



DYING YOUNG

Study of global mortality patterns shows 2.6 million young people die each year of various causes

The first study of global patterns of death among young people has found that road traffic accidents, complications during pregnancy and child birth, suicide, violence, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis are the major causes of mortality among people between 10 and 24 years of age. All these causes are preventable and treatable, the study pointed out.

The study, supported by the World Health Organization (WHO) and published in *The Lancet*, found that 2.6 million young people die each year, with 97 percent of these deaths taking place in low- and middle-income countries.

Maternal conditions were the leading cause of deaths among females, accounting for 15 percent of total deaths among young women. HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis contributed to 11 percent of deaths in both sexes. Traffic accidents were the largest cause and accounted for 14 percent of male and five percent of female deaths. Other prominent causes were violence (9.2 percent of male deaths) and suicide (six percent of all deaths).

There are more young people in the world today than ever before—1.8 billion, accounting for 30 percent of the world's population. Until now, there has been very little information available on the causes of death among young people globally and by region. The study was meant to aid countries in the development of policies and programs to ensure that they improve the lives—and prevent the deaths—of young people.

“Young people are transitioning from childhood to adulthood—at the threshold of becoming productive members of society—yet they often fall through the cracks,” said Daisy Mafubelu, WHO assistant director general for family and community health. “It is clear from these findings that considerable investment is needed not only from the health sector, but also from sectors including education, welfare, transport, and justice, to improve access to information and services and help young people avoid risky behaviors that can lead to death,” she added.

Highest in Southeast Asia

More than a third of the 2.6 million deaths among young people were in Southeast Asia, with Africa ranking next. Males died at higher rates than females in all age groups and regions. The relative risk of death in poor countries compared with that of high-income countries was higher for females than for males (5.6 v. 2.8), largely because of the low rates for young women in high-income countries.

Worldwide mortality rates were 2.4-fold higher in young adults than

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in young adolescents. High-income countries had the steepest relative rise in mortality from young adolescence to young adulthood. In low-income and middle-income countries, all-cause mortality in young adults was 2.4-times higher than in young adolescents. In the African region, all-cause mortality was high for all age groups, with a female predominance most evident in the 15-to-19 age group. In low- and middle-income countries in the American region, male mortality rose more than fivefold between early adolescence and young adulthood, and brought about a pronounced difference between sexes.

Some of the reasons for the rise in female mortality were regional differences in age of sexual-activity onset; availability and accessibility of condoms, contraception, safe abortion, antenatal and obstetric care, and HIV testing.

On the other hand, injury deaths contributed most to the rise in mortality among males. Injuries account for around 10 percent of worldwide mortality for all ages, but in people aged 10 to 24, they accounted for more than 40 percent of all deaths and about half of male deaths.

Preventive measure

The WHO recommends several interventions to promote safe behaviors, improve health, and prevent deaths among young people.

Road traffic accidents can be prevented through speed management (for example, creating low-speed zones in urban settings and imposing speed limits according to road type), strictly enforcing drunk-driving laws by limiting blood alcohol concentration to 0.05 g/dl with lower limits for young or novice drivers), and requiring the use of helmets and seat belts.

Sexual and reproductive health can be improved by ensuring that young people receive sexuality education and have access to condoms and other contraceptives; safe abortion to the full extent of the law; antenatal and obstetric care; and HIV testing, counseling, care, and treatment.

Violence and suicide can be prevented by ensuring that young people have access to life-skills training, promoting positive parental involvement in the lives of young people, reducing the use of alcohol by young people, and reducing their access to lethal means (including firearms, knives, pesticides, and sedatives).

The immediate and long-term consequences of injuries and violence can be significantly reduced by improving access to effective community-level care and emergency medical care, and providing treatment and support for young people exposed to child abuse, youth violence, and sexual assault. **M**



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Road traffic accidents are among the top killers of children and adolescents worldwide.