

Big drop in global drownings

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Credit: Amy Humphries

James Cook University researcher Associate Professor Richard Franklin says drownings globally have dropped by half over the last 30 years, with rates reducing in all regions except Oceania.

Dr. Franklin was the lead author of a world first study in partnership with the Institute of Health Metric and Evaluation and published in the journal *BMJ Injury Prevention* which found that age standardised mortality rates from unintentional drowning have decreased by 57% between 1990 and 2017.

Dr. Franklin said the decrease was not uniform across countries and the revised global estimate is now approximately 300,000 drowning deaths per year. He said China, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh accounted for half of the drowning deaths and with children bearing the highest burden and overrepresented in the figures.

"Approximately 90 per cent of drowning deaths occur in low and [middle income countries](#) and are often due to everyday activities such as collecting water, bathing or walking to school.

"There is a particular need for us to work with our neighbours in Oceania where there was an 80% increase in drowning, with Papua New Guinea seeing a 93% increase," he said.

Dr. Franklin has been working with the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation in the US to publish what is the first Global Burden of Disease Report on unintentional drowning.

"Drowning is a significant global challenge, described by the World Health Organization as a hidden public [health](#) threat, with Australian organisations such as Royal Life Saving leading efforts to build capacity to reduce drowning in low and middle income countries such as Bangladesh and Vietnam," he said.

Justin Scarr, CEO Royal Life Saving said "Associate Professor Franklin's study is globally significant, brings new focus and energy to an under-resourced health and development issue."

Dr. Franklin said high rates of drowning in children will shock most Australians, and much more needs to be done by UN bodies WHO, UNICEF, development agencies and donors to support nations in the Indo-Pacific region.

Dr. Franklin said in Australia there are on average 288 unintentional drowning deaths per annum (Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report). While the good news is the numbers have been reducing, there is a need for more work.

More information: Richard Charles Franklin et al, The burden of unintentional drowning: global, regional and national estimates of mortality from the Global Burden of Disease 2017 Study, *Injury Prevention* (2020). [DOI: 10.1136/injuryprev-2019-043484](https://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2019-043484)

Provided by James Cook University

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