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## **Drama in the dailies : violence and gender in Dutch newspapers, 1880 to 1930**

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## Chapter 5: Parents who maltreated their children in the news

This chapter looks at various forms of parental cruelty to children that were reported in the newspapers. These were stories of parents who killed their offspring (including infanticides), or who abused, neglected or abandoned their children.<sup>1</sup> The period it covers, from 1880 to 1930, was one in which children became the focus of attention in politics and civil society. The Swedish feminist Ellen Key famously proclaimed the twentieth century to be the Century of the Child because 'saving the child' had become of such fundamental importance.<sup>2</sup> Chapter 2 has already discussed the shift in the Netherlands to child-oriented policies, with the introduction of child protection legislation in 1905. In Chapter 3, moreover, it was argued that Dutch newspapers increasingly became papers for all the family, with separate children's sections in the interwar period. This would suggest increasing sensitivity to parents' maltreatment of their children over time. But did that result in greater media interest in stories of cruelty to children? That is the main issue addressed in this chapter.

The question of media coverage of child maltreatment in this period of heightened interest in child welfare has received relatively little attention in the historiography. While some studies have been published on media representations of perpetrators, these have explored the influence of gender rather than of changing ideas about childhood.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, historians have seen gender as central to understanding the maltreatment of children, both in explaining patterns of parental violence and in explaining the responses of experts and the general public. The literature on the ill-treatment of children in this period is uneven. There is a large body of work on infanticide. Much of this work has focused on unmarried women and used infanticide as a way in for examining ideas about female sexuality and illegitimacy. Sometimes the killing of new-born babies has been considered in conjunction with abortion or the abandonment of foundlings, which are seen as constituting a range of strategies for dealing with unwanted babies. Historians of infanticide have looked at both the circumstances that drove women to commit this crime and their treatment in the law courts. A key debate has been on leniency: historians have found increasing leniency shown

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<sup>1</sup> Stories were only included if children were below the age of 23 when the offence started. This was the age of majority until 1905. In some respects, parental authority extended beyond the age of majority. Thus young people up to the age of 30 needed parental consent to marry. See: Pieter R.D. Stokvis, "Van kind tot volwassene: overgangsrutuelen in Nederland van de Franse tijd tot de Eerste Wereldoorlog," *De negentiende eeuw* 17, no. 2 (1993): 51-52.

<sup>2</sup> Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 171.

<sup>3</sup> Studies of media coverage of child killings from a gender perspective include: Goc, *Women, Infanticide*; Grey, "Discourses of Infanticide," 37-87; Jade Shepherd, "'One of the best fathers until he went out of his mind': paternal child-murder, 1864-1900," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 18, no. 1 (2013): 17-35; Amanda Kaladelfos, "The dark side of the family: paternal child homicide in Australia," *Journal of Australian Studies* 37, no. 3 (2013): 333-348; Anne Rodrick, "Melodrama and Natural Science: Reading the 'Greenwich Murder' in the Mid-Century Periodical Press," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 50, no. 1 (2017): 66-99.

to infanticidal women since the early modern period but have debated what form it took in different countries, the relationship with marital status and notions of femininity, and the role of medicalization.<sup>4</sup> Historians of child abuse and neglect have largely used the records of child protection services rather than judicial sources. They have accordingly focused on the operation of those services, how they constructed cruelty to children and the extent to which they acknowledged poverty as a factor, and how their responses were shaped by assumptions about maternal and paternal roles. Historians have argued about a shift in focus by the agencies from abuse to neglect, and about the extent to which neglect was construed as a female offence.<sup>5</sup> Abuse and neglect could in exceptional circumstances result in the death of the child. Historical studies that focus on child-killings other than infanticide are however rare. A few historians have examined cases of paternal child-killings from the perspective of the perpetrators' motives and notions of masculinity.<sup>6</sup> No studies were found of the abandonment of children by their parents other than of foundlings.

This chapter aims to add to the literature by concurrently considering press coverage of *all* kinds of ill-treatment of children by both mothers *and* fathers. This comprehensive approach should give a better picture of journalists' understanding of parental roles. Given the Dutch context of child protection campaigns and policies, the first question addressed in

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<sup>4</sup> For general overviews of the debates, see: Anne-Marie Kilday, Katherine D. Watson, "Infanticide, Religion and Community in the British Isles, 1720-1920: Introduction," *Family & Community History* 11, no. 2 (2008): 85-88; Mark Jackson, "The trial of Harriet Vooght," in *Infanticide. Historical perspectives on child murder and concealment, 1550-2000*, ed. Mark Jackson (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 1-17. For infanticide in conjunction with abandonment and abortion, see: R. Sauer, "Infanticide and Abortion in Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Population Studies* 32, no. 1 (1978): 81-93; Rachel Ginnis Fuchs, "Crimes against Children in Nineteenth-Century France," *Law and Human Behavior* 6, no. 3-4 (1982): 237-259; Jeffrey S. Richter, "Infanticide, Child Abandonment, and Abortion in Imperial Germany," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28, no. 4 (1998): 511-551. On the changes since the early modern period, see: Mary Clayton, "Changes in Old Bailey trials for the murder of newborn babies, 1674-1803," *Continuity and Change* 24, no. 2 (2009): 337-359; Spierenburg, *History of Murder*, 143-164; Leboutte, "Offense against Family Order". Leniency, the use of the insanity plea and differences between countries are covered in: Marland, "Getting Away with Murder?"; Ruberg, "Travelling Knowledge"; Simone Caron, "'Killed by its mother': infanticide in Providence County, Rhode Island, 1870 to 1938," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 1 (2010): 213-237; Tony Ward, "The sad subject of infanticide: law, medicine and child murder, 1860-1938," *Social and Legal Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 163-180; Breathnach and O'Halpin, "Scripting Blame"; Brennan, "A Fine Mixture"; Grey, "Discourses of Infanticide," 201-261.

<sup>5</sup> Classic studies of child abuse and neglect and the child protection agencies are: Behlmer, *Child Abuse*, 161-192; Gordon, *Heroes*, 82-203. Patterns of abuse are discussed in: Yvone, "La justice". On the attitudes of agencies to poverty, neglect and parental responsibility, see: Ashley Hogan, "'I Never Noticed She Was Dirty': Fatherhood and the Death of Charlotte Duffy in Late-Nineteenth-Century Victoria," *Journal of Family History* 24, no. 3 (1999): 305-316; Gordon, "Single Mothers"; A0459 Buckley, "Child Neglect"; Gary Clapton, "'Yesterday's men': the inspectors of the Royal Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 1888-1968," *British Journal of Social Work* 39, (2009): 1043-1062; Swain Shurlee, "'I am directed to remind you of your duty to your family': public surveillance of mothering in Victoria, Australia, 1920-40," *Women's History Review* 8, no. 2 (1999): 247-259; Flegel, "Changing Faces"; Gary Clapton, Vivienne E. Cree, Mark Smith, "Moral panics and social work: towards a sceptical view of UK child protection," *Critical Social Policy* 33, no. 2 (2013): 202-205.

<sup>6</sup> Kaladelfos, "The Dark Side"; Daniel A. Cohen, "Homicidal Compulsion and the Conditions of Freedom: The Social and Psychological Origins of Familicide in America's Early Republic," *Journal of Social History* 28, no. 4 (1995): 725-764; Shepherd, "One of the Best".

this chapter is whether the Dutch press also increasingly highlighted and criticized child maltreatment, and why this did or did not happen. The second question concerns the effect of gender on child ill-treatment as represented in the newspapers. As discussed in Chapter 1, a distinction is made here between the gendered effects of socioeconomic structures that led to different patterns of violence between mothers and fathers, and cultural norms that affected how journalists interpreted and evaluated the actions of mothers and fathers.

The chapter starts with the newspapers' coverage of the 1905 Children's Acts. That coverage was uncritical and muted. But after the acts were implemented, an alleged miscarriage of justice involving a widow whose children were removed from her care became a *cause célèbre*. This story appealed to journalists because it fitted with their view that poverty did not cause child maltreatment. The second section looks at the space newspapers dedicated to child maltreatment stories. It shows that these crimes received relatively little attention from the press. Furthermore, different kinds of maltreatment were consistently presented using different narratives and sources, giving a typology with four categories: abandonment, abuse and neglect, infanticide, and filicide. Section 5.3 discusses the construction of these categories in the newspapers: the style of the articles, the source of the information, the characteristics of the perpetrators and the setting. It shows that women committed different crimes to men and their motives were interpreted differently. The fourth section looks at sympathy and condemnation. The journalists were sympathetic to the children but did not portray them as individuals. Parents were treated with sympathy if their acts could be interpreted as delusional love, but abandonment, abuse and neglect were condemned vehemently.

### 5.1 The Children's Acts

This section looks at newspaper coverage of the campaign for the child protection legislation and the operation after 1905 of the new laws. The 1905 Children's Acts put the operation of the child protection organizations on a firm legal footing. The civil-law act provided for parents to lose custody of their child if there was a threat of their 'moral or physical ruin' (*zedelijke of lichamelijke ondergang*) and was therefore in theory a means of protecting children from physical abuse or neglect by their parents.<sup>7</sup> However, as was discussed in Chapter 2, the key concept in the campaign by lawyers and philanthropists for the child protection legislation was '*verwaarlozing*', referring to moral neglect. It conjured up images of drunken and idle parents who kept their children from school and sent them out to beg and steal. According to Van Montfoort, physical maltreatment by parents was of secondary importance in this discourse.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Bakker, Noordman, and Rietveld-van Wingerden, *Vijf eeuwen*, 463.

<sup>8</sup> Van Montfoort, *Het topje*, 81-85.

To date, historians' analyses of the child protection discourse have focused on publications by experts and philanthropists rather than media accounts. For the present study, an investigation was carried out of newspapers' reports of the campaign leading up to the Children's Acts and on the implementation and operation of child protection legislation after 1905. This showed that the discourse of the morally deficient upbringing was adopted without question by the press in their coverage of the campaign. Once the Children's Acts were implemented, their operation took place largely out of sight of the media. In 1910, however, a case of the alleged wrongful removal of children from the care of a widow was seized upon by the newspapers as a scandalous affair. This was a story where the mother was the 'victim' of the child protection institutions. A consideration of the reasons why the media gave it so much attention helps understand the relative silence (as will be seen in Section 5.3) on cases where children were the victims of their parents.

### ***Coverage of child protection campaign and system***

The Dutch newspapers covered the debates inside and outside Parliament in the lead-up to the new legislation, which was passed in 1901. However, their reporting was passive. They did not act as a forum for public debate, for example by publishing letters airing alternative views. Nor did journalists question the campaigner's central concept of moral neglect. Of forty-three articles examined in the four newspapers in the period 1897 to 1901, not one mentioned physical abuse or neglect as a potential reason for removing children from the parental home. Interestingly, although historians have seen the acts purely in terms of children's rights, journalists at the time stressed the implications for women's rights too. The legislation was seen as progress for women because it removed some inequalities between fathers and mothers with regard to guardianship.<sup>9</sup> Framing the Children's Acts as an advance for women ties in with journalists' attempts to appeal to women readers in this period and the positive attention paid by the press to feminist organizations (see Section 3.1).

Dutch newspapers' passive role in the campaign for child protection legislation is in marked contrast to the UK, reflecting differences in the importance of the media to campaigners in the two countries. In Britain, the main child protection society used the media to construct 'cruelty to children' as a concept and a crime and to mobilize public support for its views. Its secretary, Waugh, cultivated close relationships with influential national papers such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *The Times*. They publicized cases prosecuted by the society and

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<sup>9</sup> "De voogdij," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 8 May 1900, 5; "De ouderlijke macht," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 14 June 1897, 17; "Ouderlijk gezag," *De Telegraaf*, 2 June 1897, 5. Detailed discussions by historians of the Children's Acts that do not consider the implications for women's rights include: Bernard Kruithof and Piet De Rooy, "Liefde en plichtbesef. De kinderbescherming in Nederland rond 1900," *Sociologisch Tijdschrift* 13, no. 4 (1987): 637-668; Bakker, Noordman, and Rietveld-van Wingerden, *Vijf eeuwen*, 452-465; Jeroen Dekker, "Le modèle néerlandais," 38-41.

provided space for the society's letters on the subject.<sup>10</sup> This fits the standard model for a social problem process as described by Joel Best (see also Section 2.4). In this model, claimsmakers (for example, experts or philanthropists) identify a troubling condition and then seek publicity for their claims in the media to draw attention to the problem and change the public's views. Policymakers respond to the media coverage and public opinion, for example by passing legislation.<sup>11</sup> However, the Dutch historian Janse contends that this is only one model of the relationship between the state and civil society. She argues that the Netherlands in the nineteenth century fitted a harmonious model of constructive collaboration between civil society and government. Pressure groups were seen by the state as having a positive role in debating the task of the state and making proposals for legislation. Civil society groups often had small, select memberships and close personal ties with politicians. Although Janse concludes that this harmonious model was in decline from the 1880s, the campaign for the Children's Acts fits this description well. There was a close working relationship between the philanthropic organizations and lawyers lobbying for the new legislation and the politicians, and the legislation was largely based on an 1898 report published by the leading philanthropic organization 't Nut. In these circumstances, there was no need to raise public awareness or sway public opinion through a publicity campaign in the press.<sup>12</sup>

Two further factors encouraged the newspapers' wholesale adoption of the campaigners' discourse of '*verwaarlozing*' in the lead-up to the Children's Acts. The first was the tendency of reporters to rely on institutional sources. The philanthropic organizations agitating for new child protection legislation were largely long-established, respectable bodies, whose activities were regularly reported in the newspapers. In the 1890s, the newspapers were still largely targeting middle-class readers who were likely to either be members of these organizations or at least attend their talks and meetings. For the newspapers, reports of such meetings were a relatively easy way of filling space and satisfied the demand for information amongst their readers.<sup>13</sup> Journalists were therefore receptive to information provided by the campaigning organizations and unlikely to approach the material critically. A good example is the newspapers' coverage of the publication of the above-mentioned report by 't Nut in 1898. All four newspapers printed an identically worded article on this publication. The article has the appearance of being a press release that the papers simply incorporated in full.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Behlmer, *Child Abuse*, 56-57, 83; Flegel, "Changing Faces," 2-5.

<sup>11</sup> Best, *Social Problems*, 3-28.

<sup>12</sup> Maartje Janse, "Op de grens tussen staat en civil society. Samenwerking tussen hervormers en politici, 1840-1880," *De negentiende eeuw* 35, no. 4 (2011): 169-187; Bakker, Noordman, and Rietveld-van Wingerden, *Vijf eeuwen*, 457; "Ouderlijke macht en voogdij," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 12 May 1900, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*, 259260.

<sup>14</sup> "Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen," *De Telegraaf*, 19 May 1898, 2; "Verwaarloosde kinderen," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 21 May 1898, 1; "Verwaarloosde kinderen!" *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 21 May 1898, 2; "Verwaarloosde kinderen," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 23 May 1898, 2.

The second factor was readers' own interest in public nuisances rather than private abuses. The focus in the campaign rhetoric on the public disorder caused by delinquent children chimed with readers' own concerns. As was discussed in Chapter 2, large-scale migration to the cities in the 1880s and 1890s was putting pressure on urban spaces. As more and more working-class people moved into the cities, urban streets became a site of conflict. According to Jan Hein Furnée, there was a class and gender aspect to this. With the rise of shopping as a leisure activity for middle-class women, they were using the streets more. But they were regularly subjected to harassment from lower-class boys, which Furnée sees as a form of resistance to the takeover of public spaces by the middle classes.<sup>15</sup> Readers' letters provide evidence that readers were concerned throughout the period 1880 to 1930 about the nuisance caused by street children. Readers wrote in to complain about boys urinating in the street, smashing windows, and trying to knock down women when cycling past.<sup>16</sup> It was these public problems caused by lower-class children that directly affected readers, rather than the private problems suffered by children in the home.

After the Children's Acts were implemented in 1905, there was little coverage in the papers of the day-to-day operations of the child protection system. Hundreds of children were removed from the custody of their parents every year, yet there was little mention of this in the newspapers.<sup>17</sup> It is possible the press were not reporting on these cases because they did not have access to the information. Court proceedings for the removal of custody were held *in camera*. The rulings were made public and were reported on occasion by the two local newspapers, but the language in these reports (and presumably the rulings themselves) is formulaic and vague. It is, for example, not possible to differentiate between physical deprivation and moral neglect.<sup>18</sup>

While individual cases were rarely reported, journalists produced favourable coverage of the meetings and publications of child protection organizations and wrote articles about the good work being done at residential homes. These items tied in with newspapers' desire to appeal to women readers, as child-saving was one area where women were thought to be able to make an important contribution.<sup>19</sup> In 1930, the first

<sup>15</sup> Jan Hein Furnée, "Winkelen als bevrijding? Vrouwen en stedelijke ruimte in Amsterdam, 1863-1913," *BMGN* 130, no. 2 (2015): 109-111.

<sup>16</sup> "Schaamteloosheid," *Rotteramsch Nieuwsblad*, 17 October 1910, 9; "Politietoezicht op de Marnixkade," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 24 March 1880, 6; "Vreemdeling en straatjeugd," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 27 July 1920, 7;

<sup>17</sup> Figures for the period 1921 to 1930 show 500 or more children were removed from the custody of their parents each year, see: Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, *Crimineele Statistiek, gevangenisstatistiek en statistiek van de toepassing der kindwetten over het jaar 1930* (The Hague: Algemeene Landsdrukkerij, 1932), 74.

<sup>18</sup> For example: "Voogdijraad," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 3 February 1910, 1. The institutions themselves also had no need to publicize the cases. Fingard writes that in Nova Scotia, protection agency reports were confidential and the press rarely found out about the cases. Fingard, "The Prevention of Cruelty," 88.

<sup>19</sup> "Een kwart eeuw kindwetten," *De Telegraaf*, 30 November 1930, 5. This is evident from the fact that when women were first admitted to the police force, it was to work in the new juvenile squads: "Kinderpolitie," *De*



quarter-century of the Children's Acts was celebrated on a grand scale. The newspapers covered the speeches to mark this event at length and printed articles reflecting on the first twenty-five years. All were agreed that the Children's Acts were a watershed moment, but also that the battle was not yet won — there were still children out there who needed help.<sup>20</sup>

### *A miscarriage of justice*

Yet not all the newspaper coverage was favourable after the acts came into effect. One case in particular became a *cause célèbre* in the Dutch newspapers in 1910 as an alleged miscarriage of justice. It received far more coverage than any story of abuse, neglect or abandonment of children in this period; the *Algemeen Handelsblad* devoted more than twice as much space to this story than to all other stories of abuse and neglect combined in all five of the study years. The case is discussed at length here because it sheds light on why stories of actual child maltreatment never became politicized in this way by the newspapers. It had ingredients that encouraged the press to embrace it as a cause and that incidents of child maltreatment lacked: it had active claimsmakers, it touched on issues of principle about the power of the Christian pillars in public institutions, it fitted with the idealization of motherhood and it fitted with journalists' views that poverty was not a cause of abuse and neglect.

The story involved a widow, Mrs De Rijk, whose children had been removed from her custody and sent to Catholic children's homes in 1908. In 1910 she went to court challenging the decision to remove the children. The court ruled in her favour and ordered the children to be returned to their mother. However, it took several weeks to track down and recover the children due to misinformation and an apparent lack of cooperation on the part of the child protection organizations. Although the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* barely paid any attention to the case, the liberal-leaning newspapers *Leeuwarder Courant*, *Algemeen Handelsblad* and *De Telegraaf* covered the story at great length, making their opinions clear with headings such as "A wrong put right" (*een onrecht goed gemaakt*) and "From pillar to post" (*van het kastje naar de muur*).<sup>21</sup>

The newspaper coverage of the De Rijk case gives every appearance of having been the result of an orchestrated publicity campaign by the lawyer who took up the woman's

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*Telegraaf*, 28 April 1920, 6; Nelleke Manneke, *Korps zonder kapsones. Geschiedenis van de Rotterdamse gemeentepolitie, 1340-1993* (Bussum: Thoth, 1993), 50-51.

<sup>20</sup> "De zilveren kindervetten," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 27 November 1930, 1; "Welke functie heeft de voogdijraad?," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 28 November 1930, 15; "Een kwart eeuw kindervetten," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 30 November 1930, 5; "Kwart eeuw kinderbescherming," *De Telegraaf*, 29 November 1930, 5; "Een kwart eeuw kindervetten," *De Telegraaf*, 30 November 1930, 5; "Een kwart eeuw Kinderwetten," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 1 December 1930, p. 26; "Vereeniging „Kinderzorg",," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 9 December 1930, 5.

<sup>21</sup> "Van het kastje naar den muur," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 30 July 1910, 1; "Een onrecht goed gemaakt," *De Telegraaf*, 22 July 1910, 3; "Een onrecht goed gemaakt," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 21 July 1910, 6.

case, Mr J.A. Levy, and the local newspaper in her town, the *Hilversumsche Courant*. The story appeared in the *Hilversumsche Courant* first, and several of the items in the other newspapers were taken from this local paper.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, when Mrs De Rijk went to fetch her two sons from one of the children's homes, she was accompanied by a reporter from the *Hilversumsche Courant*.<sup>23</sup> Her lawyer Levy was also a prominent liberal and a former MP with a particular interest in child protection issues – just the kind of claimsmaker who journalists would take seriously.<sup>24</sup> He made sure interest in this case was maintained with a series of letters to the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, which was one of the leading elite liberal newspapers.<sup>25</sup> The *Algemeen Handelsblad* was clearly already well disposed to the lawyer as it had reported his anniversary as a lawyer earlier that year.<sup>26</sup>

The story also appealed to the liberal newspapers because it spoke to concerns among liberals about the rising power of the Christian pillars in politics and civil society. The Children's Acts had increased the institutionalized power of the religious blocs: the religious pillars were represented in the custody boards, which advised on custody cases, and most children's homes were private institutions run by the Protestant and Catholic pillars with government funding.<sup>27</sup> This had been necessary to get the Christian parties to agree to this intrusion into family life by the state, but was now viewed with suspicion by liberals.<sup>28</sup> The papers presented the De Rijk case as misuse by the Catholic institutions of their authority, punishing Mrs De Rijk for her desire to convert to the Protestant faith. It was alleged that a parish priest, upon finding her reading the Bible at home, had tried to seize it from her, and that Catholic officials had been behind the termination of her social welfare payments and the request to take away custody of her children.<sup>29</sup> In the newspapers' accounts, the mother was portrayed as a poor, simple creature, pitted in an unequal battle against the bureaucratic might of the Catholic organizations.

Another attraction of Mrs De Rijk's story was that she could be portrayed as the epitome of the devoted mother battling for her children. This tied in with a rhetoric of motherhood as an essential aspect of the female condition and a common experience that united women of all backgrounds. The fact that she was a widow only increased the pathos: she was a single mother without a man to support her but unlike the unmarried mother,

<sup>22</sup> "Een onrecht goed gemaakt," *De Telegraaf*, 22 July 1910, 3; "Een onrecht goed gemaakt," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 21 July 1910, 6.

<sup>23</sup> "Een onrecht goedgemaakt," *De Telegraaf*, 8 August 1910, 1.

<sup>24</sup> J. Charité, "Levy, Isaac Abraham (1836-1920)," in *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland*.

URL: <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn3/levy> [12-11-2013], accessed 7 January 2018.

<sup>25</sup> "Een onrecht goed gemaakt," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 1 August 1910, 7; "Een onrecht goed gemaakt," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 4 August 1910, 1; "Een onrecht goed gemaakt," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 5 August 1910, 1; "Een onrecht goed gemaakt," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 7 August 1910, 1.

<sup>26</sup> "Jubilee Mr. J.A. Levy," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 25 April 1910, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Lechner, *Honderd jaar kindbescherming*, 25-54.

<sup>28</sup> Bakker, Noordman, Rietveld-van Wingerden, 465.

<sup>29</sup> "Een onrecht goed gemaakt," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 23 July 1910, 6.

there could be no doubt about her virtue. Here was a mother who was going to great lengths to get her children back but who was thwarted by the authorities in what the *Algemeen Handelsblad* called “bitter denigration for the bonds that bind a mother’s heart to her child”.<sup>30</sup> She was presented as someone who female readers would be able to identify with despite the very different social class.<sup>31</sup>

The case also enabled journalists to draw a firm distinction between the sad fact of poverty and deliberate neglect by bad parents. In these early days of the Children’s Acts there was some unease about the fine line between poverty and neglect. This issue had arisen earlier that year in a meeting of the *Bond voor Kinderbescherming* (‘Association for Child Protection’) when the question was discussed of whether children should be forcibly removed from their parents if the parents were too poor to raise them properly.<sup>32</sup> In the De Rijk case, the custody board defended its decision not to return the children to their mother by arguing among other things that the mother had at one point been evicted and unable to find a new abode immediately and that it was highly unlikely she would ever be able to support her five children financially unaided. This made her lack of money in itself an argument for removing her children. This view was opposed by Mrs De Rijk’s lawyer. According to his application to the court, which was reported in the papers, “if poverty were a crime, half the Dutch population would have to be removed from custody”.<sup>33</sup> The journalists supported this interpretation. However, this position also made it easier to deny the role of poverty in cases of actual child maltreatment.

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<sup>30</sup> “*hier eene algeheele en bittere kleineering aan den dag komt ‘voor den band die ‘t harte bindt der moeder aan het kind.’*” In “De kinderen der weduwe De Rijk,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 27 August 1910, 1.

<sup>31</sup> The notion of motherhood as a unifying experience across the classes has also been seen as an important argument justifying middle-class women’s social work in this period: Waaldijk, “Personeel,” 47-49.

<sup>32</sup> “Ned. Bond voor Kinderbescherming,” *De Telegraaf*, 11 June 1910, 2; “Ned. Bond voor Kinderbescherming,” *De Telegraaf*, 12 June 1910, 5.

<sup>33</sup> “*Ware armoede een misdrijf, de helft van Nederlandse bevolking moest worden ontzet.*” In “Een onrecht goedge maakt,” *De Telegraaf*, 8 August 1910, 1; “De kinderen der weduwe De Rijk,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 27 August 1910, 1.

## 5.2 Coverage of maltreatment stories in the newspapers

Table 14 Coverage of parental maltreatment of their children, 1880-1930.

Newspaper	Year	No. of cases	No. of lines	Average no. of lines per page
<i>Leeuwarder Courant</i>	1880	50	798	0.8
	1895	29	677	0.4
	1910	30	489	0.2
	1920	18	355	0.2
	1930	30	719	0.2
<i>Algemeen Handelsblad</i>	1880	32	557	0.3
	1895	30	533	0.3
	1910	14	379	0.1
	1920	21	338	0.1
	1930	29	572	0.1
<i>Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad</i>	1880	33	513	0.5
	1895	65	1,276	0.6
	1910	67	1,082	0.4
	1920	32	745	0.4
	1930	69	2,672	0.6
<i>Het Nieuws van de Dag</i>	1880	32	351	0.2
<i>De Telegraaf</i>	1895	47	724	0.4
	1910	28	576	0.2
	1920	32	405	0.2
	1930	48	962	0.3
All newspapers	1880	93	2,219	0.4
	1895	128	3,210	0.4
	1910	106	2,526	0.2
	1920	70	1,843	0.2
	1930	104	4,925	0.3

Source: [www.delpher.nl](http://www.delpher.nl), *Algemeen Handelsblad*, *Leeuwarder Courant*, *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, all issues in 1880, 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930; *Het Nieuws van de Dag*, all issues in 1880; *De Telegraaf*, all issues in 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930.

The amount of space dedicated to stories of parents' maltreatment of their children was relatively modest (see Table 14). This form of family violence received far less attention than

stories of intimate partner violence (see Table 10). Only in 1880 was the coverage of the two forms of family violence comparable, with an average of 0.4 lines per page on child maltreatment and 0.5 lines per page on violence between partner. Throughout the period, newspapers were less invested in the individual stories of child maltreatment: items were shorter than items on intimate partner violence (averaging 16 lines as opposed to 31 for partner violence), and fewer stories were followed up with multiple items. The difference was particularly large in the years leading up to World War I, when the number of column inches dedicated to partner violence shot up but coverage of cruelty to children remained on a level. Thus in 1910 the combined newspapers printed over 33,500 lines on intimate partner violence but only about 2,500 lines on the maltreatment of children.

The relative paucity of stories about parents maltreating their children would probably have affected readers' perceptions. According to the agenda-setting theory, issues that receive a great deal of coverage are seen as salient by readers, even if they do not necessarily accept the journalists' views on those issues. Conversely, issues that receive little coverage are not seen as salient.<sup>34</sup> The Dutch newspapers were not presenting the physical ill-treatment of children as a salient issue. This might seem surprising, given the notion of the twentieth century as the Century of the Child.<sup>35</sup> One reason could be that Dutch stories of abuse and neglect were not coming into the public domain as they were being dealt with behind the scenes by the child protection organizations. However, that does not explain the lack of investment in the stories that did get reported or the lack of coverage of other forms of violence against children such as homicides. It is also possible that there were fewer incidents of extreme violence against children than against partners; a modern Dutch study found that just over 10 per cent of victims of family violence were aged under 18.<sup>36</sup> Another possible reason for the lack of coverage after 1880 is an assumed limited appeal to readers. In 1880 and to a certain extent in 1895, child maltreatment was portrayed as a working-class phenomenon and part of the same narrative of the degenerate masses as the stories of domestic violence discussed in the previous chapter. This was a period when the lower classes were emphatically not part of the Dutch imagined community as constructed in the newspapers. In the decades that followed, the working classes became an integral part of the Dutch nation and stories that portrayed them as outsiders and inherently bad parents were no longer appropriate. In the case of domestic violence, these stories were replaced by romanticized tales of crimes of passion that were used in the fin-de-siècle to attract female readers. However, stories of violence against children did not lend themselves to this romanticizing treatment; attacks on one's own children could not be construed as an act of passion.

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<sup>34</sup> McCombs and Shaw, "The agenda-setting function," 184.

<sup>35</sup> Dessertine also mentions in a study of the operation of the child protection laws in France that there was little press interest in child maltreatment cases except during the campaigns for the new laws. Dessertine, "Tribunaux face aux violences," 130-131.

<sup>36</sup> Ferwerda, *Huiselijk geweld gemeten*, 3.

Table 14 gives a picture of stability over time: the amount of coverage (expressed as the number of lines per page) did not change much between 1880 and 1930. However, this apparent stability hides big shifts in the kinds of story covered. In order to understand these shifts, the cases have been categorized into different kinds of stories. A dedicated typology was developed for this purpose based on the characteristics of the Dutch stories. Although historians routinely differentiate between various kinds of child maltreatment, there is no current consensus on the appropriate subdivisions. For example, infanticide studies may be limited to the killing of new-borns or they may include babies up to the age of twelve months or even older.<sup>37</sup> Nor is the distinction between foreign stories and incidents set in the Netherlands that was made in the previous chapter appropriate here. While there were differences (foreign stories were for example more likely to involve extreme violence), this was not the main fault line for the differences in style and content. Differences between types of violence were much more decisive.

### ***Typology***

The starting point for the typology is the newspapers' narratives. As was discussed in Chapter 3, simplification and predictability are important news values for journalists and this results in them adopting standard scripts. The reporting on violence against children used a limited set of scripts, with different scripts being used for different kinds of violence.<sup>38</sup> The various categories of violence are characterized not only by differences in their circumstances (such as the perpetrator's sex and the outcome for the victim) but also in their style elements (for example, sensational or matter-of-fact), sources (agencies, foreign correspondents, the police or court reports) and attitudes towards the perpetrator (empathic or critical).

Based on these differences, a typology of newspapers' maltreatment stories has been developed, with four different categories of maltreatment story. The four categories and some key characteristics are shown in Table 15. Abandonment concerns stories of parents abandoning babies (foundling cases) or older children, which was a criminal offence under Dutch law (see Chapter 2). Infanticides concern stories in which a new-born baby is killed (by the mother or father). Filicides are defined here as stories of the sudden killing of one or more children. This category includes familicides (in which the spouse is killed too). The final category is stories of abuse and neglect. This covers stories of harm caused by physical attacks on the child or by withholding food and physical care. It includes cases involving the death of the child where this is the unintended result of abuse or neglect.

While this typology is based on newspaper representations, it has affinities with modern criminological classifications of child killings. In the typology set out in Table 15, a

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<sup>37</sup> This issue is discussed in: Kilday and Watson, "Infanticide, Religion and Community," 85-86; Grey, "Discourses of Infanticide," 8-10.

<sup>38</sup> Jewkes, *Media & Crime*, 50-53. An example of scripts for infanticide stories was given in Section 3.5.

story that ends with the death of the child can fall in any of the four categories, depending on the type of violence. These subdivisions are in line with those made by criminologists. For example, Resnick differentiates between the killing of an unwanted baby within the first twenty-four hours (the infanticide category), other deliberate killings of children (the filicide category) and child battering in which death is an unintended result (abuse here). In a classification specific to women, d'Orban distinguishes between neonaticides (infanticide here), the mentally ill and retaliation (both included in filicides) and battering and killing by neglect (both covered by the abuse and neglect category).<sup>39</sup>

*Table 15* Typology of parental maltreatment stories.

The four categories with their key features and the number of cases.

Category	Description	No. of cases	Perpetrator			Setting	Victims	
			Mother	Father	Both	Foreign	Multiple	Killed
<i>Abandonment</i>	Permanent abandonment of a child	85	30%	37%	33%	5%	62%	4%
<i>Filicide</i>	Sudden killing of a child	141	36%	60%	4%	79%	70%	89%
<i>Infanticide</i>	Killing of a new-born child	157	87%	4%	9%	8%	4%	99%
<i>Abuse and neglect</i>	Physical abuse or neglect of a child	118	36%	50%	15%	33%	22%	30%

Source: [www.delpher.nl](http://www.delpher.nl), *Algemeen Handelsblad*, *Leeuwarder Courant*, *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, all issues in 1880, 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930; *Het Nieuws van de Dag*, all issues in 1880; *De Telegraaf*, all issues in 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930. Own analysis.

The construction by the press of these different categories of violence is discussed in the next section. It explores the differences in the circumstances (who committed these crimes and where) and the typical style elements. It also looks at the treatment of gender in these stories.

<sup>39</sup> Josephine Stanton and Alexander Simpson, "Filicide: a review," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 25 (2002): 1-14; Peter Sidebotham, "Rethinking Filicide," *Child Abuse Review* 22 (2013): 305-310; Ania Wilczynski, "Child-killing by parents. Social, legal and gender issues," in *Gender and Crime*, ed. R. Emerson Dobash, Russell P. Dobash, and Lesley Noaks (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), 167-180. Resnick's classification has also been used by Cohen in his study of American filicides between 1780 and 1840: Cohen, "Homicidal Compulsion," 743-747.

### 5.3 Representation of abandonment, abuse and neglect, infanticide, and filicide

#### *Abandonment*

Abandonment was a criminal offence in the Netherlands. Abandonment of a child up to the age of seven was a crime under the 1811 Penal Code, which was in effect in 1880. The 1886 Criminal Code extended this to cover all children, regardless of age, and any other dependents the perpetrator was legally obliged to care for. As the husband had a duty under marriage law to provide for his wife and family, men who abandoned their families could be prosecuted under the Criminal Code. Throughout the period 1880 to 1930, a handful of men and women were convicted every year under these laws (see also Section 2.6 and Appendix A for more on the legislation and prosecution). Abandonment also ran counter to all notions of parental devotion and responsibility. Moreover, because it left the dependants in penury and was often a product of poverty, it was particularly contentious in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the extent of state support for the 'deviant' poor was a subject of debate.<sup>40</sup>

The newspaper stories of parents abandoning their children were both brief and highly critical of the parents. As can be seen in Table 15, the stories almost always concerned children abandoned in the Netherlands, and rarely ended in the death of the victims (three deaths were reported, all of which involved foundling babies). The items were short and the headlines moralistic, either expressing compassion for the abandoned children (for example, "Poor little ones!") or disgust at the parents (for example, "Depraved parents!").<sup>41</sup> The items seem primarily designed to convey the newspaper's condemnation of the parents' behaviour and there was rarely any follow-up with information on what happened to the children.

The interest in abandonment stories therefore has to be seen in the light of the debates about neglected children that fuelled the 1905 Children's Acts. The stories often involve children who were discovered in public spaces, roaming the streets or parks. Reporting on abandonments reached a peak in the years prior to World War I, a period of crowded cities and concern about unsupervised street children.<sup>42</sup> By 1930, abandonment stories had virtually disappeared from the newspapers: only two cases were reported, compared with 33 in 1910. This was not due to a decline in the number of convictions – absolute numbers were stable and low anyway – but the newspapers no longer saw these

<sup>40</sup> Beate Althammer, "Introduction: Poverty and Deviance in the Era of the Emerging Welfare State," in *The Welfare State and the 'Deviant Poor' in Europe, 1870-1933*, ed. Beate Althammer, Andreas Gestrich, and Jens Gründler (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 9-17.

<sup>41</sup> "Arme kleinen!" *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 30 May 1910, 16; "Ontaarde ouders!" *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 30 June 1910, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Manneke, *Uit oogpunt van politie*, 53-67; Bakker, Noordman, and Rietveld-van Wingerden, *Vijf eeuwen*, 458-461.



stories is newsworthy. This may have been because by then an extensive social welfare and child protection system had been established to deal with these children. As a result, they were less visible and the question of who should support them was less urgent.

Many abandonment stories, when read against the grain, reveal the precarious position of poor families. Some items were about foundling babies, others about older individual children who had been thrown out of the house, but most stories concerned entire families of young children who had been left to their fate by their parents. Poverty and family breakups were key factors in these cases. Some cases involved parents on the margins of society such as vagrants or pedlars, where the children may have been left behind because the parents could no longer afford to keep them. In 1895, three children were found wandering around the streets of Rotterdam. They had been staying in a lodging house with their mother and had spent all day with her begging. In the unsympathetic words of the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*: "...this apparently did not bring in enough for the woman and yesterday she vanished into thin air, without the slightest concern for her children whom she left behind in the lodging house".<sup>43</sup>

Another vulnerable moment for children was when parents split up. If both parents walked out, children had to rely on other family members to take care of them but that too could be an insecure solution. In May 1910, police found two children aged three and five roaming outside early one morning in Breda. Their mother had left for another town some time ago, their father was away on a job and the grandparents had been looking after them. But it now turned out the grandparents had suddenly left for Rotterdam, abandoning the two children.<sup>44</sup>

Abandonment was a gendered crime. Both the law and socioeconomic conditions operated differently for fathers compared with mothers. As a result, it was effectively a crime committed by married fathers and single mothers. In the Dutch newspaper reports, just over a third of the abandonment cases involved fathers abandoning their families. The majority were married men who had deserted their wife and children; by law, this was a crime for men but not women. Mothers made up a further third of the cases but when information was given on their marital status, they were almost invariably single mothers (unmarried, widowed or divorced). In over half the cases of abandonment by the mother, their marital status was not given but as no mention was made of the children's father, it seems likely that these would have been single mothers too. This reflects the vulnerability of these women. While more help was being provided for single mothers by philanthropic

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<sup>43</sup> *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 21 March 1895, 5.

<sup>44</sup> "Dit scheen der vrouw [...] niet genoeg op te leveren en gisteren verdween zij met de Noorderzon, zonder zich om het lot harer kinderen te bekommeren, die zij in het logement achterliet." In "Arme kleinen!" *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 30 May 1910, 16.

organizations from the 1890s onwards, this often came with conditions attached: mothers had for example to be judged a victim of seduction rather than promiscuous.<sup>45</sup>

To conclude, while the facts of the cases suggest poverty was often a factor, the journalists adopted a moralistic tone that denied the relevance of socioeconomic factors. Rather than seeing abandonment as an act of desperation, they depicted it as a selfish move by parents eager to be rid of the burden of their offspring.

### ***Abuse and neglect***

Historians have studied conceptions of abuse and neglect among philanthropists and social workers, but have paid little attention so far to the representation of abuse and neglect in newspapers (except in the context of the child protection campaigns). Examination of the Dutch newspapers shows that stories usually featured extensive violence, presented as a kind of torture. Neglect only appeared when extreme in nature. Especially in the early years, the stories of abuse and neglect were used to paint a picture of the working classes as bad parents.

Abuse and neglect were portrayed as a working-class phenomenon. Stories came from both the Netherlands and abroad (33 per cent were foreign cases). Many of the foreign stories were relatively detailed trial reports from France and Germany, where the newspapers had correspondents, and these correspondents are likely to have been the source of the stories (perhaps taking them from foreign newspapers). In the chapter on intimate partner violence, it was contended that foreign stories provided a counterpoint to the imagined community of the Netherlands because they were out-of-the-ordinary tales involving un-Dutch behaviours and customs. The foreign tales of abuse and neglect provided a different kind of counterpoint: they were on a continuum with the Dutch stories from the late nineteenth century of degenerate working-class parents treating their offspring with callous cruelty. This transnational picture reinforced the message that such behaviour was a class-bound phenomenon. The stories of abuse and neglect took place amongst settled families rather than the marginal families in the abandonment stories. In the early years in particular, drink was regularly mentioned as a factor. In fact, the child-battering narratives in this period were closely connected to the accounts of spousal violence discussed in the previous chapter.

The articles on abuse and neglect were just as critical of the parents as the abandonment items but were more lurid. The items were almost twice as long on average. The headings were moralistic while at the same time stressing the cruelty (For example

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<sup>45</sup> Jansz, *Denken over sekse*, 87-88. The effect of the absence of the father on child mortality is discussed in: Jan Kok, Mattijs Vandezande, Kees Mandemakers, "Household Structure, Resource Allocation and Child Well-Being. A Comparison across Family Systems," *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 8, no. 4 (2011): 78-79, 92-96.

“Seven years of torture”; “An inhuman father”).<sup>46</sup> That set the tone for the article that followed. The articles on abuse often contained graphic descriptions of the acts of violence and the victims’ injuries and aimed for a sensational effect. For example, in 1895 readers of the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* learnt that a man in Chemnitz had been sentenced to prison for maltreating his sons aged five and ten. “He often tied their legs together and hung them up by the legs while holding their nose and mouth closed. During a meal, he stuck a thick end of steel wire in one boy’s mouth without any reason, so hard that the blood gushed out of the boy’s mouth; another time, he dragged him around the room by one ear, giving the boy a heavily bleeding skin tear”.<sup>47</sup> Although many cases involved extreme violence that ended in the victim’s death, the newspapers took a similar approach for more minor assaults too. The violence was presented as an act of torture and while sometimes ostensibly intended as punishment, out of all proportion to the child’s misdemeanour.

The stories of abuse often emphasized that the abuse had been going on for a long time. This is in contrast to the accounts of partner violence discussed in the previous chapter, where chronic abuse was downplayed or ignored. The stress on the structural nature of the abuse here serves to underline the cruel nature of the perpetrator. However, it also makes the position of neighbours rather ambiguous. The domestic violence stories showed chivalrous neighbours and bystanders intervening to protect the victim, thus emphasizing the abuser’s position as an outsider. Neighbours might also intervene in child abuse stories, but it often became clear from the accounts that the neighbours had been aware of the mistreatment for some time. An extract from the report of a Rotterdam trial in 1895 of a mother for abusing her eight-year-old daughter can serve as an illustration:

‘The child had been brought up by a grandmother from a very young age and had returned to her mother in no. 3 Breedestraat when she was seven. The witness C. Looij stated that the child had been healthy and sturdy when she came from the grandmother, but the girl soon went into decline. The neighbours often heard the child crying and the mother loudly scolding and raging at the child. The girl was covered in bruises and scratches in the face and hands.

The child said that these injuries had been caused by her mother, and also said that she didn’t get any food and was not allowed home sometimes. One of the

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<sup>46</sup> “Zevenjarige marteling,” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 17 May 1920, 3; “Een onmenselijke vader,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 22 November 1930, 5.

<sup>47</sup> “Dikwijls bond hij hunne beenen vast en hing hen aan de beenen op, terwijl hij hun neus en mond dichthield. Een der knapen stak bij hij het eten zonder eenige oorzaak een dik eind staaldraad zoo hevig in den mond, dat het bloed den knaap uit den mond gudste; een anderen keer sleurde hij hem aan een oor door de kamer, zoodat de knaap een hevig bloedende scheurwond bekwam.” “Een onmens,” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 16 July 1895, 6.

neighbours, Mrs Van Dijk, had seen the mother kick the girl in the stomach, making her fall over. The other four witnesses had not seen any abuse but had heard it.<sup>48</sup>

Lacking the violence of abuse cases, neglect was not as inherently newsworthy and generally tended to be reported only if it resulted in serious injury or death. Historians in Anglo-Saxon countries have seen a shift in focus by the child protection societies from abuse, when they started operating in the late nineteenth century, to neglect in the early twentieth century. For Shurlee, this is related to the professionalization of the societies as they became part of the wider welfare apparatus policing the poor. Ferguson puts the shift in the context of the medicalization of childhood and the increasing importance placed on hygiene.<sup>49</sup> This shift, if it indeed took place in the Netherlands too, was not evident in the newspapers as such everyday stories of physical neglect were not being reported. One form of neglect that did repeatedly appear in the newspapers was the ‘imprisoned child’ story, in which a child was locked away out of sight and uncared for, often over many years. Fifteen such stories were reported in all during the five sample years. Most were foreign cases but two ‘imprisoned children’ came to light in the Netherlands in 1920. In one, a boy of 19, one of three children, had been locked up for about ten years in Amsterdam. He had apparently worn the same underwear for three years and was filthy when discovered by the police.<sup>50</sup>

This story is typical of abuse and neglect stories in one regard, namely that they tended to involve a single victim. Whereas the victims in abandonment and filicides stories usually encompassed all the children in the family, in abuse and neglect stories one child would often be picked out (see Table 15). The phenomenon in which one particular child is targeted is known from modern studies and was also seen by Gordon in the US and by Yvorel in his analysis of nineteenth-century French court cases of child abuse.<sup>51</sup> The single victims in the Dutch newspaper stories were disproportionately likely to be boys, particularly if cases involving very young children (under five) are discounted. This may reflect newspapers’ judgement of what was newsworthy, but could also point to the greater potential for conflicts between boys and their parents. In several stories, there is a suggestion that the boy was physically deficient. In the aforementioned Amsterdam case,

<sup>48</sup> “Het kind was bij eene grootmoeder van hare vroegste jeugd al grootgebracht en met haar 7e jaar was het weder bij de moeder in de Breedestraat no. 3, teruggebracht. De getuige C. Looij, verklaart, dat het kind, toen het pas van de grootmoeder kwam er gezond en flink uitzag, doch dat het meisje spoedig begon te verminderen. De burens hoorden het kind meermalen huilen en de moeder luide tegen het kind schelden en razen. Het meisje zat vol blauwe plekken en krabben in het gelaat en aan de handen. Het kind vertelde, dat deze mishandelingen haar door hare moeder waren toegebracht, ook deelde het mede, dat het geen eten kreeg en soms niet thuis mocht komen. Een der burens, vrouw Van Dijk had gezien, dat de moeder het meisje een trap tegen den buik gaf, zoodat het achterover viel. De overige vier getuigen hadden geen mishandelingen zien plegen, doch hadden het wel gehoord.” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 7 May 1895, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Harry Ferguson, “The protection of children in time: child protection and the lives and deaths of children in child abuse cases in socio-historical perspective,” *Child and Family Social Work* 1 (1996): 208-209; Shurlee, “I am directed,” 247-250; Buckley, “Child Neglect,” 57-59; Emsley, *Hard Men*, 71.

<sup>50</sup> “Verwaarloozing,” *Leeuwarder Courant*, 29 September 1920, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Gordon, *Heroes*, 196-198; Yvorel, “La justice,” 22-23.

the boy had had to leave school because of a lung disease and general ill health. Such physical problems increased the burden on the parents, in particular as boys grew older and were expected to work and contribute to the family income.<sup>52</sup>

Both mothers and fathers featured in Dutch stories of abuse and neglect. There is evidence, as in the abandonment cases, that single mothers were in a particularly precarious position but that this was not being recognized by the journalists. For example, in 1910 the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* printed an unsympathetic story under the heading "Neglected child". Alerted by neighbours, the police gained access to the home of J.H., a woman who worked all day at a snack stall, leaving her two-year-old son unattended. The police found him in such a state that he had to be taken to hospital. Given that the newspaper report did not mention a husband, it seems likely that the mother was a single woman.<sup>53</sup> Gordon has given an excellent analysis of the double bind for single mothers wishing to avoid accusations of neglect by child protection agencies in this period. If they did not work, they were too poor to maintain the high standards of care expected of them. If they did find work, they were often unable to obtain or pay for childcare; they had to leave their children unattended and could therefore be accused of neglect for that reason.<sup>54</sup>

Gordon's analysis follows from her conclusion that the child protection services saw different roles for father and mothers: fathers were expected to be providers and mothers to be responsible for day-to-day care. Other historians also see gendered assumptions of parental roles at play in the child protection agencies and the criminal justice system. As a consequence, mothers rather than fathers were held responsible for neglect. Hogan, however, uses a late-nineteenth-century case of fatal neglect in Australia to argue that lay attitudes were changing, with an expectation that fathers too should be directly involved in the care of their children.<sup>55</sup> The Dutch newspaper articles do not point to a gendering of the crime of neglect – there are simply too few 'ordinary' neglect cases to make that connection. However, some stories suggest dispute about the extent of the father's responsibility. In the 1920 Amsterdam imprisonment case, the father, Mr Pietersen, claimed he was not responsible. He said he could do nothing about the fact that the boy did not even have clothes because he handed over his entire weekly pay packet to his wife. This interpretation of his role as limited to that of a financial provider was accepted by the police, but apparently not by the neighbours. While only the mother was charged for the

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<sup>52</sup> "Ergerlijk verwaarloosd," *De Telegraaf*, 30 September 1920, 6; De Regt, *Arbeidersgezinnen en beschavingsarbeid*, 130-132.

<sup>53</sup> "Verwaarloosd kind," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 26 July 1910, 9.

<sup>54</sup> Gordon, "Single Mothers".

<sup>55</sup> Hogan, "I Never Noticed," 309-310; Harry Ferguson, "The Protection of Children," 209; Shurlee, "I am directed," 252-255; Clapton, "Yesterday's Men," 1052-1056; Gordon, *Heroes*, 165-167.

boy's confinement, the father eventually had to move house because of the hostile reaction of the neighbours.<sup>56</sup>

Some of the stories of abuse by fathers involved spousal violence as well. Modern-day studies point to frequent coexistence of intimate partner violence and physical child abuse, often with the father as the perpetrator in both cases.<sup>57</sup> There was however little acknowledgement in the newspapers' accounts of the difficult position the mother with a violent partner might be in. This is evident in the reporting on the trial in 1880 of a mother, Anna Fasting, and her cohabiting partner Johannes de Raad for the beating to death of her two-year-old son.<sup>58</sup> De Raad regularly beat the child and had broken his arm one day. The next night, the boy started crying and De Raad attacked him 'like a madman'. After De Raad left for work, Anna took the child into bed with her; when she woke up later, he was dead. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* reported at great length on this case and was highly critical of the mother, calling her "culpable and appalling" (*laakbaar en afschuwelijk*) for allowing De Raad to abuse her child. Yet various facts revealed in the trial reports suggest a more nuanced situation. Fasting said she had been pregnant with De Raad's baby and was afraid he would abandon her if she did not cooperate with him. It also turned out that she had arranged to leave the child with another woman on occasion because she did not trust De Raad alone with the child. Despite this, the *Algemeen Handelsblad*'s verdict on Anna Fasting was devastating: "no regret, no tears, not a trace of maternal feeling" (*geen berouw, geen tranen, geen zweem van moederlijk gevoel*).<sup>59</sup>

### Infanticide

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the law on infanticide became more lenient in the Netherlands. In 1880, a separate article applied to infanticide by single mothers (subject to certain conditions) with a lower maximum sentence than for other homicides. In the 1886 Criminal Code, the scope was expanded to cover married women as well. In the decades that followed, unmarried women were increasingly viewed by philanthropists and women's organizations as victims of male irresponsibility and initiatives were taken to care for them. Given that convictions for infanticide (relative to the population) fell from the 1890s, it might seem that infanticide was becoming less of a problem.

The infanticide stories in Dutch newspapers do not give the impression that infanticide was fading as a phenomenon. While press coverage had the greatest impact in 1880, the newspapers continued to report on infanticide stories throughout the period.

<sup>56</sup> "De verwaarloosde jongen," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 2 October 1920, 10; "De jongen uit de alcoof!" *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 4 October 1920, 6; *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 15 October 1920, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Chris Goddard and Gillinder Bedi, "Intimate Partner Violence and Child Abuse: A Child-Centred Perspective," *Child Abuse Review* 19, (2010): 7-8. See too: Gordon, *Heroes*, 263-264.

<sup>58</sup> This is the case mentioned at the start of Chapter 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 21 January 1880, 6; "Doodslag," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 14 January 1880, 7; "Doodslag van een kind," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 15 January 1880, 6.

Moreover, the number of stories featuring alleged female perpetrators in the Netherlands was consistently two to three times higher than the number of convictions in that year, which suggests a low threshold – in other words, infanticide stories were considered inherently newsworthy. At the same time the articles were unemotional and painted a picture of infanticide as regrettable but a fact of life.

Dutch infanticide stories were of two types: items reporting the discovery of a dead baby and stories of the investigation and trial of alleged perpetrators. Very few of these cases took place outside the Netherlands. The items on dead babies were short, usually without a heading and included towards the end of the local 'City News' section. They were factual and unemotional with no expression of horror, even when the baby had been found by children.<sup>60</sup> The main source was likely to have been the local police: in some instances, the item explicitly asked anyone with any information to contact the police. It was rare for the discovery of a dead baby to be followed up by a report that the perpetrator had been found.<sup>61</sup> The overall impression given by these items is of infanticide as a common if regrettable crime, moreover one in which the perpetrator was unlikely to be caught.

Like the reports of dead babies, items on infanticide investigations and trials were matter-of-fact throughout the period. Emotive terms like 'drama' were almost never used. The most common heading was 'Infanticide' ('*Kindermoord*'), referring to the subject matter without any attempt to pass moral judgement or sensationalize the story. Items were often short; there were no long trial reports with verbatim dialogue comparable to the stories on lethal domestic violence. However, the impact of these infanticide stories was greater in the early years before the advent of New Journalism, when most articles were brief and sober. In 1880, three of the top five stories on private violence in the *Leeuwarder Courant* were infanticide cases. By 1930, the unemotional infanticide stories took up a much smaller proportion of the available column inches and they were overshadowed by more lurid crime items. Thus although the nature of the reports changed relatively little between 1880 and 1930, their function and effect did change.

The stereotypical infanticidal perpetrator is the single young woman, probably a servant girl, driven by a mixture of shame and poverty. Live-in servants were particularly vulnerable because they lacked the support of a family network and would also have lost their jobs immediately upon discovery of the pregnancy. Moreover, they were closely watched and therefore likely to be caught. Many studies of infanticide appear to confirm

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<sup>60</sup> A similar style of reporting for infanticide corpses has been observed in nineteenth-century England; see: Pegg, "Sweet Fanny Adams," 94.

<sup>61</sup> One exception involved a baby in a canal in Kampen and the subsequent arrest of a maid: *Leeuwarder Courant*, 1 July 1880, 2; *Leeuwarder Courant*, 9 July 1880, 2. Other studies also find that discoveries of a baby's corpse did not usually result in the perpetrator being tracked down: Lévesque, "Mères célibataires"; Leboutte, "Offense against Family Order," 164; Caron, "Killed by its Mother," 217.

this picture.<sup>62</sup> However, the reality is somewhat more complex. The definition of infanticide in a country's legislation or that used by the historian may exclude male perpetrators and married women *a priori*.<sup>63</sup> The involvement of men in infanticide has received very little attention in the literature.<sup>64</sup> Infanticide by married couples may often have gone undiscovered as they were more able to present baby deaths as accidental.<sup>65</sup> The dominance of servants is also to some extent simply a reflection that this was the largest occupational group for women; an American study covering the early twentieth century shows greater heterogeneity in infanticidal women's occupations. Nor were all female perpetrators that young.<sup>66</sup> In the Netherlands, it was already seen in Section 2.6 that older women in their thirties made up over a quarter of the infanticide offenders.

The Dutch newspaper reports give a relatively diverse picture of the perpetrator that reflects this more complex reality. To be sure, most reports concerned unmarried women, a significant proportion of whom are described as domestic servants. However, a few women were or had been married. In these cases, the baby may have been killed because it was evidence of extramarital sex.<sup>67</sup> Female perpetrators were not always that young, either: they could be in their late twenties or thirties. One such woman was Eltje Boelens, who was convicted in 1880 of the murder of her newborn baby. Although her position as an unmarried servant fits the typical profile of the infanticidal mother, she was 34 and had already given birth to two illegitimate children.<sup>68</sup>

Not all infanticides reported by the newspapers were committed just by the baby's mother. Some women were aided by the partner or other family members. Stories involving the woman's father or stepfather as a co-offender may actually have been incest cases. Fabienne Giuliani, in her study of incest in nineteenth-century France, calls infanticide was the "privileged companion" (*compagnon privilégié*) of incest; the incest provided a motive

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<sup>62</sup> Kilday and Watson, "Infanticide, Religion and Community," 88; Rattigan, "I Thought," 141-143; Margaret L. Arnot, "Understanding women committing newborn child murder in Victorian England," in *Everyday violence in Britain, 1850-1950*, ed. Shani D'Cruze (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 58-59; Spierenburg, *History of Murder*, 150-151; Randolph Roth, "Child Murder in New England," *Social Science History* 25, no. 1 (2001): 113-114; Frédéric Chauvaud, *Les criminels du Poitou au XIXe siècle* (La Crèche: Geste éditions, 1999), 163-72; Jolie Ermers, "Kindermoord in de negentiende eeuw: en om de vrouw verging het kind," *Nemesis* 6, no. 3 (1990): 115-116. On the vulnerable economic position of Dutch servants, see: K.P. Companje, "Geneeskundige zorg voor inwonend dienstpersoneel, 1890-1910," *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 1, no. 2 (2004): 27-29.

<sup>63</sup> Examples of a restrictive legal definition can be found in studies of the Netherlands and Germany, see: Richter, "Infanticide, Child Abandonment," 511; Ruberg, "Travelling Knowledge," 364-365. Leboutte defines infanticide as a crime by the mother, see: Leboutte, "Offense against Family Order," 162. Other studies use a broader definition but choose to focus solely on unmarried women, see for example: Rattigan, "I Thought," 135-136.

<sup>64</sup> Grey, "Discourses of Infanticide," 46-65.

<sup>65</sup> Leboutte, "Offense against Family Order," 163; Caron, "Killed by its Mother," 218.

<sup>66</sup> Caron, "Killed by its Mother," 217-218.

<sup>67</sup> For instance, one woman whose husband had been at sea for a long time killed the baby she had conceived out of wedlock: *Leeuwarder Courant*, 11 March 1880, 2.

<sup>68</sup> *Leeuwarder Courant*, 16 October 1880, 3.



for the murder of the baby, while the discovery of the infanticide was often the event that brought the incestuous relationship into the open.<sup>69</sup> Dutch journalists never explicitly spoke of incest, but the information in some cases seems to point in this direction (although it remains unknowable whether readers would have interpreted the stories in this way).<sup>70</sup> In a 1920 case, a 63-year-old smith and his 31-year-old daughter were tried for the murder of the daughter's newborn baby. The father had killed the baby in February that year by leaving it naked and exposed in his smithy, and had then buried it secretly. The daughter was accused of giving the father information and opportunity to carry the murder out. The possibility of incest is suggested by the fact that the case was tried *in camera*, which was not standard practice for infanticide trials but was for sex crimes, and that the father was eventually given the relatively harsh sentence of eight years while the daughter was found not guilty.<sup>71</sup>

Historians have debated the relative importance of shame and poverty in infanticide cases. For single mothers, both could be factors: the social stigma attached to illegitimacy could lead to ostracism and consequently destitution.<sup>72</sup> Jeffrey Richter, in a comparative study of German regions, argued that poverty was more important than shame even among single mothers; infanticide was also prevalent in areas where illegitimacy was common.<sup>73</sup> Married women may also have killed their babies because they lacked the financial resources to care for them, according to Katherine Watson.<sup>74</sup> The Dutch law on infanticide assumed it was an act driven by shame: it applied when the baby was killed for fear of discovery of the birth. However, some of the Dutch stories suggest material considerations rather than shame. The above-mentioned Eltje Boelens is a case in point. She had already had two illegitimate children so would be unlikely to feel the need to hide her pregnancy. On the other hand, she was clearly unable to support her children as her previous surviving child was being cared for by the poor board.<sup>75</sup> A case in 1910 shows that poverty could still be a reason even with the greater support being offered in this period. A 33-year-old single woman in Rotterdam was tried for infanticide. Like Boelens, she had also already had two children. She freely confessed that she had planned to kill the baby, not to conceal the birth but because she felt she could not possibly care for the child. Yet one of the witnesses at the trial was from *Vereeniging Onderlinge Vrouwenbescherming*, a woman's organization that helped unmarried mothers. This witness had been in contact with the woman for over a

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<sup>69</sup> Giuliani, *Les liaisons interdites*, 186-187.

<sup>70</sup> Rodrick has given a detailed analysis of a case of incest and infanticide in mid-Victorian where the newspapers had no compunction in mentioning the incest, see: Rodrick, "Melodrama and Natural Science," 75.

<sup>71</sup> "Kindermoord," *De Telegraaf*, 4 June 1920, 6; "Vader en dochter," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 28 September 1920, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Arnot, "Understanding Women," 57-58; Watson, "Religion, Community," 117.

<sup>73</sup> Richter, "Infanticide, Child Abandonment," 542-545.

<sup>74</sup> Watson, "Religion, Community," 117.

<sup>75</sup> *Leeuwarder Courant*, 16 October 1880, 3.

year and gave a good report of her character. Despite this contact, the woman had apparently felt she would be unable to cope with the new baby.<sup>76</sup>

Stories of women arrested and tried for infanticide largely took place in rural and small-town environments. However, the reports of dead babies were mainly of corpses found in urban public places not far from the newspaper headquarters. Bodies were often dredged up from canals or other waterways. Roth has noted that the increasing mobility in the nineteenth century made it easier for single women to commit infanticide and remain undetected. They could move to a city where they were anonymous, give birth to the baby and dispose of the body in rivers, lakes or garbage dumps, then move on.<sup>77</sup> In the Netherlands, the decades after 1880 saw rapid expansion of the big cities in the west and considerable migration from more rural areas, in particular of single young women. The corpses found in urban waterways suggest that Dutch women were indeed using the increased mobility and anonymity in the big cities to kill and dispose of illegitimate babies. The prevalence of rural and small-town settings in investigations and trials may therefore reflect the greater risk of discovery in those locations. In close-knit communities, other women in particular kept a sharp watch over single women's bodies and were aware of any signs of pregnancy.<sup>78</sup>

### ***Filicides***

In this study, filicide is defined as the deliberate and sudden killing of children other than new-born babies. Whereas infanticides were predominantly committed by the mother, filicides were perpetrated by both mothers and fathers (see Table 15). However, filicides too were highly gendered: there were differences between men and women in who they killed, and in the reasons that journalists gave for their actions.

Most filicide stories took place outside the Netherlands. Filicide was a rare event that was also frequently characterized by extreme violence: 70 per cent of the newspapers' cases involved multiple victims, often with entire families being wiped out.<sup>79</sup> The rarity and violence made filicides stories inherently newsworthy. Yet by the same token there was a limited 'supply' of filicide cases in the Netherlands and many of the stories accordingly came from abroad. Filicide articles were therefore particularly strongly influenced by trends in international newsgathering. In 1920, when international news was dominated by political stories in the aftermath of World War I, filicides stories virtually disappeared from the newspapers, having previously made up a quarter of all child maltreatment stories. Yet in

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<sup>76</sup> "Kindermoord," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 11 January 1910, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Roth, "Child Murder," 124.

<sup>78</sup> Willemijn Ruberg, "The tactics of menstruation in Dutch cases of sexual assault and infanticide, 1750-1920," *Journal of Women's History* 25, no. 3 (2013): 29-30; Rattigan, "I Thought," 138-139.

<sup>79</sup> Modern studies bear out that multiple deaths are a feature of filicides, see for example: Thea Brown, Danielle Tyson, Paula Fernandez Arias, "Filicide and Parental Separation and Divorce," *Child Abuse Review* 23, (2014): 83.

1930, reports of filicides were appearing about once a week on average. By this point, the newspapers were obtaining much of their foreign crime news from agencies, and 84 per cent of filicide items where a source was mentioned came from news agencies. A large proportion of the filicide stories took place in Germany or Eastern Europe, which was the domain of the Wolff news agency.

Like the foreign stories of partner violence, filicides stories were often out-of-the-ordinary tales involving high-status protagonists and reported in sensational language. One quarter of the foreign filicides were committed by middle-class or upper-class perpetrators. The items had attention-grabbing headlines that regularly described the event as a ‘drama’. Whereas the headlines in the abandonment, abuse and neglect cases gave moralizing statements about the perpetrator, the filicide headlines evoked horror at the incident (For example, ‘Appalling family drama’; ‘Madman kills his wife and four children’).<sup>80</sup> It is no coincidence that the populist papers *De Telegraaf* and the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* reported more of these sensational filicide cases than the upmarket *Algemeen Handelsblad* and *Leeuwarder Courant*.

Despite the sensational headlines, the accounts were usually brief with no follow-up, reducing the emotional impact of the items. There was relatively little detail on the actual act of violence, in contrast to the lengthy accounts of the ‘torture’ in abuse stories. That was particularly true of the foreign stories, which were generally covered in just one item a few lines long and with little information on the victims. But filicide stories in the Netherlands also often faded quickly because the perpetrator had committed suicide or was taken off to a mental hospital. After the newspapers had covered the initial incident, there was no trial to report on in subsequent items.

In the entire five years, only one Dutch filicide case went to trial, namely the 1930 murder by P. Stap in Rotterdam of his two children.<sup>81</sup> The coverage of this case in the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* shows the kind of extensive and emotive reporting a child-killing could attract given the ‘right’ circumstances: a crime that took place locally, with appealing victims and a lengthy investigation and trial. The first article set the tone with a poignant description of the murder: “[...] they found a man standing with a revolver in one hand and a knife stained with blood in the other. On the ground, in a large pool of blood, lay two children, a girl and a little boy; both had severe shot wounds in their heads.” This violence was contrasted with the everyday domestic scene just before (the landlady had dished out dinner and wanted everybody to sit up to table).<sup>82</sup> Subsequent articles informed readers of

<sup>80</sup> “Vreselijk familiedrama,” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 25 September 1930, 21; “Waaninnige doot zijn vrouw en vier kinderen,” *De Telegraaf*, 23 June 1930, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Arrests were reported in five other cases but no information followed about a trial.

<sup>82</sup> “[...] vonden zij een man staan, die in een hand een revolver had en in de andere een mes, dat met bloed bevlekt was. Op den grond lagen in een groote bloedplas twee kinderen, een meisje en een jongetje; beiden hadden zij ernstige schotwonden in het hoofd.” “Dubbele kindermoord in de Rubroekstraat,” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 12 July 1930, 13.

the background to the man's act, the children's funeral, the investigation and the trial. The two victims acquired more relief than in other filicide stories; the newspaper printed photographs of them and in the trial witnesses talked about what they were like.<sup>83</sup> The local newspaper's interest in this story reflected – and may have reinforced – the impact on the local community. The paper reported on local residents lining the street for the funeral procession, raising money for the children's gravestones after the insurers refused to pay up and crowding the public tribunes during the trial.<sup>84</sup> The detailed and empathic reporting on this story by the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* also serves to highlight the limited impact that other reports of child-killings had, despite their sensational language.



Report of a child murder in Rotterdam with photographs of the two victims and local residents outside the house. Source: "Dubbele kindermoord in de Rubroekstraat," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 12 July 1930, 13.

Figure 8 Item about a filicide in Rotterdam.

<sup>83</sup> "Het drama van de Rubroekstraat voor de rechtbank," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 17 October 1930, 10; "De kindermoord in de Rubroekstraat," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 30 October 1930, 29; "Dubbele Kindermoord in de Rubroekstraat," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 12 July 1930, 13.

<sup>84</sup> "Het drama in de Rubroekstraat," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 16 July 1930, 15; "De dubbele moord in de Rubroekstraat," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 6 October 1930, 21; "Volte op de tribune," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 16 October 1930, 13.

An analysis of the Dutch newspaper reports of filicides shows differences between mothers and fathers in who they killed (see Table 16). Of the 121 filicides that were committed by only one parent, about two-thirds were perpetrated by the father. As in intimate partner violence, men were more dangerous than women, both to their family and themselves. Whilst the majority of mothers killed only their offspring, fathers were more likely to kill their spouse and themselves as well. The effect of gender on filicide patterns has been considered in modern criminological studies, although direct comparisons of paternal and maternal filicides are rare and often involve samples that are too small to be more than indicative.<sup>85</sup> These studies confirm that both women and men commit filicides, although there is no conclusive evidence that fathers dominate. Stanton and Simpson do conclude in their review of filicide studies that “familicide, where spouse and children are killed, is virtually totally a male crime”, which tallies with the Dutch newspaper reports.<sup>86</sup>

*Table 16* Filicide victims by perpetrator sex.

Killed	Perpetrator			
	Father		Mother	
	No. of cases	%	No. of cases	%
<i>Children</i>	27	35%	25	58%
<i>Children and spouse</i>	15	19%	3	7%
<i>Children and suicide</i>	11	14%	14	33%
<i>Children and spouse and suicide</i>	25	32%	1	2%
<i>Total</i>	78	100%	43	100%

Source: [www.delpher.nl](http://www.delpher.nl), Algemeen Handelsblad, Leeuwarder Courant, Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad, all issues in 1880, 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930; Het Nieuws van de Dag, all issues in 1880; De Telegraaf, all issues in 1895, 1910, 1920 and 1930.

A particular concern of both criminologists and historians working on child-killings has been to understand the motives of the parents. Various classifications have been developed by criminologists, as was mentioned in Section 5.2 in the discussion of the typology of child maltreatment used in the present chapter.<sup>87</sup> Three common categories of intentional homicide (excluding neonates) emerge from these classifications that are also

<sup>85</sup> Li Eriksson et al., “Maternal and Paternal Filicide: Case Studies from the Australian Homicide Project,” *Child Abuse Review* 25, (2016): 18, 23; Stanton and Simpson, “Filicide: a Review,” 11; Brown, Tyson and Arias, “Filicide and Parental Separation,” 83.

<sup>86</sup> Stanton and Simpson, “Filicide: a Review,” 7; Ania Wilczynski, “Child Killing by Parents: a Motivational Model,” *Child Abuse Review* 4, (1995): 367; Marieke Liem, Michiel Hengeveld, Frans Koenraadt, “Kinderdoding gevolgd door een ernstige poging tot zelfdoding. Drie modaliteiten van geweld,” *Tijdschrift voor Criminologie* 51, no. 3 (2009): 267; Brown, Tyson and Arias, “Filicide and Parental Separation,” 83.

<sup>87</sup> Some of the best known are by Resnick, Wilczynski and (for women only) D’Orban, see: Wilczynski, “Child Killing by Parents,” 365-369; Stanton and Simpson, “Filicide: a Review,” 3-4.

seen in the Dutch newspaper reports and in other historical studies. The first is killing during a psychosis or some other mental illness. The second is altruistic killing, in which the child is killed because this is thought to be in its best interests. Often this is followed by suicide because the parent feels they are failing to live up to society's standards and are unable to look after their offspring properly; the child's death is then a form of extended suicide. The third category is the retaliatory killing: killing the child as an act of retaliation against the partner after the breakdown of the relationship. The anger against the partner is displaced onto the child.<sup>88</sup> Sidebotham observes that the intentional killings covered in the second and third categories can be thought of as a form of excessive control. From that perspective, killing the entire family, including the partner, and then committing suicide can seem the only way to maintain control and the sacred unity of the family.<sup>89</sup>

Some filicides reported by the Dutch newspapers fitted the description of altruistic killings. These were often murders followed by suicide when the parent felt unable to provide for their children for financial reasons. In the view of the parent, there was no future for the children and it was an act of love to kill them. In 1910, a woman in Zeist killed herself and her four-month-old baby, leaving a letter for her husbands in which she said she preferred death to this poverty. The family had been living in impoverished circumstances as the father was frequently unemployed for long periods at a time.<sup>90</sup> The perpetrator in this story was the mother but the explanation of financial worries was mainly used for filicides perpetrated by fathers. It fitted with a worldview in which the father's role was to provide financially for his family. Even when the family was not on the breadline, financial worries could still be seen by the reporters as a credible explanation for the act. In 1930, a miller in the east of the Netherlands killed his fifteen-year-old daughter and attacked his wife before hanging himself. The man had had several businesses, all of which had failed. He had recently sold his last company and now the lease on his home had ended; the family had nowhere to go. The consensus of the newspapers was that the man had acted in desperation, driven by his financial problems.<sup>91</sup> In her study of Australian paternal filicides, Kaladelfos also finds that financial ruin was used as an explanation by fathers and seen as a plausible motive by others. She explains this by pointing to the importance of being the breadwinner to men's sense of identity. Similarly, Shepherd argues that in Victorian Britain,

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<sup>88</sup> Stanton and Simpson, "Filicide: a Review," 3-4; Wilczynski, "Child Killing by Parents," 366-368; Liem, Hengeveld, and Koenraadt, "Kinderdoding," 263-264. These three categories are explicitly used by Cohen in his study of familicides in the early American Republic: Cohen, "Homicidal Compulsion," 743-747. Most of the cases in Kaladelfos' study of paternal filicides in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Australia also fit these three categories, although she does not refer to them explicitly: Kaladelfos, "The Dark Side". Shepherd's study of paternal filicides in Victorian Britain focuses specifically on the insane: Shepherd, "One of the Best," 2-3.

<sup>89</sup> Sidebotham, "Rethinking Filicide," 307; Liem, Hengeveld, and Koenraadt, "Kinderdoding," 272-273.

<sup>90</sup> "Het drama te Zeist," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 19 January 1910, 1; "Het drama te Zeist," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 29 January 1910, 1.

<sup>91</sup> "Familiedrama te Steenderen," *De Telegraaf*, 5 May 1930, 5.

the “man’s desire to provide for his family was viewed as innate” and there was sympathy for men who committed filicide for reasons of poverty.<sup>92</sup>

In other cases, the filicide is described by the newspapers as the result of marital conflict and an act of deliberate revenge. This is the category of retaliatory murders in which the aim is to make the spouse suffer. For example, a labourer in Rennes confessed to killing his three-year-old daughter, saying he wanted to take revenge on his wife “because she made his life unbearable” (*omdat zij hem het leven ondraaglijk maakte*).<sup>93</sup> In other stories, the revenge element is absent: these are murder-suicides, acts of desperation in an unhappy marriage in which the parent takes their children with them.

The most common single explanation for filicides, however, was ‘madness’, accounting for about 40 per cent of filicides where a reason was given. In fact, ‘madness’ seems to have been the default assumption for filicides stories. In an 1880 story of a man in Alsace who tried to drown his three children, the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* wrote that “It has not yet been established whether the man acted in an attack of madness”.<sup>94</sup> Some perpetrators were clearly psychotic from the description of the incident. A woman in The Hague killed her seven-year-old daughter with an axe, went out to tell a policeman and explained she had been told by God to sacrifice her child just like Isaac.<sup>95</sup> However, even when financial worries were given as the reason for the act, a perpetrator could still be described as acting in a fit of madness.<sup>96</sup> This gave expression to the incongruity of a seemingly loving parent using such violence against their own child. Kaladelfos sees the same reaction in her study of Australian cases: onlookers say the perpetrator must have been demented as that is the only way they can make sense of the incident.<sup>97</sup> The question of parents’ natural bonds with their children and madness as an ‘explanation’ for the inexplicable is one of the subjects explored in the following section on journalists’ attitudes to child maltreatment.

## 5.4 Sympathy and condemnation

Section 5.2 showed that despite the public debate about child protection and the introduction of the Children’s Acts, newspapers devoted relatively little space to stories of physical maltreatment. On the other hand, we have also seen that journalists could be highly critical of parents who abandoned or abused their children. This section looks further at journalists’ expressions of sympathy and condemnation and how this ties in with debates about gender, leniency and parental bonds. As in the chapter on intimate partner violence,

<sup>92</sup> Kaladelfos, “The Dark Side,” 340; Shepherd, “One of the Best,” 6-7.

<sup>93</sup> “Uit wraak zijn kind vermoord,” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 19 March 1930, 14.

<sup>94</sup> “Of de man in een aanval van waanzin gehandeld heeft, is nog niet uitgemaakt.” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 9 November 1880, 2.

<sup>95</sup> “Kindermoord,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 10 July 1930, 3.

<sup>96</sup> “Wederom: de vlag van waanzin...,” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 14 November 1930, 23.

<sup>97</sup> Kaladelfos, “The Dark Side,” 343-344.

it is argued that the imagined community is a good starting point for understanding journalists' attitudes to different kinds of perpetrators.

The journalists invariably expressed great sympathy for the child victims, regardless of the category of crime or age or sex of the victim. There was no sign of the blurring of the endangered child and dangerous child that was often seen in the discourse of '*verwaarlozing*' in the child protection campaign.<sup>98</sup> There is never any suggestion that the children might have done anything to provoke their treatment, thus excluding the possibility that the maltreatment was simply excessive chastisement. Articles use the Dutch diminutive form even for teenagers to emphasize the smallness and vulnerability of the victims, and they were referred to by tender terms such as "poor lambs" (*arme schapen*).<sup>99</sup> Yet there is an ambivalence to the sympathy as the victims in these stories are rather generic – they are an 'idea' of children rather than real, individual children.<sup>100</sup> Very little information was given about the children in any particular case. Sometimes the age and sex were given, but over 90 per cent of the newspaper stories never mentioned the children's names. There is no background information about the children in the articles, and the victims play a passive role in the description of the events, with no reported speech. As a result, the child victims remain indistinct and it is difficult for the reader to empathize with them. Only in one or two exceptional cases, such as the above-mentioned murder by P. Stap of his two children, did the victims acquire more relief.

If the articles were uniform in their sympathy for the victims, the same cannot be said for their attitude to the perpetrators: some were roundly condemned while others were treated as tragic unfortunates and yet others were described in neutral terms. Journalists' attitudes need to be seen in the context of the imagined community created by the newspapers' content. Jewkes states that crime news bolsters "the consensual values of an 'imagined community'" by stigmatizing perpetrators and sentimentalizing victims.<sup>101</sup> With the increasing focus on domesticity in Dutch society at this time, one of the most important values was that parents should love and protect their children. Parents who violated this norm by abusing, neglecting or abandoning their children or by killing them as an act of revenge against the partner were treated as outsiders who were acting selfishly or cruelly. These parents were regularly described as depraved (*ontaard*), cruel (*wreed*) or inhuman monsters (*monster, onmenselijk*). In the early years, when the Dutch imagined community as constructed in the newspapers excluded the working class, such behaviour was associated with the lower classes, part of a narrative of the depraved 'other' that also

<sup>98</sup> Weijers, "Debate on Juvenile Justice," 74-78.

<sup>99</sup> "Ergerlijke verwaarloozing," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 21 March 1930, 2; "Wie zal voor de kinderen zorgen?" *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 11 February 1910, 1.

<sup>100</sup> This phrase comes from Ambroise-Rendu, who speaks of "idées de victimes" in a study of newspaper reporting on the sexual abuse of children: Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu, "Un siècle de pédophilie dans la presse (1880-2000) : accusation, plaidoirie, condamnation," *Le Temps des médias* 1, no. 1 (2003): 34.

<sup>101</sup> Jewkes, *Media & Crime*, 285.



encompassed the accounts of domestic violence discussed in the previous chapter. Around the turn of the century, as the idea of the nation expanded to encompass the respectable working classes, newspaper accounts of maltreatment focused on people on the margins of society in abandonment stories. By the interwar period, there were few stories of abuse, neglect and abandonment involving Dutch parents, and the perpetrators were presented as deviant individuals rejected by their local community. At the other end of the spectrum were the filicide stories where the motive ascribed by the journalists was altruism or madness. Rather than violating society's norms, these perpetrators were seen as loving parents who performed a delusional act. Accordingly, these parents were treated with sympathy. Moreover, most of these stories came from abroad, reassuringly outside the Dutch imagined community. Where they involved Dutch families, it is noticeable that these were often respectable members of society firmly embedded in the imagined community, such as the miller mentioned in the previous section who killed his daughter before committing suicide. These stories were similar to the partner violence stories that were presented as a 'tragedy for all'.

The infanticide stories form a special case as their neutral tone and lack of empathy seems surprising. In the previous chapter, it was argued that journalists became increasingly sympathetic to the women involved in intimate partner violence as female readers became a target for newspapers and women acquired a voice in public life. Moreover, unmarried mothers were increasingly seen by philanthropists as the victims of male sexuality, as was discussed in Chapter 2. Studies of newspaper coverage of infanticide in Britain have shown that journalists were often sympathetic to the female perpetrators, but that is not what we see in the Dutch newspapers.<sup>102</sup> The infanticide items were matter-of-fact with little evidence of sympathy for the perpetrator. The articles paid little attention to the events leading up to the killing. Articles involving single women were almost invariably silent on the subject of the father: these women were not being presented as victims of unscrupulous seducers or of a courtship gone wrong.

A number of points can be made clarifying the tone of Dutch infanticide coverage. Firstly, there was some softening over time in journalists' attitudes to infanticidal women. In 1880, the full name of the perpetrator was given as a shaming device in the relatively high number of four investigations and trials, but such harsh reporting was rarely seen in later years.<sup>103</sup> Secondly, the British findings need to be placed in the context of the British legal system. Until 1922, infanticide was not a separate crime and the murder of a new-born baby carried a mandatory death sentence. Even if the sentence was invariably commuted, the law

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<sup>102</sup> Goc, *Women, Infanticide*, chap. 6; Grey, "Discourses of Infanticide," 37-87.

<sup>103</sup> *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 20 January 1880, 2; *Leeuwarder Courant*, 11 August 1880, 1; *Leeuwarder Courant*, 11 December 1880, 2; *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 14 December 1880, 2; *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 22 July 1880, 3; *Het Nieuws van de Dag*, 28 July 1880, 2; *Leeuwarder Courant*, 29 July 1880, 1.

was out of step with public opinion, which found the punishment disproportionate.<sup>104</sup> In the Netherlands, on the other hand, the death sentence had been abolished and prison sentences were low.<sup>105</sup> There was no sense that the perpetrator deserved sympathy because the punishment was out of proportion to the crime. Finally, it is noticeable that the few occasions when the Dutch journalists did express some sympathy for the perpetrator concerned women who were already mothers. Their actions could be explained as a wish to do the best for their other children, and consequently fitted better with Dutch society's ideal of the loving, caring mother.<sup>106</sup> Infanticide by childless women was an act against the family, aimed at preventing motherhood.<sup>107</sup> The greater availability over time of facilities for unmarried mothers may in fact have made this act seem more inexcusable.

In their coverage of child maltreatment cases, reporters' views of what constituted excessive cruelty were not necessarily aligned with the criminal justice system: the press often particularly criticized parents who had committed relatively minor offences in the eyes of the law. The journalists reserved their greatest criticism for the kinds of incidents, such as abandonment, that received relatively light sentences. One incident took place in 1895 that was considered horrific enough to be reported in all four newspapers, even though it occurred in the relatively inaccessible north-east of the country. A skipper watched his son drown without making any attempt to save him. As the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*'s headline put it, this was a "Father without a father's heart".<sup>108</sup> Yet the prison sentence was only three months. What offended the reporters was the violation of 'natural' parental bonds.

The extent to which fathers as well as mothers were – and are – assumed to have an innate bond with their offspring is the subject of debate among scholars. In a study of modern-day child killings, the criminologist Wilczynski observes that female perpetrators are more likely to receive psychiatric treatment while men receive custodial sentences. She concludes that the justice system treats women's violence against their own children as irrational and aberrant whereas men's child-killings are seen as less surprising. Men's acts of violence against their own children are not seen as surprising.<sup>109</sup> Gabriel Cavaglion sees the same distinction being made in modern Israeli press coverage of parents who kill.

<sup>104</sup> Goc, *Women, Infanticide*, chap. 6; Ward, "The Sad Subject," 163-165.

<sup>105</sup> All but three of the sentences reported in the newspapers were for three years or less.

<sup>106</sup> See for example: *Leeuwarder Courant*, 2 April 1910, 2; "Verduistering van een kinderlijkje," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 16 May 1910, 3.

<sup>107</sup> Leboutte, "Offense against Family Order," 184.

<sup>108</sup> *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 21 November 1895, 1; "Een ontaarde vader," *De Telegraaf*, 8 November 1895, 2; "Een ontaarde vader," *Leeuwarder Courant*, 11 November 1895, 2; "Vader zonder vaderhart," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 11 November 1895, 6.

<sup>109</sup> Ania Wilczynski, "Mad or Bad? Child-Killers, Gender and the Courts," *British Journal of Criminology* 37, no. 3 (1997): 423-424.

Motherhood, he argues, is seen as a natural bond whereas fatherhood is learned.<sup>110</sup> Historians of Victorian Britain have also argued for a mad/bad dichotomy in the treatment of parents who killed. Shepherd, however, questions such an analysis. She concludes that men *were* expected to love their children and men who had been affectionate fathers before the filicide were found insane because their act seemed beyond reason; it *was* surprising behaviour.<sup>111</sup>

The stories in the Dutch newspaper stories accord with Shepherd's conclusion. Fathers were expected to love and care for their children – have a father's heart – just as much as mothers were. Journalists made gendered assumptions about parents' roles but not about parental bonds with their offspring. In the filicide stories, madness (which scholars see as an 'explanation' for aberrant behaviour) was therefore commonly given by journalists as a reason for men's behaviour as well as for women's violence.

Scholars have also debated whether stepparents are more likely to attack their children than biological parents because of the lack of such an innate bond. One argument for this is based on evolutionary psychology, as set out in an influential article on homicides in the family by Daly and Wilson. They contend that parents care for their genetic offspring in order to increase the likelihood that the children will reproduce and pass on their genes. The the authors predict that stepparents are therefore more likely to assault their stepchildren than genetic parents their genetic offspring, and they produce data that confirms this.<sup>112</sup> Evolutionary psychology has had a mixed response among historians, although some, notably John Carter Wood and Randolph Roth, see it as a promising avenue for understanding violence.<sup>113</sup> However, there are problems with evolutionary psychology as an explanation for family violence. Firstly, there are alternative and equally valid explanations for the patterns that are predicted by evolutionary psychology. For example, Daly and Wilson argue that parents will invest more in children close to the reproductive age so are more likely to kill younger children.<sup>114</sup> Yet it may equally be the case that older children are better able to defend themselves or escape. Secondly, it is not actually clear that the data do support the arguments from evolutionary psychology. Regarding the greater risk of violence from stepparents, Stanton and Simpson in their review of the filicide literature find the stepparent relationship to be a risk factor only in specific categories of

<sup>110</sup> Cavaglione, "Fathers who Kill," 139-140; Gabriel Cavaglione, "Bad, mad or sad? Mothers who kill and press coverage in Israel," *Crime, Media, Culture* 4, no. 2 (2008): 273-274.

<sup>111</sup> Shepherd, "One of the Best"; Ainsley, "Some Mysterious Agency," 45-46.

<sup>112</sup> Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, "Evolutionary Social Psychology and Family Homicide," *Science* 242, (1988): 519-520.

<sup>113</sup> J. Carter Wood, "The limits of culture? Society, evolutionary psychology and the history of violence," *Cultural and Social History* 4, no. 1 (2007): 95-114; John Carter Wood, "A change of perspective. Integrating Evolutionary psychology into the historiography of violence," *British Journal of Criminology* 51, (2011): 479-498; Randolph Roth, "Biology and the deep history of homicide," *British Journal of Criminology* 51, (2011): 535-555; Manuel Eisner, "Human evolution, history and violence. An introduction," *British Journal of Criminology* 51, (2011): 473-478.

<sup>114</sup> Daly and Wilson, "Evolutionary Social Psychology," 522.

parental violence, such as fatal abuse by men; killings followed by suicide, on the other hand, are particularly likely to involve biological children.<sup>115</sup> Gordon found no overrepresentation of stepparents in her study of abuse in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century America.<sup>116</sup>

Stepparents appear in the Dutch newspaper reports on the maltreatment of children, but predominantly in certain kinds of cases. Stepparents were involved in about five per cent of abandonment and filicides cases but a quarter of abuse and neglect stories. This does not fit with the evolutionary model of parental violence, which would surely predict equally high proportions of stepparents for all categories of maltreatment. It may reflect the actual involvement of stepparents in child maltreatment cases.<sup>117</sup> It certainly accords with a worldview in which biological parents were expected to have a natural loving bond with their children that precluded deliberate cruelty. Journalists may have explicitly mentioned stepparents in abuse and neglect stories because the absence of a biological relationship made the behaviour more comprehensible.

As mentioned above, another way for journalists to make parental violence more comprehensible was to ascribe it to madness. While mental instability was cited as a factor in Dutch maltreatment stories, there are differences with respect to the discourse in Britain, which has been the subject of much of the work on insanity and child maltreatment. Moreover, the newspaper reports reveal a lay understanding of madness that differed from the expert understanding of Dutch psychiatrists. In the Dutch press coverage, insanity was only used as an explanation in filicide stories. Infanticide was never portrayed as an act of madness, in contrast with Britain, where the mother's actions were regularly attributed to puerperal insanity.<sup>118</sup> That must largely reflect the different legal discourses: while mental illness defences were common in British infanticide trials, that was not the case in the Netherlands and this seems to have been reflected in the newspaper reporting (see also the discussion in Section 2.5).<sup>119</sup> When madness was used as an explanation by Dutch journalists, the reports reveal a distinction between a common-sense understanding of 'madness' and the expert label of psychological disorder.<sup>120</sup> Journalists portray madness as a sudden attack that is out of character, incomprehensible and unpredictable. Such incidents are typically described as "a fit of madness" (*een vlaag van waanzin*). The perpetrator is

<sup>115</sup> Stanton and Simpson, "Filicide: a Review," 2, 7-8. Studies published since this review also show that step-parents are prevalent only in certain categories of killings: Liem, Hengeveld, and Koenraadt, "Kinderdoding," 269; Brown, Tyson and Arias, "Filicide and Parental Separation," 82-84.

<sup>116</sup> Gordon, *Heroes*, 199-202, 352.

<sup>117</sup> This possibility cannot be discounted although the percentage seems high: Gordon found stepparents were responsible for 13 per cent of child abuse in her study. See: Gordon, *Heroes*, 200.

<sup>118</sup> Grey, "Discourses of Infanticide," 201-261; Marland, "Getting Away with Murder?" The same apparently applied in Australia, see: Kaladelfos, "The Dark Side," 336.

<sup>119</sup> Ruberg, "Travelling Knowledge".

<sup>120</sup> This distinction and the analysis that follows are also based on and apply to cases of intimate partner violence and sexual violence.

treated with sympathy as someone who is seen as not responsible for their actions.<sup>121</sup> In other Dutch cases, psychiatrists determined that the perpetrator had psychological problems, but this conclusion might only be drawn at the end of the trial and therefore did not colour the journalists' reporting. As described in Chapter 2, psychiatrists became increasingly involved in the administration of justice in the Netherlands from the turn of the century, and by 1930 a new measure had been introduced that allowed detention in a penal psychiatric institution in the event of diminished responsibility. A number of stories of family and sexual violence mention psychiatric reports or sentencing to a psychiatric institution. The case mentioned earlier of P. Stap, who murdered his two children in Rotterdam, can serve as an illustration. Psychiatrists reported on their findings at the end of the trial and the man was sentenced to one year in prison followed by detention in a psychiatric institution. However, journalists had already been reporting on the case for several months by then. They had portrayed the father not as mad but as a man with financial worries who killed his children because he felt he could not provide for them.<sup>122</sup>

Journalists could also have excused parents in child maltreatment cases by pointing to environmental factors such as poverty, but they did not do this. Modern criminological studies identify environmental stress, for example from financial problems, poor housing and isolation, as a contributory factor in abuse, neglect and child-killings.<sup>123</sup> Many items in the Dutch reports bear this out. Parents killed their children because they were unable to provide for them, children were abandoned by vagrant parents and neglected by the unemployed. Gender was at work here too and single mothers appear to have been a particularly vulnerable group. They formed the majority of infanticide perpetrators and were also reported as abandoning their children, abusing them and neglecting them. In a society that promoted the breadwinner model, it was difficult for single mothers to both satisfy the requirements of a proper home and earn the income needed to finance this.<sup>124</sup> The journalists' reports, however, rarely explicitly acknowledge these environmental factors. It was noted in Section 3.5 that 'individualism' is an important news value. Journalists personalize stories and highlight individual contributions to crime while avoiding more impersonal socioeconomic explanations, as this simplifies stories.<sup>125</sup> In the Dutch press, maltreatment was presented as a result of the moral failings or delusional altruism of specific parents. For the newspapers, ascribing the abuse and neglect of children to individual pathology rather than societal causes absolved the wider community from responsibility. The affair of the widow Mrs De Rijk, which was discussed in the first section,

<sup>121</sup> Wilkinson, "Psychische stoornissen," 391-392. The distinction between lay and medical definitions of insanity is discussed in: Ward, "The Sad Subject," 166-169.

<sup>122</sup> "De dubbele kindermoord in de Rubroekstraat," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 15 July 1930, 13; "Het drama van de Rubroekstraat voor de rechtbank," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 17 October 1930, 10; "De kindermoord in de Rubroekstraat," *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 30 October 1930, 29.

<sup>123</sup> Wilczynski, "Child-killing by Parents"; Stanton and Simpson, "Filicide: a Review," 5-10.

<sup>124</sup> Gordon, "Single Mothers," 174-175.

<sup>125</sup> Jewkes, *Media & Crime*, 53.

had an important message in that respect as it allowed the newspapers to distinguish between poverty and neglect, and argue that poverty did not necessarily lead to neglect. And while Mrs De Rijk had influential advocates who obtained favourable media publicity for her case, there were no claimsmakers publicizing parents' physical maltreatment of children and the role played by socioeconomic factors: their behaviour never became a social problem.

### Conclusion

This chapter started from the premise that the focus on protecting children from the 1890s onwards in state policies and philanthropic activities would lead to stories of child maltreatment becoming more prominent in the Dutch newspapers. This did not happen. Certainly, journalists were highly critical of parents who abused, neglected or abandoned their children, but items were brief and sympathy for victims was formulaic and impersonal. Except in 1880, far less space was devoted to child maltreatment than to intimate partner violence. The newspapers' coverage of the Children's Acts reinforced the idea that the real problem was moral neglect, and there were no claimsmakers challenging that viewpoint. It is not clear why newspapers were not covering stories of physical maltreatment. Were there simply too few such incidents, were newspapers not hearing of such incidents or did the journalists not see them as appealing for readers? However, we can certainly conclude based on agenda-setting theory, that parents' maltreatment of their children in the Netherlands would not have been seen as a salient issue by readers after 1880.<sup>126</sup>

A second key question in this chapter was the influence of gender in the newspapers' portrayal of the perpetrators. Gender operated at two levels: mothers and fathers committed different kinds of crimes because of differences in their socioeconomic circumstances and the gendered justice system, and the newspapers interpreted their actions based on gendered assumptions about parental roles – but there is no evidence that mothers' violence was seen as more unnatural than fathers' violence. Women, especially single women, committed infanticide and abandoned their children for reasons of poverty. Men were charged with abandonment because of their duty to provide. Men were more violent: they were more likely than women to kill children other than neonates and to commit filicide. Journalists often linked men's filicides to their failure to fulfil their financial responsibilities. There is some evidence that mothers were held more responsible for the physical care of their offspring. But gender was not a primary determinant of journalists' evaluation of parental behaviour. Both mothers and fathers were expected to have a strong natural bond with their biological children; parents who abandoned, abused or neglected their children were strongly criticized while affectionate parents who committed filicides from delusional love or a fit of madness were treated as unfortunates.

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<sup>126</sup> McCombs and Shaw, "The agenda-setting function," 184.

## Chapter 5

This chapter and Chapter 4 have considered newspapers' reporting of physical violence within the family. The next chapter looks at sexual violence. This too could take place within the family, for example in incest cases. But sexual violence could also occur outside the home, perpetrated by acquaintances or by strangers. This gave journalists more possibilities for portraying the perpetrator as an outsider.