

SHORT ARTICLE

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**PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS OF UNDER FIVE CHILDREN TOWARDS LEAD AND OTHER TOXICITY HAZARDS IN TOYS AND CHILD ACCESSORIES**

Kallol Mallick<sup>\*</sup>, Manoj Bansal<sup>\*\*</sup>, Nattu Bhai Patel<sup>\*\*\*</sup>, Gajjar Yogesh<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>, R. K. Bansal<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Community Medicine

<sup>\*\*</sup> DM Resident, U.N. Mehta Institute of Cardiology & Research Centre, Ahmedabad

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Tutor, Department of Community Medicine

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of E.N.T

<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> Professor and Head, Department of Community Medicine

Surat Municipal Institute of Medical Education and Research, Surat

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**Introduction**

The major recall of Chinese toys by US giant Mattel<sup>1</sup> and withdrawal of sale of children's jewellery imported from China by Britain's biggest toy store, Hamleys, on lead contamination grounds<sup>2</sup> has raised the important issue of whether such recalls do occur in developing countries as India. It is true that low cost toys are often imported in India from countries such as China and our quality control systems are quite lax in this regard. Of equal concern is the fact that low cost locally manufactured toys could also be unsafe. The road side vending of attractively coloured toys often tempt children and their parents often end up purchasing these toys given their low pricing. Many of these parents hardly realise the potential risk of lead and other toxicity hazards which may arise in children when they put these brightly coloured toys and child accessories in their mouth while playing with them.

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Correspondence: Dr. Kallol Mallick:

Assistant Professor, Department of Community Medicine

Surat Municipal Institute of Medical Education and Research, Surat

Email-drkmallick@gmail.com

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## **Material and Methods**

This cross-sectional study was conducted among 100 purposively selected parents of under five children residing in the Mafat nagar, Pati chal and Tanki falia slums; and Zanpa Bazar and Mahiderpura area of Surat city from Sept. 1-10 on their perceptions towards potential lead and other toxicity hazards in toys and child accessories. The respondents were administered an interview schedule containing pre-tested questions on pertinent variables. All the parents were explained about the aims and objectives of the study and their informed consent was obtained. Subsequent to the study the respondents were cautioned on potential lead and other toxicity hazards that may occur in children because of toys and other child accessories along with possible ways to avoid such toxicities.

## **Observations and Discussion**

The findings reveal that brightly coloured, whether metal or soft toys, were omnipresent and all children were putting them in the mouth while playing. Households in which a child was school going also possessed accessories as lunch boxes purchased as loose items and of cheap local brands. It needs mention that vending of loose toys and accessories by road side hawkers of unknown manufacturers is commonplace in India. Observations reveal that presence of unbranded toys and accessories was universal among the economically disadvantaged households. Most middle class respondents were confident of govt. quality controls and perceived toys of branded companies and developed countries to be safer, whereas economically disadvantaged respondents had not thought of such issues. Such respondents had typically stated that we don't read newspapers and work from morning to evening and this is government's responsibility.

**Table I : Perception of Parents**

Sr. No.	Aspect (<5children)	Middle class Yes	Slu ms Yes	Total
1.	Possession of colourful (Metal/ PVC/ plastic) toys and child accessories at home for your children	50	50	100
2.	Ever witnessed your child put toys in mouth	50	50	100
3.	Toys are only of famous branded companies as Leo, Mattel etc.	07	00	007
4.	Toys are of local Indian make	01	00	001
5.	Toys are of China make	04	00	004
6.	Toys are bought as loose item so make unknown	20	50	070
7.	Branded + Unbranded	18	00	018
8.	Aware of lead and other toxicities due to toys in children (Multiple responses, Aware= 37)	Lead Cadmium Other metals Dyes Others	00 00 00 00 00	68
9.	If aware, then source of awareness (Multiple responses, Aware= 37)	Recent newspaper Old newspapers TV Magazines Friends	00 00 00 00 00	52
10.	After awareness parents have discarded doubtful make toys	15	00	15
11.	After awareness parents have not discarded doubtful make toys	22	00	22
11.	Reasons for not discarding doubtful make toys	We have paid money for the toy Media reports are unreliable and Govt. has not declared news to discard any toys Media has reported hazards for Chinese toys so other toys are safe and our child does not play with Chinese toys	00 00 00	43
12.	Govt. ensures that toys sold in India are non-toxic (Multiple responses, Believe in Govt. = 40)	Trust on Govt. Govt. carries out quality control checks on imported goods Govt. had not issued declaration not to purchase china made toys	50 00 00	42
13.	Govt. does not ensure that toys sold in India are non-toxic (Multiple responses, Don't believe in Govt. = 10)	No trust in Govt. Our laws are not strict Implementation of laws is poor Govt. not committed to children's health Officers are corrupt Citizens are unaware of consumer protection act Citizens don't care	00 00 00 00 00 00 00	38
14.	It is govt. responsibility to ensure that all toys are safe for children	50	50	100
15.	How can govt. ensure that all toys sold in India are safe for children	Suitable laws Strict punishments ISI Marks Regular testing Warning labels "injurious for health" alike for cigarette boxes Contents should be mentioned on label	16 35 00 07 00 00	130
16.	We believe that brands of developed countries are safer	Good laws Honesty	00 00	65

	Strict regulation	10	00	
	Regular testing	6	00	
	Public awareness	4	00	
17.	Metal necklaces, rings and bracelets possessed by children could also lead to lead and other toxicity	4	00	04
	Cannot cause toxicity	6	00	06
	Don't know	40	50	90
18.	Coloured lunch boxes (usually unbranded) of children could lead to lead/other metal toxicity	03	00	03
	Cannot cause toxicity	23	00	23
	Don't know	24	50	74
19.	Unbranded Coloured plasticin/ clay	04	00	04
	Cannot cause toxicity	21	00	21
	Don't know	25	50	75
20.	Knowledge of lead poisoning			
	Aware	00	00	00
	Partially aware	00	00	00
	Not aware	50	50	100
21.	Was your child was ever diagnosed as having lead toxicity anytime	00	00	00
22.	Seen/ heard of a case of lead toxicity in family or acquaintance	00	00	00
23.	Presence of toxicity effects such as abd. colic, obstinate constipation, loss of appetite, blue lines on the gums, wrist drop or foot drop	02	05	07
24.	When all details of potential lead toxicity was explained, parents who agreed to purchase toys from reputed manufacturers in future	45	30	75

## Conclusion

This study reveals that children could be exposed to toxic hazards if quality controls are lax.

These findings should be viewed against an Indian daily's recent report of virtual no regulation over the sale of potentially toxic toys, in the sense that toys are not subject to routine testing for their lead or other metal or toxic substance contents nor are these subject to the Prevention of Food Adulteration (PFA) act.<sup>3</sup> This points out to a major flaw in our PFA act needing modification. When we regulate packaging materials quality of the food industry, bought by adults, paradoxically we have omitted the vulnerable children, who are blissfully ignorant that the toy that they have received with affection from an acquaintance may prove lethal. In medical science informed consent is a well established norm. Since children are minors, it is doubtful whether parents would give consent to their children playing with toxic hazards. The potential toxicities of toys<sup>4</sup> and child accessories such as metal necklaces, rings and bracelets<sup>5</sup> or lunch boxes<sup>6</sup> have been well documented. It is time that all

governments should declare manufacture and sale of lethally contaminated toys and child accessories a grave criminal offence with interventional regulations and trade embargoes. UNICEF and medical associations should take up this matter in the interests of children and the best part is that the morbidity or mortality gains that would accrue from such a step only require regulation and not services provision, per se.

## References

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