



Fact Sheet

Maternal deaths: Estimated number of women dying annually: South Asia — 296,000; Africa — 150,000; Latin America — 34,000; East Asia — 12,000; all developed countries — 6,000; World — 500,000.¹

Lifetime risk of dying from pregnancy-related causes: Africa: 1 in 25; South Asia: 1 in 38; Latin America: 1 in 90; East Asia: 1 in 870; developed countries: 1 in 1750.^{1,2}

Maternal deaths per 100,000 live births: Africa — 640; South Asia — 572; Latin America — 270; East Asia — 55; North America and Europe less than 20.¹

Importance of maternal mortality: Among women in their childbearing years, 1/4 of all deaths are maternal deaths in developing countries compared to less than 1/100 in the USA.¹

Excess mortality: If maternal mortality rates in developing countries were the same as in developed countries, 460,000 women's lives would be saved each year.¹

Maternity care saves lives: Sri Lanka has the same GNP as Pakistan but a maternal mortality rate that is one fifth of Pakistan's. Almost all births in Sri Lanka are attended by trained personnel; there are good FP services and high female literacy.^{3,4}

Deliveries attended by trained health personnel: Percent of women giving birth that are assisted by a trained health worker: Africa — 34%; South Asia — 31%; Latin America — 64%; East Asia — 93%; North America — 100%.⁴

Increased risk of maternal death associated with age: All studies show an increased risk for very young and older women. In a study in Nigeria, women aged 15 had a maternal mortality rate 7 times that of women aged 20-24, and in Jamaica women over 40 had a death rate 5 times higher than that of women aged 20-24.^{5,6}

Percent of all births that are to women 35+ years: Nigeria — 15%; Senegal — 17%; Mexico — 13%; Bangladesh — 25%; Philippines — 16%; Sri Lanka — 11%; USA — 21%.⁷

Percent of women married by age 18: Bangladesh — 90%; Indonesia — 59%; Nepal — 70%; Sri Lanka — 16%; Colombia — 26%; Jamaica — 59%; Kenya — 45%; Senegal — 62%; USA — 8%.⁸

Physical development & teenage pregnancy: At menarche young women have approximately 4% more height but 12-18% more pelvic growth ahead of them. Even after 2 years of menstruation there may be 3-9% of additional pelvic growth to achieve, but only 1% of height.⁹

Percent of women giving birth by age 18: Africa — 28%; Asia — 18%; Latin America — 21%.⁸

Percent of first births that are to women 15-19 years: Costa Rica — 44%; Mexico — 41%; Jordan — 18%; Malaysia — 19%; Philippines — 24%; USA — 29%.⁷

Increased risk of maternal death associated with birth order: Studies in many countries have shown that the risk of serious complications (haemorrhage, infection, ischaemia), and that of maternal death increase after the third birth.

Expected number of births per woman (Total fertility rate). Number of births an average woman will have, given current fertility rates: Africa — 6.5; Asia — 4.1; Latin America — 4.3; developed countries — 1.9. Kenya has the highest fertility rate of any country — 8 births per woman.²

Women at risk of unwanted pregnancy: Percent of women who say they want no more children but who are not using effective contraceptives: Egypt — 18%; Kenya — 8%; Pakistan — 22%; Sri Lanka — 15%; Colombia — 18%; Mexico — 19%; Peru — 21%.²

Illegal abortion: In many countries a large proportion of maternal deaths is due to illegal abortion. Ethiopia — 29%; Bangladesh — 20%; Chile — 64%; Romania — 86%.^{10, 11, 12}

Maternal deaths that could be prevented with family planning if all women who say they want no more children were using effective contraceptives: Jordan — 22%; Philippines — 22%; Colombia — 39%; Jamaica — 44%; Egypt — 28%; Kenya — 15%; Nigeria — 6%.²

Women's education: In developing countries women with no education have twice as many children as those with 7 or more years schooling. They are three times more likely to be using effective contraception.¹²

Literacy: Two thirds of the women in developing countries are illiterate, compared to one half of all men.¹³

Money spent on preventive health care: An analysis of international resources devoted to health found that only \$2 out of every \$10 was spent on maternal-child health (MCH) and family planning.¹⁴

Definition of maternal death: Death of a woman who is or has been pregnant during the previous 42 days. (WHO).

Sources

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NEARLY HALF THE BIRTHS IN THE WORLD ARE NOT ATTENDED

BY TRAINED PERSONNEL

