

PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS AND EDUCATORS ON RISKY PLAY: BALANCING DEVELOPMENTAL BENEFITS AND SAFETY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract: Risky play presents a paradox in early childhood education (ECE): while it offers significant benefits for children's growth and development, it raises concerns among parents and teachers. This study aims to explore the perceptions of parents and educators regarding risky play in early childhood. A survey approach was employed using a mixed-methods concurrent embedded design, combining quantitative and qualitative descriptive analyses. The study involved 112 participants, comprising early childhood education teachers and parents in Java. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews to gather insights into parental knowledge about risky play, the types of risky play, their concerns, and their expectations. Quantitative findings revealed that 77% of parents are familiar with risky play, while 30% are not. Parents expressed the highest concern for water-related activities (90.9%), followed by sliding activities (88.4%). Injuries were identified as a significant concern, with 56.6% worried about physical harm and 14.8% about peer influence. Additionally, parents and teachers

highlighted the importance of receiving information on risk management in risky play. The findings of this study can inform the development of risk management programs tailored for early childhood education, ensuring a balance between developmental benefits and safety considerations.

Keywords: *Risky Play, Teachers, Parents, Early Childhood*

A. Introduction

Play is an important activity that contributes to children's growth and development. It can naturally stimulate various aspects of development, such as cognitive, social, and emotional development, especially in the physical motor system (Bento & Dias, 2017b; Buahana, 2020a). Play is often called an activity carried out voluntarily because it creates pleasure and satisfaction for children without considering the result (Wiwik Pratiwi, 2017). Despite the fun, various play activities are inseparable from various risks that allow children to experience injuries.

Risky Plays are games that involve a lot of physical activity, which are thrilling and challenging and have the potential for injury (Buahana, 2020b). Risky games are often identified as outdoor games; however, they have recently been found indoors and in indoor playgrounds, which is becoming a trend for playgrounds in Indonesia. In addition to indoor and outdoor environments, risky games are likely to occur in the school environment, playgrounds, and homes, often considered safe places for children. (Lavrysen et al., 2017).

Risky Plays are categorized into several types of games, such as playing with heights, playing with speed, playing with tools, fighting games, playing with elements, playing with the possibility of getting lost, playing with impact, constructive games, and games that break the rules (Brussoni et al., 2015; Sando et al., 2021). Young children find and perform these activities in early childhood institutions and other environments.

Risky play activities are challenging for children, providing a sense of thrill and a feeling of repetition. This has a good impact on children in building confidence and limits in predicting and understanding risks (Lavrysen et al., 2017). Parents' perceptions often influence play, which assumes that children are cognitively

immature, so safety and cautionary issues are essential (Madison MacQuarrie et al., 2022). Today, in Western countries, children's opportunities for risky play are diminishing, and at the same time, children's inactivity is causing health problems.

Risky outdoor play has become less common, coinciding with increased parental concerns about child safety and an emphasis on injury prevention. Risky outdoor play is associated with improved child health and development, injury, and death (Brussoni et al., 2020). This also impacts the implementation of risky play in the school environment, where parental attitudes also determine teachers' attitudes under parental pressure, thus creating an artificial environment and eliminating the risky segment (Rogulj, 2019).

This contradicts one of the benefits of risky play, which can help improve some health problems in children (Obee et al., 2021). On the other hand, risky play benefits children's health, development, and well-being. It has the potential to help individuals think about play in different and challenging ways. Risky play also enhances motor development, initiative, and social skills in terms of interaction between children (Rohde et al., 2023). Physical motor development is essential for early childhood growth, and risky play effectively improves these skills (Ryan et al., 2024).

Research on the importance of risky play to children's health, development, and well-being continues to increase. Action is needed to create a supportive environment for play so that opportunities for risky play outdoors and indoors can be minimized. Previously, to find out the level of knowledge of parents and teachers related to risky play, it was examined that as many as 76.7% of parents and teachers knew and understood the term risky play, while 23% did not know the term risky play. However, in practice in the field, parents and teachers already know and are aware of variations in play that have dangerous risks. This study analyzed parents' perspectives on risky play in early childhood.

B. Method

This study uses a quantitative and qualitative descriptive approach (mixed method embedded concurrent), combining data analyzed in percentage and supported by data interviews. Quantitative data is presented more to review the level of parental

knowledge and the percentage of types of games approved by parents. Qualitative data is used to see parents' opinions on risky games. In this case, the survey approach is used to describe or explain in detail a phenomenon that occurs in society. The population in this study were teachers in ECE institutions and parents with children aged 0-6 years, totaling 112 people spread across several regions of West Java, Central Java, and East Java. While the sample in this study was total sampling, meaning that the entire sample was sampled.

The data collection technique consists of preparing a questionnaire instrument filled in by teachers and parents online and offline. To obtain data on parents' opinions about risky play, management of risky play in institutions, and types of risky play known by parents and teachers. The questionnaire also determined parents' expectations regarding the components that must be included in the risky play guide. The research instrument used is Buahana's development. The instrument grids studied in this study include:

Table 1. Question instrument grid

No	Question Item
1	Knowledge related to risky play
2	Knowledge of aspects of motor development in risky play
3.	Allowable categories of risky play
4	Concerns in risky play
5	Solutions in risky play
6	Components that must be present in a risky play guide

The data obtained were then analyzed using a descriptive quantitative and qualitative approach.

C. Result and Discussion

This study aims to determine how parents and teachers perceive risky play and risk categories in the game and analyze their needs in implementing risky play. The following research findings are categorized according to the question items.

Parents' knowledge of risky Play

In this item, parents' knowledge of risky games varied. Table 2 shows 87 parents knew about risky play, while 25 did not know or had only heard about it.

Table 2. Parents' knowledge of risky play

Item	Total (n)	Total (%)
Knowing	87	77%
Not aware	25	23%

From the data above, about 23% of parents claimed not to know about risky play. However, in the sense of allowing children to play freely, this result aligns with a study that found seven parents supported their children's participation in risky play (Pretorius & Marais-opperman, 2023). In this case, some parents do not understand the tendency of risk when children play. Parents' knowledge of risky play is multifaceted and influenced by various factors, including their childhood experiences, cultural background, and current societal attitudes.

Furthermore, data related to parents' knowledge of risky play, which shows that around 77% of parents are aware of the existence of risky play in early childhood, indicates parents' interest in these games. Parents' interest in risky play aligns with the growing interest in this topic and concern for early childhood education and development. While parents generally support risky play, they emphasize the importance of supervision to ensure children's safety. Parents and teachers acknowledge that proper supervision is crucial to prevent injuries and ensure children learn to manage risks effectively (Pretorius & Marais-opperman, 2023). Researchers have sought to understand the potential benefits and risks of allowing children to engage in independent, adventurous play that involves an element of perceived danger (Brussoni et al., 2015; Tremblay et al., 2015).

Parents often overlook the potential benefits of risky play. Today's society often overlooks the importance of risk to children's learning and development. A culture of fear results in parents underestimating children's ability to make risky play safer. Elements of the physical environment have been shown to influence children's ability to engage in all types of play, including risky play (Obee et al., 2021). Children need to adopt a broader vision of risk, going beyond the possibility of accidents to consider the positive implications of feeling successful and happy when challenged or mastering new skills (Bento & Dias, 2017a). Research shows that risky play supports motor skills

development, including gross and fine motor skills, balance, coordination, and body awareness (DEREOBALI & ÇANDIR, 2021).

Parents' and Teachers' perceptions of game choices with risk categories

The researcher lists several risky games often carried out in children's play activities in this item. Risky play activities are generally categorized as outdoor play. In outdoor play, children can obtain many benefits, including exploring and observing the playing conditions around them and gaining unique experiences adapting to their environment (Muhammad Akhlis Rizza et al., 2021). However, some risky plays are also widely practiced indoors.

In this study, researchers made a list of games by referring to the types of risky games according to (Sando et al., 2021)(Sandseter et al., 2021) Including playing with heights, playing with the possibility of getting lost, playing with dangerous elements, playing with dangerous tools, playing with speed, playing with impact, and cooperative play. There are as many as 15 lists of games from these variations with various risk categories, both indoors and outdoors, to see which games are most avoided by parents and which are considered safe or allowed to be played by children. The following are the results of parents' perceptions in the category of risky plays:

Table 3. Parents' choices in the risky play category

Item	Parents' perspective
Playing trampoline	68,2%
Constructive play	86,4%
Play hide and seek	77,3%
Fighting game	40,9%
Play with sand	81,8%
Play with water	90,9%
Play with fire	36,4%
Play with sticks	72,7%
Play with ropes	77,3%
Play on the knives	36,4%
Play with scissors	72,7%
Play on the swing	86,4%
played round and round	72,7%
played sliding	88,4%
played on a footbridge	68,2%
played jumping	81,8%
played climbing	81,8%

Table 3 shows that in the types of risky play asked above, not all parents agreed to all risky play. From the figure, it can be seen that 68.2% of parents agree to play trampoline, 86.40% agree to constructive play, 77.3% of parents agree to play hide and seek, 40.90% agree to play fighting or wrestling, 81.80% to play sand, 90.9% to play with water, 36, 4% played with fire, 72.7% played with sticks, 77.3% played with ropes, 36.4% played with knives, 72.7% played with scissors, 86.4% played swing, 72.7% played round and round, 88.4% played sliding, 68.2% played on a footbridge, 81.8% played jumping and 81.8% played climbing.

This study found that parents' perceptions of risky play options varied considerably, even though most respondents were female. One study found that mothers perceived greater risk in children's risky play activities than fathers, while the child's gender was not significantly associated with parental perception of risk (Fauzi et al., 2017).

Table 3. Parents' choice in the category of risky games, the highest percentage was achieved by playing with water at 90.9%. This shows parents' perception that this game does not have a high risk among other games. The results of this study contradict other studies that show this type of play is considered risky because the potential for children to fall into the water or drown is very high (Hansen Sandseter, 2007).

The data in the table also shows that parents choose to play with fire as a game that is not allowed for children to play. Only 36.9% of parents agreed that children should play this type of game but with high supervision. Parents assume that playing with fire risks children being injured and causing fires, so most parents prefer to avoid this game for children and secure equipment such as matches. Hence, they are not easily accessible to children (Pollack-Nelson et al., 2006).

Furthermore, parents also avoided children playing on swings and trampolines. This is in line with the increase in injuries caused by playing on trampolines, such as broken bones (Series, 2024). Parents are concerned about allowing children to play on trampolines or swings. Providing opportunities for risky play means giving young children the space to explore and gain experience and essential skills. It involves physical risk-taking, such as swinging at high speed, jumping from heights, and exploring the environment (Gray, 2020).

Parent and Teacher Concerns

While most parents agreed with risky play in early childhood motor stimulation, they also had concerns about injuries caused by risky play. Cultural differences also play a role in shaping attitudes towards risky play (Brudzińska & Śmieszek-Formela, 2022). Parents and teachers in interviews gave several reasons that caused parents to play at risk, including physical injury, influence of playmates, lack of supervision, concerns about room settings, concerns about trauma when injured and traumatized, and worries about imprudence. The data can be seen as follows:

Table. 4 Parents' and Teachers' concerns

Item	Percentage
Physical injury	56,6%
Negative peer influence	15,4%
Concerns of insufficient supervision	14,6%
Concerns about setting up the environment and play equipment	11,1%
Concerns about imprudence	2,6%
Concerns of mental trauma when injured	1,3%

The table shows that 56% of parents were concerned about physical injury, 15% were concerned about negative peer influence, 14% were concerned about insufficient supervision, 11% were worried about making the environment and equipment safe for children, 2% were worried about carelessness in play, and 1% were worried that risky play could cause injury and mental trauma to children. The findings of this study show that more parents think about the risks of risky play than the benefits. Even though research indicates that risky play is positively associated with children's well-being, involvement, and physical activity (Sando et al., 2021; Spencer et al., 2021).

The highest percentage value was for concerns about physical injury. This is not without reason, given that children are a group that is vulnerable to accidents that cause injury. This is caused by interactions with peers and physical activities indoors and outdoors. (Rosuliana et al., 2023) Parents are also concerned about the negative influence of peers. Peers can influence

children's development in positive and negative ways. (Hanifa & Lestari, 2021)Peer interactions can cause injuries, especially in play, which often involves activities with peers. Peer conflict among preschool and school-aged children has been studied in various contexts, revealing important insights into its nature and resolution. Research suggests that catalysts for conflict differ between indoor and outdoor environments, with the idea of play being more prominent outdoors (Pic & Han, 2022).

Parents are also concerned about the organization of the play environment. A learning environment that is not conducive can harm early childhood safety and security and affect children's physical and emotional well-being and health (Anggraini et al., 2023). However, this concern may create an artificial environment where teachers are more careful supervising their students.

Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of Risky Play Guidance

Next, the researcher asked about the need for a risky play guide for parents and teachers. Parents and teachers can later use this guide to accompany children when playing at risk. In this case, parents and teachers are expected to understand the meaning of risky play and accompany children without excessive restrictions so that the essence of the benefits of risky play for child development can be felt.

Parents' and Teachers' perceptions of risky play guidance



Figure 1. Parents' perceptions of risky play guidance

From Figure 1, parents think there is a need for guidance in playing at risk. In this case, parents express several reasons that

researchers assessed through open questions, including:

Respondent 1:

“So that we as teachers understand these games’ types, advantages, and disadvantages with existing guidelines.”

Respondent 2:

“To create boundaries of what can and cannot be done.”

Respondent 3:

“So that we can anticipate accidents when playing or so that nothing harmful happens to children.”

From the respondents’ data above, it can be concluded that there is a need for guidance so that educators and parents can understand the characteristics of each type of risky play and how to anticipate the game’s impact without losing the benefits. Both parents and teachers generally view risky play as essential for children’s development. They recognize the benefits of risky play, such as developing confidence, self-esteem, autonomy, independence, problem-solving skills, and risk management skills (Ryan et al., 2024; Spencer et al., 2021).

Risky play guidelines and a well-designed and prepared environment play important roles in reducing the risk of injury to children (Back et al., 2016; Higginbottom et al., 2023). In addition, ECE services must provide a supportive environment where children can safely take risks, which promotes development and helps them understand risk management (Little et al., 2012). In this case, the guide can be a reference for teachers and parents when managing risk in early childhood. Educators play a crucial role in promoting risky play by creating environments that support risk-taking and by educating parents about the benefits of risky play. This includes using intentional teaching approaches to help children develop risk competence (Liu & Birkeland, 2022).

Researchers also explored information about what information and strategies parents need in guiding risky play in early childhood through open-ended questions, described in the following transcript:

Respondent 1:

“Information on what is and is not allowed, recommended protective equipment, and rules of play.”

Respondent 2:

"Type of game, how to play, tools or media used, How to do the game."

Respondent 3:

"Risks that can arise, preventive efforts and handling if an accident occurs."

The data above shows that parents and teachers think it is necessary to include information such as limits in risky games, rules of play, and preventive and treatment efforts in the event of an accident. This finding can be a reference for future research.

D. Conclusion

Survey research was conducted to see parents' and teachers' perspectives on risky play. This study's findings show that parents and teachers understand the importance of risky play but are also concerned about some types of play, such as water play, sliding, and constructive play. Parents also had concerns about play caused by peer influence, lack of supervision, and poor environmental management. Respondents believed there is a need for guidelines on risk management in various play categories and preventive efforts in handling children's injuries. This research can serve as input and policy for the government regarding developing training programs and guidelines on risky play.

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