Abstract

Play in children with mental retardation is one of the least studied areas of research. This study attempts to investigate various aspects of play in children with mental retardation. A distinction is made between 'play behaviour' and 'play activities'. The investigation covers various aspects of play in children with mental retardation including its characteristics and types. It covers the settings, types and involvement of play peers, amount of play in a typical 24-hour activity schedule of these children, preference for use of toys, etc. Associated personal and socio-demographic variables are analysed and discussed.

Measurement of play behaviours and activities in children with mental retardation is carried out in this study using formal observation and key informant interview techniques. The study resulted in development of a psychometrically valid and reliable tools, 'Play Behaviour Checklist' and 'Play Activity Checklist' respectively. It has demonstrated that children with mental retardation show play as in their normal peers. Children with mental retardation show a variety or types of play as in their normal age peers, such as, sensory, motor, cognitive as well as social play respectively.

Play constitutes only a part of typical 24-hour schedule of daily living in children with mental retardation. It measures at a mean of 54.1 minutes (SD: 50.98) and constitutes only 4.1% of the time spent in the 24-hour cycle of a day for the child with mental retardation. Play behaviours of children with mental retardation can be apparently arranged in a sequential series ranging from simple and passive observation of play to a complex understanding of rules and participation in social play. This investigation has succeeded in throwing light on the patterns of existing play behaviours and activities in mild
to moderate grades of children with mental retardation. It has enabled the development of psychometrically reliable and valid tools for measurement of play behaviours and activities in children with mental retardation. The developed tool could become a useful planner for enabling play based therapy for children with mental retardation in school or home settings.