Protecting Children in Digital Spaces
Global Vulnerabilities, Local Realities

A Review of TFCSEA Risk Factors Through an Intercultural Lens

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https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=WPTe8_MAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao

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Why Digital Environments Increase Children's Vulnerability Worldwide

From digital harm to prevention priorities

Digital environments can intensify harm to children through unprecedented speed, scale, persistence, and reach.

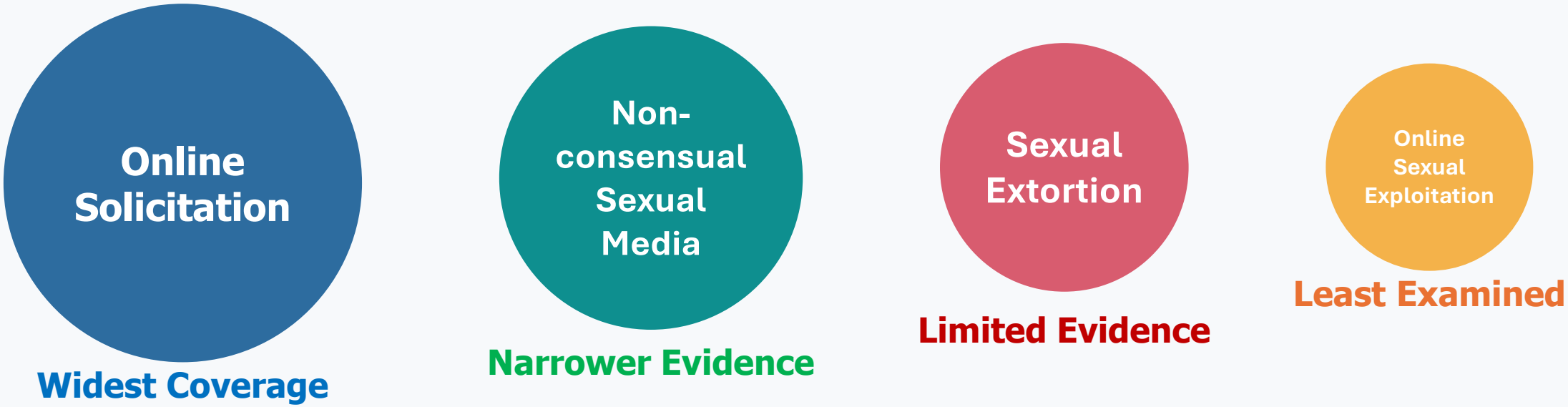
Therefore, effective prevention requires more than prevalence estimates; it requires a clear understanding of the contexts in which vulnerability develops.

⚡ **Speed**	Harm can occur instantly
🌐 **Scale**	Harm can spread to vast audiences
♾️ **Persistence**	Harmful content can remain accessible for years
🌍 **Reach**	Harm can extend across borders and communities

Safe Online emphasizes that child online safety requires evidence-informed safe technology and coordinated prevention responses (Safe Online, 2024).

Online Solicitation Dominates the TFCSEA Evidence Base

Other subtypes remain less studied, making their risk profiles more tentative.



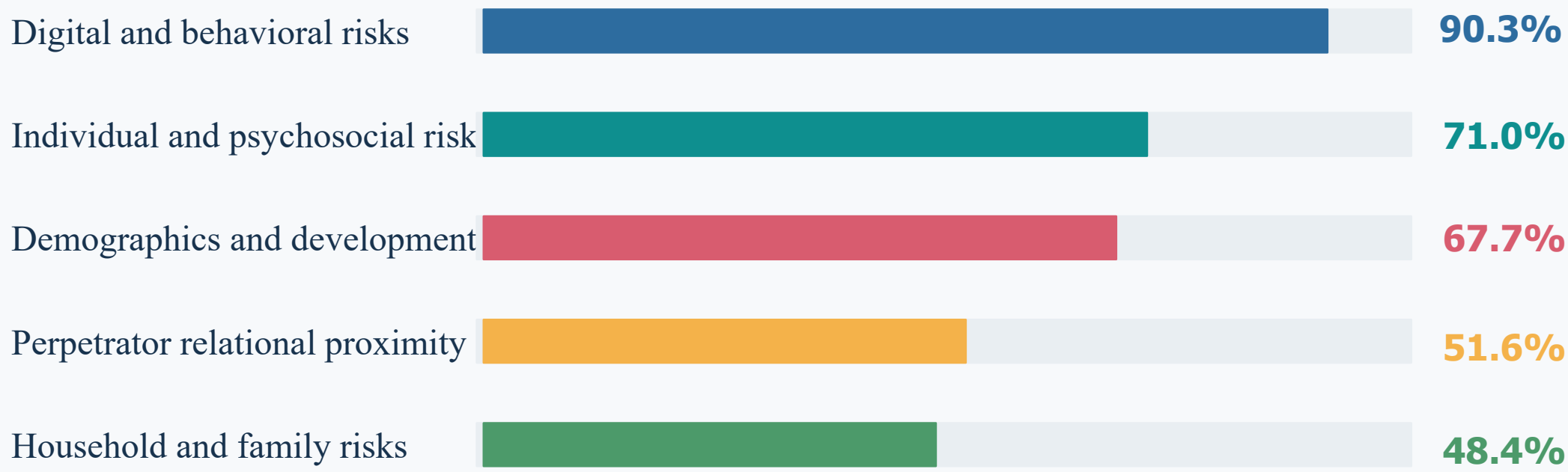
Takeaways

Our current understanding of TFCSEA risk is heavily driven by online solicitation research, leaving other subtypes comparatively underexplored.

What we know best is not necessarily where risk is greatest: prevention must look beyond online solicitation and address the distinct pathways of every TFCSEA subtype.

Where risk-factor evidence concentrates

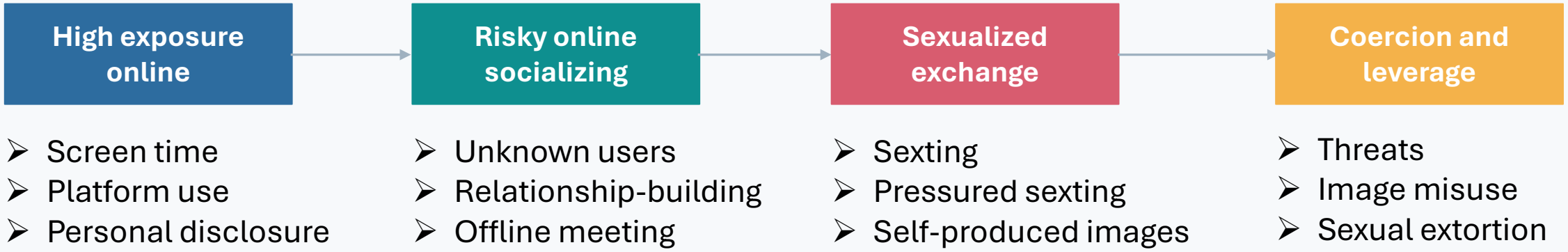
Percent of included studies examining each risk domain



The evidence base is strongest on digital behaviors, but thinner on the family and relational context that shape vulnerability

Digital and behavioral risks were the dominant domain

Repeated patterns across the results



Main Takeaway

Digital risk often develops through an interconnected pathway, from high online exposure and contact with unknown users to sexualized exchanges and, in some cases, coercion or exploitation. However, the evidence shows associations, not a proven causal sequence.

Psychosocial vulnerability is a risk context

Distress and prior harm often appear alongside TFCSEA involvement

1	**Internalizing symptoms**	Depression, anxiety, psychological distress
2	**Self-concept vulnerabilities**	Low self-worth, insecurity, shame, self-harm
3	**Prior adversity**	Maltreatment, bullying, harassment, prior sexual abuse
4	**Self-regulation factors**	Low self-control, dysregulation, disinhibition

Interpretation: these factors describe a vulnerability context and may also be consequences of abuse.

Demographic and developmental factors are not uniform

Risk varies by subtype, measurement, and context

Gender

- Female gender was more consistently associated with heightened vulnerability
- Male gender emerged as a risk factor for specific outcomes

Age

- Older adolescents faced risks linked to greater autonomy and sexual exploration
- Younger or less mature children were more vulnerable to power imbalances, manipulation, and coercion

Underexamined groups

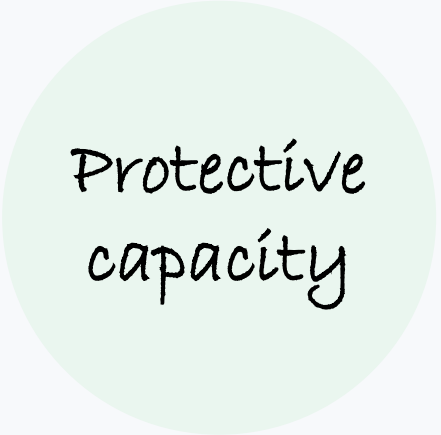
- Sexual-minority youth, children with disabilities, and those with neurodevelopmental vulnerabilities emerged as potentially higher-risk groups, yet they remain critically underrepresented in research

Takeaway: Prevention must begin with local realities: risk is shaped by developmental stage, social context, and the form of exploitation, not by a single universal profile.

The Family Shield
Supportive Households Protect Children from Digital Harm

Research results

- **Reduced care/support** — low parental care, neglect, weak emotional support
- **Limited monitoring** — less supervision, disclosure barriers, private access
- **Family instability** — conflict, separation, stress, dysfunction
- **SES / education** — examined less consistently; direction varied



Takeaway

Protection begins at home.
Family conditions shape a child's exposure to harm, courage to disclose, and pathway to recovery.
The family shield determines whether a child's vulnerability is reduced or reinforced

Major takeaway

Jesus' early life illustrates the power of protective formation: through family care, faith, community, and learning, he grew "in wisdom and stature" before emerging into public life (Luke 2:40, 52).

Perpetrator proximity complicates “stranger danger”

Risk involves both online-first and known relationships

Unknown / online-first perpetrators

Prominent in:
-grooming
-and solicitation contexts;

often connected to self-disclosure, online contact, and image sharing.

Known / peer / intimate contexts

Important in:
-coercive sexting,
-image-based abuse,
-and some sexual extortion dynamics.

Prevention must address both online-initiated access and misuse of trust within existing relationships.

Emerging Strong Risk: AI-generated CSAM

A new child-protection threat in the synthetic era

👱 **No authentic image needed**	Ordinary photos can be used to create sexualized material
⚠️ **Harm remains real**	Identity violation, revictimization, and lasting reputational harm
🚨 **Abuse can scale rapidly**	Nudify apps, generators, and circulation channels lower barriers
🔒 **Safeguarding becomes harder**	Law, platform response, and child protection struggle to keep pace

It can normalize abuse, expand the pool of victims, and lower technical barriers to offending.

Four recurring themes under AI-generated CSAM

1 Nature and extent	Deepfake pornography, nudification, synthetic intimate imagery, sextortion, peer-based school imagery, and AI-CSAM
2 Harms and lived experiences	Shame, fear, anxiety, loss of trust, educational and relational disruption, and embodied harm
3 Public perceptions and social meaning	Most people condemn the abuse, but victim-blaming and unequal credibility persist
4 Responses, regulation, and prevention	Existing legal and platform responses remain reactive, fragmented, and under-evaluated

Key Insights

AI-generated image-based sexual abuse is wider, more gendered, and more systemically organized than often assumed.

Scale and Distribution:
cross-national studies show measurable victimization and perpetration, while adolescent peer contexts may show especially high exposure

Harm and social meaning:
Harms are psychological, relational, reputational, and political; public disapproval coexists with bias and limited deepfake literacy

Response gap
takedown alone is insufficient; the literature calls for layered responses across law, platforms, AI developers, education, and victim support

Safeguarding Across Cultures and New Contexts

One commitment, many contexts: translating evidence into local practice

Digital safeguarding now includes AI-generated CSAM, deepfakes, nudification, and sextortion. The response must travel across cultures without ignoring local realities.

Culturally responsive	Digitally updated	Survivor-centered & coordinated
Translate principles into local language, faith/community norms, and trusted reporting routes.	Add AI-CSAM, deepfakes, nudification, and sextortion to safeguarding policies.	Offer rapid reporting, takedown support, and trauma-informed referral.
Co-design with children, families, educators, clergy, and safeguarding leads.	Teach age-appropriate AI literacy and bystander responsibility.	Connect schools, faith institutions, platforms, law enforcement, and child-protection services.

Shared protection principles, local cultural intelligence, and new safeguards for new digital risks.

Conclusion

Risk-factor evidence should support prevention without blaming children

TFCSEA vulnerability is not one behavior or one profile.

It is shaped by the interaction of digital practices, psychosocial vulnerability, developmental context, family support, and perpetrator relationship.

Prevention

combine digital safety with emotional support and disclosure pathways

Policy

address platforms and perpetrator pathways, not only youth behavior

Research

build subtype-sensitive, longitudinal, and context-rich models

When young people lose their religious and spiritual grounding, they may face growing struggles and begin seeking answers in artificial intelligence. Tragically, this can sometimes lead them toward feelings of despair or even thoughts of suicide. It highlights the critical importance of guiding them back to a sense of purpose, hope, and community.

Even those who perpetrate harm, often themselves victims of neglect or inner voids, may fall into these same struggles and exploit others when nothing restrains them. Thus, it becomes even more vital to offer them, and all young people, a path back to purpose, hope, and supportive community.

But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14)

Thank You

For your valuable time and attention.

For potential collaboration please contact:

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