

Media Coverage Bias: Child Abandonment in Armenia

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to shed light on the media bias representation of child abandonment worldwide with a specific focus on Armenia. Child abandonment is a critical issue worldwide and not just in Armenia. There are multilayered factors influencing such issues. This research aims to examine how media portrayal of child abandonment cases influences the public perception. Through an analysis of different media platforms and their representation of this issue it is clear that Armenia is lacking proper recognition of the root causes and proper framing when covering instances of child abandonment. After conducting a qualitative and quantitative analysis, this research sheds light on the underlying causes, stereotypes, cultural factors and biases shaping the media representation in Armenia. Lastly, this project is to serve as a call to collective action for the society and policymakers, to work in protecting the vulnerable communities by eliminating the root causes of child abandonment rather than hiding these issues that the society is facing through biased media coverage.

Introduction:

Child abandonment is an issue worldwide especially in low and middle income countries. Armenia is just one of the many countries facing this issue. Child abandonment is defined as the act of a parent leaving their child without proper care and basic needs such as food and shelter. There can be two forms of abandonment, open and secret. “Open abandonment is defined as a child being knowingly left behind by his or her parents, who can be identified, and whose intention

is not to return but to willingly relinquish parental responsibility” (University of Nottingham, n.d.). “Secret abandonment is defined as a child being secretly left behind by his or her parent, who cannot be identified, and whose intention is not to return but to willingly relinquish parental responsibility anonymously” (University of Nottingham, n.d.). Child abandonment can happen due to various reasons rather than just lack of parental responsibility as believed due to common stereotypes and failed representations of most stories by the media. Media coverage plays a crucial role in shaping the public's perception and understanding of social issues, and the issue of child abandonment is no exception. The portrayal of this issue by the media often contains bias because it passes misconceptions which affect the proper policy responses and societal attitudes towards addressing the root causes of the issue. This research paper aims to explore how media coverage bias contributes to the increase of misconceptions about the real issues underlying child abandonment worldwide and more specifically in Armenia. The main question raised is, how does media coverage bias lead to misconceptions about child abandonment and the real underlying causes of it?

There can be various coverage methods used by media platforms. The framing of the cases can imply the intent of the media outlets. There can be negative and positive framing. When it comes to negative framing the media outlets use this in order to create sensationalism and focus on only the dramatic and negative aspects of the story. Unfortunately, in this case media outlets are not trying to get the real causes and raise awareness but are only wanting to attract the audience for more views. Another technique of negative framing can be to cause blame and judgment within the public. This method often makes the public have a negative perception about the parents who abandoned their child portraying them as evil and irresponsible. One such example of this is the article by Mary Stringini, titled “Newborn baby found abandoned in bathroom trash can at park in

Lynwood; person of interest sought” (Stringini, 2021), now just the title of this article is already enough to start blaming the parent and get a bad idea about them. The headline is formulated in a way that the rest of the story doesn’t matter much because automatically people start thinking what kind of a parent would leave their child in a bathroom and leave. However, there can be a backstory to this, what if the child was abducted or what if it was a life or death situation for the parent and that was the best they could do. This is just one example of how the framing of the story and even just the headline can make us have a perception about the story without knowing the details.

On the other hand, there can also be positively framed stories. This method of framing the stories gives a more empathetic approach to the issue. Such an approach not only shows sympathy towards the abandoned children but also shows empathy towards the parent, making the society consider the reasons why a parent would make the difficult decision to abandon their child rather than just placing guilt on the parent. It is always easier to blame people rather than imagine yourself in their shoes. An example of a positively framed story is “Behind the Box: A mother's story of surrendering her newborn out of love”, an article written by Katie Cox, telling the story of an Indiana mother who had to make the difficult decision to surrender her child in a “Safe Haven” baby box. The article explores the emotional turmoil the mother felt when having to surrender her child (Cox, 2020). This is just one example of how the media tells the story, can shape society's perception. The author of this article chose keywords such as surrender rather than abandon and that is what makes this story more empathetic rather than guilt shaming. These little things can change a lot of what society perceives. When using words such as abandon, people automatically feel badly about the parents without considering the parents emotional state and the difficulties they are facing as well when making such a decision. The choices made by the media on how to portray stories automatically affect the psychology of the reader and their perception. Therefore, a

positive framing approach by the media can be the first step in raising awareness about child abandonment issues and the need for better social services and support systems.

Speaking of social services and support systems, the article also mentions the “Safe Haven” baby box. While this may not exactly qualify as a social service or support system, it is still a great tool to help ensure the safety of the abandoned children. These baby boxes are special boxes placed usually around towns and specifically near hospitals or other governmental facilities such as the police station or fire departments. The “Safe Haven Baby Boxes mission is to prevent illegal abandonment of newborns by raising awareness, offering a 24-hour hotline for mothers in crisis and offering a last resort option for women” (*Safe Haven Baby Boxes*, n.d.) This provides a safer alternative for parents, at least they will know their child has been safely rescued. In this case also the parent can remain anonymous if they are considering secret abandonment because they feel ashamed. Many U.S. states have placed these baby box around the cities. In European countries as well, “of 27 EU member countries, 11 still have "baby hatches" operating – Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia” (Ramesh, 2017). Until this day over 400 children have been abandoned in these baby boxes (Ramesh, 2017). Surely the number is unfortunate, children should not be abandoned or surrendered however, at least parents have the opportunity to do this safely because it is not easy for them either. However, there can be various issues leading them to this difficult decision.

The root causes can be lack of financial resources, family troubles or lack of social service support. These are usually the cases in low-income or middle-income countries. Armenia is one of these middle income countries. Many families are facing financial issues and unfortunately the social service availability is very low and the ones existing are mostly untalked about. Therefore, in Armenia as well child abandonment is common and the stories are mostly framed negatively by

the media in order to hide the root causes and bigger socio-economic issues of the country. Unlike the other European countries, there are no alternatives in safely leaving a child. A simple tool such a “Safe Haven” baby box is also not available for people to surrender their child in that way. Therefore, most of the stories seen in the media are about a parent leaving their child outside, in the woods or at the best cases leaving them in the hospital and leaving. Such abandonment obviously leaves the child at risk because their safety is not guaranteed when left outside alone, therefore there is also a punishment according to the laws of Armenia.

According to “The Law of the Republic of Armenia on the Child’s Rights”, any child under the age of 18 has the right to live freely, receive care and have basic resources needed to live. Any law that may be disregarded from the parents side can be subject to prosecution according to the laws of Armenia. Unfortunately, there are no “Safe Haven Laws” , which can forgive the parents for their action as long as the baby was surrendered safely. According to article 9 from “The Law of the Republic of Armenia on the Child’s Rights”, it is stated that “the main responsibility for providing appropriate living conditions to the child is shared by the parents or other legal representatives of the child” (The Law of the Republic, 1996). The law mentions how the parents are responsible for the child's safety and proper living. Therefore, they are subject to prosecution if the child’s rights are violated in any way such as abandonment. However, the law also mentions “in case of inability of the parents or other legal representatives of the child or impossibility to provide appropriate living conditions the state is to provide corresponding assistance”(The Law of the Republic, 1996), meaning that the parents can safely surrender their children however the corresponding assistance is not there. The only way available at the moment is to give their children up for adoption; however the people who want to remain anonymous won’t be able to do

this. Therefore, something similar to the “Safe Haven Law” and the baby box would be one such assistance that would actually work out in favor of the child and the parents.

Literature Review

Child abandonment is an issue worldwide concerning all types of countries from low to high income. Therefore, there are many papers and researches written on this, representing it from different viewpoints. There are various representations in each one. Some choose the route of positive framing, others do so in negative ways.

A research done by Deirdre Elizabeth Blackie, explores the prevalence of child abandonment in South Africa. Her research aims to explore how the media represents these issues and the stereotypes created by others about the cases being mostly related to teenage girls and women who are mentally unstable. Her aim in the research is to prove that the state should have the responsibility to address the social challenges rather than label certain individuals and move on. She speaks about the media portrayal of child abandonment in South Africa which are often framed negatively and in a way through “demonization of young pregnant teenage girls” (Blackie, 2014). The media often headlines these cases through keywords such as “shocking” or “crisis” shaping the perception that teenagers cannot be good mothers and that the concept is abnormal. The media also goes to extremes of photography portraying young teenagers who are pregnant in school clothing to also cause criticism by the community. When covering the child abandonment cases in South Africa, there is often bias towards the women alone and especially the younger ones implying that it is due to irresponsible behavior that they get pregnant and abandon their children after birth. However, Blackie believes that the government should do a better job in addressing the roots of the problem. She believes there is a lack of proper education on reproductive health, contraception and abortion. Instead of creating sensational headlines through the media and

shaming women, the government should do a better job in addressing the lack of socio-cultural support in the regions of South Africa. Overall, her research aims to highlight how the media in South Africa sensationalizes coverage of child abandonment particularly focusing on teenage girls and women. These methods of coverage lead to the creation of societal stereotypes and stigma rather than the right thing such as addressing the underlying socio-economic and cultural factors.

Another article, "Abandoned Babies-Abandoned Issue" by Lorraine Sherr and Natalie Hackman explores the phenomenon of child abandonment through various contexts such as psychological, social, and systematic. It is mentioned how child abandonment is a prevalent issue yet lacks academic study to properly address it. There is an emphasis on the gaps which is the lack of research in this case on the psychological state of the mothers and the social issues which are leading to abandonment. The study examines the patterns and responses to child abandonment cases. When it comes to the prevalence and patterns of child abandonment in England, there are on average almost 50 cases annually. An interesting fact about these abandonments was that the children were mostly males and very few females. However, there is no explanation as to why this was the case and what could be the intent and circumstances behind it. Next, the article explores the media coverage and the public perceptions. Like in most countries, the newspaper coverage sensationalizes the incidents of child abandonment, primarily focusing on the drama and blindsiding the more relevant issues which require an analysis of the social and psychological factors. The portrayal methods used by the media influence the public perception, oftentimes lacking reasoning and in-depth analysis. The research also discusses the social and psychological implications of child abandonment on the people involved such as the parents, the children and the rescuers. The paper not only mentions the implications at that specific time but also highlights the potential long term psychological effects on the abandoned children alongside the societal

judgements placed on the parent. Often the parent to blame is the mother and the father is nowhere to be found in the picture. Lastly, the research aims to highlight the systematic unprofessionalism related to the response to child abandonment by the government. The research criticizes the absence of policies regarding this topic. It proposes that the right policies could help address the needs of the children and the parents. The research does a great job of highlighting the gaps and proposing solutions for the future. The gaps that are highlighted are the absences of detailed analysis of the psychological factors influencing a parents decision to abandon their children. Overall, the article provides a thorough overview of the research on child abandonment and the gaps by highlighting the need for more studies and better policies.

Lastly, another research, “Newspaper Analysis on Filicide and Infant Abandonment in Malaysia” explores not only the topic of child abandonment but also filicide which is “an act when a parent kills his/her own child” (Razali, Syed Hassan Syed Ahmad Almashoor, Yusoff, & Basri, 2016). The research examines the connection between child abandonment and filicide and its portrayals in Malaysian media. The data explores the influence on public perception through the media. The research provides an analysis of data from the year 2005 to 2015, identifying the prevalent themes and societal perceptions. The research starts with distinguishing between filicide and child abandonment naming them both as cruel acts. Like in most cases, here as well women are portrayed as the perpetrators of such immoral acts with the males being untalked about which spots the gender biases in media coverage patterns and the societal attitudes. Through the analysis we can see what some of the contributing factors to these cruel acts are. The research suggests that the most prevalent contributing factors are related to social issues including teenage pregnancy, lack of sexual education, and inadequate social support for families. The research claims that there is a major gap which is the need for more evidence based research pertaining to the root causes

and the development of effective interventions to address these root causes. The research criticizes the approach taken by the government and media which is to simply portray the complex social issues and place individual blame rather than address the issues. The main aim here is to have more accurate media representation which will not sensationalize these issues but rather will address the underlying socio-economic factors that are influencing the spread of child abandonment. Overall, the research does a great job in highlighting the complexities of filicide and child abandonment in Malaysia and highlighting the crucial role of the media in shaping the public perception. Surely, the media raises awareness about the two issues however it fails to do it properly and fails to address the socio-economic issues that are contributing factors. Lastly, there is a call to be unbiased when informing the public and have more nuanced accurate media representations when covering such instances.

Research Question

How does media coverage bias in child abandonment cases impact the perception of people?

Methodology

The research methods used for the research were mostly qualitative consisting of a survey, interview and individual analysis of literature and discourse that has been already present on the topic of child abandonment. It was essential to analyze the existing literature both from worldwide and in Armenia in order to identify the gaps present within the theoretical framework and also the methodological approaches. When researching data worldwide, it was easy as there were many statistics and lots of discourse on both the topic of child abandonment and also media coverage representation both positive and negative. However, when it comes to the case of Armenia, there

wasn't as much discourse because mostly the child abandonment cases are covered through the news on television and receive a few seconds to a minute of brief coverage putting an emphasis on the sensationalism of it.

Within the scope of this research paper, a survey was conducted based on random sampling to understand what different people think about the media representation of child abandonment. The survey's main aim was to understand what people think the main reasons for child abandonment are and whether their perception is in any way influenced by how the media covers the stories. The survey was conducted online, it was sent through email to various people from different age groups to have an unbiased outcome. The survey was also posted on social media platforms such as facebook and instagram for the general public also to have access and express their perspective on the matter. The questions were created in a way to first of all understand the gender and age groups of the people and then dive deep into the topic of media coverage and child abandonment. By getting an understanding of the age and gender we can also get an understanding of what may influence these perspectives such as experience or lack of experience.

The Survey Questions:

1. What is your gender?
2. How old are you?
3. How often do you see news related to child abandonment?
4. Which of the following factors do you believe are the primary causes of child abandonment, based on media coverage?
5. How accurately do you think media coverage highlights the complexities of child abandonment issues?

6. To what extent do you believe media bias influences public perceptions about child abandonment and its causes?

After analyzing the answers between different demographic groups, the survey revealed various trends. Among female respondents aged 18-24 years old, there was the acknowledgement of a range of factors contributing to child abandonment including poverty, lack of parental responsibility, mental health issues and unwanted pregnancies. Some people even mentioned that a contributing factor can be having a disabled child. This age group of females also had an opinion about media coverage being somewhat inaccurate in portraying the complexities of child abandonment issues. There were also male respondents, among the male respondents within this age group, there was primarily a focus on poverty and lack of parental responsibility. Also, the stance on media coverage accuracy was neutral. This age group's perceptions can be highly influenced by their exposure to social issues like child abandonment through various social media and public media channels. Their early adolescence might also be a crucial component of them having a more empathetic approach to the matter.

The next age group of respondents was 25-34. The females from this sample primarily saw mental health issues as a significant cause of child abandonment. They also had a neutral stance on media coverage accuracy without any agreement or disagreement. Since this age group is a bit more mature and experienced, they have a more nuanced understanding of the matter and also think that mental health is important as those issues can impact parenting which can lead to child abandonment.

Lastly, there were also female respondents within the 35-44 age group. They mostly viewed unwanted pregnancies as the key cause of child abandonment. One person even mentioned that

nowadays wars can be a contributing factor to child abandonment. This is an unfortunate yet a very relevant thought. Here also, there was a neutral stance on the media coverage accuracy. When it comes to this age group they are more experienced when it comes to unwanted pregnancies and witnessing wars therefore their perspective prioritizes those factors over anything else.

Now let's understand how gender differences may influence perspectives. Men and women think differently and that is totally okay because they have different mentalities. Women often consider a broad range of factors contributing to child abandonment because in society women are seen as primary caregivers therefore with those instincts naturally in them they can't help but consider broader topics unlike men. Men generally tend to focus on the tangible factors. In this scenario these include poverty and lack of parental responsibility hence ignoring all other factors.

And last but not least, let's understand the media usage habits which may also influence the perspectives of the population. People of different genders and age groups consume news and media differently and based on how it is convenient for them. When it comes to the younger people they rely more on social media and online news which exposes them to different perspectives. When it comes to older people they usually use traditional media such as television news to get acquainted with issues like child abandonment.

Overall, it is crucial to analyze all factors that contribute to different perspectives within a survey. It is important to consider these influences because they can help develop strategies on how to properly address issues of child abandonment and help improve proper media representation of such serious issues.

The conducted survey gave great insights on what people know about child abandonment and what they believe the main reasons are for this issue being relevant so often in Armenia. The

survey also questioned people's perception about the media coverage of such cases and whether their proper coverage and representation has any influence on people's perception about the issue.

The Issue in the Context of Armenia

Just like in other countries the reality in Armenia is actually similar and the outcome of the survey also proves the point that media coverage does strongly shape the perception of the people. Like in Malaysia or in South Africa, the media coverage in Armenia often chooses the negative framing approach and over sensationalism, mostly focusing on the negative aspects of the act itself in order to grab the readers or viewers attention. Thus, evoking strong emotional responses from the side of the public. Armenian media also chooses the negative framing approach often when covering the cases of child abandonment therefore leading to public shaming and judgment rather than raising awareness and promoting support. Now the main question is why would the media prefer negative framing over positive? The answer is actually very simple because negative framing and over sensationalism often gets more views and feedback rather than positive information. In other words, it gives the public something to talk about and creates somewhat of a chaos. However, this does not last only a day. The way the media covers the stories in Armenia has a great impact on the perception of the people. The negative framing leads to increased stigmatization against the mothers who are often at the center of the child abandonment cases. The next issue with the media coverage in Armenia is that it lacks in-depth analysis regarding the root causes that are contributing to child abandonment. Therefore, there is a need for more empathetic approaches to reporting that puts aside sensationalism and advocates for supportive interventions.

The gender bias is also present in Armenia because like in the examples mentioned above, here the main targets to blame are also the mothers. There is a big stigmatization in the coverage which negatively affects the people involved, oftentimes the mothers themselves. From back in

the days women in Armenia have always faced gender discrimination which puts them always behind the man. Whether it is in the workplace or just family life women are always fighting for equal representation and therefore in many cases they are always the ones to blame if something goes wrong. In the case of child abandonment it is similar as well when it comes to gender bias. In the Armenian reality, gender roles have placed a big portion of the responsibility on the mothers to take care of the child. However, having a child is a choice of two and not just one therefore it is unfair to place the blame only on one person. In Armenia though, when a child is abandoned the societal stigma unfairly places the blame on the mother without even being one percent understanding and considering the broader context of why a mother would abandon her child. These biased societal attitudes may lead the mother unable to receive the needed support because of being judged. Before judging, people should consider why a mother might make such a difficult decision, maybe it's factors that are beyond her control. Therefore the society, the government and even social support services must focus on actually providing support, education, and resources for families or single mothers who are at risk of abandoning their child. This will not only decrease the instances of child abandonment but also raise awareness of the social support available for people who are seeking it. Lastly, such services will greatly reduce societal stigma and create an unbiased environment where people will feel safe to get help rather than make heartbreaking decisions.

In the case of Armenia, we can also see many gaps in the research. Some of these gaps that are failing to be addressed by the media and the government are the underlying issues that are leading to child abandonment such as: poverty, unemployment, and lack of social services. All of these factors play a crucial role in contributing to the issue of child abandonment. According to the International Trade Administration, Armenia is qualified as a middle-upper income country

however about 30% of the people are living in poverty with very limited financial resources which keeps them from being able to provide for the children and families. These families are often called by the media to have “Սոցիալ խնդիրներ” meaning social problems such as struggling to have basic necessities like food, shelter, healthcare and etc. When a parent is struggling to provide for their family, overtime it affects their mental health and they feel overwhelmed leading to child abandonment. Lack of financial resources also contributes to stress and family related issues such as separation also contributing to child abandonment. After speaking with Anahit Tamrazyan who is a member of the Chamber of Advocates of Armenia and is also a family lawyer, she mentioned how the number one root cause of many divorces in Armenia is the lack of resources. As someone who works with many families who go through separation, she mentioned how not being able to provide for the household is a great stress for men especially because they are also facing societal stigma. In Armenia, men are supposed to take care of the family financially while the women take care of the household. These societal expectations place great pressure on both men and women often leading to stress. Tamrazyan mentioned that this stress often leads to other issues such as misunderstandings among the couple and also fights which oftentimes lead to separation. After speaking with Tamrazyan, I understood how great of an impact the economic standing of the country has on its people. Many people in Armenia are living in poverty and it often takes a toll on people impacting their personal relationships. When families go through separation it's also an influencing factor for one of the parents to abandon their child because they feel pressure of being a single parent. When we think some things don't have any impact, in reality we learn that everything is

interconnected and in the case of child abandonment as well the roots are very deep and therefore its important to analyze all aspects leading to it rather than just the easy way around which is to blame on another for the mistakes we make.

The next crucial component of poverty is unemployment. It is a crucial component leading to poverty because many people are not able to find jobs due to lack of accessibility or often even disabilities. Since the targets are often the mothers, in many cases the mothers who take the steps of abandoning their child are single mothers. Often they have no means of survival and therefore choose to leave their children rather than give them a hard life growing up. As a single mother it would be hard to both take care of the child at home and also financially provide for them. Many times single mothers receive help from other members of the family such as grandparents or relatives who help them raise their children and provide for them properly. However, there are many other single mothers who have no support systems neither from family nor the government. It is important to support especially single parents in this case mothers since they are the center of attention most of the time however it can apply to men and even regular families with both parents present. The point is that there should be no discrimination no matter the gender or other factors, all families who are facing issues of poverty or unemployment should receive the help they need in order to take care of their children. When there are no jobs, there will be no money to live for the family let alone take care of a child's needs such as giving them food or shelter. Therefore, it is crucial to address unemployment which definitely requires comprehensive strategies such as creating jobs, developing skills and supporting vulnerable communities such as the disabled.

Next it is also important to have social welfare programs such as child care services and mental health services which help single parents to take some of the burden off their shoulders. These mechanisms help the struggling families to navigate and overcome the temporary obstacles

they are facing which are also contributing to child abandonment. By addressing these socio-economic root causes such as poverty and unemployment, we can ensure more opportunities and support is available for families that are struggling. All of these things will play a crucial role in reducing the incidence of child abandonment that has been caused due to economic hardships.

Analysis of the Media

Even though the root causes are often associated with socio-economic factors, the Armenian media has its way of representing the stories. In order to analyze the approach taken by the media there are a few examples to take a look at to understand whether there is a pattern in representation and portrayal of child abandonment cases. These are just ones from online news channels however there are many more being showcased on TV which receive a few minutes of coverage yet are later not talked about.

An article published on ShantNews.am website is titled “6 ամսական երեխան, որին մայրը լքել էր, այժմ լավ է և ինքնուրույն շնչում է” in translation meaning “6 month old baby whom the mother abandoned is doing well now and breathing on his own”. The article is an older one published in 2018 and relatively a short one. However, the headline immediately grabs your attention as it is very devastating to imagine a baby being left and when mentioning that the baby is breathing on his own now, one can jump into conclusions and start thinking that the baby might have also been abused. However, the short article later describes that the mother left the baby to be under the surveillance of the doctors and then left. And when it comes to the breathing problems, the mother had nothing to do with it because the baby had some health related issues. Even though what the mother did was very unfortunate, she still made sure her baby was in safe hands because she left him at the hospital under the watch of the doctors. However, the

headline given by the reporter immediately draws negative attention towards the matter because it is very sensational and negatively framed rather than giving in depth context.

This same exact article has also been published on aseko.am website. The headline on this website is “6 ամսական Նարեկի մայրը լքել է երեխային «Մուրացան» հիվանդանոցում. փոքրիկն առողջական խնդիրներ ունի” in English “The mother of 6-month-old Narek abandoned the child in "Muratsan" hospital. The child has health problems.” The article similar to the one published by Shant News is also short. A key point mentioned in the article is by the journalist Gagik Shamsghyan who reported on the case, he said that the baby’s mother left him in the hospital under the surveillance of the doctors. Both coverages are very similar even when it comes to the wording. However, this second one has an extra line which mentions the devastating destiny of the child after fully recovering. It mentions how the baby will be sent to an orphanage after recovery. This extra line makes it more heartbreaking and instills some judgment inside the reader criticizing the mother of why and how they would leave their child, especially that they know the child will be sent to an orphanage. However, since there are no other details it is hard to understand what can be causing the mother to make such a decision.

Another great example of Armenian media portrayal is on the website Past.am. The headline is the following: “Ես անպայման կվերդառնամ». մայրը լքել է նորածին երեխային ու անչափ հուզիչ գրառում թողել” in English translation meaning the following: “I will definitely come back. The mother abandoned the newborn child and left a very touching note.” The headline in this case is not so negative, even though it talks about a negative action by the mother but also empathizes by mentioning how she left a touching note. This case is also relatively old coming from 2016 however it is still on the internet available for everyone to see. The article is accompanied by a photo and a video. The strange thing is that the video is no

longer available. Therefore, the only thing left to analyze is the photo which is attached to the headline as there is no actual text accompanying the article. The photo attached is the actual photo of the note that the mother left with the baby. The interesting part about the note is that it is written in Russian and it reads “Мне очень жаль, но мне некуда с ней пойти. Она очень здоровая и спокойная девочка. Родилась 12 августа. Прививки сделаны. Это самое страшное в моей жизни, я обязательно вернусь и верну ее, но пока ничего не могу сделать, мы уже в поезде...” in English it reads as the following: “I am sorry, but I have nowhere to go with her. She is a very healthy and calm girl. Born August 12. Vaccines are done. This is the scariest in my life, I will come back for sure and bring her back, but for now I can’t do anything, we are already on the train...”. It is heartbreaking to read this note because it is evident that the mother is making the hardest decision of her life however she believes that at that moment that was the best decision she could have made. It is hard to make any judgments without knowing the circumstances. In this case though the media does justice to the story as it is not biased in covering the case. This coverage uses a positive framing approach rather than negative and is very objective without any hidden judgements. It is clear that the author of the story is trying to tell the story without any biases. This approach shows that the author covering the story also empathizes with the mother. Another key aspect worth analyzing is the fact that the note was written in Russian. This could also mean that the abandoning mother is not Armenian and what if she had difficulties providing for her child in a foreign country therefore she chose to leave. She left but she mentioned that she will come back showing the amount of love she has for the child.

Gaps in Media Analysis

The analysis of the few of the child abandonment cases in Armenia leads to one conclusion which is that there are significant gaps in the way the Armenian media portrays child abandonment

cases. There are a few trends which can be noted. One of them being the fact that it is more often negatively framed rather than positively. Next, there is a lack of context provided. If it is on television then it may receive one minute of coverage describing the action and the person who did the action and maybe a location. If it is an article published on a news website then it is more likely to be a few short paragraphs, also consisting of location, person and the action committed. However, in neither format is there a representation of context. Almost none of the child abandonment cases provide further information about what could be the cause of the parent to abandon their child. It seems that the goal of the media is to only let people know that such bad situations are happening, however the media does not actually care to deeply investigate why these things are happening.

The media prioritizes other news such as the political and economic. The child abandonment cases are often a direct cause of lack of social welfare therefore other news overshadow this one. Obviously, the media and government would choose to spend more time to cover cases where the government will not have any direct link and will not be blamed. By analyzing the Armenian media it is clear that social issues are receiving little to no coverage. The coverage of social issues like child abandonment may often affect the government's image as the well being of the people is the responsibility of the government as well. If families are facing hardships and having to abandon their children because of it then there is lack of accessibility of social services and lack of proper policies to address families in need. Therefore, instead of sugar coating things and placing blame on individuals specifically, the media should provide a more balanced and unbiased coverage of child abandonment cases. If needed the government should also be held accountable for ensuring the wellbeing of its citizens and especially the most

vulnerable groups - the children. Both the media and the government can work together to play a crucial role in addressing social issues and the gaps in representation of child abandonment cases.

Government Proposed Intervention

Before speaking about proper media coverage, it's important to address the root causes of why child abandonment is happening. In the context of Armenia it is an issue of various root causes such as lack of financial resources, lack of family support resources, and lack of child safety protection laws. To start off it is important to create social welfare services and better the already existing ones. There may be services available to support the families in need however it is not accessible to everyone and many people are not aware of the help they can receive. One organization that is successful in helping vulnerable groups is the Mission Armenia NGO which has been successful in helping people after the devastating Spitak earthquake and the displaced communities from Artsakh after the many wars they have faced. However, this should not only be an effort from non-governmental organizations. The government should take the most responsibility in ensuring there are family support services available for all families struggling and at the verge of making devastating decisions. These organizations will empower the people however they will not work if there is lack of education and awareness. The media should also participate in creating campaigns and raising awareness through them. Also, there should be education for families who are going through unplanned parenthood. Some classes can help teach people positive parenting skills and practices keeping them away from ideas like abandoning their child. Lastly, if the case is so severe that the parents feel that the best way for their child is by leaving them then there should be some child safety laws in places and also places where the child can be left safely until rescued. An example could be the “safe haven baby boxes” which have been used in many European countries by parents who want to leave their child but do it by

knowing that they will be safe. Some things like this will help keep the child safe and also will allow parents to leave their child safely if they want to remain anonymous without having to fear prosecution and societal stigma.

Media Coverage Do's and Don'ts

However, the government cannot do all of these alone without the help of the media. At the end of the day, people behind the media are the ones who decide on how to frame the story. Therefore there should be a do's and don't in reporting especially such sensitive cases.

Do's

- Use positive framing and exclude biased judgements
- Ensure privacy
- Verify all information is correct
- Emphasize the importance of child protection
- Include insights from social service experts
- Raise awareness of the root causes

Don'ts

- Don't sensationalize
- Don't disclose private information
- Don't stigmatize
- Don't use negative framing
- Don't neglect the causes

Example of Good Reporting:

Case : A newborn girl was abandoned at a park in Yerevan. The parent left a note with the baby and disappeared. Locals found the baby and called the police.

Headline: “The community joins together and rescues an abandoned baby at a local park.”

The local community gathered to support and rescue a newborn girl abandoned at a park. The individuals who left the baby also left a note, locals immediately contacted the police for assistance.

Upon arrival, the authorities ensured the baby's safety and well-being, emphasizing the critical role of timely intervention in such cases. The infant has been placed under the care of child protection services.

Experts from social services underscored the importance of addressing the root causes behind child abandonment, highlighting the need for comprehensive support systems for struggling families.

This incident is a reminder of the significance of child protection and the responsibility of the government in ensuring the safety and welfare of vulnerable children.

Example of Bad Reporting

Now here is an example of how the media should not report on this exact case...

Title: "Tragic child abandonment by a bad parent in Yerevan"

A horrible incident shocked the people of Yerevan as a newborn girl was found abandoned in a park. The parent left behind a note and disappeared without a trace. The baby's identity and background were revealed; it was 6 month old Ani Hovsepyan. This story clearly shows how the mother was irresponsible and didn't care for her baby. Her actions show that this baby was most likely unplanned.

Conclusion

After doing thorough research about media coverage, child abandonment and the literature available on the topic. It is clear that media coverage bias has a significant impact on misconceptions about child abandonment cases and the complex underlying causes of this issue, both globally and specifically in countries like Armenia. The framing of stories by media outlets plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards child abandonment. There are two main approaches to framing, either positive or negative. Each approach has its intent and consequences. Negative framing often takes the route of sensationalizing the stories, focusing on blame and judgment, and fails to address the complex circumstances that lead to abandonment. On the other hand, the positive framing route emphasizes empathy and understanding, and can in most cases raise awareness about the challenges faced by parents and the need for better support systems to be created in Armenia.

Moreover, the lack of adequate social services and support systems make the issue even worse, particularly in low and upper-middle income countries like Armenia. While there are many laws that exist to protect children's rights and hold parents accountable, there is still a pressing need for comprehensive assistance programs that provide safe alternatives for parents facing a crisis situation. Projects such as "Safe Haven" baby boxes, though are not the complete solution, however, they demonstrate the potential for creating safer options for parents and ensuring the well-being of abandoned children. Projects like such not only ensure the safety for the child but also release the parent from persecution as they made sure their child was left in safety.

To conclude, addressing child abandonment requires a multi-layered approach that involves holding the media accountable to provide proper and unbiased representations. There should be an accurate and empathetic storytelling approach, increased awareness and access to

social services and support networks, and the implementation of policies and laws just like the "Safe Haven Laws" that offer legal protection and assistance to both children and parents who are in a crisis. By addressing the root causes and providing multi-layered compassionate solutions, we can work towards reducing child abandonment rates and ensuring a safer and more supportive environment for families in need worldwide and in Armenia.

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