

## Achieving School Safety: A Positive Approach to Health Promotion

<sup>1</sup>O. Nwankwo Benjamin, <sup>2</sup>O. Obanny Adolphus, <sup>1</sup>N. Amadi Agwu, <sup>1</sup>A. Nwoke, Eunice,

<sup>3</sup>E. Ikegwoha Alloy, <sup>4</sup>S. Nwoga Kachy and <sup>5</sup>O. Nwabueze Peter

<sup>1</sup>Department of Public Health Technology, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>College of Health Technology, Amaigbo, Imo State, Nigeria

<sup>3</sup>Department of Primary Health Care, Isu LGA, Imo State, Nigeria

<sup>4</sup>Hands of Joy Health and Community Support Initiative, Aladimma, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

<sup>5</sup>Divine Clinics and Maternity, Egbeada, Orlu Road, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Schools anywhere located (whether, primary, secondary or tertiary) have always been part of the community, each having a complementary role to each other especially as regards to preventing accidents and maintenance of adequate safety in the school environment. School age children have been reported to be highly impressionistic, experimentalist and prone to hazards and accidents during their school period and as such need more education and protection than adults. Thus, the emphasis on the inculcation of safety education in school environment portends great hope for the overall focus and goal of this study. It also examines, the barriers to school safety and ways of promoting school safety. It is hoped that for the contemporary Nigerian schools to achieve the lofty objectives set in the educational curriculum, due attention must be given to the safety and encourage general health promotion in the school. This can be achieved when and if the recommendations advanced at the end of this study are utilized.

**Key words:** School, safety, approach, health, promotion, hazards

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### INTRODUCTION

The school is just an institution in the community, such that whatever happens in the school affects the community either directly or indirectly (Ogbalu, 2002; Igwe and Emeharole, 1993). Schools have been recognized (Nwana, 2007) as an extra-ordinarily effective setting, in which to improve people's health. Schools provide the most effective and efficient way of influencing the population, including young people. In this wise, the school (authorities, staff and students) and the community all have their different, but complementary roles to play in promoting safety in schools. Nigerian school age children who comprise about 20% of total population (Nwankwo, 2004a) especially, those of primary school age are experimentalists, which for most times predisposes them to danger (Ogbalu, 2002; Okafor, 2000). The national policy on education (1981 revised edition) confirmed that children in this age group are normally between  $\pm 6-11$  years. Okafor (2000) stressed that if all the school children are left to be killed, disabled or handicapped through accidents or unwholesome behaviours, there will be no people to carry on the developmental programmes in future. Therefore, effective

teaching on safety education in our schools is important and will be the solution to the accident problems or school safety (Igwe and Emeharole, 1993).

Uchegbu *et al.* (2002), opined that it was becoming increasingly evident that the possession of certain basic knowledge about health was essential to promote a sound programme of health instruction in the Nations schools. It is also fundamental and basic for the promotion, protection and maintenance of the health of the school children, as well as for the care of their health problems (Uchegbu *et al.*, 2002). Okafor (2000) and Ejifugha (2002) reiterated that the necessity for a virile health education programme for Nigerian schools calls for no emphasis. The schools they said are the most effective base for inculcating of any desirable health habits aimed at improving the life pattern of the general population. To be effective, such health promotion programmes must include; healthful school living, school health service, school health instruction and school and community relationship (Oluwande, 1998; Igwe and Emeharole, 1993).

Onuzulike (1997) had earlier stressed the importance of safety by observing that many inventions and activities would have been doomed to failure if principles of safety precautions had not been evolved. Despite the

principles, the nature of accident problems worldwide has led to economic losses amounting to enormous injuries, deaths and damages to property. The major solutions to accidents problems regardless of where, it exist is through balanced safety education programmes. Therefore, safety in schools (Ogbalu, 2002) should be every one's foremost consideration, thus, the need to include safety education in educational institutions curriculum, which would be a positive approach to health promotion.

**Concept of school safety and health promotion:** The more technology we have in the societies, the more safety hazards we have. Children by nature are more prone to accidents and in fact they need more protection than adults do (Ogbalu, 2002). Safety according to Oshodin (2005) is a condition or a state of being, which results from modification of human behavior and or designing of the environment in other to reduce the possibility of hazards thereby reducing accidents. School safety is a human concern, one that every school and community must take seriously and strive continually to achieve. It is also, a legal concern as schools can be held liable if they do not make good-faith efforts to provide a safe and secure school environment (Oluwande, 1998). Therefore, for one to be in a safe condition wherever, the person should be less prone to accidents. Also, to develop an understanding of their responsibilities in accidents prevention and control, there should be a well planned safety education (Oshodin, 2005). Many of the so-called minor injuries could develop or result into more serious ill health. Therefore, Nigerian schools should be places where guidance, supervision and instructions are geared to personal responsibility for one's safety and that of others and where, due emphasis is given to adequate safety, knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits (Onuzulike, 1997). According to Egwu (2002) and Abanobi (1999) health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over their health and to improve their health status. Health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector. It goes beyond healthy life styles to well being. It focuses on achieving equity in health. Health promotion actions are aimed at reducing differences in current health status and ensuring equal opportunities and resources to enable all people to achieve their fullest health potentials.

Health promotion or new public health has emerged in the last decade as an important force to implore both the quality and quantity of people's lives. It seeks to support and encourage a participative social movement that enables individuals and communities to take control over their own health (Abanobi, 1999). For one to enjoy good health, his or her surroundings must be safe and

healthy. That is an environment that can guarantee his physical, mental, emotional and social well being (Nwankwo, 2004b-d). Nwankwo *et al.* (2008), explained that health promotion is the efforts made to safeguard, maintain and improve health status. These efforts can be achieved at the individual level, which Okafor (2000) termed personal health promotion. They can also be achieved at the community, state and national levels (Egwu, 2002). It encompasses all the activities related to the betterment of an individual's and community health ranging from provision and acquisition of knowledge to health practices under accepted health principles and by the use of community health and health related resources. At the individual level, health promotion is more of what the individual should do. But, at the state and national levels it involves what should be done to help the individual and community as the case may be to achieve good health by their own actions and efforts (Egwu, 2002).

**Need for school safety and education:** Okafor (2000) defined safety education as The area of experience through, which boys and girls learn to make wise choice of when injuries to themselves or others are involved. It is important to encourage safety education, as it is said to help reduce accidents and then promote health (Onuzulike, 2000). Since, accidents are the leading causes of death and disability among the age group of 1-35 years (school children-form nursery to university levels), some of the causes are preventable. However, when people are taught safety education, the rates of accidents reduce greatly. Safety education highlights the safety precaution provided for all hazardous conditions. It develops, a sense of responsibility among people and understanding of the importance of the part each individual plays in ensuring his own safety and that of others. It aids philosophically and psychologically in the development of confidence to make assessment of potential danger. Again safety education will enable people develop proper lasting positive attitudes of mind towards safety precautions.

These could be achievable through: taking things easy by being careful, obeying rules and regulations and reading meaning to sign posts in e.g., don't touch any chemical on this Laboratory table; Never rush into the chemistry laboratory; wearing of safety gadgets; having fire extinguishers in the classroom, laboratory, staff offices, plant room etc., wearing shoes, boots, slippers where and when necessary; observing road signs and highway code etc example, zebra crossings, flyovers, schools signs etc. (Onuzulike, 1997).

Different forms of teaching safety education in schools according to Okafor (2000) have existed long time ago such as: organizing safety as a separate subject, teaching safety as a unit included in other subjects e.g., agricultural sciences, physical education, arranging a safety education programme around pupil's organizations and special projects, Correlating and integrating safety with many other subjects and activities or combining safety teaching with health teaching. The aim of the school safety education programme will not be to eliminate all risks, but it will try as much as possible to eliminate the needless risk (Nwankwo, 2003). Therefore, an effective safety education programme for the contemporary schools in Nigeria according to Okafor (2000), should be able to fulfill the following objectives to the children:

- Provide adequate safety knowledge
- Provide adequate safety supervision and leadership
- Develop in children adequate safety attitudes and habits
- Provide safety environment for the children

For effective knowledge of accident prevention in the schools, it is important to have knowledge of the possible causes of accidents within the school environment. Such areas include: sports and laboratory experiments, defective facilities e.g., slippery floors, sharp edge instruments, hazardous arrangements, improper illumination, using defective tools or using tools in unsafe manner; unnecessary exposure to danger e.g., running across a burning lawn as a sign of bravery, etc (Nwankwo, 2003).

Knowledge of these facts will enable the school authorities, staff and others connected with the health of the school children provide safeguards where necessary as well as ensuring strict enforcement of safety rules. To this end, Igwe and Emeharole (1993), opined that every teacher should therefore bear in mind that school accident prevention is his/her ethical responsibility. During each class teaching especially those involving practicals and use of instrument, the teacher must make sure that he teaches the safety rules along with the main lesson. Apart from assisting children in carrying out safety regulations concerning the inspection of facilities (playgrounds, school farms, laboratories and workshops) and equipment, the teacher should also develop in the children proper skills required in using these facilities and equipment.

**Scope of school safety education programme:** The teaching of safety education in the schools will as much as possible according to Okafor (2000) and Igwe and Emeharole (1993) cover the following areas of safety.

**Home safety:** The research of the school here is to develop in the children safety awareness, which they will apply in their homes. For the promotion of safety in the homes, the classroom, the teacher needs to review with the students' places where accidents occur in the homes e.g., the basement and laundry, kitchen, living and dining rooms, stairs, bathroom, garage and yard surroundings.

**Pedestrian safety:** A lot of school children have had accidents as a result of violating traffic laws (Igwe and Emeharole, 1993). To help the pedestrians especially, primary school children, federal government and state governments have provided zebra crossings at strategic points along the major highways and streets so that the pedestrians can cross half of the street at a time. Onuzulike (1997) have rightly suggested some safety knowledge required of school children as pedestrians. These include that children should learn to keep to their left side of the road to avoid being knocked down from behind. They should go to the nearest zebra crossing or paved land if the street is very wide. Children should learn to attract the attention of other road users, namely: motorists, cyclists and motorcyclists before crossing a road. They should learn to raise their hands and watch all vehicles stop for them. They should also know the suitable crossing points away from a street junction.

**Bicycle safety:** A substantial number of bicyclists, including the primary school children commit errors in operation and judgement. Bicycles are obviously dangerous if the rider does not comply with safety rules. For effective bicycle safety, the children must have adequate knowledge about bicycle safety rules. According to Okafor (2000), some of such rules include: learning to obey all traffic regulations; keeping their bicycle under control-no weaving or stunting; riding on the right side of the street and move with traffic; giving proper hand signal when turning or stopping; come to a full stop at traffic stop signs; slow down at intersections, get off and walk bike across busy streets.

**Fire safety:** For school children to have adequate knowledge about fire safety and so be able to prevent fire accidents, lessons on fire safety according to Igwe and Emeharole (1993), should cover the following areas: nature of fire; causes of fire-careless use of such things as cigarettes, matches, kerosene and petrol, careless use of appliances, spontaneous combustion, incorrect disposal of ashes, accumulation of rubbish and litter and controlling of fire menace.

**Teaching safety education in Nigerian schools:** To achieve these, it is necessary to note that at school, the children are often exposed (Ogbalu, 2002), to various

sources of accidents namely, the school buildings, the playgrounds and the school farms, the school laboratories and workshops. Since, it is pertinent for awareness to be created in advance, Onuzulike (1997) suggested among others, three good methods of teaching home safety education and these would be suitable for the schools especially the primary schools. These methods, which are in line with other methods of teaching general health Education (Okafor, 2000) include:

**Discussion method:**

- This method generally permits children to ask questions, make recitation, perform surveys and participate in numerous other ways in the teaching process
- They should also discuss the dangers of throwing sticks, climbing fences, throwing balls improperly, running in a crowded area or slippery surfaces, the school play ground hazards and their associated accidents
- They should also discuss motor vehicle laws and regulations, causes of bicycle accidents and how to prevent them
- Discussing questions like: what causes fire? How does fire start? what materials burn? how do we keep these materials? where matches should be kept? how can fire be prevented?

**Dramatization:** These are ways for children to express their feelings and urges through make believe imitation and imagination. It is believed that children are more likely to remember facts when they are portrayed or when they participate in portraying them.

- The teacher will dramatize how to keep the home safe by storing knives, matches, kerosene, use of scissors, clearing of sharp objects. Encourage school children to prepare a play on home safety
- Using a classroom to display the zebra crossing lesson
- The safe way to use playground apparatus such as swings, baths, javelin, discuss etc.

It is important to point out here that dramatization could be done by teachers themselves or by experts in the different fields with appropriate skills. Example road traffic agents, fire fighters, the police etc.

**Excursions:**

- Children could be taken to a street corner nearest to school to see the traffic signals
- Walk round the school with students to locate hazards to safety. Notices could be placed at the very dangerous ones to serve as signals for the children

**Activity of the schools in promoting safety:** As earlier mentioned, healthful school living is an aspect of school health programme, which aims at providing adequate physical, emotional and social environments at school. It embraces four areas according to Okafor (2000), which are as follows:

**Healthful school building and facilities:** Such as in the location of school building with respect to orientation, noise, dust, odors and dangers related to traffics, playground and drainages. Other areas include provision of adequate buildings, fire protection, water supply, toilet facilities, staff room, classroom, lighting and ventilation (Oluwande, 1998). In case of boarding schools, there is need to provide adequate and attractive space for facilities for schools food services. Schools that provide food vendors should mount a training programme for these vendors. It is the duty of the health coordinator to inspect the foods and make sure that only the approved and supervised vendors sell food to the pupils/students.

**Provision of adequate sanitation in school:** According to Nwankwo (2004) this include provision of simple, cheap but effective environmental health facilities (e.g., Adequate potable water and school building, vector control, refuse disposal etc.). Incorporation of suitable health education syllabus and activities into the school curriculum and organization of the pupils to accept responsibilities for provision and maintenance of the services and facilities.

**Provision of healthful school day:** This can be achieved through proper management of the school programme including attention to such items as length of unbroken study, recreation, sequence of subjects, nature and pattern of homework, number of pupils in a class, nature and conduct of examination, discipline and punishment. Appropriate healthful school day could be provided for the pupils through planned programme of physical activities requiring suitable playgrounds, gymnasium, playrooms etc. These according to Okafor (2000) will ensure that students and pupils are kept busy all the time.

**Establishment of good interpersonal relationship in school:** Both between teachers and pupils, teachers themselves and among pupils themselves (Okafor, 2000). This is to provide an opportunity for the development of good mental health.

**Barriers to school safety:** Nwankwo (2003) defined accident as a consequence of sudden unplanned events, which has the potential for producing personal injury or property damage. They went further to enumerate some barriers to school safety to include:

- Ineffective supervision of materials and individuals for and at research, respectively
- Overcrowding of human and materials
- Inaccessibility to things necessary for safety
- Irregular maintenance and repairs of materials
- Lack of alertness to potential hazards, so that they may be avoided
- Lack of safety education and creation of awareness
- Non-maintenance of safe school living
- Non-involvement of students themselves (organizations) in accident prevention
- Non-safety measures in major areas of the school e.g., corridors, staircase etc.
- Absence of perimeter walls around school building
- Absence of trained teachers in charge of health promotion programmes

**Ways of promoting school safety:** Promotion of school safety depends on the school management, the teachers and the school children. This could be described as the community school relationship or the responsibilities of each set in other to promote school safety. Mitigating hazards in school facilities should be planned and implemented by those who know the school and its community best. By so doing, they can successfully assess the safety and security of the school buildings, grounds and surroundings; make a hazard mitigation plan and implement the plan (Onuzulike, 1997). These ways of promoting school safety were justified by Onuzulike (1997) and Igwe and Emeharole (1993) when they listed them as follows:

- Keeping both staff and school children informed of the schools disaster preparedness plans
- Knowing and teaching others about the effects of the survival techniques for natural and man-made disaster/accidents
- Teaching and practicing of sound instruction in survival techniques
- Developing an air of confidence in the school children-maintaining students personal data e.g., name, address, parent's name and telephone number
- Staying with students during emergencies
- Rendering of necessary first aid
- Conducting recreational activities
- Reporting casualties/missing students to the school administrator

It is necessary to form students Organizations to assist individual in case of emergencies like town unions, christian groups, boys brigade, girl guides, etc.

## CONCLUSION

Improving the safety of school facilities is not a new idea (Oluwande, 1998). All schools practice it in some way, but often informally and on an ad hoc basis. A school and its occupants are best protected by conducting and maintaining a systematic, careful and well-documented hazard mitigation planning process. This also fulfills the school's legal obligation to maintain an appropriate standard of care (Oluwande, 1998). For the contemporary Nigerian school to achieve all the lofty objectives set in the educational curriculum, due attention must be given to the safety education aspect, which will enhance school safety and encourage health promotion in the school. This is a core aspect to achieving the 4th Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of reducing child mortality (Nwana, 2007). Safety consciousness should run through all the activities within the school environment so as to make school children most productive and each child according to his/her ability. Children by nature are more prone to accidents and in fact they need more protection than adults. Most of the so-called minor injuries could develop or result into more serious ill health. Nigerian schools should be places where guidance, supervision and instructions are geared to personal responsibility for one's safety and that of others and where, due emphasis is given to adequate safety, knowledge skills, attitudes and habits.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Nwankwo (2003) categorically stated that an unsafe act, unsafe condition and an accident, all indicate that something is wrong within the management system. The ultimate responsibility for successful implementation of the safety-training programme lies with the top management. To this end, it is the opinion of the authors that:

- For effective and efficient safety services, each school or group of schools should have accident prevention committee whose duty will be to plan, organize, implement, evaluate and review accident prevention programmes
- Accident prevention/safety services in schools should not be made a separable phase of the community safety programmes
- The school should not work in isolation of the community as both shares a lot in common
- The co-operation of local organizations, such as the police, the fire brigade, the voluntary organizations,

association and the government agencies should be sought for a successful safety education programme

- Adequate financial and human resources be provided by government to execute safety programme in all our over populated schools at all levels

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