

Mr. Wimmer

Apollo Social Studies

11 May 2020

Maternal Death Rates in Sudan and Afghanistan are Some of the Highest

Why are pregnant women in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia dying at such a high rate compared to other countries? UNICEF reported from 2000-2017 that there were 211 deaths per 100,000 live births (Maternal Mortality). According to the World Health Organization, 94% of all maternal deaths still occur in low and lower middle income countries (Maternal Mortality). These deaths are mostly preventable. The factors that seem to impact these mothers the most are poverty, access to healthcare, politics, education, women's rights, and cultural beliefs.

The most significant factor is poverty. Women living in poverty do not have access to healthcare, healthy diets, and quality care. This can lead to infections and poor pregnancy outcomes. These complications could all be managed if they were treated by a skilled healthcare provider. In Sudan, 47% of the population lives in poverty (Khartoum). Countries like Afghanistan continue to be some of the poorest with 42% of the country living below the poverty level (Poverty in Afghanistan). Afghanistan has one of the least developed healthcare systems in the world. They are not able to access drinkable water in most parts of the country. This causes widespread disease.

Politics have a direct impact on the people living in these countries. Sudan is in the middle of a political crisis. In 2018, the government made cuts to bread and fuel leaving its people who were already suffering in a worse position (Dahab, Abdelmagid, Osama). Sudan's

streets are filled with constant protests against the government. In Afghanistan even though there is a formal government the Taliban had widely replaced the authority of the government. Medical training in Sudan and Afghanistan is non-existent. An article in Borgen magazine.com stated that as of 2013, there were only eight registered midwives in South Sudan. One for every 125,000 women (Reducing the maternal mortality rate in South Sudan). In Afghanistan when the Taliban took power much of the trained medical workers were women. The Taliban prohibited those women to work, this collapsed the health care system and they have not been able to recover(Political Process). Not allowing women as trained medical workers has contributed to women seeing untrained caretakers who lack the knowledge to provide life-saving help.

Limited access to education and women's rights also play a big part in keeping these women alive. Pregnant women in Afghanistan and Sudan have limited access to education and prenatal information. In Sudan, 49 % of girls do not have any education (Benque). In Afghanistan 3.5 million children are out of school and 86% of them are girls. The Afghan government provides fewer schools for girls than boys(Afghanistan: Girls struggle for an education). Amnesty International has warned of human rights abuses against women in Sudan. Women in Sudan face a daily risk of being arrested for their clothing or false accusations of immoral behavior. Women, there are under strict Sharia Law and can be arrested for wearing pants or knee-length skirts (Sudan human rights). In Afghanistan, girls are kept home from school and many families do not value a girl having an education. There is a cost for sending children to school and many families can't afford it. Schools may be free but

families have to pay for travel to and from school. Many families rely on children to work and contribute

Evans 3

to their household income. When they go to school the families can struggle to pay bills and eat.

Finally, cultural beliefs can contribute to increased death rates as well. In an article from front page Africa it talks about a woman who was in labor for 2 days suffering complications. The midwife left the delivery and her husband was forced to pay men to carry her in a hammock to the only clinic in the area. The midwife superstitiously accused the women of adultery blaming her complications on that. The mother and baby both died (Azango). There are many untrained midwives in Sudan who believe labor complications are a result of adultery. Pregnant women are forced to rely on these midwives. Pregnant women in Afghanistan usually deliver their babies at home, with aids or old midwives. These untrained aids believe that when a woman bleeds after birth, a whiskey-soaked pack of cotton inserted into the vagina could stop the bleeding (Gall). Often these beliefs have no medical background and cause death. In addition, child brides are a common thing in both Sudan And Afghanistan. The World Health Organization reported that adolescent girls under the age of 15 have more complications and are at a much higher risk of dying (Maternal Mortality).

Women die from complications that develop during pregnancy. These issues are preventable and can be treated. Women's lives can be saved with access to healthcare and trained healthcare workers. Education about good hygiene and signs of infection and getting treatment early can also help. Finally, women need access to birth control to prevent unwanted pregnancies. As you can see poor women in remote areas do not get the treatment that they need. Until this is addressed pregnant women will continue to die.

Works cited

Benque, Leah. "Children in Sudan: Inequality, Poverty, and Disease." Humanium, 12 Oct. 2019, www.humanium.org/en/children-in-sudan-inequality-poverty-and-disease/.

Dupree, Louis, and Marvin G. Weinbaum. "Political Process." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 2 Mar. 2020, www.britannica.com/place/Afghanistan/Political-process.

Gall, Carlotta. "Afghan Motherhood in a Fight for Survival." The New York Times, The New York Times, 25 May 2003, www.nytimes.com/2003/05/25/world/afghan-motherhood-in-a-fight-for-survival.html.

"Maternal Mortality." UNICEF DATA, data.unicef.org/topic/maternal-health/maternal-mortality/.

“Nearly Half of Sudan's Population Live in Poverty.” Radio Dabanga,

www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/nearly-half-of-sudan-s-population-live-in-poverty. “Sudan.” Amnesty International USA, www.amnestyusa.org/countries/sudan/.

User, Super. “How Traditional Beliefs Contribute to Maternal Mortality in Rural Liberia.”

FrontPageAfrica, 9 July 2017,

frontpageafricaonline.com/health/how-traditional-beliefs-contribute-to-maternal-mortality-in-rural-liberia/.