

Technology and its Impact on Street Games & Other Informal Sports Activities

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ABSTRACT

Rapid changes in technology, including the exponential growth of video and mobile games are sweeping the nation off the street games and outdoor sports activities. The objective of the study is to describe the losing charm and benefit of street games and other informal sports activities by the children- Past and Present scenario and technology. Today children want to play latest video / computer / mobile games inside their homes. They have rather lost their interest in street games and outdoor sports activities.

Ask anyone over 40 years old to recount their most treasured memories of childhood play, and hardly any will be related to indoors. Independent outdoor playing, away from grown-up eyes is what we remember. As things stand, today's children will be unlikely to treasure memories like this. Only 21% of today's kids regularly play outside as compared with 71% of their parents (Henly Jon, August 2010). A shift away from outdoor activities has made children weaker compared to children of previous generations. Outdoor playing is essential for their emotional and physical health, wellbeing and happiness and is also important for their development, to build vital life and social skills (The Telegraph, July 2011). It is parent's role to provide children time and motivation to play. It is not about playing computer games at home but playing street games like in the past. The technology of today may be very advanced and can simulate an outdoor activity inside the house but playing real outdoor games and street games is a different ball game altogether. Children should be encouraged to play street games creatively, where they can explore their curiosity and learn many things from environment.

Keywords: *Outdoor activity, Street games, informal sports.*

1. Introduction

Childhood Games are so sweet to remember! There was a time when the season of summer was filled with kids playing all sorts of games on the streets. When we were kids we used to play a whole lot of games from street cricket to marbles. As the days passed by, these games have made to the history shelves and the day may come when these games would have been forgotten with time!

Street Games or other sports activities are those which are played by their own rules and with improvised equipment. These were not just games; through them one could develop lot of skills like thinking, logical strategy, concentration, basic mathematics, aiming, and lot more.

These games and sports activities play important role in developing skills among children besides providing mental & physical refreshment. They are therefore very important in the overall development of a child. Playing Street game them helps a child in improving socializing skills, listening skills as well as verbal skills. And it also helps the child in the regular exercise of the body, which in turn helps in keeping the body fit and healthy. Nowadays,

we have to develop these skills ironically by paying money to centers that conduct personal development courses.

There was a time when children used to play varieties of Street Games or other sports activities. Before 1980s, we used to play a variety of indoor and outdoor games that were the games of the soil. These games had a rich culture and heritage value and were tools of passing of ancestral knowledge down the generation.

2. Present Scenario

Rapid changes in technology, including the exponential growth of the video game industry, has made the children's game basket completely different.

Modern Age children have unfortunately lost interest and charm to play Street Games or other outdoor sports activities.

Almost all the kids now want the latest video / Computer games and the newest technology to play them. Nobody is playing Street Games or other outdoor sports activities like Hide and seek, Stapu, Kanchey, Kabaddi, Gulli-Danda, etc..

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Picture 1: Modern-day Children

Street Games or other informal sports activities are almost lost in the metro cities of India. Electronic items and video games have taken place of Street Games or outdoor sports activities. Many of the negative health aspects are tied to playing excessive video games.

While different genres of games attract different players, it's possible — and useful — to identify some of the reasons for video games' widespread appeal to kids. For some kids, these games offer more than the passive medium of television — providing a facsimile of individualized attention and self-paced stimulation and thus avoiding the frustration of waiting for others or feeling left back. Many attention disordered children will sit enthralled for hours with the right game. Additionally, these games can be seen as very fair in terms of consistency. Actions are usually scored in a reliable, easily learned system. Kids love fairness. Even the most observant teacher or parent may miss something which computer will not.

As adults also, we feel good when the work we do is appreciated and acknowledged, and become increasingly frustrated if we feel taken for granted. Video games provide that constant reinforcement and reward. Another source of appeal for many of these games is that they grant a feeling of control and competency. There is a universal desire to affect the world around us, a sense of mastery in seeing that the actions one takes matter. Some games also track progress and growth from session to session, allowing children to "invest" in the game.

Online games can give kids and teens a connection with others, an ability to compete, opportunities for teamwork, and a sense of belonging in a safe, anonymous environment more insulated from peer judgment. When parents understand what their children see in video games, it will allow them to offer alternatives, or moderate their use.

Positive studies in favour of video games tout improving hand-eye coordination (surgeons who play video games

are faster and more accurate in laparoscopic surgeries), stimulating imagination, and improving cognitive thinking.

While all this is okay, the fact remains that video and computer games are playing havoc with children's physical health. Modern life is 'producing a generation of weaklings', as a shift away from outdoor activities has made children weaker compared to those of previous generations. Research has revealed that children are becoming weaker, less muscular and unable to do physical tasks that previous generations found simple.

As a generation dedicated to online pursuits grows up, 10-year-olds can do fewer sit-ups and are less able to hang from bars in a gym. Arm strength has declined in that age group, as has their ability to grip an object firmly.

The above findings, published in the child health journal *Acta Paediatrica*, have led to fresh concern about the impact on children's health caused by the shift away from outdoor activities. One public health consequence is that children and teens are much less physically active than in prior generations and we face an epidemic of overweight and obese children.

In India, though the penetration of video games and internet may not have been worrisome, the time available for Street Games or outdoor sports activities remains still very less. The outcome of a survey conducted on children was published in Hindi Newspaper 'Hindustan Times' dated 27 July, 2012. According to the survey, in metro cities children hardly get time to play. Their average daily time table is like this:

Sleeping.....	8-9 hours
School	8-10 hours
Home work	2 hours
Tution at home/outside	2-3 hours
Eating.....	50-70 minutes
Play	30-35 minutes

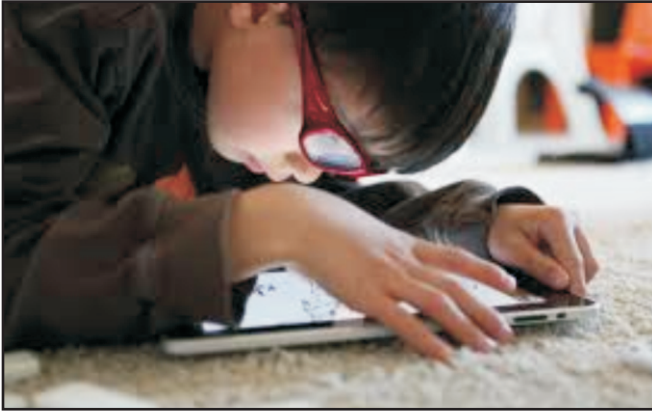
The study reveals that :

- 76% students said that Home work is barrier in their play
- In metro children's daily schedule is busier then parents.
- Children have to study 13 hours daily

It concludes that there is a need to motivate students towards play. Planners and parents therefore need to intervene.

3 Importance of Street Games or other informal sports activities

Everyone needs exercise, and so do kids. Exercise along with a balanced & healthy diet improves kids' physical well-being and their personalities and their ability to



Picture 2: Modern-day Child

concentrate. Some of the points which make Street Games or outdoor sports activities so important can be listed as under:

- a) Children learn a lot of things from playing out, like taking decisions in a group, solving problems on their own.
- b) Children playing Street Games or informal sports activities need and use much more energy because they run, hide and crawl on the ground. These movements burn calories. It is like doing sports exercises.
- c) Children like fun activities. They enjoy playing out. Hide and seek is one of the interesting games as it involves playing out with playmates. Children love the opportunity to play out because they are happy to run, walk, jump and do other physical activities.
- d) Children learn how to become supportive. In playing Street Games or outdoor sports activities, they lose sometimes and win sometimes. With peer help, they learn not to be stressful even when they lose the game. They will be sportive whether they win or lose.
- e) Children can make friends better. Street Games or outdoor sports activities provide this opportunity. Children have much chance to socialize with their peers. This is a great time to make friends.
- f) Children learn how to overcome problems. While playing games they need to think smartly and quickly. This way they will learn how to escape from difficult situation while playing. It is great mental exercise for them to overcome stressful and difficult conditions.
- g) Every country has different Street Games or outdoor sports activities, based on local culture, environment, custom etc. These games therefore help in passing such knowledge down the generation.
- h) Street Games or outdoor sports activities usually have educational value besides fun.

Apart from these there are other good aspects of playing Street Games or outdoor sports activities which parents need to be aware of in order to encourage the children to play Street Games or outdoor sports activities.

4. Role of Parents in Children's Play

Parents who let their children play outside in the sun can also help their children acquire vitamin D which is very important for the body. Running outside the house can also boost their immunity. Children with the right environmental exposure will grow to have a strong immune system and can easily adapt with their surroundings.

a) Invest in Good Playground Equipment

Kids may complain that there is nothing to do outside. While it's true that imaginative children can always find something interesting to do, it's worthwhile to invest in good playground equipment in their backyard to encourage children to play outside.

b) Give Your Child Time to Play

Kids should be given enough to play. Every kid is entitled to play. As kids grow up they become more curious and active and parents should encourage them to develop their skills and talents by playing. Let them be exposed to different activities where they can acquire more skills and develop themselves.

It is important for growing children to be given the time to play. As young as they are they should explore their surrounding and be creative. They should play to exercise their body. Sweating their calories off is very important to prevent them to become obese. Physical activity like running is important to develop the muscles and boost the strength of their limbs.

c) Give Your Child Right Environment to Play

Playing is learning and they should be given the avenue to acquire as much knowledge and also exercise at the same time. This will make them happy and will prevent them from any social incapability. This will also make them more confident and healthy mentally and physically.

Parents can also spend time with their children and play with them. You can play with them with bean bag toss or corn toss game. These games are helpful in enhancing their body coordination, especially their hand and eye. This is an activity where you and your children will have a good exercise and will effectively make you closer to your children. As your children grow they have needs. One of these needs is your attention and time for them.

When children play with other children they will learn to mingle and socialize. This will keep them from becoming aloof. Playing games in a group with the

guidance of adults will also develop the listening skills of children. They will tend to listen more and obey. It will improve their focus and concentration as they take instructions.

In specifics, here are a few ideas to get the kids started. Once they're outside, we predict that they'll have plenty of their own ideas!

- a) Create a child-friendly backyard in your house.
- b) Provide simple tools to aid discovery. Kids love tools! Include a bug box, trowel, magnifier, etc.
- c) When you take children to parks and other natural areas, allow them to explore. Let them decide which trails to take. Stay nearby for safety, but don't interfere or help unless asked.
- d) Encourage plenty of time outside. Consider taking a walk to the library, store or post office instead of driving.
- e) If a child asks or remarks about a landmark or natural feature you drive past often, find out more about it and go for a visit.
- f) Take advantage of the natural resources available in your area. Take children canoeing, kayaking or fishing.
- g) Take a few leaves from different trees while the children are not looking. Give them the leaves and ask them to find which trees they came from.
- h) Provide a tree identification book to help kids learn about the trees in their own neighborhood.
- i) In the autumn season, leave the fallen leaves down for awhile so kids can run around and shuffle through them.
- j) Rake up a big leaf pile and let them demolish it. If they're not pre-schoolers, leave the rake out so they can rebuild it if they want.
- k) If you have an appropriate area, let older children build a campfire in the backyard. Set safety rules, then stay away while they and their friends discuss hot topics. Check for safety by looking out the window or wandering out to ask if they need more snacks.
- l) Put up bird feeders that can be seen easily from windows. Let children help feed the birds. Keep a bird book by the window to help them identify what they see.
- m) Make up challenges for children to do outside, similar to the "Survivor" television show. This is a guaranteed kid pleaser, especially if there is a reward.

5. Role of Government

In the paragraph mentioned above, some advantage of computer games were explained which are attracting

children to go for them. A conscious effort therefore needs to be made so that the same advantages are also more or less made available while playing street games and other games. The government may have to do a bit to invest its efforts and resources in this direction.

Children are not getting enough playground or even streets in their residential areas/villages. Traffic has increased, clogging the streets. How can children therefore retain interest in street games when streets themselves are not available? To compensate for this,

- Government should provide open space for play in the form of small playground, parks, and open gym in the residential areas/villages.
- Government schemes should be implemented on large scale. It should be compulsory for children to enroll in any scheme of play launched by government.
- Technology provides a facsimile of individualized attention and self-paced stimulation and thus avoiding the frustration of waiting for others or feeling left back. To compensate for this, if sports schemes of the Govt are made compulsory for children and sufficient parks/playing grounds are created in every locality with some honorary coaches, children can find their friends always available for play and these coaches can provide personalized attention.
- The Come Out & Play Scheme was initiated for optimum utilization of Sports Authority of India's sports facilities across the country, and primarily focused on encouraging local youth in areas where SAI sports facilities/Centers are operational. This scheme should be expanded to include street games as well.
- SAI Special Area Games (SAI SAG) - This scheme has been introduced by the government for the children of age 12-18 years. Focus of the SAG Centers is on popular indigenous sports of India by spotting and nurturing talent in specific disciplines in tribal, coastal and hilly areas, to groom them to achieve excellence in the related modern competitive games and sports. These schemes can be expanded to other general areas also based on the results/feedback from the pilot schemes.

6. Conclusion

The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights recognizes play as a right of every child and the American Academy of Pediatrics states that "Play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being of children and youth".

Creative and spontaneous play is thus important for children. It is the parents' role to provide the children

adequate time to play outdoors. The technology of today may be very advanced and can simulate an outdoor activity for them inside the house but playing real outdoor games is altogether different.

Dozens of studies from around the world show regular time outdoors produces significant improvements in learning ability, creativity and well-being - mental, psychological and emotional. Just a few minutes of “green exercise” can perhaps produce rapid improvements in mental well-being and self-esteem of children.

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