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Children's Perception on Play and Recreation in Dhaka City: A Qualitative Overview

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Abstract

The paper is an attempt to take into cognizance children's views and perceptions about their outdoor play and recreational facilities in Dhaka City. In total 347 children between five and eighteen years of age from all major socio-economic strata were consulted. Qualitative tools were used in order to get their individual and group views on the subject. These tools also gave the opportunity to make them express their views in their own words which is not possible to capture with quantitative statistical assessment tools. The children were mainly asked three questions related to their current leisure practices, their desire on how to spend their leisure and their dream to the best way to spend their leisure time.

It appeared during consultations that children's participations and needs regarding their play and recreation in many cases are different from those of adults. It was also seen that the needs and perceptions vary with age, socio-economic background and gender. A little effort to pay heed to children can contribute in a great way to the physical and mental development of our next generation. A small change in the local environment may have a big impact on children's lives. It was revealed that a child's desire and dreams about their play and recreation are not always unattainable and unrealistic even in the current high density condition of Dhaka City. Although their opinion may not be backed with formal rational and principles, they can show us a new direction to make the Dhaka City more child-friendly without any major interventions.

Keywords--- children's play, recreation, outdoor play, leisure time.

1. Introduction

About 10 Million people live in Dhaka City, which has one of the highest population densities (14,939 people/sq.km) of the world. From a small town with a population of only 200,000 people in 1947, Dhaka grew to a city of 4.2 million in 1987 (Islam, 1987), and has now become a mega city of nearly 10 million (BBS, 2001). This phenomenal increase of population was not matched with proper physical planning; as a result, Dhaka has become a concrete jungle without adequate room for outdoor play and recreational facilities.

Due to the concentration of major socio-economic activities and facilities as well as employment opportunities, many people migrate regularly from different parts of Bangladesh to Dhaka. As a result of population pressure, Dhaka's most parks and open spaces are gradually disappearing from the Dhaka's map. Moreover, parks and playgrounds designed by the City planners merely allocation of space without any consideration of the accessibility, spatial quality and the age of the children. There is a total ignorance of the children's views and perceptions in the design of the outdoor play and recreational facilities in Dhaka City. As a result most of the play and recreational facilities of Dhaka City are seldom used by children.

2. Research Methodology

This paper is an attempt to take into cognizance children's views and perceptions about play and recreation. In total 347 children between five and eighteen years age from all socio-economic strata were consulted individually and in groups. Qualitative tools were used to get their individual and group views. These tools also gave the opportunity to make them express their views in their own words which is not possible to capture with quantitative statistical assessment tools. The

children were mainly asked three questions related to their living spaces, which are:

- a. Existing Leisure Pattern of Children of Dhaka City
- b. How the children of Dhaka City wanted to spend leisure or recreation; and
- c. Dream or imagination about the “Best Ways” of spending the leisure time

The research deals with children from five to eighteen years age-group of the four major socio-economic groups living in Dhaka city. To understand the implications of physical environment, gender and economic condition on the children’s perceptions about their leisure pattern, separate in-depth consultations were conducted with girls and boys of different socio-income groups. For each group, at least two different locations were considered for the in-depth interview and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The research deals with the following four target groups:

- i. Street Children: Children living or working on the street were considered for this group. Altogether 95 street children were interviewed between 5 to 18 years age of age.
- ii. Children living in slums: Children living in slums with their parents belong to this group. Altogether 144 children living in slums were interviewed between five to eighteen years of age group.
- iii. Children from middle income group: Children from middle income families, living in the un-planned areas or in the public housing estates/colony with monthly family income ranging from US\$ 80 to 350/month. Altogether 63 children living colony or unplanned areas were interviewed between five to eighteen years of age group.
- iv. Children from high income group: Children living in the planned or other residential area with minimum family income of US\$ 350/month. Altogether, 45 children living in the planned areas were interviewed between five to eighteen years of age group.

3. Research Findings

3.1. Existing Leisure Pattern of Children of Dhaka City

Watching TV: Watching TV is the most predominant means of recreation for the high income, middle income, lower middle income groups and children staying at the dropping centers. Some of the adolescent girls of the higher income group watch TV for more than 7/8 hours a day, where as the slum children and children staying at the dropping centre watch TV for about 1-2 hours a day.

Outdoor games like cricket and football: Outdoor games are the major means of recreation for adolescent boys of the middle income groups and all the groups of

the children except the adolescent girls. Cricket and football are the common outdoor games the children play.

Hide & Seek, toy kitchen sets (Hari-Patil) etc. : Young girls living in slums play a large number of different games in front of their house or in the streets like hide and seek (Chor-Chor, Hari-Patl).

Sleeping: Sleeping is mentioned as one of the leisure time activities among the children living in the streets and slums.

Story books, drawing pictures, computer games, ludu etc.: Reading story books, drawing pictures, playing computer games, playing indoor games like Snake & Ladder “Ludu” are also some of the leisure time activities mentioned by the children from most of the groups.

Absence of leisure time: Adolescent girls from the middle income groups and slums noted that they don’t have any leisure time. They have to do household chores or look after their siblings during their leisure time. The adolescent girls from higher middle or middle income groups spend their leisure time sitting idle or sometimes gossiping or chatting with friends.

A. Street Children:

As most of the children of this group interviewed at the dropping center, where the street children can take rest and watch TV and play with other children at the dropping centre. The most important finding of the group are:

Watching TV: Watching TV is the predominant means of recreation for this group. Among all the four groups watching children’s programs, movies, dramas, magazine programs are the most favorites. They watch the television mostly during the day time at a fixed time set by the centre authority. “Alef Laila”, a fantasy drama cereal is found to be the most favorite TV program among all the four groups of children (Group 1 and Group 2). They watch the television 3/4 hours a day.

Sleeping: Sleeping is also one of the most desirable habits particularly, among the boys living in streets during their leisure time. They liked sleeping at the dropping centre.

Outdoor games: Outdoor games like cricket, football: Apart from playing indoor games the boys also enjoy playing outdoor games. Many of them mentioned that they like playing cricket, football in the park, and moving around with their friends during their leisure time.

Indoor games (Ludu and Carom) : Girls who are living in streets mentioned that they like to play some indoor games like Ludu and Carom with their friends.

B. Children Living in Slums

Altogether 144 children living in slums were interviewed aged between 5 to 18 years. These children

are living in slums in a very disorganized and congested way and most of them don't have their own television. The following are the major findings about the leisure and recreation pattern:

Outdoor games: Outdoor games like cricket, football: Outdoor games are their major recreational activities. Cricket, football are the common games among the boys.

Hide and Seek: Girls aged between 5-12 years age group like playing variety of games, usually in the streets or in front of their house. Hide and seek is the most favorite game for these little girls.

Watching Television: Watching television is common for all the groups living in slums except adolescent boys, but for a shorter time only 1-2 hours a day. This is because most of them don't have their own television in their house, so they have to go to their neighbor's house to do so. For the adolescent boys, watching TV is not a common leisure activity.

Absence of leisure time: The adolescent girls groups have very limited leisure time particularly for the working group.

Sitting idle: For most of the adolescent girls are sitting idle at home as they are not allowed to go outside due to security reasons.

Household chores and taking care of siblings: Many girls also mentioned that they have to do household chores and take care of their siblings during their leisure time.

Sleeping: Since many of the adolescent boys are the working children, they prefer to sleep at home during their leisure time.

C. Children from Middle Income Families

Altogether 63 children living in colonies or unplanned areas were interviewed aged between 5 to 18 years. The most important findings of the group were:

Watching Television: Watching TV is the predominant recreation for all the three groups except the adolescent boys. Most of the adolescent boys play outdoor games like cricket, badminton etc.

Reading story books: Reading story books and drawing are also means of recreation or leisure time activities for these groups.

Sitting idle and gossiping or chatting with friends: The adolescent girls spend their leisure time sitting idle or sometimes gossiping or chatting with friends.

Indoor games: Playing indoor or board games like "Snack and Ladder" (Ludo) is common for three groups except the adolescent boys.

D. Children of High Income Group

Altogether 63 children living in colonies or unplanned areas were interviewed aged between 5 to 18 years. The most important findings of the group are:

Watching Television: Watching TV is the most predominant means of recreation mentioned by all the four groups. Adolescent girls watch TV 7/8 hours a day and the adolescent boys watch television 1 to 2 hours a day.

Computer games: Playing computer games is also a common recreation for the boys.

Reading story books: Reading story books and comics are the common recreational activities for the girls.

Listening music, walking, chatting with friends: Listening to music and walking on the rooftop, chatting with friends over the telephone are also some of the activities of the adolescent girls.

Playing with toys: Playing with toy cars and dolls are the indoor games played at home by the small boys and girls respectively.

Outdoor game: Playing outdoor games like cricket is also mentioned by some of the boys living in posh residential areas (Dhanmondi and Uttara) in Dhaka.

3.2. How the children of Dhaka City wanted to spend leisure or recreation

Playground: A big clean, even play ground is the most wanted facility mentioned by the boy's groups of all the socio-economic groups of children living in Dhaka City. Playing cricket and football in playgrounds are the most favored by boys of all age group.

Parks and amusement parks: Visiting parks and amusement parks are also mentioned by most of the girls group and young boys of these four socio-economic groups living in Dhaka City.

Indoor games: Gymnasium, swimming pools are the facilities mentioned by the middle income and high income groups, particularly by the girl's groups.

Library: Having a library, or video library are also desired by children from middle and high income groups.

Out door play accessories: Slides, swings, sea-saws are play accessories that are wanted by most of the young children of Dhaka City.

Friends: Young boys and girls of the different socio-economic groups wanted to have more friends close to their living areas.

Own Television: Having own televisions are also wished by many of the children living in slums.

Leisure time: Adolescent girls living in slums wanted to have some leisure time as they didn't have any leisure time, most of the time they do house hold chores or take care of their siblings.

Separate playgrounds for girls: Adolescent girls of middle and higher middle income groups wanted to have a separate playground for girls only.

A. Street Children

Following are the main findings for these groups:

Playground: Big clean playgrounds to play football, cricket and other sports are the most wanted things for the boys living in streets. Whereas the girls are more interested to go to the park.

Park: All the four groups are interested going to children's park for their recreation.

Swimming pool: Except the adolescent girls, the girl of the remaining three groups wants to have a big pool where they can swim.

Hide n' Seek : Playing hide and seek is the most liked game for the small girls living in streets.

Fair: Fairs are also favorite places to visit for the girls

Play tools: The boys also want to have more play tools like bat, ball etc.

Sea beach, mausoleum: Visiting far away places in the country like sea beaches at Coxes Bazar and the mausoleum at Sylhet are also mentioned by some of the adolescent boys.

B. Children Living in Slums

The summary of the findings are as follows:

Playground: Playgrounds are the most wanted facilities for the boy's groups (Group 5 and Group 7). Football and cricket are the most desired games they wanted to play at the playgrounds.

Parks: For young girls, parks and for adolescent girls having their own TVs is the most wanted things. All the four groups wanted to go to the children's park during their leisure time.

Leisure time: The girl's groups mentioned that they don't have any leisure time for themselves. They wanted to have some leisure time .

Clean play ground: The young girl's group wanted to have a clean playing space for them to play.

Friends: All the young children and adolescent girls, except adolescent boys wanted to have more friends in their areas.

C. Children of Middle Income Families

The summary of the findings are as follow:

Parks: The three groups, young girls, boys and adolescent girls all wanted to go to a park for their recreation and during their leisure time.

Playground: The most wanted thing for recreation is a playground for the adolescent boys group.

Amusement park: "Fantasy Kingdom", "Wander land", "Nandan Park" and "Shishu park" are the most favorite amusement parks all the groups wanted to visit.

Playground: The boy's groups wanted to have big playgrounds close to their living areas. The girl's groups also wanted playgrounds but the adolescent girls wanted to have a separate playground where they can only enter.

Library: All the groups wanted to have a library for their recreation.

Play facilities and accessories: Playing accessories like see-saws, slides and swings are also mentioned by some of the young girls and boys. Whereas the adolescent boys wanted to have gymnasiums, video games shops while the adolescent girls wanted to have exercising and aerobics centers for their recreation.

D. Children of High Income Group

The key findings are as follows:

Parks and amusement parks: Visiting parks and amusement parks are the most wanted recreational activity for all the four groups.

Playground: Most of the adolescent boys wanted to play cricket and for that they wanted to have a playground or a roof top with protection.

Friends: The young boy's and girl's groups wanted to have more friends in their apartments or close to their living areas.

Indoor play facilities and library: Gymnasiums, swimming pools, video libraries, are also mentioned by many children of these groups.

Outdoor games: Badminton and basket ball courts are also wanted by the girl's group.

3.3 Children's Dreams and Imaginations about the Best Ways of Spending the Leisure Time or for Recreation

Amusement parks: Visiting different amusement parks situated in and around Dhaka City are the dreams of most of the children living in Dhaka City, but most of the street children imagined to visit Cox's Bazaar sea beach at Chittagong which is about 400 kilometer from Dhaka City.

Zoo: The second most desirable place mentioned by the children of all groups is the Zoo.

Museum, fair etc.: Museum, fair, "Savar Monument", "Martyred Intellectual Monument", the national assembly building, were the dream places of many of the slum and middle income children. Many of the street children have a dream to visit many places outside Dhaka City. They would like to see the different places of natural, historical and other religious interests like Chittagong to see hills, Sundarban to see forest, Sylhet to see the Mazaar, Madhupur for forest and archeological sites, Pabna to see the mental hospital etc. Some of the high income children mentioned about visiting Malaysia and Darjeeling in India as their dream places.

Village: Visiting village homes and country side are also mentioned by many of the street, slum and middle income children. Even some children living in streets and slums mentioned that they dream of going back to their village homes.

River: Most of the children dream about visiting water body, e.g. Cox's Bazaar sea beach is most of the children of all socio-economic groups wanted to visit.

Apart from Cox's Bazaar, visiting ponds and river banks, and an island surrounded by water are the dream places for the children living in Dhaka City.

Picnic: Going to picnic is also dreams of the street, slums and middle income children.

Ice cream and Chinese food: Young children living in streets mentioned about having ice-cream and Chinese food at free of cost as their dream, the children living in slums mentioned about having their own TV at their house and bi-cycle so that they can move around wherever they wanted to as their dream. Eating out at Pizza Hut, visiting friend's house are their best leisure time mentioned by the high income groups of Dhaka City.

Playground: Children of middle income group mentioned about their dream is to have a big play ground and Rickshaw rides in good weather as their dream.

A. Street Children:

The key findings are:

Sea beach and Zoo: For the young boys living in streets, the first two dreamed places to spend their leisure time are the beach in Cox's Bazaar and the Zoo. For young girls, it is visiting the children's park and the zoo. The best two places the adolescent boys group imagined for their recreation are visiting the Sylhet Mazaar and Cox's Bazaar and for adolescent girls, it is visiting the Zoo and the children's park.

Amusement park: Visiting the children's parks is also the dream of all children, girls and boys of this group.

Monument, park etc.: Apart from Cox's Bazaar, the two girl's groups dreamed places are within or adjacent Dhaka City like "Victoria Park", "Nowab Bari Park", "Ramna "park", the museum, "Shafipur Ansar Club" and "Fantasy kingdom" at Ashulia etc.

Visiting places outside Dhaka: Both the young and adolescent boys groups mentioned many places outside Dhaka City like Chittagong, Sundarban, Sylhet, Rangamati, Madhupur, Pabna etc. as their dreamed places to go to.

Picnic: Going for picnics is also mentioned by the boy's groups while having ice-cream is mentioned by the girls groups.

Own TV: Having their own TV and car also their dream.

Chinese food: One young boy mentioned about his dream to have Chinese food for free. One young boy mentioned to go abroad. One adolescent boy mentioned about visiting "Bagha Club" (British club) and one adolescent girl wished that her parents drop her at school by a car.

B. Children Living in Slums

The key findings are:

Amusement park and monuments: Visiting amusement parks and zoos are the two most desired places to go to for all the groups. Other than these two places, visiting the museum, fairs, the airport, the assembly building, "Savar Monument", "Martyred Intellectual Monument" and the Ashulia river bank etc are also their dream places.

Play accessories: The young groups wanted to have more playing accessories like swings, see-saws and slides.

Village: Going back to the village is a dream for all the groups.

Park, garden in slum areas: One young boy mentioned that his dream is to create a park in the slum; one young girl mentioned "my dream is to create a garden with fruit trees in the slum"; one adolescent boy dreamt about having a by-cycle of his own so that he can go anywhere he likes; one adolescent girl mentioned to have a library in the slum as her best imagination.

C. Children of Middle Income Families

The key findings are as follows:

Amusement park: Visiting amusement parks like "Fantasy Kingdom", "Nandan Park" and "Wonder Land" are the dream places for the younger children's groups and adolescent girl's, whereas having a play ground is the dream for the adolescent boy's group (Group 11).

Sea beach, zoo etc: Visiting Cox's Bazaar sea beach, Zoos and the museums are also the dream places for the younger children's groups and adolescent girl's groups, whereas having a cleaner and better space for playing is mentioned by the boy's groups (Group 9 and Group 11).

Fair, river side etc: Going to fun fairs, book fairs and river banks are also mentioned by many of the children of these groups.

Playground: One young boy has a dream to have a big playground, a big pond; having a place like a village is the dream of a young girl; having an indoor play area is a dream of the adolescent boys and a Rickshaw ride during good weather is a dream for an adolescent girl.

D. Children of High Income Group

The key findings are as follows:

Amusement park: Visiting amusement parks like "Fantasy Kingdom", "Wonder Land", "Sports Zone", "Fantasy World" are their dream places for most of the young children from Group 13 and Group 14. Whereas playing cricket, musical instruments and having a large playing field and a basket ball court and a badminton court are dreams for the adolescent boys and girls respectively.

Eating out, libraries, swimming pools etc.: Libraries, swimming pools, eating out at "Pizza Hut", visiting friend's house are the best ways of spending leisure time.

Riverside: Going to riversides is also mentioned by many of these groups.

Going abroad for holiday: One young boy has a dream to go to Malaysia; one young girl mentioned to do shopping with her parents as a dream; one adolescent boy mentioned about going to an island surrounded by water and an adolescent girl mentioned about visiting Darjeeling in India as her dream.

4. Conclusions

This paper is an attempt to take into cognizance children's views and perceptions about their living spaces. It appeared from the consultations that children's perceptions and needs regarding their living spaces in many cases are different from those of adults. It was also seen that the needs and perceptions on play may vary with socio-economic background and gender. For instance, providing small playground close to their house can create a great sense of happiness among children. A little effort to pay heed to children can contribute in a great way to the physical and mental development of our next generation. A small play provision in the local environment may have a big impact on children's lives. It was also revealed that a child's dreams about their play and leisure are not always unattainable and unrealistic even in the current high density condition of Dhaka City. Although their opinion may not be backed with formal rational and principles, they can show us new directions to make Dhaka city more child-friendly without any major investment.

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