

# Parent perception and encouragement of risky play: The role of gender and anxiety

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## Introduction

**Risky play refers to exciting play where there is an element of uncertainty or risk of injury (Sandseter, 2009).**

**Exposing a child to risky play may reduce their risk of anxiety. We hypothesise that parents with higher anxiety levels will perceive more danger in risky play. We also hypothesise that parent's perception of risk will be associated with child anxiety, and that this association will be stronger for fathers than mothers.**



## Method

### Participants:

- 40 parent dyads from the community
- Parents of 4 – 8 year old children

### Measures:

- **Parental Overprotection (POM)** (Edwards, Rapee & Kennedy, 2008, 2010)
- **Parent Trait Anxiety (STAI-Y2)** (Spielberger, 1983)
- **Child Anxiety (PAS)** (Spence, Rapee, McDonald & Ingram, 2001; SCAS-P; Spence, 1998)
- **Challenging Parenting Behaviour (CPBQ-4-6 and CPBQ-7-12)** (Majdandzic et al., 2014)
- **Perception and Encouragement of Risky Play (PAQ)** (developed for this study)

## Play Activity Questionnaire (PAQ)

- 12 item image-based questionnaire
- Parents rated on a 10-point scale:
  1. How risky they felt the activity was
  2. The degree to which they would actively encourage their child to take part in each activity
  3. How likely it was that their child would want take part in each activity

Internal consistency for each of the scales, and for the overall measure, was good (mean  $\alpha = 0.84$ )

Good convergent validity with the POM and CPBQ



### Differences between mothers and fathers on PAQ subscales

- Mothers' ratings of perception of risk ( $M = 67.29$ ;  $SD = 19.04$ ) were significantly higher than fathers' ratings ( $M = 60.47$ ;  $SD = 14.77$ ),  $t(39) = -2.16$ ,  $p = .04$ .
- No significant differences between mothers and fathers on other two subscales (encouragement of risky play and likelihood the child would want to take part)

## Results

### Parent anxiety and PAQ subscales

- Father's anxiety was positively correlated with perception of risk, although this did not reach significance ( $r = .30$ ,  $p = .06$ ).
- Mother's anxiety was not correlated with perception of risk ( $r = .02$ ,  $p = .91$ ).
- Encouragement of risky play was not correlated with maternal ( $r = -.13$ ,  $p = .42$ ) or paternal anxiety ( $r = -.04$ ,  $p = .79$ ).

### Child anxiety and perception of risk

- Father's perception of risk was associated with child anxiety, but not to significance ( $r = .29$ ,  $p = .07$ ) 95% CI [.03, .53], and this was stronger in children aged 4-6 ( $r = .40$ ,  $p = .07$ ;  $n = 21$ ) than in 7 – 8 years olds ( $r = .12$ ,  $p = .64$ ;  $n = 19$ )
- Maternal perception of risk was not associated with child anxiety ( $r = .02$ ,  $p = .90$ ) 95% CI [-.23, .21]

### Child anxiety and encouragement of risk

- For both mothers and fathers, encouragement of risky play was not correlated with child anxiety (mothers:  $r = .09$ ,  $p = .58$ ; 95% CI [-.16, .33]; fathers:  $r = .10$ ,  $p = .53$ ; 95% CI [-.28, .48]).



## Conclusions

- PAQ is a useful measure in capturing parent's perception of risk in play
- Fathers may have a unique influence on their child's anxiety through their perception of risky play
- Encouragement of risky play is complex – Parent's responses can be determined by multiple factors

## Future Research

- Longitudinal work, focusing on children with relatively homogenous temperament, at risk for anxiety (i.e. behaviourally inhibited)
- Examine physiological responses (i.e. galvanic skin response) to corroborate self-report measure
- Examine parental cognitions (i.e. evaluation of risk, attitudes to anxiety, core beliefs) to establish if any parental training in perception and encouragement of risky play could be of benefit
- Eventually establish a play-based intervention aiming to protect the child from anxiety

### Main References

- Bögels, S.M., & Phares, V. (2008). Fathers' role in the etiology, prevention and treatment of child anxiety: A review and new model. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 28, 539-558.
- Sandseter, E.B.H. (2009). Children's expressions of exhilaration and fear in risky play. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 10(2), 92-106.

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