

children's independent mobility why is it important?

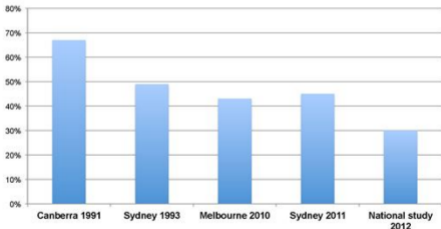


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Children Independent Mobility National Comparative Study

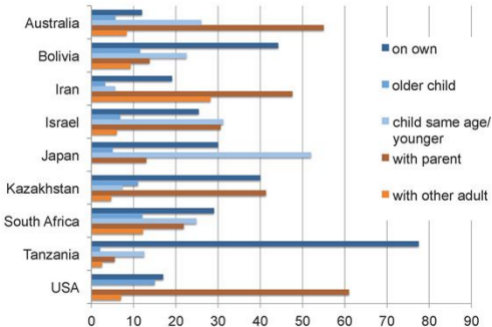
CIM National Australian Studies: Allowed to travel alone to school Under 10 years old



Journal article under review Children's Geographies:

Australian children's independent mobility levels: Secondary analysis of cross sectional data between 1991-2012 Authors Stephanie Schoeppe¹, Paul Tranter², Mitch J Duncan³, Carey Curtis⁴, Alison Carver⁵, Karen Malone⁶

Childhood freedom and who they walk with



**historical socio-
cultural story**



THE COUNTRY
OF LOST CHILDREN

An Australian Anxiety

PETER PIERCE

country of lost child

Peter Pierce contends that our cultural preoccupation with lost and stolen children dates from colonial times, the Aboriginal stolen generation and more recent high profile child abductions. Pierce shows how these stories were imbued with meaning and often reinforced social stratification and 'fear of the unknown other'.



William Strain 1825-1915
'Found, Mr. Duncan, Redrick, Bella and David', c. 1876
Pencil and wash drawing
13 x 18.2 cm
National Library of Australia

history of lost child

...the cultural and moral implications of the lost child in our history illuminates a crucial aspect of our present condition – we are a **country obsessed with the fear of losing our children** – *Peter Pierce*

If the children died or were never found they were victims of the romantic but dangerous lure of the 'unknown' Australian bush and toll of life on the margins of European settlement. Their fate stood as a warning of the vulnerability of children in a foreign landscape. Given the convention in Victorian literature of using the child to symbolise purity and innocence, Pierce argued that these early lost child accounts revealed a profound unease about the European presence in Australia. New Colonial Australians were a people persistently fearful of where they were lodged in place and time and the lost child became a symbol of their constant anxiety.

Police threat to parents on children walking alone

Kim Arlington, Andrew Stevenson

February 9, 2012



Police have lectured parents for letting their children walk alone to school. PARENTS have been "lectured" by police for letting their children walk to the shops or catch a bus on their own, with senior police saying incidents will be reported to the Department of Community Services if a child is considered at risk.

Officers told a Homsby mother it was "inappropriate" for her 10-year-old daughter to catch a bus unaccompanied, and warned a Manly father whose seven-year-old son walked alone to a local shop that while they would not alert DOCS, they would file a report.

Benign Neglect or Eternal Vigilance? Which parent are you?

As the issue of children's freedom, mobility and bad parenting hits the headlines once again, I see the same arguments recycled and positions once again polarized. There are those who believe parents who allow their children to walk the streets alone are negligent and should be told so and those who reminisce of a rich and free childhood lost and question the actions of parents who bubble wrap their children. I believe this either/ or position is not so helpful in a debate that is fuelled fundamentally by a desire for parents to protect and keep their children safe. The question is though are we killing our kids with kindness? Is our desire to protect our children actually making them more vulnerable? Is there the possibility of satisfying both positions – children's freedom and safety?

“Benign Neglect or Eternal Vigilance?”

Welcome to the Super Nanny State. **Government Nannies will determine how you will and will not raise your children.** They will then watch you as if you were their children and punish you for everything you do or don't do. **American TV shows will be used to frighten you into believing that a predatory rapist and pedophile are both hiding around every corner.** Children may not be allowed to do anything alone.

YankJones Location Date and time

Feb 9, 2012, 08:58AM

If I wanted a babysitter, I would hire one and it certainly wouldn't be the NSW Police. They have more than enough to do without adding this to their list. Sure, there are plenty of 'scary' people in the world but **to coddle children, wrap them in cotton wool and not expose to the wider world is only going to develop a generation of adults who are scared of their own shadows.**

Mark Location Sydney Date and time

Feb 9, 2012, 12:29PM

All you people waffling on about independence for 8-10 yr olds are crazy! They are children and dependent on YOU for their safety. How are you gonna feel if your children don't have the sense to run or get caught by some predator? Better having your children in sight and safe as opposed to being told by the police that they are dead or missing!

Commenter, You decide Location

Date and time Feb 9, 2012, 01:26PM

About time!. I have seen children as young as 5 walking to school with no older siblings or parents in sight. **You are parents so PARENT! We need to accept that its a different world now from "the old days" when we did walk to school unaccompanied. Only the lazy and "too busy" parents will be offended by this article.**

Miss Dolly Location Sydney Date and time

Feb 9, 2012, 09:24AM

**How are parents deciding
what is the right thing to do**



"I would love to let my kids play outside, but I just can't trust other people, there are just too many dangers these days. Actually, sometimes I think back and I can't believe my parents let me do the things we use to do" (Richard aged 36);

"No way, too risky" (Sara aged 38).

"I did let my children play in the streets outside our house, you know cricket and that, but that was 20 year ago. I wouldn't do it now days it just isn't safe, there are too many strangers who might nick them. Its sad but that is the reality of the world we live in now" (Susan aged 52);



**Do you let your children
play outside?**



Parents negotiations of children's freedoms

Empirical evidence reveals that the influence of group dynamics and external information on risk conception can contribute to a **'public' knowing of risk.**

Individual held conceptions of risk can **changed or be subsumed by group dynamics.**

1. Boundaries, Rules and Justifications

Each family had a 'bottom line' that signified a minimum level of negotiation parents were willing to engage in.

"Families drew on familial events and experiences in order to make sense of current risks and to establish and legitimate their significance within their own family"

Many families had a shared cautionary "local" story or personal experience of "an incident" to which parents and children often referred as justification for parental watchfulness.

Known and expected to be enacted by the children this bottom line was enforced through a variety of means. Variations depended on the characteristics and histories of each family and the community. **Many families had a shared cautionary "local" story or personal experience of "an incident" to which parents and children often referred as justification for parental watchfulness**. A child that have been abducted in the neighbourhood, a story on the TV that was deconstructed. The range of strategies adopted by parents were often contingent, contextual and fluid. This by its nature the idea of risk is negotiated and fluid on a daily basis often by child wanting to reach the boundaries of the bottom line.

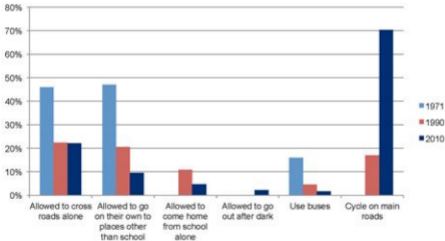
2. Age, Siblinghood and Competency

Negotiations around freedom by parents with children depended upon age (although this could be overridden by maturity and sense) that could mean different boundaries for siblings, and what happened in other families.

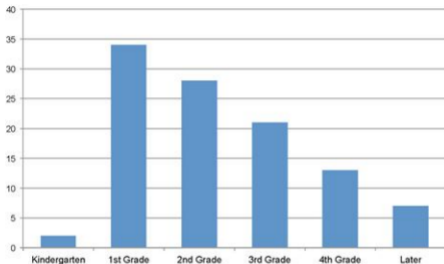
Children in the study often spoke about resentment about the ways in which their parents exercised greater or lesser amounts of control over their younger or older siblings. However age discriminators were often again quite fluid and dynamic and could be changed according to a variety of factors that might be outside of the family – the existence of a bike pathway for example could allow parent to believe one child might be able to ride to school at an earlier age than an older sibling because they lived on a main road. The character and personality of certain children can also be a factor – as does the gender of a child – boys overwhelmingly will be given much more independence and freedom than girls in most families.

Seven year olds' loss of mobility - UK

Six licenses granted to 7-year old English children



Year Level Children's Independent Mobility Parents response – Japan Study 2011



Age was a significant factor as to when children were given independence in Japan. Generally parents gave **children independence between first and third grade in primary school.**

Source Riela Provi Drianda

Age, freedom and children's cognition

Kidsafe NSW website for instance it states: "...children below the age of 10 years do not have the capability or judgement to handle many pedestrian situations. Children need to be accompanied and closely supervised by a parent or adult carer to keep them safe" (Kidsafe 2011)

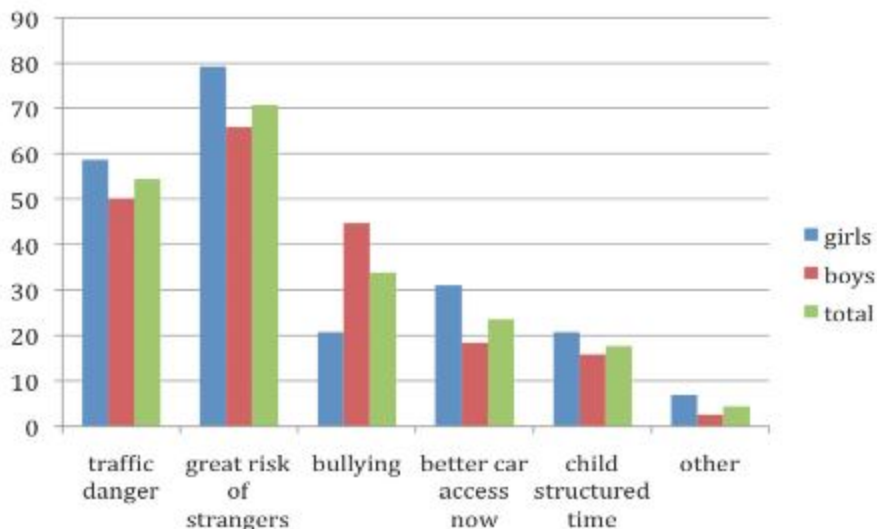
Professor John Wann and his colleagues, from the department of psychology at Royal Holloway College, University of London who reports "primary children don't have the cognitive capacity to detect the speed of moving vehicles causing low-level visual detection mechanisms" (Wann et. al 2011: 6)

Kidsafe (2011) *Pedestrian safety*; http://www.kidsafensw.org/roadsafety/pedestrian_safety.htm accessed 17 August, 2011

[Wann, J. P., Poulter, D. R. & Purcell, C. \(2011\)](#)

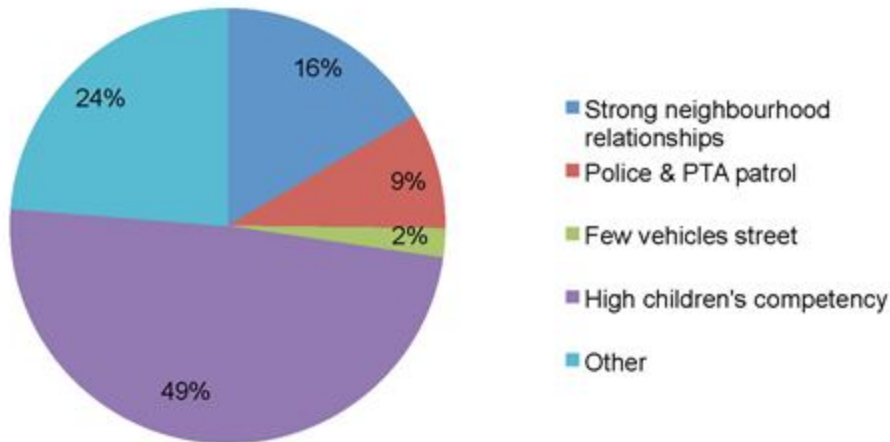
[Reduced Sensitivity to Visual Looming Inflates the Risk Posed by Speeding Vehicles When Children Try to Cross the Road](#)
Psychological Science, 22, 4, p. 429-434.

If you were allowed to get about alone at a younger age than you would allow your child to do so, what are the main reasons for this?



**Children's Independent Mobility Parent Survey
10-12 years, Dapto Study Australia**

Parents reasons allow CIM – Japan 2011



In all neighbourhoods a view of children having **a high competency level** was by far the most important reason parents felt comfortable to provide children's independent mobility

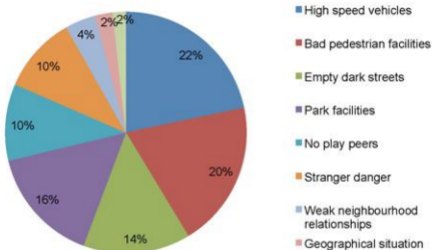


3. Defining and Managing time

Negotiations over how to manage time was a central feature of discussions on providing children's freedom. Parents being 'time poor' was often the greatest decider around whether a child would walk to school or to a friend's house.

"If I didn't see Amy walk in the school gates. In my mind I would be worrying about it all day at work – did she actually get there?" – Parent interviews 2012.

Parents concerns about children's safety – Japan 2011

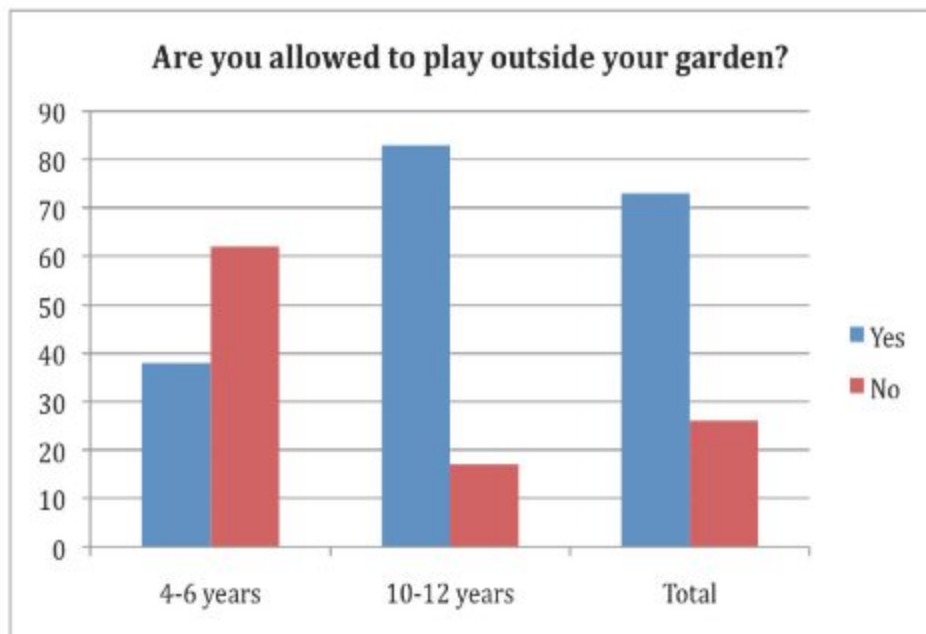


The most common problems that parents complained were the **neighbourhood traffic such as speeding vehicles and bad pedestrian facility**. Stranger danger was less of an issue.

**What do children think about
freedom and independence in
different places**



Children playing outside – Western Suburbs Melbourne 2008



You might get lost or kidnapped- Sara age 4

Traffic, cars hit you- Max age 5

I am too little - Richard age 5

May get hit by a car, can play backyard -Krystal age 6

Stay at home - Alison age 5

My dad says unsafe, cars - Michelle age 5

Mum is scared I may get hurt- Hayley age 6

May get lost, kidnapped, killed, all those things- Darah age 6

I would like to go outside my garden but I might get killed - Sally age 4

I do not like the street. I might get lost of killed on the street – Daniel age 5

Can I Go Outside My Garden Alone?

Draw me a picture of your town and include any places you like or you think children would like the best on it and places you don't think children would like

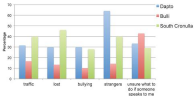


This is my house. My house has a garden. I play soccer in my backyard and I also play musical things. I do not like the street, because I may get lost or killed on the street. - Daniel age 5, Brimbank, Australia.



My pool where I play in the backyard – Daniel age 5

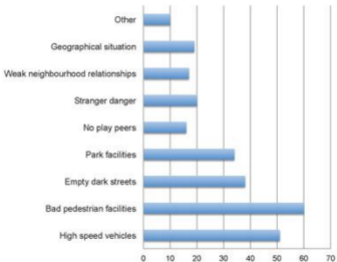
Children - What are your concerns about being in the community alone?



Children's Concerns

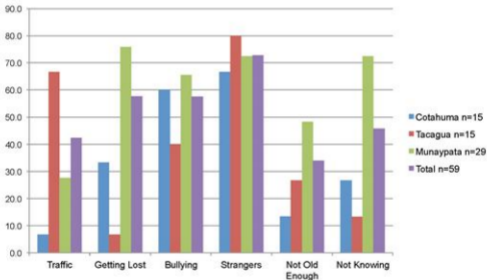
Children's Independent Mobility Survey, Sydney Suburbs 2011

Children - Problems threatening my freedom- Japan Study 2011



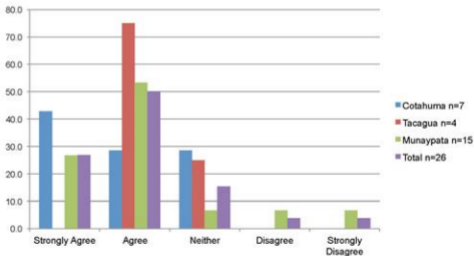
Source Riela Provi Drianda 2011

Children - When on your own or with friends, are you worried by any of the following?



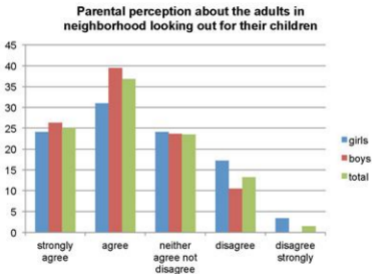
Children's Independent Mobility Survey, La Paz, Bolivia 2012

Parents Bolivia- Most adults in the neighbourhood look out for others' children



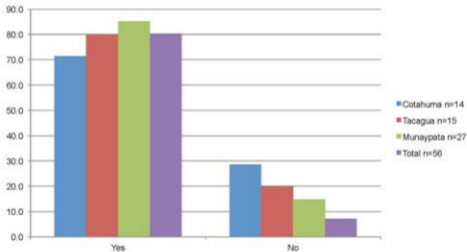
Children's Independent Mobility Survey, La Paz, Bolivia 2012

Parents Dapto- Most adults in the neighbourhood look out for others' children



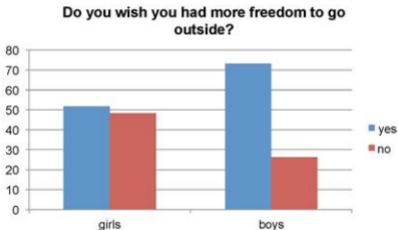
Children's Independent Mobility Survey, Dapto , NSW 2012

Children - Do you wish you had more freedom to go outside?



Children's Independent Mobility Survey, La Paz, Bolivia 2012

Children - Do you wish you had more freedom to go outside? – Dapto Study 2011



"I want to be able to walk home on my own..." – Bluerock, aged 11

**What have we learnt and
what have we done to
support children's
freedoms?**





Parents concerns for children's safety is universal – but their response to risk is culturally unique and not consistent with social class, urban form or child's age & gender



Most significant social determinants for increasing children's place freedoms (independent mobility & increased walking) is **local social ties and social trust, view of childhood supports self-efficacy and children's growing competence**

Key factors comparing constructions of risk and children's independent mobility – Bolivia, Japan and Australia

Different Factors	Japan	Bolivia	Australia
View of children/childhood	Competent/ Free play	Competent/Free play	Incompetent/Regulated, controlled
Social context - social trust 'loco parentis'	High, all adults expected carer role with children community	High, community supports children, intergenerational support	Low, only parents and immediate family are trusted in social settings
Ecological risk factors	Speed of traffic, pedestrian hazards	Abductions, high risk pollution	Stranger danger, traffic, fear of being lost
Cultural domain	Largely homogenous society, limited social groupings	Largely homogenous society, social inequities across class and ethnicity	Multi-cultural society, many diverse social groupings
Ecological encounters available	High, park, playgrounds, schoolgrounds, cram schools, clubs, friends houses, shops	Low structured organised encounters, informal wild spaces, community, shops	Low, limited local parks and playgrounds, regional facilities, supervised sporting
Parents belief children are competent in risk assessment	High, educated about risk assessment, community strategies	High, for males less for females. Girls have less experience	Low, children are vulnerable, no risk assessment

Strategies to overcome issues

Japanese Study 'Mamoruchi' Safety Buzzer

The growing anxiety about strangers in Japan has also generated a market for crime prevention devices for children, making many young children carry cell phones and/or a buzzer in their everyday lives.

The latest products from Japanese cell phone providers offer children's cell phones that are fully equipped with a GPS system to track the holder's whereabouts, a crime prevention buzzer function, and a cyber protection service.



外出する時は、必ず防犯ブザーを持ってい





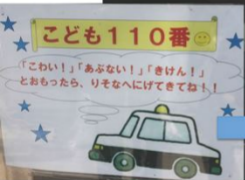
Staff & Parent Patrols



'Kodomo 110' – Children's
Safety Map

'Kodomo 110' – Children's Safety Map





The sticker lets children know this is a safe haven if they need support



**Scaffolding from an
early age**



**Self-organised walk to
school group**





Educating children and community about safety on streets



In many neighbourhoods in the UK they have developed *Homezones* – streets that have been identified as child specific spaces where cars can not go and children can play.

Sometimes you just need to be free

"To return to how it was in their parents day is not possible for children now. The aim should be to construct childhood for the present generation in a way that allows children to experience freedom and explore risk in safe environments where hazards are reduced but opportunities for self-chosen risk remain, therefore allowing them to gain the skills they will need to be able to negotiate the complex urban environments and the increase of risks likely to be a consequence of the impact of the anthropocene. To achieve this, we cannot keep complaining about children not having these experiences without providing a workable solutions and strategies. It requires us to really consider how we came to be in this place, why and what are the historical, social, cultural and ecological factors that have been at play, and consider why other countries have managed to overcome these factors,

