THE GLOBAL BURDEN OF STILLBIRTHS: 2.64 MILLION STILLBIRTHS YEARLY AND MORE THAN 7200 DAILY

For many of the poorest countries, there is a triple burden, with high rates of stillbirths as well as deaths among women and newborns.


Stillbirths are devastating losses for women and families, but remain a neglected tragedy in global public health.

Each year there are an estimated 2.64 million babies born dead (stillbirths). This is more than 7200 a day, with 85% of these occurring in the developing world – where an estimated 99% of maternal deaths also occur. Almost half (1.2 million) of these stillbirths happen during labour.

Reliable figures are lacking both on stillbirths and maternal deaths and there is an urgent need to improve data for programme decision-making.

THE SKILLS GAP: LACK OF HEALTH WORKERS COSTS THE LIVES OF BABIES AND WOMEN

One of the main reasons why stillbirths occur is inadequate or inappropriate care during pregnancy, labour and delivery. Ensuring women have access to family planning as well as antenatal care and good quality care from skilled health professionals at the time of delivery could prevent 1.1 million stillbirths by 2015, and prevent 1.6 million maternal deaths and newborn deaths. The additional cost to national health budgets, per population head, is only about $2USD.

% Births without trained health workers*

*Trained health workers include doctors, midwives, nurses and in some cases country-specific cadres such as auxiliary nurse midwives

In Ethiopia, the stillbirth rate is estimated at 25.8 per 1000 births – a high burden related to the low availability of skilled care at delivery. More than 98% of women deliver without a trained health worker.

In Bangladesh, more than three-quarters of women deliver without a trained health worker, and the stillbirth rate is among the highest in the world, at 38.4 per 1000 births.