

Activity patterns and the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) outside of school for boys and girls with motor disabilities

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Introduction: Research concerning activity patterns outside-of-school indicates that children with disabilities have restricted participation in activities in comparison with non-disabled peers. However, the activity patterns outside-of-school of children and youths have changed in recent years as a result of the increased use of ICT. ICT has huge potential to compensate impaired function in the area of communication, information and knowledge gathering, without physical transportation.

Objectives: The aim of the study was to investigate activity patterns in outside-of-school activities of boys and girls with motor disabilities compared with non-disabled children. Of specific interest was their use and opinions of ICT.

Methods: Participants were 254 children and youths, mean age 13 y 6 mo [SD 2 y 5 mo], with motor disabilities, attending mainstream schools. The participants responded to a questionnaire about outside-of-school activities, and the use of ICT. For group comparisons with non-disabled children, normative data from the survey "Kids and Media" was used.

Results: Findings show, when studying activity one by one, that children with motor disabilities participate in less varied outside-of-school activities than non-disabled children ($p \leq 0.01$). By studying activity patterns, all activities together our findings indicate no significant differences in the number of activities. A significantly higher proportion of children with motor disabilities were engaged in ICT activities, such as using the Internet, playing computer games and visiting communities. Our study reveals a positive result from a gender perspective, where the use of ICT activities is more equal among boys and girls with disabilities than among non-disabled boys and girls.

Conclusion: The outside-of-school activity patterns of children with disabilities seem to be characterized by a focus on ICT activities, while non-disabled children are engaged in a broader range of outside-of-school activities. This brings new interest in ICT and computer activities as an opportunity for all boys and girls.

Contribution to occupational therapy: ICT provides opportunities for children with motor disabilities to participate in meaningful out-of-school activities to compensate for limitations in other activities. ICT not only compensates for children's disabilities as assistive technology; in terms of its universal design, suiting all, it can provide equal access to society.