



What is the Relationship Between Outdoor Risky Play and Health in Children?

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Abstract

Background: Risky play is a thrilling and exciting form of free play that involves elements of uncertainty and the possibility of physical injury (Sandseter, 2009), and includes activities such as climbing to heights, moving at high speeds, using tools and engaging in rough-and-tumble play (Kleppe, 2018; Sandseter, 2009). In recent years, a growing body of research has heightened awareness of the potential benefits of outdoor risky play for children's health. The purpose of this systematic review is to synthesize the evidence regarding the relationship between children's outdoor risky play and health outcomes.

Methodology: A systematic literature search of five databases identified eligible studies that assessed associations between children's (ages 3-12) outdoor risky play and health outcomes. Measures of risky play as an exposure variable were included as well as categories of risky play behaviours (Sandseter, 2007, 2009). Health outcomes were defined as 'a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (World Health Organization, 2005). Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed by quantitative narrative synthesis and qualitative framework synthesis, respectively, and synthesized using a Pillar Integration Process (Johnson et al., 2019).

Results & Conclusion: Across the 71 included studies, four categories of risky play exposure were identified: general risky play (n=12); environments that support risky play (n=20); independent mobility (n=18); and rough-and-tumble play (n=21). The results outline positive associations between risky play and children's physical health outcomes. Findings related to mental health and well-being, aggression, social, cognitive, and injury and risk competence outcomes were mixed. These results offer insights into how children's health is influenced through participation in thrilling and challenging play experiences and provide guidance for physical health and education programs.

Keywords: pediatrics; risk taking; injury; physical activity; independent mobility; rough and tumble



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