

Chinese Parents' Beliefs on Children's Outdoor Risky Play during Preschool Years

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Abstract

The value and influence of play have long been discussed in early childhood. However, the importance of outdoor risky play and its role in development has long been underestimated, especially in the Chinese context. This study aims to explore Chinese parents' beliefs about outdoor risky play based on the ecological and dynamic transition model, as well as the opportunities and constraints set for children's risk-taking activities. Ten Chinese parents of children aged 3 to 6 participated in this study through semi-structured interviews. The results showed that parents perceived outdoor risky play could benefit their children in physical skills, risk assessment, and social development, but they had concerns about the safety threats associated with outdoor risky play. Parents' beliefs related to outdoor play were largely influenced by personal experiences and public media. Compared to the preschool context, children's opportunities to engage in outdoor risky play in the family context were limited by social pressure regarding parental supervision and external threats to children's safety. Considering these findings, implications for supporting young children's practice of outdoor risky play are presented and discussed. Finally, suggestions for future practice and research are made based on the limitations of this study.

Keywords : *outdoor risky play, risk-taking activities, Chinese parents*

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Introduction

Extensive research has established that young children tend to engage in and enjoy outdoor risky play (Stephenson, 2003). Outdoor risky play refers to a type of challenging activity that involves the risk of injury (Bruner, 1972). It includes activities like cycling, climbing, and jumping, which allow children to challenge themselves, encounter risk, and even learn how to assess it (McFarland & Laird, 2018). However, there are obstacles to the practice of children's outdoor risky play. The potential consequences of outdoor risky play, such as injury, can negatively affect parents' provision for children to engage in risky play in the outdoor environment, and some parents even discourage their children from participating in such play (Boufous et al., 2004). As urbanisation progresses and family values evolve, increasing restrictions on play spaces and concerns about safety shape parents' beliefs and practices regarding children's outdoor risky play (Brussoni et al., 2012; McFarland & Laird, 2017).

Literature Review

The definition of outdoor risky play

The definition of outdoor risky play has experienced changes during the past two decades. Outdoor risky play for children from 3-6 years old usually refers to an exciting, challenging and uncertain outdoor physical activity with the potential risk of physical injury, including play with great heights; play with high speed; play with harmful tools, play near dangerous elements, rough-and-tumble play and play where the children can get lost (Sandseter, 2007; Stephenson, 2003). Children get the opportunities to explore the boundaries of danger and learn about the limits of their abilities through risky behaviours. Specifically, children experience the development of height and depth perception, perception of the speed of body movement, and the skill to manipulate the use of tools flexibly through the act of play (Little & Wyver, 2008; Sandseter, 2009). Recently, Cooke et al. (2020) pointed out the limitation of current conceptualisation, arguing that outdoor risky play is overly simplified as merely a

physical activity in preschool education discourse. This limited definition has been criticised for overlooking the importance of outdoor environment and risk-taking behaviours in play.

The study of outdoor risky play should be contextualised within the specific cultural and social framework of China. With the infusion of Confucian tradition on academic achievement and modern Western value on child development, play has been regarded as one way of learning and listed as a vital part of preschool education (Zhang et al, 2024). The value of play has also been appreciated by the parents in China in relation to children's learning and development (Zhang et al., 2021). However, Chinese researchers mourned for the disappearance of outdoor risky play due to intensive parenting style and high housing density, especially in urban areas (Hou & Zuo, 2017). As a reflection on the research trend in China, outdoor risky play in this study refers to the activities that primarily take place outdoors and involve a certain degree of risk and uncertainty in their outcomes.

The necessity and value of outdoor risky play

Children are naturally drawn to the elements of risk in play, especially in the attractive setting of the outdoors. Regardless of gender, children are spontaneously interested in risky play (Sandseter et al., 2020). Studies show that when children have the freedom to choose their activities, about three-quarters prefer to play on challenging playground equipment, opting for adventurous setups such as the space net or tall tubular slides (Little & Eager, 2010).

There are two possible explanations for children's preference for such play. From an evolutionary perspective, risky play is a part of children's development, as engaging in a certain degree of risk helps them learn to regulate fear, thus equipping them with adaptive responses when faced with fear in everyday life (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). On the other hand, the high level of pleasure that risky play brings to children may also explain their interest. When participating in risky play, children experience not only fear but also fun, enjoyment, excitement, and thrill, with the pleasure often outweighing the fear (Sandseter, 2010; Stephenson, 2003).

The value of outdoor risky play for children is significant, with physical health being one of the most notable short-term benefits. Outdoor risky play often involves high levels of

physical movement and stimulation, helping children develop motor skills essential for balance and coordination (McFarland & Laird, 2018). In addition, the outdoor environment provides children with unique opportunities to experience the nature firsthand, contributing to their overall physical and mental development (Little, 2017; Whitebread, 2017).

Another key benefit of outdoor risky play is the development of children's risk assessment skills. By simulating real-life risks, outdoor risky play provides opportunities for children to learn about their capabilities and boundaries. For example, when children play in high places—a common setting for outdoor risky play—they improve their spatial awareness and learn to identify and manage potential risks (Rakison, 2005).

Outdoor risky play also supports children's social development (Brussoni et al., 2015). In detail, social and emotional health, problem-solving, and teamwork are benefits gained through outdoor risky play. The challenging environments typical of such play often require children to engage in discussion, negotiation, agreement, and cooperation with their peers, naturally enhancing their thinking skills (Obee et al., 2021). At the same time, outdoor risky play fosters positive social relationships. Games like chasing can improve complex social skills, foster emotional expression and control, and support the regulation of aggressive behaviours (Farmer et al., 2017).

Conversely, when children lack opportunities for outdoor risky play and instead engage in activities like video games or watching television, they may confront long-term threats to their learning and well-being (Brussoni et al., 2012). The absence of outdoor risky play can lead to negative outcomes, including health issues (Little et al., 2012; Paul, 2015). For example, the decline in outdoor risky play has been linked to rising childhood obesity rates (Lee et al., 2021). From 1990 to 2022, the obesity rate for children and adolescents aged 5-19 surged from 2% to about 8% (WHO, 2024).

Parents' role in outdoor risky play

While the benefits of outdoor risky play for children are widely acknowledged by parents, this does not necessarily transfer into their actions. Parents' attitudes toward children's play significantly influence their decisions regarding outdoor risky play. For instance, parents with a low tolerance for risk are more likely to restrict their children from engaging in such

activities to avoid potentially dangerous situations, whereas those with higher risk tolerance are more willing to allow their children to participate (Boufous et al., 2004). In practice, concerns about the danger of outdoor risky play often led parents to limit their children's participation (Jelleyman et al., 2019). A previous study in the United Kingdom found that while over 80% of parents understood the importance of outdoor risky play for young children, around 60% expressed concerns about their children's safety during outdoor play (Little & Wyver, 2008).

At the same time, parents' protective tendencies often hinder their willingness to promote outdoor risky play (McFarland & Laird, 2018). Concerns about physical harm, such as injuries, bleeding, or broken bones, lead some parents to discourage their children from engaging in these activities (Boufous et al., 2004). Additionally, with urbanisation, the rise in traffic accidents and violent crimes has heightened parents' anxiety about their children's safety, even when they might otherwise support outdoor risky play (Chak, 2007).

Theoretical framework and research rationale

This study adopts the ecological and dynamic transition model (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) to explore how parents' beliefs and practices regarding outdoor risky play are influenced by their interactions with an ever-changing context. The model is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which highlights the multiple layers of influence on a child's development (Bronfenbrenner 2000). For example, family works as the microsystem; interactions between family members work as mesosystem; and the cultural values on risks and play work as macrosystem. This model emphasises the reciprocal relationships between parents and children, family and society, recognising that these relationships evolve over time and are shaped by broader societal changes (Dockett & Perry, 2004).

Specifically, parents' beliefs about risks, play, and child development are not fixed. These beliefs are dynamically adjusted in response to social changes, such as urbanisation, cultural norms, and media narratives. By applying the ecological and dynamic transition model, this study delves into the interplay between personal experience, family expectations, and social factors, aiming to uncover how these dynamics drive parents' beliefs and practices related to

children's outdoor risky play.

Research has consistently highlighted the developmental advantages of outdoor risky play, yet parental anxieties about injuries, societal pressures, and environmental constraints often limit its practice. While substantial research on outdoor risky play has been conducted in Western contexts, including Australia, New Zealand, and the United States (Boufous et al., 2004; Little, 2017; McFarland & Laird, 2018), there is a paucity of studies exploring this topic within Asian cultural and societal contexts. With its unique cultural and environmental challenges, China presents a particularly compelling context for exploring the factors influencing parents' beliefs and practices regarding outdoor risky play.

To fill this gap, this study explores Chinese parents' beliefs and practices regarding outdoor risky play for preschool-aged children. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Chinese parents perceive children's outdoor risky play?
2. Which factors influence Chinese parents' beliefs and practices related to children's outdoor risky play?

Method

This study employed semi-structured interviews with ten Chinese parents from Guizhou, China, exploring their subjective views on young children's engagement in outdoor risky play.

Sampling and participants

This study focuses on exploring risky play in family context during preschool years, which primarily refers to children aged 3 to 6 years (Hsueh et al., 2015; MoE PRC, 2012). To gain diverse perspectives from parents, this study employed purposive sampling with ten participants from different ages, genders, education backgrounds and occupations to make the sample representative in the middle-class groups. All participants were primary caregivers of their preschool-age children in Guizhou, China (see Table 1).

Guizhou province covers a total area of 176,167 square kilometres, with a preschool population of 1,545,246 in 2019 (Guizhou Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2020). As a mid-sized province, its population density ranked 17th among 34 provinces in China in 2020. Although the province does not face issues related to limited living space, challenges persist regarding children's public spaces. According to the Guizhou Province Children's Development Plan (2021–2025) (Guizhou Provincial People's Government, 2021), there is a call for expanding public service resources for children, build a professional team of child protection specialists, and foster a child-friendly society in Guizhou.

Table 1. *Participant Information*

Participant	Relationship with Child	Age	Education and Occupation	Child Information
A	Mother	32	Postgraduate Doctoral student	4-year-old girl
B	Father	32	Bachelor Businessman	5-year-old girl
C	Father	40	Junior college Manager	3-year-old boy
D	Father	39	Bachelor Preschool teacher	5-year-old boy
E	Mother	30	Postgraduate Lawyer	6-year-old boy
F	Mother	31	High School Housewife	6-year-old boy 3-year-old girl
G	Father	33	Bachelor Businessman	5-year-old boy 3-year-old boy
H	Mother	34	Bachelor Office worker	3-year-old boy 4-year-old girl
I	Father	47	Bachelor House husband	3-year-old boy
J	Mother	35	Bachelor Housewife	3-year-old boy 5-year-old girl

Procedures

To gather insights into parents' perspectives on children's outdoor risky play, online semi-structured interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. Following a

small-scale pilot study that preceded the main interviews, the interview schedule was optimised. This adjustment not only enhanced the accuracy of the information collected but also preserved the flexibility needed to dynamically modify the questions during the interviews in response to new developments (Denscombe, 2017). The entire series of interviews were meticulously recorded. Interviews were conducted in Chinese, and the content was then translated into English by the first author, with revisions made by the co-authors.

Ethical Concerns

All participants received an information leaflet detailing the research aims and relevant literature. The leaflet included contact information, allowing participants to reach the first author via telephone or email at any time. Before the data collection process, the first author explained detailed information about confidentiality, anonymity, and data storage. Participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any stage of the research, even after signing the consent form. This study was conducted with the approval of the relevant institutional ethics committee and adhered strictly to the British Educational Research Association's guidelines to protect and respect participants' rights.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse all the information gathered from the interviews, with the content unpacked based on previous literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). First, the transcripts and notes were coded, and these codes were grouped into distinct themes by the first author, who conducted the interviews and resided in the same province as the participants. The themes were then rigorously reviewed and refined by the second author, who has five years of teaching experience in another province but did not directly participate in data collection. Finally, all the transcripts were shared with the third author and the participants for review, helping to mitigate personal bias and avoid over-analysis.

Results

Benefits and necessities of outdoor risky play

All participants displayed a positive attitude towards outdoor risky play, recognising its benefits for children. However, not all agreed that it is an essential activity during preschool years. In principle, parents were willing to encourage and support their children's involvement in outdoor risky play. More than half of the parents further emphasised the value of such play and its importance for their children's development.

Outdoor risky play was viewed as a valuable but optional contributor to the development of young children, offering various benefits that primarily fall into two categories: access to the nature and enhancement of children's developmental skills. Half of the parents supported outdoor risky play as a way for children to connect with the nature. Two parents further highlighted that engaging in risky activities in natural settings helps children develop their adventurous spirit and boost their courage. They noted that compared to indoor environments, the unknown risks in the natural environment allow children to become brave and further develop their risk-taking ability.

“There're more unknown risks in the natural environment than in the indoor environment, so I think it helps children to boost their courage and develop their ability to take risks.”
(Participant B, father)

The role of outdoor risky play in fostering children's development of key skills—such as self-confidence, self-protection, risk assessment, social skills, and physical coordination was emphasised as a critical reason why parents consider such activities essential. Parents agreed that children who engage in outdoor risky play tend to develop stronger self-protection skills, and a greater sense of competitiveness compared to those who do not. Some highlighted that exposure to outdoor risky play during childhood enhanced children's problem-solving skills and independence, better preparing them to assess risks and make decisions confidently in the future.

Furthermore, parents observed that outdoor risky play helps young children develop social

skills like teamwork and communication.

“Allowing children to play in risky situations is also an opportunity for children and may help them to communicate and work in teams with other children, all of which improve their social skills.” (Participant I, father)

While all parents acknowledged the social and physical benefits of outdoor risky play for young children, they had different opinions on its necessity. Only half of the participants considered it an essential part of early childhood development.

“It’s essential for growth, as parents can’t always keep their children in protected environments.” (Participant H, mother)

In contrast, the remaining parents viewed outdoor risky play merely as one of many experiences or learning options, not a necessity in the early years of a child’s life.

“I don’t think this kind of play is essential for my children. If they don’t like this type of activity, or if the activity is too dangerous, then of course I won’t encourage them to play.” (Participant G, father)

Moreover, most participants expressed concerns about the potential risks of outdoor risky play, often linking it to negative outcomes such as injury and accidents.

Factors shaping parents’ beliefs

Parents’ childhood experiences with outdoor risky play, along with their work experiences involving children—whether positive or negative—have shaped their current beliefs on their own children’s outdoor risky play.

Personal experience

Over half of the parents mentioned having been injured or experiencing accidents during

outdoor risky play in their childhood, which made them attentive to safety precautions when their own children engage in similar activities.

"I fell from a tree and got injured when I was a child, and ever since, I've been a bit scared of standing in high places. Now, I try to keep my children from playing at heights as well, as it's too dangerous." (Participant D, father)

On the other hand, some parents recalled enjoyable and exciting experiences with outdoor risky activities during their own childhood, which motivated them to encourage their children to engage in similar activities and have fun experiences.

"Looking back on my childhood, I have many experiences of engaging in risk-related activities, and I really enjoyed doing challenging things outdoors with my friends. So I want my children to experience that as well." (Participant I, father)

In addition, two parents mentioned that their previous work with children had influenced their views on outdoor risky play.

"I often took the children out into the fields and other natural environments, and quite a lot of it was risky. I found over time that it was a very beneficial thing for the children." (Participants B, father)

Professional experiences also support parents' positive beliefs on outdoor risky play, encouraging them to allow their own children to engage in such activities.

Social media and publications

The tweets, news, and videos on social media, along with information from parenting books, are crucial tools for parents to learn about outdoor risky play and shape their attitudes and perceptions toward it. Over half of the parents mentioned the influence of social media, stating that their understanding of outdoor risky play was largely shaped by tweets or videos on social media.

Despite the positive impact of social media on most parents' understanding, concerns raised by social media were also noted. Three parents pointed out that there were frequent news or reports about children's safety issues on social media, which, in turn, heightened their anxiety about their children's participation in risky play.

"I often watch the news on my smartphone, and there are several reports about safety accidents involving children playing outdoors. I am worried that something similar would happen to my children when they play outside." (Participant E, mother)

Moreover, publications were identified as another factor influencing participants' understanding of outdoor risky play. Seven parents stated that they had read parenting books, from which they learned about the benefits of outdoor risky play.

"I've been reading books on child development since I got pregnant, and this has taught me the importance and values of play. So, I usually encourage my children to run and jump more when I'm playing outside with them." (Participant H, mother)

The influence of social media and publications can be a double-edged sword when it comes to parents' beliefs on outdoor risky play. On the one hand, media and publications have widely disseminated research findings highlighting the benefits of play for children's physical and social development, raising parents' awareness of the importance of outdoor risky play. Due to the strong emphasis on children's development, information on this topic can easily sway parents' attitudes regarding certain activities. On the other hand, accident reports related to such play have heightened safety concerns among parents. Media coverage often amplifies parents' anxieties about their children's safety (Allin et al., 2014). Unsurprisingly, conflicting information influences parents' practices regarding children's outdoor risky play in Chinese contexts.

Factors constraining parental practices

Despite acknowledging the benefits of outdoor risky play, parents' practices were often

constrained by practical challenges. These constraints included pressure related to parental supervision responsibilities, fear of safety threats, and apprehensions about the adequacy of play facilities. The various types of constraints were interconnected, highlighting a conflict between parents' positive beliefs and their cautious practices.

Pressure on parental responsibility

Due to social expectations and family pressure, parents got stressed about their responsibility for children's safety during outdoor risky play. Most parents perceived outdoor risky play as an activity with a significant risk of injury. While some parents were willing to encourage their children to participate, they felt the need to assess the risks involved and take precautions to address potential dangers. For parents in China, it was their responsibility to do everything possible to keep their children away from harm.

"I'm a dad, I must take care of my kid, especially when it comes to their safety. That's why I'm afraid of the dangers involved in these kinds of risk-related activities, especially the risks that can cause any harm." (Participant G, father)

In addition, pressure from the elders in the family was identified as a source of stress. Parents expressed concerns about the acceptance of outdoor risky play by the older family members.

"Older people tend to be more cautious, so if you're raising a child with an older family member, they may have a different level of acceptance towards these activities than I would." (Participant D, father)

The old generation demonstrated a higher level of protectiveness toward children than parents, leading them to prevent children from engaging in outdoor risky activities. Consequently, it can be inferred that social expectations and family pressure are combined factors that may limit parents' practises related to outdoor risky play.

Due to the intense pressure of providing supervision, parents were hesitant to allow their children to engage in outdoor risky play. To justify their practices, parents emphasised the

potential for unforeseen consequences that may arise when children are left unsupervised.

“Personally, I think parental supervision is very essential because if you’re not around, you won’t know what might happen. So, I wouldn’t let him go out on his own to do risky activities at this age.” (Participant C, father)

Parents even outlined clear boundaries for acceptable behaviours during outdoor risky play.

“Usually when I play outside with my daughter, I always tell her first that there is a boundary for the play area, which is probably no more than 2 or 3 metres within a radius of my sight.” (Participant A, mother)

This level of demanding supervision led half of the parents to report that they often lack the time to accompany their children outdoors. When parents have other responsibilities, they tend to restrict their children's opportunities for outdoor risky play.

Fear of safety threats

Parents were concerned about the safety threats of outdoor risky play, including physical injuries, traffic hazards, and kidnapping, with physical injury being their greatest concern.

“There were a few times when I was doing rough and tumble play outside with my son, and I told him to try to find a flat path to run on, but he still fell a few times. I was a bit distressed to see him get injured.” (Participant E, mother)

Although physical injury was the main safety concern for parents when considering outdoor risky play for their children, half of the parents reported that they could accept minor injuries, such as bumps, bruises or small cuts. Parents acknowledged that some injuries were an inevitable part of outdoor risky play.

In addition to the risks associated with outdoor risky play itself, parents also mentioned about the external safety threats during outdoor play. Traffic dangers were one major threat regarding to children’s safety. Seven parents specifically mentioned their concern about

traffic accidents, especially when their children were near the roadside. Due to the potential severity of traffic-related harm, this was listed as the second greatest concern regarding outdoor risky play.

Additionally, concerns about child abduction by strangers increase the need for adult supervision and restrict children's opportunities to freely engage in outdoor risky play.

“Incidents of strangers abducting children are constantly being reported on the internet, this increases our concerns about children playing outdoors.” (Participant F, mother)

Although threats such as traffic and strangers are not included in the definitions provided by previous literature, parents expressed uneasiness about these external safety concerns in relation to children's outdoor risky play. Most outdoor play zones for children are public and unsupervised, located in easily accessible areas. The ease of access for both people and vehicles can lead to unpredictable threats. These safety concerns, in turn, heighten parental pressure regarding supervision during outdoor risky play and may even result in the avoidance of such play.

Apprehensions about facilities

The safety of playground facilities also influenced parents' decisions on whether to allow their children to engage in outdoor risky play. Parents' perceptions of the risks associated with these activities were influenced by the availability of equipment. Some admitted that if the playground equipment appeared unsafe or posed a high risk of injury, they would choose not to let their children participate in outdoor risky play.

It is worth noting that special attention was paid to the safety of playground equipment, especially during adverse weather conditions, when the risk of accidents could increase.

“If the place is slippery due to rain, then I'm less likely to let her play.” (Participant A, mother)

Several documents have been issued on safety standards for public playground facilities in

some developed areas in China, such as the Design Specification of Children's Park (children's zone) in Shenzhen (2018). However, Guizhou Province has not yet established similar guidelines, resulting in a lack of supervision and enforcement in existing children's play areas. This disparity in policy formulation and implementation across regions has heightened parental concerns about the safety of outdoor risky play.

Discussion

Parents' beliefs about outdoor risky play are shaped by the reciprocal relationships among factors at the individual, family, and social levels. At the individual level, parents make an evaluation on the value of play based on their personal experiences and information gathered from various sources. In the family context, parental responsibility compels parents to protect their children from harm and supervise them based on risk assessments. At the social level, the external threats add burden to parents' pressure on supervision and constrained their practices.

Valuable experience for individuals

The value of outdoor risky play is well recognised by all participants. It can be inferred that most parents agree on the importance of outdoor risky play for young children's learning and development and hold a positive attitude towards their children's participation. Similarly, a study in the United Kingdom found that over 90% of parents believed that allowing young children to take appropriate risks during play promotes their early development (Little & Wyver, 2008). In this study, freedom to explore natural environments, improvement in motor and social skills, as well as the ability to assess risks and protect themselves, were listed as the main benefits children could gain from outdoor risky play. These findings align with previous research, suggesting that most parents adopt the developmental perspective and view outdoor risky play as a crucial opportunity for children to learn risk identification and assessment (Little, 2010).

While parental views on outdoor risky play may vary across cultures (Cevher-Kalburan &

Ivrendi, 2016), Chinese and Western parents share a commonality: their attitudes and beliefs about outdoor risky play, as well as their concerns for young children's safety, significantly influence the opportunities for children to engage in such activities (Little, 2010). It is worth noting that parents' positive attitudes toward outdoor risky play often come from their own childhood experiences of unsupervised play. Chinese parents are more likely to support their children to play outdoor risky activities if they have had experience with this type of play and had positive feelings about it. Specifically, when parents recall their own childhood outdoor experiences and the excitement of playing risky games, they tend to encourage their children to engage in outdoor risky play (Laird et al., 2014). Conversely, if parents have negative experiences with outdoor risky play during their early years, they are likely to maintain a negative attitude toward these activities in adulthood (Lewis et al., 2004).

Threat to family hope

Although many parents experienced the joy of unsupervised risky play in their childhood, they are now hesitant to offer their children the same freedom (Laird et al., 2014). Parents tend to limit their children's opportunities to engage in outdoor risky play, as shown in both the current study and previous research (McFarland & Laird, 2018). In family-centred cultures like China, parents may be blamed by other family members if a child is injured under their care. As the old Chinese saying goes, '养不教，父之过' (yangbujiao, fuzhiguo)', meaning that father should be the one to be blamed if one child is not well-educated. Parents are regarded as the ones that responsible for children's safety and development. Additionally, urbanisation in China has increased traffic and social complexity, and reduced the availability of safe play spaces, and indirectly reinforced the need for closer parental monitoring.

Opinions from family elders further reinforce this pressure. During the preschool years, researchers have focused on child-rearing practices within the family context, highlighting challenges such as the involvement of grandparents in child-rearing (He, 2018). In China, it is common for parents to respect and follow the parenting advice of their elders when raising children (Hao & Hsueh, 2018). Due to the declining birth rates, children receive great attention from both parents and grandparents. The upside-down family structure created by the birth-control policy has led to a child-centred pattern of resource allocation and the

overprotection of young children (Jing, 2000). Despite the challenges posed by the new birth policy, parental investment in children continues to grow. Since children are often seen as the key to upward family mobility, ensuring their safety becomes essential to the family's prosperity (Yan, 2021). Believing that children may easily engage in unsafe behaviours, all the family members try to protect their hope from risks.

Risky activity in society

Due to concerns about children's safety within families, parents emphasised the risks posed by external social issues. Studies have shown that traffic near playgrounds is a significant source of anxiety for parents (Jelleyman et al., 2019), highlighting the constraints that urban environments impose on outdoor risky play opportunities for young children. From parents' perspectives, the accessibility and safety of play areas often conflict in public spaces. The perceived risks of outdoor play extend beyond physical injuries to include traffic accidents and violent crimes. This tendency to exaggerate the risks of outdoor activities reflects a collective cultural belief about risk.

Over the past decade, younger Chinese parents have adopted increasingly conservative beliefs regarding risks. According to a longitudinal study on public risk perception in China, Li et al. (2021) found a decline in risk acceptance in 2018 compared to 2008, particularly in relation to environmental risks. This shift has been attributed to the rise of the middle class and changes in natural risks. Middle-class parents, who grew up in the 1990s and began raising children in the 2010s, have demonstrated a heightened awareness of the differences between their own childhood experiences and the risks associated with child-rearing practices today, particularly concerning outdoor risky play.

Summary

In China, urbanisation has redefined outdoor play spaces and introduced new safety concerns, such as traffic hazards, prompting continuous changes about parents' beliefs on outdoor risky play. These shifts reflect not only parents' efforts to balance developmental benefits and safety considerations but also profoundly influence parenting practices,

ultimately shaping children's experiences with outdoor risky play. Despite these parents actively embracing the value of play, family responsibilities during child-rearing and social threats regarding supervision constrained their practices related to children's outdoor risky play on general.

Conclusion, limitations, and Implications

A growing number of studies demonstrate that young children's opportunities for outdoor risky play are diminishing (Brussoni et al., 2012; McFarland & Laird, 2018). Due to the over-protection, children get less chance to get involved in outdoor play activities (McFarland & Laird, 2018). Due to changes in the living environment in which children live, such as urbanisation and climate change, there are fewer spaces for children to play outdoors, especially in China (Paul, 2015).

This study explored Chinese parents' beliefs on young children's outdoor risky play and the factors that influence their beliefs and practices. It helps fill this gap due to the lack of research on Chinese parents' beliefs on outdoor risky play in Chinese context. Chinese parents' beliefs on young children's outdoor risky play were related to personal experiences as well as cultural expectations and environmental concerns. In general, they had positive attitudes towards young children's participation in low-risk, beneficial, and adult-supervised outdoor risky play. In addition, social expectations and family pressure on supervision, accessibility of playground and availability of facilities influence parents' beliefs and practices toward children's outdoor risky play.

However, this study has several limitations due to constraints on time and resources. First, it captured the beliefs of only a small number of parents. More studies with large sample size, including participants from both developed and underdeveloped areas, may provide a more comprehensive representation of the situation in China. Second, only semi-structured interviews were adopted; future studies incorporating validated observations can offer more nuanced insights into this topic. In addition, research on parents' beliefs can provide valuable insights into the ecological and dynamic transition model, as well as children's outdoor risky play.

According to the results, careful consideration of urban planning may be necessary to create safe and accessible outdoor play spaces. An ideal playground location should balance accessibility and safety, minimizing the threats of traffic accidents and criminal activity. Facility availability can be improved by integrating natural elements, such as trees for privacy or shrubs to separate play areas from traffic. Furthermore, designing with weather in mind, like using non-slip materials or adding shelters for rain protection, can enhance the safety and usability of these spaces.

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