

# Mothers' Perception of Their Children's Play in Dhulikhel Hospital, Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

### Background

Play is a cherished part of childhood that offers children holistic developmental benefits and parents the opportunity to fully engage with their children. However, modern-day children are spending significantly less time in outdoor play due to a number of factors including technological advancements, more time involved in structured activities, and a greater emphasis on early cognitive learning.

### Objective

To assess perception of mothers on their children's play.

### Method

This was a descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among the 228 mothers having at least one child children who attended in Paediatric OPD of Dhulikhel hospital of Nepal from 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2018 to 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2019. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Committee (IRC) of Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences (KUSMS). Research instrument was developed by Barnett and was adopted for this study with permission from the author. Systematic random sampling technique was used to select mothers and face to face interview was carried out to collect information.

### Result

Perception on play of children in the mothers was varied. Most of mothers agreed on different subscales of play with mean range 2.07-3.01 in which they were agreed on freedom play with mean score  $3.01 \pm 0.40$ , importance of play with mean score  $2.93 \pm 0.37$  and nearly agreed on maternal rule with mean score  $2.89 \pm 0.50$ , play safety with mean score  $2.92 \pm 0.36$ , child's choice with mean score  $2.96 \pm 0.49$  and disagreed on imaginative play with mean score  $2.42 \pm 0.59$  and gender typing with mean score  $2.07 \pm 0.51$ .

### Conclusion

Although almost all respondents had positive attitudes towards different component of the play, they disagreed on gender typing and imaginative play which is very important for developing problem solving skill of children based on their gender. So, nursing faculties, pediatricians and nurses can use the findings to develop awareness on importance of gender typing and imaginative play among mothers.

## KEY WORDS

*Children, Mothers, Play, Perception*

## INTRODUCTION

Parental beliefs appear to play a significant role in children's development, play-learning beliefs remain relatively unexplored in the context of Nepal. Given that beliefs evolve in part through cultural and personal experiences, parents may hold different beliefs about the nature of play itself and its role in academic learning. Being allowed to engage in play is acknowledged by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as the right of every child throughout the world. Here is a wide range of literature and research supporting the concept of play in promoting healthy development in young children.<sup>1-6</sup>

This universal and innate disposition is believed to be one of the most significant components to holistic wellbeing and development, especially during the foundational years of early childhood. However, it is the type of play which is best suited to achieve these positive outcomes that has received much debate in recent years. Specifically, current literature suggests that many more children in today's modern world are experiencing less time to engage in freely chosen play activities than they once did.<sup>7-9</sup> There are many benefit of play which help to develop intrinsic interests and competencies; learn how to make decisions, solve problems, exert self-control, and follow rules; learn to regulate their emotions; make friends and learn to get along with others as equals; and experience joy. Through all of these effects, play promotes mental health.<sup>10</sup>

The examination of parental perceptions in this research found that these beliefs influence the choices parents make about the way in which children spend their time. It is because of the central role parents have in the lives of their children that their beliefs and knowledge need to be recognized and understood in order to offer valuable insights into children's early experiences and consequent learning.<sup>9,11</sup> Despite the great influence of parental practices on children's early experiences, current research surrounding parental perceptions of the value of structured and unstructured play during years of childhood is limited. The study finding can serve as a basis for the nursing professionals to provide health education to mothers to promote play among children. So, this study finding will be valuable and significant contribution to the field if child.

## METHODS

This was a descriptive cross-sectional study administered to all 228 mothers who attended in pediatric OPD of Dhulikhel Hospital from 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2018 - 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2019. The purpose of study was to assess mothers' perception of their children's play. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review committee (IRC) of Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences (KUSMS).

Research instrument developed by Barnett, L.A. was adopted for use in this study with permission from

author.<sup>12</sup> The Author reported content validity and internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) 0.84 as a whole and ranging from 0.82-0.91 on the different subscale of the instrument. The adapted instrument used in this study consisted of:

Nine questions about demographic information (added by researcher)

Seven item Sub-- -Scale Question on play freedom.

Fiveitem Sub-- Scale Question on Maternal Rules.

Fouritem Sub- Scale Question on play safety.

Seven item Sub- Scale Question on Imaginative Play.

Fouritem Sub- Scale Question on Gender Typing.

Six item Sub- Scale Question on Important of Play.

Sixitem Sub- Scale Question on Child's Choice Play.

Written consent was obtained from each participant prior to data collection. All respondents were assured that their participation was voluntary and their responses were anonymous. After data collection, responses were transferred to an excel database and subsequently analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

## RESULTS

Most of mothers, (82.5 %) had given birth to their first child at 20 years of age or above nearly half of the mothers had only one child. Among total respondents, three-fourth of them followed Hindu religion and most of them (93%) were literate. Among total respondents, 89.0% had sufficient income beyond that required for basic needs and 50.4% belonged to single family.

Perceived play freedom were assessed by asking participants to rate on a 4 point likert scale their perceived level (Table 2) with 1 representing strongly disagree and 4 representing strongly agree and reverse in negative statement. Higher scores on subscales indicate mother belief on free play. Table 2 indicates the percentage of responses in each category. Mean scores on these items ranged from 2.00-3.2 and the overall mean was 3.01±0.40 suggesting that the respondents perceived that they agreed on different items of play freedom for their children.

Perceived maternal rules were assessed by asking participants to rate their level of agreement on a list of 5 maternal rules to play using a 4-point likert scale (0=do not know, 1, strongly disagree, 4 strongly agree). Higher mean score indicates greater perception that there should be rules in place governing their child's play. Table 3 summarizes the percentage responding to each category and mean score for each rule. The overall mean for this scale was 2.89±0.50 suggesting that the respondents almost agreed that there should be rules in place governing child play.

**Table 1. Demographic Information of respondents (n=228)**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age at first child birth</b>		
< 20 years	40	17.5
≥ 20 yrs	188	82.5
<b>Number of children</b>		
One	113	49.6
Two	91	39.9
≥ Three	24	10.5
<b>Age of child</b>		
< 1 yrs	90	39.5
1-5 yrs	71	31.1
> 5 yrs	67	29.4
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	166	72.8
Buddhist	42	18.4
Christian	20	8.8
<b>Education status</b>		
Literate	212	93.0
Illiterate	16	7.0
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Illiterate	16	7.0
Primary Level (1-8 Class)	56	24.6
Secondary Level (9-12 Class)	119	52.2
Higher education (>12 class)	37	16.2
<b>Type of Family</b>		
Single	115	50.4
Joint	77	33.8
Extended	36	15.8

All the participants were asked to rate play safety. Among total respondents 17.1% had disagreed or strongly disagreed with the negative statement that school age children should be allowed to play without supervision. More than 90% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that physical play should be allowed only in designated areas, important to watch out for the safety of child playing and they can easily get hurt when they are playing.

All respondents were asked to rate the perception on imaginative play. The overall mean for this scale was 2.42±0.59 out of total possible score 4 suggesting that the respondents perceived that imaginative play should be discouraged for their children. Among total respondents 69.3% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement imaginative play is good for children to make child believable and 53% and 50.9% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that it is alright for children to get dirty once in a while and they should be allowed to make mess just for fun of it respectively and only, 35.5% respondents disagreed on parent should be worried if their child has an imaginary playmate.

Perceived gender typing were assessed by asking

**Table 2. Perception of Mothers on Play Freedomn (n=228)**

Statement	Strongly agree n(%)	Agree n(%)	Dis-agree n(%)	Strongly disagree n(%)	Don't know n(%)	Mean (SD)
Child should be given freedom to decide how they want to play	92 (40.4)	114 (50.0)	14 (6.1)	5 (2.2)	3 (1.3)	3.26 (0.78)
Child should be allowed to take toys apart	18 (7.9)	103 (45.2)	97 (42.5)	7 (3.1)	3 (1.3)	2.55 (0.74)
Child should be able to decide when to share their toys	56 (24.6)	137 (60.0)	30 (13.2)	-	5 (2.2)	3.05 (0.76)
Children should be allowed to play with whom they please	80 (35.1)	122 (53.5)	-	24 (10.5)	2 (0.9)	3.21 (0.70)
Children should be allowed to play safely anywhere	94 (41.2)	116 (50.9)	15 (6.6)	-	3 (1.3)	3.0 (0.71)
Children should be allowed to watch TV as child wish	29 (12.7)	134 (58.8)	57 (25.0)	4 (1.8)	4 (1.7)	2.79 (0.75)
Using toys in wrong way should be corrected*	56 (24.6)	109 (47.8)	57 (25.0)	3 (1.3)	3 (1.3)	2.00 (0.77)
<b>Overall Mean (SD)</b>						<b>3.01 (0.40)</b>

\*indicate negative statement

participants to rate on a 4-point likert scale. Overall mean score was 2.07±0.51 suggesting that respondents perceived that play for children should not be different according to his/her gender.

Overall mean score on importance of play was 2.93±0.37 indicating that the respondents perceived that organized play is important for children which is summarized in table 7. Among total respondents 93.3-96.8% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that children can learn by organization of their activities and it is important for the children. Similarly, 80.6% and 95.7% mothers perceived that it is important that children learn to use time wisely and they should be busy in their

**Table 3. Perception of Respondents on Maternal Rules (n=228)**

Statement	Strongly agree n(%)	Agree n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Strongly disagree n(%)	Don't know n(%)	Mean (SD) n(%)
Certain rooms should be off limit when they play	29 (12.7)	79(34.6)	108 (47.5)	6 (2.6)	6 (2.6)	2.52 (0.84)
Child should not be allowed to leave their toys around the house	48 (21.1)	135(59.2)	38 (16.7)	5 (2.2)	2 (0.8)	2.97 (0.74)
A lot of discipline is essential for raising child	82 (36.0)	124 (54.4)	17 (7.5)	2 (0.8)	3 (1.3)	3.23 (0.73)
Child should play toys the way they are meant to be used.	53 (23.2)	112 (49.2)	50 (21.9)	5 (2.2)	8 (3.5)	2.86 (0.92)
Children should follow the game's rule when they play	48 (21.1)	116 (50.9)	55 (24.1)	6 (2.6)	3 (1.3)	2.87 (0.81)
Overall Mean (SD)						2.89 (0.50)

**Table 4. Perception of Mothers on Play Safety (n=228)**

Statement	Strongly agree n(%)	Agree n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Strongly disagree n(%)	Don't know n(%)	Mean (SD) n(%)
School age children should be allowed to play without supervision*	57 (25.0)	127(55.7)	37 (16.2)	2(0.9)	5 (2.2)	1.88 0.72)
Physical play should be allowed only in designated areas.	75 (32.9)	133(58.3)	19 (8.4)	-	1 (0.4)	3.23(0.63)
It is important to watch out for the safety of my child when they are playing. (1 missing data)	113 (50)	109 (48)	3 (1.3)	1 (0.4)	1 (0.4)	3.46(0.60)
Children can easily get hurt when they are playing	54(24)	151(66.2)	19 (8.3)	-	4 (1.8)	3.10(0.69)
Overall Mean (SD)						2.92(0.36)

\*indicate negative statement

**Table 5. Perception of Mothers on Imaginative Play (n=228)**

Statement	Strongly agree n(%)	Agree n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Strongly disagree n(%)	Don't know n(%)	Mean (SD) n(%)
It is good for children to play make-believe.	47 (20.6)	111 (48.7)	26 (11.4)	1 (0.4)	43 (18.9)	2.52 (1.34)
Parent should be worried if their child has an imaginary play-mate.*	24 (10.5)	92 (40.4)	78 (34.2)	3 (1.3)	31 (13.6)	1.99 (1.02)
It is all right for children to get dirty once in a while.	32 (14.0)	89 (39.0)	94 (41.2)	6 (2.7)	7 (3.1)	2.58 (0.87)
Children should be allowed to make a mess just for the fun of it.	29 (12.7)	87 (38.2)	104(45.6)	8 (3.5)	-	2.60 (0.76)
Overall Mean (SD)						2.42(0.59)

\* indicate negative statement

**Table 6. Perception of Mothers on Gender Typing Play (n=228)**

Statement	Strongly agree n(%)	Agree n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Strongly disagree n(%)	Don't know n(%)	Mean (SD) n(%)
Boys should be discouraged from playing girl's game.	3 (1.3)	24 (10.5)	183 (80.3)	15 (6.6)	3 (1.3)	2.04 (0.53)
Girls should be discouraged from playing boy's game.	4 (1.8)	23 (10.1)	181 (79.4)	15 (6.5)	5 (2.2)	2.02 (0.57)
Boys should play boy's game.	9 (3.9)	32 (14.0)	168 (73.7)	13 (5.7)	6 (2.7)	2.11 (0.67)
Girls should play girls' game.	9 (3.9)	35 (15.4)	166 (72.8)	12 (5.3)	6 (2.6)	2.13 (0.67)
Overall Mean (SD)						2.07 (0.51)

holidays respectively. Only Seven percent disagreed with the statement that it is important for children to have free time to do whatever they wish and only 60.5% respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement that involvement of child in different activities is important when they are not in school.

Among total respondents 70.6-86.3% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed on different items of child's choice of play. Mean scores on these items ranged 2.81-3.10 and the overall mean was 2.96±0.49 suggesting

that the respondents perceived that their child should determine extent and type of participation in structured out of school activities.

## DISCUSSION

Majority of mothers (82.5%) had given birth to their first child at ≥ 20 years. of age which is supported by NDHS data whereas median age at first child birth is 20.4 years of age. and nearly 50% mothers had only one child which could

**Table 7. Perception of Mothers on Importance of Play (n=228)**

Statement	Strongly agree n(%)	Agree n(%)	Dis-agree n(%)	Strongly disagree n(%)	Don't know n(%)	Mean (SD) n(%)
Children can learn a lot by being in organized activities.	96 (42.0)	117 (51.3)	13 (5.8)	-	2 (0.9)	3.33 (0.67)
Organization of activities after school is important part of child education.	98 (43.0)	123 (53.9)	6 (2.7)	-	1 (0.4)	3.39 (0.58)
Involvement of child in different activities is important when they are not in school.	49 (21.5)	89 (39.0)	78(34.2)	10 (4.4)	2 (0.9)	2.75 (0.86)
It is important that children learn to use their time wisely.	80 (35.1)	138 (60.5)	6 (2.6)	2(0.9)	2 (0.9)	3.28 (0.64)
Child should be kept busy with lots of activities when they have holiday.	68 (29.8)	118 (51.8)	37(16.2)	2 (0.9)	3(1.3)	3.08 (0.78)
It is important for children to have free time to do whatever they wish.*	69 (30.3)	140 (61.4)	16 (7.0)	-	3(1.3)	1.74 (0.60)
Overall Mean (SD)						2.93 (0.37)

\* indicate negative statement

**Table 8. Perception of Mothers on Child's Choice (n=228)**

Statement	Strongly agree n(%)	Agree n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Strongly disagree n(%)	Don't know n(%)	Mean (SD) n(%)
Parent take an active role in setting up activities for their child's holidays.	64 (28.1)	132 (53.9)	26 (11.4)	3 (1.3)	3 (1.3)	3.10 (0.75)
Children should say in what they do after school hours.	48 (21.1)	138 (60.5)	39 (17.1)	-	3 (1.3)	3.00 (0.71)
Child knows best what out of school activities they will get something out of.	33 (14.5)	138 (60.5)	50 (21.9)	1 (0.4)	6 (2.6)	2.84 (0.77)
Children should be allowed to decide for themselves if they want to be in organized activities after school hours.	49 (21.5)	135 (59.2)	36 (15.8)	1 (0.4)	7 (3.1)	2.95 (0.82)
Child should have more say in deciding what activities the community should arrange for them.	47 (20.6)	114 (50.0)	53 (23.2)	6 (2.6)	8 (3.5)	2.81 (0.91)
If the children are unhappy doing an out of school activity, they should be allowed to quit.	56 (24.5)	141 (61.8)	28 (12.3)	-	3 (1.3)	3.08 (0.69)
Overall Mean (SD)						2.96 (0.49)

be because of increasing awareness on family planning methods among mothers. Among total respondents ¾ of them followed Hindu religion which is slightly less than NDHS's (86%) data and most of them (93.0%) were literate which is supported by Turkish study in which 90% mothers' were literate.<sup>13</sup> but according to NDHS only 69% of women were literate.<sup>14</sup> Among total respondents 11.0% had not sufficient income beyond that required for basic needs and 50.4% belonged to single family.

### Play Freedom

Among total respondents, 72.36% respondents perceived that they agreed or strongly agreed on different items of play freedom for their children whereas and only 28.64% respondents disagreed on items of play freedom where study done in Dublin city 15% of the variance seemed to reflect mother's feeling of control over children and a study done in Australia showed that 69% parent selection of toys used their preference.<sup>15,16</sup>

### Maternal Rules

The overall mean for this scale was 2.89±0.50 suggesting

that the respondents almost agree on there should be rules in place governing child's play. There was overall agreement on placing maternal rules for play which might be because parents also considered playtime as a way of teaching discipline to their children from early age.

Majority respondents (90%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that a lot of discipline is essential for raising child and next 3 most perceived rules were not allowing to leave their toys around the house and should play the way they are meant and children should follow the game rule when they play. This finding is supported by the study done in Turkey in which majority of mothers (85%) instructed the child how to play and study done in Australia majority of parent (60%) agreed that guidelines of play were important. However, another study done in Australia's reported that only 39% parents believed that parents needed to take control and set limits for their children and more closely monitor their children's screen time.<sup>13,16,17</sup>

### Play Safety

Only 17.1% of respondents disagreed with the negative statement that school age children should be allowed to play without supervision. More than 90% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that physical; play should be allowed only in designed areas, important to watch out for the safety of my child playing and they can easily get hurt when they are playing which is supported a study in Canada whereas 51% of Canadian parents said that they wanted their children to play more outdoors but were worried for their child's safety.<sup>18</sup> This is also supported by studies done in Australia and America.<sup>16,19</sup> Perhaps parents are always protective and concerned about their children's safety, irrespective of the country context which is necessary for the prevention of accident in one way but on other hand it will not allow children to develop self-confidence on play. So, child should allow free play with safety precautions.

### Imaginative Play

The overall mean for this scale was  $2.42 \pm 0.59$  out of 4 suggesting that the respondents disagreed that imaginative play should be encouraged for their child. Among total respondents 69.3% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement imaginative play is good for children to make child believable and 53% and 50.9% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement it is alright for children to get dirty once in a while and they should be allowed to make mess just for fun of it respectively and only, 35.5% respondents disagreed on parent should be worried if their child has an imaginary playmate. Similarly, a study done in Australia showed 48% parents reported that active play provided opportunities to foster imagination and enjoyment.<sup>17</sup>

### Importance of play

Overall mean score on importance of play was  $2.93 \pm 0.37$  indicating that majority of the respondents agreed that play is important for the children which is supported by studies done in Ireland and America, but according to the study done in Dade showed that only 20% of the teacher perceived that play was an integral part of their school day.<sup>15,19</sup> Similarly, Turkey's study showed that only 15% mothers gave priority to play.<sup>13</sup> Majority (95.7%) of mothers perceived that children should be busy in their holidays however a study done in Australia showed that 36% parents mentioned the social benefit of active play and 82% parent perceived benefit was that screen provided opportunities for learning and education.<sup>17</sup>

Most of the respondents felt that children can learn by organization of their activities and more than 80%

respondents felt that children have to learn to use time wisely but the study of Bangladesh showed that only 16% of the mothers agreed on play is detrimental to children's learning and 20% of mothers had lack of awareness on benefits of play for children's cognitive development.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the respondents (80.3%) disagreed that boys should be discouraged from playing girl's games and almost 80% of them disagreed that girls should be discouraged from playing boy's games as the study done in Bangladesh in which 26% of mothers strongly agreed on statement play of girls and boys should be different and 60% respondents agreed that play materials for boys and girls should differ.<sup>20</sup> These finding can be used for educating mothers that play should be different as gender wise.

### Child's Choice

Among total respondents 70.6-86.3% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed on different items of child's choice play. Mean scores on these items ranged from 2.81-3.10 and the overall mean was  $2.96 \pm 0.49$  suggesting that the respondents perceived that their child should determine extent and type of participation in structured play out of school activities. Giving children autonomy to decide the type and extent of play will help children to grow into independent individuals and research done by Dr. Rachel E. White and Ageliki Nicolopoulou concludes that both free and guided play are essential elements in a child-centered approach to playful learning and managing stress as intrinsically motivated free play provides children with true autonomy.<sup>21,22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Play is very important for holistic development of children. Findings of this study suggest that almost all mothers agreed or nearly agreed on importance of play, play freedom, maternal rule, and play safety and Child's choice on play but they were disagreed on imaginative play, gender typing which is very important for developing critical thinking for problem solving in future. So, nursing faculties, nurses and pediatrician can use these findings to develop awareness regarding important of imaginative play and gender typing among mothers in Nepal.

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