

Parental Attitude and The Extent of Outdoor Play Among Children

Ganga Kailas, Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Government College for Women, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, gangarajiv08@gmail.com

Dr. Sonia George, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Government College for Women, University of Kerala, sonia@mindcarter.com

ABSTRACT

'Play' has a prominent role in the development of a child. Children explore their surroundings and start to learn a lot through their play. However, nowadays children recede from playing, especially from playing outdoors. Their leisure time is cut down, and their play activities have been restricted to indoor most of the time. Parents, teachers, school authorities, and even many health professionals are not aware of the beneficial impact of outdoor play. Often, they consider playing as an unproductive and meaningless activity. But the role of 'play' in a child's emotional and social development is still an exciting area of research in the field of developmental psychology. Here, the investigators try to study the parental attitudes towards outdoor play and understand its contribution in determining the duration of outdoor play their children have. The participants were 750 children from the fifth grade to ninth grade, including girls and boys from different schools in Kerala, India. Quantitative statistical methods were used to find the results, and the results will be detailed in the paper. By understanding the attitude of parents and its influence on outdoor play, we can make parents more aware of the value of play so that it will be an eye-opener for many parents who don't permit children to play.

Keywords

Children, Outdoor Play, Parental Attitudes

Introduction

"Play is the highest form of research," said Albert Einstein, one of the greatest scientists. For children, play is a vehicle of learning. Different psychologists had provided different definitions and theories for play and play has been considered as an important facet of development and learning. As stated by Hurlock play means any activity engaged in for the enjoyment it gives, without consideration of the result" (Hurlock, 1997). People voluntarily enter into it, without external force or compulsion. We cannot consider play as a work, as its end result has little or no importance. The essential element of play is the enjoyment that it provides. Many definitions exist for explaining play, but as Jean Piaget stated, "the many theories of play expounded in the past are clear proof that the phenomenon is difficult to understand," (Piaget, J., 1962)

There are different types of play, like passive play, active play, physical play, constructive play, dramatic play, etc. and one of the important among them is physically active play. Children can engage in physically active play inside or outside their home. Usually, active outdoor play is the primary platform for children, where they get exposure to nature and the environment. When children take part in active outdoor play, they can explore and experiment with objects in nature. Active outdoor play provides them with healthy physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development due to excessive involvement in physical activity. (Spinka M, (2006), Pellegrini AD (2009), Sutton-Smith B, (2001), Pellis SM et al., (2010), Burdette HL & Whitaker RC, 2005). Along with all these known benefits, studies have found that active outdoor play and contact with nature is associated with a high level of vitamin D, enhanced wellness of mind, improved attention and concentration, significant self-regulation, and good spatial working memory (Carson V & Predy M.).

However, recent scientific reviews revealed that despite all these advantages associated with outdoor play, children are moving away from outdoor play (Clements, R., 2004). Researches in this area identified various reasons which contribute to the decline of outdoor play among children. As we all know, entry of mobile phones, the internet, computer and videogames play a significant role to keep apart children from outdoors. In addition to these, socio-psychological factors like the unsafe neighbourhood, parent's anxiety regarding the safety contributes to this trend. (Clements, R., 2004; Kalpogianni, D. E., 2019).

Cultural differences definitely play a major role in child rearing, parenting style, and attitude of parents. In Indian culture, parental involvement is evident in all aspects of children's life. Children live in a world which is typically enclosed by protection, supervision and control from parents. Even the teenagers experience this monitoring when they have to make decisions in academic or leisure activities. Here, the attitude of parents matters a lot. Parental attitude directs the major social influences a child experience during his life. Be it academic, food habits, spending their free time and the like, parental attitude determines what the child does or can do.

Attitude is a positive, negative or mixed evaluation of an object expressed at some level of intensity. Parenting reflects these attitudes, belief, thoughts and feelings, and it has a crucial influence on their children's behaviours (Grusec, J.E. et al, 2017). Even though most parents are not aware of this influence, we cannot neglect the pivotal role of parental attitude on children.

Just as the case of all aspects related to children, parental attitude is likely to influence their play behaviour too. Awareness of the parents about the need and benefits of playing outside may influence their attitude towards outdoor play, and it may further decide the duration of outdoor play engaged by their children. Many studies have been done outside India in this regard.

In Texas, a study held by McFarland and colleagues (2014), the association between parental attitudes toward nature and the amount of time children spend in outdoor free play activities were examined. The study was conducted among three to five-year-old children and their parents. The results revealed that the attitude of parents toward nature and their children's outdoor recreation has a relationship to the amount of time children spent in free play outdoors. Tandon and colleagues conducted a study to compare parent's attitudes about pre-schoolers' physical activity and outdoor time with those of childcare providers (Tandon et al., 2016). It also analysed the association between parental attitudes and pre-schoolers' measured activity. Even though both groups considered the daily physical activity as vital for children, some parents conveyed worry about their young children involving in outdoor play in a cold climate. These findings point out the need for childcare-based interventions to enhance pre-schoolers' physical activity and outdoor play. Another project done in Portugal by Bento & Dias (2017) highlighted the significant dimensions connected to outdoor play that came out during the project and the role of the family in establishing quality outdoor play opportunities. They concluded that if professional would help parents to reduce the anxiety regarding the outdoor environment and would make them aware the need of unsupervised outdoor play during growth, it could make a considerable difference in parent's cooperation for their children's outdoor play.

Even though studies have been done on outdoor play, researches focusing on the attitude of parents and its influence on the outdoor play are scarce in Indian population. Hence, a study of this kind is significant. There is also a lack of statistics related to the amount of time children of Kerala spent in outdoor play. This study tries to find answers to all these objectives.

Definitions

Outdoor play: Outdoor play is defined as playing outside actively in a freely chosen and unstructured manner.

Parental attitude: Attitude of mother and father towards outdoor play

Objectives

To study the relationship between the attitude of parents, both father and mother, towards outdoor play and the amount of time spent by children on outdoor play

Hypotheses

- There is a significant relationship between the attitude of mother towards outdoor play and the total duration of children's outdoor play.
- There is a significant relationship between the attitude of father towards outdoor play and the total duration of children's outdoor play.

Method

Sample

The study focuses on the school children staying in Trivandrum district, Kerala, India. 750 students from grade 5 to 9 were selected as participants. Through these students, their parents were also contacted, and data was collected from both father and mother. Thus, along with the students, their parents were also included in the study. Accordingly, data collection was done from 750 students, which is our

actual sample, and 1500 parents (father and mother) of those students.

Inclusion exclusion criteria were set before collecting the data. Children below the fifth standard were excluded, as the study requires children to read questionnaires and mark their response independently. Children above ninth standard were excluded, as it is generally seen that children hold back from all kind of play activities when they reach to higher classes. Children with physical, psychological and cognitive problems were also excluded from the study. Children reared by single parents were also excluded, as the study requires the responses of both parents to measure the parental attitude.

Students from seven schools of Thiruvananthapuram district, the capital city of Kerala, India, were selected to collect data for the study. Government, state and Private Schools (CBSE) were included, to get a representative sample. Before starting the research, the study was approved by The University Ethics Committee and the data were collected by taking a consent from both students and their parents.

Tools used

Parental Attitude towards Outdoor Play (PATOP) Scale:

To measure parental attitude towards outdoor play, the researcher could not find out any tools standardized in Indian children. Hence, Ganga and Sonia prepared the scale of Parental Attitude towards Outdoor Play in the year 2018. This scale was used to measure the attitude of parents towards outdoor play. It includes 61 items. The items were prepared in both English and regional language (Malayalam). Through inter-item reliability, Cronbach's Alpha of the final scale was found to be 0.933, and it was found to be highly reliable.

The duration of free outdoor play that students spent on working days (after school time) and holidays was collected directly from student participants. (Schools in Kerala have five working days in a week and their usual working time is 9.30am to 3.30pm). The weekly duration of outdoor play was then calculated

Statistical Analysis

The results were analysed in SPSS 21 version. When the data were checked for normality, it was not found to be normally distributed. Hence, non-parametric test was used for further analyses of the data. Usually, the Pearson product-moment correlation is used to find out the relationship between two variables. But here the Spearman's rank correlation was used as it is considered as the non-parametric version of the Pearson product-moment correlation. Spearman's correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the association between two ranked variables. (statistics.laerd.com)

Results

The hypothesis of the study is that there is a significant relationship between the attitude of mother and father towards outdoor play and the total duration of children's outdoor play. In order to test this hypothesis, Spearman's rank correlation was done. The results of the analysis are given in Table 1.

The values show that there is a significant positive correlation between parent's attitude towards outdoor play and the total duration of outdoor play by children during a week. The result indicates that as parents' scores on the PATOP scale increases, the total amount of time children spend in outdoor free play in a week also increases. This result shows that both the hypotheses can be accepted. Parental attitude toward their children's outdoor recreation is positively related to the amount of time their children spent in outdoor activities. This result shed light on the fact that the attitude of both parents is positively related to the total amount of time their children spent in outdoor play.

Discussion

The results show that like any other attitude of parents, the attitude towards outdoor play also influences children's life. It determines the total duration of time children spent on outdoor play. Children who have parents with a positive attitude towards outdoor play spend more time in outdoor play and vice versa.

Awareness about the importance of playing outside may definitely contribute to developing a positive attitude towards outdoor play. If parents know about the physical, social and psychological benefits of outdoor play, they will be ready to overcome any obstacles for making their children engage in outdoor play and without any hesitation, they will encourage them to engage in outdoor play.

Many researchers had studied how different attitudes, beliefs and emotions of parents influence the day-to-day activities of children. However, studies that focus on the relationship between the attitude of parents towards outdoor play and the duration of outdoor play by children are very few. When it comes to raising children, the role, parental beliefs, emotions, and attitudes are inevitable, and it has been proved in many pieces of research. Many studies conducted in similar areas like attitude toward nature, involvement in physical activity etc. have similar results. Children's developmental outcomes and expectations for behaviour and participation in particular activities are influenced by beliefs and socialization practices of parents. Many previous studies proved that the beliefs of parents play a crucial part in the physical activity involvement of children (Sallis et al., 2000). Especially, parental decisions to discourage or prevent their children from participating in sports or physical activities are influenced by their care for children's safety. (Boufous et al., 2004). It was also found that all parents have some beliefs about the safety of their neighbourhood, and it will influence children's independent mobility and opportunities for outdoor physical activities (Soori and Bhopal, 2002). While these researches indicate that parent beliefs may lead to restrictions on activities of children, it can also provide positive outcomes on children. Play equipment in the parks should be suitable and adequate to ensure the child's safety, and thereby to gain the trust of parents. It should make parents more confident, and they will take their children with them, even in faraway parks to provide them with outdoor play experiences and challenges (Veitch et al., 2006).

The study done in Portugal by Bento & Dias (2017), which has been mentioned in the review of literature, also supports this finding. The study concluded that if professionals could help parents to reduce the anxiety

regarding the outdoor environment and could make them aware of the requirement of unsupervised outdoor play during growth, it can make a huge difference in parent's support for their children's outdoor play.

The result shed light on the fact that in order to increase the interest of children in outdoor play, we should focus mainly on their parents. We should make them aware of the relevance of engaging in outdoor play; we should make them confident, and we should set up the facilities for outdoor play in communities. Taking steps to build positive attitude among parents, teachers, and government authorities would be an excellent initiative to promote outdoor play among children.

Conclusion

We all know that the world has been intensely affected by the Noval Corona Virus pandemic. Social life, Public health, and world economy have been severely compromised. In addition to this, Studies show that COVID 19 has several psychological impacts like fear, stress, depression, anger etc. among children as well as adults. Especially for children, they have lost their opportunity to play with friends in schools, parks or playgrounds during this period. The only opportunity they have to play outdoors during this period is limited to their courtyards. Parents or siblings are becoming their only playmates, and duration of interaction between parents and children is increased. For the coming two or three years also, playing actively in outdoors with friends may be a great challenge or risk for children. In this Scenario, the attitude of parents towards outdoor play has a substantial role in determining children's outdoor activities. If we can build a positive attitude towards outdoor play among parents, they will help their children being physically active in an outdoor play taking all the safety measures against COVID 19 virus. Hence, it can be said that the major step to be taken for bringing our young generation revert back to outdoor play is to make the parents aware of the benefits of it. These findings also point out the importance of community-based interventions to promote outdoor play.

Table 1

Results of correlation

	N	Total duration of outdoor play in a week (Spearman's rho)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mother's attitude towards outdoor play	750	.186**	.000
Father's attitude towards outdoor play	750	.157**	.000

References

- [1] Bento, G., & Dias, G. (2017). The importance of outdoor play for young children's healthy development. *Porto Biomedical Journal*, 2(5), 157-160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pbj.2017.03.003> retrieved on 25-04-2020
- [2] Bidzan-Bluma, I., & Lipowska, M. (2018). Physical activity and cognitive functioning of children: A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(4), 800. doi:10.3390/ijerph15040800. retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5923842/> on 14-06-2020.
- [3] Boufous, S., Finch, C., & Bauman, A. (2004). Parental safety concerns - a barrier to sport and physical activity in children? *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 28(5), 482-486. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-842x.2004.tb00032.x>. retrieved on 23-04-2020
- [4] Burdette, H. L., & Whitaker, R. C. (2005). Resurrecting free play in young children. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 159(1), 46. doi:10.1001/archpedi.159.1.46
- [5] Carson V, Predy M. Active Outdoor Play. In: Tremblay RE, Boivin M, Peters RDeV, eds. Brussoni M, topic ed. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development* [online]. <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/outdoor-play/according-experts/active-outdoor-play>. Published May 2019. Accessed August 11, 2020.
- [6] Clements, R. (2004). An Investigation of the Status of Outdoor Play. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 5(1), 68-80. doi:10.2304/ciec.2004.5.1.10. Retrieved on 05/02/2020
- [7] Grusec, J. E., Danyliuk, T., Kil, H., & O'Neill, D. (2017). Perspectives on parent discipline and child outcomes. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 41(4), 465-471. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025416681538> retrieved on 25-04-2020
- [8] Hurlock, E. B. (1997). *Child Development* (6th ed.). New Delhi: Tata McGraw Hill Education Private Limited.
- [9] Kalpogianni, D.E. (2019). Why are the children not outdoors? Factors supporting and hindering outdoor play in Greek public day-care centres. *International Journal of Play*, 8(2), 155-173. doi:10.1080/21594937.2019.1643979. Retrieved on 26/02/2020.
- [10] McFarland, A. L., Zajicek, J. M., & Waliczek, T. M. (2014). The relationship between parental attitudes toward nature and the amount of time children spend in outdoor recreation. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 46(5), 525-539. doi:10.1080/00222216.2014.11950341. retrieved on 27-04-2020
- [11] Pellegrini, A. D. (2009). The role of play in education. *The Role of Play in Human Development*. 198-223. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195367324.003.0012
- [12] Pellis, S. M., & Pellis, V. C. (1998). Structure-function interface in the analysis of play fighting. *Animal Play*, 115-140. doi:10.1017/cbo9780511608575.007
- [13] Piaget, J. (1962). *Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood*. New York: W. W. Norton & company, Inc. (The Norton library, N171). *Psychology in the Schools*, 3(2), Pp.147. doi:10.1002/1520-6807(196604)3:2<189::aid-pits2310030222>3.0.co;2-z. Retrieved on 26-04-2020.
- [14] Sallis, J. F., Prochaska, J. J., & Taylor, W. C. (2000). A review of correlates of physical activity of children and adolescents. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, 963-975. retrieved on 25-04-2020 <https://doi.org/10.1097/00005768-200005000-00014>
- [15] Soori, H. & Bhopal RS (2002). Parental permission for children's independent outdoor activities: Implications for injury prevention. *The European Journal of Public Health*, 12(2), 104-109. doi:10.1093/eurpub/12.2.104 retrieved on 25-04-2020
- [16] Spinka, M., Newberry, R. C., & Bekoff, M. (2001). Mammalian play: Training for the unexpected. *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, 76(2), 141-168. doi:10.1086/393866
- [17] Sutton-Smith, B. (1988). *Perspectives and critical models - Vera John-Steiner, notebooks of the mind*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico press, 1985. Pp. X + 256. - Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University press, 1986. Pp. Xi + 201. - James W. Wertsch (ed.), *Culture, Communication, and Cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1985. Pp. X + 379. *Language in Society*, 17(2), 298-304. doi:10.1017/s0047404500012896
- [18] Tandon, P. S., Saelens, B. E., & Copeland, K. A. (2016). A comparison of parent and childcare provider's attitudes and perceptions about preschoolers' physical activity and outdoor time. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 43(5), 679-686. doi:10.1111/cch.12429 retrieved on 27-04-2020
- [19] Veitch, J., Bagley, S., Ball, K., & Salmon, J. (2006). Where do children usually play? A qualitative study of parents' perceptions of influences on children's active free-play. *Health & Place*, 12(4), 383-393. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2005.02.009>. retrieved on 27-04-2020