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Journal article

A review of community playgroup participation

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published as:

McLean, K., Edwards, S. and Mantilla, A. (2020). A review of community playgroup participation. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 45(2), pp. 155-169.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1836939120918484>

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Type of article: Commentaries

Title: A review of community playgroup participation

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Abstract

Community playgroups, which are one type of playgroup and early childhood service, operate on a weekly basis under the leadership of volunteer caregivers (including parents, kinship members, family-day carers, and other adults in children's lives). Caregivers and children voluntarily attend and participate in community playgroups. Although community playgroups operate throughout Australia and similar models exist internationally, little is known about the benefits and/or otherwise of community playgroup participation for children, families and communities. A review of the research into community playgroup participation, specifically research investigating children and families' participation in community playgroups published between 2000 and 2018, is reported in this paper. The findings from the five peer-reviewed papers, identified through the search provide directions for further research needed to build the evidence base for community playgroup participation.

Key words: community playgroup; children; families; parents; early childhood; playgroup participation

Word Count: (6298 words including abstract and key words)

Introduction

Internationally, there is increasing interest in the potential for playgroup participation in early childhood to address disadvantage and contribute to long term social and economic outcomes (French, 2005; McShane, Cook, Sinclair, & Fry, 2016). Despite this interest, the body of empirical research detailing the benefits and/or otherwise of community playgroup participation is relatively limited. The purpose of this review is to determine what the empirical literature regarding children and families' participation in community playgroups has indicated. Playgroups have a variety of labels (Lloyd, Melhuish, Moss & Owen); however, they are typically defined as groups where caregivers (including parents, carers, and other adults in children's lives) and their children (birth to 5 years) meet regularly at a community-based venue to engage in play and socialise with other caregivers and children (ARTD, 2008; Playgroup Australia, 2018). Playgroups as sites for socialisation and the facilitation of play are reported to exist in New Zealand (Ministry of Education New Zealand, 2014), United Kingdom (Statham & Brophy, 2006), United States (Mize & Pettit, 2010), Ireland (French, 2005) and Australia (Hancock et al., 2012).

Australian playgroups emerged in the 1970s as a grassroots response by mothers to access social support and provide quality play experiences for their children (Townley, 2018). Reported benefits of playgroup participation, in general, include increased social support (Hancock, Cunningham, Lawrence, Zarb, & Zubrick, 2015) and social connections (Strange, Bremner, Fisher, Howat, & Wood, 2016) for families, raised awareness of early childhood education for caregivers (Nyland, Nyland, & Yan, 2011) and improved social and learning outcomes for children (French, 2005; Gregory, Sincovich, Harman-Smith, & Brinkman, 2017; Hancock et al., 2012). The quality of children's play experiences in the home learning environment has been found to influence children's learning and developmental outcomes (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004). Families' participation in playgroups in early childhood has the potential to positively influence the home learning environment through increased provision of play experiences for young children at playgroup that are repeated and extended upon play in the home (McLean, Edwards, Morris, Hallowell, & Swinkels, 2016).

Playgroups as key early childhood services are represented in government policy and curriculum documents. For example, in the Australian National Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development

Framework (DETV, 2016) playgroups are recognised as one of a range of universal services for “learning and development pathways” (DETV, 2016, p. 6). Similarly, the New Zealand Ministry of Education recognises the contribution of playgroups via an early childhood learning and development continuum through certification criteria and the inclusion of playgroups in the regulatory framework for early childhood education (Ministry of Education New Zealand, 2016). In the United Kingdom playgroups emerged out of a lack of preschool provision (Statham & Brophy, 2006), and remain a recognised early years provider for the implementation of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (Dfe, 2017). However, in the United States playgroups provide a less formal option for parental support in early childhood and exist without recognised forms of support such as organisational memberships (Mize & Pettit, 2010).

There are two main types of playgroups in Australia: supported and community playgroups. Supported playgroups are run by a paid playgroup coordinator who is usually a trained early childhood professional employed by a community agency (Dadich & Spooner, 2008). Supported playgroups tend to seek to engage vulnerable families with a view to improving outcomes through parent support (Jackson, 2011) and parental education (Williams, Berthelsen, Viviani, & Nicholson, 2018). Terms such as ‘vulnerable,’ ‘marginalised’ and ‘hard-to-reach’ are typically used throughout this literature and policy stemming from interventionist studies; however, there appears to be an emerging trend to view families through a strength-based research lens (Evangelou & Wild, 2014). Supported playgroups are appealing sites for interventions aimed at improving outcomes for children and families (Berthelsen, Williams, Abad, Vogel, & Nicholson, 2012; Grealy et al., 2012; Jackson, 2011; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2018). Recently, Williams et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review of the research evidence to identify outcomes associated with supported playgroup participation in Australia. The findings of this review validated the role of supported playgroups in the community and highlighted the potential of this model to support parenting interventions in early childhood.

In contrast to the supported playgroup model, community playgroups are caregiver-led with voluntary leadership and attendance (ARTD Consultants, 2008; Keam, Cook, Sinclair, & McShane, 2018). Community playgroups tend to operate in all sections of the community (McShane, 2015) and attract caregivers and children from a range of socioeconomic levels (Gregory, Harman-Smith, Sincovich, Wilson, & Brinkman, 2016). Community playgroups are

of research interest because the potential benefit associated with caregiver and children's participation in these groups extends into a broad cross-section of society (McLean, Edwards, & Morris, 2017). However, compared to supported playgroups the body of empirical research detailing the benefits and/or otherwise of community playgroup participation for children, families and their communities is limited.

In Australia, although community playgroup attendance is described as declining (McShane, 2015), there are over 7,560 community playgroups operating in 75 percent of postcodes (Playgroup Australia, 2018). Intended aims of community playgroups include: the provision of self-managed support including social and support networks for caregivers; opportunity for children's play-based learning and development; and early intervention in vulnerable communities (Commerford & Robinson, 2016; Gregory et al., 2016). Currently there are three commissioned research studies reporting on the benefits of community playgroup participation for children and families. While each of these reports suggest social benefits for children and families and economic benefits for communities more broadly, this evidence tends towards qualitative investigation. The work of McLean et al. (2016) was predominantly qualitative. Although McShane et al. (2016) and Gregory et al. (2016) also used a qualitative approach to identify participants' perspectives about community playgroups McShane et al. used data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) to make a case for social and economic benefit for communities by identifying associations between social trust and playgroup participation and Gregory et al. used existing data from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to make a case for the developmental benefits of playgroup for children. As these authors acknowledge (Gregory et al., 2016; McShane et al., 2016), the LSAC and AEDC data sets do not differentiate between playgroup type, meaning that community playgroups still remain under-researched, even within the grey literature.

A systematic review of the research on supported playgroups has previously been conducted by Williams et al. (2018) but none has been conducted for community playgroups. In this paper we propose a systematic review of community playgroups. The research question informing this review is: *What are the identified benefits and/or otherwise of community playgroup participation for children, families and their communities?* In addressing this research question limitations of the reported research and recommendations for further research will be considered.

Methods

Search strategies, identification and screening of studies

The search was conducted in three phases: (1) Identification; (2) Screening; and (3) Eligibility (Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 here

Phase One Identification commenced the search process. A systematic search using ten databases was conducted on 7th December 2018. Databases included Web of Science Core Collection, Scopus, A+ Education, Education Source, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), CINAHL Complete, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Education, Medline Complete, and Indigenous Collection database. The range of early childhood education, education, nursing and health sciences databases used in the search strategy aimed to identify the maximum number of reported studies in the past 18 years. All searches included the term 'playgroup' and a series of terms synonymous with playgroup including 'mothers group' and 'infant toddler group'. The 'playgroup' key words were also combined with search terms, including 'benefits' and 'outcomes' as part of each database search.

The search was conducted from 2000 through to 2018. The 2000 starting point was implemented to encompass established, organised groups including parent, infant and toddler groups in the United Kingdom (Bidgood, 2016), which are similar to community playgroups in Australia. The eligibility criteria included peer-reviewed studies published in English about community playgroups. This included qualitative studies, which provide a valuable source of information about context and evidence in practice in literature reviews (Dixon-Woods, Fitzpatrick, & Roberts, 2001). The search deliberately excluded grey literature because an aim of the review was to establish the evidence base for identified benefits and/or otherwise of community playgroup participation for children, families and communities within the empirical literature. This complete search process returned a total of 3,879 papers for consideration.

Phase Two Screening involved the removal of duplicates and papers that did not meet all of the initial criteria (i.e. not meeting the definition of a community playgroup; not reporting on empirical investigations; not peer reviewed; not published in English). The title, abstract and

key words were screened (Atkinson, Koenka, Sanchez, Moshontz, & Cooper, 2015) by a team member and checked by the first author, leaving 46 papers for consideration.

In Phase Three Eligibility, each of the 46 papers was read in full text. For inclusion, papers had to report specifically on community playgroups. Community playgroups were defined as groups (birth-to-five years) which are volunteer-facilitated and self-managed by caregivers (including parents, kinship members, guardians) who attend with their children and share responsibility for the playgroup (Playgroup Australia, 2018). For the purposes of this review, studies that referred to data from community playgroups as embedded in, but not extracted from, data from other types of groups such as supported playgroups and/or mothers' groups not meeting the definition of a community playgroup, were excluded. This is because the extent to which the findings from these studies can be attributed to community playgroup participation cannot be determined. Papers not reporting on empirical research and community playgroup participation by children and families (e.g. reporting on interventions using community playgroups as a site only), or papers of which were reporting studies undertaken in a playgroup specifically set up for the research were excluded. This process was carried out separately by a team member and the first author and any uncertainty about inclusion was resolved through discussion. The process resulted in five papers meeting the full criteria for inclusion in this review.

Quality appraisal

The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) was used to review the research. CASP (2018) is a quality appraisal tool for evaluating qualitative research. A decision to use CASP was made because all five identified papers were qualitative. CASP canvases nine aspects of quality in qualitative research including: research aims; design; methods; recruitment strategy; data collection; researcher relationship; data analysis; credibility of findings; and ethical issues. CASP (2018) can be used to workshop these nine dimensions of qualitative research. CASP has previously been used by Williams et al. (2018) to evaluate qualitative research in supported playgroups. Papers identified in this review were evaluated using the CASP nine-point checklist and a mean score for all five calculated (5.8/9.0). This process involved the first and third authors independently applying the tool to each study and then coming together to cross-check criteria scoring for each study. Any discrepancies in the evaluation process were resolved via discussion among all three authors. All five papers had a clear statement of aims, research design, methods, recruitment and data collection. However, less consistent were details relating

to ethical issues (e.g., ethical considerations arising from the study), researcher relationship (e.g., potential for researcher bias), rigour in data analysis (e.g. how categories were derived) and findings (e.g., discussed in relation to the research question).

Results

Overview of reviewed studies

The purpose of this review was to determine what the empirical research into participation in community playgroups has indicated regarding the benefits and/or otherwise of playgroup participation for children, families and communities. In this section of the paper the term caregiver is used as inclusive of all adults who attend playgroup with their children. When referring directly to the studies included in this review, the terms used by the authors themselves (i.e. parents, mother and/or father) are deployed.

Table 1 provides a synthesis of each study in relation to the research question - *What are the identified benefits and/or otherwise of community playgroup participation for children, families and their communities?* It includes country of origin, research design and key findings for each study. The five studies were qualitative and involved a total of 145 caregivers. Of these studies only one involved a father as a participant (Gibson, Harman, & Guilfoyle, 2015). One study did not report on the gender of participants or provide details of how many members from each of the 19 families participated in the research perhaps due to cultural sensitivities (Fleer & Hammer, 2014). None of the reported studies appeared to have used the same sample and although two authors are co-authors on two papers (Gibson et al., 2015; Harman, Connor, & Guilfoyle, 2014), these papers appeared to be reporting on different projects. Four out of the five studies were conducted in Australia, including two in Western Australia (Gibson et al., 2015; Harman, O'Connor, & Guilfoyle, 2014) and two in Victoria (Fleer & Hammer, 2014; Keam, Cook, Sinclair, & McShane, 2016). One study was conducted in Ontario, Canada (Mulcahy, Parry, & Glover, 2010). Of these five studies one was undertaken in an Australian Indigenous community (Fleer & Hammer, 2014). From the demographic details about participants that were provided, two studies were undertaken with participants predominantly from middle to upper socio-economic backgrounds (Kear, Cook, Sinclair, & McShane, 2016; Mulcahy, Parry, & Glover, 2010), a further two were undertaken in metropolitan areas (Gibson et al., 2015; Harman, O'Connor, & Guilfoyle, 2014) and one in rural Victoria (Fleer & Hammer, 2014). Four out of the five studies reported the use of a theoretical orientation informing the research, including social capital (Gibson et al., 2015), interpretative

phenomenological (Harman, O'Connor, & Guilfoyle, 2014), cultural-historical (Fleer & Hammer, 2014) and critical social capital (Mulcahy, Parry, & Glover, 2010) theories.

Data in the five papers were collected using individual and/or focus group interviews (Gibson et al., 2015; Harman et al., 2014; Keam et al., 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2010) and video recordings (Fleer & Hammer, 2014). Interviews focussed on parents and their experiences and perspectives of their involvement at playgroup, including benefits and constraints of participation for parents, families and communities. Of these studies, one drew on interview data collected for a broader project commissioned by Playgroup Australia (Kearney et al., 2016). Video data focused on families' participation practices during the playgroup session (Fleer & Hammer, 2014).

Insert Table 1 here

Despite the research question for this review referencing the benefits and/or otherwise of playgroup participation for children, none of the five papers reported findings directly related to children. The findings identified the social dimensions of community participation; benefits for caregivers, families and communities; and barriers to realising the benefits of community playgroup participation.

Social dimensions of community playgroup participation

The five studies reported on various social dimensions of community playgroup participation. Fleer and Hammer (2014) reported on "repertoires of practices" (p. 42) in an Australian Indigenous community playgroup. Kearney et al. (2016) reported on capacity building in community playgroups. Gibson et al. (2015) reported on social capital in community playgroups. Mulcahy et al. (2010) examined experiences of mothers and Harman et al. (2014) identified reasons mothers attend playgroup. Four out of the five studies reported similar findings in relation to benefits of, barriers to, and issues arising from participation (Gibson et al., 2015; Harman, et al., 2014; Kearney et al., 2016; Mulcahy et al., 2010). One study differed in focus, examining instead the organisation of participation in an Australian Indigenous community playgroup (Fleer & Hammer, 2014). The findings for caregivers, families and communities from all five papers are summarised below.

Benefits for caregivers

Three of the five studies described benefits for caregivers of participation in a community playgroup (Gibson et al., 2015; Keam et al., 2016; Mulcahy et al., 2010) and a further study (Harman, et al., 2014) identified reasons mothers attend that could lead to benefits such as increased social support and new social networks. Two of these studies used social capital theories (Gibson et al., 2015; Mulcahy et al., 2010), and although undertaken in two separate countries reported similar findings. In a study from Ontario, Canada Mulcahy et al. (2010) interviewed 24 parents from a mothers' group (synonymous with community playgroups in Australia). Findings from this study were organised under three categories of "getting together", "getting by" and "getting ahead" (p. 8) to describe the social benefits of participation. Gibson et al. (2015) carried out individual interviews with 15 community playgroup parents (including one father) in metropolitan Perth, Western Australia about their interactions at playgroup. Findings from Mulcahy et al. (2010) and Gibson et al. (2015) established shared commonalities in playgroup participation valued by participating parents, including having young children, similar life experiences and values. These studies also noted caregiver participation in playgroup benefited their access to networks for needs-based support and resources for parenting, new friendships and social support.

Harman et al. (2014) described an Australian study undertaken in metropolitan Perth in which 21 mothers were interviewed using a combination of individual and focus group interviews. The study examined mothers' experiences of attending a community playgroup. Reasons provided for attending included a "sense of belonging" (p. 133) and "validation as a mother" (p. 134). In a study from Victoria, Australia Keam et al. (2018) used interview data from mothers involved in a broader project to consider the role of playgroups in building community capacity. Keam et al. (2018) found that mothers involved in leadership roles at the playgroup considered these roles as developmental for their leadership capacity in the community. These mothers also benefited from opportunities to maintain and build their administration and communication skills as a function of their playgroup leadership.

Benefits for families

Two studies described findings for families. Mulcahy et al. (2010) described families including partners and children, as seeming to benefit through a trickle-down effect to "gain the same advantages of friendship, support and resources" (p. 23). Benefits included removing pressure from partners to provide emotional support, mothers sharing knowledge gained from participation with others at home, and access to resources to support relationships in the home.

Fleer and Hammer (2014) used video data taken over a period of five visits to an Indigenous playgroup in rural Victoria to examine families' participation practices during playgroup sessions. This study involved 19 families and identified those Indigenous practices for social engagement between children and families that supported their participation within the Western-based cultural repertoires embedded within playgroup.

Benefits for communities

Two papers described findings that benefit communities. From interviews with 33 mothers Keam et al. (2010) reported that playgroup leadership contributed to building community leaders in early childhood beyond playgroup and into local communities. Community playgroups were described as “incubators for future leaders” (p. 5) expanding community capacity through strengthening connections with community organisations and members. A key barrier to building community capacity was a “lack of support” (p. 4) with burn out identified as a major concern as leaders did not have access to ongoing support in playgroup roles. Similarly, in the Canadian study reported by Mulcahy et al. (2010) interviews from 24 mothers suggested that communities benefited significantly from mothers' participation in mothers' groups. This is because the informal processes in these groups provide unpaid support across a broad range of areas including counselling, parenting and child-care that are “devalued in present political and social systems” (p. 23). These studies suggested the potential for the cost-effective contribution community playgroups make to communities and broader early childhood landscape.

Barriers to realising the benefits of community playgroup participation

Barriers to realising the benefits for participation were identified in four studies. These included the risk of being excluded due to solidarity of established groups (Gibson et al., 2015), and differences including gender, socio-economic status or ethnicity (Gibson et al., 2015; Mulcahy et al., 2010). Mulcahy et al. (2010) additionally described a fear of “getting left out” (p. 10) due to differences including values, beliefs and circumstances, and further, a sense of anxiety around “getting judged” by other mothers. Similarly, mothers in the study reported by Harman et al. (2014) described “negative experiences of playgroup” (p. 135) including a “lack of support” (p. 135) as reasons for not continuing to attend a playgroup. Leadership whether in assumed (Gibson et al., 2015) or established roles (Keam et al., 2018) could contribute to negative experiences. Playgroup leadership was highlighted as an area where financial

resources and expert support for mentoring were needed from local government, community organisations, schools and other early childhood services including maternal and child health.

In summary, the five qualitative studies indicated that community playgroup participation largely provided social benefit to caregivers, families and their communities, including friendships, parenting support and resources, and new social networks. Barriers to realising the benefits of playgroup participation were mostly about exclusion and/or the need for financial support or mentoring. The authors of these studies also noted limitations such as a lack of diversity in participant groups including: (a) medium to high socioeconomic status (Mulcahy et al., 2010; Keam et al., 2018); (b) low ethnic diversity in self-selected participants (Gibson et al., 2015); and (c) participants from metropolitan areas (Harman et al., 2014). A further limitation was noted by Keam et al. (2018) where findings were secondary and not part of the intended focus of the study.

Discussion

This review has investigated the benefits and/or otherwise of community playgroup participation for children, families and their communities. The five papers included in this review presented valuable insights into the social aspects of community playgroup participation including practices (Hammer & Fler, 2014), experiences (Harman et al., 2014; Mulcahy et al., 2010) capacity building (Keam et al., 2017) and social capital (Gibson et al., 2015). Interview data methods with parents (Gibson et al., 2015; Harman, et al., 2014; Keam et al., 2016; Mulcahy et al., 2010) and video data methods (Fler & Hammer, 2014) were used to gain insights into community playgroup participation. Findings were supported using quotations from interviews or transcribed video data. In the four studies that used interview methods, parents, notably mothers, provided the source of data and were interviewed about various aspects of their participation. These studies focused only on parents' views, perspectives, and/or understandings of different aspects of their playgroup participation including experiences, practices, attendance and leadership. In the study that used video data, families' practices in the community playgroup provided the main source of data for understanding cultural practices used in a playgroup in an Indigenous community.

The five qualitative studies used a range of theoretical frameworks including cultural historical (Fler & Hammer, 2014), interpretative phenomenology (Gibson et al., 2015; Harman et al., 2014) and social capital (Gibson et al., 2015; Mulcahy et al., 2010). Each of these studies, while

drawing on diverse theoretical frameworks, nonetheless reported similar findings regarding the social dimensions of community playgroup participation and benefits for caregivers, families and their communities, with two studies noting barriers to realising the benefits of participation.

Although four out of the five studies reviewed were Australian studies, a similar model exists within Canada in the form of mothers' groups. Consistent with research that recognises the evolution of playgroups as a grassroots approach to supporting mothers (Mize & Pettit, 2010; Townley, 2018), the studies in this review align with those from commissioned reports (Gregory et al., 2016; McLean et al., 2016; McShane et al., 2016) highlighting that playgroup participation provides benefits in the form of friendships, parenting support and social connections. Further research nationally and internationally may seek to examine the impact support networks and social connections enabled through community playgroup participation have on the home learning environment as a known influence on children's learning and development in early childhood (Sylva et al., 2004). This would seem to be a gap in the existing empirical literature regarding participation in community playgroups.

None of the studies in this review specifically identified benefits of community playgroup participation for children. Although reported in commissioned research (Gregory et al., 2016) and minimal scholarly research (Hancock et al., 2012) about playgroups, in general, further empirical evidence regarding children's participation in community playgroups specifically, is warranted. Attention could also be directed towards establishing developmental and educational outcomes associated with children's participation in community playgroups.

Given this review generated only five empirical investigations regarding children and families' participation in community playgroups, further research is clearly needed. To this end continued efforts in the field would benefit from expanding on the research designs of the five studies reported on in this review. It appears that early work in the area is predominately exploratory regarding different dimensions of playgroup participation such as community capacity building (Keam et al., 2016), cultural repertoires of practices for learning (Fleer & Hammer, 2014) and playgroup experiences (Gibson et al., 2015; Harman et al., 2014; Mulcahy et al., 2010). This is an important starting point for empirical investigations into the participation of children and families in community playgroups. Complementary research designs using methodologies for larger scale and/or longitudinal research such as cohort studies and research designs for identifying and/or developing suitable measures for assessing a range

of outcomes of community playgroup participation for children, families and their communities are indicated. However, this is not without challenges. The complex nature of recruitment for community playgroup research (Stratigos & Fenech, 2018) is recognised, including fluid and fluctuating attendance rates; varied, diverse and unstructured programs; voluntary leadership and administration; and less organisational support structures than supported playgroups (McLean et al., 2017), making the implementation of some research designs difficult.

Community playgroups operate in culturally and geographical diverse communities (McShane, 2015; Townley, 2018). Demographic limitations acknowledged by authors across the five studies suggest that further research about community playgroup participation should include participants from rural, regional and metropolitan communities and from a full range of socio-economic backgrounds. Further studies could also extend reach beyond mothers as the primary caregiver including children and other stakeholders in their samples.

Limitations in the conduct of this review are that studies conducted prior to 2000 may not have been identified in the review period 2000-2018. However, playgroups were not strongly represented in early childhood education policy prior to this period (Townley, 2018), perhaps therefore limiting their interest to researchers. Grey literature was not included in this research because the focus was on empirical investigations regarding community playgroups, however, this may have resulted in the exclusion of other publications of interest such as conference proceedings and reports that were non-peer reviewed.

Conclusion

Community playgroups are a valued part of the early childhood landscape in Australia and internationally. Not only do community playgroups have an historical presence in the early childhood education landscape in Australia (Townley, 2018), they are also represented in current policy documents (e.g. Australian National Early Years Learning Framework – DEEWR, 2009; Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework – DETV, 2016). Although predominantly exploratory community playgroup research has begun to provide valuable insight into different dimensions of participation. The purpose of this review was to determine what the empirical literature regarding children and families' participation in community playgroups has indicated. The findings suggest that there are (a) social dimensions of community participation including benefits for caregivers, families and communities, and (b) barriers to realising the benefits of community playgroup participation. Research at this

stage is predominantly qualitative suggesting the need for more mixed method approaches and greater insight into the outcomes of participation, particularly for children and families.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge the contribution of Carmela Germano as a team member supporting the conduct of literature searching for this review.

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Figure 1. Flow chart of the study selection process.

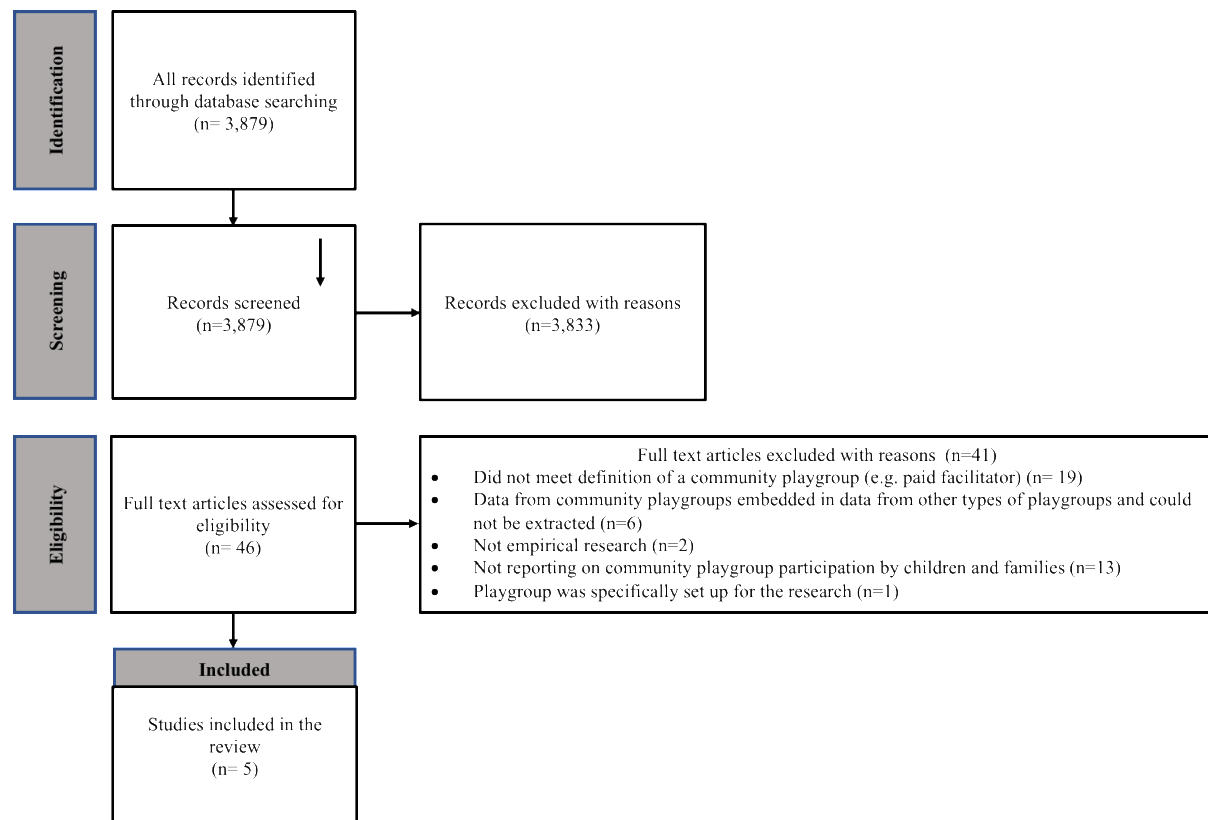


Table 1. Summary of study details

Authors Year Country	Study aim	Design Sample Setting Duration of study Theoretical orientation	Methods	Key findings <i>Children</i> <i>Caregivers</i> <i>Families</i> <i>Communities</i>
Fleer & Hammer (2014) Australia	Analyse repertoires of practices in a community playgroup where Indigenous families use traditional, Western early childhood resources and structures to run the playgroup.	Design: cross-sectional, qualitative study. Sample: 19 families Setting: One Indigenous playgroup community within a Western rural region of Victoria, Australia Theoretical orientation: Cultural-historical concepts of <i>demands</i> and <i>motives</i>	Video recordings of participation practices	Paralleled other studies of guided participation in everyday situations in Indigenous communities. <i>Families' participation:</i> Regularities in cultural repertoires used by Indigenous families for learning extended beyond Western early childhood education practices and supported participation in the playgroup.
Gibson, Harman, & Guilfoyle (2015) Australia	Understand how new parents, construct their reality through their interactions with other parents in community playgroups (p. 5)	Design: Cross-sectional, qualitative study Sample: 15 community playgroup participants (14 mothers & 1 father with ages ranging between early twenties to mid-forties). Setting: Perth Western Australia metropolitan Theory: Social constructionism and using Interpretive Phenomenology as theoretical framework Social capital theory	Individual semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions	<i>Benefits for parents:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> new support networks, shared commonalities, and needs-based support social support including friendships <i>Barriers for parents' participation:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> missing out on benefits due to difficulty socialising, solidarity of established groups, leadership roles, gender, socioeconomic or ethnicity differences.
Harman, Guilfoyle, & O'Connor (2014) Australia	Examine mothers' experiences of attending playgroup	Design: Cross-sectional, qualitative study. Sample: Stage 1 - 11 mothers across seven playgroups Stage 2 - 10 mothers across two playgroups Setting: Perth, Western Australia metropolitan	Semi-structured interviews (Group 1) Follow up focus group interviews (Group 2).	<i>Reasons mothers attend:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop a sense of belonging seeking validation as a mother <i>Reasons for non-attendance:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> negative experiences of playgroup.

		Theoretical orientation: Interpretative Phenomenology.		
Keam, Cooke, Sinclair, & McShane (2018) Australia	Explore community playgroups as community capacity building sites	Design: Part of broader commissioned study Qualitative study Sample: 33 mothers Setting: across Victoria Theoretical orientation: Not identified	Individual phone interviews	<i>Benefits for parents:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintaining and developing skills through participation on playgroup committee and in leadership roles establishing leadership in the community more connected to their communities <i>Benefits for communities:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> developing community leaders
Mulcahy, Parry, & Glover (2010) Canada	Explore the experiences of mothers of mothers' groups	Design: Cross-sectional, qualitative study Sample: snowball sampling of 24 mothers who attend mothers' groups (27-44 years). Setting: Mid-sized city in south-west Ontario, Canada Theory: Critical social capital theory	Individual interviews	<i>Benefits for parents:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> getting together with other mothers who share similar characteristics such as having children, shared values, beliefs and life experiences; friendship, support, access to resources and social networks. <i>Barriers for parents' participation:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> can perpetuate exclusion through getting left out, judged and gendered. <i>Benefits for families:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> friendships, support and access to resources <i>Benefits for communities:</i> provide coping mechanisms and support networks for responsibility of motherhood at little or no cost to the community bridging gap in services