New study reveals investing in midwives could save millions of lives

A new study published in the Lancet Global Health documents the potential impact of midwives in preventing and reducing maternal and newborn mortality and stillbirths. Led by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Confederation of Midwives and the World Health Organization, the study is based on modelled estimates of deaths averted in 88 low- and middle-income countries that account for over 95% of global maternal and newborn deaths and stillbirths. These countries have severe health workforce shortages: they are home to 74% of the world's population but just 46% of the world’s doctors, nurses and midwives.

Key findings from the study

Midwives who are EDUCATED AND REGULATED TO GLOBAL STANDARDS play a vital role in reducing mortality

- **Achieving UNIVERSAL COVERAGE of midwife-delivered interventions by 2035**
  - 67% of maternal deaths
  - 64% of newborn deaths
  - 65% of stillbirths
  - **SAVING 4.3 MILLION LIVES PER YEAR BY 2035**

- **A less ambitious 25% INCREASE IN COVERAGE of midwife-delivered interventions every 5 years**
  - 41% of maternal deaths
  - 39% of newborn deaths
  - 26% of stillbirths
  - **SAVING 2.2 MILLION LIVES PER YEAR BY 2035**

- **Even a modest 10% INCREASE IN COVERAGE every 5 years**
  - 22% of maternal deaths
  - 23% of newborn deaths
  - 14% of stillbirths
  - **SAVING 1.3 MILLION LIVES PER YEAR BY 2035**

1. See: http://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(20)30397-1/fulltext
A small decrease in coverage rates (2% every 5 years) would result in 552,000 more maternal and newborn deaths and stillbirths per year than if the 88 countries maintained current rates of coverage of these interventions.

Overall, increased coverage of midwife-delivered interventions, including family planning, would:

HELP REDUCE the number of abortions from 40 million to 25 million

HELP AVERT 44% of infant deaths due to HIV from 27,000 to 15,000

CONTRIBUTE TO healthier families and more productive communities and to a health system that can provide effective coverage of essential sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn and adolescent health services.

For midwives to work effectively, investment is needed in their education, training, regulation and working environment.

For more information about midwives and midwifery see: https://www.unfpa.org/midwifery

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