

Alternative Report to the UN Committee
on the Rights of the Child

Children's Voice on the right to play in the Republic of Korea



Prepared for the 82nd pre-sessional working group

Submitted by Save the Children Korea

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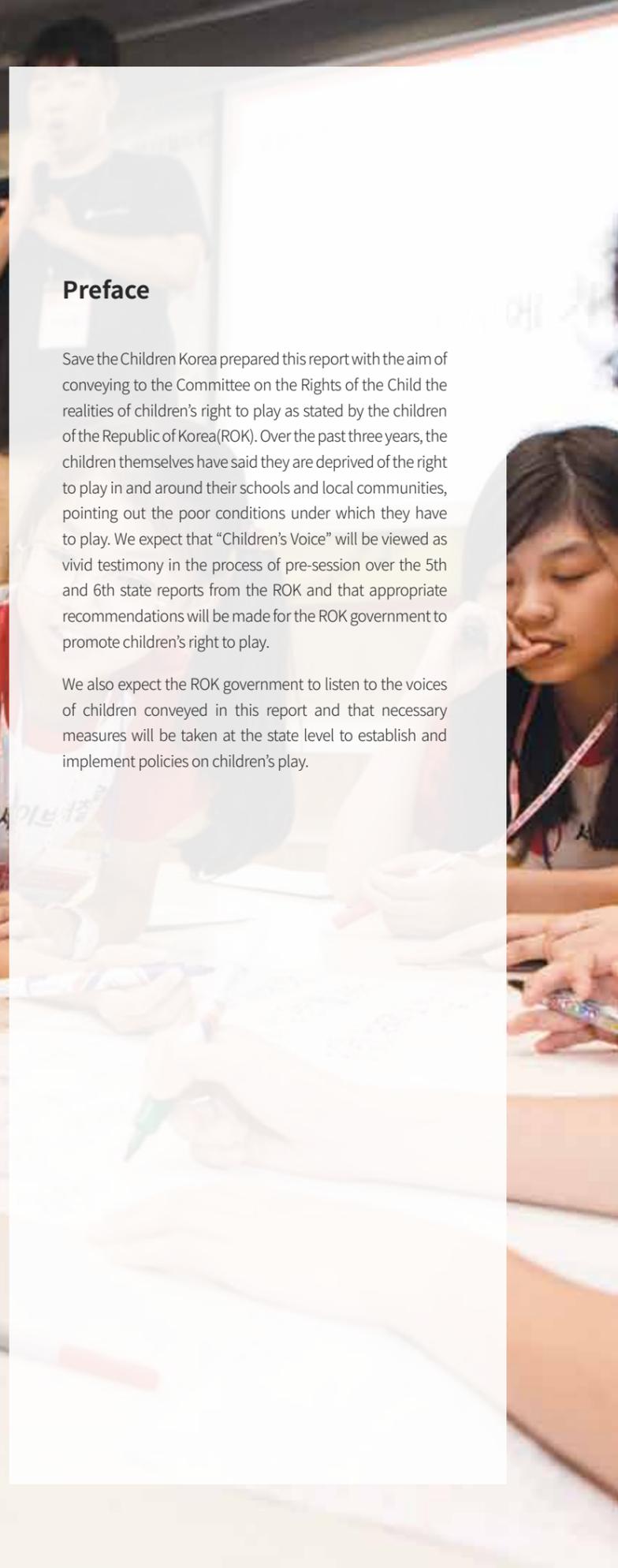
Save the Children



Preface

Save the Children Korea prepared this report with the aim of conveying to the Committee on the Rights of the Child the realities of children's right to play as stated by the children of the Republic of Korea(ROK). Over the past three years, the children themselves have said they are deprived of the right to play in and around their schools and local communities, pointing out the poor conditions under which they have to play. We expect that "Children's Voice" will be viewed as vivid testimony in the process of pre-session over the 5th and 6th state reports from the ROK and that appropriate recommendations will be made for the ROK government to promote children's right to play.

We also expect the ROK government to listen to the voices of children conveyed in this report and that necessary measures will be taken at the state level to establish and implement policies on children's play.



Background

Since the Republic of Korea ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991, its state reports have undergone Committee reviews on three occasions. Now the ROK is awaiting review of its 5th and 6th combined reports submitted to the Committee, which will be conducted in 2019. When the report of a State Party is submitted to the Committee, non-governmental organizations working to promote the rights of the child may also submit reports evaluating the level of implementation of state obligations under the Convention. Accordingly, non-governmental organizations in the ROK have submitted their own reports to the Committee in parallel with the state reports.

In 2010, Save the Children Korea submitted "Children's Report" in which children talked about the realities of the rights of the child in the ROK to the Committee for the first time ever. In February 2011, two children who played a role in preparing that report made remarks about the violation of child rights in the ROK during a pre-session in Geneva, Switzerland. This was a meaningful occasion in that children were able to make their own voices heard for examining whether child rights are properly respected.

In this regard, we gathered children's opinions once again on the state of children's rights prior to the Committee pre-session on the 5th and 6th reports submitted by the government of the ROK. It is this report "2018 Children's Voice" that reflects their opinions.

Process

Save the Children Korea has been conducting its "Save the Playground" campaign since 2015 with a view to fulfilling children's right to play. In an effort to make the ROK a place where children can play with their friends with adequate time and freedom, we have kept working to improve the play environment in cities, rural areas, and schools, and to change related laws and systems.

As part of this process, we organized the "Summer Camp for Child Self-Advocates" for three years starting from 2015 with the aim of listening to children's vivid descriptions of play. In five regions across the nation including Seoul, Busan, Daegu, Chungnam, and Jeonbuk, 438 elementary students from grades four to six attended the camp, allowing us to gather their views about what should be changed in order to make their local communities and schools better places to play.

In the annual two-day camp, children not only engaged in discussion but they were also absorbed in play—romping around with friends, drawing, and engaging in arts and crafts while chatting with each other. The fruits of their discussions were edited in the form of policy proposals which were conveyed directly by children to policymakers including the mayor and education superintendent. Their efforts led to changes in local policies regarding play.

During this process, Young Savers (University Student Advocates of Children's Rights) have played an important role. For the past three years, 194 Young Savers, who had been educated about children's rights and as facilitators, planned play activities with children attending the "Summer Camp for Child Self-Advocates." In particular, Young Savers encouraged lively discussions, listening to the children attentively and carefully recording their words.

This report has been prepared based on the voices of children and the cumulative outcomes of our activities over the past three years. Although it was adults who wrote the report, efforts were made to convey the voices of the children just as they are with minimal arbitrary interpretation.





Why a report about the right to play

In 2015, more than 1,000 playgrounds across the ROK were closed suddenly, ostensibly for the safety of children in accordance with the “Safety Supervision Law of Children’s Play Facilities.” It is reasonable to prevent substandard facilities from being used. However, the problem is that no follow-up measures were taken to repair the closed playgrounds. On the grounds that repair costs were high and that “children no longer play outside,” the playgrounds were abandoned and cordoned off by layers of sticky tape for nearly a year. As for the children, having been deprived of the playgrounds where they had played with friends just the day before, they were left to wander around looking for a place to play.

Now, thanks to the efforts of Save the Children Korea and countless citizens, the law has been amended to repair the closed playgrounds. Without these efforts, however, many playgrounds would have been neglected as eyesores and remained tightly taped off until now. This case clearly shows how our society views children’s right to play.

Children tell us their right to play is important. In 2015, Save the Children Korea surveyed children on how the government should invest in children’s rights. Among the 330 children questioned, 189 children, or 57.3 percent, chose “the right to play” as one of the areas that most urgently need government investment. These voices reflect their need for a better play environment.

Children of the ROK have always ranked at the bottom in OECD surveys in terms of happiness. The level of children’s happiness also marked the lowest compared to that of other countries in “A Report on Korean Children’s Quality of Life” written by the Institute of Social Welfare at Seoul National University in collaboration with Save the Children Korea. The reality that children cannot spend time doing what they want, in the way that they want, was cited as the main culprit lowering children’s happiness. Indeed, “the Comprehensive Surveys on Conditions of Children” conducted in 2013 by the ROK Ministry of Health and Welfare found that while around half of the children surveyed wanted to play with friends after school, those who actually did so barely reached 8.6 percent.

According to the survey of Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, four-year-old children in the ROK spend only about an hour every day playing, while about half of all elementary students spend an average of more than three hours a day studying after school (National Youth Policy Institute). The proportion of elementary students receiving supplemental education symbolized by private cram schools has reached 80 percent, whereas that of two-year-old children has reached 35.5 percent. This stark reality facing children in the ROK shows the cutthroat competition under which they devote their whole time to studying.

Play is important to children but the consistently observed reality is that they cannot play. Inspired by the voices of children who want to play with their friends with adequate time and freedom, we listened to them with a focus on the right of the child to play in this report.

HOW CHILDREN RAISED THEIR VOICES



Build friendship with other children and think about play during physical activities



Make policy proposals through deliberation

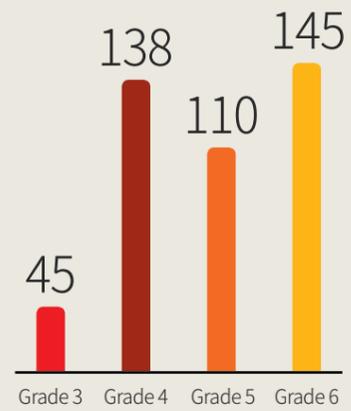


Deliver our policy proposals to the mayor or education superintendent



438 CHILDREN FROM ACROSS THE NATION PARTICIPATED

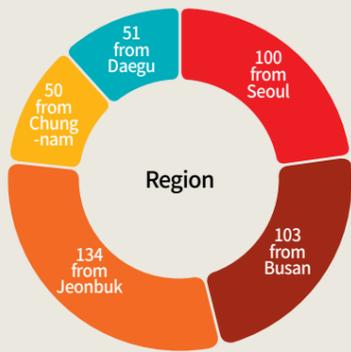
Grade



Gender



Region

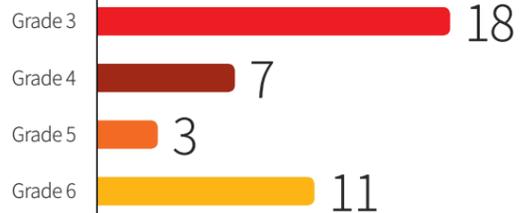


2015

39 children



39 from Jeonbuk



2016

140 children



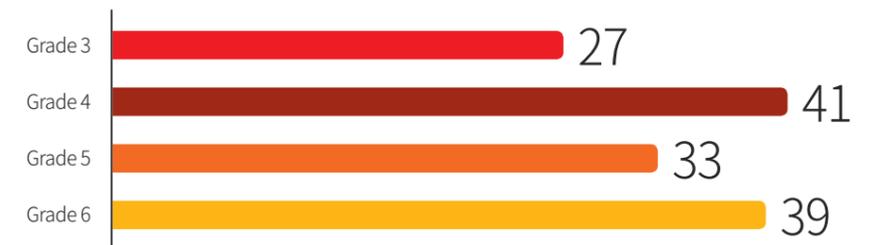
56 from Busan



47 from Seoul



37 from Jeonbuk



2017

259 children



53 from Seoul



50 from Chungnam



47 from Busan



58 from Jeonbuk

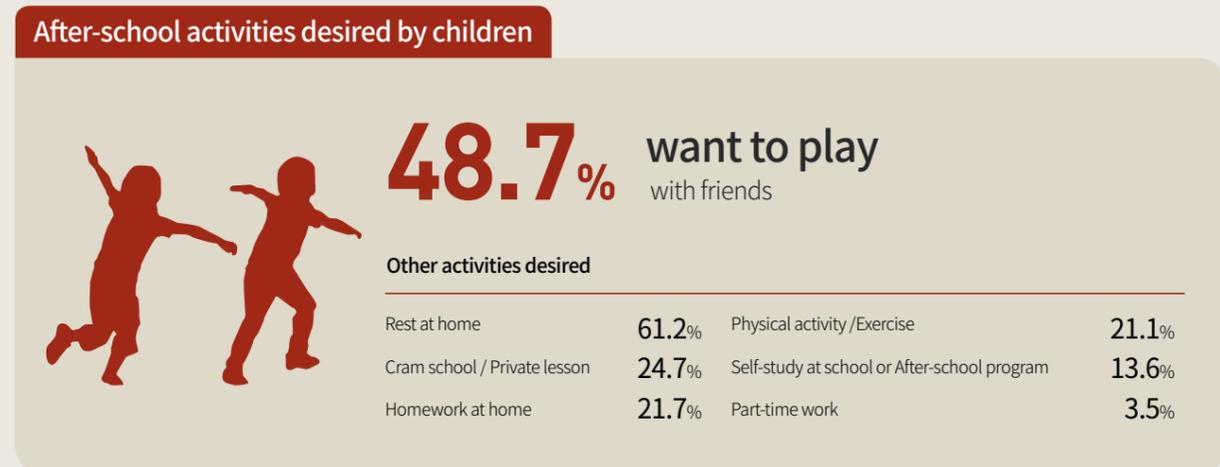


51 from Daegu

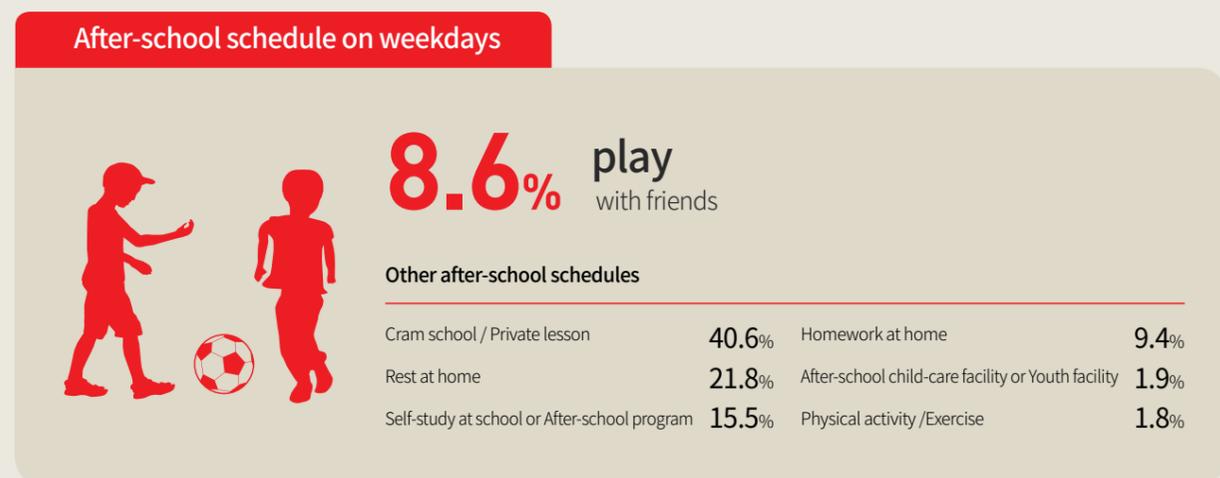


STATE OF THE RIGHT TO PLAY IN NUMBERS

While 48.7 percent of children want to play with friends after school, only 8.6 percent actually do.



(First and second priority)



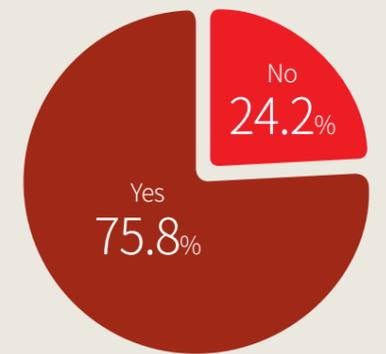
(Ministry of Health and Welfare, Comprehensive Surveys on Conditions of Children, 2013)

1 hr 9 min
four-year-old children spend in **playing** on weekdays, while one hour and six minutes in using various media



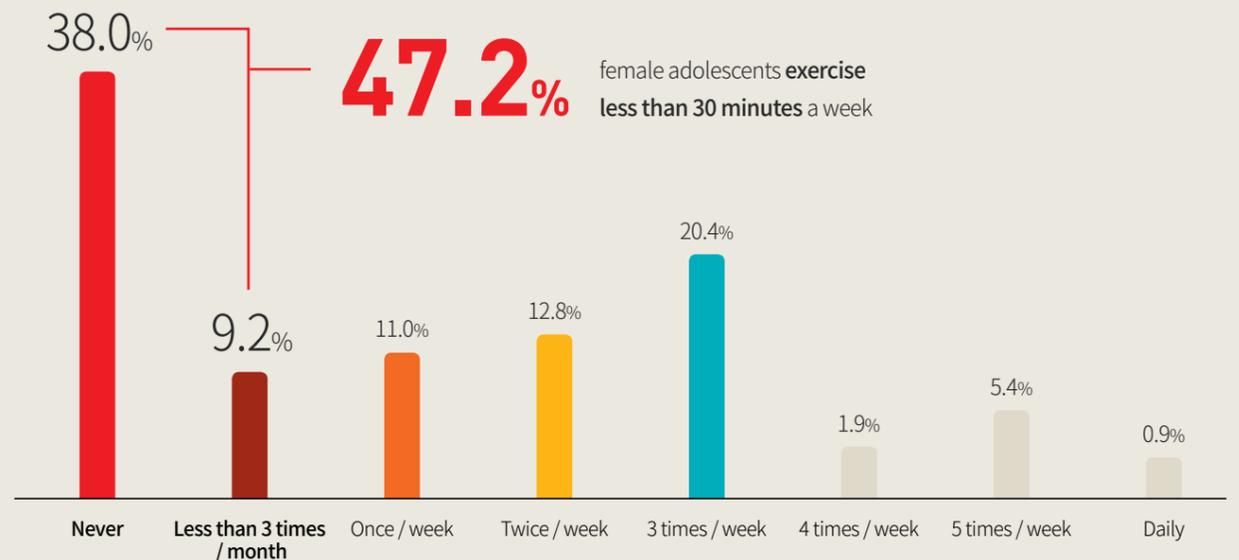
(Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, A study on time diary of 1-4 year-old children, 2013)

24.2%
children have **no time to freely rest and play**



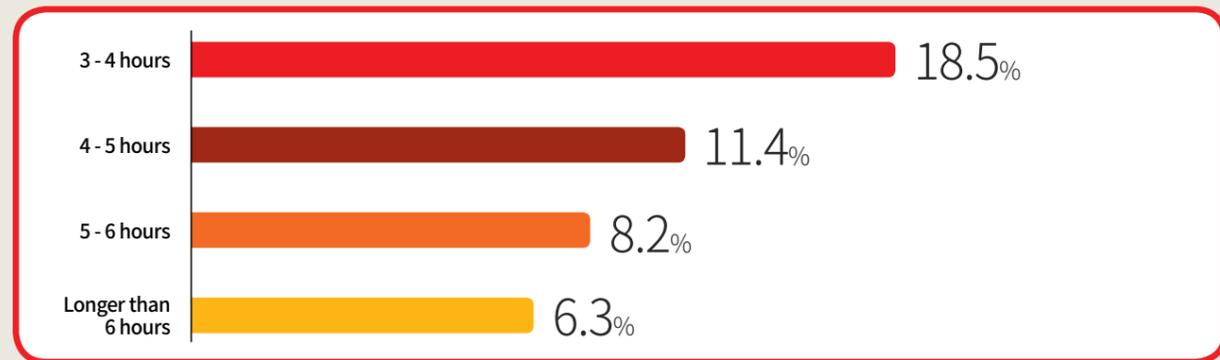
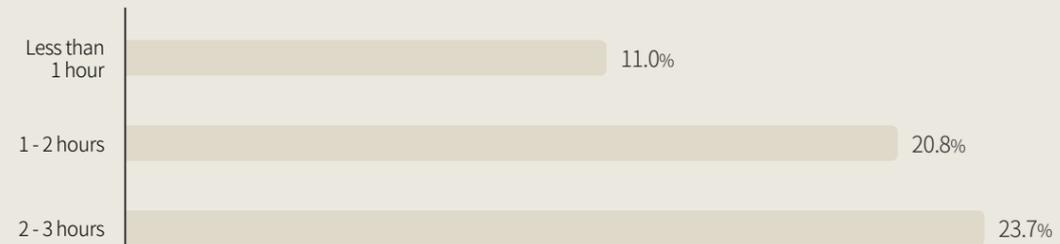
● Have time to freely rest and play – No
● Have time to freely rest and play – Yes

(Child Fund Korea, Child Happy Life Index, 2018)



(Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Survey on citizens' sports participation, 2017)

44.4% elementary students **study after school** more than three hours a day on average

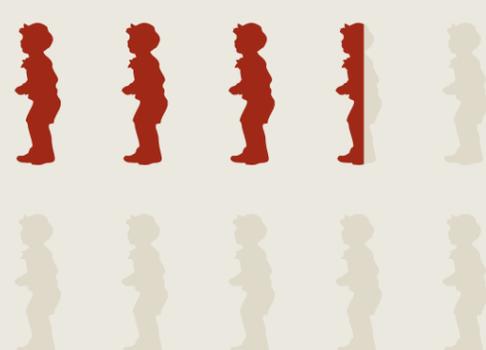


(National Youth Policy Institute, Survey on the Rights of Children and Youth, 2016)

80% elementary students receive private education



35.5% two-year-old children receive private education



(Statistics Korea, 2016)



50.1%

① Lack of safe, quality play spaces

- ② Lack of people to play with (adult caregivers or peers) 43.3%
- ③ Lack of time to play due to schoolwork 32.7%
- ④ Increasing use of electronic devices 25.5%
- ⑤ Adults' failure to recognize the importance of play for children 17.1%
- ⑥ Burden of play expenses 10.6%
- ⑦ Rigidly Structured play programs, excessive play marketing 10.5%
- ⑧ Adults' overzealous intervention 7.2%
- ⑨ Other 2.8%

(Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, Plans to create a community environment for promoting children's right to play, 2017 / First and second priority)

Usual Play Space

77.5% usually play indoors

18.0% usually play outdoors



(Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, Plans to create a community environment for promoting children's right to play, 2017)

422min spent in indoor play per week

160.5 min on weekdays

261.81 min on weekend

226min spent in outdoor play per week

69.06 min on weekdays

157.11 min on weekend

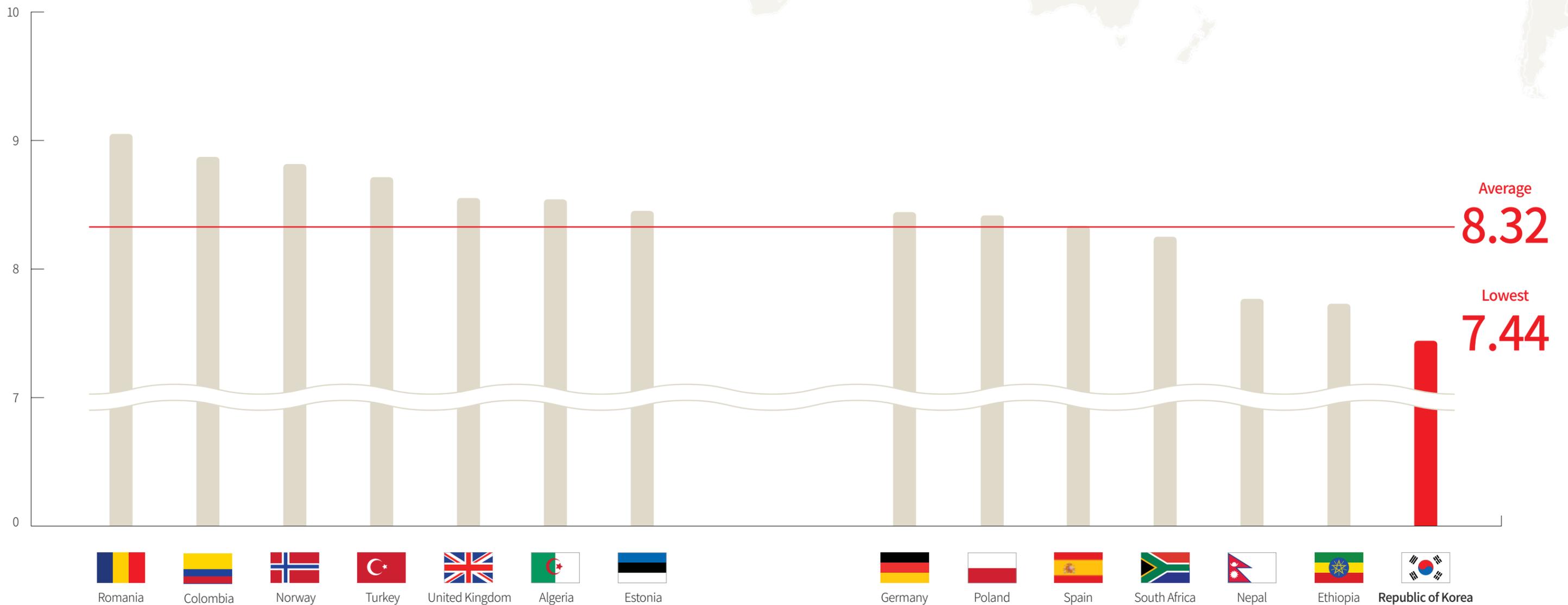
(Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, Plans to create a community environment for promoting children's right to play, 2017)

KOREA RANKED THE LOWEST OUT OF 14 NATIONS ON SATISFACTION WITH PERCEIVED FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN USE OF TIME

I'm able to exercise a satisfactory level of discretion in deciding how to spend my time. **Strongly disagree (0) – Strongly agree (10)**

Romania	9.05	United Kingdom	8.56	Poland	8.41	Ethiopia	7.73
Colombia	8.88	Algeria	8.54	Spain	8.33	Republic of Korea	7.44
Norway	8.81	Estonia	8.45	South Africa	8.24		
Turkey	8.71	Germany	8.43	Nepal	7.76		

* 16,106 children aged 12 in 14 nations



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Romania
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Colombia
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Norway
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Turkey
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United Kingdom
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Algeria
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Estonia
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Germany
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Poland
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Spain
- 
South Africa
- 
Nepal
- 
Ethiopia
- 
Republic of Korea



REALITIES OF THE RIGHT TO PLAY STATED BY CHILDREN

- Please recognize and support our play
- Wherever we live, we need a fair chance to play
- We wish we had clean playgrounds
- The places where we play must be safe
- Playgrounds are no fun
- Schools also need to become good places to play
- School is not only about studying. We need more time to play

PLEASE RECOGNIZE AND SUPPORT OUR PLAY

Children's Voices



"If elderly ladies are exercising and they see us, they tell us to stop kicking our ball around." (Jeonbuk)

"Grownups keep on kicking us out of the local gym. Please give kids and grownups different times, days, and places to play." (Chungnam)

"We want to play and talk by ourselves at our neighborhood playground. But there're so many grownups, it's hard to play there." (Busan)

"At the senior center next to our playground, the grownups get mad at us and say we're too noisy." (Busan)

"If mom catches us playing at home, she gets mad." (Busan)

"I wish teachers wouldn't tell us how we're supposed to play. I wish they would just let us have fun." (Seoul)

"I wish we could set a certain time to get together and play. We can't play because we have to go to cram schools at different times." (Jeonbuk)

"Please make a law so adults can't make us study too long at cram school, or at regular school. It's like we need a time-stopping machine if we want to play." (Daegu)



"We can't even play without being worried about the future. Please make various standards of success so we can be happy doing what we really like rather than just seeking a 'good job' or wealth." (Seoul)

"We don't have time to play because cram schools finish too late." (Seoul)

"We have so much homework, we can't finish it at home. Even during break time we have to do homework so there's no time to play." (Seoul)

"During school break time, they tell us to keep quiet and study or read books. At lunchtime, too, we can't go out to the schoolyard. They say it's dangerous and we might get hurt. But if they won't let us run or shout during breaks or lunchtime, then when can we play?" (Seoul)

"They took away the playground slide to make room for a building. It's like everything we play with keeps disappearing." (Jeonbuk)

"Don't keep all of us from playing just because one student got hurt playing at school." (Daegu)



Children's Showcase

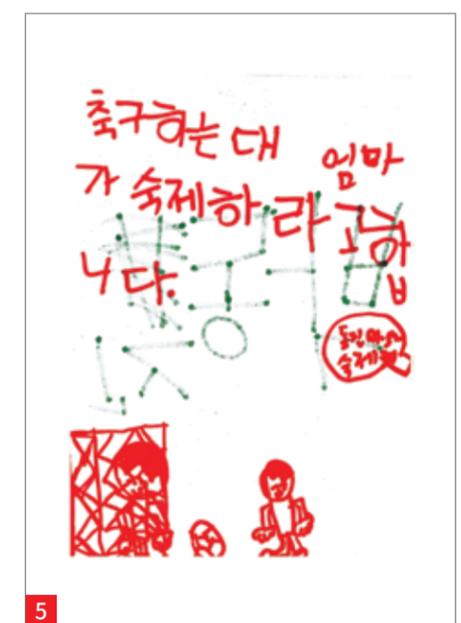
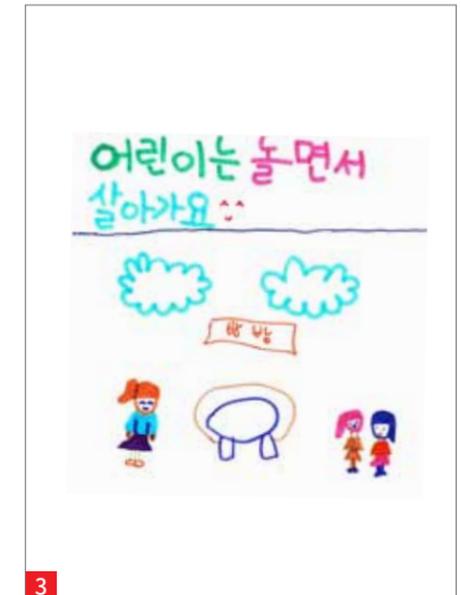
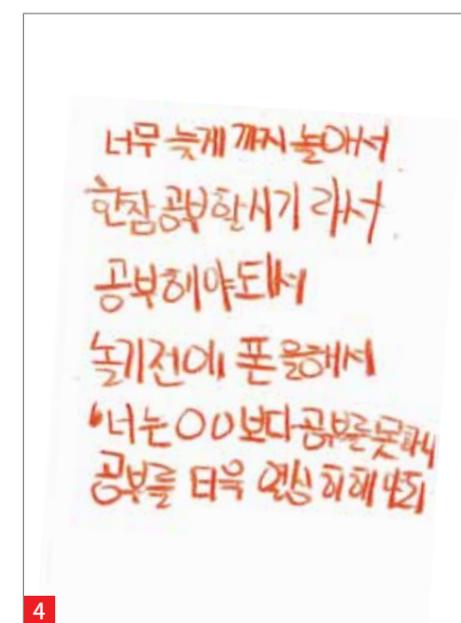
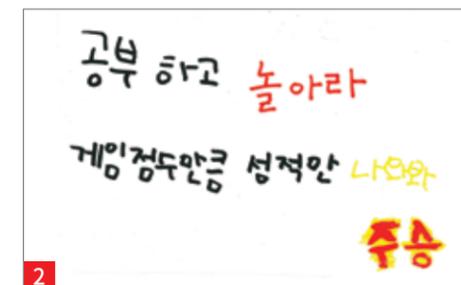
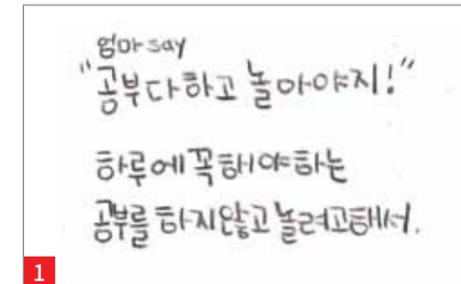


Figure 1. "Mom says "Can't play before you finish studying!" Because I went to play before I did all the work I had for that day." Figure 2. "They say "Study first, then play. Your test scores should be as high as your game scores!" Figure 3. "It's natural for children to play." Figure 4. "Because I play until late, because now's the time for me to study a lot, because I have to study, because I use my phone before I play, They say "Because you're doing worse than X, you have to study harder." Figure 5. "Mom says "Do your homework!" when I'm playing soccer."

Data

Time spent in sports and leisure

(Statistics Korea, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2016 Statistics on the Youth)



Save the Children's Commentary



With regard to the right to play, what children most urgently called for was recognition of and support for play. Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child. In the words of play therapist Garry L. Landreth, "Birds fly, fish swim, and children play," reaffirming that children play by instinct.

In contrast, children say their desire to play is not fully understood by adults. They say adults tend to see children's play as a low priority or restrict it and say it's too noisy. It is also suggested that pressure to study and excessive competition do not allow children the leisure to play and that play tends to be dismissed as secondary. In addition, when one child gets hurt while playing at school, all children are prevented from playing. Children are also told they can "play only after finishing their studies" every day.

Children would like for their right to play to be recognized and supported by adults. When they play, they may seem to get overexcited from the perspective of adults, but they still want their world to be accepted as it is.



WHEREVER WE LIVE, WE NEED A FAIR CHANCE TO PLAY

Children's Voices



"Our neighborhood is in the countryside, so it's dull and there're not enough places to play."

It's so boring. Around here, it's just rice paddies and fields. Nowhere to go. The only playground we've got is tiny and crowded with kids from all over. So we can't play there like we want to." (Jeonbuk)

"We get excited to go out and play, but actually there's nowhere to go." (Jeonbuk)

"The playgrounds near my house are too small. Please make them bigger so we can play and run as far as we want." (Jeonbuk)

"If we had a playground close by, we could get there quickly and play without any worries. That way, we could save time and our legs wouldn't hurt. Then we could save our energy, and we could have even more fun." (Jeonbuk)

"No matter how much fun it is, I get upset because I can't go to the playground very often if it's too far away." (Jeonbuk)

"Not counting my friends' house, there's no place to go. I wish we had more playgrounds with lots of equipment." (Jeonbuk)



"The park is too far away. If you walk there, it takes an hour or two, so we can't play there." (Seoul)

"Why do only apartments have playgrounds?" (Chungnam)

"My friends living in a big apartment have five playgrounds just in their complex. But we don't have even one." (Busan)

"I live in an old apartment. We have a playground but it's really dirty and nobody plays there. The one in the new apartment is so cool." (Chungnam)

"Sometimes you have to spend a lot of money, so it's hard to play." (Jeonbuk)

"You know that ice rink in front of Seoul City Hall? We need places like that where we can play inexpensively." (Daegu)

"Not counting playgrounds, they won't let me in at most places because I'm not old enough or they're too expensive." (Jeonbuk)



Children's Showcase

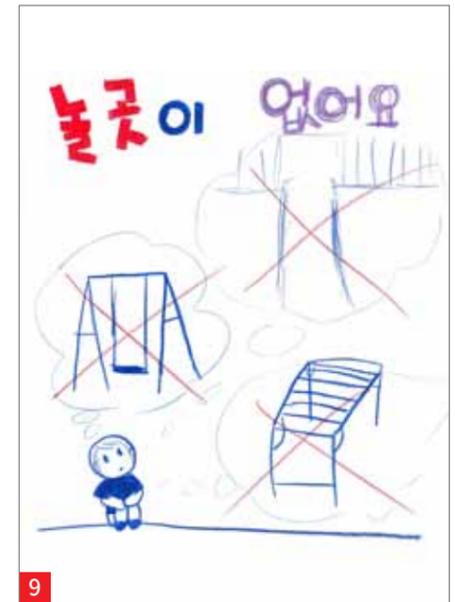
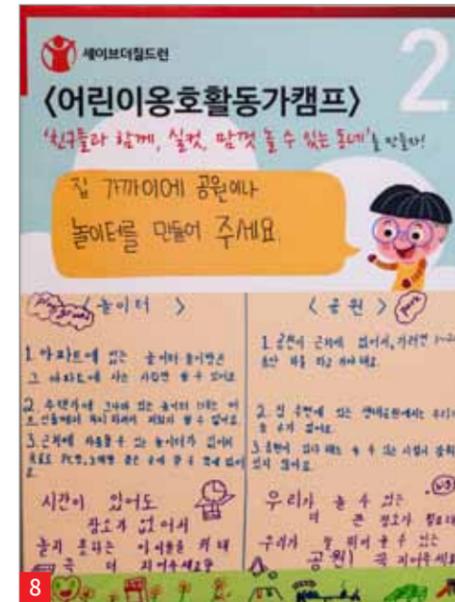
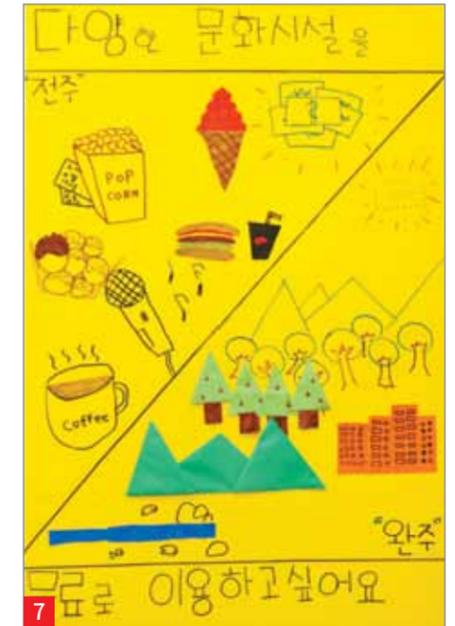
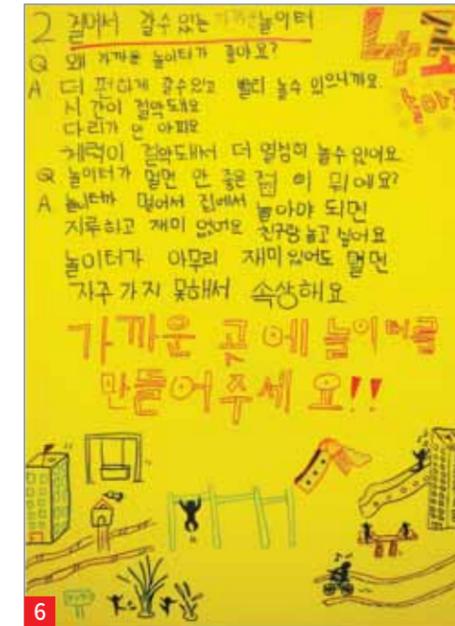


Figure 6. "Playgrounds close enough you can walk to them – Please build a playground close to me." Figure 7. "I want to use all kinds of cultural facilities for free." Figure 8. "Please build a park or playground close to my house." Figure 9. "Nowhere to play."

Data

45% playgrounds in the capital area



Nearly half or 45 percent of Korean playgrounds are concentrated in the capital area which accounts for only 12 percent of the country.

(Ministry of Public Administration and Security / Safety Control System of Children's Amusement Facilities)

42.7% play with siblings



In rural areas, "siblings" account for 42.7 percent of the people children play with, while "peers" account for only 10.5 percent.

(Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, Plans to create a community environment for promoting children's right to play, 2017)

200.81 min in using media per day



The time spent using media is 200.81 minutes a day on average, about 30 minutes longer than the urban average of 170.58 minutes.

(Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, 2017)

75.8% dissatisfied in rural area



While 75.8 percent of the children in rural areas say they are dissatisfied with outdoor play spaces, 59.6 percent in urban areas say so

(Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, 2017)

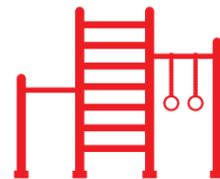
59.7% say play spaces are insufficient in rural area



The proportion of children who say play spaces are insufficient is also higher among children in rural areas, with 59.7 percent and 47.3 percent saying so in rural and urban areas, respectively.

(Korea Institute of Child Care and Education, 2017)

70% growth of private indoor playgrounds



As of February 2018, the number of private indoor playgrounds was 2,483, showing an exponential 70 percent growth from 1,493 in 2015.

(Ministry of Public Administration and Security / Safety Control System of Children's Amusement Facilities)



Save the Children's Commentary



Disparities in access to play felt by children in the ROK have been observed in three broad areas: gaps between cities and rural areas, imbalances between newly developed areas and aging urban areas, and unequal opportunities to play due to wealth inequality. Indeed, most play infrastructures are concentrated in the capital area. As for small communities in rural areas with a low child-population density, investment in play infrastructure is also insufficient. Playgrounds for children need to be considered social infrastructure and balanced social investments must be made both in cities and rural areas.

In addition, because the law requires playgrounds to be constructed as part of urban development processes, playgrounds are not built unless they're part of a large-scale housing development site or apartment construction project. As a result, while children living in apartments are able to play in playgrounds built out of legal obligation, their peers in older urban areas or densely populated residential areas have relatively rare access to play spaces.

Finally, gaps are widening between rich and poor even in play. As public play spaces are both insufficient and not well maintained, people tend to seek quality places even at their own expense. These private play spaces, however, cost more than one might expect, and therefore poor children inevitably have only limited access. In 2013, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child encouraged governments to support marginalized children in particular since they lack access to play and recreation facilities and the ability to pay.

Data

Smoking and drinking at playgrounds



Smoking is prohibited by law at playgrounds but barely in action. Legislation to ban drinking has yet to be passed.

(National Health Promotion Act)

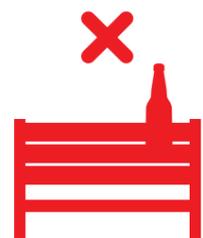
Lying drunken at playgrounds



The courts have ruled that it is unlawful for a police officer to eject a drunken homeless person from a playground, even when the person is lying with a liquor bottle in hand.

(The Herald Business, 5 Sep 2016)

Consensus on drinking ban



According to a survey by the City of Seoul, 84.9 percent of Seoul citizens say that drinking inside parks should be prohibited.

(Seoul M-Voting, 2 Jul 2016)

Playgrounds out of maintenance



In collaboration with the City of Gunsan and the venture philanthropy fund C Program, Save the Children Korea examined every playground in Gunsan and found that the playgrounds were not being managed properly and often were cluttered with trash and weeds, all of them showing traces of adult smokers.



Save the Children's Commentary



Throughout the country, children uniformly see playgrounds as dirty. Children feel uncomfortable about playgrounds for a number of reasons but the biggest problems are alcohol, cigarettes, and trash. In particular, playground drinking is a serious issue as traces of drinking are frequently found at the same playgrounds where children play. Another grave concern has to do with homelessness. Of course, the homeless should be guaranteed the same right to rest as the general public but in playgrounds children's right to play must be the top priority. However, the relevant laws have yet to be amended.

As for the conditions of playgrounds, trash and weeds are not handled properly and traces of adult smokers are commonly found at most playgrounds. Without timely weeding, many of them are filled with overgrown grasses and trees.

In interviews parents say they are reluctant to let their children go to playgrounds, which have problems related to alcohol, cigarettes and homelessness or in which trash and weeds are not managed properly, since they seem to be dangerous places for children to play by themselves. As a result, it's a vicious circle—playgrounds where children won't play look dim and bleak, remain deserted, and end up being abandoned spaces in their local communities.

The government needs to use its budget and make efforts to keep playgrounds in pleasant condition but maintenance at most playgrounds continues to be neglected using manpower shortages and budget deficits as an excuse. Particularly in the case of local governments in densely populated areas, a single person may be required to oversee more than a hundred playgrounds.

THE PLACES WHERE WE PLAY MUST BE SAFE

Children's Voices



"We got some mail saying that a sex offender lives in our neighborhood. So I wish we had a security guard at least at the playground." (Busan)

"One time, I almost got hit by a motorcycle on the sidewalk in front of the playground. Please crack down on things like traffic violations." (Jeonbuk)

"It makes me scared because there's no fence on the street or sidewalk on the way to school." (Busan)

"Please make a zone around the playground, like those school zones. They should make it safe to play in school zones even when there's a lot of cars." (Chungnam)

"It's dangerous without bicycle lanes." (Busan)

"Cars go way too fast by the playground. They should put barriers or speed checking machines in front." (Seoul)

"We need a playground with bright lights so we can play there even at night, and a security guard nearby to protect us." (Jeonbuk)



"I wish we had a safe playground so parents wouldn't have to worry." (Jeonbuk)

"There's no surveillance cameras at all at my neighborhood playground." (Busan)

"I wish we had an emergency bell to call the police and keep us safe." (Daegu)

"Since we have lots of alleys, I wish we had lots of streetlamps. Because accidents happen in dark places." (Jeonbuk)

"When I play in a scary place, I get scared too." (Jeonbuk)

"At the playground, there's some scrap metal left behind by construction workers a long time ago. I wish someone would take them away because you can really get hurt if you step on them." (Seoul)

"We should have first-aid kits at the playground so you can use them if you get hurt." (Busan)



Children's Showcase

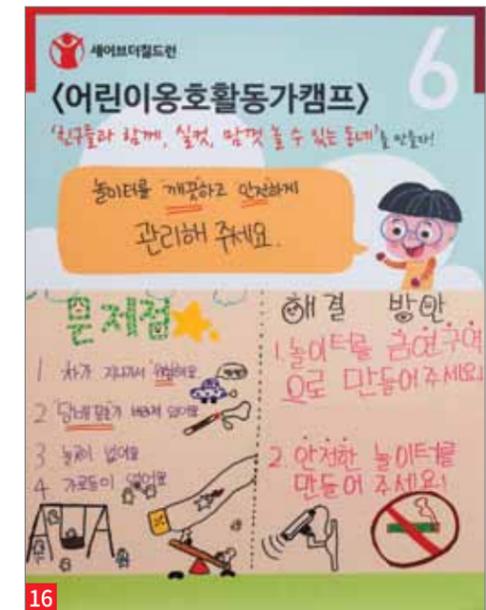
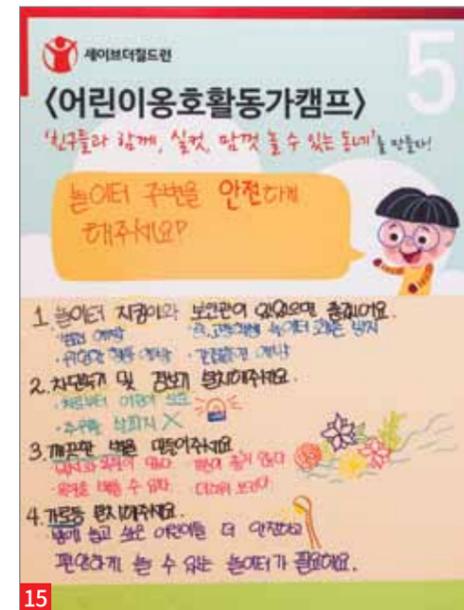
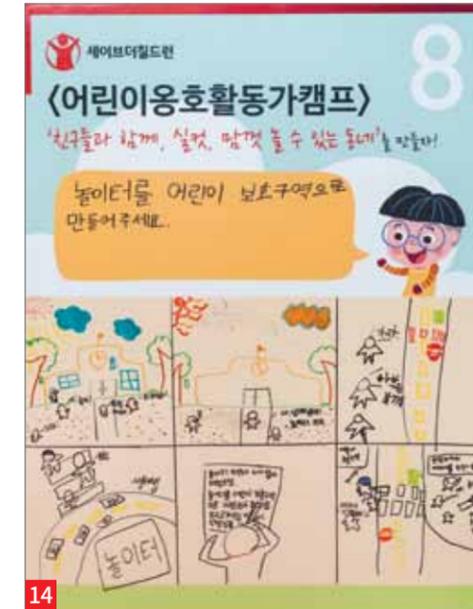


Figure 14. "Please make our playgrounds into child safety zones." Figure 15. "Please make playground areas safe!" Figure 16. "Please keep our playgrounds safe and clean."

Data

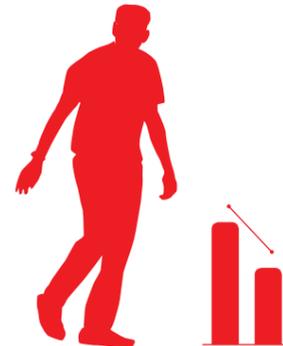
59.1% traffic accidents near public playgrounds



Over a five-year period beginning in 2011, 59.1 percent of all traffic accidents involving children in Gyeonggi-do occurred near public playgrounds.

(Gyeonggi Research Institute, Study on Improving Traffic Safety near Children's Parks in Gyeonggi-Do, 2017)

27% Korean citizens trust others



When given the prompt "On the whole, people can be trusted", 38 percent of Korean respondents surveyed from 1981 to 1984 agreed, but that rate fell by 11 percentage points to 27 percent from 2010 to 2014.

(Korea Development Institute, KDI Focus No. 91)



Save the Children's Commentary



Current ROK laws concerning children's playground safety focus only on playground equipment. If a playground and its surroundings are not safe, children using the playground will not feel safe even if the equipment has been safety certified. In particular, children expressed many concerns over traffic safety around playgrounds. Children feel a lot more secure when the way to and from the playground and the surrounding streets are safe.

In addition, these days, crimes occurring at the playground have made children extremely wary of strangers. Nevertheless, all passersby have free access to playgrounds, so increasingly children have been calling for surveillance cameras and security guards, but these are not a fundamental solution. Furthermore, because playground construction standards do not include criteria for evaluating the surroundings, some playgrounds have been built next to harmful facilities for children, such as love motels, factories, and bars.

Children's playgrounds must be located in the best and safest places for children to play, but they are sometimes built in remote, completely inappropriate places because the location of playgrounds is not considered a significant factor in urban planning. Some playgrounds are located very far from residential areas, and in order to get to a playground, some children have to cross large busy streets that would be hard to cross even for adults.

PLAYGROUNDS ARE NO FUN

Children's Voices

"Playgrounds are all the same. That's no fun. Please make us different play equipment." (Chungnam)

"We need play areas where we can play all kinds of games of our own. Please make them more fun." (Busan)



"Our neighborhood playground only has slides and swings, so I like to hang out at the Internet café or karaoke room instead." (Jeonbuk)

"I went to go play there, but the playground was the most boring ever." (Daegu)

"The playground in my neighborhood is really old, so it's no fun. If they had equipment that was unique and exciting, I bet a lot of my friends would go play there." (Busan)



"I used to go to the playground, but now I don't go very often. It's boring because it's always the same playground stuff. I wish they had new stuff there." (Jeonbuk)

"It's really safe. But it's like it was made for little kids. I wish we had playgrounds that were more exciting—maybe have parts that shake and make things suspenseful."

I used to go to the playground by my house, but not anymore because it was boring." (Jeonbuk)

"The play equipment is only for little kids, so it's too easy for us." (Busan)

"We need a playground for big kids too. We want exciting stuff to do." (Seoul)

"There are so many kindergarten students on the playground equipment, so we can use only the pull-up bars or jungle-gym nearby, but that's just boring." (Jeonbuk)

"It's all stuff for little kids, so there's nothing for us to enjoy." (Jeonbuk)

"We can play in the sand even on a rainy day, but there are so many kindergarteners in the sand box, so it's hard to go play there." (Jeonbuk)



Children's Showcase

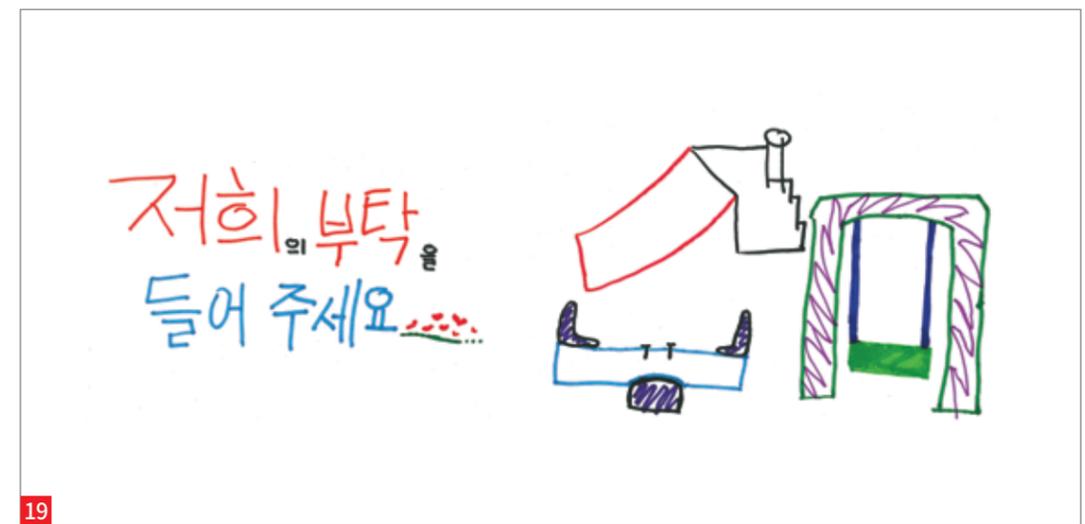
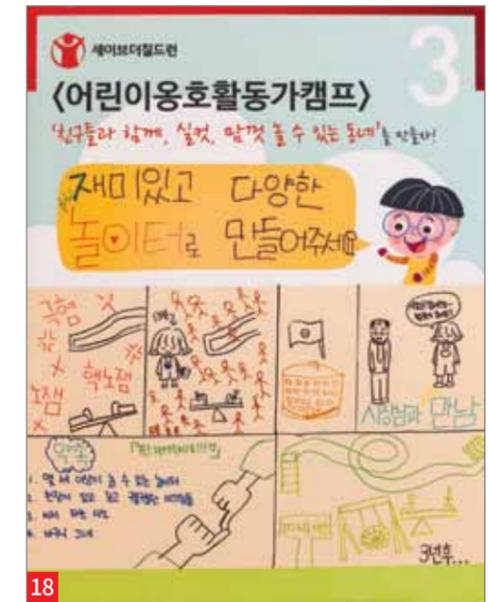
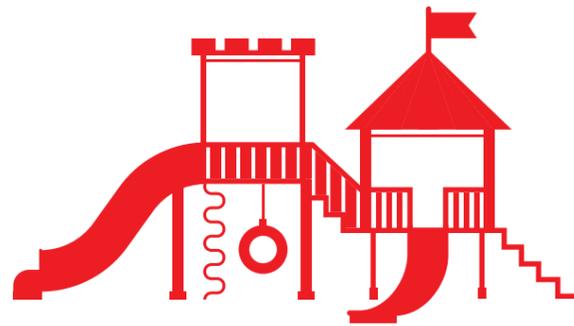


Figure 17. "The playground is so boring. I want a fun playground." Figure 18. "Please make playgrounds more fun and different." Figure 19. "Please make our wishes come true."

Data

No room for new types of play equipment

(Safety Supervision Law of Children's Play Facilities)



According to current laws, safety certification must be obtained to build a new playground. However, thorough safety standards have not been established for new types of playground equipment.

Save the Children's Commentary



In general, children in the ROK have two main complaints about the play areas besides their conditions. First of all, they say, every playground is identical so that soon they get bored. The playground in one neighborhood is not much different from one in the next neighborhood, and it does not have equipment that's particularly interesting. As playgrounds have been built with emphasis on leaving no risk, many elementary school students point out that they seem to be made just for little kids.

When a playground is built in accordance with current law, it must be certified for safety. However, the absence of specific safety standards for playground equipment makes it difficult to obtain certification even if a new type of play equipment has been developed at considerable expense in terms of time and money. Besides, with a view to reducing any possible playground accidents or civil complaints, local governments supervising playgrounds tend to prefer conventional playground designs that seem the least dangerous and least likely to cause civil complaints. As a result, this has yielded the same boring playgrounds offering only the simplest play equipment.

Another problem is that because most playgrounds are built for infants and young children, those in the upper grades of elementary school do not enjoy the playground anymore. For different age groups, different kinds of play spaces should be available around the community; however, in most cases, play spaces are limited to playgrounds built around equipment for young children. With most playgrounds targeting the very young, the need for play spaces for older children including intermediate-level elementary students has not been fulfilled.

Playing is not only about playing on equipment. Even without manufactured play equipment installed, children can play with geographical features, natural objects, or even loose parts in a vacant lot. Adventure playgrounds, pop-up playgrounds, and street playgrounds are good examples. Society needs to make efforts to provide novel playgrounds for different age groups.



SCHOOLS ALSO NEED TO BECOME GOOD PLACES TO PLAY

Children's Voices

"After I graduate, the school bathroom will probably be the place I remember most. Because it was the only place we could actually relax and play." (Busan)

I may have thought it was fun back then, but it's sad to think I had nowhere else to play but the bathroom." (Gyeonggi)

"During break time, I spend most of my time in the classroom, but our teachers don't let us run inside. There's not much you can do sitting down, so I bring board games and toys from home." (Busan)

"Sometimes, I just want to play freely where the teachers aren't watching us during breaks or lunch time." (Busan)

"Teachers in the other classes don't let other students go into their class or even other classrooms, so I can't play with my friends in different classes. I need a place to meet and talk with friends." (Seoul)

"There's no place where I can talk with my close friends." (Busan)

"The classrooms are so small, and the big kids rule the schoolyard, making us uncomfortable to be there. I wish we had a place where kids from each grade could relax and just play." (Seoul)

"If the 6th graders are playing soccer in the schoolyard, it's too crowded for us to play. I wish we had assigned areas or play times for each grade." (Busan)

"Even though we have a play room, we're not allowed to use it. And it's closer than either the schoolyard or the auditorium." (Busan)

"I want to play in the computer room, art room, or music room, but whenever I try, I get scolded by the teachers, so I can't play there." (Jeonbuk)

"I want to play and practice playing musical instruments in the music room, but teachers won't let us go inside. We're not allowed in the gym either except for P.E., and the same goes for the science lab. I wish we could freely enter and use those rooms." (Jeonbuk)

"I want to play on the rooftop, but it's always locked, so I can't play there. If they could put a fence on the rooftop to make it safe, and then install trampolines, slides, or swings, we could have fun there." (Jeonbuk)

"I wish we had a room in the library where we could read and relax at the same time. If we had a lounge, I would be able to talk and have fun with friends, and also read books." (Jeonbuk)

"When I was playing in the schoolyard, it got too hot, so I wanted to play in the auditorium or the gym, but I couldn't because they were locked. Please allow us to play on a hot or rainy day as well." (Seoul)

"If a play space could be built on the rooftop, I would like to grow plants and watch the stars there." (Seoul)

"In the classroom, they have only desks where you can study, but I wish we had large desks that you could play on." (Busan)

"If the school desks and chairs were replaced with folding ones, they could make more space in the classroom, and we could also use it for playing." (Jeonbuk)

"The lockers at the back of the class take up too much space. If the lockers are put somewhere else, the classroom will become bigger and a better place to play." (Seoul)

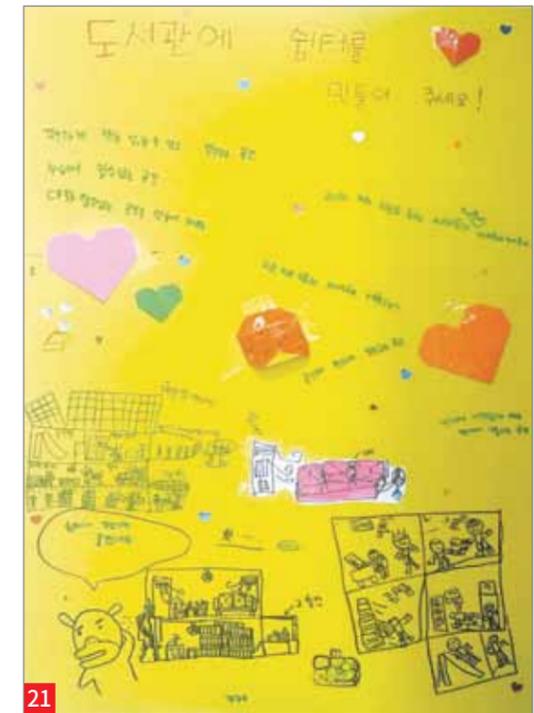
"When we play in the classroom, I frequently bump into the edges of the desks and get hurt. I wish we had more space between the desks." (Seoul)



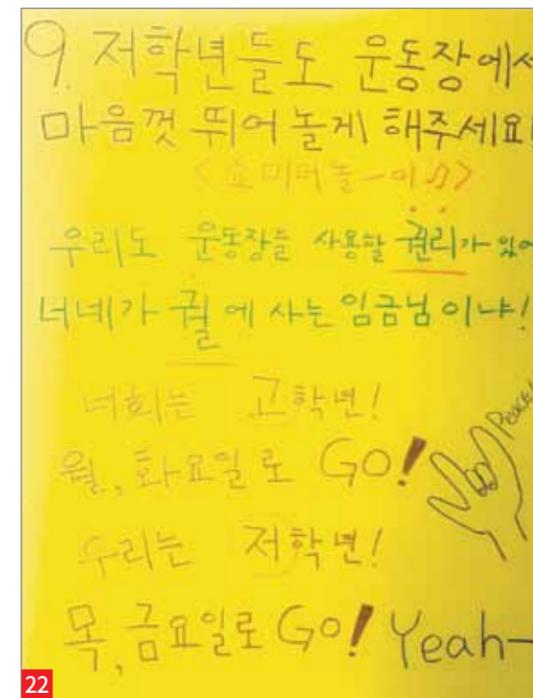
Children's Showcase



20



21



22



23

Figure 20. "Keep the doors open in special-purpose classrooms like music rooms, art rooms, and science labs!" Figure 21. "Please make a lounge in the library where we can relax." Figure 22. "Please let students in the lower grades also play in the schoolyard as much as they want." Figure 23. "Our Imaginary Rooftop"

Data

Areas and activities for play at school

(Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation)



Whereas 93.3 percent of teachers saw “classrooms” as the main area for play at school, students said that they stay there by default because the schools lack true spaces for play. What they do there for fun is “talk” or “board games”.

(Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation)

Save the Children's Commentary



Children say that schools must become good places to play. For this reason, spaces are needed where children can play freely with friends without teacher supervision. In addition, they wish to have the freedom to use rooftops or special-purpose classrooms including computer classrooms, art rooms, and music rooms. Classrooms or schoolyards also need to be changed to become more suitable spaces for play.

However, our society and schools have yet to address the systemic and policy problems that fail to support children's play. In particular, if a safety accident occurs at school, the principal and the homeroom teacher must take responsibility in considerable measure. In this regard, school authorities treat children's lively play activities as a burden that can lead to safety issues. In fact, there is one case where a school was sued by the parents of a student who had been injured while playing on school grounds.

Therefore, the government must take the initiative to make safe places for play within schools. Furthermore, in order to relieve schools of any attendant burdens, the system must be supplemented through the introduction of games that can be played at school. To this end, teachers in charge of play activities as well as safety can be newly assigned or a system of regional security guards can be implemented. In addition, policies need to be established to develop teacher training programs and to streamline administrative work so that the invigoration of play activities does not cause conflicts among teachers.



SCHOOL IS NOT ONLY ABOUT STUDYING. WE NEED MORE TIME TO PLAY

Children's Voices



"During the morning self-study class, the teacher always forces me to read a book." (Busan)

"We're supposed to get to school by 08:30, at 08:40 the school broadcasts an announcement to take our seats and read a book." (Busan)

"Please don't tell us to review the math problems we got wrong or to preview the math workbook during break time." (Busan)

"Even when the recess bell rings, our teacher just continues with class." (Busan)

"My school provides less time to play. In addition to short break times, we have to move frequently to take our classes. That makes break time even shorter. Teacher tries to make us study more using breaks for study, so we're starved for break time to play." (Jeonbuk)

"Teachers teach classes even during breaks, so that makes break time shorter. Since we have to prepare our textbooks for the next class, we can't play during breaks." (Jeonbuk)

"Since we have a lot of homework, instead of playing I have to do homework during breaks." (Seoul)

"After regular school, I go to cram schools, and come back home around 10 p.m. So I don't have time for homework. I have to do it during breaks at school." (Seoul)

"I want to learn something that's right for my age. Even though I'm an elementary school student, I have to read ahead on what I'll learn in middle school, so I don't have time to play." (Seoul)

"I wish they could make a certain class time for play on our class schedule. Playtime is short, and class time is long, so it would be good to make sure we have playtime by creating a class only for play at least." (Jeonbuk)

"During lunch break, I have to clean my assigned area, so I don't have time to hang out with friends." (Busan)

"Since I have to move more a lot from one class to another for different levels or subjects, I have many things to do during break. So I rarely play during break time." (Busan)

"During lunch time, I've only got about 15 minutes left to play after handing out meals, lending books, eating, and cleaning up. I wish we had more time to play during lunch time." (Jeonbuk)



"We have playtime between classes, but teacher says we have to jump rope during playtime, so it doesn't seem like playtime to me." (Jeonbuk)

Children's Showcase

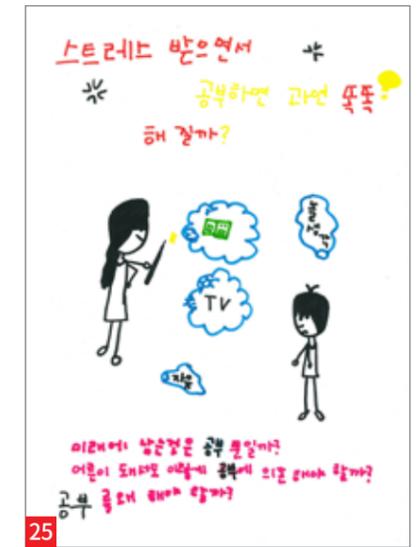


Figure 24. "Mom says "Hey! Are you studying?" Every day study, study, study..." Figure 25. "How will I get smarter if I'm always stressed when I study?" Figure 26. "We also have the right to play." Figure 27. "I have so many things to study all day long." Figure 28. "Days in black on calendar = Work days, Cram School from Mon. to Fri., Cram School from Sat. to Sun."

Data

Study hours on weekdays

(National Youth Policy Institute, Survey on the Rights of Children and Youth, 2016)



7hr 50min

On average, adolescents in the ROK study for 7 hours and 50 minutes on weekdays. This is about **2 hours longer** than the average of the other OECD member countries, which is around 5 hours.

Save the Children's Commentary



The recreational environment in schools is not only about having space. Children must have sufficient time to play. The trouble that children have in their daily lives is that they cannot relax as much as they deserve during breaks and lunch time.

First of all, due to a social environment where learning is considered more important than children's right to play or to relax, sometimes class continues during school break times. Moreover, students have said that they have to give up rest during break times in order to do homework or review what they learned due to their heavy academic workloads. In this competitive society, many children have conflicting feelings: even while hanging out with friends, they are anxious about getting left behind those same friends. And learning continues even after school. In such a situation, having enough time to play is not easy.

In addition, because students have to change classrooms to take multiple classes for different achievement levels or subjects, they do not have enough break time, especially as these kinds of classes increase. Due to other responsibilities, such as cleaning and meal distribution, students cannot make full use of their given break times. Besides, due to the lack of understanding of play, when given playtime, students cannot play autonomously or actively, and in some cases, that time is even used as an extension of certain structured classes.

Without sufficient time to play, some children have suggested that "playing" be introduced as a subject alongside the others. Of course, this could create additional burdens on schools because new mandatory courses, such as safety education and software education, have been increasingly adopted these days on top of the regular curriculum. However, substantially increasing the amount of time devoted to "play" must be considered, perhaps by readjusting the heavy academic workload currently focused on Korean language, mathematics, and English.



MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' VOICES ON THE RIGHT TO PLAY

Since 2012, Save the Children Korea has conducted "A Report on Korean Children's Quality of Life" in collaboration with the Institute of Social Welfare at Seoul National University. During the research process, children's quality of life was compared across 15 countries including the ROK. The results show that the level of happiness of children in the ROK is lower than that of other countries, and that this level drops sharply as they enter middle school. Based on the results Save the Children Korea conducted Focused Group Interviews with middle school students to learn about the changes in their lives after entering middle school and their thoughts about happiness.

"I feel most unhappy when I can't play. Sometimes, my parents don't let me go out, and sometimes I have to do homework." (Jeonnam)

"I spend a lot less time playing and hanging out with friends." (Chungnam)

"In elementary school, I didn't have to study much like I do now, so back then I had time to play. But now I can't play at all." (Seoul)

"Between different cram schools, I don't have any free time. I have no time to relax." (Seoul)

"I think I'm more stressed out. I'm under a lot of pressure to study, and I also have some troubles with my friends." (Gangwon)

"I think I spend more time studying, and I'm told more frequently to study harder from people around me including my parents." (Jeonnam)

"I wish I could skip cram school classes on holidays." (Seoul)

What students participating in the interviews talked about most was use of free time and pastimes. The students said that they feel happy when doing what they want and enjoying pastimes. However, many said after entering middle school that they have no choice in how they use their time. And in particular, they feel sad to have much less time to hang out with friends.

Along with use of time, studying was regarded most negatively by the students. Every student said their level of happiness has fallen as academic pressure has become more serious after entering middle school. Above all, due to the excessive academic workload and competitive social atmosphere, students were shown to have been struggling not only with the difficulty of a higher academic level and extended study time, but also with various kinds of pressures, such as self-imposed pressure, hypercompetitiveness, feelings of inferiority, high expectations from surrounding people, and concerns about future employment.

WHAT EFFORTS HAS THE ROK MADE SINCE 2011?

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child considered the consolidated 3rd and 4th periodic reports of the ROK (CRC/C/KOR/3-4) on 21 September 2011 and adopted concluding observations on 7 October 2011. Below is a part of the concern and recommendations on the right to education, leisure and cultural activities stated in the concluding observations.

Despite the efforts made by the State party to lower the stress of students and the adoption of programmes to ensure that children have the opportunity to play and engage in recreational and cultural activities, the Committee is concerned at the severely competitive conditions that are still prevalent in the State party's education system. The Committee is also concerned at the widespread enrolment of children in additional private tutoring taking place outside the curriculum resulting in, inter alia: children being subject to serious and disproportionate stress and the negative impact on their physical and mental health. Furthermore, the Committee notes with concern the exacerbation of pre-existing socioeconomic asymmetries arising from the financial cost of such private tutoring and its hindrance to the adequate fulfilment of the rights of the child to leisure and cultural activities.

63. The Committee recommends that the State party:

c) Ensure the right of children to enjoy adequate leisure, cultural and recreational activities, in compliance with article 31 of the Convention.

In the six years that have passed since then, what efforts has the government made thus far based on the recommendations?

The 5th and 6th Periodic Reports submitted by the government to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child include the right to play as below:

In a bid to promote the rights of children to play, local-level education offices and municipalities have established playgrounds and parks in whose design children themselves participated, a comprehensive plan for the right to play, and rules related to the protection of the right to play.

That is all. As no effort has been made at the central government level to promote the children's right to play, it mentioned only the efforts made by municipalities and local-level education offices.

In May 2015, with the announcement of the 1st Master Plans for Child Policies, the government declared that it would establish a National Play Strategy to promote children's right to play. After that, the government made a visible effort by organizing a council for civil society cooperation, but it was convened only once before disappearing for no clear reason. Moreover, although it announced that the National Play Strategy would be built under the 3rd Plan for Ageing Society and Population, it did not go any further. Finally, after six years had passed without any efforts made, in 2017, the government conducted a policy study to establish a play strategy. However, even since the study's completion, there have been no visible efforts on the part of the central government at all.

Conclusion

After listening directly to the voices of Korean children on the right to play, we found that most of all, **they asked for adults' recognition of and support for play.** The children said that playing with friends is important in their lives, but adults tend to view it as less significant than their own activities, or dismiss it as noisy and annoying. In addition, adults think of play as an extra activity that is less important than studying, something done after children have finished studying.

They also asked to narrow the gap in access to play. The social structural problems of the country, such as the gaps between cities and rural areas, between new and old urban cores, and between rich and poor, were witnessed equally in terms of access to play. They wanted to enjoy fair chances in play wherever they live.

Finally, **they asked for improved play environments around communities and schools.** They said they can play with greater peace of mind when their neighborhood playgrounds are maintained in good condition, and become safe spaces protected from dangerous situations and people. They also called for playgrounds specifically designed for each age group because the existing playgrounds are all identical, too simple, therefore boring.

The children requested that they be allowed to use various special activity rooms and rooftops along with the existing spaces at school, and to increase the number of places where they can talk freely with friends. They also wanted to enjoy their breaks and lunch time undisturbed, and to have more time to play at school.

Taken together, the children's voices reflect **many problems resulting from the perspectives of Korean adults on play.** Many adults still think of play as a reward for study or as a break to study better, devaluing play and regarding study as more important. Likewise, the government has indeed shown less interest and made less investment in relevant policies than other fields. As a result, the play environment to which children are exposed has become worse and worse. As their parents do not want their children to play in a poor environment, children's play has been disappearing gradually.

The role of the government is significant in promoting children's right to play. **The government must strive to improve the social awareness of play. In addition, it must invigorate children's play culture by proactively investing budget funds toward improving the play environment through establishment of a "National Play Strategy".** Through this process, we hope the children's voices and experiences in this report will be used as a valuable reference because, **in terms of play, children are the experts.**



Special Thanks to

Save the Children Korea is deeply grateful to all the children who participated in the Summer Camp for Child Self-Advocates from 2015 to 2017 and informed us about the reality of their and their friends' right to play while suggesting directions our society should take. We also appreciate the efforts made by Young Savers (University Student Advocates of Children's Rights) to help children express their thoughts by attentively listening to them and documenting what they had to say.

Save the Children Korea will do its utmost to ensure that the voices of the children are conveyed directly to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the government of the Republic of Korea with a view to realizing substantive change.





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