

Black Market For Baby Selling

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Introduction

Babies, like any other commodity, are subject to the laws of supply and demand. Whenever demand exceeds supply, conditions are ripe for the emergence of a black market. With liberalisation coming in the form of modern and progressive thinking, many parents are now unwilling to give up their children for monetary benefits. Because of the reduced availability of desirable children for adoption,' certain unprincipled profiteers have been able to capitalize on the situation, creating a small but thriving "baby black market". These adoptions do not conform to the established state and federal laws that regulate adoption, and which usually involve the payment of large sums of money to an adopted child's birth parents, an adoption attorney, an adoption facilitator, an adoption agency, or another intermediary, in order to avoid provisions of the law. In this article, we will talk in-depth about how the baby black market works, what different factors affect it and how prevalent it is in the contemporary world. We will also be discussing the case studies of China, Malaysia and Nigeria.



Structure and Functioning

Black market for adoption refers to the sale and purchase of babies that takes place outside government sanctioned channels. It is similar to any other black market which serves as the venue for illegal trade of highly controlled substances or products. The only difference being the 'product' - the babies.

The buyers in this unregulated market constitute of the couples who are faced with long waiting lists and rejection from authorities for child-adoption, and ultimately turn to black market, since outright baby-selling is illegal, for fulfilling their desire of a child. Many region-specific problems have also led to a thriving black market for babies. Consider the case of India: couples have to deal with complex regulations, lengthy bureaucratic delays and corruption and hence, they are encouraged to enter and utilise illegal adoption markets. Changes in the existing societal norms where

couples do not carry the social stigma of adopting a baby of a different race or ethnicity, are ready to adopt foreign orphans available for adoption. The supply comprises of the unmarried, pregnant women and poor families, who misled by unscrupulous doctors and institutions are incentivised to sell their new-borns to childless couples. Already distressed by the thought of raising a child in poverty and an orthodox society, such families give up their babies who are eventually sold at higher prices. Other factors affecting supply can be region-specific, similar to that of demand. Chinese parents, for example, because of the one-child policy, abandon their second child or else have to pay fines and lose out on many social benefits.

Undoubtedly, the price in such black markets are very high and many a times, babies are obtained via kidnapping and coercion. This makes the entire concept of such markets all the more unethical and highly debatable.

Factors affecting black market adoptions

1) Psychological factors

Women face a lot of mental and psychological stress during pregnancy, mostly related to health and how the child would be raised. The financial position of a family plays a very important role in deciding whether a family can afford to have a child or not, as most parents want to provide their children with quality education, good healthcare and a stable lifestyle. But all this requires money.

Women who get pregnant when they are very young often face these kinds of problems. Without a proper education and a steady job, they become helpless as they are unable to provide for their child. Parents and society usually force these young girls to give up their children mainly because of the fact that these young women are inexperienced and don't have the mental and physical capability of raising a child on their own. Basic logic says that raising a child is a lot of work while giving a child up is not. This thinking within the contours of our society has shaped the way young women are made to think, they are faced with immense stress, societal imposed guilt of having a child out of wedlock and the constant reminders of how hard it is to make it on their own.

This issue is often also faced by people from an economically weaker background who cannot afford to take care of their kids. The mental dilemma that these people face is the fact that giving up their children would give the child a better life moving forward and the birth parents or young mothers would get some sort of monetary compensation that can be used to either make their life a bit more stable and hassle free. This process is what fuels the baby black market as the legal route is a bit tough to go through. Another aspect fuelling the black market (mainly the international one) is the newfound popular idea of "saving" children, who are suffering in other countries without the adopting parents thinking about the fact that these children could have been trafficked, forced into being given up or simply put up for adoption because the parents can't afford it.

2) Civil and Legal factors

It is a huge struggle to adopt ethically in today's time. With stringent and airtight legal procedures required for a public adoption, parents have become more willing to work

with private agencies in order to adopt a child. Legal adoption usually costs a lot of money and many families have to go into debt in order to fulfill their dreams of becoming parents. Contrary to common belief, there are not a lot of kids available for public adoptions and adopting parents usually have to wait a long time before the whole procedure is completed. Whereas in a black market adoption, the process is easier and faster if not a bit more expensive. The baby black market is a seller's market, where the main motive is to serve the adopting parents and not the child. In private illegal adoptions, babies can be chosen according to the wishes of parents whereas through the legal route, children and adoptive parents are matched. Heavy duty restrictions are also placed on parents who wish to adopt and they are monitored regularly by legal adoption agencies in order to keep a check on whether the child is being treated properly or not whereas in private adoptions all these aspects are usually ignored. Experts on this matter say that tough adoption laws, long waiting lists, corruption along with red tape fuel black market adoptions.



3) Social and cultural factors

A lot of cultural norms play a huge part in enabling the black market of babies. Baby valuing indicates that racial and genetic preferences are associated with the cost of adoption. Parents in developed countries wish to come out as saviours of children of underdeveloped countries, this fueling International adoption market. In Asia, a lot of countries including India and China give a major preference for boys over girls. They go to extreme measures like giving up or killing female infants in order to have a male child. In China, adoptive parents are willing to pay atrocious amounts of money in order to have a boy. Adoption agencies and independent adoption agents establish fees with adoptive parents based on the characteristics of the children in the adoption supply pool, such as, race, gender, and supposed genetic strengths, including the parents' intellectual aptitude. Societal boundaries and culturally stereotyped thinking fuel the illegal trade of children.

4) Economic Factors

The inherent need for money to satisfy wants fuel the supply side of the baby market. Couples with low income and unmarried women give up their young infants for gaining monetary compensation for a better life. The demand side of the market is fueled by high income infertile couples who are willing to pay money in order to get a kid of their choice. A lot of medical professionals are also found to be involved in these kinds of practices, as in many countries, their earnings are not enough to ensure that they have a stable life. Couples that have many children, give up or sell some of them in order to guarantee the well-being of the remaining children unaware of the

fact that they might be leading their children into trafficking or abuse. The economics are clear: There is a lot of money involved with giving a child into adoption.

Case Studies

Societies and cultures have always influenced our habits, lifestyles and the way we think of our lives. It goes without saying that social and cultural factors have been responsible for how the nations work, how its economies function and how the citizens are affected by the decisions of the governments who themselves design the policies after taking into consideration these factors.

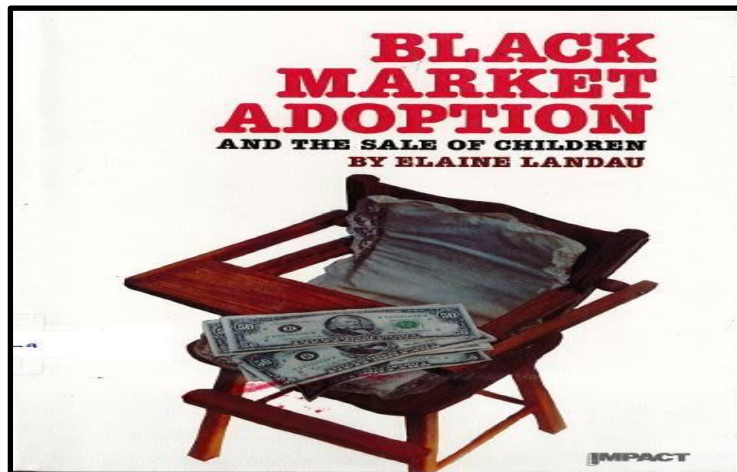
This same principle applies to the black market of babies as well. Reports about increasing rates of child abductions, quasi-legal adoptions and abandonment of children by their biological parents are a testimony to this fact. The 'one-child policy' implemented by the People's Republic of China in the year 1979 (later modified in year 1980s) can serve as an example to study how the government's control over reproductive freedoms of the people have led to a thriving black market in babies in the country.

When the ever-increasing population of China took a toll on the country's food supply and a massive famine in the year 1962 led to around 30 million deaths, officials took note of the rising population and decided to address the problem by limiting most Chinese couples to one child each through its 'One-Child Policy', now called as one of the history's biggest engineering experiments. Incentives in terms of social benefits (such as financial perks and greater employment opportunities) were offered to families who complied with the policy. On the other hand, couples based on where they live, would be fined for having a supernumerary child without a permit. Forced abortions and sterilization also became increasingly common during the tenure of the policy. However, in the year 2015, the Chinese government scrapped the one-child policy because of the concerns over ageing population. While the policy brought down the fertility rate from 5.8 to 2.8 in under a decade, in large cities, the fertility rate (no. of children an average woman is likely to have during her lifetime) is less than 1.6, well below the recommended (replacement) level of 2.1 and one of the lowest in the world. With a shrinking workforce, China is expected to be the first economy to grow old before it gets rich.

The state policy of planning the size of the families and in turn, the entire population, have left behind a shocking legacy of gender disparity and ruinous demographic imbalance. As sons were preferred over daughters during the one-child policy regime, the sex-ratio in China became skewed towards males. The country's gender gap – one of the biggest in the world – is approximately 118 males to 100 females, had dire consequences for both the society and the economy at a macro level. Forced abortions of female fetuses and infanticide had led to spike in crimes, prostitution, child trafficking and a booming black market for baby-selling. As of the year 2015, tens and thousands of babies are sold every year in China, either due to forced labour or due to illegal adoption. If reports prepared by China's Southern Metropolis Daily are to be believed, in 40% of the cases, the biological parents themselves sold their child for money. One reason of this phenomenon can be attributed to one-child policy. Parents who are unable to pay heavy penalties for having more than one child and prefer to sell them, more so in the case of female child. Daughters are usually sold for less price

as compared to that of sons. According to another report published in 2006, unwed mothers sell babies, often girls, in the underground market in China, and the sales are to parents who want servants, more children, or future brides for sons.

With the scrapping of one-child policy and changing attitudes towards daughters, there is a hope to completely resolve the problem of black market of baby selling but overturning the effects of 35 years of a controversial policy and a traditional preference for males will take a long time.



Nigeria, an African country on the Gulf of Guinea, has been in international media for the violation of basic human rights and the illegal ‘baby factories’ that operate within the country. In the year 2012, a UK judge raised concerns about the ‘desperate childless parents’ who are involved in the baby selling scams in Nigeria based on the evidence collected after questioning women who were going to this African nation seeking infertility treatment and ended up in selling their unwanted babies. Cut to 2018, according to the media reports, more than 160 children were rescued from a baby factory and 2 unregistered orphanages from Nigeria’s main city Lagos. These two pieces of information along with the fact that it's very common for Nigerian authorities to raid such baby factories clearly indicates the magnitude of this problem and how fearlessly the underground black market of baby selling is thriving in the region. One of the major reasons behind this social malaise can be attributed to the fact that unwanted pregnant women are promised better healthcare and lured to enter such markets. Once they are in, their babies are taken away from them who later can be sold for adoption, used for trafficking to Europe or prostitution. Confused, scared and broken, often these women choose to stay quiet and do not report such crimes.

Malaysia has one of the strictest adoption laws in the world which were designed in order to stop baby farming in this South Asian country. However, like any other black market, here too these adoption laws have pushed it underground. Foreigners who are unable to legally adopt children from Malaysia owing to the lengthy, arduous process which involves a lot of paperwork and countless trips to adoption centres, are given a chance to choose their own baby based on gender, race and skin colour. The price of the product-namely babies- ranges from \$400 to \$7500. The desire to start a family combined with ineffective policing fuels this underground market. An exclusive documentary by Al Jazeera’s 101 East programme in 2016 shows how a nexus between the doctors, government officials and traffickers makes it easier for the

opportunists to make millions by baby selling. Doctors and officials could even issue fake birth certificates to list the adoptive parents as the infant's biological parents. As Hartini Zainudin, a local child right's activist, exclaims," It's like a supermarket." According to Chan Tau Chau, one of the two undercover reporters involved in the making of the documentary, childless couples will continue to buy infants and traffickers will continue to make profits out of it unless legal adoption in Malaysia becomes more accessible and laws against baby selling are enforced properly.

Conclusion

Neither one can deny the existence of illegal, underground markets of baby selling all over the world nor one can avoid the moral questions that come along with the idea of babies being sold in the markets at profits. A large section of the society argues that a baby born in a poor family, whose biological parents are themselves struggling to meet the ends, is better-off to be sold to someone who is able to provide her/him with adequate opportunities for growth in life. This argument works in the case of unmanned pregnant women as well. Most of them are financially dependent on others and cannot provide a good future to their babies. This sounds understandable and morally correct too. Only if we assume that the 'buyers' are the ones who would always provide the child with proper healthcare, protection and love, baby selling doesn't seem to be much of a problem. But this is where the actual problem lies. How will the authorities ascertain that the buyers are genuinely going to make the future bright for such babies and won't push them into a dark world of prostitution, beggary, organ selling and trafficking? As of now, human beings don't have anything that can determine a person's intentions. Moreover, in the examples of China, Nigeria and Malaysia, we see that most of the time it's either the economic factors (profit making) or socio-psychological factors (preference for male child) that drive the demand-supply forces in this black market. Such cases often lead to the violation of basic human rights of new-borns who are unknowingly 'gifted' a life of use and abuse, sometimes by their own parents. This is the high time when governments all across the globe need to take note of this underground market. And instead of an outright ban, they should focus on the causes and look for reforms-be it the complex adoption processes, rampant corruption in public as well as health sector, social programmes that aggravate the existing gender disparities or anything that fuels such black markets for babies.

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