

## Understanding Parents' Views on Key Factors and Risks in School Holiday Camp Participation

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### Abstract

School holiday camps are becoming an increasingly popular choice for parents seeking beneficial activities for their children during the school break season. Participation in these camps not only provides opportunities for learning outside the classroom but also offers various benefits such as social skill development, increased self-confidence, and exposure to new experiences. Through their children's participation in school holiday camps, working parents can achieve a balance between work responsibilities and ensuring their children to be engaged in productive activities. In this regard, this study aims to examine the factors that influence parents' choices regarding their children's participation in school holiday camps, as well as their acceptance of potential risks and safety concerns that may arise from such camps. A questionnaire was used to gather parents' views on 8 factors and 11 types of risks examined. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and mean analysis. The results of the analysis show that activity characteristics, organizers, risks and safety, and activity facilities are four key factors that parents consider when selecting a school holiday camp. Most parents are willing to accept normal potential risks from activities such as mosquito bites, sunburn, fatigue, and minor cuts, but are less accepting of moderate to high potential risks such as swelling, fractures, drowning, and getting lost. The findings of this study are hoped to assist camp organizers in understanding the needs and expectations of parents to ensure school holiday camp programs are more effective and relevant.

**Keywords:** Outdoor Activities, School Holiday Camps, Choices, Participation, Potential Risks

### Introduction

School holidays are designated breaks in the academic calendar where formal learning sessions in schools are temporarily halted. These periods typically occur several times throughout the year, known as term breaks and end-of-school holidays. School holidays offer students a chance to take a break from academic burdens, spend time with family, or engage in outdoor activities such as vacations, motivational camps, or personal development

programs. They also provide teachers and school staff with an opportunity to rest and prepare for the next term.

For working parents especially, school holidays often pose a challenge in utilizing the extended time with meaningful activities for their children. Daily work commitments make it difficult for parents to ensure that their children are engaged in productive activities throughout the break. The lack of continuous supervision may lead children to spend time on less beneficial activities such as watching television or playing with gadgets. Therefore, finding quality programs that are appropriate and capable of providing academic, social, and physical benefits to children has become a preferred option for many parents today.

In line with this, school holiday camps organized during school breaks are among the relevant choices for parents, offering opportunities for children to participate in enjoyable and beneficial activities outside the classroom. The activities in these camps often involve experiential learning, such as adventure activities, team-building skills, and interactive games, aimed at developing students' social, physical, and mental skills.

In addition to filling their free time with productive activities, school holiday camps also serve as a platform for students to build positive character traits such as self-confidence, responsibility, and problem-solving skills. Students have the opportunity to explore new interests, broaden their horizons, and form strong social bonds with peers in a relaxed and fun environment. These programs not only benefit students but also provide parents with the assurance that their children are involved in organized and meaningful activities during the school break.

The motivation for this study stems from the need to understand how parents perceive the importance and risks of school holiday camps as a solution for keeping children engaged in enriching activities during school holidays, particularly when balancing work responsibilities limits supervision. This study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by identifying the key factors influencing parents' choices of holiday camps and examining their acceptance of the potential risks associated with such programs. Additionally, the findings aim to provide insights for organizers to design more appealing and safer programs that align with parents' expectations. Therefore, this study aims to identify parents' perceptions of the key factors in choosing school holiday camps and their acceptance of potential risks that may occur in the programs their children participate in. To achieve this objective, the article is structured into five sections. The second section covers the literature review, followed by the methodology in the third section, the results of the analysis in the fourth section, and the conclusion in the fifth section.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review on the factors that influence parents' choices when selecting school holiday camps shows that these decisions are influenced by various aspects. Parents tend to choose camp programs that offer activities aligned with their children's interests and holistic development. Programs that emphasize character building, social skills, and academics are typically the top choices because parents believe these camps can add value to their children's personality development and learning. A study by Barnett (2008) emphasized that the activities offered, whether related to sports, arts, or academics, should align with children's

interests to ensure their active engagement in the program. Richmond et al (2019), also stressed the importance of activities that support life skills learning, such as independence, resilience, and appreciation of diversity. Thurber et al (2007), suggested that school holiday camp activities should be tailored to the participants' levels and the objectives to be achieved.

According to Richmond et al (2023), the quality of camp organization is often assessed based on the reputation of the institution, program quality, and the social relationships that can be formed through the camp. Camps organized by recognized bodies such as the American Camp Association (ACA) are generally more trusted by parents because they adhere to strict safety standards (Henderson et al., 2007a). Experienced organizers are also seen as capable of providing interactive learning experiences and fostering children's intrapersonal development, which is a primary objective for parents sending their children to camp (Richmond et al., 2023).

Camp location is a major consideration, especially for working parents, as it affects daily logistical convenience such as transportation and camp hours. Richmond et al., (2023) found that parents from lower-income families tend to choose camps that are closer and more accessible to reduce logistical and transportation costs. Meanwhile, higher-income parents focus more on the social connections and experiences their children can gain from more exclusive camps.

The facilities provided by the camp organizers are also an important factor in selecting a camp. Borden et al (2005), found that parents prefer camps that offer comfortable facilities and flexible programs in terms of schedule and duration. This ensures convenience for parents in managing their children throughout the camp period. Richmond et al., (2023) also noted that programs offering logistical support such as transportation are often chosen by working parents.

Camp costs or fees are one of the main factors considered by parents when choosing a camp (Lydia et al., 2019). Richmond et al (2023), showed that low-income families prioritize cost factors more, while higher-income families focus more on social aspects and the overall experience. Some camps also offer financial assistance or scholarships to ease the financial burden on parents, making them more attractive to low-income families (Barnett, 2008).

The competency and experience of camp coaches and staff play a significant role in shaping children's experiences at camp. Richmond et al (2023), noted that parents assess the qualifications of coaches based on their experience working with children, including training in first aid and safety. Effective communication between camp organizers and parents is also crucial, particularly in providing up-to-date information about children's activities during the camp (Kang et al., 2017).

Parents are also highly concerned about their children's safety while at camp. A study by Henderson et al (2007b), emphasized that camps accredited by recognized bodies are more trusted because they adhere to strict safety guidelines. Richmond et al (2023), also pointed out that safety factors, such as the background and training of camp staff, are among the key considerations in choosing a camp. Parents feel more comfortable choosing camps with safe facilities, trained staff, and strict safety measures, such as anti-bullying policies and

close supervision by program managers. This is particularly important for parents, especially when their children will be away from home for an extended period.

Potential risks to children are something that can be managed with appropriate methods. Several researchers, including Giles et al (2019), Gerlach et al (2019), and Bauer and Giles (2019), found that the level of acceptance of potential risks varies among parents. For families with a military background, children's participation in outdoor programs is encouraged as long as there is no exposure to life-threatening risks (Bauer et al., 2021). However, these potential risks need to be accepted because they offer children experiences in recognizing and managing risks. This proves that risk is an element that can be anticipated, but if not managed well, it can prevent children from participating in such activities, even though the benefits are clear (Dallat et al., 2015).

### **Methodology**

This study employed a quantitative method using a questionnaire instrument distributed among parents residing in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, and Negeri Sembilan. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed over a three-month period from June to August 2024, using a purposive sampling. During this time, 250 questionnaires were returned, of which 228 were found to be fully completed. The eight factors examined in this study were derived from various sources of previous studies, such as Richmond et al (2023), regarding activity characteristics, safety, accreditation, staff or facilitators, location, duration, and cost. Richmond et al (2019), and Borden et al (2005), contributed to factors related to activity characteristics, facilities, and accessibility; Henderson et al (2007a), focused on the competence of facilitators and program evaluation; Henderson et al (2007b), provided insights into parental feedback; and Kang et al (2017), covered factors such as organizer competence, staff or coach skills, openness, and program information sharing. Meanwhile, potential risks were derived from Marinah and Norhazwani (2017), who gathered information on cases of injuries or risks in outdoor activities conducted in or outside schools in Malaysia. Frequency and mean analysis were used to analyze the data obtained and to achieve the study's objectives.

### **Results and Discussion**

The results of the study are discussed in two sections. The first section refers to the demographic analysis of the respondents, while the second section covers the analysis of factors and potential risks. General information related to the respondents is presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

*Respondent Information*

Respondent Information	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	46	20.2
	Female	182	79.8
Place of Residence	Urban	121	53.1
	Sub-urban	71	31.1
	Rural	36	15.8
Age	21-30 years	9	3.9
	31-40 years	67	29.4
	41-50 years	121	53.1
	51 and above	31	13.6

Source: Generated by the researcher using IBM SPSS version 28.

Based on Table 1, the majority of respondents who participated in this study are female, accounting for 79.8%. Although the percentage of male respondents is smaller, many previous studies have found that women's views often represent family decisions, especially when it comes to matters involving children (Saleemi & Kofol, 2022; Moore et al., 2022; Zaimah et al., 2012; Othman & Ying, 2001). Most of the respondents in this study reside in urban and suburban areas, while 15.8% live in rural areas. In terms of age, the majority of respondents are between 31 and 50 years old, an age range typically associated with having school-aged children, either in primary or secondary school.

Table 2

*Employment Information of Respondents and Their Spouses*

Self	Spouse		
	Employed	Self-employed	Not Working
Employed	167	24	19
Self-employed	5	3	4
Not Working	4	0	2
Total	176	27	25

Source: Generated by the researcher using IBM SPSS version 28.

The employment information of respondents and their spouses in Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents are part of dual-career couples, either working for an employer or self-employed, totaling 199 people (87.3%). Meanwhile, 27 respondents indicated that only one partner is employed, and 2 people stated that neither partner is employed. Since most respondents are employed, the data collected from this study is expected to provide a general insight into the factors and potential risks of children participating in school holiday camps, particularly among working parents.

The frequency and mean analysis of factors influencing parents' participation in school holiday camps is shown in Table 3. Overall, each factor assessed by respondents indicates a high level of importance, with values exceeding 3.50. Based on the average mean, four factors show the highest average means: the activity characteristics factor (3.98), followed by the organizer factor (3.97), the risk and safety factor (3.94), and the facilities factor (3.94). Meanwhile, the lowest average mean is seen in the location factor, at 3.70. The item-level analysis shows similar results, with most items having high mean values above 3.50, except

for the location factor item "close to residence," which has a mean of 3.45. This indicates parents' willingness to allow their children to participate in holiday camps located at varying distances, as long as the location is easily accessible (mean = 3.88) and well-known (mean = 3.78).

A closer analysis of the items based on each factor shows that, within the organizer factor, all elements—such as a valid registration certificate (mean = 3.95), official permission (mean = 3.98), and safety responsibility (mean = 4.00)—are prioritized by nearly all respondents. These findings indicate that parents emphasize the importance of choosing organizers with credibility and a focus on safety. The safety element is considered a top priority, with all respondents deeming it highly important.

Regarding coaches or facilitators, skills and experience are also regarded as essential, with aspects such as skills related to activities (mean = 3.97) and skills in safety (mean = 3.98) receiving high ratings. However, the number of coaches is seen as less critical, with a mean of 3.80 indicating that it is slightly less important compared to other aspects. The location factor shows variation in responses, with most respondents emphasizing ease of access to the location (mean = 3.88) as an important factor. However, proximity to the residence received a lower score (mean = 3.45), suggesting that distance is not a primary factor in program selection.

For the facilities factor, two items were rated as highly important: complete activity facilities (mean = 3.94) and well-maintained facilities (mean = 3.92). This shows that respondents prioritize the quality of the physical environment that is available and suitable for the program. Regarding the activity characteristics factor, value-based elements such as fostering a positive mindset (mean = 3.97) and instilling good manners and morals (mean = 3.99) received high ratings, reflecting parents' high expectations for character-building benefits in programs attended by their children.

In terms of communication, respondents placed emphasis on parental preparation briefings (mean = 3.89) and activity information updates (mean = 3.88). These findings highlight the importance of transparent and organized communication between organizers and parents. Within the fee factor, the most important aspect was facilities and accommodation (mean = 3.96), compared to other items such as the number of activity days (mean = 3.89) and food (mean = 3.87).

Table 3

*Factors for Participation in School Holiday Camps*

Factor	Statement	Not Important at All	Not Important	Slightly Important	Very Important	Mean
Organizer [3.97]	Has a valid registration certificate	-	-	12 (5.3)	236 (4.7)	3.95



	Received approval from authorities	-	1(0.4)	2 (0.9)	225 (98.7)	3.98
	Experienced with camp activities	-	-	6 (2.6)	222 (97.4)	3.97
	Good reputation	-	1 (0.4)	2 (0.9)	225 (98.7)	3.98
	Safety responsibility	-	-	-	228 (100)	4.00
Coaches/ Facilitators [3.91]	Number of coaches	-	3 (1.3)	39 (17.1)	186 (81.6)	3.80
	Skilled in activities	-	-	6 (2.6)	222 (97.4)	3.97
	Holds a license/certificate	-	5(2.2)	13 (5.7)	210 (92.1)	3.90
	Child-friendly	-	3 (1.3)	18 (7.9)	207 (90.8)	3.89
	Skilled in safety aspects	-	-	4 (1.8)	224 (98.2)	3.98
	Location [3.70]	Close to residence	-	27(11.8)	72 (31.6)	129 (56.6)
Easily accessible location		-	2 (0.9)	23 (10.1)	203 (89.0)	3.88
Well-known place		-	6 (2.6)	38 (16.7)	184 (80.7)	3.78
Facilities [3.94]	Complete activity facilities	-	2 (0.9)	7 (3.1)	219 (96.1)	3.94
	Well-maintained facilities	-	5 (2.2)	12 (5.3)	211 (92.5)	3.92
	Facilities suitable for participants	-	-	9 (3.9)	219 (96.1)	3.96
Activity Features [3.98]	Builds a positive mindset	-	-	7 (3.1)	221 (96.9)	3.97
	Instills values, manners, and good morals	-	-	2 (0.9)	226 (99.1)	3.99
	No bullying elements	-	-	3 (1.3)	225 (98.7)	3.99
Communication [3.86]	Parent preparation briefing	-	-	25 (11.0)	203 (89.0)	3.89
	Sharing past experiences	-	3 (1.3)	55 (24.1)	170 (74.6)	3.73

	Activity updates	-	3 (1.3)	22 (9.6)	203 (89.0)	3.88
	Receives feedback	-	-	17 (7.5)	211 (92.5)	3.93
	Number of days	-	-	26 (11.4)	202 (88.6)	3.89
	Activity location	-	-	13 (5.7)	215 (94.3)	3.94
Fees/Costs [3.92]	Type of activity	-	-	18 (7.9)	210 (92.1)	3.92
	Facilities & accommodation	-	-	8 (3.5)	220 (96.5)	3.96
	Food	-	-	29 (12.7)	199 (87.3)	3.87
	Minimal and controlled risks	-	-	2(0.9)	226 (99.1)	3.99
Risk & Safety [3.94]	Researching participant profiles	-	-	11 (4.8)	217 (95.2)	3.95
	Insurance/takafu l	-	1 (0.4)	24 (10.5)	203 (89.0)	3.89

Note: ( ) percentage, [ ] mean average. The final factor, which is risk and safety, shows that the majority of respondents emphasize the importance of activities being conducted with minimum and controlled risk (mean = 3.99). Additionally, organizers need to be aware of participant information to ensure that anticipated risks can be managed effectively (mean = 3.95). Offering holiday camp packages with safety protection such as insurance/takaful (mean = 3.89) is also a very important aspect for parents. In summary, safety factors, organizer efficiency, and activity facilities are the main factors influencing parents' selection and evaluation when choosing suitable programs or holiday camps for their children.

The analysis of parents' acceptance regarding potential risks that may be encountered during participation in holiday camps is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Potential Risks of Holiday Camps*

No.	Type of Risk	Agree to Accept (%)
a.	Mosquito bites	196 (86.0)
b.	Sunburn	188 (82.5)
c.	Fatigue	199 (87.3)
d.	Minor cuts	185 (81.1)
e.	Swelling	111 (48.7)
f.	Animal stings	59 (25.9)
g.	Sprains	89 (39.0)
h.	Fainting	52 (22.8)
i.	Fractures	36 (15.8)
j.	Drowning	34 (14.9)
k.	Missing	32 (14.0)

Source: Generated by the researcher using IBM SPSS version 28.



Based on the analysis of the findings regarding the types of risks respondents are willing to accept, there is a variation in the level of acceptance for risks that may arise during activities. Lesser and less serious risks, such as mosquito bites (86.0%), sunburn (82.5%), and fatigue (87.3%), have a high acceptance rate. This indicates that the majority of respondents are willing to accept these minor risks, which are considered normal in outdoor activities.

In contrast, more serious risks such as fractures (15.8%), drowning (14.9%), and being lost (14.0%) have a very low acceptance rate, reflecting respondents' concerns about incidents that could potentially threaten life or cause severe injury. Other risks, such as animal stings (25.9%) and fainting (22.8%), are also less accepted, indicating that although these risks may occur, respondents tend to be more cautious regarding the more severe consequences.

Swelling (48.7%) and sprains (39.0%) received a moderate level of acceptance, suggesting that while these are more serious than minor cuts, most respondents are willing to face these risks in controlled situations. Overall, these findings indicate that respondents are more willing to accept small and moderate risks; however, they are more cautious and less accepting of risks that could pose greater dangers. These findings align with and support previous research by Bauer et al. (2021), Gerlach et al. (2019), and Bauer and Giles (2019).

### **Conclusion and Research Recommendations**

Children's participation in outdoor activities at holiday camps that offer various programs can provide benefits and positive development across multiple aspects. Based on the study analysis, it was found that parents place a high priority on safety, the competency of organizers, and the facilities provided when selecting holiday camps for their children. Factors related to the characteristics of activities, such as instilling good manners and building a positive mindset, are also important considerations for them. While the location of the camp is slightly less important in terms of distance, it still needs to be easily accessible and well-known to the public. Additionally, clear and organized communication between the organizers and parents is crucial in ensuring that parents feel confident in the chosen program.

In terms of risk, parents are more willing to accept minor risks, such as mosquito bites and fatigue, but are less prepared to accept greater risks like fractures, drowning, or being lost.

In this regard, holiday camp organizers should consistently emphasize comprehensive safety measures and ensure that all safety procedures are meticulously followed to reduce the likelihood of significant risks. Organizers are also encouraged to highlight the skills of facilitators in ensuring that activities are conducted safely and effectively. Furthermore, more effective communication between organizers and parents should be enhanced, particularly in providing updates and explanations regarding safety and the activities conducted.

Consequently, further research on holiday camps can be conducted by involving more respondents and detailing the extent to which factors and potential risks empirically influence parents' choices and willingness.

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