

Integrating Play-Based Approaches in Pediatric Rehabilitation - A High Time to Break Free From Traditional Methods



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Children are the essence of nature, the incarnation of God, the face of beauty and joy of life.

They have all rights to grow in warmth and love irrespective of cast, creed, fate and circumstances.

and,

When these naïve angels find it difficult to fight battles of life, play paves their way.

Dear Editor,

The ratio of Physical disability has alarmingly surged globally, affecting 1.3 billion people worldwide¹, with 240 million being children². Notably, these children, particularly in Low-and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), face the burden of stigma, coupled with prevailing negative attitudes and beliefs from the moment they are born. This situation places them at a heightened risk of experiencing neglect, exploitation, and various forms of violence. Regrettably, it also exposes them to premature mortality, including the tragic occurrence of infanticide. Moreover, they consistently exhibit markedly poorer outcomes compared to their peers without disabilities across a broad spectrum of health and educational indicators during early childhood³.

To address the developmental disparities, children with disabilities are enrolled on numerous kinds of traditional rehabilitative therapies at a very young age. However, these traditional approaches often neglect the importance of a child's participation in valued activities through play, where they actively explore who they are, their surroundings, and how they connect with others⁴. Instead, we see the child being passively involved in floor or mat exercises, which becomes the reason for their absenteeism, boredom and lack of compliance⁵.

Since play is crucial for positive neural plasticity and enhanced participation, pediatric physical therapists can use it to address various defects in children with disabilities as it keeps them more focused, involved, and adhered to the treatment plan⁶.

Considering the importance of play in rehabilitation, a recent paradigm shift internationally has also emphasized making play-based therapies a primary consideration in the rehabilitation of children⁴. Many organizations have also acknowledged the value of play in a child's development⁶ and have considered it an essential component of the child's plan of care⁷. This revolution also led the UN-CRC to pass a bill for safeguarding the rights of play in children, including those with developmental disabilities⁸. Such considerations should also be made in LMICs like Pakistan. As a developing child's brain and body respond differently to warmth and play, these components should be incorporated into their care plan. Shifting away from traditional, passive treatments and integrating play-based strategies can yield multifaceted benefits for children with disabilities, fostering a more holistic and practical approach to their rehabilitation.

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