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# PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES CAREGIVERS USE IN ENSURING SAFETY IN THE PROVISION OF TOYS FOR THE EARLY YEARS IN OWERRI OF IMO STATE

**Bosah, I.P. (Ph.D)**
Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education
NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka
+2348033761984
Ip.bosah@unizik.edu.ng

**Oluwutayo, Jennifer Chizoba**
Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education
NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka
+2348063325545
*Jc.oluwatayo@unizik.edu.ng*

**&**
**Chidimma Edith Ekweozor**
Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education
NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka
+2348066649489
Ce.ekweozor@unizik.edu.ng

***ABSTRACT***
*This study was design to ascertain the precautionary measures caregivers use in ensuring safety in the provision of toys for the early years in Owerri, Imo State. One research question and one null hypothesis were formulated for the study. Descriptive survey design was adopted. The population of the study consisted of 120 caregivers from 35 registered private early years centres in Owerri, Imo State. The entire population was used since it is a manageable population. A four point rating scale questionnaire containing 15 items was used for data collection. Cronbach Alpha method was used to establish the reliability of the instrument which yielded coefficients of 0.76.The researchers administered the instrument with the help of four research assistants to the respondents. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question while test was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that caregivers do not take all the precautionary measures to ensure safety in the provision of toys for children in early year's centres in Owerri of Imo State. The result shows that caregivers in urban areas take precautionary measures in ensuring safety in provision of toys for early years children while care givers in the rural areas do not take adequate precaution in ensuring safety in the provision of toys for children at early years. The researchers concluded that, since the use of toys helps physical, social, cognitive and emotional development of children at the early stage it is therefore important for caregivers to adhere to the precautionary measures in ensuring safety when providing toys for children.It was recommended among others that, conferences, workshops and seminars should be organized regularly for caregivers in urban and rural areas on the measures to take in ensuring safety when providing toys to children for optimal growth and development.*

**Keywords:** Early years centre, Toys, Safety and Location.

## Introduction

There is a popular saying in the society that children are the leaders of tomorrow and for this, every effort should be made by all stakeholders to safeguard their future through the treatment we offer them especially at this tender age. The early years in this paper refers to children who are between the ages of 0-5 years who are in the early child care centers receiving their learning.At such centers the children learn through play.

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Play like we know is children's language. It is essential for total child development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children. It also offers an ideal and significant opportunity for parents and other caregivers to engage fully with children using toys as an instrument of play and interaction. In recent times, there has been a great shift in parental and societal perception of toys. According to Goldstein(2018) parents and other caregivers increasingly view toys as being important for children's development, self-regulation, and executive functioning, increased recognition of early brain and child development as critical to educational success, among other reasons. In general, the best toys are those that match children's developmental skills and abilities and further encourage the development of new skills.

Toys are an important and fun part of every child's development, but they can come with risks too. Chocking is a hazard for kids ages 3 or younger, because they tend to put objects in their mouths. So it's important for parents and caregivers to check out their children's toys and supervise when kids play. A 2-year-old boy in a nearby home school in Nigeria placed a bead in her mouth and started to run around in the living room gasping for air, by the time the caregiver was running around looking for how to help the child, the child gave up . This becomes a revelation to everyone taking care of children to take precautionary measures in provision of playing tools –Toys to early years.

In provision of toys, the caregivers should provide children with safe, affordable toys that are developmentally appropriate. This should include toys that promote learning and growth in all areas of development. They should choose toys that are not over stimulating but those that will encourage children to use their imaginations (Greenspan, 2007). It should be warned that a toy is in the market does not mean that it is safe for use. In determining toy safety, the characteristics of the toy should be considered as well as how the toy might be used or abused and the amount of supervision or help needed for safe play.

There are necessary measures to be taken in ensuring safety in the provision of toys to the early years. When such measures are not, taken, they may be sources of infections and hazards to the young children.

According to Manner (1996) toys help children develop intellectually, socially and physically. Therefore toys are supposed to be source of fun to children. The nature of toys provided should be considered for it is not all toys that provide fun to children .Some toys due to their nature can endanger the health of the children if not properly scrutinised. Consumer Product Safety Commission (2001) emphasised that not all toys are safe for children use. For this, safety should be considered in provision of toys for children use by the parents and caregivers.

In many homes and early years 'centres most parents and caregivers buy toys because they pleased their eyes as adults, without considering the children that will use the toys. Some toys are source of sickness to children, some are source of fears while some are hazardous to their lives due to the nature of the finishing of the toys. These are the reasons why there is the need for precautionary measures to be taken in provision of such toys. Lichtenstein (2004) and Myoungson (2002) posited that in procurement of toys for children parents and caregivers should inspect the toys to ensure that no part of the toy is smaller than the child's mouth. They further added that toys with sharp or pointed edgesshould be avoided. On the same issue, Pearl (2003) added that toys intended for older children should not be kept for younger ones to avoid chocking. For toy-related deaths and injuries, it is important to note that many of the incidents were associated with a toy but not necessarily caused by the toy. Many caregivers fail to adhere to the age range restrictions that are often posted on toys. Any toy for a child under three years of age can become a choking hazard if pieces come apart or break off.

Toys that have been broken may have dangerous points or prongs. Stuffed toys may have wires inside the toy that could cut or stab a child if exposed. Caregivers should always re-install the screw locking the battery container lid on battery operated toys, especially for button batteries, as these pose a potential choking hazard if swallowed. Teach children to put their toys safely away on shelves or in a toy chest after playing to prevent trips and falls and teach older children to help keep their toys away from younger brothers and sisters. Some toys such as toy caps and some noisemaking guns can produce sounds at noise levels that can damage a child's hearing. The toys if not packed well after use can be a source of death to the children.

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There are many objects that children can use as toys because they are available. Such objects can constitute danger to their lives if care is not taken, such objects as scissors, balloons, beads, crayons, eraser, broken mirror and many others. This is why a researcher like Linchenstain (2004) advised that toys kept for bigger children should not be kept for younger ones to use to avoid choking hazards. The knowledge of caregivers in ensuring safety in providing toys varies from location.

The location decisions of firms and the distribution of economic activity have long been a central concern. Location is the relation of places through natural process. According to Singh (2003), location is seen as the geographical situation which may be a part of space or a point or position in space where objects, organisms, fields or events may be found. The knowledge of location is considered essential in the sense that it is the basic element of spatial relationships and play a significant role in the physical, economic and cultural realms. Location determines the interplay of climate elements and influences the geographic distribution of living things. It is the physical attribute which cannot be altered by man. The location can be divided into urban, semi urban and rural areas. For the purpose of this study, the urban and rural location will be discussed.

Urban areas are regions surrounding a city. Urban areas are very developed, meaning there is a density of human structures such as houses, commercial buildings, roads, bridges and railways. Rural areas are the opposite of urban areas. Rural areas have low population density and large amount of undeveloped lands. Usually, the difference between rural and urban areas is clear because the dominant pattern of migration within countries has been from rural to urban areas. This is partly because improved technology has decreased the need for agricultural workers and partly because cities are seen as offering greater economic opportunities. Irrespective of the economic, social, political advancement in the urban areas people still live in the rural areas.

The reason for the use of caregivers of private early years centres is because the Government of Nigeria handed over the administration of early years education to private individuals and it is expected that such centres must have been so established as to have sufficient toys in their centres than the government early years centres that are still waiting for due attention in the provision of facilities in the centres in urban and rural area.

**Statement of the Problem**

Toys are an important and fun part of every child's development. , but they can come with risks too. Choking is a hazard for young children, because they tend to put objects in their mouths. For such risk many children seem to be meeting their death untimely in most early year's centresdue to carelessness in the provision of toys by the adults (caregivers). This becomes worrisome to the writers hence this write up to examine precautionary measures caregivers take to ensure safety in the provision of toys for the early years . The findings of this research will educate the caregivers on adequate precautionary measures they will take in provision of toys in early year's centres for children use, this will help to reduce such untimely careless death from use of toys meant to be fun and educative to children.

**Research Question:** What are the precautionary measures caregivers use in ensuring safety in provision of toys for the early years?

**Hypothesis:** There is no significant difference between mean rating of caregivers in urban and rural area in ensuring safety in provision of toys for the early years.

**Research Method**

The study was conducted to investigate the precautionary measures caregivers use in ensuring safety in the provision of toys for the early years in owerri of Imo state.The study was carried out using descriptive survey research design. Oneresearch questionand one null hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. The population of the study consisted of120 caregivers from 35registered private early years centres in Owerri, ImoState, Nigeria. 100 caregivers in the urban area and 20 caregivers in the rural area were used. The entire population wasused sinceit is a manageable population. The instrument used for data collection was a 15 item structured questionnaire by the researchers titled"Caregivers Precautionary Measures for Ensuring Safety in the Provision of Toys Questionnaire" (CPMESPTQ). The items were structured on a four (4) point rating scales of Strongly Agree (SA, 4points), Agree (A, 3points), Disagree (D,

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2points) and Strongly Disagree (SD, 1point). Theanalysed using mean score and standard deviation to instrument was validated by 2 experts, one expertanswer the research question while ttest was used to from the Department of Early Childhood and Primarytest the null hypothesis at 0.05 alpha level .The Education and one expert from Measurement anddecision rule was that mean scores above 2.50 were Evaluation, Department of Educational Foundationsconsidered as agreed while those below 2.50 were all from Faculty of Education,considered as disagreed. The decision for hypothesis NnamdiAzikiweUniversity,Awka. The reliability ofwas that if t-cal is greater than t-crit reject the null the instrument was determined using Cronbach alphahypothesis and if t-cal is less than t-crit accept the null and reliability co-efficient of 0.76 was obtained whichhypothesis.
shows that the instrument was reliable. The date were

**Presentation of Results**

1. **Research Question One:** What are the precautionary measures caregivers use in ensuring safety in provision of toys for the early years?

**Table 1**: mean ratings of caregiver's response on the precautionary measures caregivers use in ensuring safety in provision of toys for the early years in urban and rural areas

| | | Urban N = 100 | | | Rural N = 20 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **S/N** | **The caregivers ensure safety in provision of toys to early years centre by;** | **Mean ($\bar{x}$)** | **SD** | **Decision** | **Mean ($\bar{x}$)** | **SD** | **Decision** |
| **1.** | Buying age appropriate toys. | 2.53 | 0.14 | Agreed | 1.97 | 0.92 | Disagreed |
| **2.** | Following instructions on the label on the toys | 2.31 | 0.43 | Disagreed | 2.20 | 0.47 | Disagreed |
| **3.** | Removing toys from playground after use to avoid causing falls | 2.36 | 0.58 | Disagreed | 1.40 | 0.24 | Disagreed |
| **4.** | Buying toys that are cheap | 3.35 | 0.49 | Agreed | 3.23 | 0.19 | Agreed |
| **5.** | Buying available toys | 3.37 | 0.52 | Agreed | 3.20 | 0.23 | Agreed |
| **6.** | Looking out for product fault | 2.09 | 0.76 | Disagreed | 1.04 | 0.14 | Disagreed |
| **7.** | Discarding damaged toys | 2.14 | 0.39 | Disagreed | 1.64 | 0.52 | Disagreed |
| **8.** | Repairing damaged toys | 1.99 | 0.45 | Disagreed | 1.04 | 0.14 | Disagreed |
| **9.** | Considering any type of toys | 3.40 | 0.83 | Agreed | 3.02 | 0.13 | Agreed |
| **10.** | Avoiding toys that might be hazardous to children | 3.33 | 0.74 | Agreed | 3.23 | 0.18 | Agreed |
| **11.** | Avoiding possible flammable toys | 2.84 | 0.46 | Agreed | 3.50 | 0.25 | Agreed |
| **12.** | Avoiding string tied toys | 2.22 | 0.73 | Disagreed | 1.36 | 0.24 | Disagreed |

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| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **13.** | Avoiding noise generating toys (like toy gun) | 3.01 | 0.71 | Agreed | 3.30 | 0.14 | Agreed |
| **14.** | Checking toys occasionally for minor damages | 2.01 | 0.32 | Disagreed | 1.40 | 0.25 | Disagreed |
| **15.** | Avoiding purchase of toys that can be swallowed by small children | 2.65 | 0.59 | Agreed | 3.20 | 0.23 | Agreed |
| Cluster Mean and SD | | **2.70** | **0.54** | **Agreed** | **2.10** | **0.28** | **Disagreed** |

Table 1shows the precautionary measures caregivers use in ensuring safety in provision of toys for the early years in Imo State. Items in number 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 12 and 14scored 2.31, 2.36, 2.09, 2.14, 1.99, 2.22 and 2.01 respectively were disagreed by respondents in the urban area which are below the decision mean of 2.50 while items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 12 and 14 with mean score of 1.97, 2.20, 1.40, 1.04, 1.64, 1.04, 1.36 and 1.40 were disagreed by respondents in the rural areas which were below the decision mean of 2.50. Also, items 1,4,5,9,10,11,13 and 15 with mean scores ranges from 2.53 to 3.50 respectively, were agreed by respondents in both urban and rural areas which were above the decision mean of 2.50. This shows that caregivers in the urban area take precautionary measures in ensuring safety in provision of toys for early years children while care givers in the rural areas do not take adequate precaution in ensuring safety in the provision of toys for children at early years.

**Hypothesis:** There is no significant difference in the mean rating of caregivers in urban and rural area in ensuring safety in provision of toys for the early years.

**Table 2:***t-test to show the precautionary measures caregivers in urban and rural area use to ensure safety in the provision of toys for the early years*

| Variable | X | SD | N | DF | T-Cal | T-Crit | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Urban** | 2.70 | 0.54 | 100 | 118 | 6.726 | 1.980 | Reject |
| Rural | 2.10 | 0.28 | 20 | | | | Null Hypothesis |

The calculated value of 6.726 is greater than the critical value of (t-crit 1.980) at 0.05 level of significance and 118 degree of freedom. Since the calculated value is greater than the critical value, we reject the null hypothesis. This means that there is significant difference in mean ratings of caregivers in the precautionary measures they use to ensure safety in providing toys for children at early years based on location.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings revealed that caregivers do not take all the precautionary measures such as not looking out for product fault, repairing damaged toys, checking toys occasionally for minor damages among others in providing toys for children. This is contrary toAtmakur (2012) who posited that for a toy to perform its function in child development, the caregivers must consider its safety measures so as to bring about effective and efficient

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teaching and learning processes. Mouroutsos and Mitka (2012) opined that the use of toy is to bring satisfaction and happiness in children and as such its safety measure must be strictly adhere to for optimal development of the child.

Also, the findings revealed that caregivers in the urban area take certain precautionary measures such as buying appropriate toys, buying toys that are cheap, buying available toys among others in providing toys for children in early year's centers while care givers in the rural areas do not take precautionary measures in providing toys for children in early year's centers. This finding is however consistent with that of Cox (2013) who found that urban setting affords and provide manipulative play materials (toys) due to the kind of development attained in the area and also recognizing that play is fundamental to the development of a child. Gray (2013) found that the attitude of caregivers in proving safety toys in the urban area in simulating children for effective teaching was positive. The reason for the result could be the awareness, knowledge, high exposure of caregivers and frequent in-service training provided for them in the area.

**Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that caregivers do not keep to all the measures in ensuring safety in the provision of toys for children in early years. Therefore, it is imperative that teacher's competency in the provision for toys should be looked into at all cost and urgent too. Thus, the use of toys helps physical, social, cognitive and emotional development of children at this stage. This will help in instructional delivery and hence improve creativity among pupils in early year's centers. The findings also show that care givers in urban areas maintain to an extent the precautionary measures in ensuring safety in the provision of toys unlike the rural areas.

**Recommendations**

Based on this, the researchers recommended that;

1. Conferences, workshops and seminars should be organized regularly by proprietors/Ministry of Education for caregivers in urban and rural areas in the measures to take in ensuring safety when providing toys to children.
2. Government should ensure that caregivers that run private centre in early childhood centres are qualified in the area.
3. Ministry of Education/proprietor should regularly supervise the centre to ensure that caregivers are effectively carrying out their duties.
4. Regulatory measures for toy provision should be made available to all child centre.

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