

Summary

Global and Regional Causes of Maternal Deaths 2009–2020: A WHO Systematic Analysis

Purpose:

The purpose of this article was to provide updates and analyze the global and regional causes of maternal deaths from 2009 to 2020, focusing on progress toward the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.1. By reducing the global maternal mortality ratio (MMR) to fewer than 70 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030.

Leading Causes of Maternal Deaths

- Hemorrhage: 27%
- Indirect causes (e.g., pre-existing conditions): 23%
- Hypertensive disorders: 16%
- Others: Abortion (8%), Sepsis (7%), Embolism (7%), Other direct causes (10%)
- Most hemorrhage and sepsis deaths occurred in the postpartum period

Maternal Suicide & Late Maternal Deaths

- Maternal suicide was reported in only 12 countries, ranging from <1% in sub-Saharan Africa to 26% in Australia & New Zealand.
- Late maternal deaths (43 days to 1 year postpartum) are underreported; common causes include mental disorders, heart disease, and cancer.

Regional Highlights Sub-Saharan Africa and Western

- Asia/North Africa had the highest proportion of deaths due to hemorrhage.
- Latin America & the Caribbean had the highest maternal mortality due to hypertensive disorders (22%).
- Australia & New Zealand showed the highest proportion of maternal deaths from embolism (20%) and suicide (26%).

Conclusion & Recommendations

- Despite existing medical interventions, hemorrhage remains the top cause of maternal death globally.
- Significant disparities by region highlight systemic inequities. Therefore, enhancing a focus on postpartum care, data collection, and mental health is critical for progress toward ending preventable maternal mortality.