

How safe are Ugandan daycare facilities?



Security personnel at Ggaba Early Childhood Development Program School where four toddlers were hacked to death on April 2, 2026

Wake-up call

A day care is assumed to be a safe space for children. However, the recent killing of four toddlers in Ggaba, Kampala, has raised a lot of concern about the safety of children in these facilities, writes **AGNES KYOTALENGERIRE**

Today, Justice Alice Komuhangi Khaukha is expected to deliver her verdict in a case where Christopher Onyum Okello is accused of stabbing to death four toddlers at Ggaba Early Childhood Development Centre on April 2. Okello is accused of stabbing to death Ryan Odeke (1.5

years), Keisha Agenorwoth Otim (2 years), Gideon Eteku (2.5 years) and Ignatius Sseruyange (2.5 years).

The incident, which left Ugandans in shock, has resurrected discussions about the safety of daycare centres that have sprung up in different parts of the country. Before the Ggaba incident, many cases of children being harmed at daycare centres had been reported to the Police and other law enforcement agencies.

Against this background, the Government developed a national Early Childhood Development (ECD) policy in 2025 and is set to launch it tomorrow at Nakivubo Blue Primary School in Kampala.

The policy will restrict the running of daycare facilities to corporate organisations, markets, workshops and shopping malls, which may wish to set up such facilities for workers' children.

Currently, the Government does not provide daycare or kindergarten services in schools, leaving them to the private sector. As a result, many of the private facilities that have been set up have been found to be

substandard and not fit to take care of children. In an interview with *Mwalimu*, the commissioner of basic pre-primary education, Dr Cleophus Mugenyi, said the policy will provide comprehensive guidelines on the running of kindergartens and daycare centres across Uganda.

He, however, said minimum standards for pre-primary school, including daycare centres, have been in place, but explained that people who are supposed to enforce them have not been paying attention to them until they were woken up by the Ggaba tragedy.

DAYCARE VERSUS KINDERGARTEN

Under the new policy, kindergartens will not be allowed to run daycare wings. Structurally, kindergartens are different from daycare centres. Whereas daycare centres focus on safe, all-day supervision and care for infants, kindergartens are more structured and run education-focused programmes for children aged three-five, often following school terms, operating shorter hours and preparing them for formal

schooling.

However, the education ministry studies show that 58% of early childhood centres in Uganda do not meet the minimum standards to operate.

It is against this background that the Government will launch the ECD policy tomorrow at Nakivubo Blue Primary School.

SECURITY

In Uganda, many kindergartens have sprung up, with many of them purporting to run daycare wings without trained personnel and facilities. Many are not security conscious, which sometimes results in tragic incidents.

Globally, one of the key requirements for a daycare to operate is the ability to provide tight security.

Mugenyi says apart from being in a structure that is well ventilated and conducive for toddlers, a daycare centre should have maximum security in form of closed-circuit television systems, fence, security guards and trained carers who ensure that only the right people

JOBS

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PARENTING

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access the children.

He says before parents, guardians or any stranger visits a daycare centre, they must register and state the purpose of their visit.

"They must register and state their details such as name, place of residence, and their telephone contacts. The people in charge of daycare centres should ensure that they keep watch over visitors to ensure they do not engage in anything that harms the toddlers," Mugenyi says.

He emphasises the presence of a caretaker around the children all the time.

"They should never be left to play alone. They should always be within sight and hearing of a caregiver," Mugenyi says.

Christopher Barungi, an early childhood development manager at Redearth Education Centre in Masindi district, says another critical aspect of daycare centres is on who drops and picks the child.

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DAYCARE CENTRES IN SPOTLIGHT OVER LAX SECURITY

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“A daycare centre should have a verified sign-in and sign-out system that ensures each child is accounted for.

“This builds confidence among both parents and caregivers.

The person who picks the child, whether a parent, house-help or relative, should have a gate pass with photos of the child and parent. This gate pass is presented to the gatekeeper before a child is dropped or picked. That way, you will ensure that the child gets to and leaves the daycare in safe hands,” Mugenyi says.

Stella Tumwebaze, the executive director of Literacy and Adult Education Uganda, a non-governmental organisation, calls for strict observance of rules by the people in charge of the gates at daycare centres.

“They should not allow any person to just pick a child because that’s how wrong people can end up stealing children,” she notes.

Tumwebaze adds that visitors should never be allowed to enter the rooms or areas where the children are confined unless they are accompanied by workers.

FIRST AID, FIRE EXTINGUISHER

Tumwebaze says one of the most ignored requirements



PHOTO BY ALFRED OCHWO

Wreaths laid at the entrance of Ggaba Early Childhood Development Centre in Ggaba, Kampala, where four toddlers were stabbed to death

for daycare centres is a fire extinguisher and first aid kit to cater for emergencies.

She says the presence of a first aid kit is not enough.

“The centre should have a qualified medical practitioner to contact in case of an emergency. Workers should be equipped with first aid skills to save children in case of an emergency,” she says.

“If a child is eating and gets choked, a trained worker should be able to attend to them,” Tumwebaze says.

She explains that the

location also matters.

“A daycare centre should have a good fence, preferably a perimeter wall. It should not be surrounded by a bush or incomplete buildings because these harbour wild creatures that can harm the children,” she says.

PHYSICAL SAFETY

Tumwebaze says everything in a daycare centre should be child-friendly.

“The furniture should not be too high. Soft carpets should be availed to children to sit

on. Their beds should be low enough for the child to climb comfortably. To prevent falls, mattresses can be put on the floor,” Tumwebaze says.

She also advises caretakers to watch out for electrical sockets and equipment to prevent electrocution.

“Sockets should be well covered because children are curious and they can easily push in their fingers. Even sharp objects should be kept away from the reach of children, and the floor should not be slippery,” Tumwebaze

POLICY LAUNCH IS TOMORROW

Tomorrow, the Ministry of Education and Sports will launch the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy, 2025 at Nakivubo Blue Primary School in Kampala.

Dr Joyce Moriku Kaducu, the state minister for primary education, said the policy provides a national framework for strengthening the care, learning, protection and school readiness of Uganda’s young children.

Before the launch tomorrow, the ministry will organise a walk today, starting at 7:00am. The walk will start at the ministry headquarters at Embassy House in Kampala and end at Nakivubo Blue Primary School. According to the ministry, the walk, which will be attended by officials from government departments, ministries and civil society organisations, is intended to raise awareness about ECCE.

By 2019, of the 3,890,200 children eligible for pre-primary education, about 1,839,797 (47.3%) were not accessing any form of ECCE.

adds.

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Another aspect that daycare centres should pay attention to is the feeding. Here, experts recommend a diet rich in proteins prepared under hygienic conditions.

Tumwebaze says teachers and caregivers should also impart hygiene among the toddlers and help clean those who are below the age of three.

“Children touch everything and everywhere. So their

hands need to be regularly washed with clean water and soap. Their potties or toilets should be clean, and there should be proper waste disposal,” she notes.

Hygiene also extends to ensuring that the toys are washed and sanitised because children like putting them in their mouths.

To prevent disease spread, health experts advise that all children grappling with flu and colds should remain home until they recover.