



Public Safety
Canada

Sécurité publique
Canada

Child Sexual Exploitation Public Awareness Research

Prepared for the Public Safety Canada

Supplier name: Ipsos Public Affairs

Contract number: D-160-201019/001/CY

Contract value: \$130,429.18 – phase 2/2

Award delivery: February 2020

Delivery date: March 2020

Registration Number: POR 018-19

Catalogue Number: PS4-268/2-2020E-PDF

International Standard Book Number (ISBN): 978-0-660-35767-6

Related publications:

This research report presents the results of a qualitative study conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs on behalf of Public Safety Canada. The study comprised focus groups with parents of children aged 0-17 years old held in March 2020. This publication may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes only. Prior written permission must be obtained from Public Services and Procurement Canada. For more information on this report, please contact Public Services and Procurement Canada at: tpsgc.questions-questions.pwgsc@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2020

Political Neutrality Statement

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of Ipsos that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.



Mike Colledge
President
Ipsos Public Affairs

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Background

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) online is one of the most pressing and severe public safety issues in Canada, and internationally. This crime is on the rise and continues to increase significantly because of new technological advances. These technological advances—combined with low cost and anonymity—are contributing factors to this growing problem, allowing child sex offenders to easily recruit (luring and grooming) and coerce (sextortion) children.

There is an urgent need to focus on effective prevention and awareness of CSE online, given the alarming rate at which this crime is growing, and a need for improved data collection, increased research efforts, and enhanced information exchange at the national level, to better understand the underpinnings and contributing factors surrounding online CSE.

PSC has led the National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation on the Internet since 2004. The National Strategy was launched to provide a focal point for federal efforts to combat this crime. The focus was put on law enforcement capacity, research, prevention and education activities, as well as support for Cybertip.ca, Canada's national tip line for reporting online CSE and abuse of children. Since the National Strategy's renewal in 2009, the technological landscape has changed considerably and because of this, the National Strategy has been enhanced to ensure it reflects today's reality.

1.2 Research Objectives

Qualitative research was required to inform the development of a social marketing campaign to support the National Strategy. Specifically, the research explored:

- the main challenges and concerns parents face in relation to their children and technology
- levels of familiarity with online child sexual exploitation and the extent to which parents are concerned about this in relation to their own children
- reactions to key messages and creative applications that could be used to target parents on the topic
- parents' information needs on the topic

1.3 Methodology

Ten focus groups were conducted across Canada between March 5th and 12th, 2020. Given that parenting experience varies by the age of their children, half of the focus groups were conducted with parents of children aged 13 years old or younger and the other half of the focus groups were conducted with parents of children aged 14 to 17 years old. The table below shows a breakdown of the number of participants that took part in the study by key variable.

Table 1: Sample Profile

Variable	Number of participants
Location	
Charlottetown, PEI	16
Quebec City, QC	11
Mississauga, ON	13
Lethbridge, AB	12
Vancouver, BC	12
Age of child	
13 years old or younger	31
14 – 17 years old	33
Age of parent	
34 years and younger	8
35-44 years old	32
45-54 years old	22
55 years old or older	2
Household income	
\$39,999 or less	9
Between \$40,000 and \$59,999	15
Between \$60,00 and \$79,999	17
\$80,000 or more	23
Language	
English-speakers	53
French-speakers	11

Focus groups were held in the evenings at focus group facilities or hotels. Groups lasted approximately 2 hours and participants were offered \$125 in exchange for their time. A copy of the recruitment screener and discussion guide have been appended for reference.

1.4 Interpretation of Findings

The following chapters present the key themes- notably the findings were consistent across the different demographic groups. The few notable sub-group differences have been called out where relevant.

The findings presented in this report are qualitative in nature. The value of qualitative research is that it allows for the in-depth exploration of factors that shape public attitudes and behaviours on certain issues. When interpreting the findings, it should be borne in mind that at no point is the intention to produce results that are statistically representative of the population at large. A separate quantitative survey was conducted and the report from that survey should be consulted for a representative picture of attitudes and perceptions on the topic among parents and the broader Canadian public.

Quotes have been used throughout the report to illustrate key points in the voice of parents; where quotes have been pulled from the French language groups these have been presented in French.

1.5 Key Findings

- On the broad topic of parenting in the digital age, it was evident that parents are grappling with the fact that their children are very tech savvy from a very young age, yet at the same time they are naïve, making them susceptible to being taken advantage of.
- Concerns around whom their children are interacting with online –via social media or gaming sites – came up in all groups, though the prospect of their children falling prey to an online sex predator and grooming was highlighted less frequently. This suggests that there is an opportunity to draw a stronger and more explicit link for online child sexual exploitation to be more top of mind among parents. Sexualised behaviours tended to come up as a concern in relation to young girls and older teenage boys, suggesting that there is an opportunity to raise awareness of potentially risky behaviours such as sexting and grooming.
- When the topic on online CSE was prompted, there was higher levels of familiarity with the terms ‘online child sexual exploitation’ and ‘online predators’, whereas ‘grooming’ and ‘sextortion’ were not terms that all had come across before.
- On one level, there was a general belief that this is an issue that can affect anyone and everyone among research participants. That said, the research found that they did not always translate that risk to their own children. There was a general perception that pre-teen girls were of higher risk compared to other age/gender groups.
- The research found that from an awareness raising and call-to-action perspective, the messages with statistics on prevalence resonated the most. These messages offer simple, factual and hard-hitting information and were aligned with what parents expect. There was unanimous agreement that the Government of Canada had license to use a gut punch type approach to create urgency and follow-up action on the part of parents. The remainder of the message groupings were unified in terms of none were off-putting or objectionable, and all were equally lacking in prompting a sense of urgency on the issue on the personal level.
- Of the three creative applications were tested, *Obscured* emerged as the strongest performer across all the groups due to its effectiveness in generating feelings of personal resonance and its “straight to the point” approach. *Illuminate* was appreciated by a few for its “cleverness”, but others missed the visual double entendres used or admitted that the concept is unlikely to grab their attention in their day-to-day lives. *Sketchy* was unanimously dismissed outright as a result of its lighter tone and confusing graphics.
- Almost no one had accessed information on the topic of online child sexual exploitation specifically – one participant in Lethbridge recalled attending an in-person seminar on social media when the topic was discussed – and there was zero awareness of cybertip.ca.
- Going online to look for information was a common response of where they might go if they wished to access information on the topic. Suggestions of other places information could be placed centered around locations that they or their children frequent e.g., schools, healthcare settings, and recreation centres.
- In terms of what information parents wish to access through online websites, these can be grouped into three clusters: general education on the topic, preventative measures they can take, and how they can take follow-up action.