (71%) and family activities (61.4%). Creating a memory record (66.2%) was the most common among the sharing purposes, followed by keeping in touch with family and friends (44.4%) (Table 2).

Nineteen percent of the parents also shared their child's name and location information on social media, while 8.7% reported sharing photos of their child's semi-nude states, such as wearing underwear/diapers/swimsuits (Table 2).

Parents' Sharenting-related Risk Perceptions

Two-thirds (66.2%) of parents who shared photos of their child thought parents should obtain their child's permission before sharing. Nearly half of them (49.8%) reported that sharing their child's photo/video on social media was risky for him/her (Table 2).

We also investigated the parents' sharenting-related concerns via an open-ended question. Only 57.2% of the parents who thought sharenting was risky answered this open-ended question. The remaining parents preferred to leave this question blank. The proportion of those who answered this open-ended question corresponds to 28.5% (59/207) of the overall parents

who shared their child's posts. The parents expressed their concerns in their own sentences. The answers were examined, and similar issues were grouped under 11 headings. The most common answer was "photos can be used for bad/pedophilic purposes" (n=15), the second frequent answer was "there may be all kinds of harm, but I don't know exactly" (n=8), the third

Table 1. Parental screen time and social media use characteristics

	Mothers (n=268) (n, %)	Fathers (n=52) (n, %)	Total (n=320) (n, %)	χ^2	p-value
Daily parental screen time					
Half an hour	27 (10%)	10 (19.2%)	37 (11.6%)	5.911	0.116 ^a
1-2 hours	72 (27%)	15 (28.8%)	87 (27.2%)		
2-3 hours	94 (35%)	11 (21.2%)	105 (32.8%)		
>3 hours	75 (28%)	16 (30.8%)	91 (28.4%)		
Social media use	251 (93.7%)	46 (88.5%)	297 (92.8%)		0.235 ^b
Instagram account	231 (92%)	38 (82.6%)	269 (90.6%)		0.055 ^b
Facebook account	130 (51.8%)	30 (65.2%)	160 (54%)	2.305	0.129 ^c
Daily time spent on social media					
Half an hour	45 (18%)	9 (19.6%)	54 (18.2%)	0.186	0.980 ^a
1-2 hours	109 (43.4%)	19 (41.3%)	128 (43%)		
2-3 hours	68 (27%)	12 (26.1%)	80 (27%)		
>3 hours	29 (11.6%)	6 (13%)	35 (11.8%)		
Privacy preference					
Private account	217 (86.5%)	28 (60%)	245 (82.5%)	15.892	0.000^c
Public account	34 (13.5%)	18 (40%)	52 (17.5%)		

^a: Pearson chi-square, ^b: Fisher's exact test, ^c: Continuity correction, p<0.05

Table 2. Parental sharenting behaviours and risk perceptions

	Mothers (n=184) (n, %)	Fathers (n=23) (n, %)	Total (n=207) (n, %)	χ^2	p-value
Sharing child's photos/videos online	184 (73%)	23 (50%)	207 (69.7%)	8.552	0.003^a
Content of photos shared by parents					
Special events/celebrations	133 (72.3%)	14 (70%)	147 (71%)	0.799	0.371 ^a
Family activities	113 (61.4%)	14 (61%)	127 (61.4%)	0.000	1 ^a
Child's funny moments	59 (32%)	5 (21.7%)	64 (31%)	0.594	0.441 ^a
Information about motherhood	11 (6%)	1 (4.3%)	12 (5.8%)		1 ^b
Purpose of sharenting					
Staying in touch with family/friends	79 (43%)	13 (56.5%)	92 (44.4%)	1.028	0.311 ^a
Creating a memory record	126 (68.5%)	11 (47.8%)	137 (66.2%)		0.820 ^a
Making the child known	6 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	6 (2.9%)	3.028	1 ^b
Having fun	17 (9.2%)	1 (4.3%)	18 (8.7%)		0.7 ^b
Showing happiness	24 (13%)	3 (13%)	27 (13%)		1 ^b
Sharing child's name/location/address	34 (18.5%)	6 (26%)	40 (19.3%)		0.403 ^b
Sharing child's photos in underwear/swimsuit/diaper	12 (6.5%)	6 (26%)	18 (8.7%)		0.007^b
Social media account created in behalf of child	27 (14.7%)	2 (8.7%)	29 (14%)		0.749 ^b
Child has Youtube/Tiktok channel	10 (5.4%)	2 (8.7%)	12 (5.8%)		0.628 ^b
Do you think parents should get permission when sharing their child's photos/videos? (Yes)	131 (71.2%)	6 (26%)	137 (66.2%)	16.627	0.000^a
Do you think posting about your child is risky for her/him? (Yes)	97 (52.7%)	6 (26%)	103 (49.8%)	4.783	0.029^a

^a: Continuity correction, ^b: Fisher's exact test, p<0.05

most common answer was “the child may be sexually abused” (n=7). “It causes the violation of the child’s privacy” (n=6) and “photos can be stolen and fake accounts can be created” (n=6) were other frequent responses. The parents’ answers regarding sharenting-related risks were summarized in Table 3.

The Relationship Between Parents’ Sharenting-related Risk Perceptions and Their Sharenting Behaviours

We asked parents, “Do you think parents should obtain a child’s permission before sharing his/her photos/videos on social media?” and “Do you think sharing your child’s photo/video on social media is risky for him/her? The study sample was

divided into two groups according to their answers (yes/no) and compared in terms of all variables. Parents who thought their child’s permission was not necessary had significantly lower education levels ($\chi^2=8.280$, $p<0.05$), had public accounts at a significantly higher rate ($\chi^2=14.349$, $p<0.001$) and also more commonly shared the images of their child’s semi-nude states ($\chi^2=7.966$, $p<0.05$), and aimed to make the child known in the virtual world ($p<0.001$). Parents who thought sharenting was not risky were more likely to share the photos of their child’s semi-nude states ($\chi^2=13.533$, $p<0.001$) and aimed to make the child known in the virtual world ($p<0.05$) (Table 4).

	n	%
Photos can be used for bad/pedophilic purposes	15	7.2%
It can be harmful in many ways, but I don’t know exactly	8	3.8%
The child can be sexually abused	7	3.3%
Photos can be stolen, fake accounts can be created	6	2.9%
Violation of the child’s privacy	6	2.9%
The child may be annoyed when he grows up	5	2.4%
Child’s psychology may be affected	4	1.9%
Evil’s eye	3	1.4%
The child may become addicted to the social media due to an increased desire to be liked	2	0.9%
The child may be kidnapped	2	0.9%
The child may be humiliated/ bullied by peers	1	0.4%
Total	59	(59/207) 28%

	Parents who think child’s permission is necessary (n=137)	Parents who think child’s permission is not necessary (n=70)	χ^2	p-value
Education level				
Primary school	8 (5.8%)	5 (7.1%)	8.280	0.041 ^a
Secondary school	24 (17.5%)	24 (34.3%)		
High school	30 (21.9%)	14 (20.0%)		
University	75 (54.7%)	27 (38.6%)		
Public account	13 (9.5%)	22 (31.4%)	14.349	0.000 ^b
Sharing of child’s seminude states	6 (4.4%)	12 (17.1%)	7.966	0.005 ^b
Aiming to make the child known in the virtual world	0 (0.0%)	6 (8.6%)		0.001 ^c
	Parents who think sharenting is risky (n=103)	Parents who think sharenting is not risky (n=104)		
Sharing of child’s seminude states	1 (1.0%)	17 (16.3%)	13.533	0.000 ^b
Aiming to make the child known in the virtual world	0 (0.0%)	6 (5.8%)		0.01 ^c

^a: Pearson chi-square; ^b: Continuity correction; ^c: Fisher’s exact test; $p<0.05$

Comparisons of Mothers' and Fathers' Sharenting Behaviours and Risk Perceptions

Mothers were significantly more likely to share their child's posts than fathers (73% vs. 50%) on social media ($p=0.003$). Fathers had public accounts (40%) at a significantly higher rate than mothers (13.5%) ($p=0.000$). The ratio of fathers sharing their child's semi-nude photos (26%) was also significantly higher than the ratio of mothers sharing such photos (6.5%) ($p=0.007$). Compared to mothers, fathers thought it was not necessary to get a child's permission when sharing information at a higher rate than mothers ($p=0.000$). Mothers and fathers also showed statistically significant differences regarding their sharenting-related risk perceptions ($p=0.029$). While three-quarters of the fathers thought sharenting was not risky for the child, this percentage was 47% for the mothers. No significant differences were found between mothers and fathers regarding other variables. Comparisons of mothers and fathers were shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Factors Related to Sharenting Frequency

The frequency of sharenting was negatively correlated with the education level of the mother ($r=-0.143$, $p<0.05$) and positively correlated with the daily screen time of the parents ($r=0.233$, $p<0.001$) and the daily time spent on social media by parents ($r=0.355$, $p<0.001$).

Discussion

This study investigated parental sharing behaviours regarding their children on widely used social media platforms. We also examined parents' opinions concerning the potential risks of sharenting and the differences between mothers and fathers in these factors. The findings of our study revealed that 92% of parents had active Instagram/Facebook accounts, and nearly 70% shared their children's posts on these platforms. Approximately 66% of parents thought it was necessary to get their children's permission before sharing, while nearly half (49.8%) perceived sharenting as potentially risky. Parents who did not perceive sharenting as risky were more likely to share semi-nude photos of their children. While mothers were more likely to share their children's content, fathers were more likely to have public accounts and to share semi-nude photos of their children. Moreover, fathers exhibited significantly lower risk perception associated with sharing compared to mothers.

Similarly to the rest of the world, the great majority of the mothers and fathers in our sample (92.8%) used social media platforms, with Instagram (90.6%) being the most frequently employed.⁶ This study showed that 70% of parents with social media accounts shared photographs and videos of their children on Instagram/Facebook. Similar to the present research, Livingstone³ determined a sharenting rate of 75% in their study of 2032 United Kingdom parents. In other studies, 96.5% of United States parents, 74.2% of Czech parents, and 83.5% of Spanish parents were reported to share their children's digital materials online.^{5,18} The parents in this study mostly shared photos of their children on special days and family activities.

Several previous studies also revealed similar results.^{4,5,8,9} When evaluated within the context of the country where the study was conducted, these findings indicate that social media has become increasingly integrated into daily life, with parents actively utilizing these platforms to share family memories. However, cultural values specific to the country, the emphasis on social connections, and the outward expression of familial relationships may play a significant role in shaping these behaviors. For instance, in community-oriented cultures such as Türkiye, social media may be perceived as a tool for strengthening bonds with family and friends. Additionally, the high proportion of private account usage (82.5%) among parents might reflect a certain level of awareness regarding online privacy.

Parents mostly used private accounts, while 17.5% had public accounts. Consistent with this result, the great majority of Czech and Spanish parents also had private accounts.⁵ Contrary to these findings, analysis of Polish parents' social media accounts by researchers indicated that only 7.7% of the accounts were private.⁸ These differences across countries can be explained by the diversity in societies' perceptions of privacy, digital literacy levels, social media usage habits, and security concerns.

When the participants' sharenting purposes were examined, creating a memory record was the primary reason, followed by keeping in touch with family and friends. Most of the parents shared that they remain in contact with family and friends in England.³ The fact that two-thirds of the parents in our study shared photos to create a memory record suggested that parents might use Instagram and Facebook as a photo archive or their child's diary. This finding also suggested that social media sites might have replaced formerly used photo albums.

In the present study, 19.3% of parents shared their child's name and location on social media, and 8.7% shared photos of their child's partially clothed states, wearing items such as underwear, diapers, or swimsuits. Kopecky et al.⁵ reported that 3.5% of parents published photographs of their babies naked. However, another study examining parents' Facebook accounts revealed significantly different findings. Children's names appeared in 90.5% of the accounts, and 67.3% contained posts that might be considered inappropriate, such as nude, semi-nude, amusing, or grimy.⁸ The inconsistencies between the results might have derived from whether the studies were based on parental reports or examination of accounts, and also from cultural differences of the societies concerned. Different societies may have different norms about privacy, confidentiality and children's rights. For example, in some cultures, children's privacy may be more respected, while in other cultures it may be more acceptable to share more information or images of their children on social media. In addition, cultural norms may influence the context in which parents share photos of their children and what kind of content they share, which may explain the inconsistencies found in the studies.

This study revealed that two-thirds of parents thought that consent should be obtained from the child before sharing, while approximately half reported that sharenting might be

risky. In England, 23% of parents obtained consent, 25% felt no concern about sharenting, and 12% stated that they limited their internet use due to privacy concerns.³ In another study, 20% of parents reported seeking permission from their children while 72.5% stated that child-related sharing represented no risk.⁵ The fact that our study shows different results from other countries may be due to various factors such as cultural norms, privacy perceptions, legal regulations, and digital literacy. These factors may affect the way parents approach social media posts about their children.

We also asked parents an open-ended question about the risks of sharenting. Parents' most common concern was "the use of photographs for pedophilic purposes" followed by "the sexual abuse of their child", "theft of the photographs/account" and "invasion of the child's privacy". Responses considering the feelings or opinions of their child, such as "the child might be annoyed in the future," "the child's psychology might be affected," "he might be subjected to peer bullying," or "the child might become addicted to social media due to an increased desire to be liked," were less common. The study results were noteworthy, showing that half of the parents who shared images of their children did not regard sharenting as risky. Although approximately one in three (those who did not answer the open-ended question plus those who stated that they did not know exactly) regarded it as risky, they did not know what those risks might actually be.

To the best of our knowledge, this was one of the few studies examining the relationship between parents' sharenting-related risk perceptions and their sharenting behaviours. Parents who considered it unnecessary to obtain permission before sharenting had significantly lower levels of education, used public accounts, and shared semi-nude images of their children more commonly than the rest of the sample. Parents who thought sharenting posed no risks were more likely to share semi-nude images of their children. The results of previous studies examining the relationship between parents' child-related sharing concerns and sharing behaviours were inconsistent. Ranzini et al.¹⁹ found that parents with more Instagram-specific privacy concerns were less likely to share their child's images on that platform. Australian parents who did not regard sharenting as risky reported a higher rate of private account use and more privacy precautions compared to other parents. The authors interpreted this finding as parents thought they had reduced the risk by taking these precautions.²⁰ Livingstone³ reported that parents who were concerned about privacy were also more engaged in sharenting and shared more frequently. They were also more likely to ask their children for permission and not to share images including their child's face.³

One of the striking findings of the present study was that parents who thought sharenting was not risky, and that the child's permission was not necessary, were significantly more likely to aspire to make their child known in the virtual world. This finding suggested that the children of parents with low awareness of the sharenting-related risks might be more susceptible to the risk of being used for commercial purposes.

A limited number of previous studies have focused on the relationship between parental gender and sharenting. The present study revealed a striking difference between mothers and fathers regarding sharenting behaviours and risk perceptions. One difference was that mothers engaged in significantly higher levels of sharenting than fathers (73% compared to 50%). In addition to the studies with similar results, a study revealed opposite findings.^{6,7} Livingstone³ reported that fathers shared photographs of their children on social media more commonly than did mothers.

The noteworthy findings of this study included that although fathers engaged less in sharenting compared to mothers, they exhibited a higher rate of sharing their children's semi-nude images from public accounts. Additionally, they had lower awareness of sharenting-related risks. Differences in attitudes between fathers and mothers may be related to gender roles that assign a more protective role to mothers, as well as parenting approaches and digital literacy. In contrast to our findings, Livingstone³ reported that fathers (16%) were more concerned about privacy than mothers (9%). Factors such as gender roles, parenting approaches, digital literacy, and cultural differences may underlie these results. In our society, the more protective approach of mothers and their focus on children's privacy, differences in parents' levels of digital literacy, and cultural values may influence the way parents monitor social media use and safety. Comprehensive studies are needed to examine fathers' sharenting behaviours and risk perceptions.

Evidence suggests that parents with a high frequency of sharing on social media platforms also exhibited a higher frequency of sharenting.¹⁹ In the present study, the frequency of sharenting was inversely correlated with the mother's education level and positively correlated with the parents' daily screen time and time spent on social media. These findings suggested that parents' sharenting behaviours were related to their screen and social media use habits.

Study Limitations

The limitations of this study include the low number of fathers in the sample, the fact that the study was based on parents' self-reports with no examination of social media accounts, and the lack of investigation into the frequency of parents' sharing excluding child-related content. The particular strengths of this research were investigating the relationship between parental sharenting-related risk perceptions and sharenting behavior, and comparing mothers and fathers across all parameters.

Conclusion

Sharenting has brought about a dilemma between the freedom of parents to share about their children online and the privacy rights of children. Preschool-age children are unaware of the existence of social media and have not yet reached the cognitive maturity to consent to their parents sharing information about them. Although older children and adolescents are cognitively more mature to consent to sharenting, they cannot be expected to be sufficiently aware of the possible risks that social media

may pose. Parents should remember that, even if they are well-intentioned when sharing their child's posts, the child's self-esteem, privacy, and security may all be adversely affected, and the child may feel annoyed, embarrassed, and bullied in the future. Protection of the children from the short and long-term consequences of sharenting is the parents' responsibility. To fulfill these duties, parents must first be aware of the risky situations when posting their children's photos and videos and how to protect their children from them.

Our study showed that most parents need to learn more about the risks of sharenting, since their low-risk perceptions were related to inappropriate sharing of their children's posts. Professionals (public health workers, general practitioners, paediatricians, child psychiatrists, and teachers) capable of informing parents about the potential risks of sharenting should first be aware of this. We also need studies investigating the long-term effects of sharenting on children.

Ethics

Ethics Committee Approval: The research was found ethically appropriate by the Ondokuz Mayıs University Faculty of Medicine Ethics Committee with the decision dated 30.05.2023 and numbered 2023/154.

Informed Consent: Written informed consent was obtained from all participants and their parents.

Footnotes

Authorship Contributions

Concept: G.N.S., Design: G.N.S., Data Collection or Processing: G.N.S., R.B., E.P.Y., T.A.D., Analysis or Interpretation: G.N.S., Literature Search: G.N.S., E.P.Y., G.B.K., Writing: G.N.S., R.B., G.B.K.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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