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World Health Organization



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stillbirth alliance

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Stillbirths: The Invisible Public Health Problem

New estimates place annual global toll at 2.6 million stillbirths

“The time has come for this public health problem to be recognized...”

Some 2.6 million third trimester stillbirths worldwide occur every year, according to the first comprehensive set of stillbirth estimates, published today within a special series prompted by the World Health Organization in the medical journal *The Lancet*.

Every day more than 7,300 babies are born dead. A death occurs just when parents expect to welcome a new life. “The death of a baby to stillbirth is devastating to families, and we haven’t done enough, historically, to understand its etiology,” says Joanne Cacciatore, PhD, Assistant Professor and researcher on the psychological effects of stillbirth at Arizona State University and President and Founder of the MISS Foundation, an international organization that cares for families facing infant and child death. Kathy Sandler, MSW, Executive Director for the MISS Foundation notes that “the MISS Foundation understands first-hand how traumatic the death of a baby is for families... we’ve been spearheading efforts to pass legislation on how stillbirths are recorded- and how these mothers are treated in the process- in the U.S. and have been successful in 27 states.”

Yet, the number of stillbirths can be slashed, say most experts. Besides lacking visibility, the issue of stillbirth has lacked leadership both locally and internationally. “The time has come for this public health problem to be recognized, explored, and eventually to reduce the numbers,” says Cacciatore, referencing her participation in the first of *The Lancet* articles entitled: *Stillbirth: Why it matters*. “This is a clarion call for attention to a much-underserved group.”

“Parental groups must join with professional organizations to bring a unified message on stillbirths to government agencies and the UN,” says J. Frederik Frøen, M.D., PhD, an epidemiologist at The Norwegian Institute of Public Health and member of the International Stillbirth Alliance. “This Series shows that the way to address the problem of stillbirth is to strengthen existing maternal, newborn, and child health programs by focusing on key

interventions, which often overlap with those interventions that benefit mothers and neonates,” says Gary L. Darmstadt, M.D., Director, Family Health Division, Global Health Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The WHO has worked in collaboration with worldwide stakeholders to develop the first comprehensive, global set of stillbirth data by region.

In The Lancet’s series on stillbirth, clinicians, researchers, and experts call for action to reach these goals by 2020:

- For those nations with a current rate of under 5 per 1,000, to eliminate all preventable stillbirths and close equity gaps;
- For countries with a stillbirth rate of more than 5 per 1,000 births, at least a 50 percent reduction from the current rate;
- The MISS Foundation, additionally, advocates for all 50 states to adopt their version of the Certificate of Birth resulting in Stillbirth in addition to a death certificate, already passed in 27 states;
- The MISS Foundation also encourages systemic change in the societal perception of stillbirth, beginning with medical personnel, policy makers, mental health professionals, researchers, and feminist groups, and for comprehensive support services to women and their families suffering this traumatic loss.

For more information on the MISS Foundation visit www.missfoundation.org
