

BIG STORY
big story

Reports about an abandoned girl poses questions society can't ignore

The tragic bundle

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● **Batelco Home has catered to nearly 400 abandoned children in Bahrain since its establishment 35 years ago.**

● **The abandoned children are provided with the necessary psychological help and social skills to integrate into society smoothly.**

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DR ALMOHAMMED

TDT|Manama
Supriya Reginald

Earlier this week, a gentleman was passing by a garbage bin through one of the remote streets of Muharraq when he got alerted by a crying baby. A baby girl, it didn't take much time for him to realise that it was an abandoned baby.

The man alerted police and the baby was taken to Salmaniya Medical Complex (SMC), where she is under observation.

Abandoning babies is a big crime, but still many do it across the world to get away from responsibilities.

Dr Akbar Mohsen Almohammed, deputy chairman of Batelco Home that has catered to nearly 400 abandoned children in Bahrain since its establishment 35 years ago, says the act was nothing but a curse on entire humanity.

“Not to mention names, some of these children are prominent VIPs in the society, despite being abandoned by their parents. How we raise and nurture the child determines their future,” said Dr Almohammed.

“If given the opportunity these children will show their capability,” he added.

“Currently, we have 26 from each category, those from broken homes consist of boys and girls whereas those abandoned are all boys, there is a demand more for

girls for fostering,” said Dr Almohammed who has dedicated nearly 42 years to the welfare of abused and abandoned children.

“Our care is comprehensive, it starts at birth and goes on till their 30. We provide them with food, clothing, education and entertainment, anything a parent would do for their child we do for our children and we are their family and the cling to us,” he added.

The term “adoption” isn't included in Islam, rather the term “forester” is used to describe the act of undertaking an abandoned child into a new family. The reason for this is twofold, first, the child is prohibited from taking the family name and second they are denied the right to family wealth and property, he pointed out.

“We advise fostering families to do what they can in their way to secure the child, in the long run, such a purchasing land or property in the child's name,” said Dr Almohammed.

“Apart from being below 50 years of age, according to law, the fostering fam-

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million is the estimated number of abandoned children across the world.

ilies need to be Bahraini, if I had to option to give the children to expatriates I would have no children left in the house,” he added.

Abandoned children have been victims of stigma for decades, though it has considerably reduced, stigma still prevails in many sectors of the society.

“There are some sectors of our society that can be very cruel toward these children. This has changed with time, we have launched programmes to educate people,” revealed Dr Almohammed.

“These children have the same right as any other child, it isn't their fault they are in this situation,” he added.

The Batelco Home receives abandoned children both Bahraini and expatriate alike.

“We have some children who have expatriate features but once they come to us they automatically become Bahraini irrespective of their roots,” said Dr Almohammed.

The abandoned children are provided with the necessary psychological help and social skills to integrate into society smoothly.



Batelco Home

“We keep them till their 20 and then they graduate from the center. Their rent, job, higher education as well as their wedding we provide all the help they need,” said Dr Almohammed.

“We've had children who we have taken care of who have come back to us and fostered children. This is their way of repaying us,” he revealed.

The idea of abandoning a child is hard for people to comprehend, women across Bahrain provide their input from a mother's perspective on the grounds of anonymity.

“This blatant disregard for human life is horrible, immoral and unacceptable. There are parents who are unable to conceive children and then there are these people who abandon their own flesh and blood,” says longtime resident and mother of two girls.

“Unfortunately there aren't contraceptive measures women can take therefore they are left with no choice but to have the child. Nonetheless, if they aren't capable they should reach out to child welfare instead of abandoning the child,” she added.

“There are couples struggling with infertility, those who abandon children should rather hand over their child to the concerned societies who would hand over the child to a deserving and capable family,” said a mother who recently conceived her first child after trying for nearly three years.

“I have heard of few instances here in Bahrain where a child has been dumped in public places, it's heartbreaking. Even if the child is fostered and given a normal life the trauma of being abandoned leaves them scarred,” said a mother of twins.

“I believe being thrown away by the very people who gave your life is something that has a psychological and emotional effect that never truly goes away,” she added.

Alarming numbers

There are around 143 million orphans and abandoned children and the number is 8.4 per cent of the total children in the world, according to Unicef statistics. In 2003 alone, more than 16 million children were orphaned. International Advocates for Children, an NGO, says that the number of orphans and abandoned children

will increase dramatically at an estimated rate of 15 to 20 million per year. It has been reported that factors which lead to the abandonment of babies cannot be eliminated without placing the blame on the mothers. Studies show that in African communities, cultural beliefs play a role in the abandonment of babies. While women

might seem frightened by being judged by the ancestors for having an abortion or placing a child for adoption, the shocking revelation is that men, who are traditionally responsible for introducing their offspring to the ancestors, appear to be able to facilitate abortions or abandon the mothers of their children.

