

Morbidity And Mortality In Afghanistan

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Abstract: Incidence and prevalence rates of the top five causes of morbidity and mortality in Afghanistan are poor nutrition, lack of healthcare facilities, neonatal deaths, acute respiratory infections, and common infections. The annual population growth rate stands at 2.2 %. Statistics from the World Health Organization report in 2013 shows that the life expectancy rate in Afghanistan is 61.3 years. The rates for males are 60.5 while that of the female stands at 62.1. The rise in the expectancy rates is attributed to improved healthcare conditions and decreased morbidity rates. Another report published by the WHO in 2009 suggests that the infant mortality rates were 257 deaths per 1000 live births and this number was estimated as the third highest in the world.

Introduction

The World Bank Development report in 2014 indicated that the crude death rate per 1,000 people in Afghanistan was eight while the crude birth rate per 1,000 people was 34 ("World Development Indicators," 2014). The average annual number of death per 1,000 populations is referred to as the crude mortality rate that is a rough indicator of the mortality rates. The annual population growth rate stands at 2.2 %. Statistics from the World Health Organization report in 2013 shows that the life expectancy rate in Afghanistan is 61.3 years. The rates for males are 60.5 while that of the female stands at 62.1. The rise in the expectancy rates is attributed to improved healthcare conditions and decreased morbidity rates. Another report published by the WHO in 2009 suggests that the infant mortality rates were 257 deaths per 1000 live births and this number was estimated as the third highest in the world (Viswanathan et al., 2010). Current statistics by the UNICEF indicates that the under-five mortality rate (U5MR) is 101 deaths per 1000 live births, infant mortality (IMR) are 73 for every 1000 births.

Incidence and Prevalence Rates of the Top Five Causes of Morbidity and Mortality:

Poor Nutrition

Poor nutrition is the primary cause of high infant mortality rates in Afghanistan. Nearly, 55 percent of the children under the age of 12 years suffer from physical and mental incapacitation due to poor diet. Particularly, those who survive are likely to die earlier due to health complications that are compounded by the lack of basic health care. Consequently, stunted women give birth to deformed babies. UNICEF reports indicate that malnutrition is responsible for 45% of infant deaths. In the same note, maternal mortality is also high due to inadequate nutrition.

Lack of Healthcare Facilities

A significant number of the Afghanistan populations do not have easy access to health services. Besides, most of the regions are geographically difficult to access and unsafe for health care providers: there are difficult terrains, harsh weather, and social norms that inhibit access to medical services by women ("Health and Nutrition," n. d.). In addition, the shortage of skilled health care providers contributes to high mortality and morbidity rates in the country. Afghanistan does not have an elaborate infrastructure that can provide adequate health services to all people (Viswanathan et al., 2010). Consequently, lack of health care amenities increases morbidity and mortality across all genders and ages. However, the young and

unborn children as well as pregnant women suffer more than men.

Neonatal Deaths

Afghanistan has the highest rates of neonatal deaths in the world. Approximately, 35% of the infant mortality is various factors that lead to neonatal complications and the eventual death. The UNICEF body notes that under the current conditions, 50 women are likely to die due to pregnancy related complications ("Health and Nutrition," n. d.). Hemorrhage is one of the leading causes of maternal deaths in the country (56%), further goes eclampsia (20%) and obstructed labor (11%). However, the most underlying causes of maternal mortalities are inadequate antenatal care (48%), low contraceptives usage (21%), early childbearing (26%), non-skilled birth attendants (39%), and maternal anemia (Viswanathan et al., 2010). Neonatal deaths could be prevented if the community has easier access to health care services.

Acute Respiratory Infections

UNICEF estimates that 23.4% of mortality cases are as a result of respiratory infections. The body further explains that Afghanistan is the worst place for pregnant women's health. A significant number of women and infants die due to respiratory complications. Acute respiratory infections affect all individuals due to the polluted environment ("Health and Nutrition," n. d.). However, children and pregnant women suffer more compared to male adults.

Common Infection

The high mortality and morbidity rates in Afghanistan could also be attributed to acute infectious diseases (19.7%), diarrhea (6.2%), and measles (2.1%) ("Health and Nutrition," n. d.). In particular, these common infections affect individuals of all ages and genders. However, women and young children are the most affected lot by these diseases.

Table 1 Health Status Statistics in Afghanistan Based on World Bank Indicators 2010

Indicators of Health Status	Infants	Women	Men
Mortality Rates	Males: 48.1 deaths per 1,000 live births Females: 48.4 deaths per 1,000 live births	376.8 per 1000 female adults	409.5 per 1000 male adults
Life expectancy	-	62.1	60.1

Causes of Mortality and Morbidity in Afghanistan	Most Affected	Prevalence Rates
Poor Nutrition	Young Children and women	55%
Lack of healthcare facilities	All but women and young children the most affected	
Neonatal Complications	Women and unborn kids	35%
Acute respiratory infections	Women and children	23.4%
Common Infections	All	Infectious diseases (19.7%), diarrhea (6.2%), and measles (2.1%)

An Analysis of Behavioral and Environmental Risk Factors

Behavioral Factors

Diarrhea and respiratory complications are the leading cause of child deaths and poor health in Afghanistan. For a long period, the country has experienced various social, political, and economic challenges due to local instabilities. The results of these conflicts are mass displacement of people, human rights abuse, famine, and drought. Periodic armed conflicts pose significant challenges to obtaining water, shelter, and which, eventually, makes it impossible have a healthy lifestyle. Given these conditions, women and children are the most affected by communicable and non-communicable diseases. Previous studies indicate that the high rates of mortality and morbidity in infants are correlated to family income, sanitation, mothers' education, and immunization (Viswanathan et al., 2010). The cultural frameworks of most Afghanistan have restrictive norms that prohibit women and children from seeking better health. Mothers are the primary caregivers, but the behavioral pattern in this nation undermines their effort to secure better health care for the children. Besides, young girls are forced into early marriages, a situation that complicates efforts to live healthy lives. Furthermore, poverty, illiteracy, and poor hygiene are significant factors that contribute to poor health among the communities. Overall, to a large degree the outdated cultural practices that discourage women from pursuing education increases health problems.

Environmental Factors

Afghanistan is a dry region that makes it impossible to access clean water and adequate nutrition. The state has experienced long decades of armed conflict that has polluted the environment with toxic chemicals that cause respiratory complications. Besides, the country has rough, impassable terrains that make it difficult to access healthcare facilities. The prevailing social-political tensions also complicate matters leading to increased health problems among the society. Water supply is a significant

problem that when combined with the traditional unhygienic practices expose the community to various health issues (Viswanathan et al., 2010). Furthermore, food insecurity means that the Afghanistan populations have a diet low in protein and other healthy calories. Consequently, most children are undernourished, stunted, and suffer chronic malnutrition disorders. In all these aspects, the social-environmental conditions complicate health issues, and people die from preventable diseases.

Priority Health Issue: Improved Health Care Services

Inadequate healthcare facilities are a matter of priority that the Afghanistan government should address. Statistical evidence indicates that most women and children die from preventable diseases such as diarrhea, malnutrition, and other infectious ailments. Maternal and neonatal deaths are high due to remote health facilities. Correspondingly, the health ministry should increase health services to the local people. In addition, improved healthcare services should be used to educate the communities about good health and sanitation.

Conclusion:

Inadequate healthcare facilities are a matter of priority that the Afghanistan government should address. Statistical evidence indicates that most women and children die from preventable diseases such as diarrhea, malnutrition, and other infectious ailments. Maternal and neonatal deaths are high due to remote health facilities. There are things to be done to help decreasing the high rates of annual death in Afghanistan. Starting from providing the adequate nutrition the families in need, and out reach health care to those who can not easily access it.

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