

Study: 2 million babies and mothers die at birth

October 7 2009, By CELEAN JACOBSON , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- More than 2 million babies and mothers die worldwide each year from childbirth complications, outnumbering child deaths from malaria and HIV/AIDS, according to a study.

The study, released Tuesday at the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics world congress being held in Cape Town, also showed that such deaths could be easily avoided.

"The world will continue to miss the unheard cry of the 230 babies who die every hour from childbirth complications," unless there is better planning and implementation of policies, according to the study.

Some 1.02 million babies are stillborn and another 904,000 die soon after birth. By comparison, 820,000 children die from malaria and 208,000 die from HIV/AIDS worldwide.

About 42 percent of the world's 536,000 maternal deaths also occur during childbirth, according to the study. Deaths in Africa and South Asia account for three-quarters of the maternal and [infant deaths](#).

The research was led by Save the Children, the Gates Foundation and Johns Hopkins University with investigators from a dozen countries. It was published in the October edition of the federation's journal.

"The huge numbers hide multiple personal stories of loss," said Joy Lawn, who runs Save the Children's Saving Newborn Lives campaign.

"Each death is a tragedy to a family - actually a double tragedy since almost all these deaths could be prevented."

The report said that many of the deaths could be avoided with improvements in basic [health care](#), and training for local [health care workers](#) to perform emergency cesarean sections and other lifesaving techniques.

Lawn said she hoped that the study would be used by countries to ensure money was invested where it was needed.

Poverty is one of the main causes of these deaths. In wealthier countries most women give birth with a skilled attendant while in poor countries, few women do.

Most deaths also occur in remote rural areas where there are few doctors and nurses. Each year, 60 million of the world's 136 million births occur outside health facilities, and only one out of every five babies born in African hospitals are cared for by skilled staff.

Lawn told The Associated Press that researchers were taken aback by the shocking figures and the lack of attention given to these [mothers](#) and their [babies](#).

"It is seen as women's business. Stillbirths don't count. Sometimes the deaths of women don't even count," she said.

However, she said that developments in Malawi show some signs of encouragement. The country, located in southern Africa, has only three pediatricians for about 12 million people. Yet, 60 percent of births took place in a clinic or hospital, she said, adding that the majority of cesarean sections were performed not by doctors but by trained health workers.

"They knew they didn't have a lot of money or people and so had to be strategic," she said.

The authors of the research welcomed the \$5.3 billion committed by world leaders to maternal and child care at last month's United Nations General Assembly.

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