

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT FALLS

I read with interest the article on the epidemiological profile and cost of hospitalised injuries caused by playground equipment falls of children aged 0–14 years in New South Wales, Australia.¹ I am concerned that the findings of this paper may be misinterpreted and/or send a confusing message to the wider community.

In my experience, when the general public are asked to describe where children use playground equipment they discuss and describe playground equipment that is installed by their local government authority. It appears that the data set for this study does not specifically include local government playgrounds. It does however specifically include playground equipment installed within schools, homes, sports and athletic areas, other specified areas and unspecified areas.

The technical requirements for domestic playground equipment and domestic trampolines are quite different to the commercial equipment that is installed by councils where the minimum safety requirements are contained within the Standard AS 4685 (series).

I make the following comments:

First, this paper wrongly gives the impression that local council playgrounds are dangerous and causing costly injuries.

Second, as a result of the incorrect perception that their child will get injured and end up in hospital, this paper could be interpreted as sending a message to parents and carers that they should stop taking their children to local playgrounds as these are dangerous.

Third, the elephant in the room is the injuries sustained from domestic trampolines (both falling and non-falling injuries). The title of this paper should have either included 'domestic trampolines', or filtered and removed the domestic trampoline falls data.

Fourth, a further paper that focuses on reducing injuries and associated costs to the Australian economy resulting from domestic trampoline usage would send a much needed message to the reader and the wider community.

The Australian Standards Technical Committee CS-005 for children's playgrounds has consistently been provided with evidence that play and exercise are vital components of healthy childhood development. In the recently published standard AS 4685.0 Playground equipment and surfacing Part 0: Development, installation, inspection, maintenance and operation there is an entire section within the safety management system devoted to risk benefit assessment. Within this section, it is a mandatory requirement for all playground operators to take into account the context of the playground, its likely users and the need for the use of benefit assessment procedures instead of standard risk removal procedures. It further stipulates that operators of supervised early childhood centres need to take account of the role of supervisors in injury prevention and to minimise unnecessary or inappropriate restrictions on play.

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Conflict of interest: None declared.

References

- 1 Bierbaum M, Curtis K, Mitchell R. Incidence and cost of hospitalisation of children with injuries from playground equipment falls, in new South Wales, Australia. *J. Paediatr. Child Health* 2017 <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpc.13777>.
- 2 Kidsafe NSW Inc. *Playground Standards*. Sydney: NSW Government; 2017. Available from: <http://www.kidsafensw.org/playground-safety/playground-standards/> [accessed 15 January 2018].