



## Abandoned Babies: Examination of Abandoned Babies' News in Turkey

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine stories of abandoned babies' news published in newspapers in Turkey. In this retrospective descriptive study, infant deaths and abuse stories in newspapers published as Turkish examined. In the 80 news published between 01.01.2013 and 31.12.2014, 88 babies reported. Twenty eight (31.82%) of these babies were abandoned. Of abandoned babies, 25 had died, 23 were newborn, and most of them were abandoned by unmarried mothers (n = 12) and unknown persons (n = 14) for death. This finding revealed that abandoned babies were an important baby's health problem. The protection and development of children's life and health might be contributed by preventing unwanted pregnancies, determining to women who having high risk in the matter of the abandonment of baby, and counselling these women so that they can abandon their infants safely.

### Context

Abandoned babies, with general meaning, are to abandon for the death of baby or to be found by others. Babies are abandoned because they don't want [1,2]. Abandoned babies, in other words child abuse and neglect, is a serious problem which can be widely seen in all age groups, and has complex causes and tragic consequences with medical, legal, developmental and psychosocial comprehensive [3,4]. There was no find any study made on abandoned babies in Turkey. However, 0.1% of the of late neonatal deaths had been reported to be associated with neglect and abuse in a study examining the causes of infant mortality [5]. Another study based on the reports of Forensic Medicine in Turkey reported that 8% of 328 dead babies in 0-1 years were the abuse and neglect infant mortality cases [6]. This commentary was written to draw attention to an existing situation on abandoned babies in Turkey.

We have conducted a study aiming to examine recent stories published in newspapers of infant deaths and abuse [7]. The reasons of the chosen data sources to newspaper reports in this study were more the take please of abandoned babies cases in newspapers, accessible and reliable data source and the data included the whole of the country. In this retrospective descriptive study, conducted in January 2015, ten newspapers which could be accessed via the Internet and had circulations over 100,000 were examined over the two year period from 01.01.2013 to 31.12.2014, published in Turkish. Infant deaths and abuse reported in the numbers of these newspapers were screened using "infant mortality", "baby and death", "baby and violence" and "baby of violence" keywords. There were 80 news which

the news source of these was Turkey and related to the 0-12 month old baby. Data were collected with a data extraction tool developed to record the information in the news about the baby. Data were evaluated by the number and percent.

Eighty news stories were found relating to 0-12 month old infant's deaths and abuse in Turkey, 88 babies were mentioned in these stories. Twenty eight (31.82%, n = 28/88) of these babies were reported to have been abandoned, and tragically, 25 of these abandoned babies had died as a result. Some features of abandoned babies were given in Table 1. Twenty three babies were newborn, gender of 14 unknown, and most of them were abandoned by unmarried mothers (n = 12) and unknown persons (n = 14) for death. All of babies were found in where was not suitable for life of babies, such as wasteland, garbage container, dump, garbage bags, leave alone in home, the roof and of the house, apartment gap. Also, survivor three babies were found in cemetery, garbage container and wasteland where was not suitable for survival of babies. These cases occurred in 21 province of Turkey. A study based on media reports in England between 1998 and 2005 found that 16 abandoned babies had been reported [8]. Meanwhile, a study in Denmark spanning the years 1997-2008 found 12 cases of abandoned babies; it was thought that only five of these babies could have been alive when they were abandoned and it was reported that this situation was more common among women who were young, unmarried, primipara and who had been in denial about their pregnancies [9]. These findings show that being abandoned presents a serious danger for infants and that health workers should take this into account in order to reduce infant deaths.

Table 1: Data on abandoned babies news published in the newspaper (N = 28).

Data	Number (%)
<b>Babies age</b>	
Newborn (0-28 days)	23 (82.14)
1-3 months	5 (17.86)
<b>Gender</b>	
Girls	6 (21.43)
Boys	8 (28.57)
Unknown	14 (50.00)
<b>Vital status</b>	
Alive	3 (10.71)
Death	25 (89.29)
<b>Features of parents</b>	
Unmarried mothers	12 (42.86)
Unmarried mother and father	1 (3.57)
Divorced mother	1 (3.57)
Unknown	14 (50.00)

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Infant deaths may be influenced by many factors, including biology, psychology, physical and social environment and service procurement [10]. However, in general, studies examining infant deaths have not directly discussed infant deaths resulting from factors which could be termed neglect or abuse, such as abandonment and murder, and deaths resulting from negative physical and social environmental factors, such as accidents. It is likely that these deaths have been grouped together with other infant deaths. In a recent comprehensive study based on national data in Turkey, the percentage of infant deaths resulting from neglect or abuse was given as 0.1% [11].

The deaths of infants or their abandonment to be found by others may be considered important crimes of neglect or abuse. Infants are abandoned because they are unwanted [2]. Although infant abandonment is not common, it does exist, and is generally reported as a criminal case by the police, fire service, hospitals or emergency departments. In the United States of America, the distinction has been made between three different groups of these infants, “boarder babies,” “abandoned infants,” and “discarded infants” [12]. The first two groups (boarder babies and abandoned infants) are babies who are left in hospital; these babies are placed in alternative care for 12 months or longer. “Abandoned infants” are those who have been abandoned in public places, other than hospitals, without care or supervision, and also includes those who have been killed [1]. In recent years, “Safe Haven” or “Baby Moses” laws have been introduced in the USA to ensure that infants are abandoned in a safe environment and to prevent infant deaths [13-15]. With the same aim, an “anonymous birth option” or “baby hatches” are found in many European countries [13]. Baby hatches is a safe place where biological parents can bring their newborn babies and leave them anonymously in a safe place to be found and cared for [13,16]. Asai and Ishimoto [16] reported that baby hatches have a lot of benefits, though it is best not to be used, it is necessary in society and a place of socially essential emergency refuge for babies and parents. Meanwhile, in Turkey, there have been important legal reforms relating to child protection and mothers can anonymously abandon in hospital where she give birth [17,18]. It is of vital importance that health workers know the present legislation relating to safe abandonment of infants and give counselling to mothers on this.

Health workers, especially midwives, nurses and doctors have important duties to protect and improve the health of babies before and during pregnancy, during birth and after birth. In carrying out their duties, they should be sensitive to the subject of infant abandonment in the planning and provision of their work. To prevent the abandonment of infants and their subsequent deaths, preventing unwanted pregnancies seems to be imperative. Accordingly, it is necessary and important to provide education and counselling services to increase the use of effective family planning among special risk groups such as young and unmarried women. To improve the awareness of the community, specially the health workers, teachers, chaplains, parents and young people, the projects in this topic can be prepared and applied. In this context, education and counselling services might be given to especially the students of high school and university, and the parents having drug-addicted children, the mentally or physically disabled children, and the adolescence who not being any school. In addition, health workers should pay special attention to identifying women in their patient populations who are in denial of their pregnancies and counsel these women so that they can abandon their infants safely. Furthermore, in order to prevent infant deaths due to abandonment or other unintended external factors, health workers need to work in cooperation with the police, local government and non-governmental organisations.

## Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest associated with this study and any financial support for this work.

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