

Abstract

OBJECTIVE: To determine the pattern of growth and development of institutionalized infants and to compare the outcome with that of infants living with their biological mothers.

DESIGN: A cross-sectional survey.

SETTING: Seven children's homes; Kenyatta National Hospital's New Born Unit and Well Baby Clinics in Nairobi, Kenya.

PARTICIPANTS: Eighty-two abandoned babies who fulfilled the selection criteria were recruited and for each abandoned baby two mothered babies matched for age and sex were selected from the well baby clinics.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES: Anthropometric measures of weight, length, head circumference and left mid arm circumference (LUMAC) were taken and the mean values and Z scores determined to demonstrate growth pattern and nutritional status of the babies. The Revised Denver Development Screening Test (RDDST) was used to assess the development pattern of infants.

RESULTS: Seventy per cent of infants were below six months old and 73% were abandoned within the first week of life. Abandoned babies were significantly thinner with the mean LUMAC of 10.8 cm versus 12.3 cm ($p = 0.02$). Institutionalised babies were significantly wasted ($p = 0.00001$) and stunted ($p = 0.00001$). Abandoned babies were significantly delayed in development ($p < 0.0001$). In all the four sectors tested for, institutionalised babies showed significant delay, $p < 0.0001$ in each sector.

CONCLUSION: This study demonstrates that infants under institutional care have poorer growth and development compared to mothered infants.