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Play of children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions: a scoping review

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Introduction/Rationale: Since play is central to children's lives, children with life-limiting and life-threatening need to be encouraged to continue playing as a way to preserve their normal childhood and face their illnesses. However, the main focus of health services is usually on medical issues.

Objectives: In order to enhance the play of children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions, this scoping review aimed to explore the play of these children in addition to understand how their play participation is being impacted and identify the environmental factors influencing their engagement in play.

Method: A comprehensive search of literature published between 1990-2017 was conducted in relation to the play of children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions and the environmental factors influencing their play. This was conducted by accessing electronic databases relevant to health, palliative care, sociology studies, design and architect. In addition to manual searches of relevant journals and reference lists from a range of professional contexts.

Results: Eleven relevant papers were reviewed which derived that the play of children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions is influenced by the health condition itself as well as by the limited play opportunities due to different environmental factors, which include the limited appropriate play equipment and the need for more sufficient areas for play and social interaction.

Conclusion: Children have the right to live as children, despite the terminal conditions they are experiencing. There is a need to maximise the available appropriate play opportunities by considering the environmental barriers and enablers through understanding the children's special needs.