

# The Effect of Participation to Recreative Nature Activities on Children

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**Abstract:** *This study was carried out in order to analyze the effect of participation to nature sports on children. For this aim; the study is composed of 5 fathers and their 7 children who were involved in camping names “father and children” organized by a nature sports company. Fathers were given information and their consent was taken before activities. The age of fathers varies between 35 and 51 and the age of children varies between 8 and 12. Interview technique was used in the study, it is a qualitative data collection method and its basic method is verbal communication and dialogues were recorded. When the results obtained from study were evaluated, it is possible to say that participation into nature activities has positive contributions on both physical and psychosocial development of children.*

**Keywords:** Nature Sports, Outdoor Sports, recreation, child

## 1. Introduction

Today people compulsorily move away from nature due to rapid urbanization, easy access to technology and responsibilities brought by the education system. As a result of urbanization, parks which were built between streets are insufficient in fulfilling needs of children about activities and sense of discovering. In addition to this, easy access to technological devices such as computer, telephone and tablets causes children lock themselves in home. Many children who could not release their energy due to immobilization are accused of being hyperactive and are exposed to medical drugs. However children naturally need to move and learn through discovering.

Nowadays children grow up not knowing seasons since they travel by car and wear clothes produced at factories and prevent effect of weather conditions (Huggins and Wickett 2011). As a result of participation to nature sports they are exposed to great diversity about natural events and their results. Having the opportunity of staying outside nearly at all weather conditions can bring important chances to fulfil lacking emotional experiences. Moreover, weather conditions and some unpredictable changes create environment to have different experiences. Living in the nature provides diversity about plants, trees, roots, living beings, rocks, Stones etc. This diversity enable children test their skills and create their awareness. Discovering the unknown and the unpredictable contributes development of multiple emotions (Waite 2007).

Nature sports includes those which remove the stress out of people, give them affection of love and enable them socialize, relax psychologically; besides they are exciting, moving and adventurous. It is possible to say that participating in nature sports brings psychological, sociological, educational and physical benefits to person. Some of these benefits are listed in

**Table 1:** Benefits of nature sports

Psychological	Sociological	Educational	Physical
Self-sufficiency	Compassion	Outdoor Education	Ability
Self-confidence	Cooperation	Natural Awareness	Power
Excitement	Respect for	Problem	Coordination

seeking	others	solving	
Feeling Good	Contact	Academic Development	Physical Exercise
Self Realization	Friendship	Speaking Skills	Balance
Testing Self	Belonging	Technical Development	Durability

When children spend time in nature regularly, they would have more opportunity to relax, play game and discover. This has physical and psychological benefit on children. Active, energetic and cheerful minds reflect as health and energy on child’s body. Therefore, diet and sleeping routine of children who spent time in the nature are better than those who do not (Kernan & Devine, 2010).

There is an increase in the rate of directing children towards nature sports amongst parents who participate in nature sports themselves. Some parents participate in activities with their children in order to spend time with them. Considering this, answers will be sought for these questions asked to parents who take part in nature activities with their children:

- 1) Why do you want your children participate in nature sports?
- 2) What kind of differences do you observe at your children after participating in nature sports?
- 3) What kind of benefits do you think experience of nature sports will bring?

## 2. Materials and Methods

Interview technique was used in the study, it is a qualitative data collection method and its basic method is verbal communication and dialogues were recorded. In the interview method, the important thing in reporting of data is not the numbers but what the participants says (Creswell, 1998). Therefore it was paid attention to keep the colloquial expressions as they are while doing analysis and reporting.

Participant fathers were given information and their consents were taken before the camping. At the end of the camping, each father was interviewed one by one and the interviews were recorded. Activities in the three-days camping include trekking, sea-skiing, bicycle tour and building igloo on the snow. All the participants stayed in the tent during camping.

### Participants

The study is composed of 5 fathers and their 7 children who were involved in camping names “father and children” organized by a nature sports company in Gökova/Muğla in 2016-2017 semester holiday. The age of fathers varies between 35 and 51 and the age of children varies between 8 and 12.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

Answers given by the participant fathers are as such:

Oğuz (age 42, father of 9-year-old girl and 12-year-old boy): Living in a big city has some negative effects on development of children. They cannot go outside or to the park because of security. Even if they want, there is no park to go. However when we do such camping activities they have to chance to release their energy. They become aware of the things in nature since they are away from technology. For example snowing enables them learn new things in nature while it is a hindrance in big city. Me and my children learn how to build an igloo (house made of snow) for the first time. Nature teaches us something whatever our age is (smiles). Being excited and sometimes astonished makes them very happy while learning new things. Happy child means happy father, happy father means happy family.

Refik (age 51 father of 10-year-old boy): ... my father has an important place in my life. He taught all the things all I know now. Thanks to him I spent my child years in mountains and forests. Being in nature has always been good for me. I want my son live as I have once. I want him feel much more free, become aware of his skills and learn that life is not only composed of people... Living in nature made him more free and self-confident. He started to behave more respectfully towards others. As he saw that he became more willing to participate in different activities. Moreover nature is also good for health. His asthma was bad for him at the beginning but now it is not as disturbing as before.

Atalay (age 35, father of 8-year-old boy): You have to share everything when you are on a group activity in nature. You want food if you have run out of it, you want help if you cannot manage to do something... Due to such activities I see that my son has become sharer. It is good to see that his communication skills become better every day as he shares things. I feel that his communication with me and his mother has increased as well. He started to express himself more easily. At the end of a sea canoeing activity he said “dad, you are such a comic person in fact” which caused me see that something has changed with me as well.

Mehmet (age 47, father of 10-year-old twin boys): Being father of twins means being in a constant hustle and bustle. They can do something cheerfully and without discussion only when they are in the nature... In addition to this, it is our 9<sup>th</sup> nature activity and they began to create solution not problems. I think they recognized that they can reach to the point when they act together. They are less distracted now and I think they are more successful at school for this reason.

Alper (age 38, father of 9-year-old boy): ... Weather conditions are quite changeable in the nature and you have adapt yourself quickly if you want to survive. Therefore you need to make preparations beforehand and make scenarios in your mind about how to act in changing conditions. This improves your imagination. When the imagination of a child improves, he can handle any difficulties he faces. He does not give up even if he cannot cope with it, but tries to solve the problem... My son used to give up easily before; he wanted to run away and started to cry in case of any problems. He began to take challenges thanks to these activities. He can express himself and his demands better now. He is crying less after all (smiles). One year ago, he could not stay in the darkness alone let alone making camping. Now we see that he is being more self-confident every day.

Many studies carried out in recent years show that chronic diseases such as obesity, asthma, distraction, hyperactivity disorder and lack of vitamin D increase among children who spend less time in the nature. (Lovasi & others, 2008). However, outdoor activities contribute to the protection of a good metabolism, musculoskeletal development, pulmonary (lung) and cardiovascular (heart and veins) functions and healthy immune system ( Kernan, & Devine, 2010).

Feedbacks obtained from parents who participated in the study show us that there is a decrease in distraction of children after nature activities and thereby increase in their academic success. Skrupskelis (2000) found that children who spend more time outdoors have higher capacity in paying attention and academic performance compared to other children. The study of Skrupskelis about the fact that exercises which provide rich blood in the sense of oxygen enhances brain functions are supported by other cerebral studies. These findings show that playing outside is not only important for the health of children but also for their learning. Baldwin and Rudge (1995) stressed on psychological benefits of outdoor activities apart from physical ones. In the study, sunlight absorbed in outdoor activities makes it easy to produce serotonin in the brain. Serotonin helps children stay in a calm and peaceful environment. It plays critical role in controlling violence and suicide drives and paying attention and focusing on memory. Serotonin enhances T-lymphocyte which produces endorphin that makes us feel good. Results obtained in this study support the results of our study.

It was observed by father as a result of the study that there is an increase in physical resistance and mobility of children. Nature activities provide variable alternatives to children. Activities such as climbing to trees, leaping over hurdles, running etc play important role in increasing physical capacity of children. While playing in natural environment, children tend to participate in strong physical activities which improve their motor skills, enhance their heart, increase lung function and muscular, skeletal and body health (Bell & others 2008).

Another finding obtained from the study is that nature activities improve imagination of children. Imagination is the source of motivation for learning and improving skills which enable people do what they want (Pratt, 2014).

Branson and Merryman (2010) state that children who have high imagination and creative self-sufficiency can better cope with stress and are more “clear” about their future compared to children who lack this trait. Playing with the materials provided by nature teaches children to care about nature. When children are encouraged to use their own imagination and creativity they do not need a toy to create a new game. Outdoor activities help children develop skills and values that would enable them use natural resources better (Linn, 2008). In our study, feedback obtained from parents state that there is a distinctive increase in communication, self-confidence and sharing characteristics of children. Nature activities are natural environments which help children create positive social relations. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children states that every children have the right to involve in integrated education which respect natural environment, one of the basic elements that would contribute to the success of social emotional developments of children in their future life is the natural environment. It states that nature activities help children make positive relations which enhance their insufficient social skills with peers.

In a study which analyzes social interaction of children, Hartle (1994) found out that kindergarten students use better communication and perspective skills during outdoor games. In another study, when a part of asphalt game area is transformed into a natural area, it was observed that social behaviours of children change, they behave less violent when playing on natural area compared to asphalt area (Moore & Wong, 1997).

#### 4. Result

When the results obtained from the study are evaluated, it is possible to say that participation to nature activities has positive contributions on both physical and psychosocial development of children. At this point it is quite important for the growth of children and enhance of communication with children when parents encourage them to spend more time in nature and create opportunity for this. In addition to this, it is thought that including nature sports in pre-school and elementary level students’ curriculum would be important. It must be remembered that being in the nature enables children to move, try and discover more. Enabling children feel themselves as the part of nature is an important point for healthier generations.

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