

Forum: The Committee on the Rights of the Child
(CRC)

Issue: Addressing the moral and social issues of the usage of
baby boxes

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Introduction

Most are lucky enough to be born and raised with the love and devotion of their parents, however there are millions who do not have this privilege. The number of children in care has risen every year since 2011 making it an issue of great importance. Many of these children are abandoned as infants, sometimes mere hours old, to families that cannot or do not want to support these children. The much worse alternative for these unwanted children is infanticide which may sound like an ancient issue in far off places however it is still a serious problem around the world today. The lack of access to birth control and safe and legal abortions can lead people to abandon their children on the streets to die of exposure, or even kill them.

In order to combat this issue, since 1999 there has been a large resurgence in the controversial use of baby boxes, or baby hatches, where mothers can safely and anonymously abandon their child in a warm sealed box attached to a hospital, church, or social centre. The idea of baby boxes stems from a medieval practice of foundling wheels in which mothers could pass their unwanted child anonymously through a wheel into the care of the convent.

The controversy surrounding this practise is immense and some argue that the boxes are beneficial as they enable children to be left in the care of a hospital rather than being killed or left in the elements to die. On the other hand many argue that it is a short term resolution which doesn't tackle the larger issue of birth control and furthermore may encourage parents to abandon the child. Either way the

absolute imperative is to protect these extremely vulnerable children who form one of the most at risk groups in society.

Definition of Key Terms

Baby hatches, boxes, windows

A box, typically of the side of a hospital, where infants can be left in climate controlled boxes. After the child is placed inside and the hatch closed, the box is sealed and an alarm is set off informing a nurse or clinician that a baby has been left. The boxes are often obscured from public sight to ensure anonymity however there is a form with advise and a phone number, in the box which the abandoner can fill in to help the hospital better understand the motives behind leaving the infant and help the mother should she wish to reclaim the child.

Foundling

Infants who have been found abandoned.

Infanticide

The intentional killing of infants or children

Foundling wheel

A 12th century Italian devise in which mothers could anonymously abandon their child by passing them through a revolving door into a convent.

Anonymous birth

An option for woman in some countries to anonymously give birth to a child in a hospital without having to give any identification.

Key Issues

Short Term Solution

One of the key arguments against this practice is that it is not directly tackling the issue of unwanted children. It serves as immediate relief but does not resolve the source of the issue which is a lack of available reproductive education and prevention supplies as well as available safe and legal abortions.

Encourages

Some claim that baby boxes are detrimental to the health of infants as they encourage mothers to abandon them by making it easy and anonymous.

Legality

In most countries it is illegal to abandon children and for many countries this includes abandoning in a baby box. This can discourage mothers from abandoning their child in a safe baby box for fear of prosecution and instead may encourage the child to be abandoned

elsewhere or even killed. Some countries have made amendments to their laws to exempt mothers leaving children in official baby boxes.

Who is abandoning the infants?

Another argument which many make against baby boxes, are the identity of the people abandoning the infants. Some argue that it is not the mothers deciding to give up their children but potentially, unwanted fathers, relatives, or even pimps, forcefully taking the child away from its mother.

Infringement of rights

Furthermore, baby boxes infringe on the human right to identity, and the right to be raised by ones parents of cultural group. These rights are infringed by baby boxes as due to the anonymous nature of the baby box, most foundlings are unable to trace their biological parents unless the parents completed the form with their details which many will not, furthermore if any details are left it is usually only the mother. Moreover, many argue that baby boxes infringe a man's right to know their children as they may not have agreed to the abandonment or were not aware of it at all. The baby boxes give no way for the father to contact their child.

Selective infanticide

For many, the baby boxes provide an alternative to infanticide which is much more common in females and disabled children. This is a greater issue in developing or conservative countries where female babies and particularly disabled child are much less desired so many are abandoned and some are even killed. While the baby boxes do provide a much better alternative, this is still an important issue to be tackled.

Major Parties Involved

Germany

Germany was the first country to begin using baby boxes in 1999 and it has come into use across the country. Germany now has close to 100 baby boxes, the most of any country in the world, however baby boxes lay in a grey legal area due to anonymous abandonment being illegal however there have been movements to amend the laws to exempt official baby boxes. The law in Germany states that the child is cared for by the government for up to 8 weeks and in this period the parents can reclaim the child, however after this period has elapsed, the child will be put up for adoption.

China

Baby boxes are becoming increasingly popular due to the high number of abandoned children in China. This is in part due to the, now revoked, one child policy, also owing to child preferences. It is much less desirable to have a female, or more so, disabled child and so many resort to abandoning them. This is also owing to the economic condition of many Chinese citizens who cannot properly care for their child, this is more common with disabled children. One baby box in Guangzhou had to be closed to an overwhelming number of babies being left there.

Czech Republic

There are 57 baby boxes across the Czech Republic, mainly in the major cities. These baby boxes have helped to save 92 infants since their legalisation in 2006.

Safe Haven

Safe Haven is a non-profit American organisation which works to pass the safe haven law in all states of America. This would mean that it is legal to surrender a child at an official safe haven location which include hospitals, and fire stations. The Safe Haven organisation have begun implementing baby boxes in the state of Indiana and are working on more.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

There have been very few attempts to resolve the controversy surrounding baby boxes, while there have been protests to remove them, they have had very little impact. Equally very little has been done to fully support them through legalisation and public awareness. Baby boxes are a little talked about issue and they require much more input from governments and the UN.

Possible Solution

Legalisation of baby boxes are the most pressing issue surrounding the issue as only then can they be an accepted method of surrendering a child. This legalisation would bring attention to them and encourage more mothers to leave their child in a box rather than leaving them outside or even killing them.

In order to significantly reduce the number of babies being abandoned to unfriendly and potentially unsafe environments, there have to be more baby boxes readily available across the world, particularly in areas where infants are at greater risk such as areas of poverty.

However, in order to tackle this issue at the roots, there needs to be greater sexual education for the public to teach them about birth control and child rearing to prevent unwanted pregnancies in the first place thus making baby boxes redundant.

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