

Global Health Action



ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/zgha20

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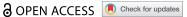
To cite this article: Anna Agnes Ojok Arach, James K. Tumwine, Noeline Nakasujja, Grace Ndeezi, Juliet Kiguli, David Mukunya, Beatrice Odongkara, Vincentina Achora, Justin B. Tongun, Milton W. Musaba, Agnes Napyo, Thorkild Tylleskar & Victoria Nankabirwa (2021) Perinatal death in Northern Uganda: incidence and risk factors in a community-based prospective cohort study, Global Health Action, 14:1, 1859823, DOI: 10.1080/16549716.2020.1859823

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/16549716.2020.1859823

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Perinatal death in Northern Uganda: incidence and risk factors in a community-based prospective cohort study

Anna Agnes Ojok Arach 60°, James K. Tumwine 60°, Noeline Nakasujja 60°, Grace Ndeezi 60°, Juliet Kiguli 60°, David Mukunya 60°, Beatrice Odongkara 60°, Vincentina Achora 60°, Justin B. Tongun 60°, Milton W. Musaba 👵, Agnes Napyo 👵, Thorkild Tylleskar 👨 and Victoria Nankabirwa 📵 m

^aDepartment of Nursing and Midwifery, Faculty of Health Sciences, Lira University, Lira, Uganda; ^bDepartment of Paediatrics and Child Health, School of Medicine, Makerere University College of Health Sciences, Kampala, Uganda; Department of Psychiatry, School of Medicine, Makerere University College of Health Sciences, Kampala, Uganda; dDepartment of Community Health and Behavioural Sciences, School of Public Health, Makerere University, College of Health Sciences, Kampala, Uganda; eDepartment of Research, Sanyu Africa Research Institute, Mbale, Uganda; Department of Public Health, Busitema University Faculty of Health Sciences, Mbale, Uganda; Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, Gulu University, Gulu, Uganda; Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Gulu University, Gulu, Uganda; Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, University of Juba, Juba, South Sudan; Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Busitema University Faculty of Health Sciences, Mbale, Uganda; *Centre for International Health, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway; Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, School of Public Health, Makerere University College of Health Sciences, Kampala, Uganda; "Centre for Intervention Science and Maternal Child Health (CISMAC), Centre for International Health, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway

ABSTRACT

Background: Perinatal mortality in Uganda remains high at 38 deaths/1,000 births, an estimate greater than the every newborn action plan (ENAP) target of ≤24/1,000 births by 2030. To improve perinatal survival, there is a need to understand the persisting risk factors

Objective: We determined the incidence, risk factors, and causes of perinatal death in Lira district, Northern Uganda.

Methods: This was a community-based prospective cohort study among pregnant women in Lira district, Northern Uganda. Female community volunteers identified pregnant women in each household who were recruited at ≥28 weeks of gestation and followed until 50 days postpartum. Information on perinatal survival was gathered from participants within 24 hours after childbirth and at 7 days postpartum. The cause of death was ascertained using verbal autopsies. We used generalized estimating equations of the Poisson family to determine the risk factors for perinatal death.

Results: Of the 1,877 women enrolled, the majority were ≤30 years old (79.8%), married or cohabiting (91.3%), and had attained only a primary education (77.7%). There were 81 perinatal deaths among them, giving a perinatal mortality rate of 43/1,000 births [95% confidence interval (95% CI: 35, 53)], of these 37 were stillbirths (20 deaths/1,000 total births) and 44 were early neonatal deaths (23 deaths/1,000 live births). Birth asphyxia, respiratory failure, infections and intra-partum events were the major probable contributors to perinatal death. The risk factors for perinatal death were nulliparity at enrolment (adjusted IRR 2.7, [95% CI: 1.3, 5.6]) and maternal age >30 years (adjusted IRR 2.5, [95% CI: 1.1, 5.8]).

Conclusion: The incidence of perinatal death in this region was higher than had previously been reported in Uganda. Risk factors for perinatal mortality were nulliparity and maternal age >30 years. Pregnant women in this region need improved access to care during pregnancy and childbirth.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 22 June 2020 Accepted 2 December 2020

RESPONSIBLE EDITOR

Stig Wall, Umeå University, Sweden

KEYWORDS

Perinatal death; perinatal mortality: early neonatal deaths; risk factors; Uganda

Background

Perinatal mortality is a major public health concern worldwide with estimated 2 million stillbirths and 1.8 million early neonatal deaths reported in 2019 [1]. Most of these deaths (98%) occur in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC), with sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia being the most affected [2]. A recent meta-analysis of data from sub-Saharan Africa reported an overall perinatal mortality rate of 34.7 per 1,000 births [3]. This is higher than the

global estimate of 26.7 deaths per 1,000 births [1] and doubles the perinatal mortality rate of 13.6 per 1,000 births reported in Georgia, a country with the highest perinatal mortality in Europe [4].

The effects of perinatal death are so devastating for mothers and their families, it is associated with longlasting economic, psychological and social consequences [5-7]. Several studies have drawn attention to the risk factors for perinatal death [8-14]. However, most of these studies were hospital-based or in an urban/peri-urban setting, excluding home births.