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**Journal of Applied Sociology**

E-ISSN: 2322-343X

Vol. 32, Issue 2, No.82, Summer 2021, pp. 151-173

Received: 07.10.2020 Accepted: 06.03.2021

**Research Paper**

**Children's Performance in Environmental Participatory Activities  
Case Study: Sonbolestan Neighborhood, Esfahan**

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**Introduction:**

It is not impossible to run a society without the participation of its members. However, the lack of participation could lead to some issues resulting in instability and underdevelopment. Obviously, through meaningful participation, the members of a community feel a sense of responsibility for their own creations and try to maintain and improve them. Therefore, if the first step in institutionalizing participation is to practice, one can assume that children are the best group that can practice and spread the participation culture in the family and community. Participation, in fact, is a value that must be internalized in a person from childhood. Internalizing the value of participation in children, in the context of a participatory-based society, is largely spontaneous. In fact, in such societies, because most things are defined in a participatory framework and there is implicit participation in social practices, children also learn these practices subconsciously and apply them in their lives. However, our society does not seem to be a participatory society. This is the claim of scholars such as Ahmad Ashraf, Parviz Piran, Mohammad Ali Hodayoun Katouzian, and others who have researched and have studied the Iranian society. In the context of such an understanding of the world, the present study aimed to investigate and gain a deeper understanding of children's participatory performance through practical environmental activities in the neighborhood. The choice of the neighborhood as a study area stems from the fact that participation takes on an objective and real aspect when people can observe and experience the results in their daily lives. We selected the topic of environment because there are many environmental problems in Isfahan. In fact, it seems that the participation of citizens in the preservation and improvement of the environment should start from the environments that they are close to and concerned about. However, improving the environment is not the goal of this study; instead, the study focuses solely on children's participatory functioning.

**Materials and Methods:**

Achieving the goal of the research requires the use of the action research method, as children's participatory performance can be studied in the form of a participatory method. This research aimed to create practical knowledge about participation and to avoid mere theoretical research. The population of the study included a group of 14 girls, aged 9 to 13, living in the Sonbolestan neighborhood of Isfahan, adjacent to the only green space in the neighborhood. The data of this study were obtained in the framework of the action research method through observation and interviews with 14 girls during 8 participatory activities and were analyzed through the thematic analysis method.

**Discussion of Results and Conclusions:**

One of the important findings of this study is that participation does not seem to be meaningful to children. They prefer to work alone. At schools, in Children and Adolescents Intellectual Development Centers, extracurricular classes, as well as family and relative parties, concepts of participation are not practiced. Individual works take precedence over participatory work. In other words, participation has no place in formal or informal structures. Lack of meaningful participation is specifically rooted in the lack of meaningful participation of parents. Possibly the parents of such children also have a non-participatory function. In addition, it is likely

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Shahzeidi, M., Safiri, K., Imani Jajarmi, H. (2021). Children's performance in environmental participatory activities case study: sonbolestan neighborhood, esfahan. *Journal of Applied Sociology*, 32(2), 151-174.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.22108/jas.2021.125284.1993>



<https://dorl.net/dor/20.1001.1.20085745.1400.32.2.7.5>

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that such parents do not consider social responsibility for their children.

The important note is that children prefer to be together but practice individually. We call this a 'non-participatory collectivism'. Although there were tensions between the children in each participatory session, which sometimes escalated into physical violence and led to an unwillingness to be together, they enjoyed working beside each other. In fact, they eagerly wanted to work in a group, but not as a team

In our experience, successful performance in participatory activities could be faced with some obstacles such as the inability to appreciate and recognize the contribution of others, the sense of being ignored, the sense of losing one's share in participatory activity, sticking to familiar group members, difficulty in accepting new people into the group, distrusting new people, as well as the strong separation of the gender-based activities.

The importance and effectiveness of participation practice is another notable result of this research. During a year of the study with children, the present researchers clearly observed the effect of participation practice on improving children's performance in a participatory activity. In the beginning, the researchers divided the activities for children, but over time, the children were able to divide the work by themselves. Tensions, selfishness, and monotony diminished over time, and children were able to form a group with other children they did not perhaps like and enter the process of participation.

**Keywords:** Participation, Participation performance, Children participation, Environment, Neighborhood.

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