

The Awareness towards Safety and Health of Children among Child Care Centre Staff

Mashitah Mohamed Esa¹, Faizatul Akmam Amiruddin² and
Norina Ahmad Jamil³

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia.

Email: mashitah9803@uitm.edu.my¹, akmamamir671@uitm.edu.my²,
norina0048@uitm.edu.my³

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to measure the awareness towards safety and health (SH) of children among Child Care Centre (CCC) staff and owners. The SH of children who stayed in CCC while their parents are working should be taken seriously. When choosing the CCC, considerations for safety and health should be considered in addition to the CCC's price and location. This study used the quantitative technique with 119 respondents, including owners and employees of CCC who voluntarily enrolled in the risk assessment course for owners and employees of CCC. In conclusion, the majority of respondents were unable to distinguish between risk and hazard in the CCC before enrolling in the course and will require additional training in the future on safety and health.

Keywords: Safety and Health, Childcare, Risk Assessment

Introduction

According to the Child Care Centre Act 1984 (Act 308), Child Care Centre (CCC) is defined as any premises at which four or more children under the age of four years from more than one household are received to be looked after for reward. As of 2019, data from the Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development shows that there are 4,933 registered CCCs in Malaysia which involved 12,522 caregivers to take care of 24,178 children at the registered CCCs. It is predicted that there will be a higher demand for childcare services in the future to accommodate the participation of women in the workforce (Mutalib et al., 2018). Ismail et al (2018) stated that the quality of preschool education is of great importance in Malaysia as it is the first formal education for children.

There are some criteria that should be looked into when parents make decisions on selecting the right CCC for their children. Criteria such as the location of the CCC, monthly fees, and the number of children in each centre have always been the main criteria to be considered. However, the quality of CCC staff should not be ignored, as children generally will stay more

than half a day at CCCs. Davidson, Burns, Hampton, White, and Perlman (2021) mentioned that when looking for early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, parents are faced with a range of options that may influence their decision such as the distance of the care centre to their home or work, how expensive the care centre is, and how warm and loving the caregivers are. Kian and Awang (2020) stated that awareness on the environment of existing childcare centres is still low, especially regarding the safety and health of the environment. The choice of CCC is very important since children are weak and are highly susceptible to illnesses and injuries if not properly cared for and supervised. With too many cases related to the safety and health of kids at the CCC, it is very important to identify at which level of awareness and knowledge related to SH by CCC staff so it can prevent any accidents and injury happening at CCC.

The safety issues of the children at CCCs should be the primary focus of CCC staff. It is in the nature of children to explore, jump, and run which will increase their risk of falling, becoming trapped, drowning, choking, bullying, and other dangers that can harm their physical and emotional health. According to Kian and Awang (2020), the most important consideration from the parents for childcare centres is the safety and the environment. They think that the environment and safety support the quality of a centre. It is also supported by Mutalib et al (2021), in which they believe childcare centres should always offer high quality care and education with high emphasis on health and safety. In addition, Balany (2014) mentioned young people are more vulnerable to accidents when entering any of the workplaces, compared to older people.

Other than that, the health issues cannot be neglected by the CCC staff. According to World Health Organization (2018), health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The rise in cases of children getting infectious diseases should be taken seriously to avoid CCCs as the cluster place for infectious diseases. Children can easily contract illnesses like flu, cold, fever, food poisoning, or even contagious illnesses like measles, or the most current COVID-19. Children must have a safe and healthy environment to protect them from harm and provide needs to maintain good health (Yong et al., 2015).

The concept of hazard and risk should not be left out when discussing safety and health issues. Hazard is defined as any situation that has the potential to cause death, harm, injury, and property damage while the definition of risk is the chance or probability for harm, injury, property, and environmental damage and likely occurrence of loss.

There are several types of hazards namely physical, biological, chemical, ergonomic, and physiological. Hazard is present in every situation. The ability to recognize potential hazards and prevent exposure to hazards can prevent worse situations. The more hazards the children are exposed to, the higher the risk. The risks and hazards that occur may negatively affect the health and behaviors of the students (Hamzaha et al., 2018). The SH issues in CCCs are predictable since it involved the children who have difficulty understanding danger, hazard and risk. However, if CCC staff know and understand how to identify and manage safety and health issues at their CCCs, accidents and injuries can be prevented and avoided.

In addition, the types of training attended by the CCC staff also can assist the staff to handle risky situations such as when children choke, fall or show symptoms of being unwell while they are in the CCC. According to Lowry et al (2022), teachers internationally do not receive sufficient training as health promoters or for specific school-based initiatives, despite their central role in children's health. In Malaysia, it is compulsory for the owner and staff of CCCs to enrol a course known as "*Kursus Asuhan Permata - KAP*". This course provides extensive information about managing children, which include fire prevention, first aid and accident prevention modules. However, this type of course is not sufficient to ensure the understanding of SH. Occupational Safety and Health (SH) training is yet to formally inclusive into teachers' training module, and the current one-off or ad-hoc SH training mainly targeted among school students (Yusoff, et al., 2019). They should attend additional safety and health related training that is suitable for the staff such as first aid, CPR, fire drill and food preparation training, among other courses. Staff who have already attended the SH training course before applying to the CCC may be beneficial for the company as they already know how to respond to critical situations.

Therefore, in this study, the researcher aims to identify the following objectives

- To assess the awareness of SH among CCC staff, and
- To identify the knowledge level of SH among CCC staff

Methodology

Respondents

Respondents for the study were the participants of the safety and health awareness course for childcare centre staff. The participants were childcare owners and employees, and the attendance was on a voluntary basis.

Methodology

The study was a result of the risk assessment course which was held in three different sessions. Two sets of questionnaires were self-developed to determine the level of SH knowledge among childcare owners and employees. The first set of questionnaires was distributed before the course began and the second set was distributed after the course was completed, with both sets distributed online. Participants' knowledge levels on basic SH such as terminology commonly used in SH and types of SH training that they had attended prior to the course were determined via the first questionnaire set that was distributed before the course began. After the course ended, the second set of questionnaires were issued to measure the participants' understanding of SH and their satisfaction level of the course. The evaluation questionnaire asked participants to score their satisfaction with the course material and to provide feedback that would be used in future course planning. The number of participants for each date is shown in Table 1. There was a total of 119 people that attended the course in three different sessions. Attendance of the course vary at different sessions with the highest number of participants in session 3. The course was conducted for 3 hours per session.

Table 1

Participants' attendance in 3 sessions

Session	Participants	Percentage
Session 1	32	26.9
Session 2	23	19.3
Session 3	64	53.8
Total	119	100

Results and Discussions*Demographic Profile*

There were 119 participants that responded before and after the workshop. Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the respondents in this study. The majority of the respondents were childcare employees (77.3%) while the remaining 22.7% were owners or employers of the childcare centres. With reference to age group, the majority of the respondents (45.4%) were between the ages of 26 to 35 years old, followed by individuals in the age of 36 to 45 years old (18.5%). Half of the respondents (50.4%) have more than 5 years working experience in childcare, while 49.6% of the respondents have 1 to 5 years working experience in childcare. In terms of academic qualification, 33.6% have a diploma, 30.3% have an SPM certificate and 20.2% have completed their first degree.

Table 2

Demographic Analysis

Variable	Frequency (n=119)	Percentage (%)
Age		
18 – 25 Years Old	21	17.6
26 – 35 Years Old	54	45.4
36 – 45 Years Old	22	18.5
46 – 55 Years Old	16	13.4
More than 55 Years Old	6	5
Working Experience in Childcare		
Less than 1 year	12	10.1
1 – 5 years	47	39.5
More than 5 years	60	50.4
Academic Qualification		
SPM	36	30.3
STPM	4	3.4
Diploma	40	33.6
Bachelor's Degree	24	20.2
Master	7	5.9
Others	8	6.7
Job Status		
Employer/Owner	27	22.7
Employee	92	77.3

Safety and health training exposure

Table 3

Types of SH related training previously attended by respondents

Training	Yes (%)	No (%)
SH Training	26.9	73.1
First Aid Training	60.5	39.5
CPR Training	63.9	36.1
Risk Management Training	21.0	79.0
Food Safety Preparation Training	83.2	16.8
Fire Drill Training	67.2	32.8

Table 3 shows the different forms of training that the respondents have attended before the workshop. The majority of the respondents (83.2%) have attended food safety preparation training, followed by fire drill training (67.2%) and CPR training (64.5%). These trainings have basically been attended by the participants because it is included in the KAP course, which is compulsory to the owners and staff of CCCs. The majority of the respondents never attended any risk management training (79.0%) and SH training (73.1%).

Understanding safety and health terms

Danger, risk and hazard are synonymous elements when they involve risk assessment. Therefore, it is important to differentiate these three elements to ensure SH issues can be handled properly.

Table 4

Participants' understanding of SH term definitions (before the course begins)

SH Term Definitions	Correct (%)	Incorrect (%)
Danger	48	52
Risk	54.3	45.7
Hazard	29.9	70.1

Table 4 depicts respondents' knowledge of SH terminology commonly used in the SH field before the course begins. The majority of the respondents have poor understanding of SH concepts, with 70.1% that answered incorrectly for hazard and 52% mistakenly answered for danger. This finding indicates that childcare centre owners and employees do require SH training and workshop. This could be a result of the findings in Table 3 as the majority of the respondents never attended SH training. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents said they attended the course to improve their knowledge and understanding of SH issues, particularly in their childcare centres.

After a 3-hour session in risk management training, the participants were given another set of questions for them to differentiate between hazard and risk. The Pictorial Risk Exercise is as follows:



Figure 1: Pictorial Risk Exercise for Participants

Table 5

Respondents' understanding of hazard and risk (after the course end)

Picture	Correct (%)	Incorrect (%)
Picture 1	70.6	29.4
Picture 2	71.4	28.6
Picture 3	53.8	46.2
Picture 4	72.3	27.7
Picture 5	50.4	49.6
Picture 6	70.6	29.4
Picture 7	63.9	36.1
Picture 8	63.9	36.1

The majority of the participants were able to correctly identify between hazard and risks for all of the pictures, as shown in Figure 1. This result implies that after taking the course, the participants gained a better comprehension of SH. The knowledge of SH among childcare personnel is critical as the safety and health of children and their caregivers are affected by the childcare centre and its environment.

In addition, the majority of respondents (80.7%) were able to accurately answer five types of hazards (physical, chemical, biological, ergonomics and psychological) in SH, while the remaining 19.3% have mixed answers. It can be concluded that the participants are actually aware about SH but find it difficult to materialize them in specific terms.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The importance of understanding SH cannot be denied especially when it involves childcare. The parents put their trust in CCC to take care of their kids and the parents ease their minds about their kids' welfare during their working time. The parents are absolutely happy if the CCC staff are concerned about the SH of the kids. From the above analysis, it can be inferred that while respondent awareness of SH in CCCs is still weak, it could be further improved if the respondents were allowed to learn more about SH. Respondents recognized that hazards exist in their environment but are difficult to manage properly. Therefore, respondents must take more risk management courses so that they can manage hazards, prevent dangers and accidents and mitigate the risk.

Perhaps, the outcome of this study helps the owner of CCC to understand that SH practices contribute more benefits towards the smooth CCC operations, minimize hazards and any cost related to accidents and injury and also gain trust from the parents which send their kids to CCC.

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