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The best practices for strengthening policy implementation on child online protection in Sri Lanka

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Background: The digital transformation sweeping across Sri Lanka has brought immense opportunities for education, social interaction and economic development. Despite the number of opportunities brought by the internet, it has also created significant online risks including cyberbullying, screen addiction, sexual exploitation and harmful content for children. This study was undertaken to analyze the child online protection policies in Sri Lanka with a specific focus on strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for harmonized efforts.

Method: The study was conducted following a qualitative methodology, primarily focusing on reviewing available national policies, frameworks and other related legislative instruments. The study further references international guidelines and instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, INSPIRE Strategies and We Protect Model National Response to benchmark local practices against global standards. Further, secondary data from reports by governmental agencies, non-governmental organization and international bodies were analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of current measures.

Results: Best practices include collaborating with different stakeholders, introducing child online safety to curricula, awareness campaigns targeting children, educators, parents, civil society organizations and policy makers. Gaps in the existing legal system, lengthy procedures in the justice system, victim blaming and cultural barriers, limited public awareness and insufficient funding for child protection initiatives are noted as significant barriers to protect children online.

Conclusion: The findings emphasize need for a holistic approach that prioritizes children's rights and adapts policies to the rapidly evolving digital landscape. This study provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators and civil society organizations to strengthen protective measures for children in digital environments while fostering their digital citizenship.

Keywords: Child online safety, digital well-being, child rights, international standards.