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Psychometric Quality of the Sharenting Evaluation Scale (SES) in Argentinian Adults

Abstract

“Sharenting” refers to parents or relatives sharing images/information of young family members on social media, which can negatively affect children. Previous studies lacked standardized measures, except for the Sharenting Evaluation Scale (SES) validated in Spain. This study aimed to validate the SES in an Argentinian sample (255 adults), test its factor structure, and explore associations with sociodemographic factors. Confirmatory Factor Analysis confirmed the model’s adequacy with satisfactory internal consistency, and cross-validation and invariance revealed similar results. Associations were found with age, number of social networks used, and gender. Findings support the use of the SES to assess Sharenting.

Keywords: *sharenting, Sharenting Evaluation Scale, social media, psychometric properties*

Introduction

Sharenting: Definition

“Sharenting” is a term coined by blending “share” and “parenting” (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). It refers to the online phenomenon where digital-native parents or relatives share images or personal information of their young family members, often minors, on various social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp Status, and blogs (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022). It includes sharing text, pictures, or videos related to different aspects of the child’s life (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022).

Positive, but Mostly Negative Aspects

Sharenting can involve positive intentions such as pride and affection (Lazard et al., 2019). It often includes digitally sharing milestones, storing memories, and exchanging information with peers and relatives (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022; Siibak & Traks, 2019). However, some parents inappropriately disclose personal content, such as pictures of their children in compromising situations (Brosch, 2016). This darker aspect of sharenting raises concerns about privacy loss and potential distress for children as they grow up (Barnes & Potter, 2021; Ní Bhroin et al., 2022; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022).

Negative aspects include sharing without consent, creating public profiles for children, documenting daily activities, and using children’s images for illicit commercial purposes (Kopecky et al., 2020). The debate revolves around unclear regulations that protect children’s reputations, privacy rights, and the right to be forgotten (Kravchuk, 2021). Research indicates that sharenting invades privacy, disregards child protection laws, and creates a digital footprint from an early age, leading to privacy loss, identity theft risks, grooming, cyberattacks, and appearance on pedophilia-promoting websites (Barnes & Potter, 2021; Hinojo Lucena et al., 2020; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022).

Assessing sharenting practices becomes crucial to protecting children’s psychological safety, especially considering the influence of social media on 21st-century children (Kaesling, 2021). The increased internet use during the COVID-19 pandemic emphasizes the need for early childhood cybersecurity policies (Edwards, 2021). Promoting children’s privacy requires a shared responsibility within families, including digital education (Barnes & Potter, 2021; Cino & Vandini, 2020). To achieve this, a thorough evaluation of digital practices within families is necessary.

Assessment of Sharenting: The Sharenting Evaluation Scale

Multiple studies assessing sharenting employed *ad-hoc* measures (e.g., Barnes & Potter, 2021; De Wolf, 2020; Hinojo Lucena et al., 2020; Kopecky et al., 2020; Marasli et al., 2016; Ní Bhroin et al., 2022; Verswijvel et al., 2019). Notably, a systematic approach to assess the degree of sharenting among adults can be carried out through the recently designed Sharenting Evaluation Scale (SES) (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Satisfactory evidence of the SES's content, construct validity, and internal consistency were verified within the Spanish adult population (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022). The scale is a self-report that assesses sharenting, specifically defined as the practice of sharing photos of the youngest family members – most often minors – by adult parents or relatives (Çimke et al., 2018; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Such assessment is carried out via three dimensions, namely Self-Control – self-control when sharing images or videos of the child in question; i.e., “How often have you felt the need to want to share the minor’s photographs or videos on social media?” – Social Behavior – social behaviours involved in sharenting; i.e., “How often have you felt that you were invading the minor’s privacy by sharing the child’s photograph or video?” – and Implications – degree of awareness of implications of sharing images of minors online; i.e., “How often have you considered that the photograph or video shared may have a negative impact on the minor’s future?”. It possesses 17 items with a 6-point Likert frequency response format (0 = *never*; 1 = *rarely*; 2 = *occasionally*; 3 = *frequently*; 4 = *very often*; 5 = *always*).

Sharenting and Sociodemographic Factors

Research on sociodemographic variables and sharenting has yielded mixed findings. Mothers tend to engage in sharenting more frequently than fathers (Ní Bhroin et al., 2022), although a gender bias may influence this in research focus (Barnes & Potter, 2022; Cino, 2021). Mothers and fathers have observed differences in sharenting content (Porfirio & Jorge, 2022). Age has shown contradictory results, being both a positive predictor (Ögel-Balaban, 2021) and inversely related to sharenting frequency in different studies (Ní Bhroin et al., 2022). The association between educational level and sharenting frequency is also inconclusive, with some studies reporting a positive correlation (Livingstone, 2018) and others finding no significant associations (Hinojo-Lucena et al., 2020). Moreover, certain studies have not found significant links between sharenting and sociodemographic factors such as gender, age, and job status (Cino, 2021; Hinojo-Lucena et al., 2020; Livingstone, 2018).

Objectives

The field of sharenting research recognizes the importance of systematic and quantitative investigations. Similarly, the Argentinian context lacks a valid and reliable assessment tool to study sharenting practices among adults. Therefore, this study aimed to gather psychometric evidence for the SES scale's suitability in the Argentinian context. The study tested the adequacy of the original SES scale's internal structure (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022) to establish construct validity. Model cross-validation and factorial invariance across age groups were examined to strengthen the evidence. Furthermore, the study aimed to explore the relationship between sharenting practices and sociodemographic factors in the Argentinian population.

Research Methodology

Sample

Two hundred and fifty-five Argentinian adults (87.5% female; 223 women, 32 men) between 22 and 82 years of age ($M = 44.68$, $SD = 8.76$) responded to the research instruments. 64.3% of the sample reported possessing a university-level degree. Regarding civil status, 42.7% were married, 31.8% in partnership, 13.7% separated, 10.2% divorced, and 1.6% widowed. 47.8% of the sample had two children, 32.5% one, 14.9% three, 3.5% four, and 1.2% more than four. 12.5% did not use social media, 29.8% one, 33.3% two, 21.6% three, 2.4% four, and 0.4% five.

Instruments and Procedures

Sharenting Evaluation Scale (SES) (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022): the Spanish version of the scale was applied, consisting of 17 items with a 6-point frequency Likert response format (as stated within the introduction). The sharenting dimensions assessed are Self-Control – items 1, 2, 3, 4 – Social Behavior – items 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 – and Implications – items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.

Additionally, a *sociodemographic and academic survey* gathered information on gender, age, maximum educational level achieved, and number of employed social networks frequently.

Data were gathered via a *Google Forms* online survey. Before presenting the instruments, participants were briefed and gave informed consent regarding the purposes of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Once individuals had given said consent, they were redirected to the online forms with the instruments.

Data Analysis

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using polychoric correlation matrices and the Robust Unweighted Least Squares estimation method (RULS) due to the sample size and the ordinal nature of the response format (Kilic & Dogan, 2021). Model fit was evaluated using the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), with values above .95 for TLI and CFI and below .08 for RMSEA considered adequate (Jordan Muiños, 2021). McDonald's omega coefficient was used to estimate the internal consistency of the SES dimensions (Ventura-León & Caycho-Rodríguez, 2017).

Model stability was assessed by dividing the sample into young and older adults based on the median age cut-off. Fit indices (TLI, CFI, RMSEA) were examined, and the Expected Cross-Validation Index (ECVI) was considered to assess cross-validity. The ECVI values obtained for young adults were expected to fall within the confidence interval of older adults and vice versa (Rial Boubeta et al., 2006).

Factorial invariance analysis was conducted to examine measurement equivalence of the model, using the segmented sample of young and older adults. Three nested models were tested, imposing progressive restrictions (Sekercioglu, 2018). Four levels were examined: Configural (no restrictions), Metric (restricting factor loadings), Scalar (restricting factor loadings and intercepts), and Strict (restricting factor loadings, intercepts, variances, and covariances). Invariance was interpreted based on Δ CFI and Δ RMSEA, with values below .01 and .015, respectively, indicating invariance (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016).

To investigate the influence of sociodemographic variables (gender, age, education level, and number of social networks used) on sharenting dimensions, a MANCOVA analysis was conducted. Due to violations of homogeneity and normality assumptions, Hotelling's T^2 statistic was used, as it is robust in such cases (Finch & French, 2013).

Analyses were performed with LISREL 8.8 and Jamovi 2.

Results

The SES scale's CFA verified an adequate fit of the empirical data to the theoretical model. Adequate internal consistency of its dimensions was observed (Table 1).

Table 1. SES tri-factor model. Factor loadings, internal consistency, factor covariances, and model fit

Item	Sharenting		
	Self-Control	Social Behaviors	Implications
S1	.862		
S2	.447		
S3	.529		
S4	.832		
S5		.749	
S6		.648	
S7		.543	
S8		.633	
S9		.405	
S10		.236	
S11			.440
S12			.746
S13			.895
S14			.938
S15			.914
S16			.848
S17			.850
ω [90% CI]	.774 [.674-.849]	.716 [.600-.807]	.933 [.906-.954]
Self-Control	-	-	
Social Behaviors	.675	-	
Implications	.560	.333	
CFI	.970		
TLI	.965		
RMSEA [90% CI]	.069 [.058-.081]		

Following this, the stability of the model between the two median-split age groups was studied. Respective groups of *young* adults – 22 to 44 years old – and *elder* adults – ages 45 to 82 – were created. A satisfactory fit was observed for both subsamples (Table 2).

Table 2. SES cross-validation analysis according to age groups

	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90% CI]	ECVI [90% CI]
Young	.968	.962	.063 [.043-.082]	1.957 [1.708-2.269]
Elder	.968	.963	.068 [.049-.087]	2.069 [1.804-2.397]

Afterwards, the priorly employed age segmentation was adopted and factorial invariance was tested between both groups in sequential levels of increased restrictions. Factorial invariance was achieved in all cases (Table 3).

Table 3. SES factorial invariance analysis according to age group (young vs. elder).

	CFI	RMSEA [90%]	Δ CFI	Δ RMSEA
Configural	.969	.068 [.054-.081]		
Metric	.965	.070 [.057-.083]	.004	-.002
Scalar	.962	.071 [.059-.084]	.007	-.003
Strict	.961	.070 [.058-.082]	.008	-.002

After verifying the scale's psychometric features, a MANCOVA analysis was conducted to assess the effect of gender, age, maximum educational level achieved, and the number of frequently employed social networks on the sharenting dimensions – Self-Control, Social Behaviors and Implications. Statistically significant multivariate effects were observed regarding the variables Gender ($F_{(3, 237)} = 8.321; p < .001; \eta^2 = .037$), Number of Social Networks Employed ($F_{(9, 717)} = 1.042; p < .001; \eta^2 = .018$), and Age ($F_{(3, 237)} = 13.964; p < .001; \eta^2 = .146$). No statistically significant interaction effects were observed. Age ($T^2 = .176$) was the variable most contributing to the explanation of sharenting, followed by Number of Social Networks ($T^2 = .143$), and Gender ($T^2 = .105$).

Regarding univariate contrasts, a statistically significant ($p < .001$) and negative association between Age and the Self-Control dimension was found. Regarding the number of social networks, statistically significant ($p < .001$) associations were verified with both Self-Control and Implications dimensions. Parents who use three or more social networks score higher in Self-Control

than those who do not use any social network ($M_{\text{None}} = 4.812$; $SD = 3.430$; $M_{\text{Three or more}} = 8.064$; $SD = 3.491$). Oppositely, parents who do not employ social media networks scored higher in the Implications dimension when compared with those who use one, two, three, or more social networks ($M_{\text{None}} = 19.281$; $SD = 13.877$; $M_{\text{One}} = 12.289$; $SD = 9.954$; $M_{\text{Two}} = 11.423$; $SD = 10.610$; $M_{\text{Three or more}} = 8.290$; $SD = 9.169$). As for Gender, statistically significant associations in favour of female participants were observed regarding both Self-Control ($M_{\text{Male}} = 4.375$; $SD = 2.685$; $M_{\text{Female}} = 7.040$; $SD = 3.329$) and Social Behaviors ($M_{\text{Male}} = 1.281$; $SD = 2.003$; $M_{\text{Female}} = 2.448$; $SD = 2.296$) dimensions.

Discussion

The study aimed to analyze the robustness of the SES scale (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Construct validity evidence was provided through CFA, and more rigorous analyses examined cross-validation and factorial invariance. Internal consistency coefficients indicated good reliability of the scale's scores. Exploratory analyses examined associations between sharenting and age, gender, education level, and number of social networks used.

Internal Structure and Internal Consistency

The CFA supported the excellent fit of the original 3-factor structure of the scale (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Most factor loadings were satisfactory, except for item S10 ($\lambda = .236$). While the decision was made to retain this item to maintain the scale's integrity, future research could explore implementing stricter factor loading thresholds. Cross-validation and factorial invariance analyses based on age groups (young adults: 22-44 years old; elder adults: 45-82 years old) further reinforced construct validity, particularly given the strong association between age and sharenting.

Covariances between sharenting factors were higher compared to the original study (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Cultural factors may influence variations in covariances, as preliminary evidence suggests differences in sharenting frequency across countries (Ní Bhroin et al., 2022). Further research examining the factorial invariance of the SES scale across countries can provide valuable insights.

Internal consistency analyses indicated that the sharenting dimensions' scores exceeded acceptable levels ($\omega > .70$; Hunsley & Mash, 2008). However, the lower bound of the confidence interval for Self-Control and Social Behaviors dimensions fell below the threshold. This discrepancy may be attributed to these dimensions having fewer items and the low factor loading of item

S10. Removal of this item could improve the internal consistency of Social Behaviors. Nonetheless, the acceptable internal consistency of the point estimates suggests that the scale performs well. Information from confidence intervals complements the analysis and highlights potential improvements in Self-Control and Social Behaviors.

Sociodemographic Factors Related to Sharenting

Age was identified as the strongest sociodemographic predictor of sharenting, with younger participants exhibiting lower levels of self-control in sharing images or videos of children, consistent with *Ní Bhroin et al. (2022)*. As parents grow older, sharenting likely decreases due to children, on average, becoming older and being able to influence their online presence. It aligns with sharenting's higher prevalence in early parenthood (*Brosch, 2016; Cino et al., 2020*).

The Number of Employed Social Networks was found to be a significant predictor of sharenting. Firstly, parents using more than two social networks reported higher levels of self-control in sharing images or videos of children compared to non-users. This finding is expected, as active social media participation is likely associated with higher self-control in sharenting. Secondly, parents with no social network participation exhibited greater awareness of the implications and consequences of sharing images of minors online compared to users of at least one social networking site. Hypothetically, parents with more intense social media usage may be influenced by practices they observe from peers, including sharenting. It is supported by the notion of sharenting as a cycle of mutual reinforcement within social networking sites (*Cino & Vandini, 2020*). Further research is needed to explore the implications of sharenting and the intensity of social media usage, yet this analysis provides a novel insight into the relationship between these variables.

Gender was found to be a relevant predictor of sharenting, with females exhibiting higher levels of self-control when sharing pictures of children and displaying increased awareness of social behaviours related to sharenting compared to males – women thus display a more cautious and aware profile. These findings contrast with studies that did not find gender-related effects (*Cino, 2021; Hinojo-Lucena et al., 2020*) and the higher sharenting levels of mothers compared to fathers (*Ní Bhroin et al., 2022*). However, these results contribute to understanding divergent sharenting patterns between mothers and fathers (*Porfirio & Jorge, 2022*). Further research using the SES scale will provide more clarity.

Lastly, no statistically significant associations were found between sharenting and educational level, which coincides with *Hinojo-Lucena et al. (2020)*

report, yet not with Livingstone et al. (2018). The educational level would seem to not have a particular bearing on multidimensional sharenting, yet future research should examine this assertion.

Recommendations for Future Research

Using the multidimensional SES scale may address important areas of inquiry. Firstly, it can contribute to understanding the privacy paradox, where parents express privacy concerns but still disclose personal information online (Barnes & Potter, 2021; Kokolakis, 2017; Ní Bhroin et al., 2022; Norberg et al., 2007). Secondly, the SES scale can be used to examine how sharenting relates to parents' digital literacy, an area that has been studied with *ad-hoc* measures (Barnes & Potter, 2022). The inverse relationship between parental understanding of sharenting implications and the number of social networks used suggests the benefits of including digital skills and literacy as relevant variables.

The limitations of the present study include the cross-sectional study design and the convenience sampling strategy. Caution is needed when interpreting the relationship between sharenting and sociodemographic factors, as further research is necessary to explore longitudinal designs and potential moderators/mediators. Moreover, the relatively small sample size of male participants ($n = 32$; particularly compared with the sample size of females, $n = 223$) may have limited the generalizability and robustness of the results when examining the effects of gender on sharenting practices. Thus, increasing the representation of men in future research endeavours could enhance the validity of the findings hereby reported. Considering that women have overall higher tendencies to sharenting (Ní Bhroin et al., 2022), a more robust analysis will provide relevant and necessary information to complement this study's results. Lastly, performing analyses based on more homogenous or theoretically relevant age segmentations (such as, for instance, forming groups based on different generations or more than two median-split age groups as in this study) would have also increased precision and provided additional interesting nuances in assessing the interplay of age and sharenting – particularly owing to priorly reported generational differences in social media usage (Walker & Matsa, 2021). Future studies involving larger samples could examine the relationship between these variables more thoroughly with such age group configurations; additional factorial invariance studies of the SES across different parent generations could also be conducted.

Conclusions

This study provides a psychometrically rigorous assessment of the measurement properties of the SES scale. Such work is essential to enhance the precision and adequacy of multidimensional assessments of sharenting. Future research should employ the SES scale to investigate the evolving phenomenon of sharenting validly and reliably. The present study serves as a step towards achieving this goal.

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Declarations of interest

None apply.

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