

CHILDREN'S INVOLVEMENT IN INFORMAL PLAY ACTIVITIES IN KENYA: A CASE OF KIAMBU EAST AND KIAMBU WEST DISTRICTS *By Esther Waiithaka, Daniel M. Kiminyo, Mwangi P.Wanderi, Maureen Mweru*

This study was prompted by the outcry on decline of children's involvement in informal play, which is crucial for holistic development. In Kenya, studies on play have mainly focused on formal play and the area of informal play has received minimal attention. The purpose for the study was to establish the status quo of children's involvement in informal play activities to compliment studies on formal games. The main objectives were to identify the existing informal games and to establish the impact of identified factors on frequency of preferred games. The study was based on Conflict-Enculturation Play Hypothesis, and Piaget's Cognitive Developmental Theory of play, in which informal play environments are viewed as micro-world levels, which are prototypes of the complex macro-world society. The literature reviewed showed that involvement in informal games is crucial for wholesome living. Descriptive study design was employed. The dependent variables were the types of games and the frequencies of children's preferred play activities. The independent variables were the available leisure time, the agents of games' transmission, types of sources of materials, and the type of teachers' participation in children's informal play. Other independent variables were gender differences and the aspects of rural versus semi-urban settings. The population of the study comprised Standard Three children from the public primary schools. Through multistage random sampling, 50% of the educational zones in each division were selected. From each of the selected zone, two primary schools were randomly sampled, making a total of twenty-two schools. All children in Class Three were interviewed in groups of between ten and twenty. Five boys and five girls were randomly selected for individual interviews. Observations and Interview schedules were used to collect data. The qualitative data were put into meaningful categories for descriptive interpretation. Quantitative data were statistically analysed by use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Football was the most frequently preferred game and was followed by brikicho. Games that involved physical prowess and strategy emerged as the most preferred play activities. The null hypotheses were tested at $p < .05$. Pearson correlation coefficient results on the association between leisure time and frequency of preferred informal games identified a significant relationship. ANOVA tests showed significant differences in frequencies of preferred games in relation to agents of games' transmission, the sources of play materials and type of teachers' participation. Results of t-tests showed significant gender related differences in children's preferred games but there were no significant differences in relation to rural vis-à-vis semi-urban zones. Chi-square results on differences in frequencies of preferred games in relation to presence of a television set showed no significant variation. Chi square results showed that there were significant differences between boys and girls' frequencies of preferred cooperative and competitive play activities, and there were no differences between cooperative and competitive play activities among the divisions. The study came up with recommendations for teachers, curriculum developers and further research.