

Positioning high school students within the circle of risk

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Abstract

This study investigates adolescents' tendencies to engage in risky behaviors, addressing a significant gap in understanding the multifaceted influences contributing to such actions. Although adolescent risk-taking has been widely studied, there remains limited insight into the interplay of individual, familial, institutional, and societal factors shaping these behaviors. The objective of the study is to explore the nature and underlying causes of risky behavior among high school students through a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative component involved 728 students selected through non-random sampling, while the qualitative component included 14 teachers and administrators chosen via maximum diversity sampling. Data collection instruments included the High School Form of the Risky Behaviors Scale and a semi-structured interview protocol developed by the researchers. Findings indicate that risky behaviors are gendered, with certain tendencies more prevalent among boys and others among girls. Contributing factors were identified as parental separation, socio-economic conditions, school type, and grade level. Qualitative insights revealed that family dynamics, socio-economic and cultural influences, individual characteristics, digital media, and school environment significantly shape students' risk-related actions. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive prevention strategies that address both individual and contextual determinants.

Keywords: Administrators; adolescents; high school students; risk behaviors; teachers

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1. INTRODUCTION

Engagement in risky behaviors during adolescence has long been a subject of academic inquiry. One of the most prominent explanations is that the adolescent developmental period is inherently characterized by a desire to explore, test boundaries, and discover personal abilities and limitations. Such behaviors are integral to the process of identity formation, the assumption of responsibility, and the transition toward independence. However, this natural developmental trajectory can become problematic when the drive for autonomy manifests as boundary-testing that disregards potential consequences. The perception of freedom and the impulse to act on immediate desires can lead adolescents to engage in behaviors with potentially adverse outcomes for both themselves and others. This study seeks to examine the underlying factors contributing to adolescents' engagement in risky behaviors, drawing upon empirical data collected from students and insights provided by their teachers.

There are different developmental periods in human life that are influenced by physiological, sociological, and psychological dynamics, and individuals exhibit different patterns of behavior that are specific to these periods. The adolescent period, which includes the high school students examined in this study, is a unique process in which rapid changes occur in the life of the individual (Karaman, 2013; Şimşek & Çöplü, 2018). During this period, which is recognized by the World Health Organization as the life stage between childhood and adulthood, between the ages of ten and nineteen, adolescents experience social, cognitive, and psychological developments, as well as rapid physical changes. These sudden changes shape what adolescents think, feel, decide, and interact with the world (WHO, 2022). This period, which significantly shapes the adolescent in the individual context, is a critical developmental process that has serious short- and long-term implications for society (Şimşek & Çöplü, 2018).

During adolescence, psychosocial transformations contribute to the transition from childhood dependency toward autonomy and active participation in adult society. In pursuit of this developmental milestone, a variety of behavioral strategies may be employed, including experimentation, exploration, risk-taking, boundary-testing, and defiance of established norms and authority structures (Knight, 2009). Concurrently, the process involves the formation of identity, evolving perceptions of family dynamics, diminishing parental influence, and heightened peer pressure, all of which contribute to significant behavioral shifts. Peer status becomes particularly salient during this period, as adolescents exhibit increased responsiveness to peer feedback, heightened biological sensitivity to social reinforcement, and a strong motivation to secure a position within the peer hierarchy (Nesi & Prinstein, 2019; Lim et al., 2023). These developmental dynamics manifest across broader socio-ecological systems, including the family, peer networks, educational settings, and the wider society (NIH, 2022). This stage is frequently marked by internal contradictions and unreflective risk-taking, often resulting in the emergence of problematic behaviors commonly referred to as "risky behaviors" (Semerci & Aşilar, 2018; Sezer & Gürtepe, 2025). Risky behaviors are defined as actions that endanger adolescent health and safety, with potential outcomes such as disability, injury, or mortality (Smith, 2001, as cited in Kurt & Ergene, 2017). These behaviors, frequently linked to underlying depressive symptoms, often persist into adulthood and exert long-term effects on individual health and well-being (Jackson et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2024).

The theoretical basis explaining risky behaviors in adolescents is called Problem-Behavior Theory (PBT). PBT is a social psychological framework that helps to explain the nature and development of problem behaviors such as alcohol and drug use (Jessor, 1987; Jessor, 1991, cited in McKellar & Sillence, 2020). Jessor (1987) defined problem behavior as a social problem, a source of concern, or behavior that is undesirable according to the social and/or legal norms of traditional society and its institutions of authority. This form of behavior usually results in some form of social or legal control response, either low, such as social disapproval, or high, such as imprisonment. The theoretical framework suggests the existence of three variables that explain risky behavior: the perceived environment system, the personality system, and the behavior system. These systems, which include interrelated social elements, are composed of variables that act either as incentives to engage in problematic behavior or as

controls against engaging in problematic behavior. The factor that determines the degree of predisposition to problem behavior in each system is the balance between incentives and controls (Jessor, 1987).

Risk behavior tends to follow a typical cycle: it is low in childhood, increases around adolescence, peaks in late adolescence and early adulthood, and then tends to decline in adulthood. Researchers believe that risky behavior in adolescents reflects the gap between biological and social maturity. Many studies show that adolescents' decision-making processes differ significantly from those of adults. First, adolescents often underestimate risks and believe that they can reap greater potential benefits from risky behavior. Second, while adults avoid risky behaviors through reasoning based on intuitive responses derived from education and experience, adolescents may not be capable of such reasoning. Third, adolescents use emotion-based reasoning, i.e., they act only on the social consequences of their decisions, rather than rationally weighing risks. Finally, when adolescents engage in risky behaviors, they often have a limited understanding of the possible negative consequences of these actions (NIH, 2022).

Adolescence is a process that includes schooling. At the end of 2021, the total population of Turkey was 84 million 680 thousand 273 people, while the ratio of young people in the 10-14 age group and early adolescence to the total population was 7.60 per cent, and 5 million 293 thousand 67 of them were in secondary education. The ratio of young people in middle and late adolescence to the total population was 7.36 per cent, and 6 million 543 thousand 599 young people continued their education in secondary education (Ministry of National Education (MEB, 2022; Turkish Statistics Institute (TÜİK, 2022). During this period, young people spend most of their time at school, and their developmental processes are closely linked to the school period. Bursaloğlu (1987) states that the most important feature of the school as an organization is that the raw material it works with is the people who come and go from society. In this respect, the individual dimension of the school is more sensitive than the institutional dimension, the informal side is heavier than the formal side, and the area of influence is wider than the area of authority. In this sense, the place of relationships is of great importance for school organizations (Bursaloğlu, 1987). In school organizations that prepare individuals for social life by supporting their social development as well as the acquisition of academic skills, experiences with peer groups and other school stakeholders have a great impact on the social behavior of individuals (Şimşek & Çöplü, 2018). It is possible to say that risky behaviors, which can be seen in this process and have the potential to shape adult behavior, can hurt the individual and the school organization in the short term, as well as serious costs and consequences for society and the country in the long term in the social and economic context. In this regard, Sun (2001, as cited in Kurt & Ergene, 2017) stated that school psychological counselors, teachers and school administrators, parents, and adolescents should have a high awareness of risky behaviors. It is also stated that healthy communication with teachers and peers, and success in school are factors that protect adolescents from risky behaviors (Kurt & Ergene, 2017).

A review of recent studies within the domestic literature reveals a predominance of research employing relational screening models to examine the associations between adolescents' engagement in risky behaviors and various psychological and social variables. Notable among these are studies exploring the influence of peer pressure (Talu & Gümüş, 2020), subjective well-being (Öngören, 2020), emotion regulation skills, strategies to enhance well-being, and grief responses (Uçar & Savi, 2021), as well as the relationship between social media use, social phobia (Duman & Baştemur, 2023), and psychological well-being (Can & Kağan, 2024). Within the international literature, systematic reviews and meta-analyses on adolescent risk behavior have also gained prominence (Bozzini et al., 2020; Raeside et al., 2024; Vannucci et al., 2020). Additional empirical work has focused on variables such as emotional regulation difficulties and neuroticism (Singh, 2024), as well as resilience and family functioning (Ritanti et al., 2023). Despite this growing body of work, a notable gap persists in the application of mixed methods approaches, particularly within the international literature. This gap underscores the distinctive contribution of the present study, which adopts a mixed methods design to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative components, the study aims

not only to generate generalizable findings regarding adolescent risk behaviors but also to uncover context-specific insights into how such behaviors are conceptualized by students in recent years. This methodological approach enhances the depth and breadth of analysis and constitutes a significant added value to the existing literature.

1.1. Purpose of study

The purpose of this parallel mixed-methods design study is to identify the tendencies of high school students to engage in risky behavior, the reasons for these tendencies, and the perceptions of teachers and administrators. To this end, answers were sought to the following questions:

1. What are the students' views on the concept of "risky behavior"?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in the propensity of students to engage in risky behavior according to demographic characteristics (gender, school type, grade level, parents together/separated, family socio-economic level, and parents' educational level)?
3. How do teachers and administrators interpret risky behavior?
4. What risky behaviors do teachers and administrators perceive students to be engaging in?
5. In the opinion of teachers and administrators, what measures are taken in schools to deal with risky behavior?
6. In the opinion of teachers and administrators, what are the reactions to risky behavior in schools?
7. What do teachers and administrators think are the main causes of risky behavior?
8. Do the findings from the qualitative data support the findings from the quantitative data?

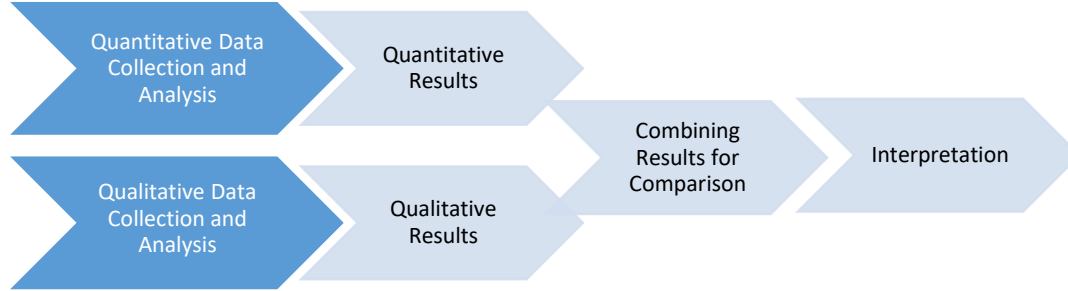
2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

2.1. Research design

A 'mixed method' was used in this study to identify the risky behavior tendencies of high school students to gain a deeper understanding (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Creswell & Clark, 2017; Büyüköztürk et al., 2015). Mixed methods design is a method that deliberately combines or integrates qualitative and quantitative data, rather than obtaining them separately, to maximize the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of each type of data (Klassen et al., 2012). In this context, the reason for choosing a mixed method in this study is data triangulation. Data triangulation involves comparing the findings of qualitative and quantitative data to obtain a more valid discussion of the research problem, based on similarities or differences (Creswell et al., 2016). Therefore, the quantitative and qualitative findings obtained from the research were compared and integrated in the discussion section of the study. The quantitative dimension of this study was conducted using the descriptive survey model, which is one of the research methods. In the qualitative dimension, the phenomenological design was used. The phenomenological design aims to reveal commonalities in the experiences of individuals living the phenomenon (Toprak, 2021) by taking into account phenomena that involve experiences, perceptions, orientations, or concepts that we cannot master (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The study used a 'convergent parallel mixed method design' in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and the data were analyzed separately (Hacıömeroğlu, 2017). The convergent parallel mixed methods design is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Convergent parallel mixed-method design



Source: adapted from Creswell & Creswell (2017)

2.2. Participants

The population of the study consists of high school students studying in Turkey. The research group consists of 728 high school students studying in various provinces of Turkey in the 2022-2023 academic year. It was formed using convenient sampling from non-random sampling types. Of the high school students participating in the study, 550 were female and 178 were male. 530 of the students are studying in Anatolian High Schools, 164 in Anatolian Vocational and Technical High Schools, and 34 in other high school types. In addition, students from all grade levels participated in the study. The other variables used in the study were the socio-economic level of the students' families, parental education level, and whether the parents were together or separated.

In order to determine where high school students are located in the risk circle, interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators working in high schools in public high schools in order to reflect different perspectives. A total of 14 participants, including 4 administrators, 4 counseling and guidance counselors and 6 teachers, were selected from among the administrators, counseling and guidance counselors and subject teachers working in different types of high schools in various provinces of Turkey by using the "maximum diversity sampling" method, which is one of the "purposive sampling" methods. In ensuring diversity, the type of task, school type, and gender of the participants were taken into consideration.

2.3. Data collection tool

In the study, data were collected online with the High School Form of the Risky Behaviors Scale (RBS) developed by Gençtanırım and Ergene (2014). The scale is Likert-type and is expressed as 5= Absolutely appropriate, 4= Appropriate, 3= Partially appropriate, 2= Not appropriate, 1= Absolutely not appropriate. The scale consists of 6 dimensions and a total of 36 items. A total score can be obtained from the scale. Confirmatory factor analysis goodness of fit values of the scale are χ^2/df : 2.99, RMSEA: .76, GFI: .79, SRMR: .75. It was seen that the goodness of fit values of the scale were between the values accepted in the literature and acceptable for this study and the scale was validated (Çelik & Yılmaz, 2016).

Table 1 shows the reliability analysis results of the scale.

Table 1

RBS reliability coefficients

Scale	Cronbach's α Reliability Coefficient	
	Scale Development Study	Current Study
Anti-Social Behavior	.79	.72
Alcohol Use	.87	.80
Cigarette Use	.87	.79
Suicidal Tendency	.70	.63
Dietary Habits	.70	.69
School Dropout	.83	.65
RBS Total	.90	.77

When the data in Table 1 are analyzed, it is seen that the Cronbach's α reliability coefficients of the scale are above the desired value of .70 (Büyüköztürk et al., 2015).

In the qualitative dimension of the study, a semi-structured interview form prepared by the researchers was used. In the preparation of the interview form, firstly, draft questions were prepared in order to gain a different perspective on the results obtained from quantitative data, and then a pilot study was conducted with administrators and teachers independent from the study group by taking expert opinion. After the pilot study, the interview form was finalized. In addition, the concepts of validity and reliability suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013) for qualitative studies such as "credibility" for "internal validity", "transferability" for "external validity", "consistency" for "internal reliability" and "confirmability" for "external reliability" were taken into consideration in the study. In this regard, for the validity and reliability of the data collected in this study, all processes of the research were explained in detail and presented to researchers who will conduct similar studies in order to ensure external validity and transferability. For internal reliability, in order to ensure credibility, all data obtained within the scope of the research were given in the form of direct quotations during the interpretation of the findings. For internal reliability consistency, the research problems were clearly stated, and their consistency with the research process was continuously tested. In addition, for external reliability and confirmability, the data collection tool and data of the research are kept so that they can be examined.

Validity measures for mixed data are listed as measures taken during data collection, data analysis, and interpretation (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). In this study, validity was achieved by integrating both quantitative and qualitative data using the triangulation method (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Participant validation was conducted for the validity of qualitative data (Kirk & Miller, 1986), and the validity of quantitative data was confirmed by the reliability in qualitative data, and Cronbach's α coefficient was found to be high in quantitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). In the data collection phase of the study, quantitative data were obtained from a large sample group (n: 789) and qualitative data were obtained from a small research group (n: 14). To adapt the design, "Quantitative + Qualitative" order was made in the analysis phase and the interpretation phase, qualitative and quantitative data were interpreted in order by the design and the research problem was answered. In addition, integration reliability was ensured by comparing the themes and codes obtained, and the findings were conveyed with detailed descriptions (Creswell & Clark, 2017) of the scales (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In terms of reliability, inter-coder reliability was achieved.

2.4. Ethics and procedure

Before the interview and questionnaire administration, the participants were informed both verbally and with the informed consent form about the purpose of the study, the questions about the study, and that participation in the study was voluntary. In addition, the participants were told that they could leave the study at any time and that their information would be used only within the scope of this study and would remain confidential. Participants indicated that they voluntarily participated in the study. The interviews were recorded in a Microsoft Word Document, and after being transcribed, they were divided into themes and sub-themes and analyzed. All data were saved as a file to be kept.

2.5. Data analysis

The skewness and kurtosis coefficients for the normal distribution of the data are given in Table 2.

Table 2
Skewness and kurtosis coefficients of RBS

Scale	Skewness	Kurtosis
RBS	.444	-.351

When Table 2 is examined, it is accepted that the skewness and kurtosis coefficients vary between +1 and -1 in the calculations made for the data collected with the RBS and that the data show a normal distribution (Karagöz, 2021; Bursal, 2017). In data analysis, basic descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, and One-Way ANOVA were used.

The content analysis method was used in qualitative data analysis. In the first stage, the interview records were transferred to the computer environment and transcribed. Then, the data were coded independently by two researchers, and the codes were compared. In cases of disagreement, the opinion of a third expert was sought (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the coding process, main themes and sub-themes were determined by paying attention to the principles of “internal consistency” and “external difference” (Creswell & Poth, 2016). After the finalization of the themes and codes, the data were supported with direct quotations and reported. The validity and reliability of the study were ensured by explaining the research model, study group, data collection tool, data analysis process, and interpretations in detail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3. RESULTS

3.1. Quantitative findings

Table 3 shows the descriptive analysis results of high school students' tendency to exhibit risky behaviors.

Table 3

Descriptive analysis results for high school students' tendency to exhibit risky behaviors

Dimensions	n		Sd	Level
Anti-Social Behavior	728	1.58	.561	Low
Alcohol Use	728	1.04	.204	Low
Cigarette Use	728	1.29	.613	Low
Suicidal Tendency	728	2.77	.961	Mid
Dietary Habits	728	2.47	.869	Mid
School Dropout	728	1.28	.448	Low
RBS Total	728	9.76	1.90	

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that high school students' tendency to exhibit risky behaviors is at low level in the dimensions of antisocial behaviors (=1.58), alcohol use (=1.04), smoking (=1.29) and school dropout (=1.28), and at medium level in the dimensions of suicidal tendency (=2.77) and dietary habits (=2.47).

Table 4 shows the results of an independent samples t-test for high school students' tendency to exhibit risky behaviors according to the gender variable and the parents' being together/separated variable.

Table 4

Independent Samples t-Test Results Regarding the Comparison of High School Students' Levels of Exhibiting Risky Behaviors According to Gender and Having Parents Together/Separated Variables

		n	\bar{X}	Sd	t	p		n	\bar{X}	Sd	t	p
Anti-Social Behavior	Female	550	1.55	.53	6.93	.009	Together	637	1.57	.56	1.11	.291
	Male	178	1.67	.62			Separated	91	1.62	.51		
Alcohol Use	Female	550	1.03	.18	21.5	.000	Together	637	1.04	.20	1.54	.214
	Male	178	1.07	.25			Separated	91	1.06	.19		
Cigarette Use	Female	550	1.26	.57	11.6	.001	Together	637	1.28	.60	.57	.449
	Male	178	1.40	.71			Separated	91	1.34	.65		
Suicidal Tendency	Female	550	2.87	.97	8.33	.004	Together	637	2.75	.95	.94	.332
	Male	178	2.45	.83			Separated	91	2.90	.98		

Dietary Habits	Female	550	2.54	.84	1.09	.296	Together	637	2.44	.84	5.39	.020
	Male	178	2.24	.89			Separated	91	2.65	.99		
School Dropout	Female	550	1.26	.42	8.14	.004	Together	637	1.27	.44	1.83	.176
	Male	178	1.33	.51			Separated	91	1.34	.48		
RBS Total	Female	550	9.79	1.89	.26	.609	Together	637	9.70	1.88	1.91	.166
	Male	178	9.69	1.93			Separated	91	10.19	1.99		

When Table 4 is examined, it is found that the tendency of high school students to exhibit risky behaviors according to the gender variable does not differ significantly in the total scale and the sub-dimensions of dietary habits. However, there were statistically significant differences in the dimensions of anti-social behaviors, alcohol use, smoking, suicidal tendency, and school dropout. It can be said that while female students exhibit suicidal tendency risk behavior more, male students exhibit anti-social behaviors, alcohol use, smoking, and school dropout risk behaviors more. In addition, according to the results of the t-test related to whether high school students' parents were together or separated, it was found that high school students' tendency to exhibit risky behaviors did not differ statistically significantly throughout the scale. When the results for the dimensions are examined, it is seen that only in the sub-dimension of dietary habits; students whose parents are separated tend to exhibit more risky behaviors. In the next section, the results of high school students' tendency to exhibit risky behaviors according to income level, grade level, and school type variables are discussed.

Examining the results for the tendency of students to engage in risky behavior according to the variable of income level, it was found that the tendency of students to engage in risky behavior differed statistically significantly between the low and high income groups in the sub-dimension of antisocial behavior ($p=.009$), and between the low and medium income groups in the sub-dimension of eating habits ($p=.01$); there was no significant difference in the total scale and other sub-dimensions. It can be said that students with low income levels show fewer risky behaviors, and that students' risky behaviors increase as the income level of the family increases. On the other hand, the tendency of students to engage in risky behavior shows statistically significant differences between the groups according to the year variable. There are significant differences between grades 9 and 11 and between grades 9 and 12. When analyzing the sub-dimensions, there is a significant difference in the smoking sub-dimension ($p=.000$), but not in the other dimensions. Significant differences are found between students in year 9 and year 11, between students in year 9 and year 12, between students in year 10 and year 12, and between students in year 11 and year 12. Cigarette consumption among students increases with grade. Students' tendency to exhibit risky behaviors is lower in 9th grade than in 11th and 12th grades. According to the school type variable, it is seen that the tendency of high school students to exhibit risky behaviors does not show a statistically significant difference between the groups. When the sub-dimensions were examined, it was observed that there was a statistically significant difference in the sub-dimensions of anti-social behaviors ($p=.040$), smoking ($p=.000$), and suicidal tendency ($p=.007$). Differences in students' tendency to exhibit anti-social behaviors were observed between Anatolian High Schools and Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools; differences in smoking were observed between Anatolian High Schools and Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools and between Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools and other high schools. Suicidal behavior is observed between students studying in Anatolian High Schools and Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools, and between students studying in Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools and other high schools. Accordingly, students studying in Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools show less antisocial behavior than students studying in other high schools. According to the results regarding students' smoking, it can be said that Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School students use cigarettes more than Anatolian High School students and students from other high schools. Again, it is seen that the suicidal tendencies of Anatolian High School students are at the lowest level, and the suicidal tendencies of the students studying in other high schools are at the highest level. The results obtained from the research on the tendency of high school students

to exhibit risky behaviors according to the variables of mother and father education level are explained in the next section.

When examining the results for the tendency of students to engage in risky behaviors according to the variable of maternal education level, it was observed that there was no statistically significant difference in the total scale and the sub-dimensions. Accordingly, it can be said that the mother's level of education is not an effective factor in engaging in risky behavior. According to the variable of father's educational level, it can be seen that the tendency of high school students to engage in risky behavior differs statistically significantly between the groups ($p=.046$). Students with a low level of their father's education show less risky behavior than students with a high level of their father's education. Looking at the results for the sub-dimensions, it can be seen that the tendencies of students to engage in risky behavior do not differ significantly.

3.2. Qualitative Findings

The views of teachers and school administrators on the definition of risky behavior are given in Table 5.

Table 5

Views of teachers and school administrators on the definition of risky behavior

Main Theme	Sub Themes	Codes	f
Defining Risky Behavior	Cause Based	The perception that you can live freely and without controlling your behavior	1
		Adolescence and harmful habits are caused by influences from each other	1
		Negative effects of family, environment, and social media, and their reflection	1
		Negative behaviors caused by wannabes and the desire to be accepted	1
		Inappropriately adopting and maintaining new trends and behaviors	1
	Based On The Sphere of Influence	Any behavior that causes harm to oneself or others	5
		Behaviors that negatively affect daily life, cause unhappiness, and lead to negative behavior	3
		Behaviors that negatively affect the mental and physiological state of the person	2
		Behaviors that negatively affect academic success and interest in school	1
		Any behavior that endangers the person	1
	Based on the Way of Display	Any behavior that harms society and friends	1
		Unconscious	4
		Conscious	1
		Learned behaviors	1

Looking at Table 5, we can see that teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the concept of 'risky behavior' are grouped into three sub-themes: "based on the cause", "based on the sphere of influence", and "based on the way it is displayed". It can be seen that teachers' and administrators' perception of risky behavior based on the cause is influenced by students' desire to be free, to be wanted, and to be accepted, as well as the negative effects and reflections of family, environment, and social media. In this regard, one participant expressed his opinion as follows: "*The concept of risky behavior, in my opinion, is that students think they have the chance to live free or without controlling their behavior...(P1)*"; another participant expressed his/her opinion as follows: "*...we can define it as the negative influences from the family and the environment in general and some negative actions and their reflections from social media that are popular today...(P5)*". Teachers' and administrators' definitions of risky behavior based on the sphere of influence include many factors such as the negative effects of the person himself/herself, his/her environment, society, academic performance, and interest in school. "*The concept of risky behavior is any behavior in which students harm or may harm themselves or their environment...(P4)*" and "*Behavior that negatively affects the student's daily life, academic success, and interest in school...(P7)*" exemplify these views. It is seen that some participants stated that risky behaviors are exhibited consciously, while some

participants unconsciously, and some participants defined them as learned behaviors. In this context, one participant stated "*Unconsciously making and maintaining new trends and behaviors inappropriately as a habit... (P11)*", while another participant stated "*...there is also what adolescence gives, but I have also observed that learning is also effective... (P14)*".

The opinions of teachers and administrators on risky behaviors encountered in high school students are given in Table 6.

Table 6
Participants' Opinions on Risky Behaviors Encountered in Students

Main Theme	Sub Themes	Codes	f
Risky Behaviors	In-School	Abusive and slang language	5
		Harmful jokes/inappropriate conversations between friends	4
		Peer bullying	4
		Fighting/Violence	4
		Truancy from school/class	3
		School absenteeism	3
		Sexual orientation / opposite sex orientation	3
		Lying	3
		Failure to comply with school rules	2
		Failure to comply with security measures	2
		Lack of motivation	2
		Negative attitudes towards the teacher	1
		Cyber bullying	1
		Inability to manage stress	1
		Other	9
	School Environment and Outside	Smoking	10
		Alcohol use	5
		Technology addiction	3
		Substance use/addiction	3
		Malnutrition	2
		Negative attitudes towards society/elders	2
		Cyber bullying	1
		Other	5

Looking at Table 6, we can see that the opinions of teachers and administrators on the risky behavior of students are grouped into two sub-themes: "in school" and "in and out of school". Teachers and administrators stated that behaviors such as abusive and slang language, harmful jokes/inappropriate behavior among friends, peer bullying, absenteeism, truancy, opposite-sex tendencies, and cyber-bullying are risky behaviors that are exhibited by students in school. In this regard, P5 expressed his opinion as follows: "*....Peer bullying comes to the fore, it shows that the lines in girl-boy relationships are not drawn with very thick lines for some students. In general, these can be described as the riskiest behaviors.* Similarly, P8 stated that "*I observe risky behaviors such as truancy, lying, smoking, tendency to fight and violence, tendency to the opposite sex, self-harm, etc.*". Participants reported that some of the risky behaviors that they observed in students outside of school included smoking, alcohol and drug use, technology addiction, gangs, cyberbullying, negative attitudes towards society/older people, and materialistic dating. P14 stated that "*...when we look at social life, this cyber bullying comes to a higher level and in my school, they call us to court with more cases related to it....*", while P11 stated

that "We can say that the misuse of social media, smoking, the habit of drinking alcohol outside of school, the use of antidepressants, and not complying with safety and security measures in and around the school."

However, two important findings stand out in the opinions of teachers and administrators regarding the risky behavior of students; the first is that smoking is perceived as a normal situation by both teachers and administrators, and families. At this point, P1 expressed his opinion as "...I don't even care about cigarettes, smoking is already widespread"; P14 said: "...there is no such thing as tobacco addiction here anymore because it has become a normalized lifestyle, a philosophy of life. I mean, when I call the parents and say 'your child is smoking', they say 'what's wrong', and they say 'did he smoke in class? I say, "Yes, he smoked in class". He says, "I'll pay whatever the punishment is....". Secondly, some teachers and administrators working in Imam Hatip High Schools emphasized that the fact that male and female students study in separate classes increases the tendency towards the opposite sex among students. P2 said: "...Because it is an Imam Hatip high school, of course, the classes for boys and girls are usually separate. If you separate them, you know, it becomes more attractive, there is such an interaction in the students..."

The opinions of teachers and administrators on the measures for risky behaviors encountered in high school students are given in Table 7.

Table 7
Participants' Opinions on Precautions for Risky Behaviors Encountered in Students

Main Theme	Sub Themes	Codes	f
Precautions for Risky Behaviors	Restrictive and Punitive	Referral to the disciplinary committee	2
		Body search of the student	1
		Restriction of out-of-school time	1
		Restricting the use of the telephone	1
	Preventive and Supportive Activities	Student/parent seminars and training	7
		Individual interview with the student	6
		Raising awareness of the individual	6
		Communicating with parents	3
		Investigating the causes of behavior	3
		Displaying a constructive attitude towards students	2
		Ensuring school and home follow-up	2
		Creating school and class risk maps	1
		Other	14
	Cooperation with Stakeholders	Guidance/collaboration with the counseling unit	7
		Communication/co-operation with parents	3
		Calling/Cooperation with the police	2
		Co-operation with the school administration	2
		Cooperation with local civil institutions and organizations	1
		Co-operation with the class teacher	1
	Other	No need to take precautions	1
		School disengagement	1
		Making him/her feel grateful	1

When Table 7 is examined, it is seen that four sub-themes emerged as "restrictive and punishment-based", "preventive and supportive activities", "cooperation with stakeholders", and "other". Among the restrictive and punitive measures, the participants emphasized measures such as referral to the disciplinary board, frisking, preventing students from leaving the school, and restricting the use of mobile phones. P6 said, *"...we restrict the use of mobile phones. We do not have any problems in that regard. I restricted their lunch breaks just like in my old school, it had a great effect. At one point, we left it free, and there were fights. Currently, only those with parental permission can go out..."*. P9, on the other hand, mentioned punishment-based measures as follows: *"...If there is no improvement in the student's situation and the student continues to do the same behaviors, he/she is referred to the Disciplinary Board..."*. As preventive and supportive measures, the participants emphasized educational seminars for students and parents, individual interviews with students, raising awareness of the individual, investigating the cause of risky behaviors, creating school and classroom risk maps, and ensuring school and home follow-up. In this regard, P7 stated the measures taken as follows: *"I conduct one-to-one interviews with students with risky behaviors, I communicate with parents, I inform students about risky behaviors and their possible consequences in my lessons..."*; P8 stated, *"...studies carried out with parents, ensuring the follow-up of adolescents at school and home, regulating family communication positively are among the measures that can be taken."*. Within the scope of the sub-theme of cooperation with stakeholders, the participants emphasized the work carried out with the guidance service, parents, school administration, police units, classroom teachers, and local civilian institutions and organizations. In this regard, P11 stated, *"...We cooperate with the school guidance service and local civilian institutions and organizations."*, while P2 stated, *"...I mean, our school generally cooperates with the police and tries to cooperate with parents."* However, some of the participants stated that risky behaviors exhibited outside or around the school are not under the responsibility of the school and the teacher, and that there is no need to take measures in this sense. At this point, P1 expressed his opinion as follows: *"Well, we don't take any precautions, to be honest. Why precautions? I don't even feel the need to take precautions right now because those students are 17 and 18 years old. Students whose relations with their families are disconnected. They know very well what the rules are, and they do everything consciously. ...because they do these things outside the school....This job falls to the law enforcement officers."*

The opinions of teachers and administrators on the reactions to risky behaviors encountered in high school students are given in Table 8.

Table 8
Participants' Opinions on Reactions to Risky Behaviors Encountered in Students

Main Theme	Sub Themes	Codes	f
Reactions to Risky Behaviors	Punishment Based	Warning	2
		Changing schools	1
		Referral to the disciplinary committee	1
		Suggestions and communication	1
	Preventive and Supportive Activities	Individual interview	5
		Referral to a counseling service	4
		Constructive approach	4
		Questioning the cause of the behavior	4
		Explaining the wrongness of the behavior	3
		Interview with the family	2
		Making them realize the result of the behavior	2
		Psychosocial examination	1
		Maintaining communication until the behavior ends	1
		Other	7
	Contingency	Approach based on risky behavior	1
		Attitude by the student's intention	1

	Age-related approach	1
	Good cop, bad cop	1
	Acting as an advocate for the student	1
	Intervention inside the school	1
Cooperation with Stakeholders	Parent, counselor, and administration co-operation	3
	Informing the top units of the state	1

When Table 8 is examined, it is seen that four sub-themes emerged as "punishment-based", "preventive and supportive studies", "contingency", and "cooperation with stakeholders" as a result of the participants' views on the reactions to risky behaviors encountered in students. Participant teachers and administrators emphasized behaviors such as warning, referral to the disciplinary board, changing schools, and making suggestions to the student as punishment-based reactions. P9 said, *"I warned the student"*, and P1 said, *"...he was already an unsuccessful student, he wanted to change schools, he left the school himself."* Among the preventive and supportive reactions, the participants expressed opinions on referring to the guidance service, questioning the reasons for the behavior, making the student aware of the consequences of the behavior, showing a constructive attitude towards the student, meeting with the family, and maintaining communication with the student until the behavior ends. At this point, P4 said, *"...sometimes there can be psychiatric conditions. In such cases, we direct the students to health institutions and psychiatry services and try to find out why they behave this way and the underlying reasons."*; P8 stated, *"...I can say that I help the student to see what the consequences of the risky behavior that the student has created may be."* On the other hand, some participants under the sub-theme of contingency emphasized that their reactions were shaped depending on the risky behavior, the student's intention, age, and whether the behavior took place inside or outside the school. In this regard, P6 expressed his reaction as follows: *"First, I call the student, I talk to him/her, I try to understand his/her problem, I talk nicely. I see that there is an ulterior motive, his/her intentions are bad, then I say I will send you to the guidance service..."*. Similarly, P5 said, *"These practices can vary according to the weight rate of risky behaviors..."* and P12 said, *"...Of course, this form of intervention varies according to the age group."* In addition, some participant teachers and administrators expressed their reactions in the sub-theme of cooperation with stakeholders in terms of cooperation with parents, guidance teachers, administration, and informing the higher levels of the state. P2 expressed his opinion on this issue as follows: *"...In that way, we try to help in the cycle of parents, guidance counselors and administration."* P5 expressed his opinion as follows: *"For example, if some of the behaviors that come to the guidance service may have legal consequences, we have to inform the higher levels of our state about them..."*.

The opinions of teachers and administrators on the main causes of risky behaviors in high school students are given in Table 9.

Table 9

Participants' Opinions on the Main Reasons for Risky Behaviors Encountered in Students

Main Theme	Sub Themes	Codes	f
The root cause of risky behavior	Family Factors	Indifferent and unconscious family profile	9
		Family problems	6
		Fragmented family	4
		Uneducated families	3
		Communication breakdown	3
		Other	14
		Low socio-economic status	4
	Socio-economic and Cultural Factors	Living environment	4
		Circle of friends	2
		Tense and angry social structure	1
		Smoking in the social environment and peer group	1
		Where and how the person grew up	1
	Individual Factors	Personality trait	5
		Adolescence	5
		The desire to be accepted and admired	4
		Aimlessness	2
		Low academic achievement	2
		Psychological reasons	1
		Other	7
	Social Media and Technology Factor	Television and social media encourage risky behavior	6
		Technology addiction	3
		Misuse of social media	2
		Social media addiction of the family	1
		Smartphone addiction	1
		Unconscious internet use	1
		Meeting strangers on social media	1
	School-Related Factors	Discipline problems in the education system	1
		Risky behavior profile depending on school type	1
		Failure to establish the school, family, and student triangle	1
		School education is based on excessive knowledge	1
		Insufficiency of social activities	1
		Lack of a sense of belonging to the school	1
		Other	3

Looking at Table 9, it can be seen that the participants' views on the main causes of risky behavior among students are grouped into five sub-themes: 'family factors', 'socio-economic and cultural factors', 'individual factors', 'social media and technology factors', and 'school-related factors'. In terms of family factors for risky behavior, the participants identified an indifferent and uninformed family profile, family problems, a fragmented family, an uneducated family, communication breakdown between family and child, and the use of substances such as smoking and alcohol in the family. In this regard, P2 expressed his opinion as follows: "...I mean children generally feel isolated and families are not interested in children because they are interested in their problems...". P4 said: "...secondly, the family, the divorce of the parents... Apart from that, some negativity in the family based on violence that is not based on love and respect between parents...". In the sub-theme of socio-economic and cultural factors, participants emphasized that factors such as "low socio-economic status, living environment, circle of friends, where and how the person was brought up, tense and angry social structure" were important factors in the risky behavior of students. While P11 expressed his opinion on this issue as follows "...on the other hand it is seen that choosing the wrong friends and starting harmful habits with peer influence...", P12 said: "...where and how you grow up is important. Family is very important. The environment is also very powerful. You are shaped by the kind of environment you are in...". P14 said: "...children with low socio-economic level are at risk

because they are open to negative guidance. Being economically low can attract them very easily, it can attract them to the negative side...". In the sub-theme of individual factors, the participants stated that "personality traits, adolescence, desire to be accepted and liked, aimlessness, low academic success, psychological reasons, indifference to learning, loss of values, carelessness and egocentric perspective" are effective in exhibiting risky behavior. While P3 stated his opinion on this subject as *"....I think that one of the biggest reasons today is social media. Especially trying to be a phenomenon, they can be open to risks for many reasons like trying to fit into a group, to be accepted, to be liked, to be loved"*. P7 stated his opinion as *"....students' lack of goals, indifference to learning, not being aware of what they do not know and letting everything go"*. Regarding the sub-theme of social media and technology factor, participants argued that "television and social media encouraging risky behavior, technology addiction, misuse of social media, family's social media addiction, phone addiction, unconscious internet use and meeting strangers on social media" were effective in exhibiting risky behavior. In this regard, P4 expressed his opinion as follows: *"....Television, social media and some negative things that are mentioned here, for example, the encouragement of smoking and drinking alcohol to young people from TV series, abusive language, and violence is very common. I think these are important factors"*. Another sub-theme highlighted by the participants regarding the causes of risky behavior is school-related factors. As school-related factors, they mentioned "the discipline problem of the education system, the profile of risky behavior depending on the type of school, the failure to establish the school-family-pupil triangle, school education based on excessive information, the lack of social activities and the pupils' lack of belonging to the school". P6 expressed her opinion as follows: *"I think education, family education, school education; I think they all have an effect. It comes from education..."*. P2 stated that *"...every school has its problems. For example, the students I am talking about here are from the project Imam Hatip schools, and more successful students go there. The rest of what I saw was related to other Imam Hatip and other vocational schools..."*.

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the risky behavior tendencies of high school students, the underlying reasons for these behaviors, and the perceptions of teachers and school administrators regarding such behaviors. The mixed-methods approach employed provided a multifaceted view of the phenomenon, incorporating both student self-reports and professional observations.

Quantitative findings indicated that high school students generally displayed a low level of engagement in risky behaviors. Sub-dimensions such as antisocial behavior, alcohol consumption, smoking, and school dropout were found to be low, whereas suicidal tendencies and risky dietary habits were observed at moderate levels. However, qualitative data presented a more complex picture. Teachers and administrators reported frequent risky behaviors, such as the use of abusive language, peer bullying, truancy, and technology addiction, both within and outside school contexts. A striking contradiction emerged: while the survey responses showed low smoking prevalence, qualitative insights revealed that smoking was perceived as widespread and normalized by families and educators. This discrepancy may be attributed to students' reluctance to report such behaviors honestly or their differing perceptions of what constitutes a "risky" behavior, possibly influenced by their cognitive development stage (Ahioğlu-Lindberg, 2011).

Gender differences were also evident. Males demonstrated higher levels of antisocial behavior, substance use, and school dropout risk, whereas females exhibited greater suicidal tendencies. These results are consistent with prior studies (Telef, 2014; Sever, 2015; Şimşek & Çöplü, 2018). The findings align with the literature that emphasizes the influence of gender roles—males often experience more freedom and peer influence, while females face greater social constraints and emotional pressures. Emotional vulnerability, personality traits, and societal expectations may contribute to these gendered patterns (Akeren, 2022; Kılıçkaya, 2021).

The study also identified that students with separated parents were more prone to risky dietary behaviors, and qualitative data supported the notion that fragmented family structures elevate risky behavior. These findings are

in line with previous research indicating that strong family ties reduce adolescent risk behavior (Hendekci & Uğur, 2021; Zeller & Modi, 2008).

Socioeconomic status emerged as another influential factor. Students from low-income families were more likely to engage in antisocial behavior and exhibit poor dietary habits. This trend is supported by findings in the literature (Semerci & Aşilar, 2018; Sever, 2015; Jessor, 1991). In qualitative interviews, participants highlighted that economic hardship limits opportunities, thereby increasing vulnerability to negative influences.

A significant trend observed was the escalation of risky behaviors with increasing grade level. This may reflect rising academic pressure and future anxiety, as supported by previous findings (Sever, 2015; Kılıçkaya, 2021). Additionally, school type influenced engagement in antisocial behavior, smoking, and suicidal tendencies. For example, in Imam Hatip schools, gender-segregated environments were noted to possibly contribute to increased curiosity and risk-taking regarding opposite-sex interactions. Studies by McKellar and Sillence (2020) and Benchamas et al. (2024) suggest peer norms and approval around sexuality significantly influence adolescent behavior.

School-specific factors were also noted as significant influencers. Participants cited insufficient extracurricular activities, poor school-family cooperation, and a rigid, academically heavy curriculum as contributing factors. The study underscores the need for greater attention to school climate, belonging, and student engagement. These findings suggest that developing a contextually relevant, updated scale for assessing risky behaviors in high schools would be beneficial.

While the mother's educational level did not significantly affect student risk behavior, the father's educational level was inversely related to such behaviors. However, qualitative findings suggested that the general lack of parental education increases risky behavior—a discrepancy that may be explained by differences in communication styles or parental involvement (Demuth & Brown, 2004; Carneiro et al., 2013).

Qualitative insights also pointed to several key risk factors: family-related issues, socio-economic and cultural background, individual characteristics, social media and digital technology, and school-related dynamics. The increasing influence of social media and digital environments on adolescents' behavior necessitates more targeted studies in this domain.

The study revealed that schools largely focus on in-school preventive and punitive interventions, often viewing out-of-school behaviors as the responsibility of law enforcement. However, research supports the importance of positive teacher-student relationships and inclusive school climates in reducing risky behaviors (Nicolson & Ayers, 2004; Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012). The qualitative findings also highlighted the value of tailoring school responses to individual cases, considering factors such as age, intent, and type of behavior.

5. CONCLUSION

This study offers a comprehensive understanding of high school students' risky behavior tendencies through a mixed-methods lens, identifying critical influencing variables such as gender, grade level, family structure, socio-economic status, parental education, and school type. The contrast between quantitative and qualitative findings underscores the complexity of measuring risky behaviors and highlights the need for nuanced, context-sensitive tools and interpretations.

The study emphasizes the importance of family involvement, school climate, and socio-cultural context in shaping adolescent behavior. It also reveals the necessity for a revised and updated measurement tool that aligns with current social realities, especially considering the role of digital media and evolving youth culture.

From a practical standpoint, the study suggests that stakeholders, parents, teachers, and school administrators should adopt a preventive, supportive, and collaborative approach to managing risky behaviors. Encouraging participation in safe, structured activities such as sports, fostering open communication about potential risks, and reinforcing social values and boundaries are all recommended strategies. Building trusting relationships with youth and maintaining consistent adult involvement in their lives can serve as protective factors.

Given that risky behaviors often extend beyond adolescence into young adulthood, it is recommended that future studies expand the target population to include university students and young adults. Moreover, future research should explore each significant variable identified in this study, such as gender, parental education, and school type, in greater depth. This approach could yield more targeted and effective interventions, policies, and educational practices aimed at reducing risky behaviors among youth.

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