PSIWORLD 2013

Parents ask: what should we do with preschool children in their spare time?

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Abstract

Spare time activities of preschool children and their parents were the subject of this research. For this study were investigated about 162 parents of preschool children and tested the assumptions that preschool parents prefer to spend their time more in parks, playgrounds detrimental to cultural, artistic or sporting variants of leisure; that preschool parents have a reduced capacity to negotiate spare time to be spent with their children and that preschool boys practice many sports and girls prefer arts activities. Results show that preschool parents prefer to spend their spare time with their children more in nature and playgrounds than artistic activities or sporting activities.

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Keywords: spare time; parents of preschool children; spare time activities; preschool children; leisure;

1. Literature Review

The literature cites several ways in which spare time or leisure is defined: as an activity, like playing, as recreation (Godbey, 1994), state of mind, quality of life (Harper, 1997; Isao-Ahola & Mannelli, 2004; Roberts, 2006). For leisure are considered several functions: rest, fun, personality development (Dumazedier, 1974), education - to learn a healthy, active lifestyle, learn about moral values (Veal, 1992, Siegenthaler & Gonzalez, 1997; Henderson, Bialeschki, 2007; Shaw, Dawson, 2010). For preschool children, spare time during a day is the time left

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after „work”, after the activities within kindergarten, extracurricular activities and personal necessities contingencies. There is spare time daily, in weekends and the time during the holidays. The spare time or leisure varies from child to child depending on age, gender, personality, personal rhythm in activity, family of children (Zick & Bryant, 1996; Larson, Verma, 1999; Sayer, Bianchi & Robinson, 2004). Specialized studies indicate that: parents who work in shifts have less spare time to spend together with their children than parents who work in the same interval daily (Volger, Ernst, Nachreiner & Hänecke, 1988); parents who do not work are not spending more hours with their children compared to parents who work (Bianchi, 2000; Zick & Bryant, 1996; Gauthier, Smelendez, & Furstenberg, 2004; Sayer, Bianchi & Robinson, 2004); mothers spend more time caring for children, while fathers spend more time in learning activities and playing activities (Bryant & Zick, 1993; Fleck, 1997; Shaw, 2009).

Children together with their parents decide upon the type of activities that will take part (sports, watching TV, playing at home/in the park, cultural and artistic activities, and so on). Factors influencing elections leisure activities are: joy and freedom of choice (Shaw, 2009). Aguiar & Hurst (2007) mention as leisure activities: watching TV, playing games with friends and family, outdoor games, socializing on the phone/Internet, attending social events/sports, reading, watching movies/theater, listening to music, playing computer games, playing a musical instrument. Guys prefer: sports (football, basketball, cycling), video games, watching television, and girls prefer: cycling, watching television, dancing, reading (Harrell, Gansky, Bradley & McMurray, 1997; Fjortoft, Kristoffersen & Sage, 2010). Boys are more active than girls (Tucker, 2008). Children from high socio-economic status, especially boys, have reported a higher proportion of sedentary activities than children with lower socio-economic status (Harrell, Gansky, Bradley & McMurray, 1997).

Singer, Singer, D'Agostino & DeLong (2009) reported that the most common activity performed by children is watching TV, followed by playing outdoors. Playing out is the activity that kids enjoy most and parents say that little ones would rather play outside than inside. However, the children investigated reported spending more time on computer activities and / or TV compared to the time spent outdoors (Wen, Kite, Merom & Rissel, 2009; Anderson, Economos & Must, 2008; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001; Taylor, Murdoch, Book, Gerrard, William & Taylor; 2009 Sisson, Broyles, Baker & Katzmarzyk, 2010). Most children activities were sedentary, activities spend in the interior in a higher proportion than in the open (Taylor, Murdoch, Carter, Gerrard, William & Taylor, 2009).

Was noted the permissivity of children to play outside is limited for safety reasons invoked by parents (Carver, Timperio & Crawford, 2008). Parental concern about road safety (Timperio, Crawford, Telford & Salmon, 2004; Carver, Timperio & Crawford, 2008; Handy, Cao & Mokhtarian, 2008), the neighbors would be upset if the kids would make noise outside (Gleave, 2010), to crime, delinquency, to strangers (Wright, 2004). Bell, Wilson & Liu (2008) find that neighborhood design should be such as to encourage physical activity, the existence of parks, recreation areas, reducing traffic hazards. Tucker, Irwin, Gilliland, Larsen & Hess (2009) found that neighborhood and recreational opportunities significantly positive influence children to practice physical activities. Proximity to an area of leisure, safety parks, playgrounds design (Godbey, 2009) social cohesion in the neighborhood (Aarts, Wendel-Vos, van Oers, van de Goor & Schuit, 2010), the existence of active recreation facilities, programs, organized sports, natural features, bigger, better maintenance and safety are factors that increase the participation rate of children in outdoor activities. It is very important support from the parents, and to ensure safe and enjoyable opportunities to be active little ones (Heitzler, Martin, Duke & Huhman, 2006). The children said that they liked the most out was fun / enjoyment, pleasure of experiencing new places / things and relaxation (Roussou, 2004).

2. Research Design

Objectives of the research focused on identifying and analyzing leisure activities of parents and pre-school children and on identifying the negotiation level of parents with preschool children for spare time activities and analyzing these activities according to children’s gender. The research hypotheses were: 1. Suppose preschool parents choose to spend their time with the children at playgrounds, in parks at the expense of artistic (theaters, libraries, children's clubs) or sports (sports clubs, gyms, rinks) activities. 2. Parents of preschoolers have a limited capacity to negotiate spare time spent with their children. In the research, the main method used was Questionnaire Survey. The questionnaire used investigates the possibilities and ways of leisure of both preschool children and children and their parents on dimensions such as: information about the child's life, information about leisure
opportunities, information about the child's spare time, socio-demographic data. The questionnaire was developed and validated especially for this research (Cronbach Alpha = 0.893). Lot of research included 162 parents of preschoolers. Of these 79.6% (129 subjects) were female, while the remaining 20.4% (33 subjects) were male. In terms of marital status: 148 parents (91.4%) say they are married, 7 parents are unmarried (4.3%), 5 parents (3.1%) parents are divorced and two (1.2%) are widowed. Most parents had 41.4% of children in first level (3-4 years), 33.3% of children in the middle level (4-5 years) and the rest 25.4% were parents of children in the third level (5-7 years). Most parents, 58%, had one child, 38.3% had two children, 3.1% had three children and only 0.6% have more than three children. Regarding income, 59 parents (36.4%) said that the family's monthly income is around 400 Euro, and 42 parents (25.9%) that income less than 400 Euro, 31 parents (19.1%) have an income of 350 Euro, by 4.9% (8 subjects) claim to have 200 to 300 Euro, the remaining 6 parents (3.7%) claiming to have an income of less than 250 Euro.

3. Results

We assumed in the first hypothesis that preschool parents choose to spend their time with the children in playgrounds, in parks at the expense of artistic activities (theaters, libraries, and children’s clubs) or sports (sports clubs, gyms, rinks). One item of the questionnaire is investigating ways of leisure as Table 1. shows in detail, preferred modalities. It is noted that among leisure preferences are parks, even if are special designed for parks games (93.8% of the parents - of which 53.1% often), whether only parks (80.9% of parents - which 71.6% often), and playgrounds for children (88.3% of the parents - of which 52.5% often). The results for the affirmative responses are significant at p<0.05, t (162) having values between 1 and 134.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>Don't know/No answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Parks</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parks with playgrounds</td>
<td>71.6%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cinemas/places running movies</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Puppet theaters/auditoriums for children</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pools/Swimming Pools</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sports Clubs</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Gyms/places to practice sports</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kids Club</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Rinks/Ice-skating places</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Places to practice arts activities</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Playgrounds for children</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Libraries for children</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Children's play-centers</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Places to celebrate birthdays</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cultural and artistic activities are not visible among leisure preferences of parents. However, if were chosen, preferences indicates theater for puppets 64.2% of parents - of which 24.7% rarely and places where you can practice arts activities (music, dance, arts, creative, etc.) 43.2% of parents - of which 19.1% sometimes. Much less parents reported when it comes to cinema attendance (29.6%), libraries (26.6%) and toy libraries/ludotecs (14.8%). Regarding sports, we can say that the situation is much better. Thus, 60.5% of parents - of which only 14.8% often argue that they prefer to walk, or rather to take the children to swimming/swimming pools (swimming classes), 45.0% of parents - of which only 8% often go to the rink (mention the place where research was conducted is a
mountain) and 35.8% of parents - of which only 6.8% said they go to gyms/places where you can practice sports (most or the child is enrolled in a group of sports: karate classes, dance, etc.). A small percentage of parents, 24.7%, of which 6.2% often report to go with the child to different clubs (in fact the child in sport: football, tennis, basketball and so on). If we make a comparison between the three groups observation, we note that parents of small group (3-4 years) prefer to go with children in parks and playgrounds designed for children while parents large group (5-6 years) diversified activities with children ranging from sports (sports clubs, gyms, rinks) and cultural activities, arts (libraries, creative circles). A possible explanation for this situation is the parents' small group of children to form and develop general motor skills at this young age, than the children can grow to be geared towards sports and / or cultural and artistic.

Confirmation comes from the results of the item investigating parents who prefer to do in their free time with their children. Parents prefer to leave the kids out (87% of them often and very often). Next activity immediately following ranks - walk in the park is chosen by 85.8% of parents (139 often and very often), the percentages were almost equal. Both are aimed by the leisure activities in nature, but it has a very high degree of parental involvement. Ranked third, there is a task that requires dynamism and involvement from parents: to play different games with the child. Percentage of parents who carry out this activity is 80.9% (131 parents). It follows two static events: reading of stories, poems, writings, and so on performed by 72.2% of parents often and very often (131 parents) and watching various TV programs undertaken by 47.3% of parents often and very often (77 parents).

According to the second hypothesis: suppose that parents of preschool children have a reduced capacity to negotiate free time to be spent with their children, we can say that our results are concerned, only 40% of parents say that negotiating schedule free time with their children (always, very often, often) and 28.4% of parents sometimes negotiate. Worrying is the percentage of 16% of parents who never negotiate leisure program. Gratifying be registered increasing trend of results, if we compared the three different age groups studied. Thus, if the parents of children aged 5-6 years the percentage who always negotiate very often, often is 31.7% (13 parents of 42) for parents of children aged 4-5 years the percentage increases slightly to 37% (20 parents of 54) and for parents of children aged 3-4 years the percentage increases to 47% (32 parents of 67). If we parents by the age they have noticed that those who always negotiate very often, often parents are aged between 31-39 years - 44.18% (57 parents of 129), followed by those aged 20 - 29 years - 30% (3 of 10 parents). Parents aged 41-49 years always negotiate very often, often the lowest percentage: 22.72% (5 of 22 parents) and single parent aged 51-59 years not negotiate leisure program. Mother’s negotiate leisure to a higher percentage: 42.6% (55 of 129) than fathers, only 30.3% (10 of 33). And in terms of marital status, married and divorced respondents negotiate free time in proportion of 40.5% (60 of 148 parents) and 40% (2 of 5 parents), followed by unmarried respondents who only 25% (2 of 8) negotiate free time. Depending on the number of children, parents with three children are best in negotiating free time: 60% (3 of 5) followed by parents with one child: 43.6% (41 of 94), the final position being of the parents with two children, 33.9%.

4. Conclusions

The outputs of this research confirmed the results of the first hypotheses: preschool parents prefer to spend their spare time with their children in: parks (44.4%), playgrounds (42%) ignoring most of the artistic opportunities of spending leisure (theatres, libraries, children's clubs) (11.7%) or sports (11.7%). Preschool parents’ reports reduced negotiating abilities when coming to decide how to spend time with their children, only 40% of the parents negotiate spare time (this is by summing the options always, very often and often). This result confirmed the second hypothesis, too. As we expected, there were some genre differences for the spare time spent doing artistically activities – 8.64% for girls and only 3.70% boys.

The typical profile of the parent that negotiate leisure with his own child has most of the following features: women, married or divorced, aged 31-39 years old, her child is aged 3-4 years old, has two or three children and an income between 250-400 Euro.

Reviewing the research results a suggestion for better parenting skills would be to reduce even for one day per week the time children spent in parks, in playgrounds and to guide and engage the child in playing sports or other artistic activities according with the interests, age and particular preferences.
References


