

Uncovering the scope of infanticide and infant abandonment in Malaysia

May 15 2015



In Malaysia, 1,096 cases of illegal infant abandonment were recorded from 1999 to 2011. Credit: 123rf.com

Infanticide refers to the non-accidental death of infants from one day to one year in age. Infant abandonment, on the other hand, has no universal

definition. In Malaysia, recent perceived increases in infant abandonment incidents have prompted authorities to impose stricter punishments. They have also started implementing "baby hatches", provided by private and non-governmental organisations, where a parent can anonymously leave a baby. A lack of official data, however, impedes the development of proper preventive and management strategies.

Led by Dr Salmi Razali, researchers in Malaysia and Australia set out to gather the first systematic data on [infanticide](#) and illegal infant abandonment in Malaysia. Their aim is to determine the prevalence of such incidents, estimate annual rates, and describe the characteristics of both victims and suspected perpetrators.

"My hope is that my research creates awareness of the importance of a proper surveillance system so that we can gather enough valid information to make accurate conclusions on this issue," says Dr Razali.

The team initially collected data from police records, birth registrations and international sources, which were used to compare data between countries. The researchers then tabulated the annual cases of illegal infant abandonment, abandoned infants found dead, as well as the characteristics of victims and suspected individuals. The team calculated the estimated rates of infanticide and infant abandonment using the same calculation methods as the United Nations to obtain [infant mortality rates](#). Only the inferred rate was determined for infanticide, because the original data did not distinguish between miscarriages, abortions and potential infanticides.

The results showed that 1,096 cases of illegal infant abandonment were recorded from 1999 to 2011 in Malaysia. In the most recent five-year period, the estimated rate of infanticide ranged from 4.82 to 9.11 per 100,000 [live births](#) – lower than the rates recorded in India, China and Tanzania [see "DID YOU KNOW?" below].

The researchers also found that Malaysia's estimated infanticide rates were positively correlated with the Gender Inequality Index, suggesting that gender inequality might contribute to the phenomena of infanticide and abandonment. The team speculates that the lower the socio-economic and political status of women within Malaysian society – reflected in a lack of financial and social security, low political participation, and limited access to and use of contraception – the more at-risk women may be for unwanted pregnancies, which are one of the recognised risks of infanticide. To date, however, no studies have been conducted to support this hypothesis.

In other results, it appeared that more boys than girls were victims, and the adult suspects were predominantly female Malays, who were usually mothers of the victim.

However, Dr Razali and colleagues noted that a substantial amount of data was missing from original sources, making it impossible to draw conclusive results. "Unless enough information is available, we cannot calculate accurate infanticide and infant abandonment rates. More research is therefore warranted," she stresses.

While improving gender equality might reduce the rates of infanticide and illegal infant abandonment in Malaysia, strengthening the surveillance system as well as data methods for collecting, recording and reporting these incidents will hugely benefit future research, the researchers conclude.

Dr Razali is currently conducting interviews with women who have been convicted of committing infanticide, in order to provide a wider perspective on the topic and help improve the understanding of infanticide and related issues in Malaysia.

Did you know?

- Non-governmental organisations in Malaysia run various programs to prevent infanticide and infant abandonment, including "baby hatches", where a parent may leave a baby anonymously for care and protection. Another program, called School of Hope, provides special schools for pregnant teenagers to continue their education as well as receive counselling and skills training in a privacy-protected environment.
- On average, 84 cases of illegal infant abandonment were documented annually in Malaysia from 1999 to 2011, according to a Child Abuse and Neglect paper by Dr Salmi Razali and colleagues. Malaysia has lower inferred infanticide rates than India, China and Tanzania, which recorded 12.3, 15.5 and 27.7 deaths per 100,000 live births respectively, but higher rates than Finland (0.8 per 100,000 live births), Australia (2.7), New Zealand (4.5), the United States (2.1-6.9) and the United Kingdom (4.3-6.3).

Provided by Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)

Citation: Uncovering the scope of infanticide and infant abandonment in Malaysia (2015, May 15) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-05-uncovering-scope-infanticide-infant-abandonment.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.