IMPORTANCE OF CLEAN, GREEN AND SAFE SPACES FOR THE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF FEMALES IN THE OLD CITY OF HYDERABAD, INDIA

Abstract

Parks are a key feature in the facilities available in any neighborhood or community for physical development of young children. Physical and mental health as well as school performance are dependent on healthy behavior and activities that children engage in during early childhood. Consistent physical activity also contributes to physical fitness, cognitive development and prevents mental illnesses like depression and anxiety. Open, green, safe places are also important for retired senior citizens.
There is a greater need than ever before to create local environments where youth and children can engage in safe physical activities so that children of every generation can grow up to be healthy and sound adults.

Urban spaces that lack parks and recreational spaces become centers for illnesses and diseases. Most clustered cities and towns have small flats and houses where children have limited space to run and play. streets are not safe for small children to cycle or play games like volleyball, cricket or basketball. Moreover, the lack of safe
And clean parks affect the growth and physical activity of girls and senior citizens in particular.
Physical play has also been dangerously substituted by digital games, which give the illusion of recreation but actually adds to the danger of sedentary life in children and adolescents.

Hence, urban communities have children who grow up with acquired non-communicable diseases- diabetes, sensory processing disorders, acquired disabilities etc in overpopulated clusters like the old city of Hyderabad. India has become a concrete jungle with no urban planning for recreation of different population groups and

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increasing cases of mental illnesses. This research especially focuses on the need for parks for women and young school girls.

Keywords: girls who play, physical activity, playgrounds, lack of parks, clean green spaces, mental and physical health.

I. INTRODUCTION

Global evidence affirms the importance of regular physical activity for children for better physical health, including cardiorespiratory fitness, bone development and improved weight status, as well as enhanced mental, social, and cognitive health (Biddle, S. J., & Asare, M.,2011). Despite these benefits, the majority of children worldwide do not achieve the recommended daily 60 min of moderate-to vigorous-intensity physical activity (MVPA). (Aubert, S., Barnes, J. D., Abdeta, C., Abi Nader, P., Adeniyi, A. F., Aguilar-Farias, N., ... & Tremblay, M. S., 2018)

Physical Activity is clearly linked to reductions in risk for cardiovascular disease, (Pinckard, K., Baskin, K. K., & Stanford, K. I., 2019) hypertension (Pescatello, L. S., Buchner, D. M., Jakicic, J. M., Powell, K. E., Kraus, W. E., Bloodgood, B., ... & Piercy, K. L., 2019) and type 2 diabetes (Pinckard, K., Baskin, K. K., & Stanford, K. I., 2019) as well as improved bone health, mood, and sleep. However, very few adults engage in physical activity on a regular basis. Children can also build friendships among their peers and learn to share, resolve conflicts, develop self-advocacy and leadership skills through physical activity.(Milteer, R. M., Ginsburg, K. R., Council on Communications and Media Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Mulligan, D. A., Ameenuddin, N., Brown, A., ... & Swanson, W. S., 2012).Children who play together grow up to have stronger bonding and friendships than those who don't. .(González, K., Fuentes, J., & Márquez, J. L., 2017) It is important that children have a seasoned coach who can guide them to play different age appropriate sports or games and gain competency. During these guided activity sessions, young children will learn to be comfortable with the uncomfortable sensations associated with physical activity, such as increased heart rate,breathing, cramps, and perspiration. It has been found that children who are able to regulate their emotions through games and channelise their energies turn out to score better in academics- math and reading assessments. (Becker, D. R., McClelland, M. M., Loprinzi, P., & Trost, S. G., 2014)

Healthy behaviors engaged in during childhood are essential for school performance, learning, physical and mental health and development, as well as important in the prevention of chronic conditions through adulthood. One metaanalysis that focused on the intersection of physical and mental health found a small but significant treatment effect of physical activity interventions on reduced depressive symptoms among youth 5–19 years old. (Brown, H. E., Pearson, N., Braithwaite, R. E., Brown, W. J., & Biddle, S. J., 2013) .A more recent meta-analysis evaluating physical activity intervention randomized controlled trials found a significant moderate overall effect on depressive symptom reduction.(Loh, V. H., Veitch, J., Salmon, J., Cerin, E., Thornton, L., Mavoa, S., ... & Timperio, A.,2019). Thus, to be successful, programs that are situated in public parks require not only an examination of access but equity in approaches to ensure that all age groups of people- children, youth and senior citizens can use parks' resources to reach desired health outcomes. Quantitative and qualitative research has shown that playgrounds, shade, greenery, active recreation facilities, sports features (e.g.courts,fields), natural and water features, trees for climbing, open space, and sports programs are all important features for facilitating physical activity in young adults. (Timperio, A., Giles-Corti, B., Crawford, D., Andrianopoulos, N., Ball, K. Salmon, J., & Hume, C. 2008).

Parks provide opportunities for social interaction, relaxation and contact with nature, and also offer a supportive environment through the provision of activity-conducive amenities, such as playgrounds for climbing and swinging (Adams, J., Veitch, J., & Barnett, L., 2018) and grassy open space and sports features for active recreation (Cohen, D. A., Ashwood, J. S., Scott, M. M., Overton, A., Evenson, K. R., Staten, L. K., ... & Catellier, D., 2006). In addition, parks are sometimes described as an antidote to counterbalance the technological saturation among children. (Loukaitou-Sideris, A., & Sideris, A., 2009) Further, research has demonstrated that exercise performed in nature (green exercise) may confer greater health benefits, such as reduced stress and improved emotional well-being and overall mental health, than activity in other urban settings.(Gladwell, V. F., Brown, D. K., Wood, C., Sandercock, G. R., & Barton, J. L., 2013) The diverse benefits of clean, green spaces include reduction in global temperature, noise and improved air quality. The enabling environment for physical activities reduces the burden of non-communicable diseases.

Physical activity is also extremely important for retired senior citizens. With shrinking house spaces in Indian metropolitan cities and the rapid growth of apartments versus ground villas, the space for an evening walk has disappeared from neighborhoods. Apart from that, the clustered, narrow lanes, filth, line of beggars and stray dogs makes streets outside apartments unfavorable for walking.

3.3% of global deaths are caused due to poor physical activity and inaccessibility to recreational areas (WHO, 2019b). It has been found that regular park users have less instances of cardiovascular diseases and instances of diabetes than those who don't use the park frequently (Tamosiunas et al., 2014). Studies have shown that proximity of people to green parks can lead to greater frequency of physical activity, reduced weight, lower coronary heart disease, and improved interpersonal skills. In addition, visibility of the park facilitates rest and relaxation, leading to improved mood, self-esteem, reduced stress, reduced mental fatigue, greater ability to focus and concentrate, enhanced well-being, and resilience (WHO, 2017). It is very important that the human race understands its interdependence on other species of the planet. It has been proven without doubt that people who are close to nature and go for regular walks into green spaces are more aware and conscious of their surroundings. The clearing of the trees for construction of road networks coupled with the heavy traffics increase the temperature, noise and air pollution, which can cause and aggravate a number of respiratory illnesses such as pneumonia and asthma, mental health problems and other infectious diseases. For instance, according to a recent review, air pollution was attributed to 500,000 lung cancer deaths, 1.6 million chronic obstructive pulmonary disease deaths, 19% of all cardiovascular deaths, and 21% of all stroke deaths (Schraufnagel et al., 2019). Along with medical prescriptions, doctors are now advising change in lifestyle, physical activity, and a walk in the green space to their patients (James et al., 2016).People living in gated communities that have green spaces are more likely to maintain healthier lifestyles and have more discipline in their routines (Siqueira Reis et al., 2013). People are motivated to walk when the walking spaces such as footpaths and walking trails are aesthetically pleasing with adequate green trees and shade with less noise and air pollution (Southworth, 2005).

The allotment for urban/community gardening helps secure the areas for greenery and increases opportunities for growing organic food. A lot of 'organic communities' are now coming up where residents grow their own food. This not only helps them to be physically fit,

but also allows them to make clear choices in what they consume (Wakefield et al., 2007). Apart from this, physical exercise, reduced stress and consumption of organic food make communities happier, thus reducing the economic costs of hospitalization and medicines.

The growth of roads without footpaths and lack of greenery, hampers the opportunity for physical exercise and evening walks.(Kondo et al., 2018). In the future, due to the shrinking urban green spaces (UGS), residents may have to rely on indoor spaces for physical activities, which may not achieve the manifold benefits of clean, green parks that are mentioned above. The problem is aggravated for women more than men due to limitations in accessibility of suitable spaces for physical activity and recreation.

Findings

No of Girls N= 115	Types ff Responses		
1. Where do you go to play ?	64% play in school only	30% have nowhere to go	6% go to parks far away
2. Can you run 500m -1km ?	50% have no idea	31.6% can run easily	18.4% can't run at all
3. How do you feel after playing and exercising ?	79% love it	19% get tired	2% don't want to play at all
4. Do you know how to play basketball and football ?	51% want to learn but have no safe space	29% learnt in school	20% don't know how to play
5. Do you go for a long walk ?	45% want to go, but don't have a safe, clean space	29% go for walks in the streets	26% don't go for walks
6. Whenever you get a chance to visit green nature spaces, does it uplift your mood?	89% said Yes	9% said sometimes	2% said they have not noticed any change
7. Is there a safe, clean, green park in your neighborhood for girls and women?	83.3% said NO	16.7% said yes	
8. Do you ever feel like escaping to any natural outdoors after a stressful week/day?	89% said Yes, all the time	9% said not really	2% they have never been, so don't know
9. Do you feel that you would have better overall health if you got a chance to walk and run everyday?	89% said Yes, definitely	9% said not really	2% they have never been, so don't know
10. Do you feel that streets are unsafe for women and small children? (because of dogs,eve-teasing, beggars, filth etc.)	95% said yes	5% said I never go out	
11. Do you like going for a walk in the neighborhood streets or alleys (as an exercise)?	95% said No	5% said I never go out	
12. Would you like to have an open, clean, green park for women and children ONLY ?	83.3% said yes	16.7% said it does not matter	

Young girls ranging from 10 - 33 years were included in a survey that aimed to gather data to check accessibility and availability of green spaces for young girls in the old city of Hyderababd. The survey also aimed to discover if women had the will to play games and space to go for walks independently.

- **Finding No.1 (Where do girls play?):** Indicates that most girls get the opportunity to play in school premises only. 30% of women who said that they have no space to go are older girls/women who have finished school or don't go to school at all. Only 6% of girls who said they go to parks are not regular and live in different neighborhoods.

- **Finding No. 2 (Can you run 500m to 1km?) :** This question was asked to judge the stamina level of the girls. An astonishing 50% of girls have never tried running! Only 31.6% girls claimed that they could run. 18.4% of girls said that they could not run at all. In the personal interview, these girls mentioned that they were poor in sports in school and are weak, they have difficulty breathing and they easily get tired. Some even mentioned that they used to faint in sports events.

- **Finding No. 3 (How do you feel after playing and exercising?):** 79% of girls/women love playing and exercising, even though they get very few opportunities to do so. 19% of females who were interviewed and submitted the survey get tired after playing, so they avoid physical games. 2% of the females don't want to play at all. When asked why they don't like games, they said they had never tried it.

- **Finding No. 4 (Do they know how to play basketball and football ?):** 51% of girls want to learn how to play physical, outdoor games but they have no safe space or a coach to teach them games. 29% of the girls reported that they learnt games like basketball and volleyball in school. However, they don't have the opportunity to practice and play those games anymore. Apart from anything else, there is no place big enough to play. 20% of the girls that were surveyed reported that they don't know how to play.

- **Finding No. 5 (Do you go for a long walk?) :** Walking is the bare minimum exercise that is required for a human body to function properly. Out of the 115 girls who participated in the survey, 45% girls claimed that they want to go for walks, but don't have a safe,clean space to go to. The streets in Old City of Hyderabad are dirty and full of stray dogs. 29% of girls who go for walks do so in the streets in spite of the dogs and the unhygienic environment. 26% of them don't go for walks at all due to the reasons stated above.

- **Finding No.6 (Whenever you get a chance to visit green spaces, does it uplift your mood?)** : 89% said yes, going to green spaces uplifts their mood and makes they feel less stressed. 9% of the women were not sure. It is possible that because they have never been away from their neighborhood, they do not know the difference. 2% of women were clear that they have never been out, so they don't know if it will help.

- **Finding No.7 (Is there a safe, green park in your neighborhood for boys and girls?):** 83.3% of the girls said no, they don't have a clean, green space in their neighborhood.16.7% said yes they have parks in their neighborhood. However, when these people were interviewed, it was discovered that they do not live in the same locality and three girls were referring to the vacant space behind their locality as a "park".

- **Finding No. 8 (Do you feel like escaping to the green outdoors after a stressful day/week?) :** 89% said yes they feel like running away or escaping to a serene outdoor space for relaxation. 9% of the women were not sure. In the interviews these women discussed that they have never traveled away from home, not even to the outskirts of Hyderabad city, so they do not know the difference. 2% of women were indifferent to going into outdoor green surroundings.

- **Finding No.9 (Do you feel that you would have better overall health if you got a chance to walk and run everyday?)**: Interestingly, the same 89% said yes they would definitely have better health if they got a chance to walk and run everyday. 9% of the women were not sure. It is possible that because they have never had regular exercise and are ignorant about the benefits of physical activity, they do not know the difference. 2% of women were clear that they have never exercised, so have no idea whether it will improve their overall health.

- **Finding No. 10 (Do you feel that streets are unsafe for women (because of filth, dogs, beggars, eve-teasing etc.)? :**An astounding 95% of women confirmed that streets and alleys are not safe spaces for walking as an exercise, 5% of women said that they never go out of the house for walks!

- **Finding No. 11 (Do you like going out in streets or alleys for a walk (as an exercise0? :**The same 95% of women confirmed that they do not like to go in streets and alleys for walking as an exercise, 5% of women reconfirmed that they never go out of the house for walks.

- **Finding No. 12 (Would you like to have an open, clean, green park for women and children ONLY?) :**The same 83.3% girls who mentioned that there is no park in their neighborhood, confirmed that they would like to have an open, green, safe space for women only. 16.7% said it does not matter.

II. CONCLUSION

From the interviews conducted by participants of the survey and the survey itself, it is safe to conclude that the women and young girls who live in Old City of Hyderabad India do not have clean, green and safe places for physical exercise and recreation. Although the survey did not include old women, we can deduce from our survey that going for an evening walk is not possible for the elderly either.

Young mothers with infants need a WOMEN ONLY park to take their children, where they can take a stroll, socialize and relax after a hectic day. India is still a country

where men have more freedom to play in streets, hire game spaces or play on rooftops, while women generally stay indoors to socialize and have no facilities for recreation. Our country lacks basketball or badminton courts as recreation spaces, or even football and cricket grounds. Most games are still played in narrow alleys and lanes .

Even though this survey is limited to a very small community in Hyderabad it echoes the woes of many women and children living in metropolitan cities across India. The marked increase of concrete jungles instead of green jungles is worrying for many reasons including air quality and risk of non-communicable diseases. A space for recreation is extremely important for the physical and mental health and well being of the entire population of the country. As a consequence of the concrete jungles there is a detachment from flora and fauna and from the environment in general in the younger generation. This is another area of concern and can be taken up as a separate research topic .

Recommendations

1. Clustered and over populated areas in Indian metropolitan cities have an urgent requirement for urban clean, green, safe spaces especially for women, elderly and children.
2. Children need parks with swings, merry-go-rounds and slides, clean sand and green grass.
3. Young girls need separate basketball/ badminton/ football grounds to run and play.

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