

‘Culture vs. Maturation?’
**Are Types of Play Displayed by Sri Lankan Infant and
Toddlers an Impact of Developmental Sequence Based on
Maturation or Based In the Sri Lankan Cultural Context, an
Exploratory Study**

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Introduction

Children’s play is biologically based and serves a variety of roles such as exercising newly developed physical and cognitive abilities as well as providing behaviours that child can use to cope with traumatic events taken in the context of child development. Play has also been demonstrated to be an effective vehicle for socio-cultural development in infants and toddlers.

Research Problem

Play is a dominant activity of children in all cultures and therefore is viewed to be an important mode of cultural leanings or transmission; conveying the need to addresses the importance of identifying or studying culture specific play in young children. However, taxonomies of play types and patterns have typically been based on studies of Western children. Moreover, the handful of studies which examine infants and toddlers’ play do not seem to offer clarification of the patterns that are common or related to the maturational process of the infants and toddlers and those that are unique to diverse cultural contexts. However, in the absence of empirical studies which examines the types of infant/ toddler play in Sri Lanka it is difficult to differentiate between the impacts of maturation vs. culture, before exploring types of play displayed by Sri Lankan children.

Objectives of the Study

Therefore, the aim of the present study was initially to explore types of play displayed by Sri Lankan infants and toddlers. Next, it aimed to identify whether their play is a descriptive of the maturational process described in the Western child developmental theoretical framework and requires to be categorized accordingly; or whether it is descriptive of the Sri Lankan culture

in terms of types and nature of play and need to be categorized as such. It also examined whether there is a gender difference in terms of types and nature of Sri Lankan infants and toddlers' play.

Methodology

This study presents an overview of descriptions of nature and types of play displayed by Sri Lankan infants (0-24 months). Trained observers who had prior knowledge in child psychology, nature and types of children's play (n = 4 hours) and basic knowledge of observation skills of children; observed 59 infants and toddlers (26 girls; and 33 boys) between the age group of 0 to 24 months (M = 15.05; S.D = 5.61).

The instructions provided to the observers were to observe and record the behaviours of the children in a naturalistic observational session with a minimum observation time of 2 hour session. During the observation sessions, caregivers of the children were told to interact with the infants and toddlers as if the observer was not present. Play behaviour listed in the observation records were coded for types, and nature of play based on the Play Observation Scale of Rubin (2001) on young children's play.

Key Findings

Observer records conveyed that 52 children (88.1%) had played during the time of observation as opposed to 07 (11.9%). Instances of types of play observed by the observers were functional or repetitive play; e.g. dropping toys picking them up or expecting the care givers to pick them, filling sand into a pot and emptying (24, 40.7%), solitary play (07, 15.3%), constructive (2, 3.4%), free play (17, 28.8%), cooperative play(19, 32.2%), make believe play(4, 6.8%). Coding did not identify culturally specific play types among the children observed, although cultural factors determined the content of their play.

Significantly, more instances of make believe play ($p < .001$), constructive play ($p < .05$) and cooperate play ($p < .05$) were observed among older group of children (13 to 24 months) while younger children (1 to 12 months) displayed a large number of structured play instance ($p < .001$). Moreover, significant difference in gender was observed only for structured play ($p < .01$), with girls displaying higher number of structured play instances.

The findings are in par with the universal developmental milestones of infants and toddlers and literature (Prosser, Hutt, Hutt, Mahindadasa, & Goonetilleke, 1986), conveying that play may be considered as an indicator and reflection of child development based on maturation; depicting that a developmental sequence independent of Sri Lankan culture maybe more useful in categorizing Sri Lankan infants and toddlers' play. However, future research needs to identify whether culturally specific behaviours are presented in the types of play displayed by Sri Lankan pre/school children.

Recommendations are offered to parents, ECCD policy makers and experts in the continuum of developmental milestones of children's play and comparing types of play across cultures.

Keywords: Developmental Play; Infants; Sri Lanka; Toddlers

References

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