

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.