

Family-based activity settings of typically  
developing three-to-five-year old children in a  
low-income African context

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*Life is a field of unlimited possibilities-Deepak Chopra*

*Dad this is for you.....*

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## ABSTRACT

### **Family- based activity settings of typically developing three-to-five-year old children in a low- income African context.**

The transition towards family-centered practice in early childhood intervention has shifted the focus from looking at the child in isolation towards understanding the child in context. The primary context for the child's development is the family setting which is inextricably linked to the family's culture, beliefs and values. The cultural context is transmitted through activity settings which make up the everyday experiences and events that involve the child's interactions with various people and the environment. Activity settings are a part of daily life and include activities like eating dinner, bath time, listening to stories and getting ready for school. Furthermore, activity settings represent how families can and do structure their time, based on tradition, the orientations provided by culture and the socio-economic system within which they live. Intervention goals that fit easily into these settings are more likely to be adopted and practised, as they are less likely to disrupt the daily functioning and coherence of the family.

While there is a clear emphasis in the literature on developing intervention approaches that are applicable to families from diverse cultural contexts, little is known about the beliefs and practices of low-income urban families in South Africa. Children in Africa have frequently been judged against Euro-American norms and standards, where the aim has been to change instead of understand the context in which children live. This study therefore aims to identify everyday activities that provide children with varied opportunities for learning and development within the natural environment of the family context.

A descriptive design using structured interviews was utilised to obtain information about the activity settings that children aged 3–5 years engaged in. Face-to-face interviews with 90 caregivers were conducted, utilising a self-constructed interview schedule consisting of a written list of closed and open-ended questions. This approach was chosen as it holds

no bias against respondents who have varied literacy levels. The interview schedule was developed through a process of consultation with parents/caregivers from the Soweto community, using focus group discussions. The results provide information on the types of activities that children participate in, the frequency of participation, the partners involved, as well as the purpose of the activities. Caregiver perceptions on the importance of activities were also obtained through closed and open-ended questions.

**Key terms:** Activity settings, family-centered, natural environments.

## OPSOMMING

### **Die studie van gesinsaktiwiteitsituasies waaraan tipies ontwikkelende drie- tot vyfjarige kinders in 'n lae-inkomste-Afrikakonteks deelneem.**

Die klem verskuiwing na gesinsgesentreerde benaderings in vroeë kinderjare-intervensie het gelei tot pogings om die kind in konteks te verstaan. Aangesien die kind se primêre ontwikkelingskonteks die gesinsopset is, is dit onlosmakend verbonde aan die gesin se kultuur, geloofsopvattinge en waardes. Die kulturele konteks word oorgedra deur aktiwiteitsituasies waarin die daaglikse ondervindinge en gebeurtenisse plaasvind wat die kind se interaksies met verskillende mense en die omgewing bepaal. Aktiwiteitsituasies is deel van die daaglikse lewe en sluit in aktiwiteite soos etenstyd, badtyd, stories luister en regmaak vir skool. Aktiwiteitsituasies weerspieël verder hoe gesinne hulle tyd kan indeed, gegrond op tradisie, die oriëntering wat kultuur verskaf en die sosio-ekonomiese stelsel waarin hulle leef. Intervensies wat maklik inpas by gesinsaktiwiteitsituasies sal meer waarskynlik aanvaar en toegepas word, omdat hulle nie so geredelik die daaglikse funksionering en kohesie van die gesin sal ontwrig nie.

Die literatuur lê duidelik klem op die ontwikkeling van intervensie benaderings wat op gesinne uit uiteenlopende kulturele kontekste van toepassing is. Daar is egter min bekend oor die opvattinge en gebruike van stedelike lae-inkomste-gesinne in Suid-Afrika. Kinders in Afrika word dikwels gemeet aan Euro-Amerikaanse norme en standaarde, met verandering as oogmerk eerder as insig in die konteks waarin dié kinders leef. Hierdie studie poog dus om die daaglikse aktiwiteite te identifiseer wat aan kinders verskillende geleenthede verskaf om te leer en te ontwikkel binne die natuurlike omgewing van die gesinskonteks.

'n Beskrywende ontwerp met gestruktureerde onderhoude is gebruik om inligting te verkry oor die aktiwiteitsituasies waarin kinders tussen 3 tot 5 jaar betrokke is. Persoonlike onderhoude is met 90 versorgers gevoer met behulp van 'n selfopgestelde onderhoudskedule wat uit 'n geskrewe lys geslote en oop vrae bestaan het. Hierdie benadering is gekies omdat dit geen sydigheid inhou jeens respondente met verskillende

geletterdheidsvlakke nie. Die onderhoudskedule is ontwikkel in oorlegpleging met ouers/versorgers uit die Soweto-gemeenskap, deur middel van fokusgroepbesprekings. Die resultate verskaf inligting oor die tipes aktiwiteite waaraan kinders deelneem, die frekwensie van deelname, die mede-deelnemers en die doel van die aktiwiteite. Versorgers se opvattinge oor die belangrikheid van die aktiwiteite is ook deur oop en geslote vrae bekom.

**Sleuteltermes:** Aktiwiteitsituasies, gesinsgesentreerd, natuurlike omgewings.