

“You don’t want your kid to get hurt but you also want him to learn something”:  
Fathers strike a balance between risk and protection

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# Acknowledgements

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# Parent attitudes & practices

- Impact child injuries
  - Supervision and safety practices
  - Attitudes towards injuries and injury prevention
  - Especially for younger ages
- Predominantly research on mothers

# Parental roles

- Maternal
  - Comfort and security
  
- Paternal
  - Encourage new activities
  - Risk taking
  - Activation function

# Research Questions

1. What are the range and scope of fathers' attitudes and practices in relation to the safety of their young children?
2. How do fathers consider the safety needs of their children when introducing them to new and potentially risky experiences?

# Methods & Sample

- Qualitative study based on grounded theory methods
- Semi-structured interviews - 32 fathers of children aged 2-7 years old
- Predominantly from Greater Vancouver

# Demographics

- Age range 23-52 years; Mean = 39 years
- Most fathers lived with mother of child (91%)
- Most fathers born in Canada (63%)
- Most fathers working (78%)
- Most fathers had two children (60%)

# Results



# Themes

- Facilitating autonomy
- Helping child actively engage
- Valuing risk exposure
  - Learning about themselves
  - Learning about injuries
- Valuing safety & protection
- Striking a balance
  - Responding to context
    - Taking seriousness into account
    - Responding to child factors
    - Considering safety measures

# Facilitating autonomy

*They need to be eased into the world and it's not going to happen if they're being sheltered and kept inside, or kept with you the whole time... just to give him some independence as well... I think you have to be aware at all times but you have to ease them into world as well, because that's what you're doing. You're raising children, for them to one day go off and be on their own... the ultimate goal, that's what we all want.*

# Helping child actively engage the world

*It's always in the back of my mind. If there's something new that I can expose them to I usually go after it.*

*Swimming for sure, biking – I've taught them all to ride bikes, that's something I have done. Biking, hiking. I try to get them to museums and things that they're not going to get into maybe not at school, so I like to go to the ecology centre....*

# Mothers less actively engaged, more risk averse

*I think anything physical I kind of do it.  
[Mother] is welcome to join in but when it  
comes to sports nobody wants to be on  
mom's team. So as far as sports is  
concerned or anything kind of physical I'm  
the majority participant.*

# Valuing risk exposure

*I think trying things is the real key in life. Just to try out things whether you think it will be tough or not, because when you accomplished something that's tough to do that really raises confidence and boosts self esteem as well and you have to be encouraged to try new things whether they look tough or not, you just have to be encouraged to at least give it a shot. I know that's what my parents always instilled in me so I want to do the same for my kids.'*

# Valuing risk exposure

- Learning about themselves and their preferences
- Learning about injuries and to avoid them

# Valuing safety and protection

*If it's small [injury] yes, but if it's big, this is my concern.... [they] lose their confiden[ce] .... they can pay [the] price for life.... but sometimes you say 'don't do it, don't do it,' [and] they do it [anyways]. This is [a] good lesson for them that they cannot reach everything. They have to get hurt sometimes. But... if [they get] hurt them too much they learn nothing. Its just damage and they never forget the day and they hate you, why [did] you let them down.*

# Striking a balance

*I try to make sure that it's balanced. I don't think you want to be over protective and I don't think you want to be under protective, right? So where is that line? Everyone is different so trying to consider what is the benefit of the experience and then the negative part of the experience.*



# Responding to context

- Taking seriousness into account

*Is it a doctor visit injury or is it a, is it a medicine cabinet injury? I don't think it's worth experiencing if you have to have a trip to the doctors.*

# Responding to child factors

- Age & Developmental stage
- Siblings

*The difficulty I find is my little guy wants to do what my older son does. So if my older [son] is going faster on his bike than my little guy wants to pick up the pace on his scooter, and that's okay with me if I'm running alongside of him. But I'm not going to let him go as far out because he doesn't know the possible dangers.*

# Considering safety measures

- Safety equipment to mitigate risk
- Training and teaching
- Supervision

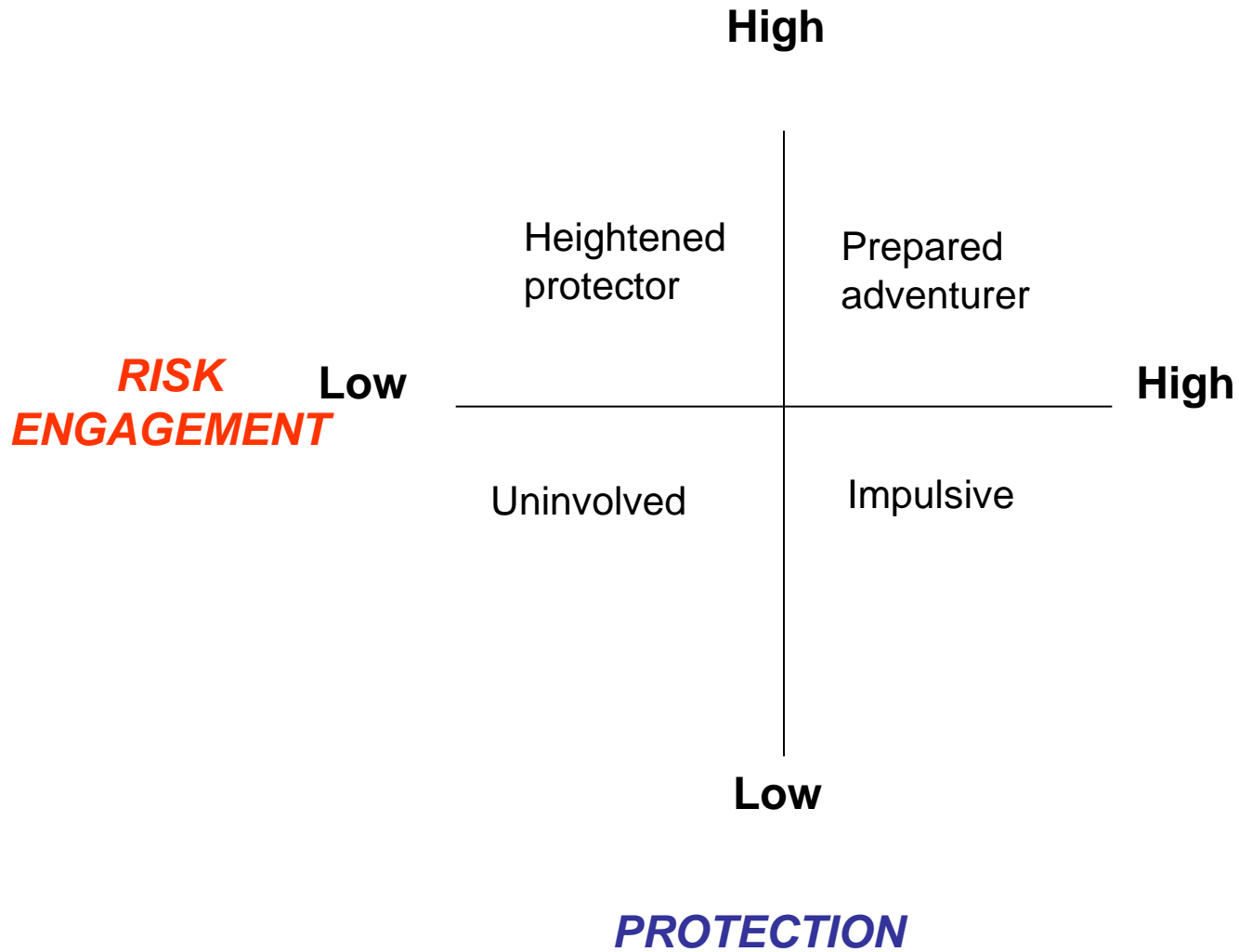
# Considering safety measures

- Supervision

*Supervision, obviously, yeah, always keeping an eye on them and I think its really important when they're going over new ground or when they're in a playground where they haven't been before that you're right there with them and you give them the opportunity that you're close enough to catch them if they fall. But to encourage them through the new activity until they feel confident in it and before you know it they're flying along. They just need you there, and when they're afraid you know they're afraid, you can see it on their faces. So you just get closer to them and put a hand on them and 'it's okay' you know 'I'm here.' So reassurance I think.*

# Discussion

- Two opposing concepts of risk and protection



# Prepared Adventurer

- Most common
- High on risk & protection

*I'd always make sure that he's safe but at the same time I encourage him to try and take that extra step or try to do it yourself.*

# Heightened Protector

- High on protection, low on risk
- Protection of children most salient

*You know nothing is fool-proof, I found that out with having the kids there's always some kind of danger that is possible.*



# Uninvolved

*I don't stay [a] very long time with my son because I work all the time and my wife is at home. So she takes care of my son most of the time. Sometimes I should play with him, talk and teach him something.*

- Low on risk
  - Little involvement in physical activities due to lack of engagement with child
- Low on protection
  - Passive
- Child could be passive, or overly active and with few limits set

# Impulsive

- Low on protection, high on risk
- ? Highest child injury rate?
- Impulsive decisions not carefully thought out

*I was allowing something that was right at the threshold of me stopping it but it was a one time shot that they could do it and they loved like the waves crashing over them kind of thing and towing them out a bit, But I was right there. But it was fairly risky.*

# Implications

- Messaging for fathers needs to incorporate their views
- Design injury prevention strategies and messaging that are sensitive to fathers' differences on these dimensions

# Future research

- Link between dimension and child's medically attended injury
- Targeted injury prevention and parenting strategies to shift fathers to a more “desirable” dimension

# Thank you!

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