Chravak / Chain

Site of Documentation
Phnom Pehn, Cambodia

Description
Chravak is a game of speed and hand-eye coordination that is enjoyed by children living in urban and rural areas of Phnom Pehn, Cambodia. In this game, players link together a number of small plastic rings to create short chains. As they play, participants have to throw one or more chains into the air and either catch them using only the back of their hands or before catching, pick up a specified number of chains with their free hand.

Who Plays?
This game can be played by both boys and girls of any age group, although it is most suited to those between 9 and 13 years of age.

Accessories/Equipment
This game requires children to have a large number of small plastic rings known locally as Chravak. Cheap and easily found in local stores, Chravaks can be purchased or brought in from home. Often children share the cost of buying enough Chravaks needed to play a game.

Time and Place

On average, each game of Chravak lasts around 15 minutes. The game can be played indoors or outdoors throughout the year as long as it is cool and dry. As the game is fairly quick, children usually play against each other during break times at school. Playing the game on a flat, raised surface (such as a table top or the seat of a chair) is ideal as it helps the children pick up the chains more easily.

Skills, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

Requiring speed and accuracy, the best players of Chravak possess exceptional coordination and are quick with their hands. These skills are easily developed through practice and those that play frequently often become very precise and have the competitive advantage against others. A key strategy for winning the game is to throw the chain up as high as possible so that players have more time to pick up the other chains. In the second level of the game, players often try to bend their palm back to make a slight indentation with which to catch the chains.

Popularity

Chravak is very popular, particularly among girls and is frequently played by those living in and around Phnom Pehn. Players enjoy learning how to become quick with their hands and testing their skill against that of their peers.

History of the game

This game was not played by members of older generations when they were young. It is however, quite similar to other traditional South East Asian games that involve throwing and picking up sticks or stones; so it is possible that it could have been adapted from these, using modern plastic accessories in the place of organic materials.
Preparation

1. To prepare, players need to link together four or five plastic rings to make five short chains.

2. Children usually bring the chains from home or purchase the rings and make the chains together during school lunch breaks.
How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** Next, the players decide which of them will go first by playing *Rock, Paper and Scissors*. To play in teams, players should first divide themselves into two groups using *Oulampe* and then determine which team starts, by playing a round of *Rock, Paper and Scissors*.

**Step 2.** The winning player (or team) starts first. The first player places all five of the chains on a table or chair. To win the game they must successfully master two levels:

![Image of children playing with chains]

**LEVEL 1**

1. First, the player needs to pick up one of the chains with their right hand.

![Image of children playing with chains]
2. The player then throws the chain up into the air and while it is in the air, quickly picks up the one of the four chains left on the table, before catching it again as it fall back down.

3. Next, the player repeats this process, but this time as the first chain is in the air, the player must pick up two chains before catching it again. If they can do this they play again, this time picking up three chains until finally they are able to throw the first chain and pick up all four chains before catching it as it comes back down.

4. If the player drops a chain or picks up the wrong number of chains while taking their turn, they have to wait until their next turn to try again. Once the players can successfully throw the first chain and pick up four chains before catching it, they continue onto Level 2.
LEVEL 2

1. In this level all the players need to agree on a target number of points that they are going to play for. The amount they choose is dependent on the skill of the players and the time they have available, but is usually between 20 and 50 points.

2. Next, the first player picks up all five chains, throws them up and before they fall back down, they need to flip their hand over and catch as many as they can, on the back of their hand. The player will be awarded one point for each chain that lands on the back of their hand. If the number of chains on the back of the hand is more than an agreed ‘standard’ (usually three or more), they can repeat the process. The player keeps going until they catch less than the ‘standard’ and then lets the next player take their turn.
3. Players continue to take turns, each time earning more points and adding them to their scores. As their scores near the total number of points needed to win, the game becomes more difficult. If a player needs to gain four or less points to hit the target, they have to catch the exact number to win. For example, if a player has a total score of 47 points and the target is 50 points, they must catch exactly three chains to win the game. If the player catches more than three chains in their final catch they are disqualified and their score drops to zero.

**Step 3.** The first player to reach the target number of points wins. The winner is allowed to ‘punish’ the losers by hitting the palms of their hands a number of times. The number of hits is equal to the number of points the loser was short of the target.
Rules

1. Players must complete all the steps in Level 1 before moving onto Level 2. If a player misses a step or picks up the wrong number of chains, they have to wait until their next turn to try again.

2. If a player intentionally tries to disturb another player’s turn, then they are eliminated from the game.

3. The winner is the first player to reach the target number of points. On their final turn, players are not allowed to catch more than the required number of chains needed to win the game. If they do, their score drops to zero and the player must start again.

4. The winner is allowed to ‘punish’ the losers by hitting each player’s palm. The number of hits is equal to the number of points that the losing player was short of the target.