

“CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO PLAY: A GLOBAL PERCEPTION”

Dr. Smita B. Vyas,
Co-ordinator,
Department of Law,
HNGU, Patan.

Abstract

*“Children need the freedom and time to play.
Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.”*

Kay Redfield Jamison

Play is a fundamental part of children’s everyday experience, from the initial days of life through adolescence and into mature age. As per International play association, 2010 children evaluate playing as one of the most significant aspect of their lives, freedom, valuable time and places to play. As per United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) article 31, the right of all children to have rest and leisure, to participate in play and various recreational activities and to take part in cultural life and arts. The Children’s Play Policy Forum (2019) stated that, in regard of alarming trends in relation to inadequate levels of physical exercise, obesity and the numbers of mental health problems in children and young people, that play become helpful to improve physical, emotional wellbeing. It also create a sense of identity and strengthen the relationship within families and society. Through play, children can learn to manage a numbers of emotions such as frustration, determination, achievement, disappointment and confidence. Despite the beneficial evidence of play for children, there are temporal, spatial and psychological elements which restrict children’s access to play. Articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are broadly divided into “three Ps”: Protection, participation and provision. This paper describes correlation in between these three categories and children’s play along with barriers which restrict children to achieve right to play.

Keywords: Rights of the Child, Play, life, development

INTRODUCTION

Children are the most valuable assets of the nation because they form the destiny of the nation as future citizens. Children and play both are indivisible words. Children are able to play everywhere and with anything. Be it designated places like parks, playgrounds, sports areas or not so designated spaces like parking lots, basement, staircase or even random public benches outside the railway station. Play is an integral part of their life and provides them with a platform to express them freely.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

- To elaborate children’s Right to Play as per UNCRC
- To discuss the role of play in children’s development and wellbeing.
- To discuss the barriers and the way forward for proper implementation of Right to Play.

CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO PLAY IS A HUMAN RIGHT

The Convention of UN on the Rights of the Child is an international treaty that sets off universally accepted rights for children. It is a benchmark against which a nation’s nurturing of its children can be measured. It brings together in one comprehensive code the benefits and protection for children previously scattered in a variety of other agreements, including the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted in 1959. The UN Convention also declared that human rights carried in other treaties apply equally to children.

Internationally, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC, 1989); has recognized the “Right to Play” as a fundamental right of every child. The Article 31 of UNCRC states the right of every child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities and free and full participation in cultural and artistic life. The 193 countries, including India that have accepted the UNCRC, are legally bound to sustain and promote this right through laws, policies and action.

Although, the Committee on the Rights of the Child is bothered by the poor recognition given by Governments to these rights¹. Article 31 has also known as ‘the forgotten article of the Convention on Right of Child’.²

Urban populations rising, violence in all its forms, the urbanization of play provision, child labour and increasing demands and expectation of education are all affecting children’s opportunity to enjoy their rights of article 31. generally, where investment is done, it is in the provision of structured and organized activities, but

equally important is the need to create time and space for children to engage in play, recreation and creativity, and to enhance societal attitudes that support and encourage such activity. To address these concerns, on 1 February 2013 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child took on a General Comment that clarifies for governments worldwide the meaning and importance of Article 31 of the Convention on the Right of the Child.

India's National Policy of Children (NPC, 1974) for the bygone 38 years did not encompass the word 'play' in its text. However, NGOs work for children using a rights-based approach often focus, the right to play is the only right that appear to be available peculiarly to the large numbers of children living in poverty. The revised NPC (2013) acquires a strong rights-based approach and does cover the word play in one place bundled with other Article 31 (UNCRC) rights.³

UNDERSTANDING OF PLAY

Play is important to the lives of children in that it gives them pleasure, is significant to their healthy, physical and psychological growth, and promotes their capacity to function in the society and culture in which they are born (IPA Declaration, 2014). Play enhances imagination, creativity, self-confidence, self-efficacy and physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills, and, as a protective process, can enhance adaptive capabilities and flexibility (Lester and Russell, 2010).⁴ Besides this, WHO (World Health Organization) also recommends one hour of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic activity for a child below 18 years every day. The interpretation of play within the CRC reflects these attitudes, and it has often been overlooked as separated right (Child Rights Information Network 2007). Additionally, Burghardt (2005: p. xii)⁵ mentioned that 'only when we recognize the nature of play, will be able to realize how to better shape the destinies of human societies in a mutually interdependent world, the future of our offspring, and perhaps even the fate of the environment itself'.

THREE "Ps" PROTECTION, PARTICIPATION, PROVISION.

Articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are broadly divided into "three Ps": Protection, participation and provision. It means that children can build their own self-protection through play, and that play is the leading way in which children take part within their own communities. Moreover, its adults' responsibility to provide conditions for plays ensuring that they are right for play to take place.

PROTECTION

Survival is not only a question of maintaining life, it denotes the ways an organism can positively position itself in its environment, to maintain both current and forthcoming integrity and to respond according to the demands of the environment.

Children's play can be viewed as a self-protecting process that offers the chances to enhance adaptive capabilities and flexibility. The experience of play effects changes to the development of the brain, especially in systems to do with emotion, motivation and reward (Burghardt 2005).

PARTICIPATION

Children's play denotes a primary form of participation, being involved into everyday life (Meire 2007).⁶ The quality of children's environments affects their ability to play. Adults usually define the purpose and use of space and time; where, children generally find ways to play that appear within the boundaries of adult order. Children's ability to look out time and space for play is affected by a couple of social, cultural, economic and political factors. These may include gender, socio-economic status and disability.

PROVISION

Provision implies much more than providing play facilities. It requires wider consideration of children's rights to ensure that the social and physical environment can support children's ability to play and for that adults should take responsibility to provide favorable responsibility.

BARRIERS TO PLAY, WAY FORWARD

The Children's Play Policy Forum (2019) stated that, in regard of alarming trends in relation to inadequate levels of physical exercise, obesity and the numbers of mental health problems in children and young people, that play become helpful to improve physical, emotional wellbeing.

Despite the beneficial evidence of play for children, there are temporal, spatial and psychological elements which restrict children's access to play.

In recent era, opportunities for play, as elaborated by the UNCRC's (2013) General comment, have been affected by numbers of factors such as increased traffic, technology and impact of social media, closure of play facilities, educational pressures and parental anxieties about safety of their children.(Children's Play Policy Forum, 2019). Within the family, fears of children,s safety and a concern to overprotect and avoid risk can

reduce access to play (Lester & Russell, 2010)⁷. Parents are excessively encouraged to focus on academic learning (Belfield & Garcia, 2014)⁸.

However, children can struggle to play when their basic needs are not fulfilled or where the environments they live in are so restricting that they are unable to play. Schools can provide children with the access to space, time and permission for playing, which is a significant part of their everyday lives. This is especially important for children who have their play restricted by factors such as domestic, poverty or environmental factors, recognizing that with access to play opportunities children can enjoy their childhoods despite also experiencing fiscal and social disadvantage (Long, 2017)⁹. Opportunities can be developed to participate with other children in various games, sports and other recreational activities, supported, where necessary, by trained instructors or coaches. To motivate, recognition should be given by parents, teachers and society as a whole of the value and legitimacy of the rights provided in article 31.

CONCLUSION

From the viewpoint of the child, the right to play is not an additional right, limited to a very small part of article 31. It reviews fully the right to be a child. Play is a vital and intrinsic part of human healthy life and development and a child's ability to exercise the right to play should not be dependent on the environmental circumstances where that child lives or the family they were grown into. Wherever children's right to play is negatively affected there are ramification for children's health, development and well-being. All children and young people should have access to free, high quality and local opportunities for play. This is especially important for children who may currently experience prohibition from play e.g. disabled children, children living in poverty or children belong to minority communities

"A child has a right to play. Parents have a liability to ensure that children are given freedom to play. Parents are expected to encourage children to play because it promotes their growth. Children are not likely to be overburden with homework or work at home. Children should be allowed to play."

(Jane Nyambura, child participant in the IPA Global Consultations on Children's Right to Play, Nairobi, 2010)

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