



## Comprehensibility of warning symbols for child care products: An in-depth study

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### ABSTRACT

Child care products are an integral part of children's developmental processes. It may also inflict accidental injuries to children. Effective warning should result in safe behaviour, leading to reduction in number of accidents. Safety and developmental appropriateness are of utmost importance for child care products. Consumer's responses to warning are affected by perceived hazardousness which in turn is affected by effectiveness of explicit warning. The study was purposively carried out at Pantnagar on a sample size of 70 i.e. 35 parents and 35 general public using comprehension test. The test was conducted to evaluate the level of comprehensibility of warning symbol for five referents (suffocation, unattended, age, weight, height) with four variants of each referent. The use of symbols along with written text is must to enhance comprehensibility of warning signs. The results of comprehension test reveal that symbols with high level of comprehension for the referents suffocation (91%), unattended (89%), weight (80%), age (89%), and height (89%) meet the acceptance criteria for use as warning symbols as per parents score. Similarly general public had given scores for the referents for suffocation (85%), unattended (85%), weight (91%), age (80%) and height (85%) were found having high comprehensive scores.

## INTRODUCTION

Children play with toys and learn about world. Child care products are an integral part of children's developmental processes. A child of below three year of age may handle the things in a different manner from a child of 3-6 years of age group. Child care products may also inflict accidental injuries to children, like sharp edges of toys; flammable, electrical, mechanical characteristics may cause accidents. Therefore, there is need to look out for toy labels and toy safety marks on the products that we buy for our children, to identify the quality of products.

Effective warnings should result in safe behaviour, leading to reduction in number of accidents. Unfortunately the response rate to the warnings is usually low. Dorris and Pusewell (1998), Otsubo (1999) showed that many either do not notice warning, fail to read them, or do not comply with them. The question is how to raise the impact of warnings.

Edworthy and Adams (1996) argued that a warning sign should be thought of as an artefact that represents the risk associated with the hazardous situation. In order to do so a warning usually serves as an alerting function and as an information function. The alerting aspects of warning serve as an indication of hazards and the severity of hazards. Signal words, colors, symbols and sounds are an example of alerting elements in a warning. When used effectively these elements require little conscious information processing; and are almost spontaneously understood. The information aspects of a warning give indication on how to handle a hazardous product or how to act in a hazardous situation.

Dingus *et al.* (1991); Wogalter *et al.* (1991) reported that perceived hazardousness and perceived cost of compliance are the most influential factors in determining the consumer's motivation to pay attention to a warning and respond to it in an appropriate way. To affect belief concerning the hazardousness of a product, the consumer should be