EXPLORING THE PLAY OF MIDDLE CHILDHOOD CHILDREN IN A POOR COMMUNITY IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE: CAREGIVERS' EXPERIENCES

Tania Prinsloo, Lizane Wilson

Play is affected by the specific community and culture children live in. Through an explorative descriptive design this qualitative study explored the experiences of play of middle childhood children in a poor community in North West province. Eighteen participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data-collection methods included focus groups and collages. Findings illustrated different types of play, factors which influenced the children's play, and the effects of poverty, resources, safety and supportive structures on play. It is recommended that professionals rendering services to children in this specific age group be aware of the games children prefer to play.

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INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The importance of play and recreation in the life of every child has long been acknowledged (Casby, 2003; Homeyer & Morrison, 2008). Ginsburg (2007) as well as Runcan, Petracovschi and Borca (2012) add that play is essential for all children to develop socially, cognitively and physically; it can also increase the emotional wellbeing of children. Although the importance of play is emphasised, certain concerns were raised by the Committee of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child about the difficulties certain children face in the matters of enjoyment of play and the settings to provide equal opportunities for children to play (United Nations, 2013). These rights defined in article 31 showed that especially girls, poor children, children with disabilities, indigenous children and children belonging to minorities face difficulties with regard to the enjoyment of play (United Nations, 2013). The changes in the world in which children are growing up also have a major impact on their opportunity to enjoy the rights entrenched in article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Play is an activity that has existed for thousands of years and it has been established that the different types of play, games and toys vary culturally (Stagnitti & Cooper, 2009). Although more commercial, educational and technologically-driven toys are available today, children do not necessarily have to be exposed to these sorts of toys for play to still be effective (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012). A study conducted by Bartie, Dunnell, Kaplan, Oosthuizen, Smith, Van Dyk, Cloete and Duvenage (2016) which determined play opportunities, activities, toys and the play environment in a low socio-economic community found that children in such a community did not need expensive toys to find play enticing and meaningful. Children in this low socio-economic community engaged in activities such as singing and dancing, and also used familiar materials found in the environment for play (Bartie *et al.,* 2016).

South Africa is becoming more of a "non-Western" type of context and therefore, according to Barker, Kraftl, Horton and Tucker (2009), children's play in this country has an uncertain relationship with views on play worldwide. This can be because South Africa is unique with its diverse cultures and communities. In South Africa children's diverse backgrounds and different experiences provide them with the opportunities to learn and express themselves in relation to their own unique background (Louw & Louw, 2014). The culture and community within which the child grows up have a direct influence on children's play and children's play materials or toys ((Louw & Louw, 2014). Children's experiences of play are affected by their local neighbourhoods/-communities or by the households in which they live (Barker *et al.,* 2009; Pellegrini, Hoch & Symons*,* 2013). Furthermore, they play within the terms of the culture in which

they are raised (Ellis, 2011; Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2009), where their ability to find time and space for play is further affected by a range of social, cultural, economic and political factors (Lester & Russell, 2010), which vary significantly across communities (Guest, 2013).

Children living in poor communities, such as the community in North West province where this research was done, face challenges regarding their safety, poverty and limited resources, all of which influence their play and development. In this community there are some households that do not have sufficient finances to repair their houses, or caregivers who do not have money to feed their families. Most families in this community live in RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) housing or in small shacks at the back of a property which they rent. Most of them do not have electricity or struggle to provide for their children, such as getting them new clothes, stationery for school or toys. Finances for transportation to work and, for children, to school are limited. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, poverty is regarded as the main reason that caregivers' struggle to meet the basic needs of their families. Residents show signs of malnutrition, there are high unemployment rates, and caregivers do not have sufficient funding to send their children to school (Youth Group [Fact Sheet 5], 2011).

Poverty not only causes severe stress for adults, but children are also faced with stressors, such as being deprived of the benefits of creative and safe times to play, worrying about having resources such as food, and being exposed to or being victims of violence in the community (Milteer & Ginsberg, 2012). Although poverty increases the exposure of children to these stressors or challenges, children inevitably make time for play in the midst of difficult circumstances (Bartie *et al.,* 2016; Milteer & Ginsberg*.,* 2012). Bartie *et al.* (2016) found that these difficult circumstances do not drastically affect children's play, and can sometimes even be the reason for children's heightened sense of creativity.

According to Van Deventer (2014), many of the children in this specific community have lost their parents because of HIV and AIDS, gang violence or drug abuse. Some of the children's parents have been imprisoned and can therefore not provide or take care of their children. These children are then cared for by relatives or an adult who will be able to support them. Therefore, caregivers were included in this study. This means that, apart from the parent/s of children, the grandparents or other relatives serving as parent for children whose parent/s are unable to provide and care for them, were also included in the research. Lester and Russell (2010) and Duncan and Lockwood (2008) state that caregivers/parents are primarily responsible for the provision of positive and safe conditions for their children to freely express themselves through play. There are contrasting views that parents/caregivers hold regarding children's play, i.e. some ignore or dismiss play as a useless activity that has no value (Ginsburg, 2007), while others experience play as valuable to a child's social, physical, emotional and mental development (Lin & Yawkey, 2013; Scalzo, 2010). Caregivers from various countries or even cultural backgrounds have different perceptions and experiences of children's play (Hendricks, 2014; Smith, 2010). Therefore, given the salience of play in the lives of the

young, it should definitely occupy a prominent place in research, especially South Africa, where Western perspectives on play are not always applicable, given the country's unique background and composition. The literature on play is currently more focused on Western perspectives, yet the relevance of these Western perspectives in a South African context is debatable, given the country's unique background. The problem is that little is known about how middle childhood children in poor communities play.

Play is used as a therapeutic tool in social work as well as a method to communicate and interview children in an age-appropriate manner in order to gain more information from them. Hence the necessity to explore the play of children in this specific poor community as not much is known about the play of children in this kind of community. It is essential for professionals working with children from poor and under-resourced communities to understand how these children play to take into account their unique way of playing and aspects influencing their play when working with them. Professions such as social work, psychology and occupational therapy will integrate play into their work with children. These professionals need to be aware that children from similar poor communities have a unique way of playing and this can help the professionals to render more effective services. Focusing on the child and what the child knows and feels comfortable with can enhance the quality of services rendered.

The focus of this study was on children in the middle childhood period, which is defined as children between the ages of six and 11 (Papalia *et al.,* 2009). According to Louw and Louw (2014), by the age of six years most children's thought processes become more logical and realistic, and fantasy and pretend play give way to seeing the world more realistically. They also state that children in their middle childhood start enjoying play activities and games that involve structured rules. Although they still enjoy elements of fantasy, the logic in games and play now becomes the focus of their interest. Children in early childhood, furthermore, enjoy playing by themselves (Louw & Louw, 2014), where adolescents' play is more focused on technology and cyberspace, and they do not show a lot of interest in playing outside or imaginative game playing (Louw & Louw, 2014). According to Louw and Louw (2014), children in this later age group have developed physically, emotionally, cognitively and academically, and therefore they now have a better understanding to be able to make more independent choices, for example, by deciding what sorts of games they like or dislike. Bronfenbrenner's eco-systems theory was used as theoretical framework for this study. Bronfenbrenner believed that a person's development is affected by everything in his or her surrounding environment (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIM OF THE STUDY

The research question that provided a framework and boundaries for this study was: "*What are caregivers' experiences regarding the play of middle childhood children in a poor community*?" The aim of this qualitative research was to explore and describe the experiences of caregivers with regard to play of middle childhood children, aged six to 11, in the context of a poor community in the North West province, South Africa.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the research question a qualitative approach with an explorative descriptive design was used. Purposive and snowball sampling, where certain inclusion criteria were as taken into consideration, were used to select the participants and the data were collected through the use of focus group discussions. Additional data-collection methods such as collages and field notes were also utilised in this study. A question guide was used to facilitate the process, especially when the conversation faltered. Thematic analysis was used to allocate different themes and sub-themes to the data.

Research approach and paradigm

A qualitative research approach was followed in this study as the researcher was interested in understanding how people make sense of their world and their experiences (Merriam, 2009) as well as studying the experiences of the caregivers in their natural setting (Denscombe, 2010; Silverman, 2013). Through this approach the researcher wanted to explore a social phenomenon (Howitt, 2010), which in this study was the play of middle childhood children in a poor community. The qualitative approach provided the opportunity to elicit participants' interpretations of meanings, experiences or perceptions, and produced descriptive data in the participants' own spoken words (Fouché & Delport, 2011; Rossman & Rallis 2012). The approach was located within the interpretive paradigm (Howitt, 2010), which allowed the researcher to perceive the reality that was constructed by the different experiences caregivers have regarding play of their middle childhood children (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smith, 2004).

Research design

An explorative descriptive design (Thorne, 2010) was used to gain insight into caregivers' experiences. This particular qualitative research design requires the researcher to describe interpretively what has been learned and understood of a specific practice situation or phenomenon being studied (Thorne, 2010). This design is centred on how people create their experiences and in the configurations of meaning that shape and inform their reality-constituting activities (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). This design seemed most appropriate as this type of design is used where there is a lack of basic information on a new subject, as in this study, the play of middle childhood children in a specific community.

Research population and sampling

The population of this research study included caregivers of children who were in middle childhood and living in a poor community in the North West province. As it was not possible to use all the caregivers of children in middle childhood in a poor community, sampling was used to select the participants for the study. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study, since each subject in the sampling frame would not have an equal chance of being selected for this study. The participants in this study were sampled through the use of purposive sampling as the participants were selected from the population on the basis of the specific inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for this study were that participants needed to be a parent or caregiver (such as a child's aunt, uncle or grandparent/s, who take responsibility for

looking after the child, because the mother and/or father are not able to support the child any longer) of a child or children in their middle childhood. These caregivers also needed to live in the poor community and able to speak Afrikaans, English or Setswana. A translator was available for participants who spoke Setswana, which was eventually not necessary, because all the participants could speak either Afrikaans or English. The child must have been living with the caregiver, and the caregivers had to attend all the sessions as arranged with them beforehand. Participants were not excluded because of age, race, language or gender. Initially 12 participants (2 men and 10 women) were selected through purposive sampling on the basis of the inclusion criteria, after which snowball sampling (Strydom, 2011) was employed, where the researcher approached participants who were already included in the study and obtained information on other similar persons who could also be included in the study. With snowball sampling another six participants (2 men and 4 women) were selected to participate in the study in order to ensure that data saturation occurred.

In terms of recruitment of participants, a gatekeeper was used who had been living in the community for over 20 years and is a pastor in the community. The reason why this recruitment procedure was used is that the gatekeeper is someone who is resourceful and has very good relationship with parents in the community as she is also involved in after-care services to children in the community. The gatekeeper had the necessary time to assist the researcher and is a high-profile person who is well known and liked throughout the community by most residents. The gatekeeper assisted the researcher to make contact with caregivers who met the inclusion criteria. The gatekeeper assisted the researcher in identifying possible participants for this study, she was the direct link with the participants and ensured that the participants understood the research process. The gatekeeper furthermore assisted with regards to the venue for the focus group meetings and also kept the researcher informed on any questions or uncertainties the participants might have.

Data collection

The data were collected through three focus groups, with six participants per group, conducted at a church that was easily accessible to the participants. Each focus group meeting lasted approximately 50 minutes. During these focus groups a question guide was used, which had been validated by experts in the field prior to the commencement of the study and adjusted accordingly. The question guide consisted of four open-ended questions: What do you understand by the play of children? What type of play is your child involved in? Tell me about their play in the community. What do you think is the value of play? These questions served as a guideline in the focus group meetings that was used when discussion faltered. Furthermore, communication techniques were employed including minimal verbal responses and reflection on the answers given in the focus group meetings. The participants' views were probed by using these open-ended questions, seeking clarification and paraphrasing to encourage more information from the participants without leading questions (Creswell, 2009). The interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim.

In combination with the focus groups, collages were used as a supporting method to provide the participants with an opportunity to express their understanding of play in their community in a visual way. According to Vaughn (2005), collages can be utilised as an additional data-gathering method, which provided the participants with an another opportunity to express their views. It is also seen as a creative method of data collection. This was used as a method to start the conversation; the researcher made material such as A4 cardboard and paper, magazines, colour pens and pencils, scissors and glue available to the participants to prepare the collages. The participants were asked at the start of the focus group, to make a collage to demonstrate their understanding of the play of their children by way of illustration The collages were discussed within the group, giving the participants the opportunity to elaborate on what they made and how they experienced play in this community, providing the researcher with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the caregivers' experiences.

Field notes was also used as a supporting data-gathering method to gain more insight into how the parents perceive their children's play. This was done by observation and making notes of everything the researcher saw and heard, even if it seemed unimportant at that time (Judd, Smith & Kidder cited in Strydom, 2011). According to Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest and Namey (2005), informal conversations and interactions with members of the study population are also very important components of data gathering and should be recorded in as much detail as possible.

Data analysis
Thematic analysis was used to analyse all the collected data. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a method to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data. The following steps by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed during data analysis. Firstly, the researcher became familiar with the data by transcribing the audio recordings, and reading and rereading the data. Then the researcher generated initial codes across the entire data set by hand. After that the researcher searched for initial themes by collating codes into potential themes. Themes were then reviewed and clear names were given to each theme.

ETHICS
Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the ethics committee of the university as all research studies conducted at the university need ethical approval. The researcher adhered to the ethical guidelines set out by the university. Prior to the focus group sessions an orientation session was held during which the aim of the study was explained and the participants were given the opportunity to ask questions to the researcher about any uncertainties that they had. The consent forms were handed out to the potential participants and explained to them. The researcher gave sufficient time for participants to complete the consent forms and written informed consent was obtained from all the participants, who agreed to participate voluntarily in the study. The consent form was provided in the potential participant's preferred language and was presented in order to ensure that the potential participants understood the process of the research clearly. Initially the potential participants had the opportunity and time (approximately 3

days) to examine the consent form and hand it back to the gatekeeper. After the orientation session all the participants felt comfortable about signing the consent form and preferred to hand it back to the researcher on the day of the orientation session. On the day of data collection, the participants were again informed that their participation was voluntary, and they were made aware of the fact that they could withdraw from the study at any time for whatever reason without any negative consequences. The aim of the study – in terms of what was expected of them, what the data would be used for and who would have access to the data – was discussed with the participants before data were collected. The fact that the data would be treated as confidential was also explained to them and the researcher emphasised that only partial confidentiality could be ensured during the focus group sessions. Privacy was assured by using an area in the church that was private and nobody else had access to. All the records have been stored on a password-protected laptop and hard copies of information kept under lock and key. Once the research has been published, the digital recordings and transcriptions will be kept for a period of five years at the university.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

To ensure trustworthiness of the research process, the model of Lincoln and Guba (1985) was followed; they described in detail the four aspects – credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability – necessary to sustain trustworthiness. Credibility was ensured through member checking and triangulation. The researcher made use of member checking (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011) after the focus group meetings. This was done by making contact with some participants to make sure that the researcher understood the participants' point of view by asking if there was a match between research participants' views and the researcher's reconstruction and representation of them. Data triangulation was also used to ensure credibility in this study. This involved the simultaneous collection and analysis of data so that the different findings could be compared, giving the researcher the opportunity to produce more complete conclusions (Delport & Fouché, 2011). According to Kennedy (2009), triangulation facilitates validation of data through cross-verification from two or more methods of data collection. In this study focus groups, field notes and collages as data-collection method were utilised. Focus groups remained the primary method of data collection, where collages and field notes where utilised as additional supporting methods to obtain more data. This was used to test the consistency of findings obtained through different instruments. The findings obtained through the use of the different methods correlated and where found to be consistent.

Dependability was facilitated through an audit trail which provided a description of the research steps that were taken from the start of the research project, as well as the reporting of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This audit trail includes the raw data (field notes, transcribed focus group meetings and collages) and data-analysis notes. Denscombe (2010) states that confirmability addresses the issue of objectivity and focuses on the extent to which qualitative research can produce findings that are free from the influence of the researcher. The researcher achieved confirmability through

audio recording of the focus group meetings and transcribing the audio recordings verbatim to ensure an accurate reflection of the participants' views.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is not possible to understand any phenomenon without reference to the context in which it is embedded. Thus, the researcher familiarised herself with the context in which the participants live and also continuously reflected on her own perceptions and how they may influence the findings.

KEY FINDINGS

Three main themes with sub-themes emerged from the data analysis and are presented in Table 1. Appropriate verbatim quotations are provided as validation. These findings are directly linked to the experiences of caregivers in this specific poor community regarding their children's play in middle childhood.

TABLE 1
THEMES WITH SUB-THEMES INDICATING THE EXPERIENCES OF CAREGIVERS

Themes	Sub-theme	
THEME 1: Different types of play	1.1	Physical play and sport
	1.2	Fantasy/imitation and rhythmic play
	1.3	Types of games in the community
	1.4	Types of toys in the community
THEME 2: Factors influencing children's play	2.1	Environmental, cultural and community influences on play
	2.2	The impact of technology on play
THEME 3: Constraints in the community affecting play	3.1	The effect of poverty on play
	3.2	Children's safety and lack of resources
	3.3	Supportive structures in the community

THEME 1: DIFFERENT TYPES OF PLAY

Andrews (2012) and Smith (2010) state that that are various types of play. The participants in this study noticed the following types of play (physical, fantasy/imitation and rhythmic) in their children.

Sub-theme 1.1: Physical play and sport

Physical play such as "skop die bal" (kick the ball) is a type of physical play that is found in this community: "…*the children there maybe they like to play "skop die bal" (kick the ball)."* The most general sports that are played in this poor community on which children spend most of their time are soccer and rugby, as can be confirmed with the following comment: *"...and soccer as well, my boy loves soccer, actually rugby but if he can play soccer it is also fine."* There is support in the literature (Andrews, 2012; Lester & Russell, 2010) that physical play leads to the ability to do things requiring muscle strength and muscle control dexterity. Although play is also an enjoyable activity for the children, it has secondary benefits such as developing motor skills that can help the child to participate in other physical activities apart from play (Andrews, 2012). Smith (2010) states that children can be motivated to keep physically active through

exercise and rough-and-tumble play. The participants also added that when they can buy a tennis ball for their children they will also use that, especially at school: *"And handjie tennis" [hand tennis], they play that also."*

Sub-theme 1.2: Fantasy/imitation and rhythmic play

Another type of play that is found in the community is fantasy or imitation play. This seems more popular amongst the girls in the poor community as is confirmed through the following comment: *"...and then it is always something about beauty, fantasising, especially the girls, they fantasise a lot. Like one of the other participants said, they are imitating, like and especially on beauty, they don't want this toys or watches, they want real stuff."*

> *"...I'm caregiver of a 12-year-old girl at this stage when she's playing I can see she imitates a lot of what's happening around her, like for instance selling, she will always do her best, try to impress her customers when they play shop-shop, she's the manager of the shop, then she will try to be very polite and sell her goods nicely, also advertising stuff so that the people can buy."*

Fantasy or imitation play can assist children to take on their fears or to explore their world (Milteer & Ginsberg, 2012). Children in middle childhood start enjoying play activities and games that involve structured rules (Biddle, Garcia-Nevarez, Henderson & Valero-Kerrick, 2013). Although they still enjoy elements of fantasy, the logic in games and play now becomes the focus of interest (Sobel, 2002). A study by Smith and Lillard (2012) reported that children would stop engaging in pretend play around 11 years of age; this correlates with the finding in this study.

According to most of the participants, rhythmic play is also one of the most popular types of play in this community. This could be because most children in this community are exposed to religious activities such as worship at church, or the ministry, or dancing in the youth group:

> *"...she likes to sing and each and every time when they play she's the one that will pick out the songs, she tells them what songs to be sung";*
> *"... in singing or in some other play when they are playing what is it... other games, they like this rhythmic play, you know, play where there are rhythm or where there are repetition of words, clapping hands and all that";*
> *"...playing church-church where they will sing, dance and clap their hands. ..."*

Games with rhymes such as clapping rhymes, dancing and singing games are popular activities in the middle childhood phase and there has been a wealth of studies globally that carefully detail the rhythmic games that children play on playgrounds, at home and in the street (Marsh, 2010). These rhythmic games such as dancing, singing and clapping can help children improve their vocabulary and self-confidence (Bishop & Curtis, 2001).

Sub-theme 1.3: Types of games in the community

The participants were excited when they began to discuss the types of games in their community. The following games mentioned are typical of their community:

"...scotch (hopscotch), they also play scotch-Kierietjie-Kierietjie...";

"Yes soccer, 'mamma safe', marbles, toll and now and then they have a story of playing blockman patile – we are looking for each other."

Another participant added that children in the community play a lot with cans and tins.

"There are two kinds of "blikkies" (cans/tins): one they put it on top of each other and the other one they make it flat and then they have to put it in a container with their feet."

In the first example they flatten the cold drink cans and then they have to place it into a container with their feet; in the other example they use empty tin food containers to play various games; for example; they build towers or use them when they are playing with marbles.

"It seems the games are more seasonal than we use to play, because I see them now playing with tops and then it differs in the time of year."

The participants agreed that games were more seasonal and the types of games also depended on what was currently popular. Some games highlighted by 2U KIDS (2015) that are mostly played in South Africa are: One-two-beki (skipping game), Hai sedi (hand-clapping game), Sowatsja watsjawa (sing and dance game), hopscotch (leap-jump game).The only similar game identified which the participants in this community also mentioned was hopscotch. The reason for this may be that the children in the community mostly name the games themselves and therefore there can be a variety of names for the same games played.

Sub-theme 1.4: Types of toys in the community

Because they do not have sufficient money to buy toys for their children, most of the participants said that children are forced to be creative. In this specific community participants experienced the following when it came to the self-made types of toys that their children play with.

"Ok like that side near the bush they have slingshots, they do it the whole time, you just see the birds falling there. They make their own slingshots or their older brothers will help. They then use the tube of the bicycle, then they will cut it nice and take a stick then they'll make that slingshot and then they will just shoot."

Another participant added: *"The children also play with kites which they also make themselves; most of their stuff they will make themselves."*

All the participants stated that children in this community were very imaginative in designing their own games and toys.

"They are very creative, so for the kites they will go and look for wool, or they use rope, that rope they will tie together, then they will take bags, plastic bags."

Although the literature (Milteer & Ginsberg, 2012) notes that parents who cannot afford materials on the market may feel disempowered to actively play with and enrich their children using the most effective tools themselves, the participants highlighted that the children were resourceful in making their own toys, and some of the participants stated

that they would assist their children in making these toys, such as kites and dolls. This is supported by Bartie *et al.* (2016), Louw and Louw (2014), and Nwokah, Hsu and Gulker (2013), who also stated that children living in communities with socio-economic challenges are more creative when it comes to the types of toys they play with in the community.

Theme one highlighted the different types of play in the community. The sub-themes that emerged can be seen as the most relevant play for children in the middle childhood phase. These sub-themes included physical play and sport, fantasy and rhythmic play, unique games played in the community, as well as how children create their own toys and games to keep themselves occupied. During the collages most of the caregivers highlighted the aspect of a kind of physical and fantasy play in which the children are involved. Dressing up and children using their imaginations during play are still very common in children's play in this community.

THEME 2: FACTORS INFLUENCING CHILDREN'S PLAY

Where Theme 1 focused on factors influencing caregivers' involvement in their children's play, the following theme focuses on more general factors that have an influence on children's play in this community.

According to Andrews (2012), children will play anywhere, adapting to their surroundings and the time available. Each culture views play in a distinct way and the reaction of adults to play also varies (Smith, 2010). Play can be seen as an effect of culture, as adult culture influences the play that is seen; but it is also a cause of culture, as children's play reproduces but also changes culture over time (Lester & Russell, 2010; Tahmores, 2011). This study identified that, in this specific community, certain factors have influenced the children's play.

Sub-theme 2.1: Environmental, cultural and community influences on play

Most of the participants agreed that children in the community were exposed to negative environmental factors such as the use of hubbly bubbly (an instrument with a base container attached to one or many pipes used for smoking tobacco which is often flavoured).

> *"I'm going to be honest, they are exposed to this hubbly bubbly especially the 11/12-year-olds, they play with the hubbly bubbly, smoking their lungs out. The 11-year ones, because in the community they mingle with this others the older ones and then they don't believe to go to the playgrounds…";*

> *"Then they will be sitting in corners in groups and then they will be starting this and the small ones of 11 years they will be checking their 'ou boeties' (older brothers) with the hubbly bubbly and dagga (illegal substance which is smoked like tobacco) and whatever, they are exposed to those things."*

Children in this community also act out through play what they are exposed to in their community. The following is an example of this given by one of the participants:

> *"…it is highly known that those ladies who are not working whenever they have children or whenever they are pregnant, they are going to get grants, then you will*

see and find the kids playing, you see them taking their bags putting them in their stomach as if they are pregnant and I'll ask what they're doing, they'll say no were going to the grants. And then, you see, you hear the movement of their footsteps in the ground and they (the children) say no were going to the grants, that's what they are exposed to. That's what they are playing."

It was also evident that there is much diversity with regard to different cultures and religions within the community which also influences these children's play:

"Children are befriending other children from unique backgrounds and also adopting that, sometimes, sometimes you don't understand your own child because she is doing the things of those people." [This participant was talking about children growing up in houses with different religious and cultural backgrounds than those of their own; hence the reference to "those people"].

According to Lester and Russell (2010), all communities with their diverse cultures have a great influence on children's play. In South Africa children's diverse backgrounds and different experiences provide them with the opportunities to learn and express themselves through play in relation to their own unique background (Louw & Louw, 2014). Although the literature may deem children growing up in a diverse environment in a positive light with regard to expressing themselves through play, most of the caregivers had an opposite experience, as they felt children in this community are being influenced in a bad way by befriending other children from different backgrounds. Another explanation for this may be that the parents/caregivers included in this study were not used to the multicultural integration which children are embracing in this modern day and age. The culture and community within which the child grows up will have a direct influence on children's play and children's play materials or toys (Louw & Louw, 2014).

Sub-theme 2.2: The impact of technology on play

The last sub-theme regarding factors that influence children's play is one that all the participants mentioned and, although most participants do not have material possessions such as a television and play stations, most of them had cell phones. Participants were of opinion that children will always take their phones and play games on it, or visit friends who have television sets so that they can watch television. It was also noted that most of the participants did not place much value on technology for children early in middle childhood, but starting from age 11 or 12 children will agitate to obtain cell phones or to watch television. The following comments made by participants with regard to the impact that technology has on children's play clearly illustrate this:

"...they'll always take their parents' cell phones and play games on it";

"...and technology is taking a lot of physical play from this children, they don't experience that anymore like we experienced it, but now they are sitting in front of the television and it is only this PlayStation, see technology has taken a lot, cell phones, the language that they are using it is giving them problems in writing correctly at school."

Milteer and Ginsburg, (2012) confirmed that children spend less time engaging in play and physical activity and spend more time engaged in sedentary activities, such as viewing television for hours, playing video games, or listening to music. In contrast to the above findings, Marsh (2010) stated that children and parents are active users of technology and highlighted the benefits of the use of technology in children's play where it increases children's creativity. However, the participants in this research perceived technology only as taking up children's time and keeping children from engaging in more active and physical play. The participants also stated that technology negatively influenced their children's academic development (such as spelling and writing).

It was evident that there were various factors which influenced children's play. These factors included environmental, cultural and community influences such as the use of illegal substances in the community, what children observe and are exposed to, and how they react to these observations. Another aspect which was especially highlighted by the caregivers in their collages was the impact that technology had on their children's play. Most of the caregivers shared the same experience when it came to their children being occupied with technological apparatus, which definitely had an influence on their play.

THEME 3: CONSTRAINTS IN THE COMMUNITY AFFECTING PLAY

Milteer and Ginsburg (2012) as well as Lester and Rusell (2010), confirm the constraints on play present in communities as including poverty, environmental hazards (e.g. presence of inadequate sanitation), safety (when children play outside in the streets where there is increased violence in the community), fewer resources and illnesses as a consequence of poverty (HIV and tuberculosis). Three sub-themes illustrate this theme.

Sub-theme 3.1: The effect of poverty on play

All the participants agreed that poverty affects their children's play and their involvement with their children in play. However, they also saw the positive side and shared with great excitement how creative their children can be. All the participants agreed with the following statement:

> "…it seems like…the poorer the environment the more children create games for themselves."

It was noted in previous research that children from low socio-economic communities were creative in the games they played, or they used what was available in their immediate community (Marsh, 2010; Nwokah *et al.,* 2013). A number of authors such as Brown (2012), Louw and Louw (2014), and Milteer and Ginsburg (2012) suggest that children living in poverty or facing extreme neglect use and adapt natural and man-made items in their living environment for play, reducing the need for commercial toys.

Sub-theme 3.2: Children's safety and lack of resources

Children's safety in the community is one of the aspects caregivers worried about the most. Caregivers stated that approximately 8-10 years ago parents did not need to worry much about their children's safety and children could freely play outside in the streets even at night; but with the increase of violence, child trafficking and drug use in the

community, parents would rather keep their children close to home. The following comments of participants with regard to safety in the community illustrate this:

> *"You don't see a lot of children that play in the streets, now they must ask because it is high crime now and so it is always that we want to know where the children are going, then we will say you're not going there, you're not going down there, you're not going down the street rather play in the yard";*

> *"Today is not safe. If your child goes out you want to know where is your child going, what is she learning there or sometimes the sad factor that I think that the parents must now break away from, I'm mostly speaking to myself, fear of the unknown, you know our children experience others things than us."*

In addition, the caregivers also expressed their constant worry when their children play in the street or not close to home. The caregivers also mentioned that, because they are working longer hours, they can't be with their children after school and so there is no supervision.

A study conducted by Kimbro and Schachter (2011) on 3,448 mothers and children living in cities in the United States found that mothers who lived in poverty-stricken areas feared for their children's safety during outdoor play, which may have restricted the child's free playtime. Another study conducted by Bartie *et al.* (2016) in a low socio-economic community in South Africa found that some parents felt the environment was safe for their children, but most parents were concerned about their children's safety and stated that they would rather their children play indoors to prevent them from getting abducted. This correlates with the findings in this study that caregivers felt safer if their children are kept indoors rather than playing outside.

In this study all the participants agreed that there is a lack of resources in their community and that the resources which are available in the community (like playparks) have various safety hazards. Participants made the following statements with regard to resources in this community and how this influences their children's play:

> *"...they don't believe to go to the playgrounds because there is nothing anyway in our playgrounds";*

> *"And yes they play and they don't believe in play grounds. I think we are short of resources in the community";*

> *"... you can go to that park and there's no slides...."*

In addition to the safety issues expressed above, the participants also did not feel comfortable about sending their children to the playgrounds, as they do not trust the apparatus because it is old, not well maintained and rusty: *"And the play apparatus is not set up completely, it is not safe."*

According to Fearn and Howard (2012), children's play can be influenced by the dynamic interaction between the challenges they face such poverty and the availability of resources. Luckily children are creative by nature and will use things in their immediate environment if there is a lack of resources in their community (Lester &

Rusell, 2010). This was also found in this community where the children utilised material in their environment to create games and toys.

Sub-theme 3.3: Supportive structures in the community

Participants had mixed feelings about supportive community structures. Some participants felt that there are no or few supportive structures in the community (such as safe play areas or groups for children, clubs children can join to practise sports or dancing). This was confirmed with comments such as:

> *"There is nothing that can keep them busy, they must bring a ball, that's the only thing they can play with in our playgrounds";*

> *"You know I've realised during our growing up time there was a lot of structures in the community that you know children could go to and they'll sort of relieve the parents a little bit from playing, we went to the scouts, we'll go to you know, because I realise it seems those community structures are few now."* [This particular participant was of the opinion that when they were children there were supportive structures such as the boy scouts where they went to learn things. This also kept them busy and they had the opportunity to make friends. But he feels that currently there aren't many supportive structures or activities that children can participate in].

Some participants stated that although there are some supportive structures in the community, they are not sufficient to fulfil children's needs, especially when it comes to children's play and recreation.

> *"But there are still some good, her husband [referring to one of the participant's husbands], for example, coach a soccer team in the community, ... he is extremely passionate about these children and I feel these children it is for them, I believe at least they have a goal and it helps them from the negative things so at least there is that."*

Another participant added "...*and then maybe the youth group they go all together to the youth they, we have this spiritual dancing at church where we make sure they are involved with....*"

Bartie *et al.* (2016) found that in a low socio-economic community, the responsibility for looking after the children was shared by many community members, including parents, grandparents, older siblings and neighbours. In this particular community different churches and ministries also served as support structures for parents and children.

Theme three highlighted the constraints in the community that affect children's play, with a specific focus on poverty, safety or lack of resources and supportive structures. Caregivers agreed that poverty has a definite influence on children's play. Some felt that children don't have the resources to keep themselves busy, while most agreed that children growing up in poverty-stricken areas are forced to be creative to keep themselves occupied whilst playing. Most caregivers shared the same fears and concerns about children's safety and stated that, because of violence and crime in the community, they prefer that their children play indoor, which may limit their outdoor play.

Caregivers also agreed that there is a great need for more supportive structures where children can play and spend time with friends in a safe environment.

CONCLUSION

Each child has the right to rest and leisure and to engage in recreational and play activities (United Nations, 2013). Play holds numerous benefits for a child's holistic development and gives children the opportunity to express themselves (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012). The reality is that most children in South Africa face immense challenges such as poverty, which can affect these rights (Louw & Louw, 2014) as well as influence the way they play, as the play of children is influenced by their communities and culture (Ellis, 2011).

Different types of play were identified by the participants; these included physical, fantasy/imitation and rhythmic play. It is evident that the children in this community enjoy participating in sports such as soccer and rugby, while some of the girls play netball. Fantasy or imitation play was found to be more popular amongst the girls. Rhythmic play was found to be one of the most popular types of play in this community; this can be because most children in this community are exposed to religious activities such as worship at the church, the ministry or dancing in youth groups. Certain types of games were found to be typical of this community and it is evident that the environment, culture and community influence how the children play. Poverty definitely has an influence on how their children play, especially with regard to the toys that they have. Children in this community have to think creatively to keep themselves busy.

It is evident that certain factors have an influence on children's play in this community as the children are exposed to negative environmental factors such as the use of hubbly bubbly. The negative influences of the community are acted out in their play. The diversity with regard to the different cultures and religions within the community also influence the children's play; for example, the children use the type of language in their play which is unique to a certain culture in the community.

It was furthermore apparent that the use of technology in this community was seen by the participants as having a negative effect on the children, as it affected their spelling, for example; children sit in front of the television and the caretakers cannot always monitor what the children are watching when it comes to television shows.

It was evident that the constraints in the community also affect the children's play with a specific focus on poverty, safety, or lack of resources and supportive structures. Although poverty affected the children's play, it also had a positive side as the children became creative in making up their own games and toys. On the other hand, the violence and crime in the community forced the children to play indoor and limited their outdoor play. The was a general lack of resources in their community, while the resources that were in the community (such as play parks) had various safety hazards. Children are not safe at the playparks and there are not many supportive structures to which they can send their children to keep them busy after school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that professionals such as social workers who render services to children in this specific age group be aware of the typical games children prefer to play. The findings of this study can furthermore be used as guidance for professionals working with children from this community to take into consideration how these children play and what constraints children face when it comes to play in the community. Professions such as social work, psychology, occupational therapy will integrate play in their work with children. Therefore it will be useful for professionals to take note of the findings and to utilise them in their intervention with children from this kind of community. This may empower professionals with regard to rendering services to children from low socio-economic backgrounds so that they can be aware that play may be different for these children.

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