

## BRIEF COMMUNICATION

**Children want parents to ask for permission before ‘sharenting’**

Now that social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic is increasingly shifting our interactions with each other into the digital sphere, it may feel natural to post pictures of our children on various social media platforms – ‘sharent’ – more than usual. But before parents do so, they should stop and think for a second: How do children feel about this? During the family day of the annual ‘SciFest’ science festival in Uppsala, Sweden in early March 2020, we asked children about ‘sharenting’.

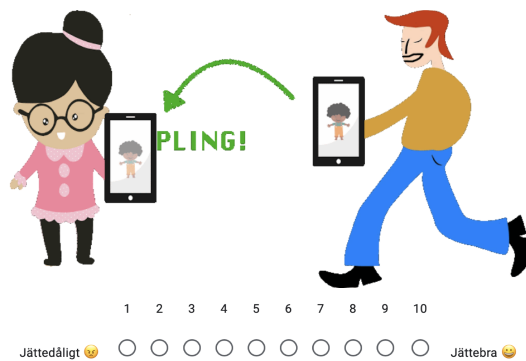
The survey consisted of two background questions, four questions aided by pictures about different forms of sharenting (Fig. 1), and an open-ended question: *What do you think adults should do?* The questions on sharenting specified and depicted a

behaviour and asked the child to rate whether or not it is okay on a 10-point Likert-scale with an angry face anchoring 1 and a happy face anchoring 10 (Fig. 1). The online questionnaire was administered by two researchers, both clinical psychologists, using tablets.

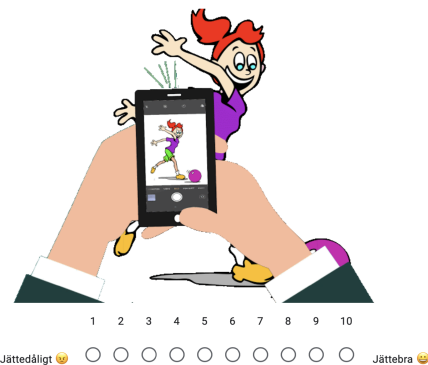
A total of 68 children, 4–15 years ( $M = 9.4$ ,  $SD = 2.6$ ), completed the anonymous online questionnaire. About two-thirds of the respondents were boys ( $n = 42$ ).

Descriptive statistics were performed for ordinal and scale variables and differences between age groups were investigated with Kruskal-Wallis  $H$  test and further analysed with Mann Whitney  $U$  test. The open-ended questions were analysed using manifest content analysis.<sup>1</sup> Because the data collection

Send a picture to a relative



Take a picture without asking for permission



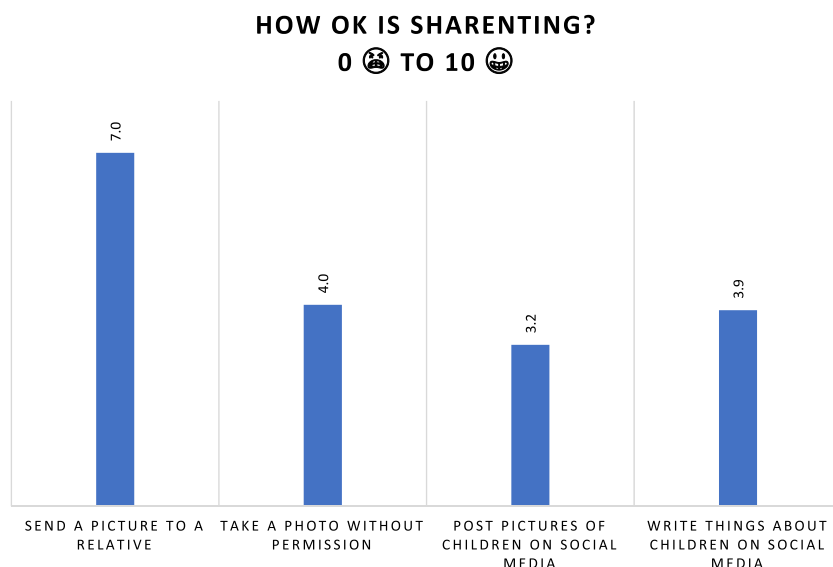
Post a picture on social media, such as Facebook or Instagram



Write on social media about children, such as Facebook or Instagram



**Fig. 1** Questions about sharenting with visual support.



**Fig. 2** Average scores regarding the different aspects of sharenting.

was anonymous, no ethical clearance was necessary according to Swedish legislation.

Children were generally quite negative towards sharenting (Fig. 2). Most acceptable was sending photos to a relative and least acceptable was posting photos of the child on social media without asking. Further analysis of the *Take a photo* item suggested a statistically significant difference in score based on age,  $\chi^2(3) = 14.146$ ,  $P = 0.003$ , with stepwise increasing scores across the age groups 4–6, 7–9, 10–11 and 12–15 year olds, indicating that the older the children, the *more acceptable* they thought it was to take a photo without permission. Further, the 4–6 year olds showed significantly lower scores compared to all other age groups ( $P$  ranging from 0.031 to 0.001). This indicates that the youngest children thought it *least acceptable* to take a photo without permission, contrary to what many parents might believe.

The open-ended answers could be sorted into two main categories: *Instruction to the adult* and *Qualifier*. The Instruction category was surprisingly unanimous: children and youth, quite

irrespective of age, wanted parents to *ask* them before taking pictures or sharing images of them and *listen* to their answers. The Qualifier category further specified situations and circumstances, but was always accompanied with an instruction (Table 1).

As a generation of adults raised in a digital culture have become parents, the phenomenon of sharenting has evolved and is now common practice internationally.<sup>2–4</sup> The content of sharenting has been explored,<sup>5</sup> as well as ethical considerations from the perspective of mothers<sup>6–8</sup>; however, there has been little exploration of how children feel about the phenomenon. A survey ( $n = 817$ ) in the Netherlands indicated that adolescents ( $M = 15$  years) largely disapprove of sharenting,<sup>9</sup> and qualitative exploration of the topic ( $n = 46$ ; 12–14 years) revealed the need to establish boundaries.<sup>10</sup> There is some evidence that preteens ( $n = 14$ ; 9–13 years) share this frustration and need for clearer boundaries.<sup>11</sup>

This brief report addresses the previously underexplored view of younger children by including children as young as 4 years, using adequate visual support.

Children's voices, brought to the forefront by this community engagement activity, convey a very clear message: Children want to be asked about, and listened to, before their parents 'sharent', that is share stories or images about them on social media.

**Table 1** Results from the manifest content analysis. The examples of instruction and qualifier are not part of the same quote

Category	
Instruction to the adult	Qualifier
Ask first	They do not have to show the photo
Ask for permission	Parents are allowed
Ask first and listen if the child says no	If ok to take a photo, it is ok to send it
Do not take pictures without permission	Check if the child likes the photo
Listen to the child	If the child says no, they should not post the picture
Ask before posting pictures	Depends on what it is they want to write

## Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the children who participated in the study.

Professor Anna Sarkadi

Mr Anton Dahlberg

Dr Karin Fångström

Dr Georgina Warner

Department of Public Health and Caring Sciences, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

## References

- 1 Graneheim UH, Lundman B. Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: Concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Educ. Today* 2004; **24**: 105–12.
- 2 Brosch A. When the Child Is Born into the Internet: Sharenting as a Growing Trend among Parents on Facebook. *New Educ. Rev.* 2016; **43**: 225–35.
- 3 Davis MM. *Parents on Social Media: Likes and Dislikes of Sharenting*. Michigan, US: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital; 2015.
- 4 Kopecky K, Szotkowski R, Aznar-Díaz I et al. The phenomenon of sharenting and its risks in the online environment. Experiences from Czech Republic and Spain. *Child. Youth Serv. Rev.* 2020; **110**: 104812.
- 5 Choi GY, Lewallen J. "Say Instagram, kids!": Examining sharenting and children's digital representations on Instagram. *Howard J. Commun.* 2018; **29**: 144–64.
- 6 Blum-Ross A, Livingstone S. "Sharenting," parent blogging, and the boundaries of the digital self. *Popular Comm.* 2017; **15**: 110–25.
- 7 Fox AK, Hoy MG. Smart devices, smart decisions? Implications of parents' sharenting for children's online privacy: An investigation of mothers. *J. Public Policy Mark.* 2019; **38**: 414–32.
- 8 Wagner A and Gasche LA. *Sharenting: Making Decisions about other's Privacy on Social Networking Sites*. Darmstadt, Germany: Darmstadt Technical University; 2018.
- 9 Verswijvel K, Walrave M, Hardies Ket al. Sharenting, is it a good or a bad thing? Understanding how adolescents think and feel about sharenting on social network sites. *Child. Youth Serv. Rev.* 2019; **104**: 104401.
- 10 Ouvrein G, Verswijvel K. Sharenting: Parental adoration or public humiliation? A focus group study on adolescents' experiences with sharenting against the background of their own impression management. *Child. Youth Serv. Rev.* 2019; **99**: 319–27.
- 11 Lipu M, Siibak A. 'Take it down!': Estonian parents' and pre-teens' opinions and experiences with sharenting. *Media Int. Aust.* 2019; **170**: 57–67.