

# Bangladesh kids who lose mother more likely to die

June 4 2010, By MARIA CHENG , AP Medical Writer

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(AP) -- For children in Bangladesh, losing a mother - but not a father - can be deadly, a new study says.

Researchers in Bangladesh, Britain and the U.S. used data from population surveys from 1982 to 2005 in Matlab, Bangladesh, to follow what happened to more than 144,800 children. Of those, nearly 15,000 died by age 10.

The experts found that children whose mothers died had about a 24 percent chance of making it to age 10. Children who didn't lose their mothers had about an 89 percent chance.

The effect was particularly dramatic in infants; those aged 2 to 5 months who lost their mothers were 25 times more likely to die than babies whose mothers were still alive.

And for children whose fathers died, there was no effect. The study was published Friday in the [British medical journal](#), Lancet.

Experts said the findings should inspire changes in how authorities tackle child health, beyond the usual strategies like child-focused vaccination campaigns and vitamin supplementation.

"Because the mother's death has such devastating effects on the child's health and survival, improving the mother's survival will improve the child's survival," said Hussain Yusuf, an epidemiologist at the U.S.

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Yusuf co-wrote an accompanying commentary and was not linked to the study.

Carine Ronsmans, a professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Lancet study's lead author, said child health initiatives should include strategies to prevent deaths in all young mothers at childbirth and throughout their lives.

She said that in rural Bangladesh, mothers typically breast-feed their children for at least a year. "Removing that biological link, in an area where formula is not popular, has a particularly big impact on children," Ronsmans said.

She was surprised the death of fathers didn't affect children's survival rates. She suggested that when fathers die, [mothers](#) may get help from their extended family or remarry, offsetting the loss.

Experts said it was difficult to know whether the results would apply to other countries. Ronsmans doubted there would be comparable findings in the West, and guessed that child death rates there might be too low to find any effect.

Previous studies in Nepal and Gambia have found had similar results, and experts fear there could be a big problem in Africa, where many children have lost a parent to the AIDS epidemic.

Ronsmans said that without prioritizing women's' health, more [children](#) were at risk. "It's a double loss," she said. "First you lose the mother, then you lose the child."

**More information:** <http://www.lancet.com>

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