



State of Mother and Child in incredible India: A Critical Analysis

KEYWORDS

Maternal Mortality, Infant Mortality, Child Mortality, Sex Ratio.

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ABSTRACT *Children and women comprise vulnerable populations in terms of health and are gravely affected by the impact of gender inequalities. More newborns die on the first day in India than in any other country. According to the latest 'State of The World's Mothers 2013' report, every year, over 309,300 children (29% of global share) in India don't live beyond the first day because of complications associated with preterm birth, hygiene and maternal health. Similarly, every year more than a third of a million women die from complications during pregnancy and childbirth, the vast majority in developing countries. This means at least one woman dies every 90 seconds. At the country level, India accounted for 19% (56,000 in numbers) of all global maternal deaths. Hence this paper critically analyses the state of mother and child in India and formulates suitable strategies to ameliorate the situation.*

Children and women comprise vulnerable populations in terms of health and are gravely affected by the impact of gender inequalities. India has 440 million children. That's more than the entire population of North America. Every fifth child in the world is Indian. In most homes, the fifth birthday of a child is very special celebration. But, for many children in developing countries, the first five years are the most dangerous. Every year, two million children die on the day they are born. Four million before they celebrate their first birthday. Many more do not reach their fifth. Diarrhea, pneumonia, HIV and malaria are targeting the young, the helpless - those under the age of five. They die silently, needlessly, far from the light of media attention.

The reports of the Save the Child says that, 4,20,000 babies across South Asia die on their first day- almost one every minute. Chronic malnourishment which leads to mental or physical impairment or stunning is particularly severe in the region. According to the report, of the one million babies who die each year on the day they are born, almost 40 per cent are in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

More newborns die on the first day in India than in any other country, according to the latest 'State of The World's Mothers 2013' report, every year, over 309,300 children (29% of global share) in India don't live beyond the first day because of complications associated with preterm birth, hygiene and maternal health. This makes India infamous for leading both maternal and new-born deaths globally. Out of every three babies in the world dying on the first day of their birth, one is in India. 24 out of 1000 newborns die within seven days of their birth Quoting Sample Registration Survey (SRS 2011) figures the report says Madhya Pradesh has the highest burden of early newborn deaths (0-7 days) at 32 .

A latest UNICEF report has said that, despite having improved infant and mother mortality rates, more than three children of under five years of age died every minute in India during 2011. With the highest number of 16.55 lakh deaths of under-five children reported in 2011, India topped the list of nations across the world.

According to figures in the UNICEF report, as many as 4,534 under-five children died every day and 189 every hour in India, accounting for almost 24 per cent of the world figures. The global under-five mortality rate has fallen from 87 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 51 per 1,000 live births in 2011, the report said.

A common factor in these deaths is the health of the mother.

Each year more than 500,000 women die in childbirth or from complications during pregnancy. Babies whose mothers have died during childbirth have a much greater chance of dying in their first year than those whose mothers remain alive. Ninety nine percent (99 per cent), of maternal and newborn mortality occurs in the developing world, where more than 50 per cent of women still deliver without the assistance of skilled health personnel.

Some more Facts on children

- About 27 million children are born each year in India. But nearly 2 million of them do not live to the age of five.
- Much of this is due to malnourishment. India has over 200 million people in hunger, and over 40% of the children who do live till 5 are malnourished.
- Immunization is very low by world standards.
- 79% of children under 3 have anaemia. Half of children have reduced learning capacity because of iodine deficiency.
- Official figures indicate that there are over 12 million child workers in India, but many NGOs reckon the real figure is up to 60 million. The number of girls involved is not much lower than the boys.

According to The latest report -Children in India 2012 - 48 per cent children under the age of five are stunted (too short for their age), which indicates that half of the country's children are chronically malnourished.

The report says malnutrition is higher among children whose mothers are uneducated or have less than five years of education. Similarly, the percentage of underweight children in lowest wealth index is three times higher than higher wealth index.

A. Fate of Girl Child

India sees widespread of practice of sex selection and sex selective abortion. Recent data indicate that sex ratios at birth are becoming more masculine since 2001. (Table-1). More girls were eliminated before birth.

Table. 1: Child Sex Ratio by Area and Census Year

Census	Total	Rural	Urban
1981	962	963	931
1991	945	948	935
2001	927	934	906
2011	914	919	902

Source: NFHS-III and Census 2011

Census 2011 also marks a considerable fall in child sex ratio in the age group of 0 -6 years and has reached an all time low of 914 since 1961. The fall has been 13 points (927-914) for the country during 2001-2011. In rural areas, the fall is significant-15 points (934-919) and in urban areas it has been 4 points (906-902) over the decade 2001-2011. Delhi (809) has recorded the lowest and Andaman & Nicobar Islands (975) the highest child sex ratio in rural areas. Haryana (829) has recorded the lowest and Nagaland (979) the highest child sex ratio in urban areas.

B. Fate of Mother

Child cannot be seen separate without mother. Statistics says that every year more than a third of a million women die from complications during pregnancy and childbirth, the vast majority in developing countries. This means at least one woman dies every 90 seconds. For every woman that dies another 20 women suffer from chronic ill-health or disability. All of this reduces the chances of a newborn baby surviving. Improving maternal health by reducing the MMR by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015 is one of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. India's target is to achieve the MMR of 109 by 2015.

Globally, an estimated 287,000 maternal deaths occurred in 2010, when the global maternal mortality ratio was 210 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. Sub-Saharan Africa (56%) and Southern Asia (29%) accounted for 85% (or 245,000 in numbers) of the global burden of maternal deaths in 2010. At the country level, India accounted for 19% (56,000 in numbers) of all global maternal deaths. At the national level, maternal mortality ratio (MMR) declined from 254 (SRS 2005) to 212 (SRS 2007-09) – a decline of about 14 points per year on an 'All India' basis. In terms of numbers, there are still 56,000 maternal deaths each year. About two-thirds of maternal deaths occur in just a few states – Assam, Uttar Pradesh (including Uttarakhand), Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh (including Chhattisgarh), Bihar (including Jharkhand) and Odisha. However, these states have also shown the most notable drop in MMR (between Sample Registration System (SRS) 2004-06 and SRS 2007-09) during the initial years of NRHM: Assam (90 points), Uttar Pradesh including Uttarakhand (81

points), Rajasthan (70 points), Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (66 points). It is likely that more of this success will be evident as and when data from the current period becomes available (Ministry of Health & Family Welfare Government of India, 2013).

Eighty percent of maternal deaths are caused by direct obstetric causes such as haemorrhage, infection, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy and complications of unsafe abortion. And for every woman who dies from complications related to childbirth, approximately 20 more suffer injuries, infections and disabilities that are usually untreated and ignored, and that can result in life-long pain and social and economic exclusion. Most of these complications cannot be predicted and prevented.

C. Role of Government

Small and affordable measures can significantly reduce the health risks that women face when they become pregnant. Most maternal deaths could be prevented if women had access to appropriate health care during pregnancy, childbirth, and immediately afterwards. It is noteworthy that a number of steps have been initiated in the country to ensure maternal health and safety. Reducing maternal and child mortality are among the most important goals of the National Rural Health Mission. Huge and strategic investments are being made by Government of India to achieve these goals. At various global platforms, India has reaffirmed its commitment to make every effort towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5.

D. Strategies to face the Challenges

Improving the health and nutrition of mothers-to-be and providing quality reproductive health services i.e. improving access to antenatal care during pregnancy, improved management of normal delivery by skilled attendants, access to emergency obstetric and neonatal care when needed, and timely post natal care for both mothers and newborns are pivotal to address many underlying causes of child and maternal mortality.

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