

What does local news use have to do with raising children? Four dimensions of the roles of local news from a study on English parents' news use

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Ranjana Das , **Maria Nerina Boursinou**, **Tom Roberts** and **Emily Setty**

University of Surrey, UK

Abstract

Communication and journalism studies have historically engaged with local news, often through investigations of local journalism and its audiences. Against this backdrop, in this paper, we pay attention to the role of local news – defined as news about one's locality and neighbourhood, although not solely gathered from local journalism alone – in the specific situational context of raising children. Locating our work at the intersections of news use scholarship and the sociology of parenting, we draw out four key dimensions of local news use from speaking to 30 parents in England, as part of a three-wave, longitudinal project exploring parental news use. First, we highlight the role of local news as an *anchor*, often serving as community connections for parents raising their children within specific local and regional contexts. Second, we highlight the role of local news as an *escape*, where overwhelming geo-political and other crises are sometimes bypassed or deflected, focusing instead on local news, as parents speak of more contained, localised anxieties and opportunities in relation to their children. Third, we highlight the role of local news as a *lens*, into national and global challenges of difficulty, where people's hopes and anxieties about raising children in the wider world are seen through specific, local lenses. Finally, we talk of local news as a site of *labour* – where, keeping up with, processing, managing and acting on local news is part of parenting labour in contemporary societies. We conclude by identifying the potentials of these dimensions of situated, contextualised news use research within other relational contexts.

Corresponding author:

Ranjana Das, School of Social Sciences, University of Study, Stag Hill, Guildford, GU2 7XH, Surrey, UK.

Email: r.das@surrey.ac.uk

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Introduction

Communication and journalism studies' longstanding engagement with news use and its civic and democratic roles, (Moe and Ytre-Arne, 2022), has historically also meant scholarly engagement with the matter of local news (Gulyas et al., 2019), often, although not solely, approached as local journalism and its audiences. Against this backdrop, in this paper, we pay attention to the role of local news – defined as news about one's locality and neighbourhood, although not gathered only from local journalism alone – in the specific situational context of raising children. Our paper explores findings from two waves of a three-part, qualitative, longitudinal study examining 30 parents' engagement with local news in England.

Despite an increasing focus on news audiences (Schroder, 2021), little research within journalism studies has addressed how those raising future generations engage with news in their roles as parents, despite fertile common grounds to explore around risks, crises and parental anxiety (Lee et al., 2010). Whilst, doubtless, a very significant proportion of participants in various news use studies would indeed, coincidentally, be parents, there are perhaps few instances where the relational intersections of news use and parenting are specifically addressed, and people invited to speak about the news in relation to the specific situational context of raising children and going through parenthood. Yet, raising children, and the hopes and anxieties about the present and the future that entails, intersects in myriad ways with the expectations and responses people have in relation to the news – both rendered forefront amidst a period of overlapping crises (Lawrence et al., 2022).

In an era of high-choice news, characterised by relentless streams of information (Bengtsson and Johansson, 2021), declining public trust in news providers (Steensen et al., 2020), and rapid data-driven shifts transforming journalism, our study, funded by The Leverhulme Trust, investigates parental engagement and practices with news in general, but also specifically related to two key thematic areas: the climate crisis and environmental change, and issues concerning young people's well-being and relationships. In this paper, we aim to show how news, and local news in particular, become central in informing and indeed shaping parental decisions, by discussing four distinct yet overlapping dimensions they assume – namely, local news as an anchor, as an escape, as a lens and as a site of (parental) labour.

Conceptually framing our approach

In what follows, we conceptually situate our interests in parenting and news use at the intersection of scholarship on the sociology of parenting, and communications scholarship on news use.

Risks and anxiety in intensive parenting cultures

From the outset, this paper argues that parenting in the context of settings like England tends to occur as an individualised activity situated within an equally individualised manner of life management in a risk society (see [Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2020](#)). Literature in the Western context shows a transformation in the concept of parenthood, which goes hand in hand with changing ideas of childhood ([Furedi, 2006](#); [Hays, 1996](#)). The sociology of parenting notes that in the early 20th century, the predominant mother figure of the 19th century was replaced by the scientification of parenting. As the era of instinctive parenting gave way to ‘guided’ parenting, a new standard of ‘good’ parenting based on middle-class ideologies emerged ([Lee, 2023](#)). In the second half of the century, societal understandings of childhood faded away from the concept of raising children as model citizens ([Lister, 2006](#)) towards regarding children as the future of society. Parenting norms adapted towards fulfilling and excelling in the whole spectrum of children’s developmental progress, leading to the intensification of parental labour required to achieve this goal.

Key to our attention to news use particularly, we explore literature that shows how perceptions of parenthood and childhood evolved further in the 21st century and were characterised by two interrelated changes. First, children, still regarded as the future, were also attributed elements of vulnerability as well as potential digression from ideal norms. Understood within this prism, children were seen as running the risk of being influenced into exhibiting inappropriate behaviour, digressing from societal norms. Second, parents were encouraged to seek expert advice to navigate and respond effectively to their advanced responsibilities, which became more pressing within contexts of declining institutional structures and informal support networks ([Trultsch-Wijnen et al., 2024](#)). Parenting is also subject to public concern, scrutiny, and debate that permeates multiple facets of the private and familial domain. While parents are expected to assume increased responsibilities in protecting their children from possible dangers, they also have to be mindful of, examining, and adjusting their own behaviours to avoid exhibiting signs of ‘bad parenting’ ([Lee et al., 2024](#)).

[Hays \(1996\)](#) introduced the concept of intensive parenting, denoting a style of parenting that required more time, energy, and financial resources than ever before ([Wall, 2022: 341](#)). Rooted in middle-class origins and neoliberal values of individualised responsibility towards risk, intensive parenting has become the standard against which motherhood is demonstrated, assessed, and evaluated ([Romagnoli and Wall, 2012](#)). Good parenting becomes synonymous with intensive parenting ([Faircloth, 2023](#)). From a gender perspective, social reproductive labour and care work, including child-rearing, have historically been undervalued activities performed by women within the domestic environment ([Fraser, 2016](#)). Although, in certain contexts, paternal involvement has grown ([Dermott and Miller, 2015](#)), intensive parenting affects both parents—albeit in different ways and intensities ([Shirani et al., 2012](#)).

From a social class perspective, notions of intensive mothering transcend class boundaries, but unsurprisingly, women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds disproportionately bear the burden as primary caregivers and household managers. Mothers

in resource-poor environments experience conflicting emotions, oscillating between guilt, frustration, self-discipline, self-monitoring, and prioritisation of the family over the self (Capellini et al., 2019). Romagnoli and Wall (2012) argue for more robust welfare support, demonstrating how young mothers from low-income contexts who fail to adhere to individualised practices of ‘intense mothering’ risk not only emotional repercussions but also their ability to secure the means for survival and even the custody of their children.

Parenting, risks and news use

The discussion so far reveals a dual application of risk in parenting: on the one hand, parents are increasingly regarded as risk managers (Lee et al., 2010), responsible for safeguarding and optimising their children’s development; on the other, failing to perform ‘good’ parenting can categorise parents themselves as risk factors (Lee et al., 2010). In this paper, we argue that local news plays a significant role—although not the exclusive one—in assisting parents in making informed decisions about their children. News consumption occurs within a broader culture of individualised risk and uncertainty management, a defining feature of modern society (Lupton, 1999).

There is no doubt that several elements regarding our participants’ news use would match that of non-parents, as parents are also autonomous individuals with unique identities, needs, and interests beyond their parental roles. However, this distinction is rarely a clear-cut one and often one role affects and informs the other. News informs parents’ views about the world, particularly regarding risks and crises, whether slow-burning or emergency situations. As faraway events and risks affect multiple localities at once (Beck, 2008), in datafied and digital societies, risks are rendered omnipresent, widespread, and hyper-visible. News exposure relates to parents’ perceptions of risk across physical, digital, and hybrid environments, influencing their responses from everyday to more long-term planning, as they seek to create safe, stable and pleasant presents and futures for their families.

Against this backdrop, we explore the role of local news in parents’ lives. The scholarship on local journalism provides a useful foundation, where definitions of local news remain contested (Freeman, 2020; Hagar et al., 2020; Hess and Waller, 2016). Defining local news is an ongoing area of discussion, as scholars strive to clarify its scope and distinguish it from other forms of journalism and it appears that there is no consensus on a singular definition of local news. Hagar et al. (2020) propose a computational approach, suggesting that the geographic location of a news publisher’s Twitter followers can help differentiate between local, regional, and national news outlets. Hess and Waller (2016) focus on hyperlocal news, a subset of local journalism that targets small, community-specific stories. Hyperlocal outlets, often operating with limited resources, provide essential coverage of niche topics and events that larger media organizations tend to overlook. Freeman (2020) expands on this, distinguishing local news from hyperlocal news by their scope and impact—local news covers broader municipal or regional issues, while hyperlocal news addresses neighborhood-level concerns, often creating more immediate and personal community bonds. Gulyas et al. (2019) find that audience

members interpret local news differently in a digital environment. Their study reveals three main understandings of local news: as content that is personally relevant, as media produced by traditional local outlets, and as a form of community engagement. Adding to this, [Weber and Mathews \(2024\)](#) show that definitions of local news are often shaped by individual media consumption habits and the context of place. As digital platforms increasingly blur geographic boundaries, [Hess \(2013\)](#) introduces the concept of “geo-social” news, where social connections, rather than geographic proximity, define what is considered local. We suggest that these debates around scope and definitions are particularly resonant in our project where parents cast a net much wider than local journalism alone, when identifying what local news means to them.

Our approach, inspired by the intersections of news use scholarship and scholarship on the sociology of parenting, must be located not solely within the contexts of local news (use) but decades of scholarship on the important civic, democratic role played by news engagement (see [Mathieu and Møller Hartley, 2021](#)), in what scholars have theorised as mediated public connection ([Couldry et al., 2016](#)), and particularly the emotional role played by news, spanning news fatigue, news anxiety, and wellbeing impacts ([Woodstock, 2014](#)). We situate parental news use on the notion of news repertoires, where [Schroeder \(2015\)](#) argues that citizens pick and choose news from a “supermarket of news” in a ‘cross-media’ environment ([Swart et al., 2017a, 2017b](#)), in which news is gathered from a range of different, overlapping sources, platforms, formats, and genres. Additionally, we apply recent theorising of news engagement as approximately informed and occasionally monitorial ([Ytre-Arne and Moe, 2018](#)), which grasps the negotiated position of news management that citizens settle upon, amidst more extreme positions of disconnection ([Moe and Madsen, 2021](#)), news avoidance ([Aharoni et al., 2021](#)), and participation in circuits of disinformation ([Tripodi, 2018](#)).

Methodology

We utilise qualitative, sense-making research from communications and sociology to explore our core research question for the whole project – *in what ways does news use relate to parental risk perceptions and decision-making?* – although in this paper we focus specifically on local news use. Sense-making, used in social sciences and media studies, examines how people interpret global concepts in daily life ([Wibeck and Linner, 2021](#)). It involves interpretative and communicative processes people use to understand and relate to phenomena. While our participants share some similarities (e.g., geography, parental identity), they have unique backgrounds, personalities, and digital engagements that shape their interpretations. To address this, we use media reception studies ([Ytre-Arne and Das, 2019](#)) and a situated sense-making approach ([Reinhard and Dervin, 2011](#)). Although our study focuses on parents’ news use, we acknowledge they make sense of the world through other interactions, including peer discussions and personal experiences across online, offline, and hybrid settings. Recognising that defining “news” can be challenging, we focus on two key themes: environmental and climate change (acute issue) and young people’s well-being and relationships (unfolding issue). This thematic focus provided concrete reference points, facilitating discussion and enabling comparative analysis. These themes, prevalent in the news, allow us to track shifts in participants’ opinions and practices over time.

Our study includes three interview rounds examining news use and parental anxiety in risk societies. Interviews took place from November 2024 to April 2025, supplemented by a WhatsApp diary study before the third round. This paper reports on the first two rounds. Recruitment occurred via Facebook, Twitter, and an external agency to ensure a diverse sample (Table 1). A limitation is the predominance of mothers over fathers. This is common in parenting studies, and while fathers' participation has been increasing, the numbers remain unbalanced. This has led scholars to examine techniques and motivations to increase the recruitment and retention of fathers (Yaremych and Persky, 2023). Our study has tried to minimise this gap as much as possible, to maximise input from fathers including from different countries. In cases of participant withdrawal, replacements maintained the same parental role.

In the first round, we undertook home visits which established rapport. Given the sensitivity of topics (e.g., parental concerns, risks), each of us was assigned specific participants and themes across all rounds to maintain trust. Analysis of the first two phases focused on (a) news consumption in family life, (b) evolving news engagement over time, and (c) the interplay between parenting, citizenship, and risk. The second round, conducted online, expanded on emerging themes and introduced perceptions of AI in news use and parental imaginaries of datafied societies.

Fieldwork involved extensive note-sharing among team members post-interview, forming an ethnographic-style archive that enriched our analysis. Our notes to each other shored up connections between news use in parenting decisions and perceptions of risk in personal and familial contexts. As a four-member team, we met regularly to discuss interviews, document insights, and conduct close readings of transcripts. Data from all waves are analysed using NVIVO alongside manual field notes. The study underwent a full ethics review at the University of Surrey, ensuring peer-reviewed scrutiny of protocols, recruitment, and data handling. Participant names are pseudonyms.

Findings

“Not news, but I suppose what’s going on?”

We begin by highlighting the tentative, often doubtful definitions of local news put forward by parents, where, as Mike does above, they cast a wide net on what they counted as local news, whilst presenting it to us tentatively, reflecting wider debates in the field on differences between news and information in people’s eyes (see Harcup and O’Neill, 2017). Mike told us that, for him, local news is everything like *leaflets through the door* or local WhatsApp groups and social media posts that provide him with what he describes as *“not news, but I suppose what’s going on [in his area]?”* with varying degrees of trust in these sources. Rather than local journalism, then, in this paper our net is cast broad, in terms of the local news sources parents spoke about.

Local news as an anchor

We found, foremost, that local news plays a significant *anchoring* role in grounding parents in their communities, providing both a sense of connection and a source of vital

Table 1. Participant Table.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Children age	Location	Round
Tomas	46	Male	White British	11, 16	Surrey	1-3
Helen	36	Female	White British	2, 4	Surrey	1-3
Luna	38	Female	White British	4	Middlesex	1-3
Thalbir	29	Male	British Asian	8, 8, 2	Middlesex	1-3
Dominic	56	Male	Black British	12, 21, 26	Surrey	1-3
Daisy	37	Female	White British	6, 13	Surrey	1-3
Demy	48	Female	Asian British	16	Surrey	1-3
Rebecca	44	Female	White British	9, 13	Surrey	1-3
Patrick	44	Male	White British	6, 9	Surrey	1-3
Mike	41	Male	White British	10, 17	Surrey	1
Charly	44	Male	White British	9, 13	Surrey	1-3
Alice	56	Female	White British	16	Surrey	1-3
Tracy	33	Female	White British	2	Surrey	1-3
Georgina	40	Female	White British	3, 16, 17	Surrey	1-3
Lina	37	Female	Black British	8, 8 (twins), 12	Middlesex	1-3
Phillip	57	Male	White British	17, 31, 23 and 26	Surrey	1-3
Donald	47	Male	White British	16, 18	Surrey	1 + 2
Nathan	53	Male	Black British	6, 11, 14 and 15	Greater London Sutton	1-3
Dean	38	Male	White British	1, 7	Wallington	1-3
Alex	37	Male	Mixed	7, 12	Mitcham	1-3
Megan	23	Female	White British	3, 4	Sutton	1-3
Ehsaneh	41	Female	British Asian	2.5, 10	Greater London	1-3
Noleen	42	Female	White British	6, 11	Surrey	1-3
Ava	40	Female	Asian	20 months, 4	Acton	1-3
Laura	48	Female	White Irish	6, 8, 20 and 22	Surrey	1-3
Beatrice	34	Female	White British	3, 5	Surrey	1-3
Clarissa	35	Female	White British	19 months	Surrey	1-3
Hye-Kyo	36	Female	Asian	8	Surrey	1-3
Max	36	Male	White British	3, 7	Sutton	1
Martin	50	Male	Asian British	16, 19	Surrey	1-3
Cole	43	Male	White British	12, 14 and 21	Surrey	Replacement for 2 + 3
Sam	41	Male	White British	3, 5	Croydon	Replacement for 2 + 3

information for navigating their roles as caregivers. First, we saw such anchoring occurring through parents seeking and finding local information about the very geographies their children occupy. For many parents, local news served as an anchor by providing critical, practical information about services and events that directly impact their families. For example, Dominic, a father whose son has type 1 diabetes, highlights how local NHS (National Health Service in the UK) and healthcare news is essential for staying informed about which hospitals offer the best care and tracking developments that might affect access to insulin. He says-

“We don’t leave it all to chance. We need to know what hospitals are good. What who can give the best care for him, you know, like the insulin is made in Spain. You know, if we had any troubles or there’s a government that could impact on us.”

Local news, we found, informs decisions that parents make about day-to-day family life, such as holiday planning. Dominic notes that when considering vacation destinations, he actively checks local healthcare availability, saying, “*We need to know that their hospitals are up to speed.*” For Dominic, local news serves as a form of risk management, echoing sociological work on parenting in risk societies (Lupton, 1999; Pain, 2006). Parenting increasingly involves vigilant risk management, where parents, like Dominic, must anticipate and navigate potential risks, such as healthcare access, for their children.

Anchoring within contexts of community and identity is also key, we found. For some parents, local news helps maintain a sense of belonging and connection to their communities. Ehsahneh, an Iraqi parent living in South London, emphasises the importance of being engaged with her local community, particularly amid broader concerns about Islamophobia. She spoke to us about her use of WhatsApp groups to share and receive local news fosters a sense of community solidarity. She mentions, “*I have a WhatsApp group for pretty much every need and social network. I set up big mums groups. I’ve got work groups, community groups, faith groups, medical politics like BMA.*” Through these platforms, local news – in its broader classification beyond formal news sources and as community information sharing- becomes a shared resource for Ehsaneh that binds her networks together, providing practical information while reinforcing social connections. But equally, it is important to situate this perspective within the context of parenting particularly, in that it is not just the local connections that are being created and sustained for Ehsaneh but also a connected parenting identity and set of practices of local news sharing and consumption.

Our interviews also showed us how local news can function as an emotional anchor, helping parents navigate anxieties about raising children in an increasingly complex world. Demy, a single mother, describes how she relies on local news sources to stay informed about her community. She says –

“I buy the [area name redacted for anonymity] News and Mail...because I like to know what’s happening locally... Over the years, yeah, I’ve been part of the sort of networks of mums and I don’t know what it is now that they used to be. And called Net Mums in this local area about

all sorts of things you could post. Activities or if you're going through a particular stage with your child and you wanted advice."

For Demy, staying updated on local events helps her feel more secure and connected to her surroundings, especially in her role as a single parent, who similarly to Ehsaneh, consumes news from a combination of sources, including school training courses, online websites, local news and books as a way to advance her knowledge and achieve a rounded perspective on child-related issues. Another perspective comes from Daisy, who expresses concerns about the safety of their children in relation to local crime and broader social issues that could manifest locally. Daisy highlights how her anticipatory anxieties often transfer to her daughter, restricting her ability to enjoy her teenage years – "*I find myself adding my anxieties to her and not allowing her to be...a teenager.*"

An interesting perspective comes from Patrick, who discusses conversations going on in male/dad group chats. Patrick's quote shows how updates about their children and school life blend naturally among other mundane aspects of life, such as work or going out plans between friends and neighbours. As such, news come in the form of updates and in-between other passing conversations about the community and do not occupy an explicit moment in time or an action in which someone will purposefully engage with specific news. Parent networks double up as news sources in this case.

"Like, yeah, there's probably a bit of conversation or more like, what's happened at school on Friday. There's some work going on. What do we need to know that sort of stuff? Yeah. More that sort of thing, or? Yeah, I guess from what I can tell my boss told me he's not It's not like they talk about news on the whatever they're not doing that. Yeah. Yeah. On those parents groups anyway."

Whether driven by a yearning for community and camaraderie, or whether as a route to taking advice and reassuring oneself about safety issues, or for making practical decisions that ease the everyday, local news worked to anchor parents to the often mundane, everyday and often ambivalent aspect of their roles as parents, we found. This mirrors broader findings in the literature, which highlight the continuing importance of local news in addressing the specific needs of its audience (Napoli et al., 2017), fostering a sense of belonging and identity (Pew Research Center, 2019) and inducing a range of emotions (Woodstock, 2014).

Local news as an escape

One of the curious things that we noticed early on in fieldwork was parents' tendencies to speak of extremely local involvements – for instance eco initiatives at their child's school, or recycling with their child involved, or other local events that could impact their child directly. When invited to speak to us about big-picture, long-haul news – for instance, a prolonged geopolitical crisis, or environmental change. Some clearly articulated a state of emotional overwhelm (see Woodstock, 2014) with the 'big' news items, often justifying this overwhelm with comments on '*you know how it is*' in terms of the chaos of juggling

small children and working lives. Others diverted our conversation onto the more minute details of local news and initiatives when asked to speak to slow-burning issues and crises around, for instance, climate change. We conceptualise these tendencies as ways of escaping the overwhelm of big-picture or big-ticket news and instead searching for hope and a sense of agency in the familiar realm of the community, and as particularly relevant for the chaotic everyday contexts of raising children. As Demy notes:

“I think we do tend to hear about the water pollution and bills going up and, but let’s hear about some initiatives that have worked. And places you know, let’s let’s create some more ideas. Let’s look at some success stories that have happened and there will be those things in local communities that you don’t get to hear about.”

This kind of attachment to the local and changeable, at the expense of attachment to the prolonged and the global, reflects a kind of ambivalent news use where (certain) news might work as an escape from other kinds of news, linking to conversations on news anxiety, news avoidance, and selective news consumption (Aharoni et al., 2021). In addition, Demy’s preference for more positive community-based news updates, reflects a broader tendency expressed from our participants for news that are not all gloom, and it also speaks to literature from communication and environmental communication in relation to the importance of positive and solution-based journalism (Mellor and Nguyen, 2023). Important to note here, though, that avoidance for the sake of protecting and empowering oneself is perhaps distinct from avoidance as part of parental practices of shielding children from upsetting news, or indeed, from upset parents, as Helen drew to our attention. The feelings of overwhelm were enhanced for some participants as a result of their parenting identity, and avoidance took on a different kind of significance to them. Helen shared with us that while her partner tends to focus on the broader, more defeatist outlook of large-scale political issues, she prefers to pay attention to local matters, particularly those with direct impacts on her children’s daily lives and their immediate futures. This highlights the role of local news in providing *practical, actionable* information that feels immediately relevant and less abstract than “big picture” news. Helen emphasised how issues like local healthcare or safety initiatives influenced her voting decisions –

“It might be like the person locally here say, like Lib Dem he’s pushing for, like the local GPS stuff. To be going on there. You know, shorter. Everyone can be seen, you know, that day or whatever, things like that. Then that actually directly impacts you and your kids. Yeah, directly, but right in front of you rather than over the next however long it’s like, yeah, this is happening right now. When it was the Police and Crime Commissioner, this stuff was about better lighting in areas that don’t have lighting, so it’s safer for women, things like that. That’s how I voted for the Police Crime Commissioner based on stuff like that.”

For Helen, local news offered a *sense of agency* by providing information she could act on, such as voting in local elections based on issues like community safety and healthcare provision – both of which was particularly important to her, she says, since she became a

mother. Her selective focus on local politics over global concerns helps her escape ‘big news’, through overt engagement with the local especially. Also, we see here the construction of a responsible parenting role through decisions and actions in response to local news because of voting in response to impacts on one’s children, as Helen clearly said how her news use had radically altered post-parenthood. Similarly, Mark noted that since becoming a parent he had become much more engaged with local news and events especially related to education, schools, local safety etc. In terms of climate change and the environment, he did have a genuine concern and interest. However, he was much more focused on local environmental issues such as pollution and recycling than the big global challenges. Whether through local politics, community safety, or environmental initiatives, local news emerges as a form of “manageable” news that contrasts with the often distressing and unmanageable narratives of global crises.

Local news as a lens

While local news often serves as an escape from the overwhelming nature of global crises, our research shows that parents also use it as a means to interpret, contextualise, and engage with larger, prolonged national and global issues. Rather than simply distancing themselves from “big picture” problems, parents often use local news to make sense of these issues on a smaller, more tangible scale, empowering themselves and connecting with their communities in practical ways. This reflects a broader trend of *localisation* of global issues (Devine-Wright, 2013), where people relate large-scale problems to their immediate environments and experiences. A significant number of parents spoke about local news relating to knife crime in England, and about missing children. There was a heightened affective response to this coverage as parents albeit perhaps not necessarily local, found that leading news stories on these events are then affecting them on a more proximal level because it orients them to risks facing children. So, the issue itself might be at the national level, but local news offered a *felt*, affective proximity to the particular geographies and spaces of one’s neighbourhood making local news work as a lens through which unsettling national or global issues might be understood.

For Tracy, issues like knife crime and pollution—while part of larger, more systemic concerns—are made personal through their local manifestations, particularly as they relate to her son’s safety. Her focus on the local context of knife crime in London allows her to connect a national issue to her family’s lived reality. Alex, goes a step further to show the centrality of local news, as he comments on the lack of coverage for issues relating to crime and children in proximate areas he finds important but struggles to locate. He says-

“In the same week, there was a young, nine-year-old girl from [area name redacted for anonymity] that got missing. And I saw one post about it. Yeah, it wasn’t all over the news. Where’s all the police searching for unless he’s on our own country where people are doing a GoFundMe page raising 50 grand for someone they’ve never really known or met, and they’re sending people over to another country to go and look for an English person. Yet we’ve got a nine year old missing round the corner here. And it’s like, what? Why is that not on the on the news? Because someone could have kidnapped her and took her up north, but

you it's not even on my local news. You know, I had to read about it on a social media thing. And then again, it's like, what is it real?"

When speaking to us about news on young people and their well-being and relationships, parents explained how national issues apply to them and their children. Ava, **who was worried about the presence of microplastics in baby products, spoke to us about the news and happenings in her** local recycling and sustainability initiatives through a community microplastics group. Similarly, for Hye-Kyo, sustainability and environmental protection is an issue high on her personal as well as parental agenda and tightly connected to safety concerns for her family. She shared-

"So it's really frustrating, especially when you see those like alerts don't drink water for a few days like it's just ridiculous, I think. when it does happen, even if it doesn't affect my area directly, if it affects for instance like [area name redacted for anonymity]. I go out and buy a few bottles of water. Yeah, that's that's what I can do, isn't it? Protect my family, you know.

Local news offers parents a critical lens through which they make sense of national or global issues on a manageable scale. This connection of large-scale crises to local contexts is often rendered especially relevant because of child-related ties – for instance, a child's route into school. Local news use helps personalise and contextualise national and global concerns, where local news is a lens for interpreting global crises in ways that resonate with parents' immediate experiences, often in overt and covert ways, linked to hopes and anxieties around raising children. It is this last theme – hopes and anxieties around raising children that leads us to consider, next, the labour involved in monitoring local news.

Local news use as a site of labour

For many parents, staying informed about local issues, services, and events requires time and effort. Demy describes being part of various local networks over the years, including platforms like NetMums, which provide a space for parents to share news and advice about schools, activities, and community issues. This underscores how local news is integrated into the everyday work of parenting, from planning school choices to managing local environmental concerns, such as participating in litter-picking activities. For many parents, staying informed about local issues, services, and events is not merely a *nice-to-do* but it is an essential aspect of managing their parenting responsibilities. This labour is sometimes, although, not always, gendered. It appeared, in our dataset that a lot of worrying and anxiety – for instance – about local safety or security issues, was part of the remit of maternal caregiving, and this was accompanied by accounts of mothers frequently assuming the responsibility of actively participating in community networks and disseminating news within their social circles. For instance, Demy articulated her involvement with various local networks, such as NetMums, which serve as platforms for parents to share news and advice about schools, activities, and community issues. Daisy discussed the anxiety that comes with the responsibility of being informed, illustrating how local news engagement is tied to her maternal role. She shared her experiences of

monitoring local incidents, such as rumours about groups of boys ‘mugging’ children, which led her to frequently search for updates online – “If you hear like a rumour...I spent two weeks searching to see...if anything comes up”

Local news monitoring, anticipating and the use of it in decision-making then links to broader discussions of *risk management* in parenting (Lareau, 2011). Clarissa highlighted her heightened awareness and planning around potential risks, such as travel disruptions or safety concerns related to protests. This monitoring of local news shapes her approach to outings and activities with her child - “I think I’m probably a bit more aware...because it comes out of planning all week.” These experiences underscore how local news is integrated into the mundane logistical planning of parenting, where, as part and parcel of keeping children safe, local news is monitored closely. Megan says for instance – “I go onto Google when I go onto...Local Guardian to try and find if there’s any fact in it (the news she encounters) because before I start stressing about it, I want to see if it is factual.”, Local news use is part of vigilant practices, where, as Clarissa articulates, there is, for some, a shift in their worldview since becoming a parent, as she tells us, that, after becoming a parent “the world became smaller.”

But it seemed also that fathers, through the very particular transitional moment of becoming a father (Hodkinson and Das, 2021), develop an interest in the local, as their world is re-organised, so to speak, around their children. Mike said –

“(news use) is more geared to how your family is, how your family, what your family needs, what caters for your family. So again, you pay more attention to what’s going to benefit you over stuff that’s like something going on in the country you’re not travelling to.”

Max and Mike in our datasets are good examples of men who engaged a lot more with local news, particularly around schools and education since they became parents. Mike elucidates this phenomenon of a world becoming smaller, after the transition to fatherhood, and that shaping his news use. Another participant, Dean, presents a different and perhaps more expected response, when discussing news use for parenting. For Dean, who is also involved in child raising as a father, news appeal to him in the sphere of sports entertainment. News consumption beyond that, comes through his partner the selections of who, he trusts as being the most noteworthy. Dean shares:

“My girlfriend she’s very hot on these things, so she knows about the facts. She knows about so .. I will look into it She’s sort of my filter. If there is a story that she goes about then I’ll say OK and then look into it.”

Conclusions

In this paper, we argue that our findings on local news functioning as an anchor, lens, escape, and site of parenting labour enriches understandings of people’s news repertoires (Schröder, 2015) in a cross-media environment (Swart et al., 2017a, 2017b). We conceptualise how parental news engagement is intertwined with issues which have long been central to the sociology of parenting, for instance parental anxiety, or the emotional

labour of parenting. Our four-pronged conceptualisation of the place of local news in everyday parenting also resonates with Ytre-Arne and Moe's (2018) notion of news engagement as *approximately informed* and *occasionally monitorial*, as parents selectively engage with local news, amidst a plethora of global news, to balance the need to stay informed within the emotional and time constraints of parenting. We have also, of course, spoken of local news as an *escape* from more distressing or overwhelming national and global news speaks to the emotional toll that news engagement can take. Parents who described how they selectively avoided news (Andersen et al., 2024) that exacerbated their anxieties while engaging with local news that was directly relevant to their children's lives, tell us about the kind of news fatigue and anxiety we already know about (Woodstock, 2014), but equally also position news about the local and almost more 'manageable' aspects of the news. When parents use local news as a *lens* into larger national or global issues, such as environmental concerns or public health, they navigate the overwhelming nature of global news by connecting it to tangible, actionable, local contexts. The idea of 'escaping' the news and the world, might raise questions or concerns about its effect on (good) citizenship and societal participation in the context of parenthood. Some scholars argue that news avoidance can negatively affect participation in democratic societies (Skovsgaard and Andersen, 2020), whereas others support that a more balanced and attentive to well-being engagement with news can enable positive civic participation. There are two ways to approach this: In the first case, escape becomes an emotional coping technique, a relief from stress associated with news that are too big to handle whilst dealing with the juggle and chaos of raising children and presenting a together and positive front to them on a daily basis. Yet, our data show that people respond in a dynamic way, with their news habits not set in stone, changing as they children grow, and as life progresses. In addition, most of them maintain an overview of the headlines (e.g., elections in the UK and the US) with a focus on news deemed most relevant to their families. While we could assume that lack of deeper knowledge could affect the ability to make informed decisions, we do not have enough data to support a claim for withdrawal from citizen participation. In the second case, an escape from the bigger picture does not equate to complete withdrawal but rather a partially introverted stance also in terms of societal participation. Our climate change theme, for instance, showed that while participants were describing a relatively bleak view of the world, they also turned to local news (see for example Demy's quote about positive news), for a glimpse of hopeful news and updates. For instance, if we pay attention to parents' engagement with local environmental initiatives, we might hesitate from dismissing parents who appear to draw away from discussing big picture items, as people who are disinterested in big-picture news, but notice the ways in which local news use becomes a lens, and a mediator of their engagement with those very bigger issues in the news in the first place. Parents step up and engage in local participation, actively contributing to the community, neighbourhood and familial level, for issues they find necessary to 'do their bit' as part of their civic and parental roles alike. Their environmental -related actions for instance, show that parental motivations originate not only by the belief that climate change is a serious issue but rather because of its perceived impact on their children' future and well-being. In that sense, their actions reflect their commitment as responsible citizens and caring parents whose

wish to ‘bequeath’ a healthy planet and also role model environmentally friendly behaviours to their children.

This reminds us of the concept of sub activism brought forward by Bakardjieva (2009) as “*a kind of politics that unfolds at the level of subjective experience and is submerged in the flow of everyday life. It is constituted by small-scale, often individual, decisions and actions that have either a political or ethical frame of reference (or both) and are difficult to capture using the traditional tools with which political participation is measured*”. (p. 92). Overall, we need to still understand whether feelings of wider concern or even hopelessness can result in parental mobilisation, and in what ways this might happen and the role of news in these circumstances or if such feelings can push them further isolating from their civic roles.

Our findings also reveal the ways in which local news consumption functions as a form of *parenting labour*. Our participants highlighted how staying informed and making decisions which rely on the news about which roads are safe for one’s child to take, or worrying about local knife crime incidents - is part of the labour of parenting. Responding to their personal life circumstances, they engaged in coordinated and emotionally charged practices of engaging with the news as a means to achieve a high level of everyday life organisation that leaves the smallest possible margin for unpreparedness. Parents worried about the news, and their children’s futures, but also appeared to worry about appearing too worried – producing a multi-layered and nuanced form of emotional labour.

These varied stances towards news use in general and the kinds of local news use we are watching unfold in our longitudinal project speak to how risks are managed in contemporary parenting cultures (Furedi, 2006; Pain, 2006), where the ideal parent is ever-vigilant and engaged in harm avoidance. Parents who spoke of monitoring local knife crime news and community safety as part of their daily lives exemplified the emotional labour and anxiety tied intrinsically to parenting. Here, for instance, the role of checking of local platforms like Nextdoor or WhatsApp groups to monitor potential threats, especially in relation to children and their futures, beckons deeper attention to how local news use might work as a tool for risk anticipation (Lupton, 2016; Macvarish, 2010).

In summary, our four-fold conceptualisation of the role of local news in the specific situational context of parenting adds to existing scholarship on news engagement, and its focus on civic and democratic roles (Mathieu and Møller Hartley, 2021), by contextualising the personal, emotional, and familial dimensions of news use. These four dimensions indeed they relate to one another intrinsically. Likewise, parents, across the course of life, as children go through specific stages of childhood, might focus attention on different types of risks and changing rapports with their children, families and wider communities, where their relationships with local news are likely to remain fluid, over the longer horizon. We are hopeful, that our fourfold conceptualisation of the deeply personal, affective roles played by local news can be further developed, honed and explored in a variety of other situational contexts.

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ORCID iD

Ranjana Das  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0100-1817>

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Author biographies

Ranjana Das is a Professor in Media and Communication at the University of Surrey. Her current research interests span technology use and user-centric research on algorithms, datafication, and broader digital technologies. She dovetails these interests with her interest in families, parenting and parenthood. She recently published her book “[Parents talking algorithms: Navigating Datafication and Family Life in Digital Societies](#)” with Bristol University Press.

Maria Nerina Boursinou is an Interdisciplinary researcher at the intersection of Migration, Media, and Sociology. She currently works as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Leverhulme News Use Project at the University of Surrey. Nerina's doctoral thesis focused on Migrants' uses of ICTs while in transit. She has been an ESRC Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of St Andrews and a founding member of the Radical Urban Lab.

Thomas Roberts is a Senior Lecturer in Environmental Sociology at the Department of Sociology and Co-director of the Institute for Sustainability, at the University of Surrey. His research focuses on the relationship between people and the environment. More specifically he is interested in the impact of climate change on everyday life, healthcare and crime; public perceptions and understanding of environmental change and new low carbon technologies and the challenges associated with transitioning to a low carbon society. Thomas's research has been funded by The British Council; The British Academy; Public Health England; The Economic and Social Research Council; The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

Emily Setty is an Associate Professor in Criminology at the University of Surrey. Her work focuses on young people's experiences of sex and relationships in offline and online domains. Since 2014 she has conducted research on harmful sexual behaviour and peer-on-peer abuse among young people and on young people's experiences of online harms. She has also done extensive work in schools designing and delivering Relationships and Sex Education, including outreach work with parents.