

Abuses, deaths on the rise in daycare centres

Busy parents place their trust in childcare centres and babysitters to take care of their children, but how safe are these places? **MASAMI MUSTAZA** and **AIDI AMIN** take a peek into this growing industry

PARENTS turn to nurseries to look after their children while they are at work.

Such centres are a necessity and parents often choose to live near their babysitters.

But how safe are nurseries, babysitters and daycare centres?

In recent years, the number of accidents and child abuse at such places has increased.

What is alarming is that parents are ignoring the warning signs that can result in their children getting hurt or, in some cases, end up dead.

From last year to last month, the Welfare Department had recorded 12 deaths at nurseries based on reports published by the media.

And there could be more deaths that went unreported.

Recently, two infants choked to death while being fed milk from bottles at nurseries in Putrajaya on Sept 20 and 21.



Welfare Department legal and advocacy department head Zaitol Salleh says registered nurseries will have a declaration of registration

finding a good childminder worries her.

Unlike Irwan, she does not get along well with her in-laws and doesn't fancy living with them.

"I can't expect my mother to move in with me because she's still taking care of my younger siblings who are in school," she said, adding that her family lives far away.

Tan stays in Petaling Jaya with her husband while her family lives in Muar, Johor.

"I'm actually considering asking my friends and colleagues who have mothers living with them if they could take care of another child when I give birth to one.

"It may sound outrageous but that's an option I'm looking at."

Recently, Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil urged unregistered childcare centres nationwide, including home-based ones, to register following the deaths of the



The nurseries were not registered with the Welfare Department.

Both centres had been ordered to close for three days pending investigations.

It's cases like these that have led some parents to look for childcare alternatives.

Lifestyle editor Irwan Abdul Rahman, 36, and his wife have a house in Shah Alam that they moved in after their marriage.

But when their first child, Izzfarhan Syafi, 4, was born, the couple stayed at his in-laws' house although the distance between their houses was only a 20-minute drive.

"At first, it was a matter of convenience. We were both working and we knew we could trust my wife's parents as they were the best people to take care of Izzfarhan," he said.

A year after the birth of their second son, Ilan Syahputra, 1, the couple moved back into their own home.

However, the boys' grandparents decided to move in with them.

"It's better for us and them, too. The children are very attached to their grandparents but what's more important for us is that we know it's a lot safer than to have them taken care of by a babysitter or a maid."

But not all can enjoy the kind of convenience Irwan and his wife had.

Graphic artist Melissa Tan, 29, has yet to have a child but the problem of

register following the deaths of the two infants who choked.

There are only 413 registered nurseries while more than 2,000 are not.

The Welfare Department's legal and advocacy department head, Zaitol Salleh, said most accidents and deaths of children happened in unregistered nurseries.

"Childcare services have become such a necessity to parents that there are those who take advantage of the situation to set up daycare centres without the proper paperwork.

"You can find many in high-density residential areas, apartments and workers' quarters.

"There are also housewives and single mothers who offer to take care of children in their homes to supplement their income."

She said although the Welfare Department monitored these premises, parents must be more vigilant when choosing a daycare centre.

"Nurseries registered with the department will have a declaration of registration, which states the conditions that they must abide by."

Zaitol said it was important for parents to choose the services of a registered nursery.

"We urge parents to report unregistered nurseries to the nearest district welfare office or contact the Talian Nur line at 15999.

"Parents must not take the easy way out by choosing convenience over safety because that can lead to very tragic consequences."

This childcare centre is registered with the Welfare Department but many others are not.

Minders here only get basic training

SINCE the Childcare Centre Act 1984 was amended in 2007, childcare service providers in the country must renew their permits every five years instead of annually.

In Britain, registered childminders fall under the purview of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate of Wales.

The childminders are checked every two to three years to ensure that they are working according to requirements.

Childminders are also required to attend and complete an introductory childcare training course, and other courses such as a paediatric first-aid training, before they could be registered.

The National Childminding Association is a charity and professional association registered in England and Wales.

It works with stakeholders to ensure that children and families have access to high-quality and home-based childcare.

It also works with the authorities and government to ensure that children's services include home-based childcare.

Ireland and Scotland have their own childminding associations.

In Malaysia, there is the Association of Registered Childcare Providers Malaysia.

But its role is only to offer the Basic Childcare Course required by the Welfare Department and other courses for childminders.





Handwritten notes on a piece of paper, possibly a checklist or instructions, with some words underlined. The text is partially obscured and difficult to read, but includes phrases like "one of the signs into the", "to be taken up by", "not near", "one falls into drains", "and pipes and is carried", "away", "to drain", "and flushed", "down the drain", "to drain", "to drain".



LITTLE VICTIMS OF CRUELTY

HARESVARRA KARIGALAN
March 5:

Haresvarra Karigalan, only 16 months old, was allegedly pinched, punched, beaten and stomped upon by his former babysitter's husband at a playground in Kayu Ara, Damansara.

The brutal murder took place after the suspect, a 33-year-old lorry attendant, had taken the toddler away from his new babysitter on the pretext of buying him chocolates.

Haresvarra was returned 10 minutes later to the babysitter's house, looking unwell and feeling dizzy.

When the babysitter realised that something was wrong, Haresvarra was rushed to a clinic and later to the University Malaya Medical Centre where he died.

A man had lodged a police report claiming that the child choked on a piece of chewing gum, but this was later proven to be false after a post-mortem.

District police chief Assistant Commissioner Arjunaidi Mohamed said the post-mortem showed that six of Haresvarra's ribs had been broken and his liver was ruptured. The injuries were consistent with those caused by assault.

NUMBER OF NURSERIES

State	Unregistered	Registered
• Selangor	637	80
• Perak	82	66
• Johor	122	20
• Malacca	65	3
• N. Sembilan	81	31
• Kelantan	130	8
• Kedah	76	21
• Perlis	25	4
• Pahang	12	53
• Penang	149	13
• Terengganu	159	31
• Sabah	139	52
• Sarawak	38	15
• K. Lumpur	371	35
• Labuan	0	3
TOTAL	2,086	435

Source: Welfare Department

Requirements to operate a nursery

- The nursery's premises must be registered with the Companies Commission of Malaysia or the Registrar of Societies;
- The nursery's premises must get the approval of technical agencies, including the local authorities, the Fire and Rescue Department and the Health Department;
- Upon receiving the approval of technical agencies, the Welfare Department will scrutinise the minimum requirements from the aspects of the specified ratios between childminders and the number of children in their care, which are 1:5 for children below 3 and 1:10 for children aged between 3 and 4;
- Childminders must be citizens aged 18 and above;
- Childminders must complete the Basic Childcare Course provided by agencies authorised by the Welfare Department.

Police question babysitter

POLICE have recorded the statement of a 30-year-old babysitter over an alleged child abuse case at a nursery in Presint 14, Putrajaya.

District police chief Assistant Commissioner Abdul Razak Abdul Majid said police were waiting for the medical report before wrapping up the case.

Five-month-old Muhammad Firdaus Hakim Faizal Hafiz died last Friday while under the care of his babysitter.

He was believed to have sustained injuries in a fall and went into a coma last Tuesday.

"The child may have died from brain haemorrhage and police are checking if the fall was an accident or if the baby was a victim of abuse," he said yesterday.

The boy's parents, Faizal Hafiz Abdullah and Nor Zulaihan Mustapa, had lodged a police report.

They suspected that negligence and possible abuse might have caused their son's death.

They claimed that when they brought their son to the hospital, he was unconscious and bleeding from the nose.

NUR IZZATUL SHAHIRA ROZILAN

June 27, 2008:

Megat Shahrizat Megat Shahrur was sentenced to 15 years' jail by the Kuala Lumpur High Court for placing a cushion on a crying toddler and sitting on her. The 2-year-old child's liver and pancreas ruptured, causing her to die instantly.

Megat Shahrizat, 32, was charged with culpable homicide not amounting to the murder of Nur Izzatul Shahira Rozilan in an apartment at Sri Suajaya Condominium, Jalan Kampung Bandar Dalam, Sentul, between June 3, 2001 and the next day.

He had offered to care for the child as her mother was away.

According to the pathologist, the girl's liver and pancreas were sandwiched between Megat Shahrizat's body weight and her backbone, causing them to tear and rupture.



MUHAMAD FIRDAUS NOR HANIF

July 13, 2001:

A babysitter was charged with causing grievous hurt to a baby and compounded for a sum of RM50,000 with the consent of the Kuala Lumpur Sessions Court.

Wah Yunah Abd Hadi, 46, was charged with voluntarily causing grievous hurt to 10-month-old Muhamad Firdaus Nor Hanif at a house in Jalan Raja Mahmud, Kampung Baru, between March 9 and 19, 1999.

She was charged with abusing Firdaus at the same place and time and had pleaded not guilty.

Firdaus died on March 21, 1999, and according to the post-mortem report, the death was caused by non-accidental head injury.

However, the child's parent agreed for the case to be compounded.

