

COUNTRYWIDE MORTALITY SURVEILLANCE FOR ACTION

COMSA NEWS

Welcome to the inaugural issue of COMSA NEWS, where we share recent findings from the research and get to know the people who make it happen. We welcome your feedback and ideas for future feature stories.

MATERNAL MORTALITY IN SIERRA LEONE: FINDINGS FROM THE COMSA BASELINE SURVEY

Pregnancy and childbirth are among life’s happy milestones for families around the world, but the end result is not always a healthy mother and child. Sierra Leone has among the highest levels of maternal mortality in the world—young women dying as a result of the pregnancy itself or during or shortly after giving birth. The maternal mortality results from COMSA round 1 are, therefore, of particular interest. Understanding the circumstances surrounding maternal deaths

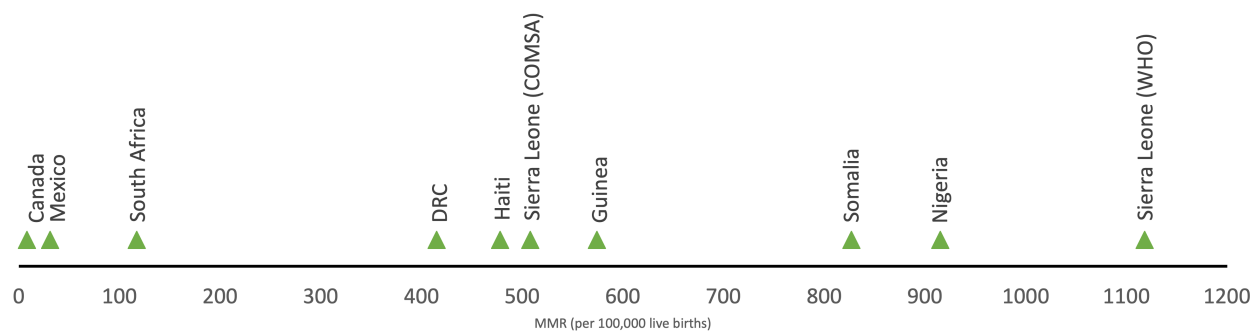
is the first step to implementing effective prevention.

What we found

The Statistics

The common metric is the maternal mortality ratio (MMR), which is the number of deaths among women who were pregnant or had recently given birth, per 100,000 livebirths. The MMR from COMSA round 1 was 510/100,000.

The figure below has rates from a selection of other countries. The rate in



Source: World Health Organization (WHO), Maternal mortality levels and trends 2000-2017 (<https://mmr2017.srhr.org/>) Carshon-Marsh et al., Lancet Global Health 10(1): e114-e123 January 2022

Sierra Leone is very high, but the 2015 census, various demographic surveys, and model-based estimates reported a rate twice as high: 1120/100,000. It is likely that the rate has been declining, as it has been around the world.

Another useful measure is the lifetime risk of maternal mortality, which incorporates the risk per birth and the average number of births per woman. In COMSA, that risk was 3.4%--or 34 out of 1,000 women of childbearing age. This also is very high in comparison to the rest of the world.

The Causes

In Sierra Leone, the majority of maternal deaths occurred between 20 and 30 years of age, and the most common causes were the same as in other countries (see figure):

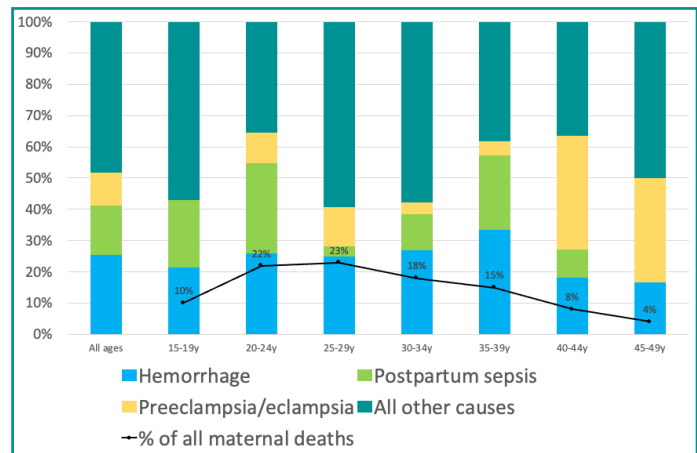
- ✦ Haemorrhage: severe bleeding, mainly after childbirth
- ✦ Postpartum sepsis: infection after childbirth
- ✦ Preeclampsia leading to eclampsia: high blood pressure during pregnancy leading to convulsions

Effective Prevention

Almost all maternal deaths can be prevented with basic prenatal, delivery, and postnatal care by skilled health professionals.

- ✦ **The risk of haemorrhage can be reduced dramatically by injected oxytocics immediately after delivery.**

Figure: Age distribution of causes of maternal death in Sierra Leone 2018-2020



Source: Carshon-Marsh et al., *Lancet Global Health* 10(1): e114-e123 January 2022

- ✦ **Postpartum sepsis can be prevented by good hygiene and by recognizing the early signs of infection.**
- ✦ **Preeclampsia can easily be detected during prenatal appointments and managed to prevent eclampsia.**

This new COMSA analysis provides the details needed to develop national and local prevention strategies, as well as a reliable baseline from which to measure progress. Saving mothers' lives is one of the highest public health priorities in Sierra Leone and around the world.



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