

Strategies for Enhancing Safety in the Home

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Abstract

The paper examined factors that threaten home safety, causes injuries, loss of life and property. These factors are related to human and non-human (facility) factors. It also discusses way of enhancing safety in the home. Some common emergencies in the home and prompt first aid treatment are also discussed. The paper recommended that residents should be emergency ready by keeping emergency phone numbers such as those of fire service. They should also have a complete first aid box with emergency instructions among other things.

Key words: Home, Safety, Dangers, Threats, Accidents.

Introduction

A home is a house where a family resides. A typical home consists of the necessary things family members require to facilitate family living (Anyakoha, 2010). Home is the place to relax, play and enjoy spending time with members of the family. Visitors are also entertained in the home. Since people spend more time at home than anywhere else. It therefore needs to be safe from harm, injuries and danger. The act of making home safe and free from dangers is referred to as home safety.

Safety is the condition of being safe, freedom from danger, risk or injury. Safety activities seek to either minimise or eliminate hazardous conditions that can cause body injury (Norton and Exposito 1995). Safety involves the control of recognized hazards to achieve an acceptable level of risk. This can take the form of being protected from the event or from exposure to something that causes losses. It entails protection of people and possessions. Safety in home needs to be assured so that people can live without threat to their lives and properties. Safe situations are where

risk, injury or property damage is low and manageable.

Home safety refers to the awareness and education on risks and potential dangers in and around the home which may cause bodily harm, injury or death to those residing in and around the physical structure of a home (Zucker 1982). It can also be referred to as the ways of controlling or eliminating the commonly occurring hazards in the home. It involves an ability to protect against external harm around the home such as overgrown bushes, untrimmed hedge, refuse dumps, pools of water, mosquitoes infestation etc. other aspects are dangers such as faulty household equipment, household fuel such as kerosine, electricity, gas and other petroleum products, poor sanitation, careless handling of drugs, poor nutrition, unsound emotional relationships, etc.

Unfortunately many homes can be exposed to danger, preventable injuries and death due to some internal factors that threaten home safety. Zuker (1982) observed that more accidents occur in the home than in any other place because there no safety inspections in homes as in commercial building. Besides, family members especially the children are not aware of the potential hazards that exist in the homes.

This paper deals with internal and external factors that threaten safety in the home.

Internal Dangers in the home

Poor nutrition is a real threat to family safety due to limited resources. Nutritional problems develop when the family nutrition is imbalance, it can result to nutritional deficiencies such as kwashiorkor, marasmus and others. Fauci and Anthony, (2013) stated that good nutritional choice is a component of healthy and safety home. Poor preparation, storage and preservation of food are indices of poor nutrition which can lead to food poisoning and can cause deaths in the home.

Poor sanitation: Sanitation is a cornerstone of public health (WHO, UNICEF 2012). This poor sanitation entails dirty environment, poor toilet facilities and poor hygienic practices. The absence of adequate sanitation has a serious impact on health and social development. Poor toilet facilities and improper washing of hands at home can lead to contamination of water resources with human excreta which can lead to diarrhoea, cholera, schistosomiasis and trachoma. Poor sanitation endangers safety in the home as expose family members to infections as in the use of dirty toilets

Unsound emotional relationship: A healthy safety home involves a sound emotional environment (Fauci and Anthony, 2012). Ineffective communication among family members, the unwillingness to compromise and weak conflict resolution skills can interfere with mental wellbeing for everyone in the home. Disrespect among the couples can result to suicidal tendencies,

murder, aggression, fight and even setting the house on fire.

Faulty household equipment and facilities: Faulty household equipment can lead to fire outbreaks, electrocution, and even death of family members. Any faulty appliances should not be used but rather be checked immediately. Electrical socket should never be overloaded. Damaged electric cords or appliances should be repaired or discarded.

Careless use of household fuel such as electricity and gas kerosene: Electricity is also a common cause of fire outbreaks in the home. Many home accidents involving electricity are fatal and must be treated with extreme care. Portable generators are useful when temporary or remote electric power is needed but they can be hazardous. The house fire may start from electrical appliances in the house. Fires can start suddenly and spread quickly damage home, furniture and putting lives in danger. Children and adult can get burns from open fires, cookers, irons, cigarettes, matches, lighters, among others.

Slippery floors and stairways: Slippery floors can result to falls. Falls are the most common type of accident in the home, accounting for 44 per cent of all childhood injuries Royal Society for Prevention of Home Accident, (ROSPA, 2012) About 10 children in the UK die each year as a result of falling from balconies, windows and stairs. Older children and adults are more likely to experience fractures such as broken

arms, wrist or hip. The bathroom, living room and stairs are particularly dangerous areas because water tends to spill in the bathroom and living rooms. Rushing the stairways up or down, loose rails can cause falling along the stairways.

Careless handling of drugs and chemicals: Chemical preparation of all sorts, whether in the form of medicines or household cleaners may endanger safety in the home if not properly handled. Medicine is a potential poison and most poisoning injuries involve medicine, household products and cosmetics. Every year over 28,000 children in UK receive treatment from poisoning or suspected poisoning (Carol and Smith 2005). The chemical products may include cleaning liquids and powders, polishes, paint thinners, drain cleaners which can be dangerous and cause burns, fires, poisoning and explosions. Alzheimer (2014). Some children may take iron tablet as chocolate as the colour depicts that of chocolate and will lead to iron toxicity which is fatal.

External sources of dangers around the home

Building failures and collapse: A building once properly constructed is expected to be in use for a very long time. The very recent challenges of buildings collapsing in various locations have been giving the various arms of government and people of Nigeria sleepless nights in view of enormous loss of huge investments in housing, properties and human life (Olugede, Omogun and Akinjare

2010). Okpara, (2007) stated that the cases of building failures and consequent collapse in Nigeria has reached an alarming and lamentable stage. Houses that are not carefully built are potential danger to the family.

Ponds and swimming pools: Children can drown in a few centimeters of water without supervision. Almost all incidents where a child drowns in garden pond occur after a breakdown in supervision. Toddlers crawl into a flat surface wells or ponds unnoticed. Adults can drown in the pool if the person dives carelessly hitting the head on the sidewalls of the ponds or if the person is not perfect in swimming. Children should not be allowed to use swimming pools without supervision. Swimming pools should always be kept clean. The choice of location of swimming pools should be in a well- lighted area to avoid accidental fall.

Untrimmed hedges and refuse dumps: This becomes a breeding place for insects and other creeping creature that endanger the safety of the entire house hold. It can come in form of mosquito's bite that introduces plasmodium parasites to the blood stream of man or snake and scorpion bites among other things that can introduce deadly venom. In other words it possesses more health risk than the ordinary eye can see (Carol and Smith, 2005).

Ways of ensuring safety within the home and its surroundings

Factors that threaten home safety can be caused by human or non human(facility) factors. These factors when poorly managed bring home accidents. Home accident could prove disastrous as it may result in disability and loss of productivity. Children aged under 15 are also at risk of home accidents. Olaleye(2009)reported that every year many thousands of Nigerian children are permanently disabled or disfigured by home accidents. He also noted that elderly are also vulnerable to home accidents especially those over 65years of age. Therefore there is need for safety measures in and around the home. Such measures include the following, among others:

Good nutritional choices: Making good nutritional choices such as eating adequate amount of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, reducing consumption of refined carbohydrates, avoiding sugar laden juice and sodas can help prevent adult and childhood obesity, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Parents can help their children develop good nutritional habits by serving healthy meals at home (Wardlaw 2004). When healthy foods are served at home, immunity of the family member will be high and infections can be minimal

Improved sanitation: Improved sanitation contributes enormously to human health and wellbeing. The simple achievable interventions can reduce the risk of contracting diarrhea and other diseases. Using good toilet

facilities and hands washing preferably with soap and water prevents the transfer of bacteria, viruses and parasites found in human excreta which otherwise contaminate water resources, soil and food (WHO and UNICEF, 2012). Improved sanitation is an nonnegotiable steps towards reducing the impact of diseases. It also helps create physical environment that enhances safety, dignity and self esteem.

Sound emotional relationship:

Effective communication among family members, the willingness to compromise, and strong conflict resolution skills can help foster an atmosphere of mental wellbeing for everyone at home (Fauci and Anthony, 2012). Cordial relationship between the couples and children will help to avert suicidal tendencies, murder, and fight and ensure home safety. Stress management skills, including simple relaxation exercises can be learned and practiced by everyone in the home. Healthy parenting skills can also be learned and practiced to reduce stress in the home for both children and parents.

Careful use of fuel and other petroleum product:

Domestic fires pose a significant risk to children and adult. Children should not play with matches and lighters because this can set houses on fires. The primary hazards to avoid when using fuel and other petroleum products are carbon monoxide poisoning, electric shock and fire outbreak. Appliances with worn or damaged flexes should not be used. Children should be kept away

from electrical appliances and wires. ROSPA, (2012) stated that all fuel burning appliances use up fresh air as they burn, and give off waste gases including the deadly carbon monoxide and as such proper ventilation and never to block air vents. Those living in the house should beware of symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning such as drowsiness. If a gas flame which normally burns blue, suddenly burns orange, it may be due to buildup of carbon monoxide, the cooker should be switched off and the appliance checked immediately. If gas leak is suspected, open the windows, turn off the supply and call the supplier or electrician.

Fire safety: British blind and shutter Association, (2009) stated that family safety plans are an essential tool in fire safety because the plan helps family members to identify a fire escape plan. Components of a family fire safety plan include, making two ways out of every room, a safe place for family members to meet outside of a burning home, and essential emergency phone numbers. The association stipulates that fire sprinklers, fire extinguishers, fire alarms and smoke alarms will be provided in the house to quench fire or notify the appropriate authority about fire outbreak. ROSPA, (2012) outlined these measures to ensure fire safety:- To keep all fires and heaters well-guarded especially open fires. All portable heaters and candles should be kept away from furniture and curtains, and should be positioned safely where they cannot be knocked over. Not to dry or air clothes over fire

or near fire or cooker as they can catch fire. Smoking in bed should be avoided as the beddings can catch fire. **Electrical safety:** ROSPA, (2012) also outlined these measures to prevent electrical home accidents. All the wiring installations should be checked at least once every five years by an approved contractor. Appliances with worn or damaged flexes should not be used. Any faulty appliances should not be used and be checked immediately. Electrical socket should never be overloaded. Furthermore, electrical outlets, unused electrical sockets should be covered with plastic materials and damaged electric cords or appliances should be repaired or discarded. Children should be kept away from electrical appliances and wires. When an unusual odour, flickering lights or unissued power surge is noticed, an electrician should be invited to inspect the house and ensure that the wiring system is safe (Gill, 2007).

Floor and stairways safety: Accidental falls are one of the most common types of injuries to children and elderly. The bathroom and stairs are particularly dangerous. Majority of the falls happens at floor level, rather than at a height, and are due to tripping on loose, slippery surfaces, failing wires or general litter. However, falls can be prevented by making adjustments to our home and life styles. Alzheimer, (2014) enumerated these measures to ensure floor and stairways safety. Wipe up any moisture or spills right away. Install grab bars by the bath to help

you stand or sit. Reduce litter and get rid of loose wires, cords and obstacles on the floor. Have good lighting throughout the house and install night lights. Ensure that the path is clear between the bathroom and bedroom. Scatter mats are tripping hazards, so get rid of them or make sure they are not slippery. Ensure that the stairs are well lit. install solid handrails on both sides of the stairway. Remove reading glasses when going up or down stairs. Never rush up or down stairs as this may cause falls. Carroll and Smith, (1992) instructed that gates should be put at the top and bottom of stairs if there are young children in the home.

Safe keeping of drugs

Drugs can be sources of danger when handled carelessly. The following are important:

- Follow doctor's instructions in use of any drugs.
- All drugs should be kept in a safe cupboard: Drug cupboard should be under lock and key. Adult should handle the key and administer the drugs.

Safe keeping of chemicals

Chemical can impose danger when handled carelessly. (Mitchelle, Bail Bull, Clemonds and Marshall, 2005). The following steps are taken to safe guard use of chemicals.

- It is very important to read the label before buying and using household chemical products. Instructions on the household chemicals should be followed every time it is used. The hazard symbols on the front of the

product should be learnt and followed.

- To use household chemicals products carefully especially around children.
- Never to mix household chemical products together because some mixtures can produce harmful gases.
- Cork the container even if you set it down for just a moment.
- Teach children that hazard symbols mean danger, so do not touch.
- To store household chemical products safely in their original containers. All household chemical products should be locked up where children cannot see or reach them. Products that may release harmful fumes or catch fire should not be stored in the house. These items include paints, solvent, gasoline, fuels or varnishes. They should be stored according to instructions on the product label in a separate building if possible or in an area that is well vented to the outside.

Safe keeping of small objects: Small objects like pin, beads among others could impose danger to the family. Accidental swallowing of small objects such as beads, buttons, marbles, and pins can cause choking in children. Thus, these small objects should be kept away from children (Gill, 2007).

Ways of ensuring safety around the home:

There are several ways of ensuring safety around the home. The following ways are:

- Cut grasses around the home: The

grasses around the home could house insects, reptiles, scorpions which may harm the family members. Hence, the grasses should be cut monthly or any time it grows (Michael and Tony, 2005).

- Trim hedges: The flower hedges often grow to lose its function, flower is more beautiful when trimmed. Not only that it reduces the risk of danger to the family.
- No stagnant water in small cans and pools: Cans around the home should be discarded into the dustbin and disposed well. Pools should be drained out to avoid breeding of mosquito. (Carol and Smith, 1992).
- Sweeping the surroundings: The home environment should be cleaned on daily basis to avoid insect crawling into the home. Sweeping prevents odour in the home.
- Choose good accommodation that will not collapse: Good choice of home safe guard life, property and avoids collapse (Olugede, Omogun and Akinjare, 2010).

Some common emergencies in the home

The ten emergencies as advised by National Road and Motorists Association, (NRMA, 2015) are:

- Locked out of home.
- Blackout or power failure.
- Blocked toilet, pipe or drainage.
- Broken or burst hot water system.
- Damaged roof, gutter or downpipe.
- Broken heating or cooling system.
- Broken doors or windows.
- Gas leaks.

- Water leaks.
- Burst tap or showerheads.

However Gill, (2007) enlisted some home emergencies such as bruises and bleeding, burns and scalds, electrocution, poisoning and foreign bodies in the eyes, nose and ears.

These emergencies manifest in different ways:

- *Locked out of home:* This brings embarrassment, time loss to unlock the door and possible destruction of door or keyhole if the key is not reachable. A very common emergency at home. Being locked out of home; An NRMA survey of over 1,000 members living in metropolitan in Australia found that one in three people admitted to having either been locked out of their own homes of these 19% were locked out while taking out the trash and 16% after a late night out. A further 17% were locked out by their kids.

Furthermore, in the era of Face book and YouTube, 10% admitted to being locked out in their pajamas, under wears or in their nude(NRMA, 2015).

- *Blackout or power failure:* This is a sudden absence of light in the home especially in the night. Electricity has not been stable in some countries. Blackout in a house has imposed great danger for the family. It has lead to family members knocking their bodies on the wall or stair case in search in search of their ways to their rooms.
- *Blocked toilet, pipe or drainage:*

Inability of the pipe to dispose waste to the reservoir. It has also caused so much problem to homes, such problem include odour, unsightly and infection. It could also lead to indiscriminate disposal of waste and its resultant effect.

- *Broken and hot water system:* They have potential danger that may harm the family members. When hot water system, hot water bottle and hot flask are broken the family is exposed to burns and scald. (Gills, 2007).
- *Damaged roof and gutter:* When roof and gutter are damaged they pose danger to family. The damaged roof and gutter are likely to collapse at any point in time. The sudden collapse may endanger lives.
- *Broken door and window:* This could be done by thieves or carelessness in the home. (NRMA, 2015). Broken door and window pose great danger to the home, children could fall from broken door and window, harmful insects, rodents and reptiles could crawl into the house.
- *Gas leaks:* Diffusion of gas into the surroundings of the home endangers the life of family members. It could cause fire-out break or exposure to naked light.
- *Water leaks:* It could leak from weak and old water pipe. Most falls in the home is often caused by water leaking from the tap head or water pipe in the home. Water from such leaks may form ponds breeding area for mosquito.
- *Burst tap and shower head:* Due to poor fixation of water tap and

shower head. This could cause shock to a child under the shower and flooding of the bathtub.

- *Bruises and bleeding*: Bruises develop when small blood vessels under the skin tear or rupture and spread into surrounding tissues. Most often from a bump or fall.
- *Burns and Scalds*: They are damage to the skin caused by heat or liquid. Burns and scalds are really painful. The skin shrivels and the heat goes right inside the skin.

Burns are damage caused to the skin by sun burn, flames from a fire, something hot-like, an iron or a heater. Electricity- When electric shocks, chemicals like caustic acid, oven cleaning, playing with matches or lighter or a lit cigarette.(Mitchelle *et al*, 2005).

A scald is a burn caused by hot water or steam, or other liquid like coffee or tea being spilled from a mug or water from the hot water tap in the bath, hot water tap in the bath tub, hot food (Kids health, 2015).

- *Electrocution*: It is flow of electrons into the body which causes tissue or nervous system damage. All electrons passing through the body either heat and burn tissues or interfere with essential electrical signals such as those that cause the heart to beat. It makes muscles to clench and make it impossible for a person to let go of the current source. Being physically unable to let go a live wire is called Tetanic contraction (Hart field, 2015).
- *Poisoning*: Poisons are substances that cause disturbance to organisms,

usually by chemical reaction or other activities. It could be swallowed, inhaled, injected absorbed through the skin, such poisons include lead, carbon monoxide, among others. (Medline Plus, 2015).

- *Foreign bodies in the ear, nose and eye*: Foreign bodies are objects or substances that are not part of the body which are seen in the body. It could be pin, bead, cotton wool, sand, and buttons among others. These objects could accidentally enter the nose, ear, and eye. It may cause pain or may not cause pain immediately.

First Aid Treatment of Common Emergencies

The above mentioned emergencies in the homes need urgent attention such as:

- *Blackout or power failure*: Provision of alternative light such as solar lanterns, inverter among others to light the house and prevent further harm in the home.
- *Block toilet, pipe and drainage*: The pipe and drain should be repaired as soon as possible in the home. The drainage system should be cleaned to enhance easy flow of waste to the reservoir tank.(Gill, 2007)
- *Broken and burst hot water system or flask*: Notify the repairers on time. Stop using broken flask to avoid bursting of hot water on family member. If old, new ones can be bought.
- *Damaged roof, gutter and down pipe*: Damaged facilities like roof and gutter should be repaired. Replace

- old pipes with new ones.
- *Locked out of home:* alternative places could be provided to keep spare keys to avoid embarrassment caused by locking out of home. (NRMA, 2015).
 - *Broken heating or cooling system:* Heating or cooling system should be properly fixed. Regularly check to detect when it is faulty and act immediately. (Michael and Tony, 2005).
 - *Broken door and window:* Repair door and window as soon as they are broken to avoid danger to the family members. (NRMA, 2015).
 - *Gas leaks:* Instruct the distributor to tightening the head to avoid further leaking.
 - *Water leaks:* Repair pipe or roof through which the water is leaking. Dilapidated pipes should be changed with new ones (Gill, 2007).
 - *Burst tap or Shower head:* It should equally be repaired with new shower heads and tightened well.
 - *Foreign body in the ear, nose and eye seek for medical attention.* Use water to irrigate the eye if sand. But if stick rush to the hospital. (Mitchelle, Bail, Bull, Clemonds, and Marshall, 2005).
 - *Bruises and Bleeding:* Treatment aims to control bleeding and stop swelling. If the wound is deep and bleeding profusely, the bleeding must be stopped quickly to prevent shock, unconsciousness and death (Carroll and Smith 1992). To stop the bleeding, apply direct pressure on the wound, raise and support the part if in shock, lay the person down, raise the legs up to increase blood and oxygen supply to the brain. Loosen tight clothing and wrap the victim in a coat or a blanket to prevent heat loss. If the person is bleeding through the nose, ears, coughing out blood or has a swollen abdomen, seek for emergency medical help (Mitchelle *et al*, 2005).
- First aid treatment for burns /scalds aims to remove the victim from danger, relieve pain, prevent infection, prevent or treat shock. If the burn is severe or covers a large area, call for medical help immediately. If the clothes are in flames, smother them with a blanket or roll the victim back and forth on the ground, then call for a help. Remove wet clothing but not dry burnt ones that is stuck to the skin. Apply cold compress or immerse the area in cold running water (Carroll and Smith, 1992). Cover the burnt area with a clean cloth and take the victim to hospital.
- *Poisoning:* Accounts for about 1:50 of all home injuries (Peters and Smith, 2005). Poisoning is always an emergency and need to be treated as thus. Seek for medical help after any poisoning, no matter how well the victim might feel, as there may be delayed complications (Carroll and Smith, 1992). Never leave the victim alone. If conscious, try to find out what type of poison taken as it could help to save the victim. If poisonous gas has been inhaled, take the victim out for fresh air, loosen tight clothing around the neck to help the victim breathe. If corrosive substance such as bleach has been swallowed

wash the mouth. Do not give drinks or induce vomiting. Seek for medical help.

In electrocution, do not touch the victim because you may receive shock. Turn off the current or separate the victim from the power source with a dry, non conducting object like a dry wood or broom. Check for breathing and begin artificial respiration if not established. Once the victim is breathing, treat any visible burns, stay with the victim and send for help.

Conclusion

Enhancement of safety and emergency strategies in the home is very important to prevent loss of life and property and necessary for the survival and sustainability of the family. Not only that when home facilities are kept in safety ,it offers aesthetic outlook to the environment and enhances healthy living Therefore knowledge, skill and observance are indisputable factors needed by family members to safeguard home.

Recommendations

Since home safety is not adequately guaranteed, the following recommendations are offered:-

1. Safety and emergency education should be taught at different levels of education.
2. Families should prepare for an emergency by having emergency phone numbers of fire service, poison control, health care provider and neighbor or nearby relative.
3. As soon as children are old enough

to know their names and address, they should be taught how to dial help line in case of emergency by having emergency phone numbers of fire service, poison control, health care provider and neighbors or nearby relative.

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