Research Article

Early Childhood Caregiver Practices and Perceptions Regarding Sharenting and its Impact

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Posting and socializing have become very common in the modern era of social media and technology. This practice is also found to be very common in caregiving. Parents frequently document and share their children's moments on social media, a practice known as 'sharenting'. This phenomenon greatly impacts child development, particularly in behaviour and child privacy. This study was conducted regarding early childhood caregiver practices and perceptions regarding sharenting and its impact by using a quantitative, cross-sectional study design that recruited 64 participants who registered for the Parenting Club online webinar conducted by the ECD PREP (Early Childhood Development Parenting Readiness Education Program) team at a tertiary care academic medical center in Karachi Pakistan to address the research problem. A scale known as the Sharenting Scale developed by Mustafa Maruf Cansızlar was used to examine the concept of sharenting and its impact on Early childhood caregiver practices and perceptions that were employed through an online Google form. The study employed descriptive statistics to analyse sharenting behaviour among caregivers using SPSS software version 25. Results showed that 54.7% of parents are not even aware of the term sharenting. 42.2% of parents never shared content related to their child on social media while 4.7% of parents always post on social media, out of which 64.1% parents use Facebook, 67.2% uses Instagram, 79.7% uses WhatsApp, 92.2% uses TikTok, 95.3% uses YouTube, followed by 98.4% parents who uses Snapchat to share content related to their children. The result of this study highlights a need to further explore the parental awareness regarding sharenting, children's digital rights, and protection in Pakistan.

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Introduction

In the current modern era of social media and technology, posting and socializing has become prevalent practices. This practice is also found to be very common in the caregiving of young children. Parents frequently document and share their children's moments on social media, a practice known as 'sharenting'. Sharenting is a portmanteau of sharing and parenting. It refers to parents sharing images, videos, or information about their children on social media platforms[1]. This phenomenon has a huge impact on a child's development, particularly in behaviour and child privacy.

Although sharenting has its drawbacks, it also has significant benefits, including benefiting parents by creating online communities, sharing happy moments with friends or family, and seeking support from other people who go through the same experience as well as improving their social network support[2]. It promotes the concept of minimizing distance and keeping everyone connected as one. Children grow and develop their sense of identity, and they can experience embarrassment or emotional harm due to content shared without their consent[3]. However, the long-term effects on their autonomy and digital footprint can become concerning, especially when they have no control over how they are portrayed online, which is a major drawback and leaves a negative impact on a child's mental state.

Global data on sharenting shows increased usage of social media among parents. This is a prevalent practice globally and has become part of their culture. Almost 75% of parents in the U.S. share images of their children online[4]. Additionally, nearly 65% of parents in Poland engage in sharenting, reflecting broader social media trends and parental behavior in sharing content about their children[5]. Further, about 60% of parents posted content related to children on social media[6]. These statistics prove that sharenting is common among caregivers of young children.

Research on sharenting raises several key ethical concerns, particularly regarding consent. Given that children are usually not capable to consent to their willingness regarding posting content related to them online and parents might not consider their child's right to digital privacy. Moreover, the negative effects of sharenting may develop over the years because children can be struggling with their data and reputation as they grow[7]. To address these concerns, various policies and frameworks have been established, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe, which emphasizes the importance of obtaining explicit consent known as assent when processing personal data, including that of minors[8]. The UK Information Commission Office (ICO) works along with

GDPR to offer guidance on the Data Protection Act 2018 regarding protection and safeguarding of the content posted on social platforms[9]. Moreover, the U.S Federal Trade Commission provides detailed information on the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), including guidelines and implementation actions for child privacy[10]. COPPA implements certain requirements on operators of websites or online platform services regarding content posting of children under 13 years. Although COPPA doesn't directly control what parents can post, it affects how platforms manage data associated with minors[10]. There are many global policies and initiatives taking place to protect children's rights in the growing era of social media platforms where an international treaty outlines the rights of children with emphasis on the right of children's privacy by the UNICEF Convention on the rights of the child[11].

Pakistan has a population of 254 million in 2025[12] and trend of sharenting is rising in country as caregivers are adapting foreign cultures of sharing content however, it lacks policies and frameworks regarding children digital rights. In Pakistan, there are various legal instruments such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016[13], National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC) 2020[14] and various child protection guidelines which are formed but doesn't include the concept of sharenting. These policies or frameworks can only become relevant once the content shared is misused, resulting in the impact of child privacy and well-being. This is an alarming concern and should be greatly focused to protect children today and tomorrow.

Literature Review

Sharenting is a digital-era trend of posting children's photos and information online with potential implications of loss of privacy and digital trail. Scholars discuss its psychological, social, and legal implications with both positive and negative implications, with a specific focus on the issue of consent[15]. Some parents document milestones for a few, while others crave endorsement. Consequences of sharenting are the long-term identity threats to children with an out-of-control digital presence. In this section, sharenting's drivers and implications will be discussed while also considering the research gaps to inform research into digital parenting and the child's privacy.

Motivations and Behaviour of Parents Regarding Sharenting: Parents engage in sharenting out of psychological and social reasons to record their child's development and successes. Social media provide a convenient way of uploading milestones to their relatives and friends who are not present at

the time of the events[16]. Parents also practice sharenting to promote bonding by uploading positive moments to reinforce them digitally. Parents also practice sharenting to obtain social validation by uploading material that is acceptable to society's image of the best parent[17]. Parent' digital competence significantly influences the practice of uploading due to the levels of knowledge about the dangers of exposing their children to the digital environment without their knowledge. Sharenting is purported to be a case of parent performance by the critics since the greater percentage of the time the parents craft their digital image to reflect their dream instead of their child's actual moments[18]. It is a significant issue of ethics about the practice of a parent crafting a digital image of a child without their knowledge.

Cultural and regional influences significantly shape sharenting behaviour since societies have divergent conceptions of privacy and public disclosure. Individualist societies value personal expression, with the consequent public disclosure by parents of personal information about their children[19]. In contrast, collectivist societies like Pakistan value family honour and confidentiality. In Pakistan, while a segment of the society avoids showing the faces of their children or personal information due to religious sensitivities or traditional culture, others emulate contemporary digital behaviour influenced by international culture[20]. With the spread of the internet and greater social media usage, the culture divide is diminishing with a conflation of traditional culture with digital presence. Sharenting creates online communities of supportive parents, while others criticise that the need to present a sanitised version of parenting creates pressure that results in stress and exaggerated parenting expectations[21]. The psychological impact is also borne by the children who later have to deal with the unwanted digital presence, underscoring the need to practice prudent disclosure that is both personal to the parent and maintains the confidentiality of the child.

Prevalence and Intensity of Sharenting: Sharenting has penetrated other parts of the world with varying levels of frequency due to the impact of culture and technology. Research by Blum-Ross and Livingstone established that well over 75% of American mothers shared their children online before the age of five[2]. In a survey by Siibak and Traks, Polish mothers shared personal information about their children at a frequency of about 65%[22]. Research by Lipu and Siibak established that 80% of Australian mothers practice sharenting, a manifestation of the normalisation of digital sharing[23]. Sharenting frequency is influenced by the age of the child with the parent posting at a higher frequency about infants and toddlers compared to the category of the older-aged group of children. Parents with higher levels of activity on social media are likely to share at a higher frequency since

online sites favour the engagement of the parent within digital communities. It is argued by opponents that the raised awareness of digital privacy causes a gradual reduction of sharenting among parent due to the awareness of the ills of excessive digital disclosure[24]. Social media sites are argued by others to favour continuous parent engagement with interactive functions that favour sharenting regardless of the raised concerns.

Sharenting helps construct a child's digital identity, yet it creates serious moral issues about their privacy rights and consent abilities. According to Kumar and Schoenebeck, parents generate permanent digital trails for their children through the continuous sharing of personal information that continues to exist online[25]. Bessant's study explained that when parents engage in sharenting, their children face dangers such as identity fraud along with unauthorised exploitation of their photographs by outside entities[26]. The intersection of artificial intelligence systems with data analytics creates challenges for this situation because children's content is analysed and utilised in ways that extend beyond parental expectations. Academic and professional opportunities can be supported by children who develop well-managed digital footprints according to some scholarly perspectives[27]. People challenge this viewpoint by saying children would feel psychological anguish after discovering online material they never authorised. A study by Ouvrein and Verswijvel documented through their research that adolescents commonly experience humiliation and irritation after discovering unauthorised sharing of personal content[18]. Research by Autenrieth showed that children who understand digital issues express worries about their inability to manage what appears online about them[28]. Some children become desensitised to digital exposure, perceiving sharenting as a routine aspect of life. Sharenting presents a complex situation because parents have different intentions from what children expect regarding their online privacy and digital rights.

Impact of Sharenting on Children's Privacy and Emotional Well-being: The practice of Sharenting generates significant privacy concerns for children, given that ethical discussions emphasise parental lack of consent when such information is posted online. Children lack the capacity to consent to their digital presence, which creates an ethical dilemma for parents when making sharenting decisions[26]. Research findings indicate that child-related data becomes permanently available on the internet after sharing, which makes children vulnerable to risks, including data exploitation and identity theft from third-party organisations[29]. According to the study by Kumar and Schoenebeck, artificial intelligence has become so accessible that it enables organisations to monitor and evaluate children's online data without disclosing their activities to parents[25]. Under the General Data Protection

Regulation (GDPR) in Europe, the processing of minors' data requires explicit consent from both children and parents for managing their digital footprint[30]. Critics point out that social media companies are free to keep and analyze children's data because weak enforcement methods do not provide sufficient limitations[31]. GDPR and other legal regulations attempt to protect children's privacy, but numerous studies show parents lack knowledge about how sharenting activities affect their children in the long run. The combination of biometric recognition systems and predictive analytics tools has worsened these security risks by creating permanent data records that limit a child's digital self-governance in modern times.

Research indicates children develop psychological issues, including anxiety, along with embarrassment and resentment from parents who share their moments without their permission. Adolescents who discovered their digital footprint, according to research by Ouvrein and Verswijvel, reacted by feeling angry at parents who did not respect their privacy rights[18]. Autenrieth explained how children who understand digital risks well can build negative connections with parents who post content without their consent[28]. Sharenting at an early age, according to researchers, helps children regard digital sharing as conventional behaviour, which makes them think online visibility is a regular practice. Opposition exists that the exposure children experience through sharenting forces them to adopt artificial online personas created by their parents[32]. No specific regulations exist in Pakistan to govern sharenting practices, which leaves the digital rights of children without sufficient legal protection. The Personal Data Protection Bill 2021 struggles to clarify how its privacy regulations should be applied to parental sharing activities[33]. The policymaking authorities thus need to establish specific protective measures that combine parental accountability with children's digital privacy rights. The current lack of robust enforcement systems makes children's online data security even more vulnerable since social media companies face low accountability standards.

Literature Gaps: Existing literature is rich with information about sharenting, with significant gaps existing, notably concerning region-wise research within Pakistan. The first gap is the lack of extensive research that examines the role of Pakistan's society and culture in the sharenting behaviour of the parent. The second gap is the little research that exists about the long-term psychological impact of sharenting on the child, notably with respect to the formation of the identity of the child and their well-being. The third gap is the inadequate legal debate about the digital privacy of the child within Pakistan, with existing legislation not providing specific provisions about the

responsibility of the parent to regulate a child's digital presence or the potential dangers of sharenting.

Objective

This research is important in the context of Pakistan, specifically because with the shift to the digital era, parenting has shifted to sharenting. With the increased use of social networks and, more especially, parents posting content involving their children, there is a need to examine the effects of such behaviour on children's rights to privacy.

1. To understand the motivations and behaviour of parents regarding sharenting practices.
2. To measure the prevalence and intensity of sharenting using the Sharenting Scale (SS).
3. To explore the impact of sharenting on children's privacy and emotional well-being as they grow.

Methodology

Study Design: A quantitative cross-sectional study design was employed. This design is appropriate and feasible to collect data at a single point of time, ensuring the current data and perspective of the people without change of time-based differences.

Study Population: In this study, 64 participants were recruited who registered for the Parenting Club online webinar conducted by the ECD PREP (Early Childhood Development, Parenting Readiness Education Program) at a tertiary care academic medical center in Karachi.

Data collection tool: The research used a validated Sharenting Scale (SS) developed by Mustafa Maruf Cansızlar[34] to measure the frequency, reasons, and concerns associated with sharenting behavior among parents, which has also been used in previously conducted studies, that is an efficient means of measuring parental attitudes toward sharing information about the child online.

Data collection process: The study utilized Google Forms for data collection, offering a user-friendly platform for participants to complete the survey online. This method made it convenient for parents with an active social media profile since they can participate from any device with an internet connection[35].

Sampling method and size: Convenience sampling was used in the study, which included 64 participants who were parents, teachers, and healthcare providers with an active status on social

media platforms to make the results accurate and inclusive of different types of parental attitudes toward sharenting. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling technique in which participants are chosen due to their accessibility to gather the insight for the research problem[36].

Data analysis: The study employed descriptive statistics to analyse sharenting behaviour among parents, teachers, and healthcare providers to determine the existing patterns regarding sharenting. Such an approach makes it easier to identify the frequency, reasons, and concerns[37]. To perform the analysis, the data was analysed by SPSS software version 25, which offers an extended set of options to interpret the data collected with the help of the Sharenting Scale.

Ethical considerations: Ethical approval was obtained before the initiation of data from the institution's Ethical Review committee. The research fulfilled the necessary ethical measurements provided by the institutional research board by ensuring participants' responses were anonymised and that data collected using Google Forms was secure. Participants were fully informed regarding the purpose, significance, and procedure of the study. Written informed consent was taken from each participant, who had the right to withdraw from the study at any point in time without any consequences. Data was stored in a password-protected system with access only to the core research team to prevent any data breach. These steps ensured that the study maintained rigorous ethical standards throughout.

Results and Findings

A total of 64 participants participated in this study. The majority were female (n = 54, 84.4%), while male participants comprised 15.6% (n = 10). Almost 51.6% of participants were parents, 18.8% were teachers, and 29.8% were care providers such as Early Childhood Development (ECD) consultants, Healthcare providers and educators, and students. Furthermore, 3.1% (n = 2) of participants were matriculate, 1.6% (n = 1) were intermediate, 31.3% (n = 20) were graduate, 3.1% (n = 2) were undergraduate, and 59.4% (n = 38) were postgraduate qualification. The characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1. The key finding stipulated that 42.2% (n = 27) of parents never shared content related to their child on social media. In comparison, 4.7% (n = 3) mentioned that they always post on social media, and 25% (n = 16) post sometimes on social media platforms, as mentioned in Table 2.

		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	10	15.6
	Female	54	84.4
Qualification	Matriculate	2	3.1
	Intermediate	1	1.6
	Graduate	20	31.3
	Undergraduate	2	3.1
	Postgraduate	38	59.4
Status	Parent	33	51.6
	Teacher	12	18.8
	Care Provider	19	29.8

Table 1. Profile of participants (n = 64)

		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Usage of posting on social media	Sometimes	16	25.0
	Rarely	15	23.4
	Never	27	42.2
	Often	3	4.7
	Always	3	4.7

Table 2. Usage of posting on social media

There is a rise in social media posting of content of children by their parents was observed in this study. Participant uses different platforms, as mentioned in Table 3, for posting content of their

children, such as 64.1% using Facebook, 67.2% using Instagram, 79.7% using WhatsApp, 92.2% using TikTok, 95.3% using YouTube, and 98.4% using Snapchat. These results showed that there is a rising trend of parents sharing content of their children on social media through various platforms.

Platforms		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Facebook	Yes	41	64.1
	No	23	35.9
Instagram	Yes	43	67.2
	No	21	32.8
WhatsApp	Yes	51	79.7
	No	13	20.3
WhatsApp stories	Yes	64	100
	No	0	0
WhatsApp family group	Yes	61	95.3
	No	3	4.7
TikTok	Yes	59	92.2
	No	5	7.8
YouTube	Yes	61	95.3
	No	3	4.7
Snapchat	Yes	63	98.4
	No	1	1.6

Table 3. Platform used for posting

Furthermore, it was also noticed, as mentioned in Table 4, that only 17.2% of parents and caregivers take consent from their children while sharing their content on social media, while the majority

62.5% do not take consent at all. Sharing of content can invade a child's privacy and autonomy, leading to long-term impact and damaged well-being of the child.

	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	11	17.2
No	40	62.5
Sometimes	8	12.5
Rarely	5	7.8

Table 4. Consent from children

Most importantly, many parents and caregivers are unaware of the concept of sharenting as only 10.9% of parents and caregivers were aware of sharenting while 54.7% of parents are not even aware of the term sharenting. However, the majority of parents and caregivers showed concern regarding the impact of posting their child's moment on social platforms. As mentioned in Table 5, parents are concerned about 76.6% of their child's privacy, 54.7% were concerned about online security, 34.4% about the digital footprint, and 32.8% were concerned about the embarrassment of their child in the future. This is not only concerning but a great issue that should be kept in mind when posting content. Parents had stated that lack of awareness regarding the sharenting and impacts can lead to long-term consequences, including privacy concerns, identity theft, cyberbullying, or future embarrassment for the child, which will greatly impact their social and mental state.

				Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Concept of sharenting		Very familiar		7	10.9
		Somewhat familiar		22	34.4
		Not familiar at all		35	54.7
Concerns regarding sharenting	Yes			56	87.5
		Privacy	Yes	49	76.6
			No	15	23.4
		Online security	Yes	35	54.7
			No	29	45.3
		Digital footprint	Yes	22	34.4
			No	42	65.6
		Embarrassment for the child	Yes	21	32.8
			No	43	67.2
	No			8	12.5

Table 5. Concept and concerns of sharenting

The Sharenting Scale was used to measure the practices and perceptions regarding sharenting and its impact. As mentioned in Table 6, the results of the sharenting scale reveal an alarming and cautious approach toward sharing children's content on social media. A significant number of participants expressed concern regarding privacy violation and potential negative impact on their children's future, indicating a strong implication on digital safety and ethical sharing approaches. There is also a noticeable awareness of the context in which content is shared, where many participants encouraged more appropriate sharing. Overall, fewer participants were motivated by their positive feedback or focused on personal appearance, suggesting that social validation is not the primary cause of sharenting. Overall, the result explains a balanced ratio, with participants being aware of both the benefits and potential risks of sharenting.

	Not favourable to me at all [1]	Not favourable to me [2]	Somewhat not favourable to me [3]	Neutral [4]	Somewhat favourable to me [5]	Favourable to me [6]	Very favourable to me [7]
I share my child's photos/videos to get positive feedback from my followers	28	3	3	11	7	4	8
I take care that I am also in the image while sharing my child's photo/video.	28	1	7	15	1	6	6
While sharing a photo/video I take with my child, I take care to choose the one I look most beautiful in.	19	5	20	10	10	0	0
I care about writing an effective caption while sharing my child's photo/video.	18	2	6	9	4	12	13
I care about the environment being tidy while sharing my child's photos/videos.	14	5	12	18	15	64	0

	Not favourable to me at all [1]	Not favourable to me [2]	Somewhat not favourable to me [3]	Neutral [4]	Somewhat favourable to me [5]	Favourable to me [6]	Very favourable to me [7]
I use regulatory filters in posts involving my child.	24	6	7	10	2	8	7
I worry about violating my child's privacy while sharing my child's photo/video.	19	3	3	14	5	10	10
I believe that the photos/videos I share may affect my child's future negatively.	18	5	5	8	7	8	13
I consider that my child's photos/videos may be used by websites that promote inappropriate content	22	5	3	13	7	4	10

Table 6. Sharenting Scale (n = 64)

Discussion

This study reported that 42.2% of parents never shared content related to their child on social media, while 4.7% mentioned that they always post on social media and 53.1 % post sometimes on social media platforms. The parents reported using Facebook (23%) and Instagram (21%) for sharing content, and 56% use other social media platforms to share content related to their children. More than half (54.7%) of parents were not even aware of the term sharenting.

A study from Turkey reported that 52% of mothers and 34% of fathers used social media. Among those, 68% of parents shared photographs on social media. While one-third (36.94%) of parents shared a photograph on social media when their child was younger than 2 years[38]. In another study, 60.93% of parents reported that they use Facebook, amongst them 56.6 percent shared information about their child/children[24].

In a study conducted regarding experiences from the Czech Republic and Spain[39] reported that 56% of mothers and 34% of fathers post potentially sensitive and embarrassing information about their children on social media (children aged 0-4). Additionally, over 70% of parents reported knowing other parents who post information that could hurt a child or post inappropriate images or videos of their kids online (27%), for example, sharing naked pictures of a child or infant[39].

Moreover, a survey on the sharing practices of one thousand parents and children was carried out in the United States. According to the survey, over 80% of parents used their children's real names on social media, and 75% of parents posted images, videos, or stories of their kids[40].

The literature stated that causes of sharenting include parents opting for social connectivity, showing off or pride, making new connections, appreciation from other parents, and making a digital gallery to save photos. However, parents were unaware that sharenting can cause privacy issues for children and compromise autonomy[41].

Despite the posting on social media, parents were concerned about privacy. A study from Belgium with Instagram's mom influencers demonstrated that children bear the potential privacy risks they receive little to no benefit from their mothers' influencer activities. Further, mothers reported concerns about their children's privacy and mentioned taking privacy-related precautions to protect their children[42].

The use of social media has surged significantly, with children frequently leaving digital traces even before they take their initial steps through sharenting. Experts suggest that parents be mindful while posting on social media and manage their usage to maintain the privacy of their young ones[43]. The information parents post online will accompany their children into their adult lives as a memory, and while with this advantage, there are also possible dangers that numerous parents do not acknowledge. Risks can involve identity theft, disclosing private psychosocial details, and sharing sensitive or compromising information that could be exploited by others. A research study by the Australian government's eSafety Commission revealed that around 50% of images circulating on paedophile sites were sourced from social media platforms[44].

Due to increasing worry about internet dangers, parents have started sharing pictures of their children that show only the back of their heads or after blurring the child's face. Nevertheless, many parents persist in posting information and images of their children without taking precautions, frequently because of a misleading sense of safety regarding the privacy features promised by social media. Sharing can be a hazardous activity that puts children at various risks, such as breaches of their privacy, sexual abuse, emotional distress, unauthorized access to metadata, online permanence, and digital abduction[45].

Considering the threats and risks posed by sharenting, there is a need for educational and healthcare institutions to provide awareness to parents regarding sharenting practices. This study alerts educators, ECD teachers, paediatricians, healthcare workers (HCWs), and preventive health professionals to take a key role in educating families about the impacts of posting child content on social media to raise awareness among parents and inform them about the possible risks and threats[46].

There is an urgent need for educational initiatives and awareness campaigns to tackle the dangers linked to sharenting. Educators, ECD teachers, paediatricians, and other HCWs can be essential in teaching parents about the risks of excessive online sharing, and tailored training for them could provide methods to tackle this concern successfully. Moreover, parents can be advised to seek a balance between expressing pride in their children's accomplishments and recognizing the potential risks involved. Providing prenatal classes on the use of social media and digital skills could increase parents' awareness even more. Furthermore, preventive measures, including counselling and educational programs for parents, are vital for safeguarding children's welfare, privacy, and identity.

Strengths: This study highlights sharenting as an understudied problem in Pakistan. Thus, validated tool was used for data collection and responses from direct caregiver to perform this robust study, resulting in diverse and accurate response.

Limitation: This study has several limitations. Firstly, there is small sample size consisting of 64 participants which may not reflect all early childhood caregivers in Pakistan therefore it lacks generalizability due to a single centre. Secondly, this is a cross-sectional self -reported data study, it does not show cause and effect between sharenting and its impact on their children future and result in long-term consequences. Finally, cultural and regional differences within Pakistan may influence sharenting behaviour which is lacking in this study. More studies should be conducted with large sample size, including qualitative methods to gather deep insights on sharenting and its long-term impacts.

Conclusions

The section demonstrated sharenting's increasing trend together with its effects on child privacy alongside digital identity development and psychological health. An increasing number of parents share their children's life events because they seek social validation as well as emotional support and the need to document important milestones, but data protection and consent issues persist as major ethical concerns. GDPR provides global privacy protections, yet Pakistan needs specific legal frameworks that address the digital rights of children. The study confirms the necessity to research cultural factors as well as explore long-term psychological consequences and develop appropriate legal guidelines for sharenting practices in Pakistan. The protection of children's autonomy needs balance to enable responsible parental digital sharing practices.

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Declarations