

Parental Attitudes toward the Use of Baby Walkers

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Abstract

Objectives: Identify the parental attitudes toward the use of baby walkers (BW) and the associated injuries. **Methods:** 235 parents of babies attending polyclinics and private clinics in Kuwait were surveyed by self-administered questionnaire. **Results:** 224 (95%) of the sample population used the BW. The main reasons for using the BW were; to keep the baby occupied in 55.5% and, because it promotes walking in 60.4% and for child safety 40.9%. 68 parents (28.9%) reported some sort of injury. Around 70% of the parents thought that the use of the BW promotes motor development of the child and around 55.5% thought that it increases the risk injuries. **Conclusion:** The use of the BW is very common is a representative sample from Kuwait and the rate of the injuries is not different from other studies. Most parents thought high of the BW as promoter of the child development and have other uses.

Keywords: baby walker, parental attitude, child development, injuries, survey.

1.0 Introduction

Baby walker use is popular all over the world and the rate of its use ranges from 42% to 86%.¹⁻³ The age of use starts from 4 to 15 months with no difference in sex.¹⁻³ Baby walkers have been used since the 17th century, however, it was reported to be used in old days, more than 1000 years ago by Arab population.¹

The reported reasons for its use were many, but mainly was the parental belief that they promote the child's development especially walking. Other reasons included that being used in previous siblings, because babies enjoy them, received as present, to give the child freedom, babies became heavy to carry, to be able to do house work by the mother, to make baby's muscle stronger and other reasons.¹⁻⁴

On the other hand, a number of researchers have contended that baby walkers delay the motor milestones of crawling, standing and independent walking.⁵ in addition and the most important of the subject is the reports from many studies of high incidence of injuries associated with the baby walkers ranging from as low as 7.8% to as high as 94%.^{1-3,6}

In 2001, American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee of Injury and Poison Prevention, recommended a ban on the manufacture and the sale of mobile baby walkers.⁷ Since then, education and training on injury prevention have been implicated in many countries, and this has led to considerable positive feedback from parents, and hence a decrease in reported injuries.⁸⁻¹⁰

In the region of the Middle East, baby walkers are still in wide use in spite of the associated accidents.¹⁻³ The aim of our study is to find out the incidence of injuries associated with the local use of baby walkers and to uncover the parental attitudes toward the device.

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Methods

A self administered questionnaire was distributed among parents visiting outpatient, general practice and private clinics for their children in all governates of Kuwait to include the Kuwaiti and the non-Kuwaiti population. The questionnaire had five parts of variables. The first part included the variables of personal details of the parents answering the questionnaire like age, level of education and occupation. The second part included details of the personal use of the baby walker like past experience with BW, reasons for use, frequency and duration of use. The third part included details about the motor development of the baby in comparison with his sibs or related cousins. The fourth part included details of any injury associated with the baby walker, and the fifth part asked about general and specific attitude of the parents toward the baby walker.

Allied health students have participated in collecting the answered questionnaire from the parents. Data were analyses using spss 11.0 software and statistical evaluation included chi-squared analysis for categorical variables and student's t- test for continuous variables. Variables entered into the multivariate logistic regression analysis if they were significant at $p < 0.1$ in the univariate models. Odds ratios (OD) with 95% confidence interval were ported for the final multivariate model.

Results

We had a total of 235 responders to the questionnaires.

Baby walker use

224 (95.3%) of the responders have used or were currently using the baby walkers while 11 (4.7%) have never not used it. Seventy six (32.3%) were using the walker for the first time. The reasons and their frequency percentage for the use of the baby walker are shown in figure 1.

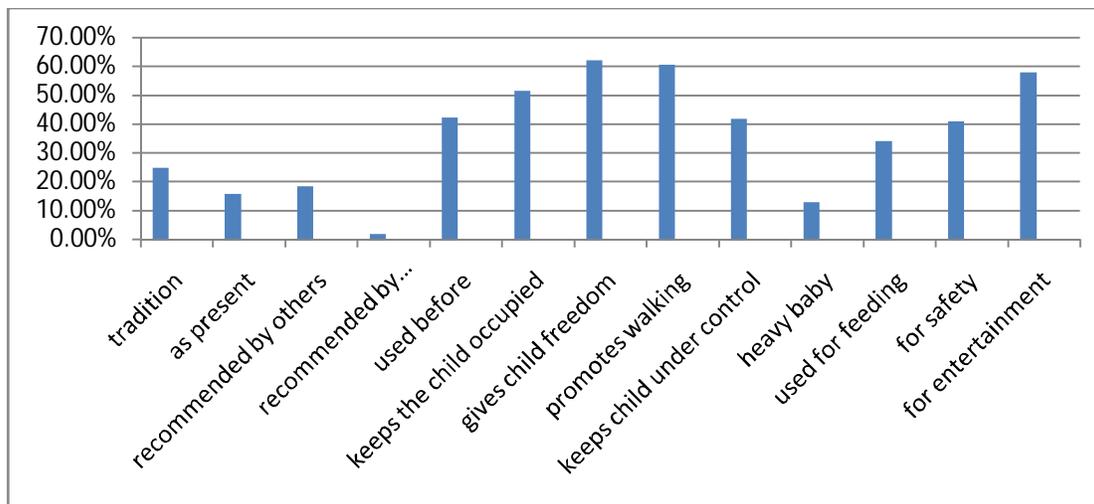


Figure 1: the frequency percentage of the reasons for using baby walkers.

The time distribution of the use during the day and week is shown in tables 1 and 3.

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1 hour daily	80	34.0
1-2 hours daily	102	43.4
2-4 hours daily	42	17.9
More than 4 hours daily	11	4.7
Total	235	100.0

Table 1: hours per day spent in a Baby-Walker

	Frequency	Percent
Daily	151	64.3
Every other day	21	8.9
1-2 days per week	10	4.3
Most days of the week	53	22.6
Total	235	100.0

Table 2: days per week spent in a Baby-Walker

Injuries sustained from Baby walkers

Sixty eight children had a type of injury while using the baby walker (28.9%). Thirty eight (16.2%) had a fall from the baby walker, 20 (7.2%) had a fall from height, 17 (7.2%) children had their fingers stuck between surfaces, 8 (3.4%) children had burn and 4 (1.7%) had scald burn. Twenty two children (9.4%) were poisoned by swallowing chemicals, 5 (2.1%) had objects fallen on them and 7 (3%) had cuts after reaching for a sharp object.

Twenty two (9.4%) children required medical treatment after experiencing any of these injuries, five of which needed suture operation, one child needed fracture treatment and three children needed admission to the hospital. In spite of this high rate of injuries among the users, eighty four (35.7%) of the parents have been advised not to use the baby walker

Parents' attitudes toward Baby walkers

The attitude of the responders about the benefit of the baby walkers is shown in figure 2, and that about the harms is shown in figure 3.

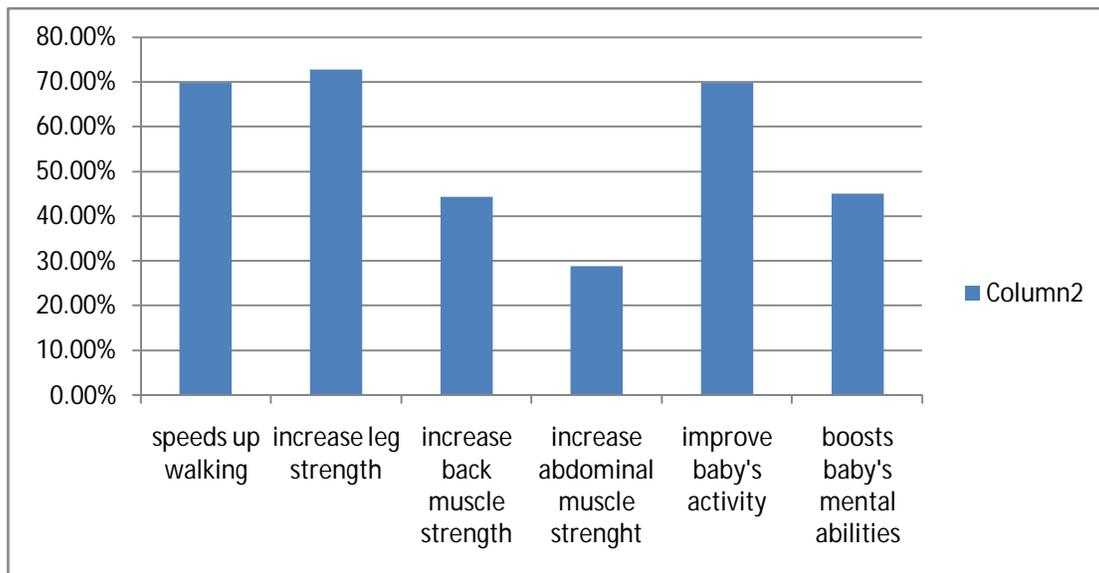


Figure 2: The attitude of the responders about the benefit of the baby walkers

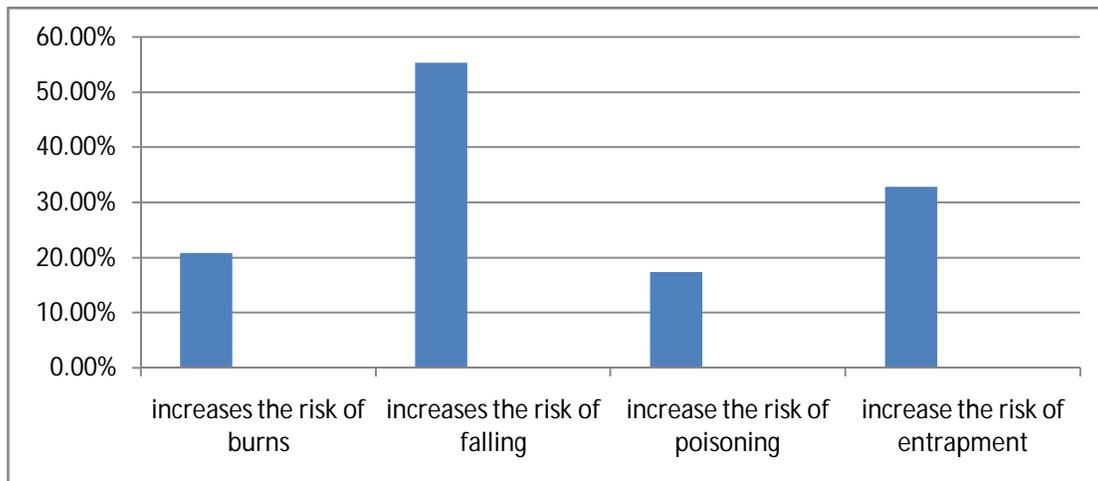


Figure 3: The attitude of the responders about the harms of baby walker

When asked about the motor development of their children, parents had different responses as shown in figure 4.

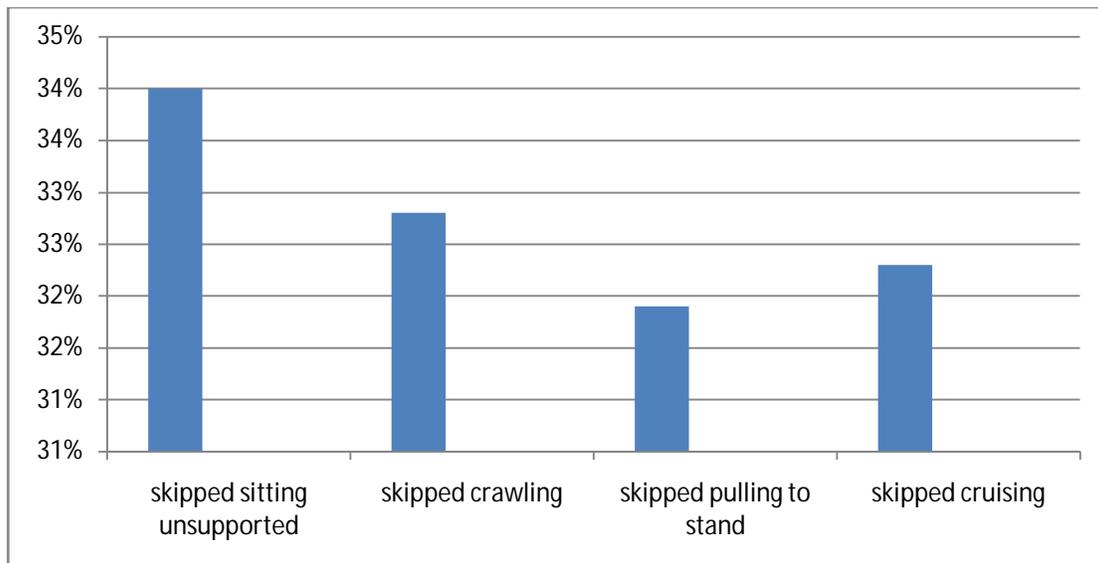


Figure 4: motor development among users of baby walker

Discussion

This was the first study about the use of baby walkers in Kuwait. It showed the increased popularity of the device among both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti. This is because of easy accessibility to the cheap device and in most cases is given as present to the parents for the new baby, and there were other reasons for its use. In addition, there was no proper educational campaign regarding the use of the baby walkers. The rate of injuries among our sample was around 29% and it is similar to many studies although one study from Iraq showed very high rate of 94% and that from Turkey showed very low rate of 7.8% while in a study from Dublin the rate was 12.6%^{1,3,4}. The types of injuries included fall from the baby walker, fall from height, fingers stuck between surfaces, burn and scald burn. In addition, some children were poisoned by swallowing chemicals and some had objects fallen on them while others had cuts after reaching for a sharp object.

Most of the parents in our study were confident about the benefits of the baby walker to enhance the motor development of their babies while the results showed that large percentage skipped major gross motor skills like sitting unsupported, crawling and cruising. A study by M Garrett showed in fact that the baby walker delayed the gross motor development in the babies⁵.

The parents gave many different reasons for using them most of them were related to the baby including to keep the baby entertained, occupied, easy to be fed, and the belief that it keeps the baby safe and promotes development. The use also became a tradition and recommended by parents. However, small percentage of responders reported that the use was recommended by medical staff. We are now conducting another study to know the attitude of different medical staff toward the baby walkers.

In conclusion, our study showed the wide use of the baby walker among Kuwait and non-Kuwaiti children with a considerable risk of injuries. However, the belief of the walker to promote the child's development is running common, and therefore, proper education and issuing a strong recommendation of abandoning its use are to be implemented.

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