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PLAY EXPERIENCES: THE VOICES OF CHILDREN RESIDING IN A LARGE CHILDREN'S HOME IN JOHANNESBURG

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Abstract

Introduction: Play is an integral part of a child's life and is crucial for healthy development and well-being. Children residing in Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCs) are at risk of developmental delays. Therefore, it is essential to find ways to support their play experiences. As occupational therapists, we assess and treat play and are uniquely situated to support children in play and promote occupational justice.

Objectives: This study explores the play experiences of children living in a large children's home, focusing on their preferred activities, equipment, and environment. It also examines how children engage in social play and the barriers and facilitators they encounter as perceived by children.

Method: A cross-sectional qualitative descriptive design was employed, utilizing the draw-and-tell method for data collection. The study was conducted in Johannesburg with 25 children from five children's homes operating under the same non-governmental organisation.

Results: Three key themes emerged from the data analysis: 'social dynamics in play,' 'social connections in play,' and 'play resources and structures.' Within these themes, categories and subcategories and direct quotes from children were identified.

Conclusion: This study highlights how living in institutional care impacts children's play experiences. The findings emphasize the role of social dynamics and connections, routines, structure, and available play resources in shaping these experiences. As occupational therapists, we can understand children's perspectives in institutional care to inform efforts to promote their overall health and well-being in alternative care settings.