



# Optimising Malaysian childcare safety performance, in light of management, and babysitting practices



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**Background:** Safety practices play a vital role in childcare business, as childcare entails managing children's daily life routines and preventing them from any harm.

**Aim:** This study aims to explore the perspectives and awareness of childcare centres regarding the importance of childcare safety practices, babysitters' traits and safety performance in Malaysian childcare business settings. In addition, this study seeks to appraise the initiatives and actions employed among childcare centres in improving the safety levels of their establishments and management.

**Setting:** This study focuses on safety performance, and its practices, including the management, and babysitting among Malaysian childcare providers.

**Methods:** A convenience sample of 11 participants, comprising childcare owners, management, supervisors and senior babysitters, from a wide variety of Malaysian childcare centres participated in a semi-structured interview.

**Results:** Nine themes encompassing the actions and initiatives required by childcare practitioners in sustaining and empowering the safety of childcare centres were synthesised from the thematic analysis, which was grouped into two main categories: (1) Management practices; monitoring systems, training, rules and procedures and maintenance and (2) Babysitting practices; personality, mental health, religion and belief, responsibility and cooperation and knowledge and skills.

**Conclusion:** These findings provide valuable insights to childcare practitioners, including the childcare owners, management and staff, in enhancing the safety levels of childcare premises and the benefits for the children they serve.

**Contribution:** This study contributes to the childcare safety framework to be employed as a reference in monitoring and regulating the safety performance of childcare centres in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** safety performance; safety sustainability; management practices; babysitting practices; childcare centres.

## Introduction

The relevance of childcare is widely acknowledged in many countries (Koenig 2013). Childcare provision is organised differently wherein certain nations, such as Belgium, France and Italy, stipulate childcare as part of the education system, while other countries such as Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia perceive childcare as part of the social welfare system (Koenig 2013). In the Malaysian context, childcare is not a compulsory educational programme but rather under the regulation of the Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development. Nevertheless, various categories of childcare centres in Malaysia, including institution-based, work-based, community-based, and home-based, are required to register under the *Childcare Centre Act 1984* (Akta Taman Asuhan Kanak-Kanak 1984 2008). Nonetheless, there is no standard framework to be employed as a reference in monitoring and regulating the safety performance of childcare centres in Malaysia.

Safety practices play a vital role in a business atmosphere (Perera 2021), including the childcare business, as childcare entails managing children's daily life routines and preventing them from any harm. Besides, children's growth and development at the early stage of life are crucial in determining future life paths. As such, accidents and injury cases reported in the media (Berita Harian, 2015, 2018a, 2019, 2020; Sinar Harian 2019) have initiated certain regulatory actions of authorities or relevant parties in systematically solving the safety issues, especially in the childcare setting among service providers. However, childcare providers did not provide adequate levels of

concern regarding the issues of children's safety and parents' expectations because of the increasing number of childcare centres in the existing market (Sisson et al. 2017).

Childcare providers, management and parents should always be concerned and comprehend the obligations regarding the safety and protection of children by preventing injuries and accidents (Abashah & Taib 2021). Although several studies have been conducted on the health and safety provisions of childcare centres, a higher level of focus is required to ensure children's health and safety in different settings (Abashah & Taib 2021). Moreover, the existence of health and safety issues at childcare centres would endanger children in suffering substantial levels of health consequences and negative impacts on their well-being (Sisson et al. 2017). Childcare providers should therefore be well versed in various safety procedures and guidelines, and practise incessantly in the routine operations of childcare centres.

Managers of childcare centres need to guarantee that all employees will receive ample health and safety training and participate in different intervention workshops. Participating in training and workshops would positively impact the children and employees. For example, a study in the USA implementing developmental monitoring training (Chödrön et al. 2021) among childcare providers had shown a significant increase in caretakers' knowledge and abilities to enlist the child's doctor as an appropriate referral. This approach was suggested to be effective as an early intervention to enhance the safety and health of the child (Chödrön et al. 2021). As such, a training session on basic safety practices could equip early educators with vital skills in ensuring children's safety in their daily routines and emergencies. Furthermore, the complexity of a childcare environment containing multiple potential risks requires abundant coping strategies, such as injury prevention, emergency assistance, infectious disease prevention and containment, milking techniques, child nutrition and food safety, in which further attention is necessitated from relevant parties (Kementerian Kesehatan Malaysia 2007). The prevention efforts are parallel with the declaration of United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) on children's rights, including 54 articles covering children's fundamental needs, which are to be fulfilled by respective parents. For example, 'children have the right to the best healthcare possible, clean water to drink, healthy food, and a clean and safe environment to live in' (UNICEF UK 2019, Article 24).

To address the aforementioned childcare issues, this study aims to explore childcare practitioners' perspectives on the safety performance, childcare management and babysitting practices of childcare centres. It is expected that the findings will assist in developing pertinent improvement strategies for childcare centres in Malaysia.

## Literature review

According to the Malaysian Department of Statistics, an estimated 4300 and 800 children aged 5 and 1 year to four

years old died in 2018, respectively (Department of Statistics 2018). Furthermore, only 3173 of the 16873 caregivers under the existing list of the Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development were certified (Aliza Shah 2018). These reports suggest only approximately 19% of carers and educators were properly educated and trained in establishing a safe childcare environment with appropriately controlled hazards. Despite the existing laws and regulations in ensuring the safety of children in Malaysia, a total of 16 child deaths were reported in childcare centres that were mainly unregistered in 2012, whereas the number of child mortality increased to 23 cases in 2015 (Mutalib & Saleh 2018). These statistics highlighted the critical issue of child safety to be properly addressed, particularly as accident-related deaths of Malaysian children have reached a serious level (Mutalib & Saleh 2018).

In the childcare context, the commitment of childcare providers, including management, staff and babysitters, is necessary for fulfilling their obligations and responsibilities when taking care of children on the front line for at least 9 h a day while the parents are working. However, the importance of safety management is often underestimated among childcare providers (Ladewski & Al-Bayati 2019). A qualitative study conducted among 53 childcare providers in examining the perceived concerns and screening practices of mental disorders revealed that mental health concerns among children were among the challenges faced as a result of poor management and application of safety practices (Kumar & Chaudhary 2021). Similarly, Osuji & Omah (2019) conducted a study among secondary school students and discovered that transparent safety policies and objectives would help promote an environment with better and safer quality in an educational institution while improving safety performance (Zakaria et al. 2020). Meanwhile, inefficient and ineffective safety management practices could cause unintended consequences when not appropriately handled (Zakaria et al. 2020). Previous studies have also demonstrated that inspection and maintenance of equipment and facilities, such as physical facilities, outdoor play spaces, play equipment, the safety of school compounds and availability of firefighting equipment and first aid kits, are not conducted at a satisfactory level (Mwoma et al. 2018; Murungi 2018; Sisson et al. 2017). These important safety procedures should be constantly emphasised among teachers who are primary caretakers of children in schools or educational institutions (Mwoma et al. 2018; Sisson et al. 2017). Besides, communication and cooperation would achieve higher levels of performance when the quality of both aspects is provided with an adequate focus regarding safety policies, safety expectations, collaboration and feedback (Ladewski & Al-Bayati 2019).

An established monitoring system in an organisation may also sustain sufficient levels of childcare safety with effective leadership and management. This is because a leader can inspire and motivate the entire organisation at different levels by

communicating the shared vision (Ladewski & Al-Bayati 2019), including childcare, before subjecting to efficient practices. Furthermore, the management could also initiate safety training sessions for safety development skills, abilities and knowledge among the staff before providing childcare services (Ladewski & Al-Bayati 2019). However, Klibthong and Agbenyega (2019) revealed that an insufficient level of training was provided for teachers or educators in taking care of children with disabilities appropriately, thus postulating that effective training programmes in improving the work process and a sense of belongingness were important in sustaining child safety. Similarly, Koenig (2013) also argued that when training sessions provided for early childhood professionals were not developed based on research and science, the transfer of knowledge and insights regarding early childhood education would remain challenging. Hence, by administering appropriate, continuous and evidence-based training sessions, childcare management, babysitters and staff could enhance their babysitting knowledge and skills before being committed to performing their daily obligations and assignments.

Consequently, childcare institutions serve two main functions, namely providing a safe environment of care and quality education for children (Koenig 2013). Furthermore, Ghavifekr and Adewale (2019) posited that personality traits could also influence personal attitudes towards work and organisation by transferring individual traits and characteristics to the workplace. Thus, children, toddlers and babies should be provided appropriate caring and loving behaviours from caretakers or babysitters possessing fitting personality traits and satisfactory levels of empathy.

## Theoretical framework

Childcare ecologies are complex because of the involvement of diverse parties of childcare providers (Zaida et al. 2017). In the Malaysian context, several bodies such as Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development are involved, particularly to provide policies and guidelines, enforcing and monitoring the childcare centre. Babysitters employed by the childcare centres and the children's parents also constitute important domains of childcare ecologies (Haziq et al. 2020; Norulhuda Sarnon 2017). Therefore, the childcare ecology comprises mainly of four different parties whose commitment is pivotal in providing the safest environment for children's wellbeing, particularly at the early state of life and development.

Given the involvement of various parties in a typical childcare setting, the present study is based on the social ecological framework and integrates theoretical models at three main levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal and organisational (Sallis et al. 2008; Stokols et al. 1996). At the intrapersonal level, the model focuses on childcare staff, which posits that people constantly perceive their current state, comparing it against some reference conditions and adjusting their behaviours accordingly. This behavioural adaptations align with the perceptual control theory (Ward et al. 2018). At the

interpersonal level, the main focus is the interactions with the team and measures taken to encourage such activities such as physical and social support. Hence, interventions can be developed using the social support theory. Lastly, organisational level entails the inter-connection between child care centres' programmes, policies and environmental support. Strategies that could be employed at the organisational level include behaviour change methods such as goal setting, feedback on current practices and action planning (Ward et al. 2018).

## Research methods and design

### Research design

An exploratory research design was developed for this study. Generally, physical face-to-face interview sessions are usually conducted for qualitative studies. However, this study was conducted using the virtual platform and adapted to online approaches because of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the uncertain series of movement control order implementation in Malaysia. Thus, the feedback was gathered from participants through the online Google Forms and video conferencing platforms. Subsequently, the data collected were analysed using thematic content analysis in generating corresponding themes.

### Study area

This study was conducted among childcare centres located in Peninsular Malaysia. Thus, childcare practitioners, owners, management, babysitters and staff of the childcare centres were considered potential participants in this study. This location was chosen given that the majority of childcare centres are found in the region, as well as a higher probability of reaching the participants that will be eligible for the study. Moreover, childcare centres in the selected regions contributed significantly to the record of accident-related child mortality in Malaysia (Mutalib & Saleh 2018).

### Participants and recruitment

Virtual and online structured interviews were conducted for 11 participants comprising childcare practitioners, owners, management, babysitters and staff. The sample size was considered appropriate for this qualitative study as recommended in previous studies. A set of predetermined criteria were established in selecting qualified participants who were considered seniors with at least 5 years of experience in the childcare field. These criteria were selected to enable the recruitment of those with ample experience in childcare.

The childcare centres in various districts in Selangor were contacted via available information on the websites. Upon communicating with the centre manager or appropriate officers, individuals willing to participate in the study were conveyed to the researcher. Thereafter, the researcher

communicated with the potential participants via email and phone contact. The researcher briefed the staff about the research objectives, the confidentiality of all information provided and voluntary participation. For those willing to participate, the time for the interview was scheduled and the preferred virtual communication platform.

## Interview guide and interview session

As this study used a qualitative approach, an interview guide was deemed necessary to guide the researcher during the process. The interview guide was divided into three broad sections: participants' characteristics, practices in improving safety performance and participants' perceptions towards the importance of safety in childcare centres. The first section entailed five items regarding participants' gender, age, job position, educational level, childcare category and Kursus Asuhan PERMATA (KAP) certification. Meanwhile, the other two sections were designed in line with the research objectives. Specifically, the following questions were asked in each interview: (1) What practices are in place to improve the safety of children in your childcare centre? (2) Please share your thoughts on the importance of safety in childcare centres.

The interview was conducted either on Google Meet or Zoom, which are among the common online conferencing or meeting platforms. On the interview date, the participant was reminded about the research purpose and the need for oral and informed consent. All the responses were treated as private and confidential, and all participants were identified as P1 to P11 in order to protect personal privacy. The session

was audio-recorded, and the video was disabled for privacy purposes, and each participant spent between 20 and 30 min completing the interview. Information was gleaned from the participant continuously until data saturation was attained. Data saturation was considered when no new information was generated from participants' responses to the questions being asked. The interview was conducted from 12 August 2020 to 12 October 2020.

## Data analysis

All the data analyses were performed using thematic content analysis on NVIVO Version 12. Thematic analysis is a vital qualitative research method that is utilised to reflect the values and meanings in dataset patterns. As qualitative data were retrieved from the participants, fieldnotes were taken after each interview, and the audio records were transcribed verbatim.

The emerging patterns were classified into themes that were derived from multiple and in-depth readings of interview transcripts. Similarities among recurrent themes were drawn to sustain continual re-categorisation (Lichtman 2012). The meaning of the themes was filtered through inductive strategies for descriptive outcomes (Merriam & Grenier 2019). As proposed by Lichtman (2012), the overall process in the thematic analysis entailed: (1) an initial coding in which the responses were organised into a summary of response ideas, (2) the codes were revised and modified based on the previously collected and new data, (3) developing a list of categories, (4) modifying the categorical list based on additional data

ID	Column A	E1. E1. In your opinion, what is the best way to improve...	E2. In your opinion, what is the best way to improve s...	E3. In your opinion, what is the best way
1	R1	Caregivers are constantly reminded of their responsibilities	Preparing the guideline in writing	Management needs to play a role s atmosphere and emotions are always given regular training
2	R2	hjtv	iivh	io
3	R3	Isolate children2 by age level..	Do not allow children to play sharp or small objects and staff should always be there to keep an eye on them	Hold courses for staff
4	R4	Be sensitive and update.. Regular inspections	Krusus and practical.. frequency of visits dn examination of the relevant agencies.	Prayer 5 time and faith.. Discipline Motivational and Personality Work
5	R5	Management personnel need to constantly monitor	Collaboration between nanny and management	The management holds weekly me the nanny
6	R6	Be sensitive and update.. Regular inspections	Krusus and practical.. frequency of visits dn examination of the relevant agencies.	Prayer 5 time and faith.. Discipline Motivational and Personality Work
7	R7	Peka dan mengemaskini.. pemeriksaan yg kerap	Krusus and practical.. frequency of visits dn examination of the relevant agencies.	Prayer 5 time and faith.. Discipline Motivational and Personality Work
8	R8	In my opinion, the best way to improve safety performance is to make regular observations to make improvements in safety performance. Through these observations, we can identify problems or shortcomings that need to be fixed from time to time.	In my opinion, the best way to improve safety management practices is to increase knowledge from courses / reading materials related to safety management practices and apply such management practices.	send to the relevant course
9	R9	preparation of periodic monitoring schedule by management and caregivers	liaising with health authorities to improve safety management in nurseries	Always show a positive attitude an nanny about the problems faced dt

FIGURE 1: Data coding and the emerging themes identified from the qualitative analysis in NVIVO.

review, (5) revisiting the categories whereby possible redundancies were either omitted or integrated and (6) deriving themes or concepts from the categories. Two researchers coded the transcripts independently, and then the themes and sub-themes were compared. The inter-coder agreement was above 80%. Both researchers discussed any slight divergences and descriptions of the main themes. Figure 1 depicts the file and dataset from all the participants during the coding process and the emerging themes. The data analysis was also strengthened by incorporating additional data sources, specifically by reviewing relevant policy documents and guidelines for childcare safety and management in Malaysia.

### Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Universiti Utara Malaysia (No. UUM/HEA/UPS/PEL: 904439).

## Results

### Participants' profile

This section provides an overview of the participants' profiles (see Table 1). Most of the participants were females (10/11), between 38 and 42 years old (4/11) and were KAP certified (9/11). In terms of educational level, the majority (5/11) of participants had secondary school qualifications until Malaysian Higher School Certificate (STPM). Six participants were owners of childcare centres and two participants were senior babysitters. Likewise, five and four participants were from institution-based and home-based childcare centres, respectively.

### Thematic content analysis: Participants' perceptions towards the importance of safety in childcare centres

Based on the thematic analysis, all the participants agreed that the elements of safety management practices, including physical facilities, outdoor play spaces, play equipment, the safety of school compounds and availability of firefighting equipment and first aid kits, in the childcare setting were essential for safety sustainability in different childcare premises. Furthermore, they all agreed with the roles of babysitters and staff in sustaining the safety performance of childcare centres when supervising and taking care of the children.

### Thematic content analysis: Management and babysitting practices in improving safety performance of childcare centres

As shown in Figure 2, thematic analysis led to the emergence of two main themes, namely: (1) management practices and (2) babysitting practices. The sub-themes under management practices included these sub-themes: (1.1) monitoring system, (1.2) training, (1.3) rules and procedures and (1.4) maintenance, while the sub-themes for babysitting practices were: (2.1) personality, (2.2) mental health, (2.3) religion and belief, (2.4) responsibility and cooperation and (2.5) knowledge and skills.

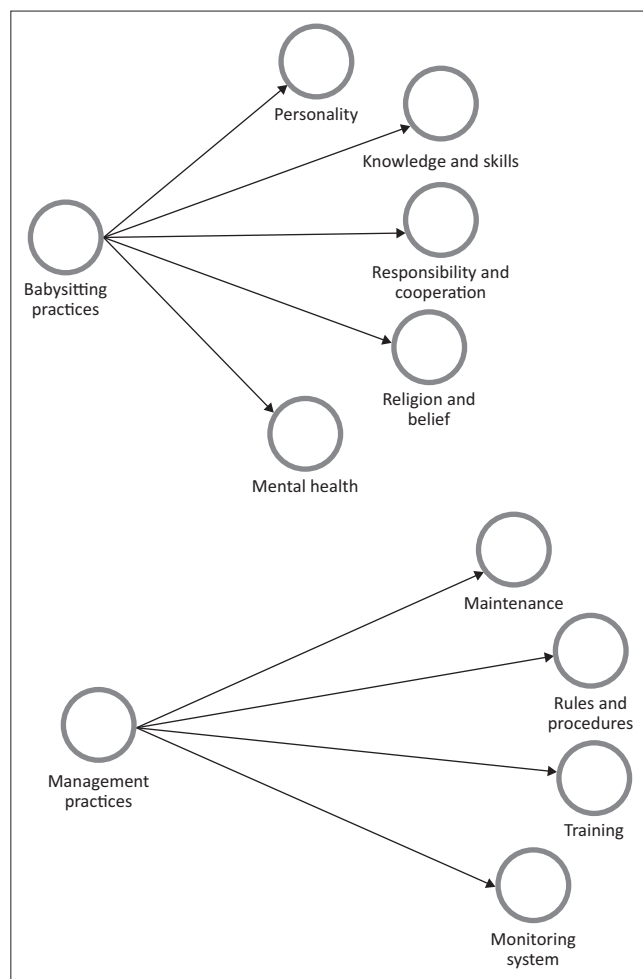


FIGURE 2: Concept map for the emerging themes.

### Theme 1: Management practices

The first theme identified in this study is management practices, which encompass all the activities perceived by participants to be crucial for the safety performance of childcare centres.

#### Sub-theme 1.1: Monitoring system

The participants perceived that a monitoring system is vital for management practices, which should be inspected regularly and continuously. Simultaneously, the management should be sensitive and alert during routine inspection and monitoring. Thus, a childcare centre can achieve subsequent safety improvements aligning with the expectations of stakeholders:

'[A]lways sensitive and alert ... frequent inspection ...' (P4, P6, P7)

'[M]anagement needs to monitor constantly ...' (P5)

'[T]he best method to improve the safety performance is by conducting regular observations to make improvements in safety performance ... through such observations, we can identify problems or deficiencies that need to be fixed over time ...' (P8)

Besides, the monitoring system should also involve external parties when inspecting the daily operations of the childcare organisation as summarised from the verbatim responses of some participants:

'[F]requency of visits and inspections from the relevant agencies ...' (P4, P6, P7)

'[L]iaise with the authorities to improve the safety management in the nursery ... monitoring ... preparation of periodic monitoring schedules by management and babysitters ...' (P9)

### Sub-theme 1.2: Training

The second theme that emerged from the thematic analysis under management practices was training. Specifically, participants believed that training sessions, workshops, team-building activities and pertinent programmes are conducive to improving childcare safety performance. The continuous effort of providing training could enhance staff knowledge and practical skills during the babysitting practices:

'[W]orkshop courses ... training and practical ...' (P4, P6, P7)

'[T]he best way to improve safety practices in childcare is to improve knowledge from courses and reading materials related to safety and apply them in daily childcare routine ...' (P8)

### Sub-theme 1.3: Rules and procedures

Some of the participants highlighted the need to establish written guidelines, rules and regulations visible to personnel in a childcare organisation. This was owing to an explicit instruction that would be instrumental in providing transparent childcare instructions for the staff, especially babysitters in playing their respective roles:

'[P]rovide the write-up guidelines ...' (P1)

Besides, every rule in childcare premises is also crucial for the selection, size, material and condition of toys before allowing children to engage. One participant also stressed the guideline wherein babysitters were always required to accompany and monitor the children, especially during playing time. Participants also emphasised that children must always be separated into groups based on age category in any activity for an efficient monitoring process:

'[D]o not allow children to play with a sharp or small size of objects ... staff must always be there to monitor them ... separate children based on their age category ...' (P3)

'[S]election of tools and toys that are safe for children ...' (P10)

### Sub-theme 1.4: Maintenance

Maintenance was the last theme identified under management practices. In order to improve the safety performance of childcare centres, participants posited that the maintenance of facilities, establishments, playing tools and toys should be performed regularly:

'[T]he selection of appropriate facility and safer building ... a monthly report should be presented on the damage and so on ...' (P11)

## Theme 2: Babysitting practices

The second theme focused on babysitting practices and the emerging sub-themes are presented as follows.

### Sub-theme 2.1: Personality

To be qualified as a frontline employee in the childcare premises, most participants highlighted the need for a babysitter to possess outstanding personality or traits, including self-discipline. A babysitter should also physically demonstrate an inner loving character and caring towards children while concurrently concerned with the safety of the surrounding environment. Therefore, the safety performance of a childcare centre could be improved and sustained as reflected in the following statements:

'[S]elect the only person with good traits and discipline ... love and caring the children ...' (P2)

'[D]iscipline ... motivation and personality workshop ...' (P4, P6, P7)

'[A]lways be more sensitive and aware of the situation ...' (P10)

### Sub-theme 2.2: Mental health

Mental health was mentioned by several participants when responding to questions on babysitting practices. They delineated that a babysitter should be devoid of mental health problems when discharging their responsibilities. Given the high-stress level in the childcare centre, babysitters could develop mental health-related problems that will affect their interaction with children. As such, the childcare owner and management play vital roles in conducting various sharing sessions for babysitters by assisting them in overcoming the challenges encountered. Meanwhile, the recruitment stage was highlighted as the opportunity to identify the appropriate candidate to be employed as a babysitter – without any mental health issues:

'[T]he management needs to play a role so that the atmosphere and emotions of the babysitter are always stable when carrying out tasks ... and given the regular training ...' (P1)

'[W]hen choosing staff, choose exactly ... look at the personal background, her family, her status ... do checking with former employers there is attitude problem or not ... hot temper or not ...' (P2)

'[A]lways show a positive attitude and talk to the babysitter and staff about the problems encountered during the caregiving session with children ... sharing the problems to release stress ...' (P9)

### Sub-theme 2.3: Religion and belief

The babysitter's religion and beliefs were emphasised by participants as an important factor in executing their functions and ensuring safe performance. In fact, a participant mentioned that it is the responsibility of the management to determine the current religion or belief of a babysitter or staff in a childcare organisation. It is perceived that childcare employees who are devoted to the rules of the religion would be of good character, which could be beneficial in performing the job obligations and commitment effectively. Furthermore, P2 described the job responsibility of a babysitter as a 'fardhu kifayah' in which a Muslim should react in a good character and manner:

'... Islam teaches us to do so ... this is our fardhu kifayah as Muslim ...' (P2)

'[P]ray five times a day and have faith ...' (P4, P6, P7)

### Sub-theme 2.4: Responsibility and cooperation

Thematic content analysis also revealed the theme of win-win responsibility and cooperation between babysitters, childcare staff and management in achieving the safety and sustainability of a childcare centre. Furthermore, a babysitter should constantly be reminded of their commitment to taking care of children with good practices and complying with the safety rules and regulations. Hence, the current babysitting practice could be applied by conducting regular meetings from time to time:

'[B]abysitters are constantly reminded of their responsibility ...' (P1)

'[B]oth must comply and follow the safety rules ... ensuring there is no accident in premise ... their participation in abiding with safety requirement ... can improve safety ...' (P2)

'[C]ontinuous cooperation between babysitter and management ... management and babysitter weekly meeting ...' (P5)

### Sub-theme 2.5: Knowledge and skills

The last theme in this section entailed the knowledge and skills required by babysitters. Participants stated that babysitters' knowledge and skills are continuous processes that could be empowered through training courses, team-building activities, workshops and sharing sessions during regular childcare meetings. Hence, by implementing the aforementioned initiatives, accidents and injuries related to children could be avoided and achieving the objectives of safety performance:

'[H]ave a training course for staff ...' (P3)

'[S]end to relevant courses ... to gain knowledge and improve their skills ...' (P8)

'[G]iving lots of knowledge related to babysitting in the nursery ...' (P10)

'[E]mployers send employees to courses, initiate team building for them ... have every month a meeting with the babysitter ...' (P11)

## Discussion

Based on the perspectives of childcare personnel, including childcare owners, management and babysitters, a high and satisfactory awareness level of safety performance in childcare was demonstrated. Besides, all participants agreed on the importance of safety performance executed in the childcare centres by emphasising the best safety practices from the management, staff and babysitters. Participants also expressed personal opinions regarding the initiatives in enhancing safety performance and practices among the childcare management and babysitters.

Participants' apposite and positive ideas recorded in this study are essential in designing approaches to protect children under the supervision of babysitters in childcare premises. Childcare providers, management, staff and babysitters could also continuously implement and incorporate the up-to-date safety framework and activities in improving the safety level of childcare establishments. Aside from that, previous studies that had determined the importance of childcare management, safety monitoring

systems (Ladewski & Al-Bayati 2019), continuous training programmes (Klibthong & Agbenyega 2019; Ladewski & Al-Bayati 2019), safety rules, procedures (Osuji & Omah, 2019; Zakaria et al. 2020) and maintenance (Zakaria et al. 2020) for safety sustainability could be qualitative empirical evidence in further refining while sustaining the safety performance of childcare premises. The quality of the aforementioned management practices could be ensured with frequent monitoring (monthly or quarterly) of all childcare centres by the Ministry of Health Malaysia instead of being performed annually on selected premises (Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia 2012). The monitoring routine could be instituted as a mandatory practice when being applied to all types of childcare institutions in Malaysia.

On the other hand, babysitting practices, namely personality (Ghavifekr & Adewale 2019), mental health, religion and belief, responsibility and cooperation (Ladewski & Al-Bayati 2019) and knowledge and skills (Klibthong & Agbenyega 2019; Ladewski & Al-Bayati 2019) had also been discovered by previous research as qualitative empirical evidence in improving childcare safety performance according to the themes generated in the current study. As such, the significance of inculcating awareness of the crucial babysitting practices is illustrated in preventing any forms of emergencies for the children at childcare centres. A high safety level could be achieved by ensuring all child caregivers complete 144 h of KAP courses and 40 h of practicals during the first 12 months of their service as stated in Regulation No. 54 of Preschool Regulation 2012 (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat 2018; Peraturan 54, Peraturan-Peraturan TASKA 2012) before enrolling the probation period as employees at respective childcare premises. Although the rule might not be applicable for all types and categories of childcare institutions, it could be a preliminary approach in developing sufficient levels of knowledge and skills among childcare staff and babysitters as a prevention strategy to minimise the rate of child accidents and deaths in the institutions.

The theme of religion and belief is a new element discovered for babysitting practices. This is owing to most participants of this study being Muslims as Islam is the religion predominantly practised in the Malaysian context Husin & Ibrahim (2016). Thus, Islamic teachings and concepts have been incorporated into quotidian routines, including in workplaces and childcare establishments. Islamic laws also accommodate the rights of children as human beings who must always be protected without any form of deprivation of their rights (Gilligan 2009). This suggests that the existing issues of child care and protection could be resolved through the process of legislation, upholding human rights and compliance with Islamic laws and teachings. Thus, based on the themes from the qualitative results revealed in this study, the model of childcare safety sustainability was developed as portrayed in Figure 3.

Another aspect that has been continually discussed in previous studies is the teacher-to-child ratio in sustaining a high level of safety among children (Miranda 2017; Muñoz et al. 2018; Perlman et al., 2017). A basic level of child safety

can be ensured with a lower teacher-to-child ratio as the ratio would promote high-quality caregiving from the teachers or babysitters (Miranda 2017). Smaller groups or low teacher-child ratios are associated with lower odds or risk of situations that could threaten child safety while upholding the quality of initial caregiving. Although this aspect was not directly gleaned from the thematic analysis results, the aforementioned themes under babysitting and management practices could be effectively implemented when low teacher-child ratios are distinguished in childcare institutions.

## Theoretical and practical implications

There is limited empirical evidence regarding childcare safety and pertinent safety practices, especially in Malaysia. Theoretically, the current qualitative research finding could

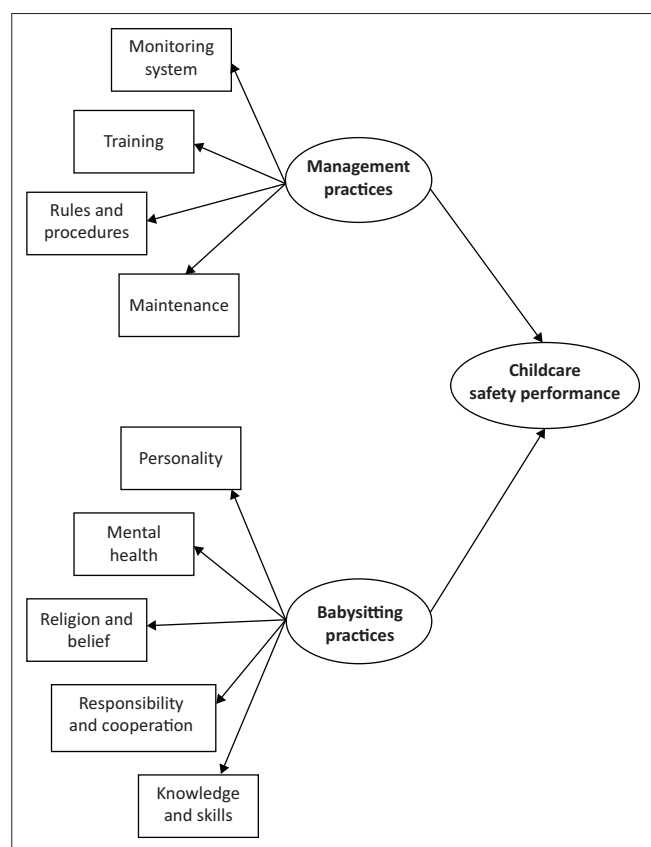


FIGURE 3: The model of childcare safety sustainability.

contribute to the contemporary body of knowledge, specifically childcare safety in Malaysia by filling the existing research gap. In addition to establishing a safety sustainable model for childcare providers, government organisations may implement the proposed framework to support childcare providers in participating in further training and pursuing professional development opportunities by providing technical assistance, financial support and planned time off to complete the training programmes. This model could also enable the government to pinpoint the important factors underpinning the safety elements of childcare institutions as perceived by childcare providers. Meanwhile, the safety components could be taken into consideration when evaluating the existing regulations and guidelines for future improvements. Concurrently, the federal government needs to allocate an adequate amount for public investment in childcare to ensure the pertinent programmes are executed safely and with high quality and support childcare providers with sufficient resources required in implementing vital safety measures to prevent accidents or emergencies.

Practically, the current findings could provide valuable insights into developing guidelines for childcare practitioners, including owners, management, staff and babysitters, to improve the safety level of childcare premises and fulfil the stakeholders' expectations, especially the parents of the children under the care of childcare personnel. Apart from that, the findings also provide instrumental empirical information and knowledge to society, especially parents who are utilising childcare services. Hence, the latest research knowledge would guide parents in selecting the most appropriate childcare centres that could guarantee the safety and well-being of their children. A safe model should be standardised for all types of childcare institutions regardless of the number of fees expended by the parents.

## Study limitations

Despite the qualitative evidence gathered from the perception towards the importance and initiatives of child safety implementation in Malaysian childcare centres, this study focused on the aspects that were limited to registered institutions. In other words, childcare premises that were

TABLE 1: Participants' profile.

Participants	Gender	Age range (years)	Education	Job position	CC	KAP
P1	Female	38–42	Secondary	Childcare owner	IB	No
P2	Female	38–42	Bachelor Degree	Childcare owner	HB	Yes
P3	Female	43–47	Secondary	Childcare owner	IB	No
P4	Female	33–37	Secondary	Childcare owner	WB	Yes
P5	Female	38–42	Master/PhD	Management	WB	Yes
P6	Female	33–47	Secondary	Management	HB	Yes
P7	Male	23–27	Secondary	Childcare owner	HB	Yes
P8	Female	48–52	Diploma	Supervisor and/or Semi babysitter	IB	Yes
P9	Female	48–52	Bachelor Degree	Childcare owner	HB	Yes
P10	Female	23–27	Diploma	Supervisor and/or Semi babysitter	IB	Yes
P11	Female	33–37	Master/PhD	Management	IB	Yes

KAP, Kursus Asuhan PERMATA; IB, institutional-based; WB, work-based; HB, home-based; CC, childcare category.



legally not registered or under the periodic supervision of relevant authorities were excluded from the current study. Consequently, the findings delineating a sustainable framework for childcare safety could not be applied to unregistered institutions. Moreover, this study analysed interview data from a variety of childcare personnel by administering the online platform without actual observation of the premises, management or babysitting practices. Future studies may determine and compare various perceptions of the importance and initiatives in maintaining a sound level of safety performance between registered and unregistered childcare institutions. Such investigations will be pertinent in validating the current findings. In addition, the generalisability of our findings to other contexts should be done cautiously given that only a small number of childcare centres in a specific region of Malaysia were considered. While childcare centres in Peninsula Malaysia were selected because of their high record of accident-related child mortality in the country, safety performance and childcare practices may differ among childcare employees in other regions of Malaysia. Recruiting childcare centres from each state or region and selecting a representative sample will assist in addressing this limitation in future studies. Data triangulation can also be effectively achieved by using a mixed method research, particularly by gathering quantitative data.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study revealed that the synergy between different parties is a requisite in promoting safety sustainability for individual childcare premises. Childcare providers should also aim to accomplish zero number of accidents and injuries among the children under their care and supervision in realising a win-win situation with the stakeholders, including children, parents, authorities and the community. Subsequently, the initiatives for establishing a model of safety sustainability in the childcare context should be considered the main objective by different relevant parties to strengthen the childcare centres as essential organisations in providing sufficient care for children.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

A.A. completed the data collection, analysis, recruitment of participants and drafting the initial draft. C.A.T was involved in supervision, funding support and review of the article before submission.

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## Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study will be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author, A.A.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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