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Preventing Newborn Deaths in Marginalized Population Groups

Dear Editor,

Since the time of adoption of the millennium development goals, a remarkable success has been observed in the field of saving lives of under-five children, including newborns.[1] In fact, in excess of a 60% decline has been observed in the incidence of under-five deaths from 1990 to 2016; nevertheless, the progress has not been universal.[2] In 2016 alone, more than 45% of reported under-five deaths were in the neonatal age group, which is an alarming cause of concern.[2] To attain universal health coverage and promote the survival of newborns, the need of the hour is to target vulnerable sections of the community.[1,2]

Further, based on the available estimates, it has been anticipated that 30 million newborns will die in the next 13 years from 2017.[2] This should act as the driving force for improving the quality of services and ensuring the provision of timely care during and after childbirth.[1,2] The available recent global figures suggest that India accounts for the maximum number of newborn deaths followed by Pakistan, while preterm birth-related complications, pneumonia, and diarrhea were the most common reasons for the deaths.[2] These estimates are an indirect reflection of the high incidence of home deliveries, poor infrastructure/logistics supply in health facilities, lack of funding, poor quality of services, and limited number of trained health professionals in healthcare establishments.[2]

It is worth noting that if the global stakeholders fail to improve the progress, in excess of 60 nations will not meet the set target of ending preventable newborn deaths by 2030.[1,2] Because the lives of more than 50 million under-five children have been saved since the start of the 21st century, it is obvious that the health sector has made significant progress in the field of knowledge and technology desired to save lives.[2,3] Thus, it is high time that efforts are taken to minimize the number of deaths of newborns; otherwise, all gains achieved till date is incomplete.[1] In other words, it is high time that we take measures to ensure that essential services reach to those who are in utmost need of the same.[1]

As the majority of the newborn deaths are preventable through simple and cost-effective interventions, the primary objective is to minimize the existing inequity among different sections of people.[1,3] In addition, measures such as enhancing access to skilled personnel during the antenatal period and during childbirth, discouraging the practice of home delivery, provision of basic services (such as immunization, drugs, and promotion of breastfeeding), increasing funding for the program, and enhancing access to water and sanitation facilities can be implemented.[2-4] These measures will not only improve the survival chances of the newborn but also even the mother and thus will have a double-folded benefit.[4]

To conclude, the proportion of newborn deaths among the total under-five deaths has shown a rise despite the significant progress made in the field of childbirth. This essentially advocates for the necessity to expand the services to the marginalized population groups.

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