

stop to the dastardly act.

Recounting her experience, she noted that each time she went to the crèche to pick her son after the day's work, she would meet him sleeping. Mrs. Okonkwo recalled that on the day she discovered that her son was being sedated, she went to pick him up, but met him sleeping.

"When we got home, he continued sleeping and refused to be breastfed. Each time I tried to wake him up, he would slump and sleep off. My son slept from 6.p.m that evening till 5.am the next morning. He was so weak. It was then someone told me that he must have been drugged. I just decided to allow the sleeping dog to lie and didn't bother going back there," she said.

But the family of Pius Okafor was not that lucky. For them, the controversial death of their only son, Christopher Akachukwu, in a crèche was a blow too many for the family. Seeing his lifeless body literally halted their world and they are yet to recover from the shock.

The arrival of Akachukwu through a Caesarean Section (CS) on November 10, 2011, threw the family into joy, especially being the first boy after three female children.

Just like other children, he was enrolled into a nearby private school, owned by a very popular Pentecostal church in Lagos, alongside his other siblings. But on June 8, 2012, at seven-month-old, Akachukwu, who was earlier taken to school hale and hearty, was confirmed dead.

According to a medical report from the hospital where he was taken, "the complaint from his care-giver was that the baby was closing his eyes unusually, as he was being fed his lunch. Examination revealed a well-nourished male infant, who was obviously lifeless on getting to the hospital at the time. There were no breathing moments, no pulses felt, no heart sounds were heard and the pupils were dilated and unresponsive to light. He was certified dead by attending doctor as a 'Brought-In-Dead' (BID)."

However, the report of the toxicology test carried out on the dead child in LUTH, and signed by a pathologist, certified the cause of the death to be severe cerebral edema due to marked anemia and toxicology evidence of Diazepam in body fluid.

Diazepam is a tranquilizing drug used to reduce anxiety and tension and is a muscle relaxant and sedative.

To the Okafors, the medical and toxicology report was, no doubt, a staunch confirmation of the widespread rumour that most crèches use sedatives on the children put under their care.

Though still shrouded in mystery, the death of another infant, nine-month-old Osezua Emmanuel, has pitted the parents against the management of a crèche in Ajao Estate, Lagos. According to reports, the infant, who was described as vivacious, was in top shape when he was dropped off at school. The parents were later called and told that their son was critically ill and had been rushed to a

nearby hospital. On getting to the hospital, they were shown the lifeless body of their son at the emergency ward.

Till date, whatever transpired behind the walls of the school is still left to imagination, as the staff of the school have remained secretive about the whole affair.

Recently, medical experts, in a bid to get a clear picture of malicious drug and alcoholic poisoning of children, especially those under seven years of age, and the fatal consequences of the practice in the United States of America, for example, analysed data from the National Poison Data System and found that an average of 160 cases of intentional drug abuse in children, including two deaths, are recorded each year.

The researchers, writing in the Journal of Pediatrics, said the most common medications administered without prescription were painkillers, alcohol, sedatives, sleeping pills, anti-psychotics, cough or cold medications.

The researchers speculated that the motives behind the practice of medicating kids is perhaps, for care-givers or baby sitters to have the infants sleep to avoid tantrums and ease their own workload.

According to a medical practitioner, Mrs. Obiamaka Osita-Ede, anytime a child is given a medication for any other purpose other than for what it's explicitly prescribed for, the child run the risk of being harmed.

She warned that exposing children to medicines that they do not need could overtime affect immature organs of the body, adding that the danger inherent is that when eventually, the medication is medically necessary, they may no longer be effective.

Speaking further, Mrs. Osita-Ede said, "Sedative medications, whether for cough or any other treatment have no place in day care. Infants need to awake easily to protect themselves from dangers like choking when they spit up. The sedative interferes with that natural waking mechanism."

According to a medical journal, the minor side effects of sedation include nausea, vomiting, mild allergic reactions, headache, dizziness and restlessness. The more serious adverse effects of sedative medications are slowed breathing, decrease in blood pressure or abnormal heart rate and rhythm. These adverse effects, it noted, however, are fortunately rare.

Speaking on the implication of drugging infants, a pharmacist and managing director of Sabiz Nigeria Limited, Damian Izuka, warned that sleeping pills must not be administered to a child less than two years.

"It shouldn't even be administered to children less than six years. It is banned on them and anyone that does that must be prosecuted. These type of drugs changes the chemical composition of the brain."

He explained that some of the sedatives belong to a larger family of drugs known as phenothiazine, noting that what a person set out to achieve determines the