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Seoul Campus

Kyung Hee University,
26 Kyunghedae-ro, Dongdaemungu,
Seoul, 02447, Korea
Phone: +82-2-961-0097

Global Campus

Kyung Hee University,
1732 Deogyong-daero, Giheung-gu,
Yongin-si, Gyeonggi-do, 17104, Korea
Phone: +82-31-201-3233

Homepage

media.khu.ac.kr/khul_eng/

E-mail

khunilife@khu.ac.kr

media.khu.ac.kr/khul_eng/

khunilife@khu.ac.kr

@khunilife

Printed by Chungsol Design

Phone: +82-2-966-1495

Fax: +82-2-959-7395

Representative: Choi, Hae-gyu

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The Hidden Risks of Sharenting



Photo: Dong-A Ilbo (donga.com)

Jeon, Hyeon-jun

Reporter
dnrkdguswns@khu.ac.kr

“Sharenting”—the practice of parents sharing their children’s lives on social media—has become increasingly common. It allows parents to document their child’s growth while connecting with friends and family.

In February 2021, Save the Children, a child rights organization, surveyed 1,000 parents with children aged 0 to 11 to find out their perceptions of sharenting. It was found that 42.7% of parents engaged in sharenting more than once a week, with the other 7.5% doing so more than three times a week. However, there are risks that the contents could be misused for criminal purpose. Sharenting carries serious risks, including privacy violations and the potential misuse of children’s images for criminal activities.

Privacy Risks and Online Exploitation

According to Kim Ah-reum, a researcher at the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, “Sharenting can be exploited for deepfakes. In fact, over half of child pornography involving real children’s photos originate from child-related content,” she said.

In January 2021, a Chinese online media platform *The Paper* reported distributing photos of child actors with inappropriate captions. These images were circulated online as emojis.

Sharenting also increases the risk of identity theft due to leakage of personal information. Barclays, a British multinational bank, predicts that by 2030, two-thirds of identity theft involving today’s children will

stem from sharenting. Criminals can capture children’s online identities, including their names, dates of birth, and school details from sharenting posts.

The Right to Privacy and Consent

Another major concern is the violation of child’s right to self-determination. Survey from The Save the Children found that 44.6% of parents had discussed sharenting with their children. It reveals that more than half of children are not aware of them being exposed on social media.

Some children are beginning to push back. 13-year-old Darren Rundall from Canada filed a lawsuit against his parents in October 2016 for sharing his photos without his consent, demanding a settlement of 300 million won. His case highlighted the growing issue of children’s digital identities.

Furthermore, Kim expressed concerns about social stigma. She mentioned a television program called “My Golden Kids”, which documents the growth of children struggling with behavioral issues. “There is a risk that these children will carry the label of ‘golden kid’, which means troublemaker, even after their behavior is corrected. With this, cyberbullying can hurt the children,” she said.

How Governments Are Responding

Due to the potential danger of sharenting, legal regulations are being implemented in many countries. France became the first country to regulate sharenting in March 2023. The law requires parental consent from both parents before sharing content involving their children. Even if one parent disagrees, sharenting is prohibited and family judges can intervene.

In the U.S., Illinois amend-

“Children’s digital footprints last a lifetime, and safeguarding their privacy will ensure their security in the future.”

ed its *Child Labor Law* in July 2024 to ensure that children benefit financially from sharenting content. The law required a portion of revenue from sharenting to be deposited for the children. This is the first law in the U.S. to protect the children from being exploited for profit.

However, some argue that such regulations infringe on free expression. Kim responded, contrary to some arguments, regulation bills does not significantly restrict freedom of expression. In French case, involving children in the decision-making process does not entirely prohibits parents from engaging in sharenting. Similarly, the U.S.’s laws prioritize safeguarding children’s personal information rather than completely limiting parents’ freedom of expression.

South Korea’s Approach to Sharenting Regulation

In 2021, South Korea proposed amendments to the Popular Culture and Arts Industry Development Act. This bill prohibits the withdrawal of profits from videos starring children or adolescents. The bill requires any guardian or parent who films for public content to report it to the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

However, critics pointed

out the lacks of clarity on the boundary between labor and personal entertainment. As such, there is a movement to strengthen privacy protection known as the right to be forgotten, but it is challenging to impose restrictions on sharenting as it falls within the private sphere.

Kim emphasized the need of stronger measures: “There is a need for a bill that guarantees children’s right to be forgotten, as well as strengthening children’s consent and protecting their privacy, as in the case of France.” She highlighted the role of education: “Education about sharenting should not only target parents and teachers, but also the children themselves to enhance digital literacy capabilities.”

How to Share Safely

Despite its risks, sharenting does have benefits when done responsibly. Kim Seolah, a mother who posts her child at online more than five times a week, said, “It is good to record memories with my children through sharenting.” According to researcher Kim, sharenting can also relieve parental depression and create family bonds. She recalled, “The children I have interviewed said they felt their parents’ love through sharenting.”

She acknowledged the risks of sharenting. Therefore, Kim suggested the following guidelines for safe sharenting: avoid sharing nude or potentially embarrassing content; refrain from posting personally identifiable information, including current locations; prevent deepfake by taking photos from the side or back than directly facing the camera; be mindful of whether a post might cause the child shame or embarrassment later in life. Kim also emphasized, “It is necessary for the online platforms to provide protective methods for children, such as sending warning messages through artificial intelligence based monitoring.”

Sharenting is a double-edged sword. While it allows parents to document and celebrate their children’s lives, it also poses significant privacy and security risks. While governments and online platforms continue their efforts to safeguard children’s privacy and safety, it is also important for parents to practice sharenting responsibly. Children’s digital footprints last a lifetime, and safeguarding their privacy will ensure their security in the future.