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Registration of Vital Events In Iraq

International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics
9650 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20014
U.S.A.

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FOREWORD

Iraq is one of the countries where the birth and death registration function is in the Ministry of Health. The primary responsibility for registration is in the hands of the attendant at birth or the medical attendant of the deceased. In the event that there was no attendant at birth, the parents or relatives must report the birth. In case of death without medical attention, the nearest health office is to be notified by the relatives of the deceased, or the report must be made by the mayor with two witnesses.

Registration of births and deaths in Iraq is deficient. In order to provide a valid measure of population change, a sample registration system was put into operation in 1973. This supplemental source of data has also provided a measure of under registration of births and deaths which are referred to in this report.

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Registration of Vital Events in Iraq

by

Adnan S. Al-Rabie

Director of Vital and Health Statistics

Ministry of Health

Iraq

SCOPE AND UTILITY OF CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM

There are three main reasons for the development of a good civil registration system:

- 1) The legal or evidentiary value of a registration record to the individual.
- 2) The use in public health programmes.
- 3) The value in socio-economic and demographic planning.

From these reasons it is clear that a civil registration system has two aspects: those that affect the individual/family, and those that affect the community or country.

For the individual/family, the civil registration provides legal evidence of the birth which is necessary for proof of age, identity card, school admission, etc; and, legal evidence of death which is necessary for insurance claims, succession rights to property, family allowance, etc.

From the description of the uses of a civil registration system given above, it is clear that a registration method may be defined as "the continuous, permanent and compulsory recording of the occurrence and the characteristics of vital events, primarily for their value as legal documents as provided by law and secondarily, for their usefulness as a source of statistics for health planning and socio-economic development." Because a civil registration system gives a continuous, permanent and legal record of vital events (births and deaths), it is necessary to develop this system.

REGISTRATION OF VITAL EVENTS IN IRAQ

In Iraq, the registration of births and deaths has been compulsory for the last 30 years. Law No. 30 of 1947 required legal registration of births and deaths. In order to meet the current requirements, Law No. 148 was enacted in 1971 to deal with the registration of births and deaths. This law is implemented by the Ministry of Health through its

health establishments in the field and the Director of Vital and Health Statistics, Ministry of Health, Baghdad.

Registration procedure

The events to be registered under Law No. 148 are births, deaths and foetal deaths. Whenever a birth occurs, a certificate is issued in three copies by the attending doctor, midwife or nurse licensed in obstetrics. In the case of a death (or a foetal death), the attending doctor or the doctor performing the medical examination of the dead body issues a death certificate in three copies. The fair copy of these certificates is sent to the 'competent health authority' for registering the birth/death in the proper register. After registering, the fair copy is sent within seven days to the Census Office for entry in the parents' census book, and issuance of an identity card, etc. The second copy is given to the person concerned (parent, relative, etc.) immediately after certification. Article 14 of the Law prescribes that no dead body can be buried without a death certificate. The third copy is preserved by the health authority in the hospitals, doctor, midwife or nurse issuing the certificate.

Registration consists of two stages; the issuance of a certificate birth/death/foetal death, and the registration of the birth/death/foetal death. Articles 2-5 deal with current birth registration and Articles 7-10, 12, 13 deal with current death registration. Article 16 provides for registration of late events on the basis of a Hejje or court order. Article 20 prescribes that for a foetal death the period of pregnancy is for a minimum period of seven months.

Information which is to be recorded in the certificates have to be in accordance with the identity of the parent as issued by the Census Office. But if such a document is not available, then the information will be based on the statement made by the parent or any person responsible for giving such information (Articles 6, 11).

In the case of babies with unknown parents, the juvenile court communicates the decision to the Ministry of Health which issues the certificate of birth under Article 19.

Maintenance of registers

Any person or establishment issuing or authenticating a certificate of birth or death keeps a special register to enter all the information included in such certificates (Article 21). The person responsible for the graveyard enters the information given in the death certificate in a special register (Article 14). The competent health authority enters the information contained in the certificates or the legal document or court order, in a register of births and register of deaths, as the case may be (Article 15). The Census Office enters in the register the information on births

and deaths according to the certificates, legal document or court order (Article 18).

No amendment or changes can be made in the official register of births except through a decision of a court. Concrete mistakes can be corrected, however, by the competent official with authentication from the chief of the establishment (Article 21).

Article 22 of the Law provides for penalty of three months imprisonment or a fine up to ID. 30 if anyone infringes any text of the Law.

Who issues birth certificates?

The registration of births is based on a birth certificate or legal document issued by persons prescribed in the Law. These are summarised below for easy reference.

Birth type	Certificate to be issued by	Time limit
A. If birth occurs in a health establishment (Article 3a)	the attending doctor, midwife or nurse licensed in obstetrics	7 days
B. If birth occurred outside a health establishment (Article 3b)	the attending doctor, midwife or nurse licensed in obstetrics	15 days urban 30 days rural
C. If birth is not attended by doctor, midwife or nurse licensed in obstetrics (Article 4)	the health authority after receiving information from (a) parents or relatives (b) notification received from unlicensed midwife, mukhtar (under the amended law)	15 days
D. Child of unknown parents (Article 19)	the Ministry of Health on the decision of a juvenile court	7 days
E. Birth certificate not issued previously (Article 16)	legal document or decision of court to be treated as certificate	
F. Birth outside Iraq (Article 5)	Iraqi consulate	30 days

Who issues death certificate?

The registration of deaths is based on a death certificate or legal document issued by persons prescribed in the Law. These are summarised below for easy reference.

**FUNCTIONS OF A REGISTRAR
(or registration official)**

Under the Law, the competent health authority is to register births/deaths in a register on the basis of a birth/death certificate. The person in each health establishment where the registration is done may be designated as Registrar. The Registrar is the most important person in the registration procedure and the registration system revolves around him. The Registrar has the following important duties to per-

form: registration, registration promotion, and maintenance of records and submission of returns.

Registration

Registration is the entry of information about births/deaths (as given in the certificate or court order) by the competent authority in the register of births/register of deaths. These registers are official records of birth/death and an important source of vital statistics. The entries have to be made carefully and again checked with the birth/death certificate.

The registration has to be done in a continuous serial number in each calendar year (1 January - 31 December). Only the births/deaths that occur during a calendar year are to be entered in the register for that year (called current register). The births/deaths of a previous period for which court

Death type	Certificate to be issued by	Time limit
A. Death in private or government health establishment (article 7)	the treating doctor	24 hours
B. Death out of private or government health establishment (Article 8)	the treating doctor	24 hours
C. Death of persons not attended by any doctor (Article 9)	the nearest health establishment on the basis of (a) examination of the corpse referred by the relatives of the dead person (b) report received from the Mukhtar and two witnesses (under the amended law)	
D. Death in specific locations (Article 12)	medico - legal doctors, prison surgeons, police and military doctors, depending on the location	
E. Death for which no certificate has been issued previously (Article 16)	legal document or decision of court to be treated as certificate	
F. Death of pilgrims to Mecca (Article 13)	doctors of the medical mission accompanying the pilgrims	
G. Death outside Iraq (Article 10)	Iraqi consulate	

orders are issued are to be entered in a separate register called 'late register'.

After entering the details from the birth/death certificate in the registers, these certificates have to be sent to the Census Office (Director General of Civil Status) for entering the lawful facts about births/deaths in their registers and the issuance of an identity card. Registration has to be done immediately after the receipt of the certificate. If there is a delay, the certificates might get mixed up or sometimes even lost.

Registration promotion

In Iraq, the level of registration is low. Only 60 percent of the births and 45 percent of the deaths are being registered. The level of registration can be improved only if efforts are made by the registration authority to detect the births/deaths in each area. The following suggestions would be helpful:

- 1) The registration authority may keep in touch with the unlicensed midwives, mukhtar and persons responsible for grave yards. He may periodically enquire from them about vital events in the area and check whether they are already registered in his book. It is only through an efficient informant system that the registration can be improved. The informant system can be extended in many ways. The school teacher, policeman, postman, religious heads (quadi of mosques) can provide information about births/deaths.
- 2) Under the Law, the health establishments (both government and private) have to enter the births/deaths occurring in their establishments in a special register. The registration official may visit these establishments periodically and examine whether all the events in the special register have also been entered in the register of the health establishment. If any events are found to be missing, enquiries may be made about the certificate corresponding to such cases.
- 3) Registration cannot be improved by the officials alone. The public has to cooperate in a large measure. The reasons for a low level of registration, as far as the public is concerned are: general ignorance of the public in regard to the statutory requirement and the lack of appreciation of the importance of timely registration of vital events both for the individual and the community at large; and, the

lack of motivation, particularly among the rural community.

- 4) The fundamental point to be borne in mind is that pursuance for any project or undertaking, unless properly followed up, is doomed to failure. Accordingly, it is necessary that in registration operations the implementation of the laws and instructions be followed up in order to determine the response of the citizens thereto and whether the results are encouraging or call for certain changes with a view to achieving an ideal method of registration.

Once the public appreciates the legal and evidentiary value of the certificates, there will be a better response to civil registration. For this purpose, the public, particularly in rural areas, needs to be educated by using the audio-visual media. Such education programmes should, in particular, stress the provisions of Article 4 regarding births and Articles 9 and 14 concerning deaths. It may also have to be emphasized that failure to perform these legal duties would involve punishment under Article 22 which provides for imprisonment for three months or a fine up to ID. 30.

Maintenance of records and submission of returns

The registration official of each area (or each establishment as at present) is required to send a monthly abstract from the register of births and the register of deaths to the Directorate of Statistics, Ministry of Health. Separate registers are to be maintained for each calendar year 1 January - 31 December. Also the register of birth is separate from that of death. Events registered 'late' on the basis of court orders (Hejje, Karar) are to be entered in the 'late' register. The form of the register would correspond to the certificate (any changes in the register would be indicated by the Director of Statistics, Ministry of Health).

The registration authority has to keep the register of births and deaths up-to-date. Registration is to be done serially beginning with No. 1 on 1 January each year. It is to be noted that the events are entered in the register as soon as the certificates are received. Because the certificates could be slightly delayed, it is possible that an event which occurred earlier is given a higher serial number. The serial number is according to the date of registration and not according to the date of occurrence of event or the date of certification. Since the register of births/deaths is a permanent record, the entries have to be made neatly and accurately on the basis of the cer-

tificates. It would be a good practice to verify all the entries before sending away the certificates to the Census Office.

For each month, the registration authority has to prepare an extract from the register of births/deaths and send it to the office of the Chief Medical Officer of Muhafadha to be forwarded to the Director of Statistics, Baghdad. Since this extract is the basis for compilation of vital statistics of Iraq, it has to be accurate. As this extract is prepared by copying from the register of births/deaths, it would be a good practice to have the extract checked item-by-item by a supervisor before sending it to the Director of Statistics, Baghdad. If the registration officials have any doubt or difficulty in regard to these instructions, they may write to the Director of Statistics, Ministry of Health.