



Online Child Sexual Exploitation Public Awareness Campaign

Summary

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Online Child Sexual Exploitation Public Awareness Research: Concept Testing

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Date: January 2024

This public opinion research report presents the results of 12 focus groups conducted by EKOS Research Associates on behalf of Public Safety Canada. The research was conducted in December 2023.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Campagne de sensibilisation à l'exploitation sexuelle des enfants en ligne : Rapport sur l'analyse des concepts

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A. BACKGROUND

The Government of Canada's National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation was launched in 2004 and expanded in 2009. In 2020, the Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: Voluntary Principles was released to provide a framework to combat online sexual crimes against children and coordinate action between governments and industry partners. Public Safety launched a national awareness campaign in March 2021 that focused on changing the attitudes and behaviours of Canadians on the subject of online child sexual exploitation, a reprehensible crime causing life-long harm and suffering to victims. According to the Public Safety website, online child sexual exploitation (OCSE) is defined as when children are tricked into seeing or participating in online encounters of a sexual nature. OCSE is one of the most disturbing public safety issues facing society today. It continues to harm past and present generations of children in Canada and abroad¹.

The awareness campaign was renewed in the fall of 2022 to continue to increase awareness levels of OCSE by increasing public and parental understanding that children (persons under 18) who engage in sexting could be at risk of OCSE. Canada's Criminal Code serves to protect children from all forms of child pornography, the use of the internet to lure children, from sexual contact or touching, and the procurement of children for illicit sexual activity. Public Safety (PS) Canada has been leading the National Strategy.

The objective of the current research is to test a number of proposed concept for the newest iteration of the awareness campaign among parents of children 8 to 18.

B. METHODOLOGY

Three concepts were tested in 12 online focus groups, which included participants from five different regions across the country. Participants logged onto a Zoom video meeting to generally discuss finding information for parents about online child sexual exploitation (OCSE) and subsequently viewed proposed animated storyboards to create a 30-second video as well as an associated website/social media static ads, for the three proposed concepts. They were asked to react to each concept in terms of overall impressions, tone, clarity of message and perceived effectiveness of the approach in encouraging parents to research, plan and discuss OCSE with their children. They were also asked to provide a series of ratings for each concept along similar dimensions.

¹ <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cntrng-crm/chld-sxl-xplttt-ntrnt/abt-nln-chld-sxl-xplttt-en.aspx>

In eight of the 12 groups participants were recruited to represent a region, rather than one specific city. Eight participants were recruited to attend each discussion. In the remaining four of the 12 discussions, participants were recruited among parents living in Halifax or Vancouver, which were intended to be conducted in-person. In the end only the two Vancouver sessions were held in-person, while the sessions with Halifax residents were conducted online. The recruitment sample was drawn from among parents responding to an earlier survey on the same topic, conducted in September 2023, at which time respondents indicated a willingness to be re-contacted about the follow-up focus group discussions. The original sample source for the survey, as well as some added records of Halifax and Vancouver parents, was the *Probit* online panel. The recruitment screener is provided in Appendix A. Participants were selected from those who registered their interest in participating, based on the age of their child (8 – 13 or 14-18), region they live in (Eastern or Western Canada), gender of the child, and language. In total, 77 individuals participated in the concept testing discussions, of the 100 recruited. Discussions occurred between December 4 and 11, 2023.

**Table 1: Number of Participants per Region –
Concept Testing Discussions**

Region/Demographic	# of Groups	Total # of Participants
East/Ontario	5	38
West	5	31
Francophone	2	8

A focus group discussion guide (provided in Appendix B) was developed by EKOS in consultation with Public Safety, along with a rating sheet used to rate each concept to quantify the results and obtain an initial reaction from each participant prior to discussion. Ten of the groups were conducted in English, while the two groups held with residents of Quebec were conducted in French. Each focus group took roughly 90 minutes to conduct. Participants received an incentive of \$120 for their participation in the online discussions². Video recordings, researchers’ notes and observations from the focus groups formed the basis for analysis and reporting of results.

² The incentive was \$140 for those recruited to attend in-person.

C. KEY FINDINGS

A few overarching themes expressed about the campaign include:

- Parents view OCSE as a serious and increasing problem, especially as technology is evolving. Among the participants asked, most agreed that there is a significant and urgent need for the campaign and information to support parents, noting that it's important to generate awareness.
- Parents of younger children seem less likely to have started conversations with their kids, primarily because their children do not have their own devices and are monitored more intensively than older kids.
- Many parents said that they are aware of the dangers, and what to look out for. Some parents said they go by instinct and have not really looked or found suitable information about how to approach these conversations.
- Quite a few said that a campaign such as this one would remind them of the importance of having discussions.
- The added use of statistics was noted by many as adding power and urgency to the message.

Views About Each Concept

Highlights of the testing of the three concepts are summarized below in terms of positive and negative reactions to each of the concepts.

Summary of Reactions to Concepts

Concepts	Positive Reactions	Negative Reactions
<u>Open-Closed</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seen as simple, clear, direct and to the point. (It tells a clear story; talk to your kids, it's important".) • Whispering is ominous. You can easily understand the danger, which is captivating. It conveys urgency to respond. • Imagery sends a positive message - child alone in the dark, mother enters bringing light and end to the danger. • Scenario suggests child was not aware of the danger. Adds greater urgency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not garner attention for some (vanilla, would scroll by it). • Sends message that you need to be in constant contact with your kids (not feasible) in order to interrupt danger. • Scenario suggests something is already taking place, and thus it is too late. • Lacks context (why is mom coming in now? What was the trigger? What is the talk about?) • Needs to go farther (e.g., more explicit, heightened scare factor) in order to be impactful.

Concepts	Positive Reactions	Negative Reactions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Suggestions</u>: visual queue of whispered content, possibly dispelled when mom enters. Added words from parent about why they want to talk (adds context) or that they prepared in advance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perhaps points to singular focus on danger for girls? Towards moms intervening? • Laptop may not be the most realistic device for young child.
<u>Someone Else Will</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evokes the strongest fear factor. Conveys messages – it can happen in your own home, in short bursts of time. • Has a big reveal that makes it powerful. Grabs attention, motivating to go to website. • Use of statistics viewed as adding to the impact; emphasizing the urgency and importance. • Straightforward story for some. • <u>Suggestions</u>: show more history of chat over time. Review predator script for believability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusing for many. Difficult to visualize how this would be rendered in live action ad (how to make it obvious the predator is there but not there and why). • Needs clarity on who predator is posing as (e.g., age) and corresponding text (e.g., when I was your age). • Also sends the message that you need to be monitoring your kids/with them all the time to interrupt. • Needs more emphasis on call to action (talk to your kids, look for information).
<u>Uncomplicate It</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatable for parents who are unsure about conversations (i.e. could see themselves in this scenario). • Sends clear message to have proactive conversations; “don’t delay”. • Reassuring message that there is information available to support planning and discussions. • Topics indicated on post it notes are informative. • Light-hearted tone grabs attention and makes a connection for some. • The scenario does not appear to suggest the child is “already in a dangerous situation”. • <u>Suggestions</u>: slower pace, more time showing post it notes, less over the top reaction from dad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreted by quite a few as making fun of parents, particularly dads, who they feel are portrayed as “dumb” or “incompetent”. • There is not enough scare factor to be taken seriously or garner attention. (Some said light-hearted tone is not appropriate for the topic.) • Unrealistic or aggravating tone and pace. Seen as “over the top” (dad too panicky, music too much, pace too fast). • Weak ending (peters out). Insufficient on call to action.

Ratings of Each Concept

Participants were presented with the animated storyboard of the 30 second video for each of the three concepts. In each discussion, the scenario was described and subsequently played twice, at which point participants were asked to go to a ratings page to provide reactions to the concept before any discussion was held. The order of presenting the three concepts was changed from one discussion to the next. Participants were asked to provide reactions from weak to strong in terms of the clarity of the message, the ad's ability to capture their attention, its relevance, ability to send them looking for information, and overall.

Results suggest that the message is most clearly conveyed in Open-Closed, which is also given the highest rating in terms of ability to capture attention. Both Open-Closed and Someone Else Will are seen as relevant. Each of the three concepts received modest ratings with regard to the call to action to look for information. The Open-Closed concept received the highest overall rating. Having seen and discussed all three concepts, participants were asked to pick a preferred approach that is effective at having parents think about the issue and take action. In this case, the concept Someone Else Will was preferred by a small margin. Some of the participants who selected Open-Closed or Someone Else Will as their preferred choice said the other was a close second choice.

Wrap Up

Uncomplicate It was seen as relatable to some, however, there is a significant risk of offending some parents, particularly fathers. The ad would require toning down (strong anxious reaction, pace of the ad, etc.) in order to be effective. The message that it is important to speak with kids, and the reassurance that there is information was nonetheless considered helpful for some.

Both Open-Closed and Someone Else Will feature the shock factor that many said is needed to command attention and motivate action. Open-Closed was preferred by some because it is a simple and straightforward story, that is easy to portray and understand. Those who preferred Someone Else Will, liked the stronger shock value of seeing luring in action "right in the living room". The portrayal of the predator in the room is, however, more difficult to convey, adding distraction for some, who had trouble "seeing" what was intended for the live action video even when presented with a description of the scenario before viewing it. Ultimately, either of these two concepts is likely to be effective at commanding attention and conveying the message.

D. NOTE TO READERS

It should be kept in mind when reading this report that findings from the focus groups are qualitative in nature, designed to provide a richer context rather than to measure percentages of the target population. These results are not intended to be used to estimate the numeric proportion or number of individuals in the population who hold a particular opinion as they are not statistically projectable.

E. POLITICAL NEUTRALITY CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications. 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.

Signed by:



Susan Galley (Vice President)