

EARLY SOCIAL SKILLS AS A FUNCTION OF GENDER: AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF CHILDREN BETWEEN 3-8 YEARS IN ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

- Social experiences with peers constitute an important developmental context for children.
- In these contexts, children acquire a wide range of behaviours, skills, attitudes and experiences that influence their adaptations during the life span.
- One of the major tasks of the early childhood years is to learn positive and socially acceptable ways of interacting with others.
- As much of this learning occurs within the context of the peer group, positive peer interactions make a substantial contribution to children's socioemotional and cognitive development beyond the influences of family, school and neighbourhood
- With increasing age, play partners become better able to agree with each other about the roles, rules and themes of their pretence.
- The single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not IQ, not school grades, and not classroom behaviour but, rather the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children



Studying children's behaviour in naturalistic settings helps understand their control over their own peer culture, coping capabilities when there is very little adult help.

Naturalistic Observation of social interactions among children has been a rare area of study in the Indian context. This study was undertaken to examine naturally occurring social interactions among children 3-8 years in their school settings, day care settings and informal groups in apartment building parks.

Objective:

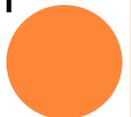
To observe and analyze social interactions of children in the age group of 3- 8 years in their natural/ informal settings for gender differences.



Review of literature

Though children grow in similar kind of ecological systems, and are almost exposed to similar kind of experiences; differences in parenting styles, stereotypic gender conceptions held by family and society give rise to gender differences in social interactions with peers.

- Although girls tend to initiate same sex play more than boys at age 3, this gender difference is reversed and even heightened by age 5 (Pitcher & Schultz, 1983).
- Children's preference for same-sex play mates is a universal aspect of growing up (Whiting & Edwards, 1988).
- Several studies have indicated that girls spend more time in small group social activities, in cooperative and turn-taking games, engage in more person fantasy and are more sensitive to the requirements of collaboration. Boys, on the other hand, prefer to engage in larger group physically active games and rough and tumble play (Walker, Sue 2004, Dorsch & Keane, 1994; Fabes, 1994; Fagot, 1985; Jones & Glenn, 1991; Lewis & Phillipsen, 1998; Maccoby, 1988; Mollor, Hymel & Rubin, 1992)
- Serbin, Powlishta and Gulko (1993) found that there was increase in preference for same-sex peers among kindergarten children and children in the early school years.



- Girls' friendships are characterized by emotional and physical closeness, the friendships of boys are founded on shared activities and interests (Maccoby, 1988).
- Putallaz et al. (1995) suggest socialization and cultural processes may act to discourage overt conflict behaviour by girls while encouraging the use of affiliative conflict strategies designed to minimize disruption.
- Similarly, overt conflict involving aggression may be not only acceptable for boys but positively valued as a means of establishing their social position if it is used as means for standing up for oneself.

Do these various findings hold true in the Indian context too, or do cultural differences bring out differences in early social interactions among boys and girls? This study tried to explore the issue.



METHOD

The city of Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India was selected for the study as there were a number of schools with cosmopolitan environments wherein children from various backgrounds, cultures, and wide socioeconomic groups could be observed interacting with each other.

Sampling procedure

Purposive sampling technique was used to gather data in order to video film social interactions of 3-8 year olds. The video recordings were taken in the following settings from five different schools, two apartment play grounds and two summer camps.

School settings: Outdoor play, Indoor play: block play, pretend play and snack time.

85 video clippings were shot, but only 72 clippings were selected for the study in order to

- Systematically distribute the samples in various play settings according to objectives of the study.
- Select children interacting normally without being self conscious about being videotaped.

What data are entered into The Observer?

When observing the behaviour of humans and other animals, researchers collect Observations in the form of more or less detailed notes. To be understood by the computer, the observations have to be 'translated' into short sentences. The Observer has been developed so that the logical structure of the observations is maintained in a 'computerized' form. Basically, each observation note entered in The Observer looks like a sentence without prepositions and articles. For instance, the observation 'siddharth is sharing' would be coded as:

“Siddharth Share”



To analyze the observations, The Observer must place these elements in certain spaces so that it can retrieve them later. Therefore, the programme creates a space for the individual that performs the action (**Subject**) and a space for the action itself (**Behaviour**).

Subject	Behavior
Siddharth	share

When another action is scored (for example, “Siddharth is fighting”, The Observer stores it by creating another record consisting of the same elements:

Time	Subject	Behavior
0:00:01	Siddhath	share
0:00:03	siddharth	fight

Each record is attached to a time stamp, so that the computer can produce information about the location in the time line and the duration of any action being recorded. In this case, The Observer interprets the records as Siddharth has shared for ten seconds. When calculating the statistics, we can see a report like this:

Behaviour	Duration (seconds)
Share	10.0



Observations are certainly more complex than the examples above. There is a need to add more details of what is being observed to our records. The Observer does that by adding a field called **Modifier**.

A modifier limits the scope of a subject or behaviour. Suppose the name of whom the subject is sharing with has to be annotated, **'Siddharth is sharing with Nandini'**

This is 'translated' into The Observer's language in this way:

Time	Subject	Behavior	Behavior Modifier
0:00:01	Siddharth	share	Nandini

In this case, the **Behaviour Modifier** specifies the receiver of the action. The state in which Siddharth is sharing with Nandini can also be specified by using a **Subject Modifier**. Suppose Siddharth is sharing in a pleasant manner with Nandini, this is translated in The Observer in:

Time	Subject	Subject Modifier	Behavior	Behavior Modifier
0:00:01	Siddharth	pleasant	share	Nandini

The Observer is extremely flexible about the kind of modifiers it uses. A feature of the behaviour (e.g., the receiver of an action, the tone of voice, the speed of walking) or of a subject (e.g., male/female, or some other characteristic) can be specified and both nominal and numerical modifiers can be defined

Coding schemes developed and used for this study

- Coding scheme for **conversations – both sociable and unsociable conversations, content**
- Coding scheme for **body language – social, unsocial, physical proximity, facial expressions**
- Coding scheme for **gender related behaviours – sex appropriate, neutral and cross gender behaviours**
- Coding scheme for **acceptance, rejection, and resistance strategies and unsociable actions.**



Coding scheme for conversations

Type of conversations

- Social conversations**-Initiation, Following, Directing peers, Pleasantries, Supporting ,Encouraging
- Unsociable conversations** - Silent, Interrupting, Argument, Gossiping, Teasing, Dominating

Content of conversations

- Social content**- Social speech, Common interest topics, Fantasy, Words of gratitude, Daily events, Secrets, Requests, Compliments, Approvals
- Unsociable content**- About self, Abusive words, Words of rejection, Disapprovals

Coding scheme for body language

Type of activity

Social activity Active, into groups

Unsociable activity Lethargic, Outside group, Dispirited

Physical proximity- Holding hands, Hugging, Patting

Facial expressions- Social facial expressions Pleasant/happy, Smiling, Excited, Surprised, Laughing

Unsociable facial expressions—Sad, angry, threatening



Coding scheme for Gender related behaviours - Sex appropriate behaviour, Encouraging sex appropriate behaviour, Condemning sex inappropriate behaviour, Cross gender roles, Encouraging cross gender behaviour

Coding scheme for acceptance, rejection and resistance strategies and unsociable actions

•**Acceptance and co-operation strategies** - Showing interest, gaining entry into play, Imitating play – trying to behave similarly as that of peers, Striving for attention, Teasing in a friendly manner, Recognition of leader – selecting a leader with common opinion, Competing with leader, Using friendship to bargain or negotiate, Team work – working or playing together in a group towards a common goal, Sharing, Explaining rules of play

•**Rejection strategies** - Group rejection- preventing entry, Indirect rejection, turning away, Denying friendship, Claims of ownership

•**Resistance strategies** -Physical resistance, yelling, Disputes over toy or roles, Threatening, Disturbing other's play



The coding also included modifiers – modifiers were persons, objects or behaviours that formed the reason for exhibiting the particular behaviour with the peers during their interactions. Eg: children expressed anger because of other's rejection. Here, "anger" is behaviour whereas "others rejection" is the modifier of the behaviour "angry". List of modifiers selected are as given below

- Same gender
- Opposite gender
- Self initiated
- Motivated by others
- Play materials
- Place of play
- Play rules
- Interruption
- Other's provocation
- Friendship
- Knowledge
- Snacks
- Self approach
- Other's approach
- Other's company
- Other's rejection
- Possessions
- Peer model
- Play rules
- Group interest

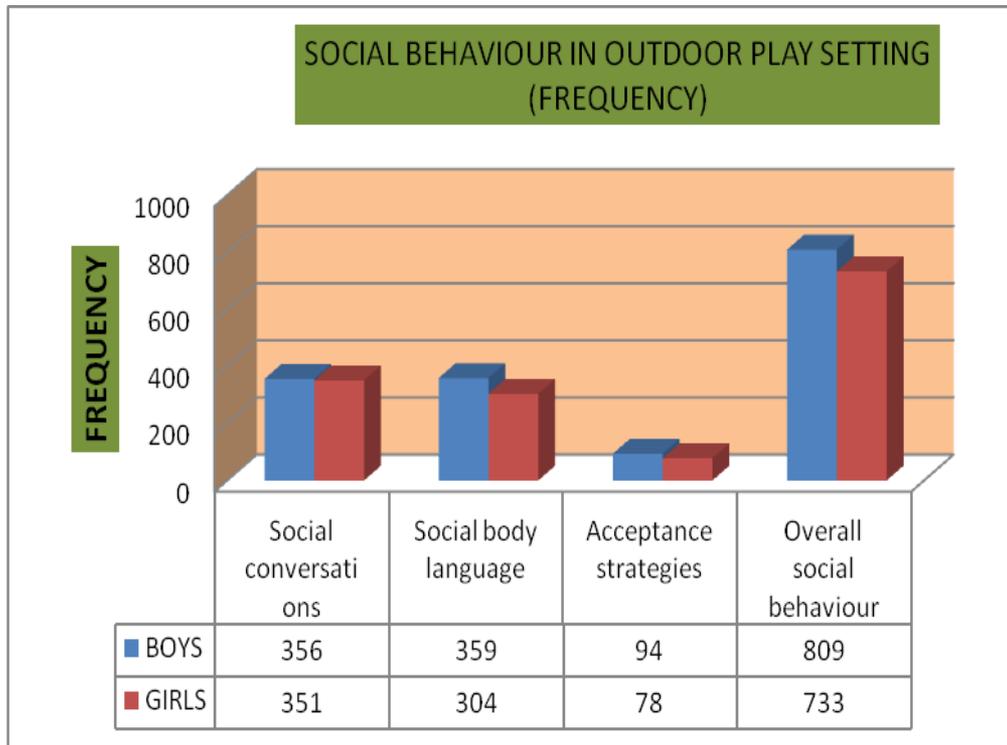


Observation & Analysis

The tapes were loaded into the computer and observations made with The Observer XT 7.0 The video tapes were subjected to intra coder reliability. 30% of the videos i.e 22 videos were coded again after a fortnight and percent of agreement between the two coding were checked and found to be 87%. Data on frequency and duration of behaviour occurrences.was transferred to excel files and analyzed using two-way ANOVA to find out gender differences in different settings.



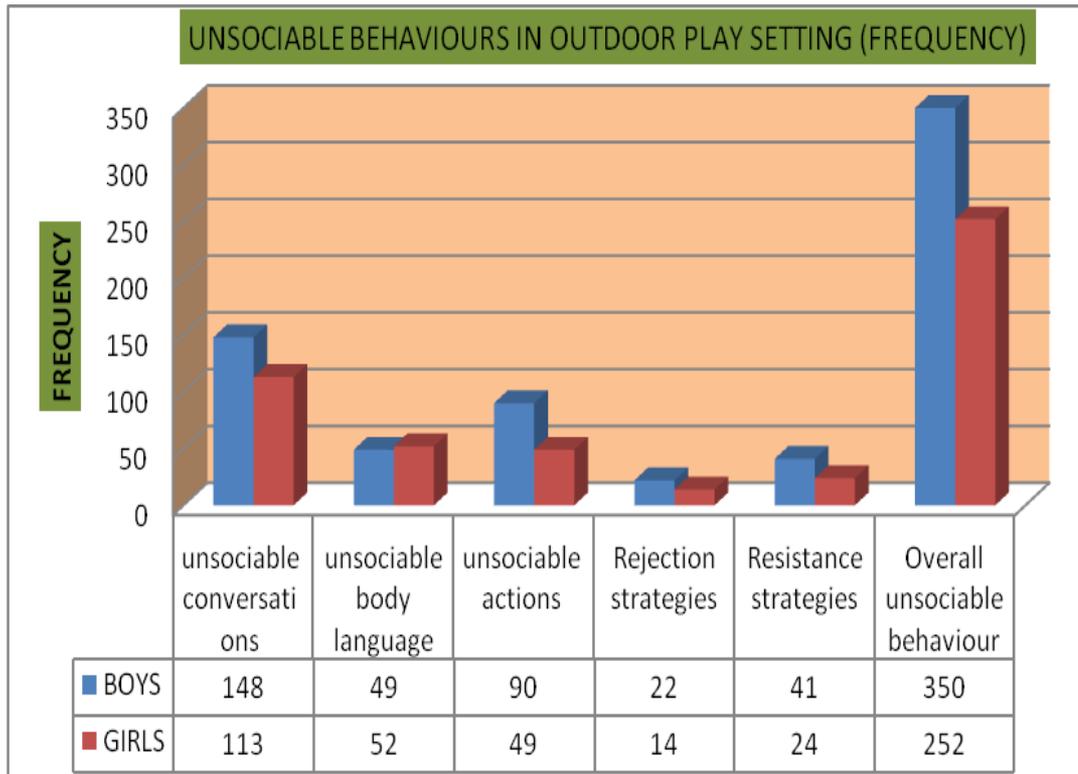
PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOURS



On an overall basis, boys exhibited more social behaviours as compared to girls with using expressions of social body language and acceptance strategies more often than girls.

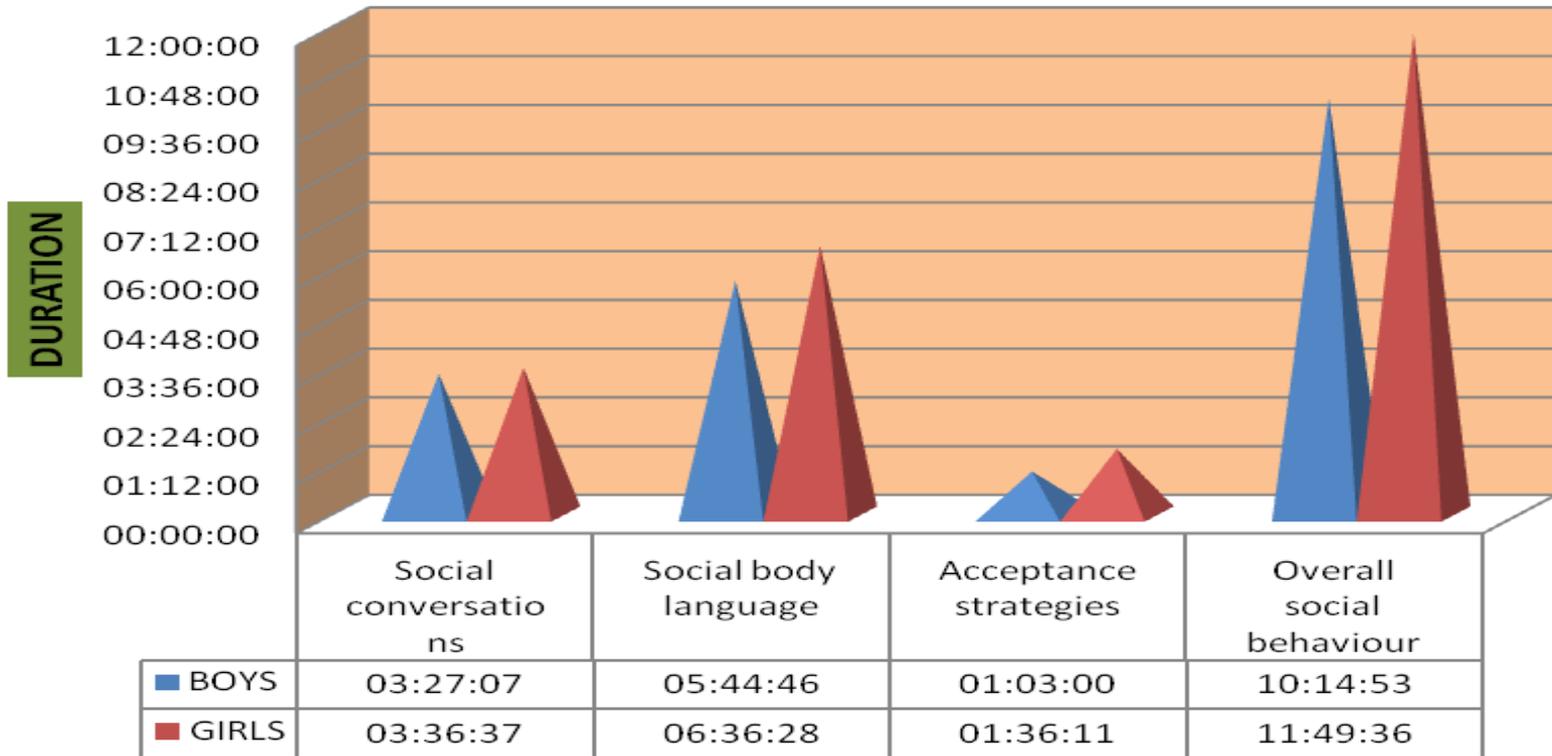


UNSOCIABLE BEHAVIOURS



Overall unsociable behaviours too were more frequent among boys than girls . Boys used unsocial conversations, exhibited unsociable actions and used rejection and resistance strategies more frequently than girls whereas unsociable body language was exhibited similarly by both genders.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN OUTDOOR PLAY SETTING (DURATION)

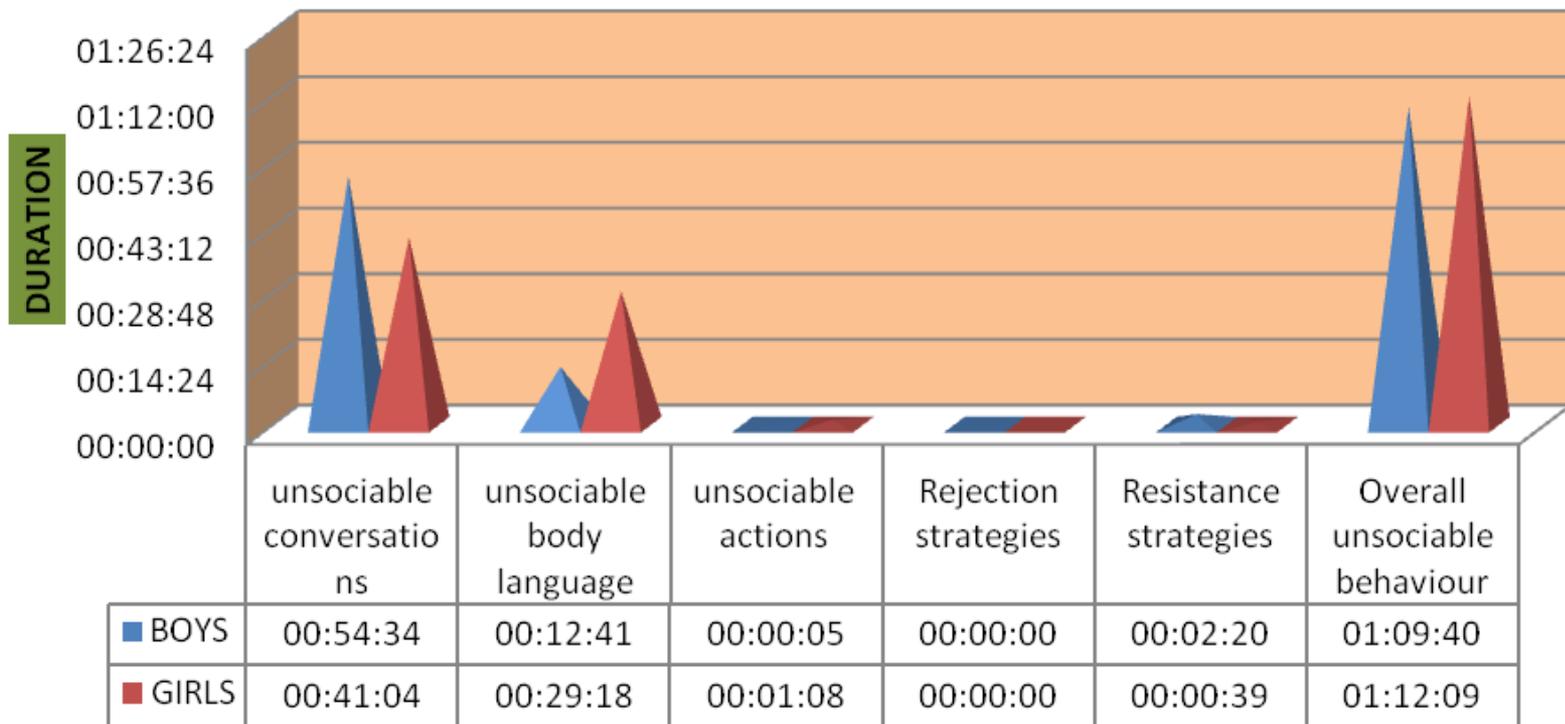


$F=2.78$ $P<NS$ gender, $F=127.77$ $P< 0.007$ behaviours

Overall social behaviour was carried out for longer duration by girls with the use of social body language and acceptance strategies.



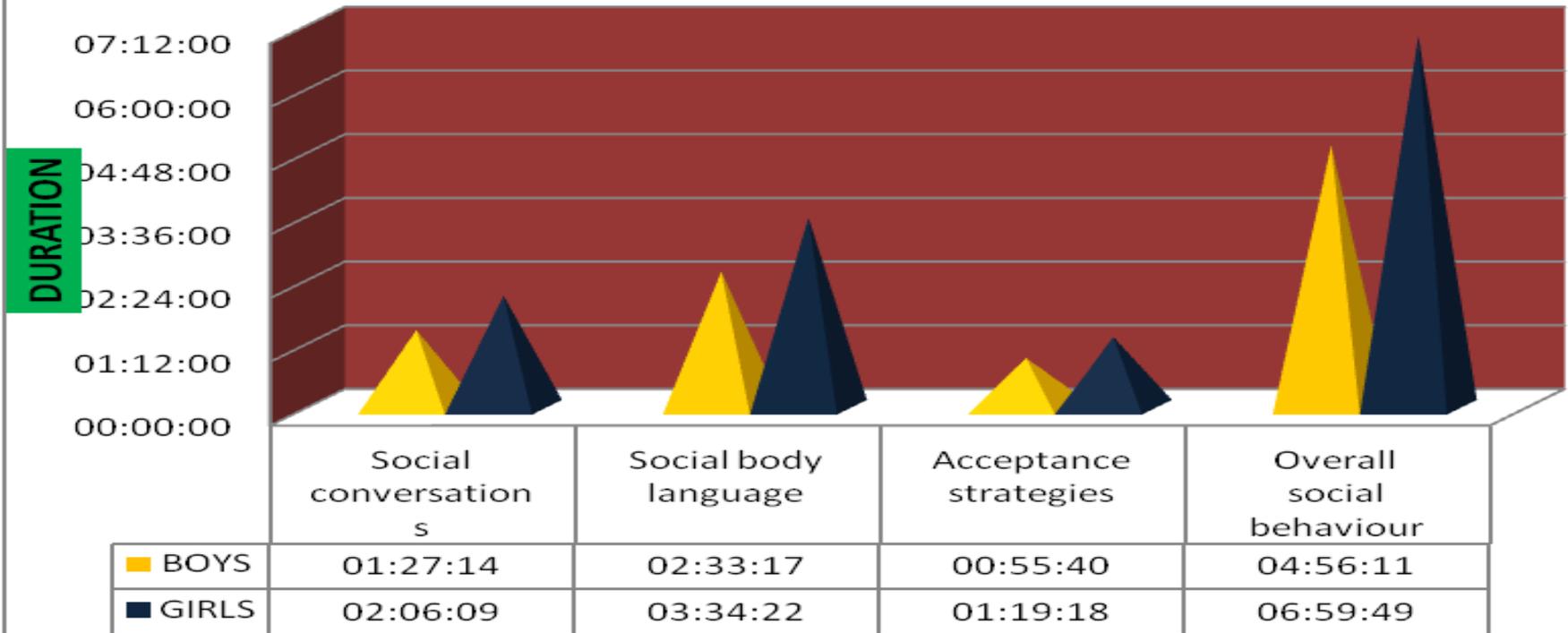
UNSOCIABLE BEHAVIOURS IN OUTDOOR PLAY SETTING (DURATION)



$F = 0.02$ $P < NS$ gender; $F = 14.87$ $P < 0.01$ behaviours

Boys used unsociable conversations for longer duration than girls whereas girls used unsociable body language for longer duration than boys and unsociable actions, rejection and resistance strategies were all momentary; irrespective of gender, hence did not persist for long duration.

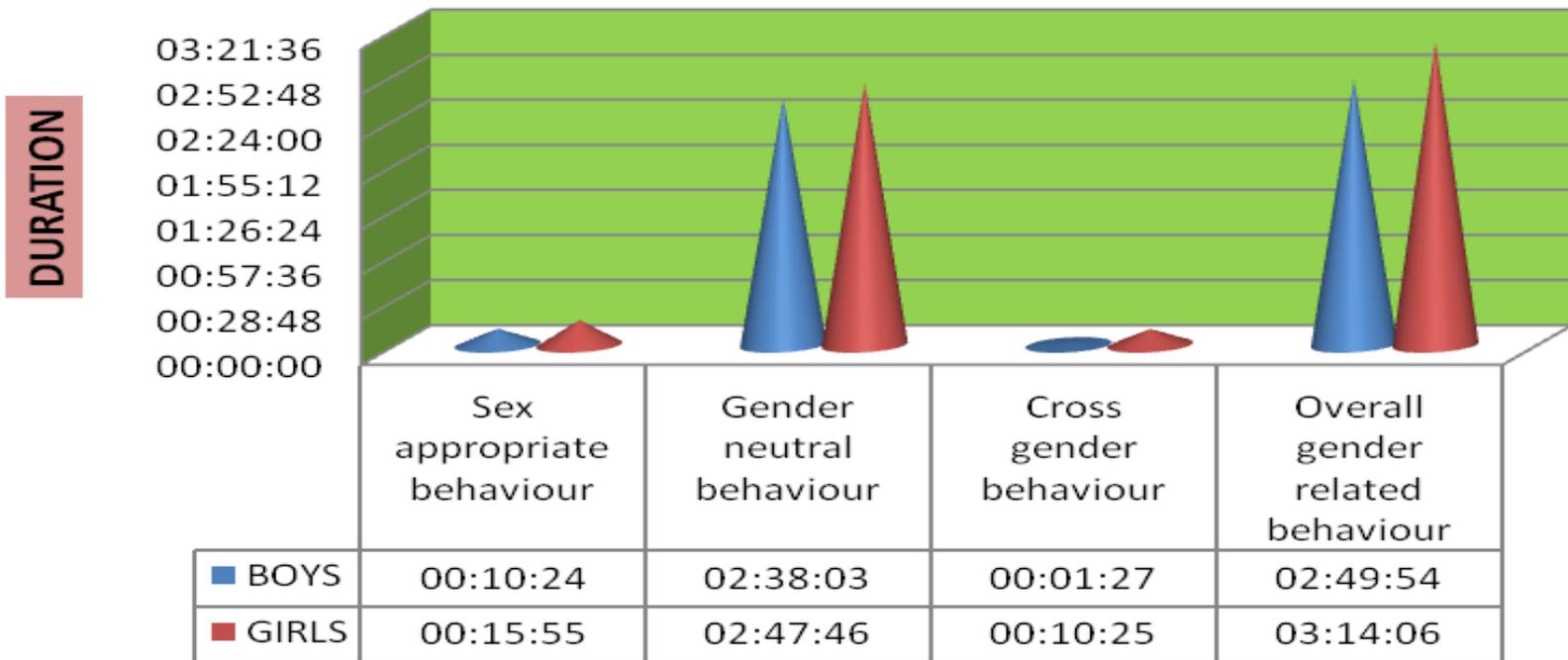
SOCIAL BEHAVIOURS IN PRETEND PLAY SETTING (DURATION)



$F = 14.79$ $P < NS$ gender ; $F = 40.54$ $P < 0.02$ behaviours

Girls conversed socially almost double the duration than the boys and exhibited social body language for longer duration than boys and used acceptance strategies for longer periods during their social interactions with peers.

GENDER RELATED BEHAVIOURS IN OUTDOOR PLAY SETTING (DURATION)

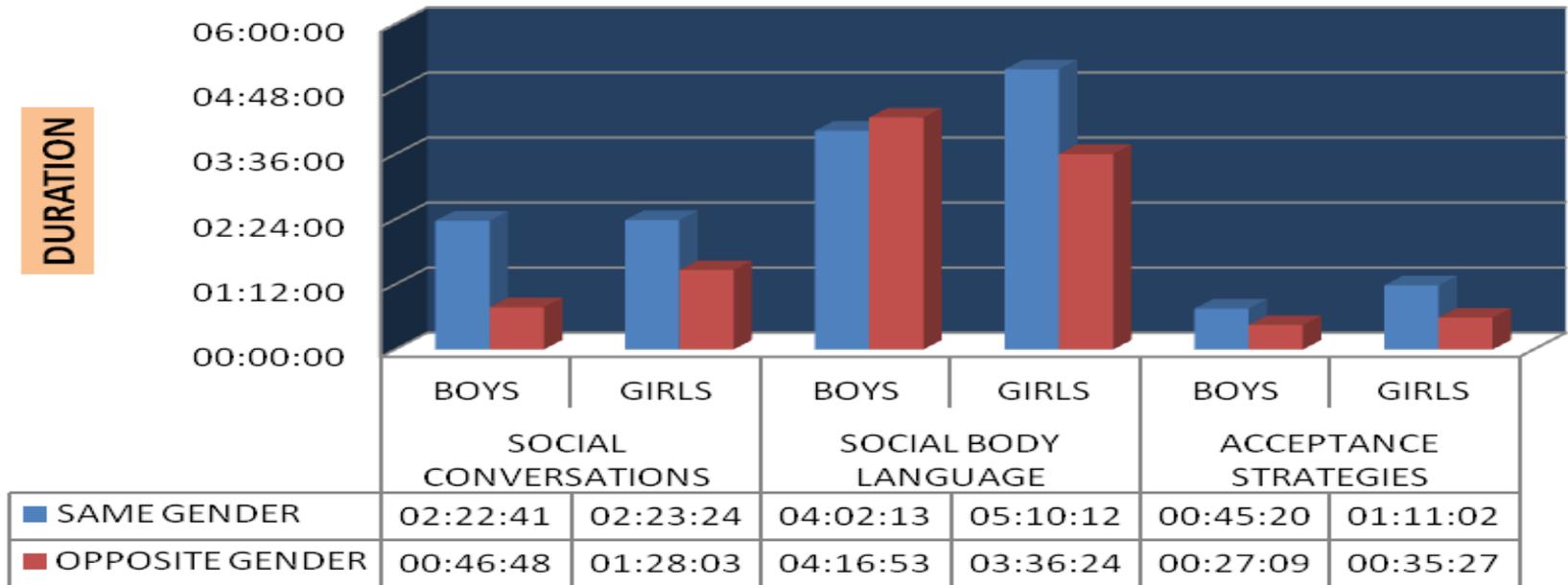


$F = 8.72$ $P < NS$ gender, $F = 537.48$ $P < 0.000$ behaviours

Though gender neutral behaviours were exhibited almost for about same duration, sex appropriate and cross gender behaviours were exhibited for longer duration by girls than boys during outdoor play setting.

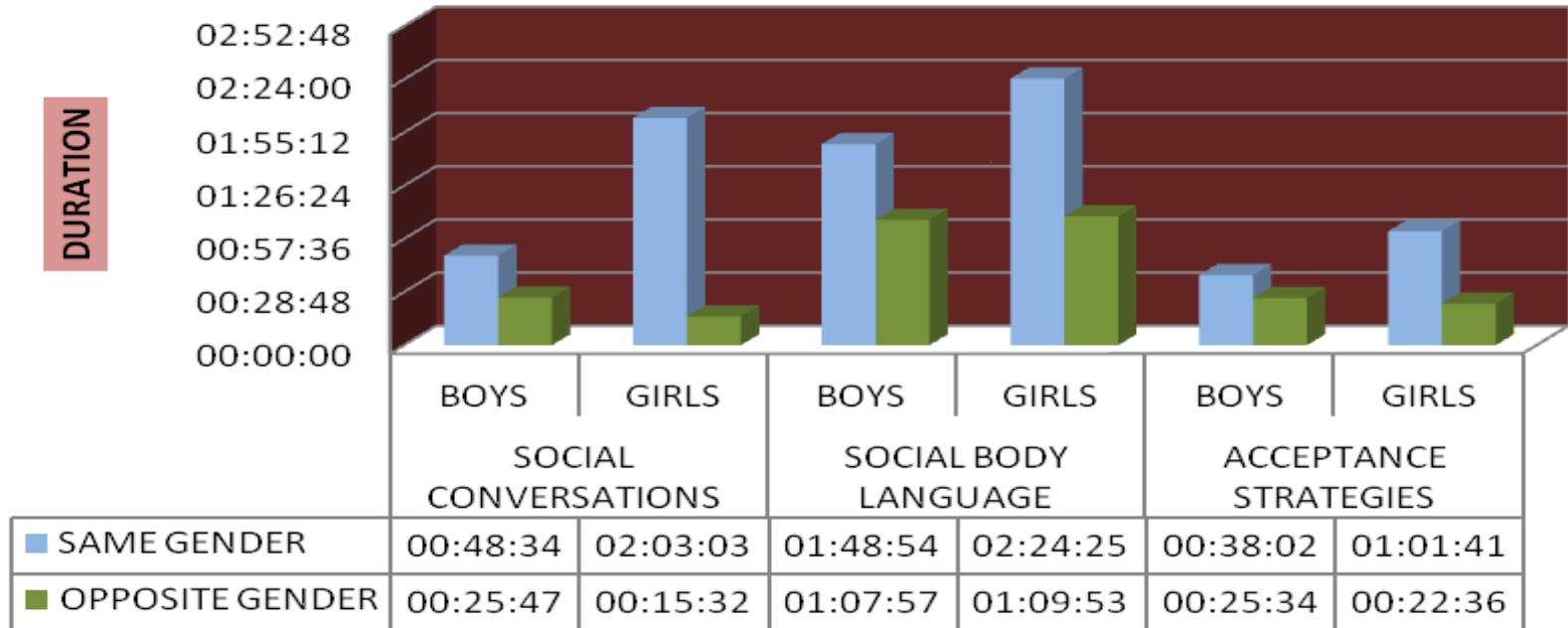
INTER GENDER DIFFERENCES

INTERGENDER SOCIAL BEHAVIOURS IN OUTDOOR PLAY SETTING (DURATION)



Boys and girls conversed socially for longer duration with same gender; seen more prominently among boys and also were found exhibiting acceptance strategies for longer duration with same gender peers. Boys expressed social body language almost for similar duration with both genders whereas girls exhibited social body language towards same gender for longer duration.

INTERGENDER SOCIAL BEHAVIOURS IN PRETEND PLAY SETTING (DURATION)

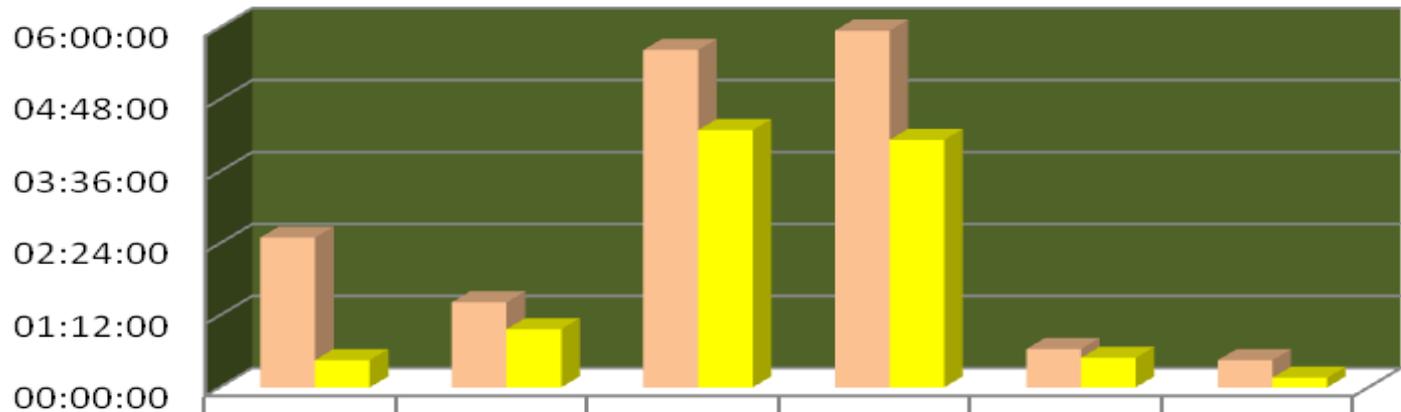


All three social behaviours were evident for longer duration towards same gender in case of both boys as well as girls. Social conversations and social body language of girls were exhibited towards same gender for more than double the duration as that of the opposite gender.



INTERGENDER SOCIAL BEHAVIOURS IN SNACK TIME (DURATION)

DURATION

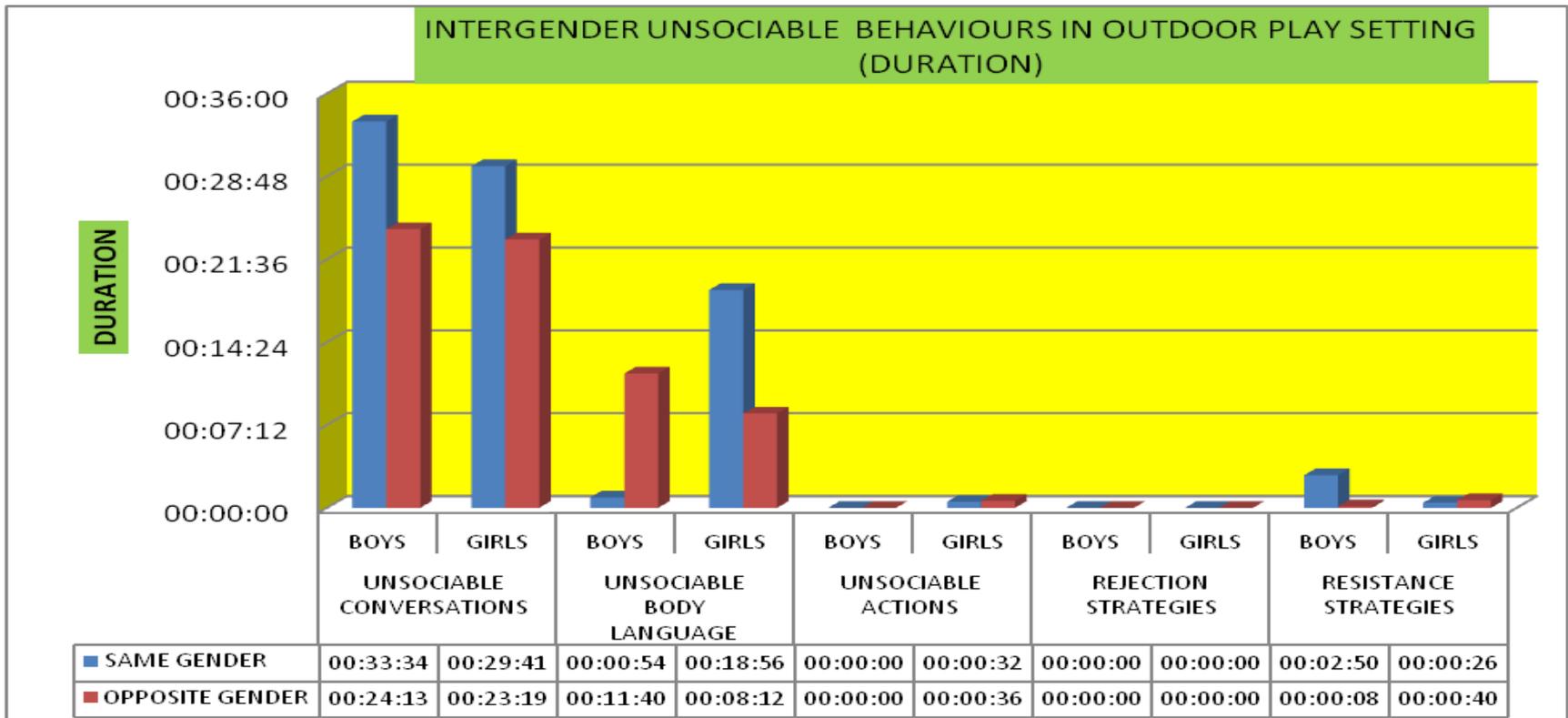


	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS
	SOCIAL CONVERSATIONS		SOCIAL BODY LANGUAGE		ACCEPTANCE STRATEGIES	
■ SAME GENDER	02:29:57	01:25:10	05:37:39	05:57:01	00:38:21	00:27:10
■ OPPOSITE GENDER	00:27:23	00:58:21	04:17:29	04:07:45	00:29:30	00:09:38

Long duration of social behaviours were carried out with same gender peers by girls as well as boys during snack time.

Duration of Social conversations with same gender peers was very high among boys and duration of social body language exhibited towards same gender were quite high for both genders.

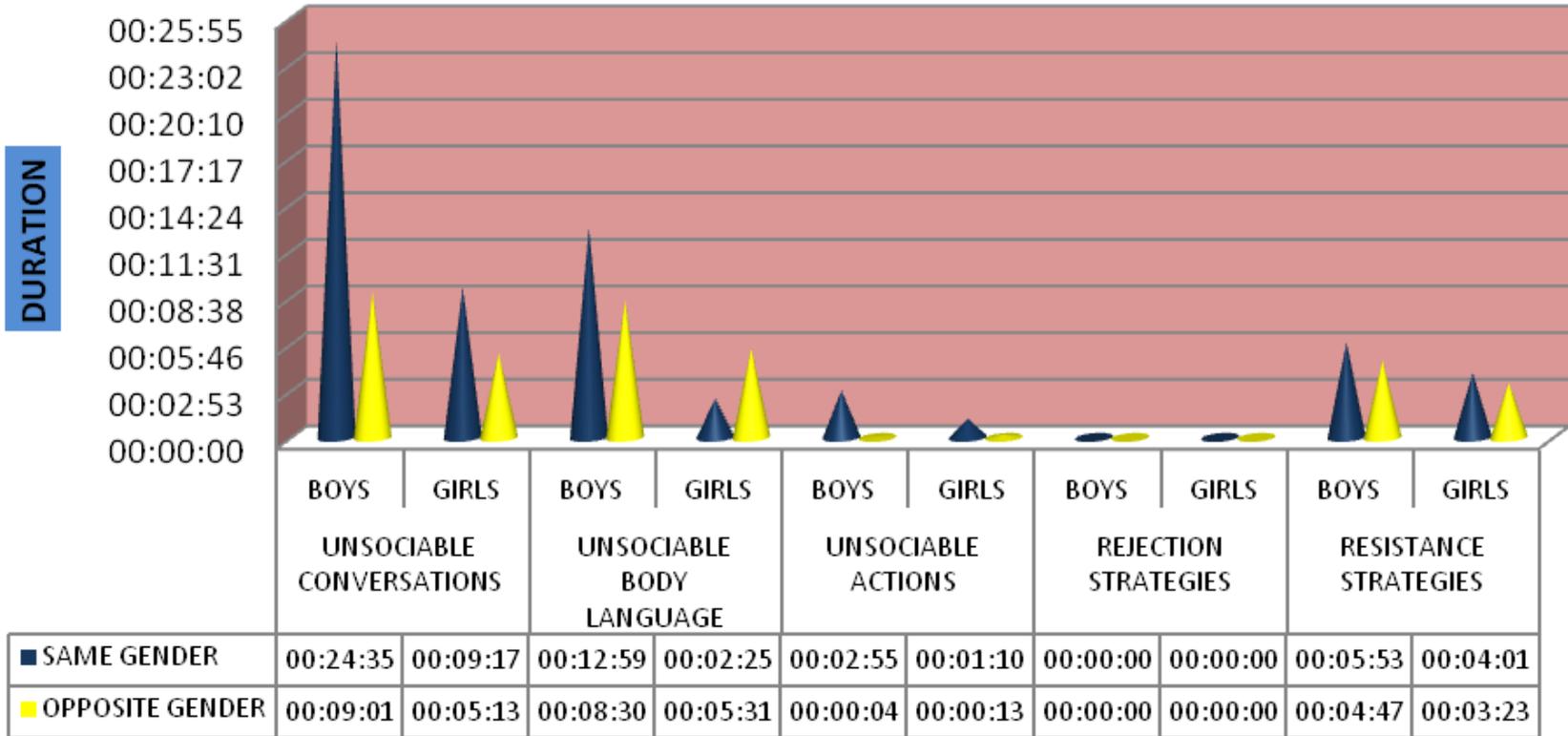




Duration of unsociable conversations with same gender were found high among boys as well as girls. Boys expressed unsociable body language towards opposite gender whereas girls were found to express them for longer duration towards same gender. Unsociable actions, rejection and resistance strategies rarely persisted for considerable duration among both genders



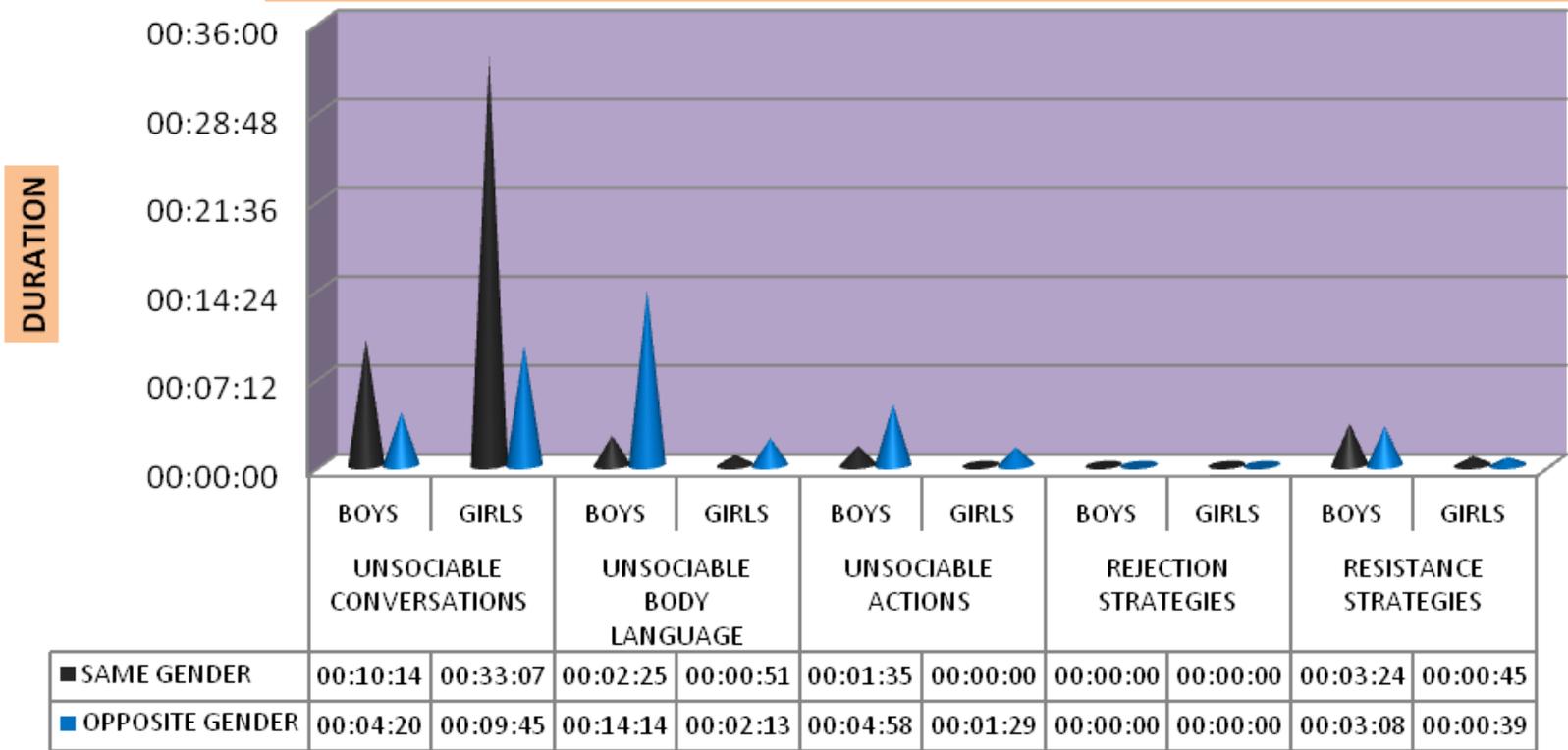
INTERGENDER UNSOCIABLE BEHAVIOURS IN BLOCK PLAY SETTING (DURATION)



Boys used unsocial conversation , exhibited unsociable body language, unsociable actions and used resistance strategies more with peers of same gender whereas girls used unsocial conversation , exhibited unsociable body language, unsociable actions and used resistance strategies more with opposite gender during block play.

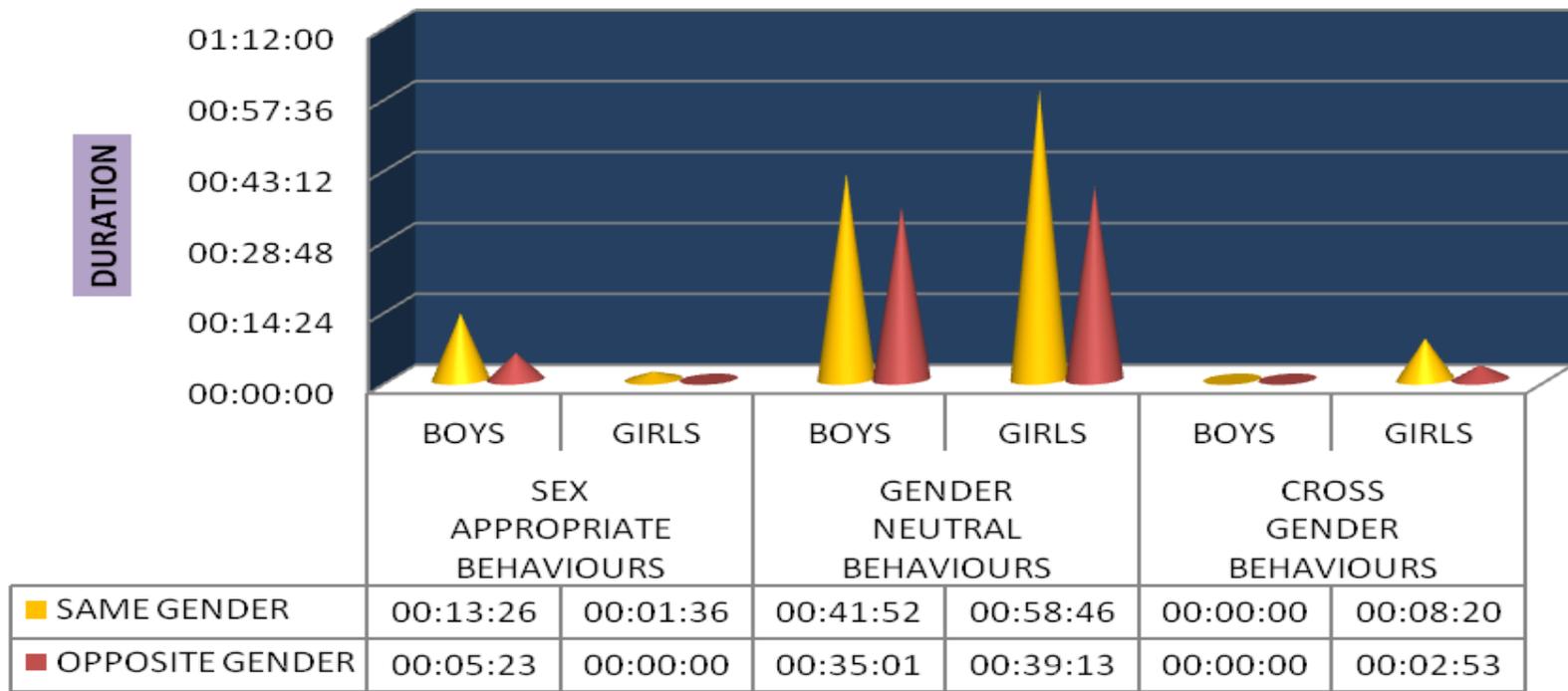


INTERGENDER UNSOCIABLE BEHAVIOURS IN PRETEND PLAY SETTING (DURATION)



Both boys and girls were found to converse unsociably with peers of same gender for longer duration; more prominent among girls during pretend play. Other unsociable behaviours were not persistent for long duration during pretend play, however boys used unsociable body language for longer duration with peers of opposite gender. Resistance strategies were used for same duration with both genders by boys and was not much persistent among girls.

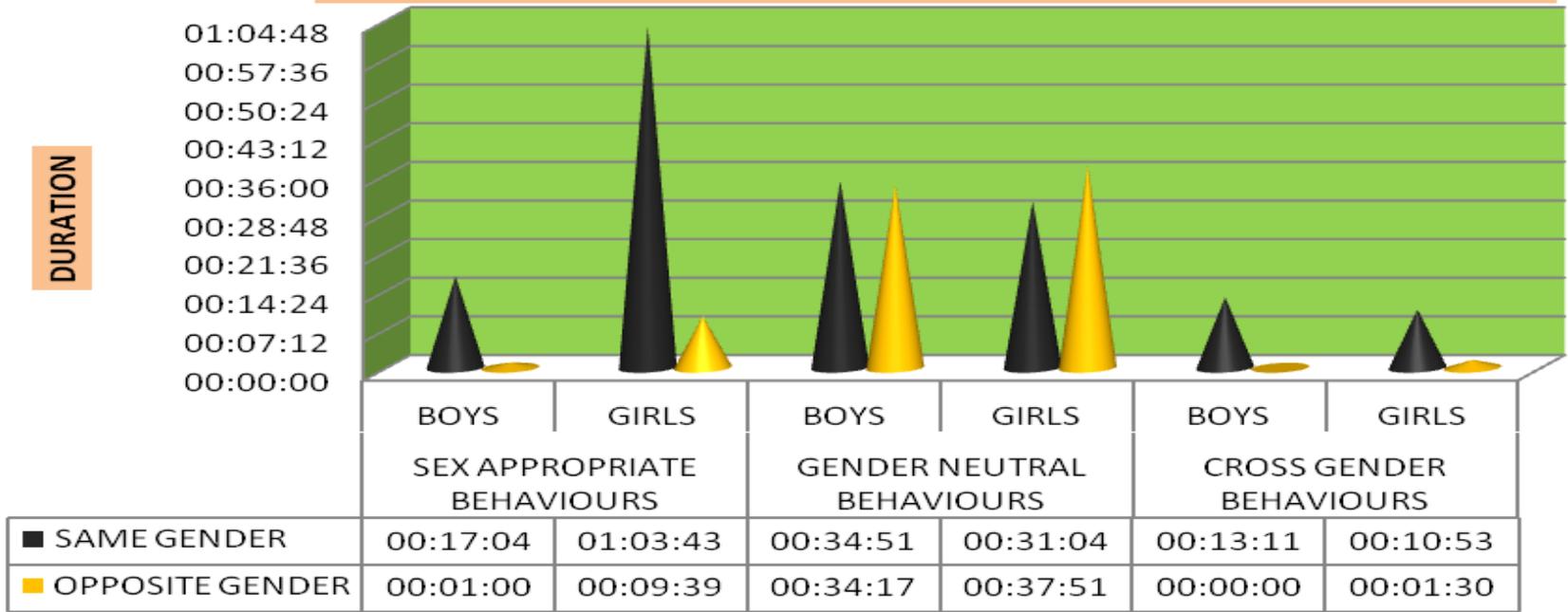
INTERGENDER GENDER RELATED BEHAVIOURS IN BLOCK PLAY (DURATION)



Gender neutral behaviours were used with both genders for almost similar duration; girls using it longer with same gender during block play. However boys used sex appropriate behaviours for longer duration with peers of same gender and girls used cross gender behaviours for longer duration with peers of same gender.



INTERGENDER GENDER RELATED BEHAVIOURS IN PRETEND PLAY (DURATION)

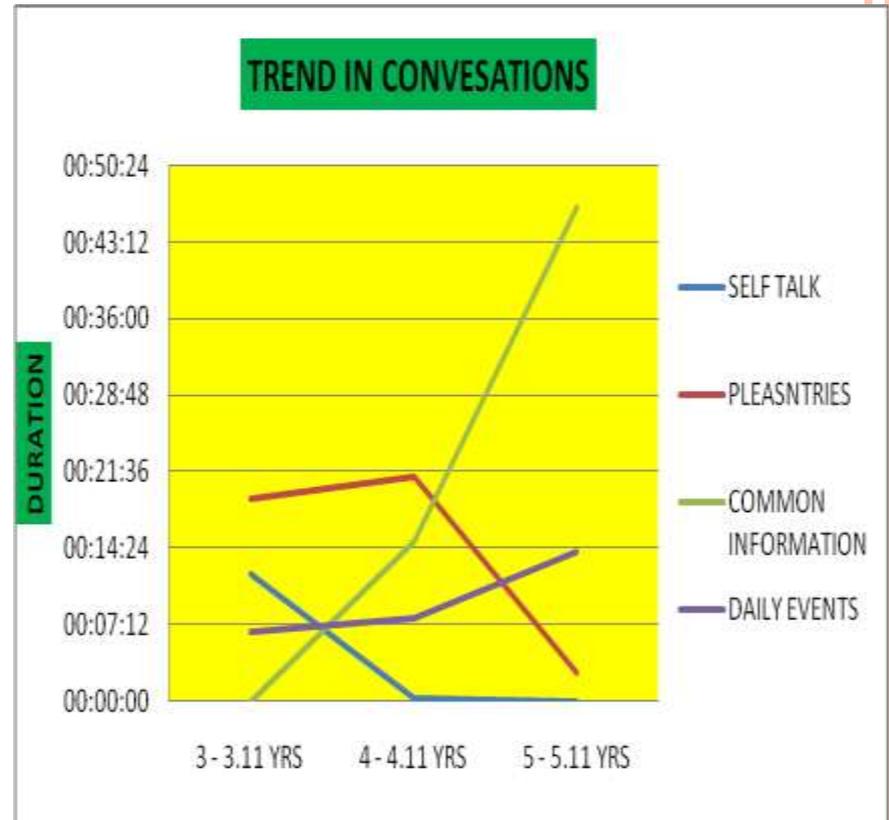


During pretend play gender neutral behaviours of both genders were found to be for similar duration towards both genders whereas sex appropriate behaviours were used for very long duration with peers of same gender by girls. Both boys and girls used cross gender behaviours for longer duration with peers of same gender during pretend play setting.

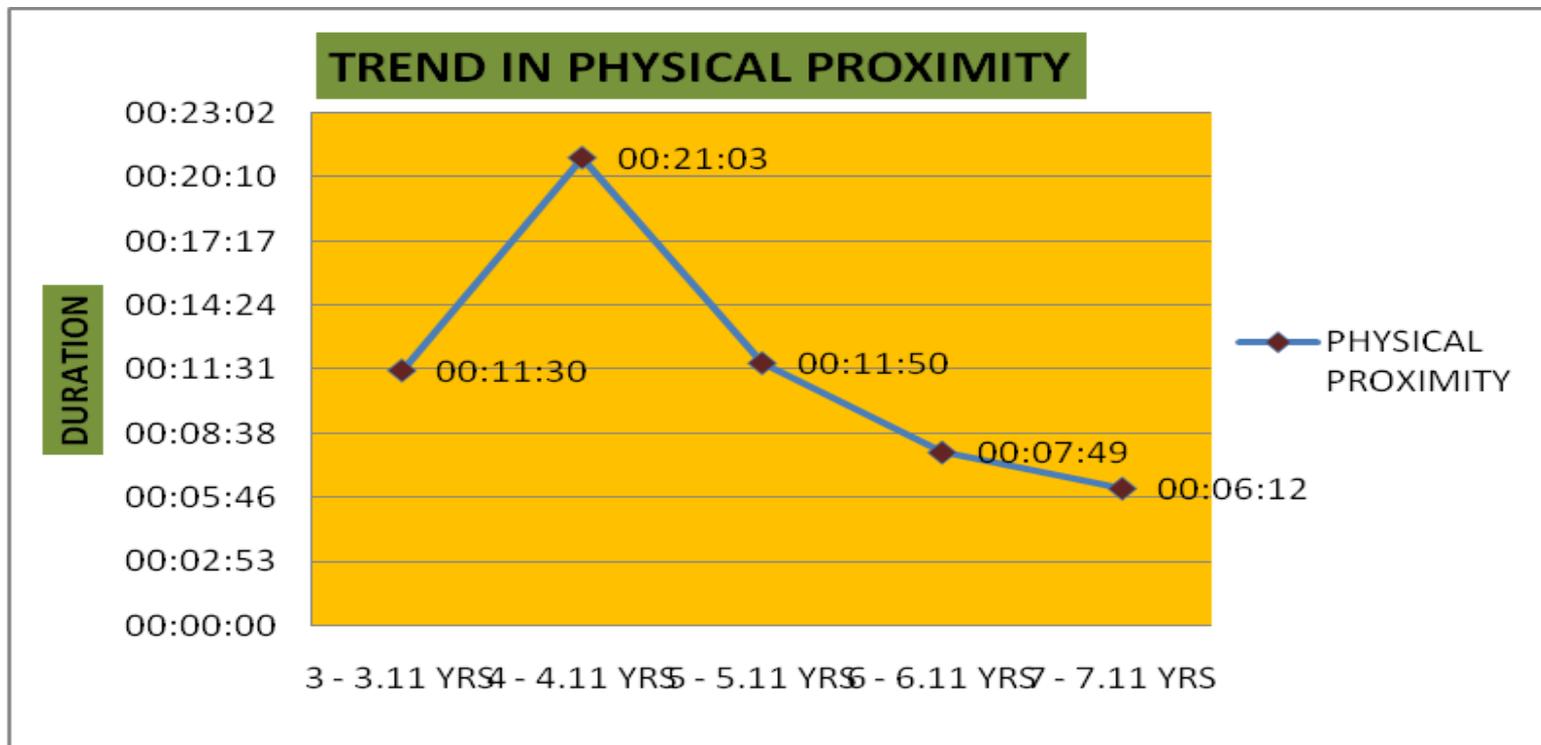


Some of the results emerged as follows

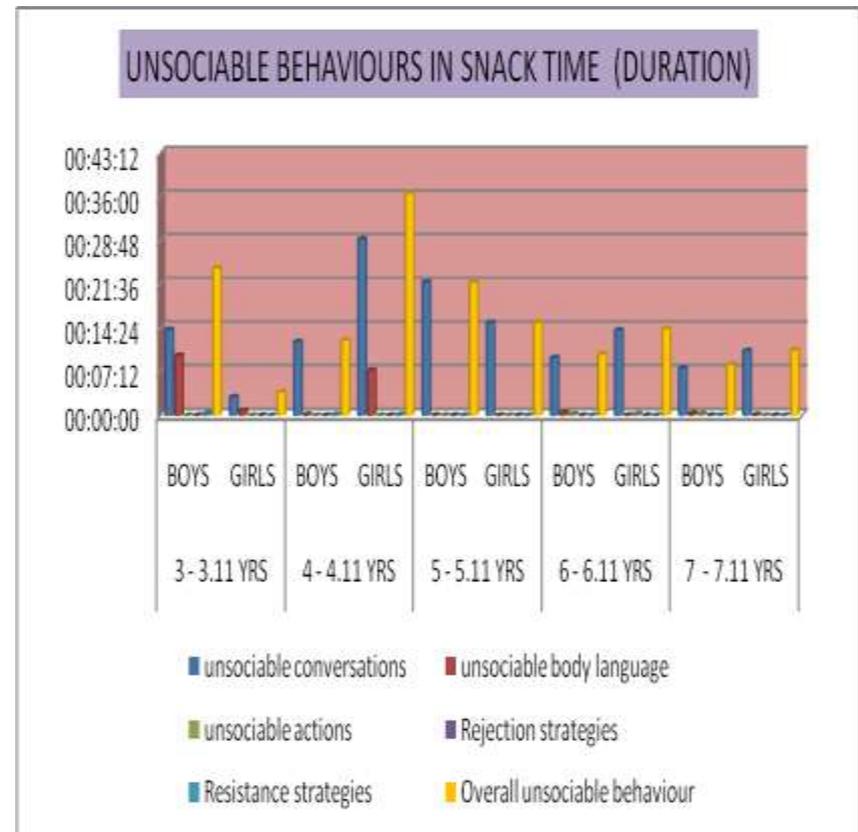
- Sex appropriate behaviours increased with age whereas, gender neutral behaviours decreased with age during pretend play.
- The social behaviours of girls were very high in frequency and duration as compared to that of boys during pretend play.
- Children of both genders used social conversations, social body language and acceptance strategies for almost same duration during block play.
- The major contents of conversation among boys were pleasantries and self talk whereas girls used pleasantries and discussions on daily events.



- Physical proximity towards peers was high among boys of 3 – 5 years which was over taken by girls during 5 – 8 years.
- Social skills refined with age; with boys using humorous body language and girls using touch as support.
- Boys used humour to gain attention, as an important acceptance strategy whereas sharing and playing together as a team formed an important acceptance strategy among girls.



- Overall unsociable behaviours, such as self centered speech were present more frequently and for longer duration among boys as compared to girls. Girls used dominations and arguments.
- Boys used aggressive body language more frequently whereas girls used rejections more often
- Girls were found to be more flexible in the use of gender related behaviours whereas boys were more sex stereotypic.
- Girls usually picked up adult roles and pretended daily events more whereas boys picked up fantasized roles such as super hero.
- Both boys and girls used acceptance strategies more frequently with same gender peers in all the play settings.



- Both boys and girls used acceptance strategies more frequently with same gender peers in all the play settings.
- Both boys and girls remained out of the group when rejected by opposite gender peers whereas they expressed anger and rejection towards same gender peers.
- Boys were more provocative towards opposite gender peers during all the play settings.
- In general children used indirect rejection strategies more frequently with same gender peers and physical resistance and unsociable actions frequently with opposite gender peers.



Conclusion:

The present observational study serves as an important basic research in the area of peer interactions, which brings out the general trends in social and unsociable behaviours of children, during their interactions with peers in natural play settings. The study focuses on the social skills of young children with specific reference to gender differences, who are trying to expand their horizon of social network.

The Observer Behaviour XT 7.0 Software has been of exceptional use to analyze children's social interactions in natural setting in the most unobtrusive manner as possible.





***THANK YOU
FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION***

