

Social and Recreational Activities of Children with Severe Developmental Disabilities

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Background

Social and recreational activities can have a positive influence on quality of life.

- However, children with severe disabilities face challenges in their social communication and interactions with peers.
- In fact, children with developmental disabilities (DD) engage in fewer social and recreational activities compared to their peers without DD (Orsmond et al., 2004).

Social and Recreational Activities

Entails the amount of contact that an individual has with community services and events outside their home environment

It remains uncertain *how children with DD and children with autism differ* in this important area of functioning. It is reasonable to suspect that diagnosis may contribute to their level of activity; however, it has rarely been examined.

For instance, children with DD participate in more recreational activities with peers and had significantly more friends than children with Autism (Solish, Perry, & Minnes, 2010).

Insight into the factors that predict the level of social and recreational activities of children with DD who have and do not have Autism may impact clinical practices and related policy.

- Past research has shown that level of support, problem behaviours and family's level of socialization of children with DD may predict a child's social inclusion, which includes social and recreational activities (Matson et al., 2010; Jones & Frederickson, 2010; Hundert et al., 1998; Orsmond et al., 2004; Solish et al., 2010).

To date there has been little research on the success of social and recreational activities for children with DD, especially in the case of children with "severe" DD.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, it will examine how children with severe DD and autism differ on level of social and recreational activities. Second, it will examine how child and family factors influence a child's social and recreational activities. Specifically, it will investigate whether age, diagnosis, problem behaviours, health, communication skills, and support needs predict child social and recreational activities

RQ1: What is the frequency of social and recreational activities for children with DD and Autism?

RQ2: How does the level of social and recreational activities for children with DD compare to that of children with Autism?

RQ3: What child characteristics will predict child social and recreational activities?

Methods

GO4KIDDS investigates the health, wellbeing, and social inclusion of school-aged children with severe DD and their families.

- Online Basic Survey in Report Card Survey
- Recruited from national associations and organizations across Canada via websites, news letters and direct mailings



Methods (Cont' d)

	DD (n = 85)	Autism (n = 93)
Age (6-18 years)	M = 11.55 SD = 4.12	M = 11.61 SD = 3.99
Gender	48 (56.5%) Boys 35 (41.2%) Girls	77 (82.8%) Boys 14 (15.1%) Girls

Social and Recreational Activities

5 Point Likert Scale: *Never* (1) to *Often* (5)
e.g., Does your child...

- Spend unstructured time with peers?
- Go on social outings?
- Go to special occasions with friends?
- Play on sports teams?
- Take lessons?
- Take part in community activities?
- Take part in social & recreational programs for children with disabilities?

Behaviour Problems

Frequency (past 2 months)
Never (1) to Hourly (5)
▪ Self-injurious
▪ Stereotyped
▪ Aggressive/Destructive

Health

Checklist of health problems
e.g., seizures, heart problems, asthma

Communication/Social skills

- Understands/uses language?
- Social interaction with family/other children?

Support

What level of support needed?
▪ Requires for almost all aspects of life (1)
▪ Does not require support (5)

Table 1.
Descriptives of Independent and Dependent Variables

	Min	Max	M	SD	Skew
Age	2	20	11.54	4.09	.15
Communication	0	21	13.05	3.97	-.37
Behaviour Problems	0	15	6.51	2.99	.28
Health	0	40	10.35	9.21	.87
Support Needs	0	5	2.29	1.09	.29
Social & Rec. Activities	0	37	20.87	6.78	-.72

Results

Table 2. Descriptive Insight into Social and Recreational Activities (n = 171)

	Un-structured Time	Social Outings	Special Occasions	Sports Teams	Lessons	Community Activities	Social & Recreational Programs
No Opportunity	12 (7%)	4 (2.3%)	13 (7.6%)	33 (18.2%)	15 (8.8%)	22 (12.9%)	18 (10.5%)
Never	42 (24.6%)	13 (7.6%)	43 (25.1%)	84 (49.1%)	43 (25.1%)	72 (42.1%)	50 (29.2%)
Rarely	54 (31.6%)	34 (19.9%)	60 (33.1%)	19 (11.1%)	25 (14.6%)	22 (12.9%)	21 (12.3%)
Sometimes	43 (25.1%)	51 (29.8%)	39 (21.5%)	15 (8.8%)	41 (24.0%)	17 (9.9%)	31 (18.1%)
Often	10 (5.8%)	44 (25.7%)	8 (4.4%)	12 (7.0%)	24 (14.0%)	14 (8.2%)	25 (14.6%)
Very Often	3 (1.8%)	18 (10.5%)	1 (.6%)	1 (.6%)	15 (8.8%)	14 (8.2%)	18 (10.5%)

Results (cont'd)

Table 3. Children with DD versus Autism on Social and Recreational Activities (n = 178)

	M	SD
DD	21.90	6.47
Autism	20.07	6.67

As shown in Table 3, there are *no differences* in social and recreational activities between children with DD and Autism.

Table 4. Predicting Social and Recreational Activities (n = 178)

	R ²	B	SE B	β
Step 1	.02			
Age		.06	.12	.04
Diagnosis		-.91	.49	-.14
Step 2	.16			
Behaviour Problems		.31	.17	.14
Health		.06	.05	.08
Communication/ Social Skills		.62	.12	.37*
Step 3	.17			
Support Needs		.45	.52	.07

Note. * $p < .001$

Communication was the Strongest Predictor of Social and Recreational Activities for Children with DD and Autism (See Table 4)

Discussion

- The vast majority of parents reported that their children never or rarely engaged in social and recreational activities while some report that there are no opportunities.
- However, more than a third of parents reported that their children engaged in most activities with less children engaging in community activities and sports teams.
- Children with ASD and DD did not differ on social and recreational activities, this is interesting considering the inherent social impairments (Solish, Perry, & Minnes, 2010).
However, this may be due to the severity of the population included in the study
- Communication predicted social and recreational activities. Surprisingly, problem behaviour and support needs did not
- Future research should consider with whom children are participating in these activities (Solish, Perry, & Minnes, 2010)
- Knowledge of the factors that predict social and recreational activities may help service providers and policy makers to attune their services to the needs of the child while supporting family practices involved in promoting social and recreational opportunities.