

## Toy and Play in Children with Mentally Challenged

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The present study attempts to show the difference in preference and use of toys, play material and/or game equipments in children with mentally challenged. A sample of 140 children with mild and moderate mentally challenged between chronological ages of 6-18 years and mental ages of 3-12 years. The sample included 71 boys and 69 girls. The results indicate that the toy preferences of children with mentally challenged appear to be restricted to very few items, such as, ball, cycle, doll, wooden blocks, colour pencils, toy car, play ring, marbles, etc. A great variety of easy available toys like beads, buttons, zip, balloons, nuts, bolts, dice, etc., do not form the armamentarium of toys for these children. This calls for the need to propagate use of interesting toys (a euphemism for teaching aids) that are safe, sturdy, accessible, durable, non-toxic, portable, user-friendly, age appropriate and above all-‘teaching task’ oriented. It is generally seen that there are increasing number of toys used by older children than their younger age peers. The children with mild mentally challenged appear to make greater use of toys than children with moderate mentally challenged. Mothers with college education appear to show predilection to influence use of a variety of toys in their children as compared to parents with school education. Children of middle aged mothers between 30-39 years appear to show greater use of a variety of toys as against younger mothers below 29 years and older mothers above 40 years.

**Keywords:** Toys, Play material, Game equipment, Mentally challenged

Play is an important medium for overall development in children. It fosters their sensory, motor, cognitive, language and social development (Chanco, 1979). Children with special needs seek and indulge in play activities like their normal age peers-although they maybe qualitatively and quantitatively different in nature, scope, type or extent of the activities (Venkatesan, 2004a; 2004b; 2003). In a related study, no case of child with mentally challenged was reported as ‘never plays’ even though such an item existed in their interview schedule (Venkatesan, 2000). In a previous study, it was noted that play behavior constitutes only 4.1 % of total time in the 24-hour activity cycle of a child with mentally challenged (Khajevand & Venkatesan, 2007).

The study also noted that these children spent more time in a day on ‘no activity at all’ than the time they spent on play. Further, their range of play behaviors was found to be limited and restricted to being passive observers of others at play without understanding their rules and regulations. There are many types of play in children depending on their age/developmental levels (Venkatesan, 2004a). The use of toys during play by children has long been recognized (Fraser, 1966). The choice of toys during play by children of different ages has been focus of several investigations (Malone & Langone, 1998). Investigators have classified toys as follows:

Family Toys: Dolls, dollhouse, people, puppets soldiers, etc.

Representational Toys: Cars, boats, planes, trucks, etc.

Expressive Toys: Paper, paint, crayons, marking pencils, etc.

Sensory Toys: Clay, play doll, plasticise, etc.

Structured Toys: Building blocks, puzzles, etc.

Motor Toys: Balls, ring toss, knock out benches, etc.

Dependency Toys or Furry objects of animals, puppets, etc.

Aggression Toys: Aggressive animals, guns, Bozo the clown, etc.

Board Games: Ludo, Chess, Snakes and Ladders, etc.

Bronson (2003) proposes a catalogue of play materials for primary school children between the ages of 3-6 years. They may be broadly classified into four categories: Social and fantasy play materials, Exploration and mastery play materials, Music, Art and Movement play materials and Gross Motor Play Materials. Bambara, Spiegel-Mc Gill, Shores and Fox (1984) attempted a comparison on the utility of creative and non-creative toys during the manipulative play of children with severe handicaps. Their results indicated that only half of the sample made use of toys. Even wherein these children preferred the use of toys, they were found to use them non-creatively. The toys were predominantly used for possession and not for any creative manipulations during play situations. For teenagers after the age of twelve, interest in toys begin to merge with those of adults. Their attention shifts to the use of sophisticated electronic games and computer based systems which are often considered as family entertainment rather than toys (Wright & Nomura, 1985).

Murphy, Carr and Callias (1986) were in favour of increasing toy play in children with profound mentally challenged by making suitable adaptations in their design and accessibility. The use of toys in children with special needs assumes special significance (Newson & Newson, 1979; Head, 1971). They

serve both as a teaching aid (euphemism for 'toys') as well as a recreational device. Several factors have been identified as influencing the selection of toys for handicapped as well as normally developing preschool children, including developmental status, interests, sensory preferences, etc. (Fallon & Harris, 1989).

Lieber and Beckman (1991) noted that special adaptations are required in terms of safety, convenience in handling and economy of use when it comes to use of toys in individual as well as group play situations by children with various types of handicaps. Martin, Brady and Williams (1991) investigated the use of toys on the social behaviour of preschool children in integrated and non-integrated groups. Results indicated that toys play a facilitation role in fostering pro social behaviours with mild disabilities in integrated school settings. These results are close and similar to the findings of another study where the investigators attempted to determine the effects of social and isolate toys on the interactions and play of children in integrated and non-integrated educational settings. In this study (Beckman & Kohl, 1984).

Malone and Langone (1998) observed variability in play of preschoolers with cognitive delays across different use of toy sets. They encouraged use of toys that facilitate make believe play rather than use of board games or tools that facilitate physical activity. Michael, Malone and Melissa (2001) studied the perception of mothers about toy play in preschoolers of children with developmental disabilities. It was seen that the choice of toys by mothers for their children was minimal. Even when preferred, there were disparities in their optima use against the background of the interests and intellectual status of their children.

Venkatesan (2004) studied a sample of 140 preschool children diagnosed as cases of 'developmental disabilities'. Information on hour wise engagement of each child was undertaken by the investigators. The results

showed that the greatest part of the days schedule is spent by this sample of children on 'sleeping' (43.24%), followed by time spent at 'school' (for school going kids only)(14.41 %), on 'feeding' activities (10.34 %) and 'watching television' (9.61%) respectively. The amount of time spent on needed activity like 'playing with peers' (4.12 %) was meagre. In the case of autistic children, the amount of time spent on sedentary or exclusion activities like 'watching television' (21.23 %) or 'playing alone' (14.6 %) almost doubled and 'paying with peers' (1.74 %) was almost reduced to half.

Khajevand and Venkatesan (2007) used a cross sectional observation and key informant interview to understand play behaviours of 3-12 year old children (n: 140) with mild and moderate mentally challenged. The results indicate that play behaviour constitutes only 4.1 % of the total time in the 24 hour activity cycle of a child with mentally challenged. There is a significant time period ranging from 1-3 hours (8.4 %) in a day, when these children are reported as performing 'no activity at all'. The range of play peers varied from same age to younger age peers, senior citizens, pets and adults. The age and severity of mentally challenged significantly influenced the duration of time spent by play peers. Majority of these children were passive observers of play by others without understanding the rules and regulations. They showed positive behaviours like lover to share their belongings, to play materials with others, indulging in pretentious or imaginary play, showing empathy with peers, showing new toys to others or recognizing and preserving their own belongings, etc. Many of them showed difficulties in postponement of their wishes to meet the demands of the game situation, not registering spontaneous protest over foul play or breach of rules by mates in game situations, lacked the knack of maintaining 'secrets' in game situations or making limited use of toys. Khajevand and Venkatesan (2007) attempted to develop and standardize

a 'Play Activity Checklist for Kids with Mental Retardation' (PACK-MR). The final format of this 60 item checklist was drawn from an initial item pool of 300 items

Further, a comprehensive review of literature (Morris & Schulz, 1989; Rubin & Howe, 1985) was undertaken to enlist the various developmental play activities seen/ reported in children. All these efforts resulted in an initial item pool of over 300 play activities. This was followed by another exercise to eliminate subjective, irrelevant, ambiguous, identical or repetitive items. The final format of PACK-MR derived at the end of these exercises comprised of 60 items to be used in main study.

#### **Objectives:**

(i) Discover and prepare a comprehensive list of Toys, Play Materials or Game Equipments indulged in children with and without mentally challenged;

(ii) Arrange the identified list of Toys, Play Materials or Game Equipments in a sequential hierarchy based on reported age levels, gender and severity of mentally challenged.

(iii) To explore the nature and types of prevailing play preferences and activities in a group of children with mentally challenged in relation to associated socio-psychological variables.

(iv) To correlate various organismic, demographic, psycho-social and family variables in relation to prevalent play behaviour practices in the studied groups of children with mentally challenged.

#### **Hypothesis:**

There is difference in preference and use of toys, play material and/or game equipments in children with mentally challenged. This varies according to child variables (such as, age, gender, presence/ absence of problem behaviours, associated conditions and severity of mentally challenged), family variables (such as, type of family, socio economic status, maternal age

and education) respectively.

**Operational Definitions:**

(a) Mentally challenged: The term 'mentally challenged' as defined in this study was the same as given in the official definitions. It is considered as a clinical condition in a person with less than sub-average levels of intelligence with concurrent deficits in adaptive behaviour manifesting within the developmental period of eighteen years (AAMD, 2002).

(b) Toys, Play Materials or Game Equipments: These terms are used interchangeably and synonymously to represent things or materials that are used during play irrespective of their recreational or educational value. It also includes the category of things usually classified or identified as teaching aids-when it comes to remediation or training of certain learning or teaching objectives.

(c) Play Behaviour and Play Activity: It is useful to distinguish between play behaviours and play activities. *Play behaviours* refer to observable or measurable play actions as seen or reported by significant others in a studied sample of children. *Play activities*-a broader term, encompasses not only the existing play behaviours; but also, the possible gaming or play behaviours that could be possibly fostered for betterment of the children with special needs (Hiedemann & Hewitt, 1992).

**Method**

**Sample:**

The main study was carried out on a sample of 140 children diagnosed as mentally challenged (71 males and 69 females) with mean age: 10.43; SD: 3.64). A part of the sample was taken from various special schools in Mysore and Bangalore while others were drawn from cases routinely seen at All India Institute of Speech and Hearing, Mysore. There were 69 cases diagnosed as 'mild mentally challenged' and 71 cases with

'moderate mentally challenged'. Of the overall sample, 89 children had one or more associated problems like epilepsy, hearing or visual difficulties, etc. The remaining 51 children did not have any associated problems.

**Tools:**

*Play Activity Checklist for Kids with Mental Retardation (PACK-MR)*: It was exclusively developed for purpose of this study. It was attempted to be a comprehensive record of various types of play activities, games and play preferences, toys/materials used by children between 3-12 years. Observation, open ended questions and non-directive interview techniques was used to collect information on commonly indulged game/play activities of children as reported by their parents, caregivers or teachers. Wherever possible, several examples of reported games or play were collected to substantiate the declarative statements of respondents.

**Results and Discussion**

The results indicate that the toy preferences of children with mentally challenged appear to be restricted to very few items, such as, ball, cycle, doll, wooden blocks, colour pencils, toy car, play ring, marbles, etc. A great variety of easy available toys like beads, buttons, zip, balloons, nuts, bolts, dice, etc., do not form the armamentarium of toys for these children. This calls for the need to propagate use of interesting toys (a euphemism for teaching aids) that are safe, sturdy, accessible, durable, non-toxic, portable, user-friendly, age appropriate and above all-'teaching task' oriented (Venkatesan, 2003).

It is generally seen that there are increasing number of toys used by older children than their younger age peers. The children with mild mentally challenged appear to make greater use of toys than children with moderate mentally challenged. Mothers with college education appear to show

predilection to influence use of a variety of toys in their children as compared to parents with school education. Children of middle aged mothers between 30-39 years appear to show greater use of a variety of toys as against younger mothers below 29 years and older mothers above 40 years. The results also indicate that a sequential hierarchy exists in play activities of children proceeding from simple to complex, general to specific and/or concrete to abstract modes of play in children with mentally challenged.

The following is the profile of results related to distribution of types of toy preferences for children with mentally challenged in relation to various child variables:

(i) In relation to age variable, it is seen that there are statistically significant differences in the toy preference of children between 3-6 years (N: 34), 7-9 years (N: 69) and 10-12 years (N: 37) respectively. It is generally seen that there are increasing number of toys used by older children than their younger age peers ( $X^2: 056.203$ ;  $p < .001$ ; HS).

(ii) In relation to severity variable, it is seen that there are statistically significant differences in the toy preference of children between mild mentally challenged (N: 69), and moderate mentally challenged (N: 71) respectively. The children with mild mentally challenged appear to make greater use of toys than children with moderate mentally challenged ( $X^2: 8.237$ ;  $p < .004$ ; HS).

(iii) In relation to children with mentally challenged having associated conditions, it is seen that there are statistically significant differences in the toy preferences. ( $X^2: 8.237$ ;  $p < .004$ ; HS).

The following is the profile of results related to distribution of types of toy preferences for children with mentally challenged in relation to socio demographic variables:

(i) As shown in Table 2, it is seen that type of family is a significant variable in influencing the toy preferences for children with mentally challenged. ( $X^2: 22.88$ ;  $p < .001$ ; HS).

(ii) In terms of SES, there are similar differences in the toy preferences of children with mentally challenged. It is seen that children from middle SES use more number of toys than the children in high SES and low SES respectively ( $X^2: 170.001$ ;  $p < .001$ ; HS).

(iii) In relation to parent education, there are statistically significant differences and influence of the caregivers is witnessed on their choice of toys in children with mentally challenged. Mothers with college education appear to show predilection to influence use of a variety of toys in their children as compared to parents with school education ( $X^2: 4.983$ ;  $p < .026$ ; HS).

(iv) In relation to maternal age, there are statistically significant differences and influence of the caregivers is witnessed on their choice of toys in children with mentally challenged. Children of middle aged mothers between 30-39 years (N: 68) appears to show greater use of a variety of toys as against younger mothers below 29 years (N: 36) and older mothers above 40 years (N: 36) ( $X^2: 179.51$ ;  $p < .001$ ; HS).

### ***Utility of the Study***

This exploratory investigation has thrown light on: (i) The patterns of existing Toys, Play Materials or Game Equipments in mild to moderate grades of children with mentally challenged, (ii) The Toys, Play Materials or Game Equipments also become useful planner for enabling play based therapy for children with mentally challenged in school or home settings, (iii) It has enabled the development of psychometrically reliable and valid tools for measurement of play behaviors and activities in children with mentally challenged, and (iv) It has enabled the development of psychometrically reliable and valid tools for measurement of play behaviors

**Table 1** Distributions of Types of Toy Preferences in Children with Mental Retardation in terms to various child variables

Toy	Gender*		Age**		Severity***		Associated Condition****			TOTAL	
	Male	Female	3-6	7-9	10-12	Mild	Moderate	Present	Absent		
N	71	69	34	69		69	71	89	51	140	
Ball	45(68.2)	21(31.8)	13(19.7)	33(50.0)	20(30.3)	40(57.9)	26(36.6)	37(56.1)	29(43.9)	66(47.14)	
Car	30(63.8)	17(36.2)	9(19.1)	21(44.7)	17(36.2)	30(43.4)	17(23.9)	22(46.8)	25(53.2)	47(33.57)	
Doll	1(2.2)	44(97.8)	11(24.4)	27(60.0)	7(15.6)	29(42.0)	16(22.5)	23(51.1)	22(48.9)	45(32.14)	
Blocks	22(53.7)	19(46.3)	11(26.8)	24(58.5)	6(14.6)	28(40.5)	13(18.3)	29(70.7)	12(29.3)	41(29.29)	
Bowling	11(31.4)	24(68.6)	11(31.4)	17(48.6)	7(20.0)	21(30.4)	14(19.7)	20(57.1)	15(42.9)	35(25.0)	
Cycle	28(82.4)	6(17.6)	11(32.4)	15(44.1)	8(23.5)	16(23.1)	18(25.3)	21(61.8)	13(38.2)	34(24.29)	
Marbles	7(35.0)	13(65.0)	6(30.0)	13(65.0)	1(5.0)	13(18.8)	7(9.8)	12(60.0)	8(40.0)	20(14.29)	
Play ring	10(58.8)	7(41.2)	6(35.3)	10(58.8)	1(5.9)	7(10.1)	10(14.0)	10(58.8)	7(41.2)	17(12.14)	
Shuttle Cock	12(80.0)	3(20.0)	6(40.0)	6(40.0)	3(20.0)	4(5.8)	11(15.4)	7(46.7)	8(53.3)	15(10.71)	
Colours	9(69.2)	4(30.8)	2(15.4)	8(61.5)	3(23.1)	8(11.5)	5(7.04)	7(53.8)	6(46.2)	13(9.29)	
Piggy Box	7(53.8)	6(46.2)	6(46.2)	5(38.5)	2(15.4)	2(2.9)	11(15.4)	12(92.3)	1(7.7)	13(9.29)	
Others	4(50.0)	4(50.0)	—	5(62.5)	3(37.5)	6(8.7)	2(2.8)	4(50.0)	4(50.0)	8(5.71)	

Figures are expressed in minutes; Figures in Brackets indicate percentage values. Cumulative percentage will exceed 100 since categories are multiply classified; \*X<sup>2</sup>: 0.915; df: 11; p: >0 .339; \*\* X<sup>2</sup>: 56.203; df: 22; p: < 0.001; \*\*\* X<sup>2</sup>: 8.237; df: 11 p: <0 .04; \*\*\*\* X<sup>2</sup>: 8.237; df: 22; p < 0.004

**Table 2.** Distribution of Types of Toy Preferences in Children with Mental Retardation in terms of Socio-Demographic Variables.

Toy	Type of Family*		SES**		Parent Education***		Maternal age****			TOTAL	
	Nuclear	Joint	High	Low	Middle	Low	School	College	<29	30-39	>40
N	89	51	26	87	27	68	72	36	68	36	140
Ball	41(61.2)	25(37.9)	14(21.2)	40(60.6)	12(18.2)	34(51.5)	32(48.5)	16(24)	45(68.2)	5(7.8)	66(47.14)
Car	30(63.8)	17(36.2)	13(27.7)	29(61.7)	5(10.6)	20(42)	27(58)	14(29.8)	30(48.8)	3(21.4)	47(33.57)
Doll	29(64.4)	16(35.6)	7(15.6)	30(66.7)	8(17.8)	21(46.7)	24(53.3)	12(26.7)	28(62.2)	5(11.1)	45(32.14)
Blocks	27(65.9)	14(34.1)	14(34.1)	28(68.3)	4(9.8)	14(34)	27(66)	8(19.5)	28(68.3)	5(12.2)	41(29.29)
Bowling	21(60.0)	14(40.0)	5(14.3)	25(71.4)	5(14.3)	17(48.5)	18(51.5)	9(25.7)	23(65.7)	3(8.6)	35(25.0)
Cycle	22(64.7)	12(35.3)	5(14.7)	27(79.4)	2(5.9)	14(41.2)	20(58.8)	12(35.8)	20(58.2)	2(6.0)	34(24.29)
Marbles	15(75.0)	5(25.0)	4(20.0)	13(65.0)	3(15.0)	7(35)	13(75)	6(30)	12(60)	2(10)	20(14.29)
Play ring	8(47.1)	9(52.9)	5(29.4)	10(58.8)	2(11.8)	7(41)	10(59)	6(35.3)	10(58.7)	1(6)	17(12.14)
Shuttle Cock	8(53.3)	7(46.7)	1(6.7)	11(73.3)	3(20.0)	6(40)	9(60)	3(20)	11(73.3)	1(6.7)	15(10.71)
Colours	6(46.2)	7(53.8)	3(23.1)	10(76.9)	—	5(38.5)	8(61.5)	3(23.1)	10(76.9)	00	13(9.29)
Piggy Box	9(69.2)	4(30.8)	2(15.4)	8(61.5)	3(23.1)	8(61)	5(39)	3(23.1)	9(69.2)	1(7.7)	13(9.29)
Others	6(75.0)	2(25.0)	3(37.5)	4(50.0)	1(12.5)	3(37.5)	5(62.5)	4(50)	4(50)	00	8(5.71)

Figures are expressed in minutes; Figures in Brackets indicate SD values; Cumulative percentage will exceed 100 since categories are multiply classified; \* X<sup>2</sup>: 22.88; df: 11; p: >0 .001; \*\* X<sup>2</sup>: 170.011; df: 22; p: < 0.001;

\*\*\* X<sup>2</sup>: 4.983; df: 11p: <0 .026 \*\*\*\* X<sup>2</sup>: 179.51; df: 22; p: <0 .001

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## Daily Hassles among School Teachers

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Daily Hassles at Work Scale (DHAWS) developed by the investigators was administered on 148 female and 52 male teachers belonging to two secondary schools situated in a sub-urban area in Perak, Malaysia. The main objectives of the present study were: (a) to identify the daily hassles at work among secondary school teachers, and (b) to examine differences in the perception of daily hassles at work among male and female school teachers. Results revealed that female teachers as compared to male teachers scored significantly higher on too much responsibility, traveling to and from work, can't say no when I should work, not enough time for family, and being taken for granted as the daily hassles at work.

**Keywords:** Daily hassles, School teachers

In general, daily hassles at work affect the quality of work life. Daily hassles at work can be stressful in many ways. School teacher's role is extremely demanding. The working conditions account for stress and burnout feeling in life of teachers (Mishra & Panda, 1996). Stress among teachers has become a topic of professional interest, but studies relating to daily hassles at work are rather scanty. Results of many studies reported that daily hassles are one of the main contributors for stress. Research studies proved that the cumulative effects of daily hassles over time are probably the significant source of stress (Zohar, 1999).

In many countries teacher's job is often considered as one the most stressful profession (Ravichandran & Rajendran, 2007). Teaching is known as noble profession with lots of expectations from students, parents and the society. The high expectations from everyone make the profession very challenging and stressful.

Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) defined teachers stress as response of negative effect (such as anger or depression) by a teacher usually accompanied by potentially pathogenic physiological and biochemical

changes (such as increased heart rate or release of adrenocorticotrophic hormones in the bloodstream) resulting from aspects of teacher's job and mediated by the perception that the demands made up upon the teachers constitute a threat to his self esteem or well being by coping mechanisms activated to reduce the perceived threat. Kyriacou (2001) stated that teachers perceived stress as an unpleasant, negative emotion such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher. Various studies have been conducted on teachers' stress and burnout. Available data suggests that teachers' of primary school, secondary school or the university level experienced different level of stress in the daily life situation (Kumari, 2008).

### **Teaching and Work Stress**

Hassles or stress at workplace are part of peoples work life. Teachers experience a great deal of work stress. Teaching has a number of specific stressors such as dealing with disruptive student behavior, the pressure of school inspection, providing cover for colleagues and large workload (Fitzgerald, 2008).