

Hidden tragedy of under reported neonatal mortality

March 28 2008

In Northern Vietnam, neonatal mortality is almost four times higher than the official figure according to a report published today in the open access journal *BMC International Health and Human Rights*. This under-reporting could mean neonatal healthcare in the country is massively under-funded.

Lars-Ake Persson, Mats Målqvist and colleagues at Uppsala University, along with researchers at Karolinska University Hospital, Stockholm, Sweden, are working with the Uong Bi General Hospital, in Quang Ninh, and the Vietnamese Ministry of Health, in Hanoi, on the question of unreported births and neonatal deaths.

The researchers explain that in order to reduce infant mortality in low-income countries, such as Vietnam, there is an urgent need to have valid health statistics. Such data would highlight the need for national and international health initiatives and for the provision of sufficient funds to implement them. Without valid statistics many children could be dying unnecessarily at birth.

Information on all births and neonatal deaths in Quang Ninh province in Northern Vietnam during 2005 was collected through questionnaire surveys and group interviews with healthcare staff at 187 Community Health Centers and 18 hospitals, as well as with 1372 village health workers. Information was also gathered from health facility records. The team then compared these results with official statistics from the Provincial Health Bureau.

The researchers found that the neonatal mortality rate was 16 deaths in 1000 births. The official figure is just 4 in 1000. This discrepancy is attributed to a dysfunctional registration system that relies on grieving families, and not the health system, to report a death. This has severe consequences because at the national and international level a low mortality rate does not necessitate urgent healthcare investment.

“Such faulty health information systems are not unique to Vietnam”, say the researchers. "Improving reporting systems on births and neonatal deaths is a matter of human rights and a prerequisite for reducing neonatal mortality," the researchers add.

Source: BioMed Central

Citation: Hidden tragedy of under reported neonatal mortality (2008, March 28) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-03-hidden-tragedy-neonatal-mortality.html>

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