

A Critical Analysis of the Effectiveness in Implementation of Health and Safety Services in Kenya Prepreschools

Kamau Bonface Gladys Jepkorir Kiptoo

Department of Early Childhood Studies, Mount Kenya University, P.O. Box 342 - 01000, Thika (Kenya)

Abstract

Children need to grow up in a free from violence environment. They should live in safe neighborhood and attend nurturing preschools that provide them with services and support that they need to thrive in learning. Preschools are sanctuaries for learning and teaching. Some of the challenges that affect health and safety in preschools include administrators' and teachers' knowledge on health and safety policy, school compound, First Aid supplies, condition of play equipments and materials. The objectives of this study included examining effects of administrators' and teachers' knowledge on health and safety services in preschools in Kenya; establishing the relationship between school compound and health and safety in preschools in Kenya; determining how First Aid supplies affect health and safety in preschools in Kenya; to establish whether there is a relationship between play equipment and materials with health and safety in preschools in Kenya. The research method used was content analysis method which evaluated words or phrases within a range of texts that is related to health and safety of children. Recommendations included forming a risk assessment committee in preschools who should be monitoring health and safety within the schools, preschools and health committees should be inducted on their roles to ensure procurement of health and safety equipments, use of repair and maintenance of funds to facilitate repairs in the preschools and also source fund from Non Governmental Organization, and having a community advisory committee who will be in charge of health and safety in the community. A room for First Aid should be allocated in every preschool where First Aid kit and first supplies are kept in accessible place.

Keywords: Health, safety, preschool, Kenya.

1.0 Introduction

Health and safety of young children is not a recent idea; it has been there in traditional societies. It was the obligation of the parents and the community to ensure that the health and safety of the child is not compromised. African traditional societies devoted their time and resources to development of children as well as their security from all forms of physical, social and intellectual harm (Kamla R. 2004).

Health and safety in Kenya dates back to 1950 during the introduction of Factories Act. The enactment of the Factories Act Cap 514 in 1951 saw the surfacing of occupational safety and health (OSH) in Kenya. The Act has been revised severally to reflect not only development in technology and knowledge but to address new areas other than the factories/ industries as well. The most recent amendment of the Act was done in 1990 when the Act was amended to take account of among others additional places of work, list of occupational diseases and institution of hygiene standards (ILO 2013).

Children have a right to protection as stipulated in Article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). To realize this right, countries that ratified this particular instrument are urged to assess legal, health and educational systems. Despite the presents of this article parents and teachers still use corporal punishment which endangers the health and safety of the child. Article 6 concerns right to life and that government should ensure that children survive and grow in a safe environment where they can grow and realize their potentials. Health and safety has a critical role to play in shielding and protecting the society's youngest citizens. Children cannot learn where their health and safety are threatened, they are not expected to achieve at their highest levels if they feel unsafe in their lives. Under Section 29(5) of the Education Act; governing bodies must comply with such directions from local authority concerning safety of children in school. Despite the presence of the Act many preschools do not pay attention to status of play equipments in preschools, instead they deny children opportunity to use the equipments. Denying children play opportunity is doing disservice to them because Physical Education is the heart of school life (Pitt M. 2007).

Majority of the preschools do not have health and safety committees to ensure that preschool remains a safe place for children. Health and safety committee helps in monitoring and evaluating health and safety services in preschools to avoid unnecessary surprises in preschools such as death of a child due to swimming, electrocution, ingestion and health emergencies within the preschool. Health and safety inspections are intended to scrutinize a precise area of organization. This prudent activity is hindered by corruption because negative report means putting the work of the managers at 'risk'.

Health and safety policies and programs are all about protecting people working within institutions (Armstrong's 2009). This accrues from the fact that health and safety help to reduce time wasted and pain experienced by the person injured while at the same time it cuts on the cost spent on treatment and compensation of families. It is known that those managing preschools do not realize the importance of health and safety and

they term injuries and loss of life of their member's as accidents.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

It is not known when the implementation of health and safety programs will be fully realized in preschools in Kenya. The Kenya Constitution (2010) has clearly stipulated a chapter on the Bill of Rights which provides for entitlements and fundamental freedoms of all citizens. Although the constitution does not address specifically health and safety, it provides for the right of every person for clean and health environment. The major challenge in preschools is that most head teachers in public preschools do not comprehend health and safety policies and programs as key in safeguarding young children. Some preschool compounds are not well fenced hence strangers trespass the preschool compounds, posing a risk to preschool children.

Preschools do not have a risk assessment records which underscores the possible hazards in the preschools. Every preschool needs to have a document that indicates emergency escape plan in each room, poisonous plants within the compound, sharp or lose objects and where they are found within the school.

The administration is lacking most important details concerning safety; this includes emergency telephone numbers of hospital ambulance, fire departments, police and poison control centre. In addition they do not have sufficient information on who may and who may not pick the preschool child. Children are left to be dropped and picked by relatives who may not be identified by the teachers. It's very imperative that each preschool need to have a photograph of the person responsible for picking the child, information on allergies that affect the child and heath issues of the child.

Another challenge is that in preschools where there is a First Aid teacher, the teacher has to attend primary school children as well as preschoolers. This work is overwhelming especially in addition to the number of lessons the teacher has to teach per week. In addition, the administration and colleagues leave all the responsibility of First Aid to the teacher to the extent of taking injured children to health facilities for further treatment.

We can't leave out the fact that most preschool security managers are not paying attention to the trend of insecurity in the world today, Kenya included. Terrorism is a threat to security everywhere, where preschools are not left out. Majority of the preschools in Kenya do not have strict rules on security; parents walk straight to the school compound and to classrooms. This poses a risk to children and the entire preschool community.

3.0 Purpose of the study

The main aim of this study was to analyze the effectiveness in implementation of health and safety services in Kenya preschools.

4.0 Objective of the study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- i) To examine whether administrators' and teachers' knowledge on health and safety services affect health and safety in preschools in Kenya.
- ii) To establish whether there is a relationship between school compound and health and safety in preschools in Kenya.
- iii) To determine how First Aid and supplies materials affect health and safety in preschools in Kenya.
- iv) To establish whether there is a relationship between play equipment and materials with health and safety of preschools in Kenya.

5.0 Research questions

- i) How does administrators and teachers knowledge on health and safety policy affect the health and safety of preschools in Kenya?
- ii) What is the relationship between preschool compound with health and safety in preschools in Kenya?
- iii) In which ways does First Aid and supplies materials affect health and safety in preschools in Kenya?
- iv) What is the relationship between play equipment and materials and health and safety preschool in Kenya?

6.0 Research methodology

The study adopted content analysis method which is a research methodology that evaluates words or phrases within a wide range of texts. The study focused on content related to health and safety of preschool children in learning institutions (Creswell 2003).

7.0 Theoretical framework

The study adopted Domino Theory which was postulated by Heinrich in 1931. He proposed a model well-known as Domino Theory, since accident sequence was connected to a line-up of dominoes knocking down each domino in a row. This theory provided the foundation for prevention of accidents. Consistent with Heinrich

accident is avoided by removing one of the dominoes; normally the central one or unsafe act. The succession is:

- Injury caused by a
- Accident due to an;
- Unsafe and / or mechanical or physical hazard due to;
- Unsafe and /or mechanical or physical hazard due to;
- Fault of the person caused by their measures aimed at preventing unsafe acts in unsafe conditions.

8.0 Literature review

This section focused on review of related literature based on, administrators' and teachers' knowledge on health and safety, school compound, First Aid supplies, play equipment and materials.

8.1 Administrators' and teachers' knowledge on health and safety

Administrators and teachers must make sure that they are given health and safety instructions they need for their occupation. That is important in order that they maintain themselves and children secure and handle risks efficiently. The Administrators and teachers should be trained with the intention that they tend pupils the same way that a prudent parent would do. Administrators and teachers are not aware of importance of risk assessment committees. Risk assessment committees keep a record of hazards and analysis of risk attached for instance risks that are likely to be corrosive, for preschools with swimming pools they check on the potential risks such as pools which are not fenced, availability of poisonous substance, present of security officers at the gate, food inspection; that is checking on proper storage. The school administrators are not taking health and safety policies within the school seriously. They discover risks and hazardous situations only when an accident has occurred. They need to be informed on how to deal with 'near miss situations' such as "I almost broke my hand". Most preschools do not have health and safety committees who monitor risks within the preschool and continuously report the rate of injuries in the centres. The health and safety committees help in organizing seminars and inviting professionals to talk to both parents and teachers on the value of health and safety in preschools.

8.2 School compound and health and safety of children

Unsafe preschool environment can affect overall health of children and their education outcome. Children should benefit from health and safety programs where they are protected from depression, loneliness, terrorism, injuries and food poisoning. Everything must be done to ensure that preschools are harmless for children. Children will also benefit from health kid strategy where obese children through their parents are helped to reduce weight and help them to have healthy minds.

Health and safety in The Employment Act defines a danger as any action, arrangement, condition, occasion, incidence, experience, circumstance or matter that is an actual or potential cause or source of harm. It includes the state where a person's behaviour might root harm to somebody else as well. This perhaps may be due to weariness, drugs, alcohol or some other temporary circumstances that may affect a person's behaviour. There's a dire necessity to plan to manage these types of situations on top of the management of any potential sources of harm for instance broken windows, unfenced compound and poor care-taking equipment.

School administrators do not take time to check whether the school compound is safe for children. There could be presence of poisonous plants within the school compound and no one notices until when it causes harm to children. In preschools where there are swimming pool facilities, some of the swimming pool policies are not adhered to. Swimming policies include the clause that 'no one should swim alone'. There should be somebody at all times designated as the swimming pool supervisor; pool gate should be firmly closed all the time (Armstrong 2009). Some preschools are not fenced such that it allows outsiders to trespass the school compound and this exposes children to risks such as child trafficking, drug abuse and terrorism.

Security personnel are found in some preschools but they do not exercise the most sensitive part of writing the names and time that every visitor gets into school; be it on foot or by vehicle. Security personnel are in preschools waiting to catch a mad person or any other person posing 'danger'. They are not aware of the trends that have changed, this time when we are faced with terrorism. The most dangerous person could be that simply dressed, humble looking stranger. Though preschools may not have a well designed office for a security officer it is important for security personnel to have a chair and a table near school gate and a book to record names of visitors entering school compound. This can reduce chances of insecurity incidences in preschools.

8.3 First Aid kit and supplies

The person in charge of First Aid should be appropriately trained or an experienced person. They should be conversant with dressing of wounds, reducing or stopping bleeding and many more ways of preventing further injuries. He or she should be able to keep a register of First Aid treatment that should indicate records of accidents, nature of people being treated, and the nature of the injury treated or infection for which First Aid was administered. Also important to indicate is the date, place the incident occurred and whether the casualty was

referred to a doctor or nurse plus the name of the person who administered the first aid. First Aid boxes in majority of the preschools are not accessible to members of health and safety committee; they are kept under key and lock in the office of the deputy head teachers.

8.4 Play equipment and materials

Preschools' play equipment and materials should be safe for children to play with. Play equipment like slides in some preschools are neglected and yet children still use them during play time. The painting done on the play materials has not been checked; some contain lead which acts as a noxious agent that can cause memory problems in children. Sand pits are not covered. When not in use, open sand pits can be risky to children in that they can cover themselves with the sand or materials therein leading to suffocation. Some play materials should not be too small; children can insert them in their noses or ears. It is important to use mulch river sand or other soft material underneath the play equipment to a depth of about 300mm to offer soft landing in case of falls from slides or swings.

9.0 Conclusion

Most preschools' managements have not embraced health and safety policy as required. This is a critical issue that needed to be emphasized. Most of the administrators realize the importance of taking precaution only after experiencing unpleasing situation. The potential risk in preschools should be identified and safety and health measures be made clear to all stakeholders in the preschools.

10.0 Recommendation

1. The administrations together with health and safety teachers should form a risk assessment committee who will be monitoring risks within the preschool environment continuously and then carry out formative assessment. The risk assessment committees should have a record of hazards and analysis of risks attached for instance analysis of substances that are likely to be corrosive. For preschools with swimming pools they should check on the potential risks like availability of poisonous plants, and presence of security officers at the main gate. Maintenance of buildings and roofs, play materials, gutters, transport of children, use of safety belts in vehicles, food inspection (checking of proper storage of foods) and so on.
2. Preschool health and safety committees which include teachers should be in-serviced on their roles to ensure procurement of health and safety equipment and repairs of preschool play materials. Health and safety audit should be brought on board to ensure that health and safety practices are adhered to for instance inspection of food within the preschool. Facilitators should be invited to demonstrate administration of First Aid services to persons with injuries. The project should also include education stakeholders like parents, teachers on critical issues concerning health and safety of learners. Children also must be sensitized on health and safety issues that concern them.
3. The administration should use school repair and maintenance finances to facilitate repairs in the preschool. It can also source for finances from Non Governmental Organizations who will provide finances for, say, fencing the school compound. Children should be supervised at all times when they are playing to avoid injuries.
4. There is need to have community advisory committees who will be in charge of the community and which will help reduce cases of death which accrues from illicit brews and ensure safety of preschool children in and outside preschool.
5. A room should be allocated for First Aid where First Aid kit, record book and First Aid supplies are kept and a register for First Aid must be kept. The First Aid room should be accessible to other members of health and safety.

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