

Development News

Deaths amongst young women

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Pregnancy complications are the leading cause of death globally among females aged 15-19, with self-harm in second place, a global study has found.

More than 1.2 million female and male adolescents die annually, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) report said – the majority from preventable causes including mental health issues, poor nutrition, reproductive health problems and violence.

The authors said that failing to tackle the health of 10- to 19-year-olds could undermine the improvements achieved in maternal and child health worldwide, pointing out that too often adolescent health was overlooked.

“By investing in adolescent health, you actually get a triple benefit because you get a healthier adolescent now, that healthier adolescent becomes a healthier, more productive adult in the near future, and also for those who have children, they become a more healthy parent,” said David Ross, lead author of the study. “If you have a healthy parent, which spills over into a healthy child.”

The WHO surveyed the causes of death for 10- to 19-year-olds in 2015. It found that the leading cause, globally, was road injuries, which caused 115,300 such deaths.

The next biggest killers were:

- Lower respiratory infections such as pneumonia.
- Self-harm.
- Diarrhoeal diseases.
- Drowning.

There were considerable differences when the results were compartmentalised by sex and age.

For girls aged 10-14, the leading cause of death was lower respiratory infections, but the biggest problems for those aged 15-19 were maternal conditions including haemorrhage, complications from unsafe abortion and obstructed labour. These occurrences led to 10.1 deaths for every 100,000 individuals.

For boys in both age groups, the leading cause of death was injury from road accidents, with drowning the second leading cause for the younger age group and violence in second place for boys aged 15-19.

For both male and female adolescents, self-harm was in the top five causes of death, resulting overall in 5.6 adolescent deaths per 100,000 individuals.

“Many people think there is not much that you can do about suicide and self-harm. [They are] wrong,” said Ross.

'If a man can do it, why can't I?': turning the tables on India's instant divorce law

As India debates the validity of a law allowing men to divorce by uttering three words, one woman is blazing a trail by using the practice against her husband

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The authors noted that 45% of adolescent deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries in Africa and 26% in similar countries in south-east Asia.

The leading causes of death among 10- to 19-year-olds varied around the world, with congenital anomalies and leukaemia in the top five for high-income countries.

As well as flagging the leading causes of death and ill-health among 10- to 19-year-olds, the authors set out a panoply of possible interventions aimed at policymakers, educators and researchers, among others.

"Adolescents have particular health needs related to their rapid physical, sexual, social and emotional development and to the specific roles that they play in societies," the authors wrote. "Treating them as old children or young adults does not work."

The authors flagged the need for adolescents to be involved in shaping public policy, as well as highlighting the need for adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services and programmes to help adolescents control their behaviour to reduce violence.

Other suggested interventions were more specific.

"The fifth biggest cause of death among adolescents is drowning, again mainly adolescent boys," said Ross. "Why are we not putting big efforts into teaching kids how to swim, especially in countries where there is a lot of water around?"

Ross added that when it came to road injuries, a slew of different strategies needed to be considered, from the installation of bridges and traffic calming near schools to the use of graduated driver licensing, mandatory seatbelts and lower blood-alcohol limits for adolescents.

"[For] most of the road traffic injuries that cause death globally in adolescents, the adolescent is a passive victim – [they are] not the driver: they are a passenger or a road pedestrian," said Ross.

While Ross stressed that adolescent girls faced particular problems, including pregnancy-related issues, he added that overall, adolescent boys were dying or affected by disease or disability at a higher rate.

Mexico's lost generation of young girls robbed of innocence and education

Study reveals rising number of Mexican girls in relationships and marriages with older men and casts fresh light on causes of child marriage in Latin America

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"As well as building on and strengthening the sexual and reproductive health and HIV programmes, we have to take in [to account] these other major causes," he said.

Aoife Doyle, assistant professor of epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, welcomed the report. "Adolescent health was neglected for so long, with research/programming focused primarily on reducing HIV and pregnancies among adolescent girls," she said.

"This publication highlights the importance of a more comprehensive approach to adolescent health, for example, by including a focus on young men, and recognising that education, employment opportunities, and family and social support can have an important influence on the health and wellbeing of a young person."

Is feeding the world's human population compatible with protecting the biological diversity of the planet?

In an article published in this week's *Science*, an interdisciplinary team of experts argue that both of those goals can be achieved by increasing women's access to education, reproductive health services, and contraceptive technologies.

In a special issue on Earth's ecosystem, the authors explore the interplay between the world's burgeoning human population and the dramatic loss of other species.

"It's the food. Follow the food and then you'll know why the planet's diversity of life is in trouble," said Eileen Crist, an associate professor of science and technology in society in Virginia Tech's College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences and the lead author of the review paper. "We're causing a mass extinction, and agriculture is arguably the primary driver of those losses."

Between 1970 and 2010, the world lost more than half its wild animals, according to a World Wildlife Fund report. Among the disappearances were an estimated 39 percent of terrestrial wildlife, 39 percent of marine wildlife, and 76 percent of freshwater wildlife.

These devastating losses, tied to efforts to feed an increasingly crowded world, are only expected to deepen. The United Nations estimates that the human population, now at 7.5 billion, will reach more than 9 billion by mid-century and 11 billion by the end of the century. Those numbers, especially in concert with growing levels of affluence, will exert increasing pressure on Earth's remaining biodiversity.

"In order to feed everyone, we're going to have to double or even triple our agricultural yield by the end of the century," Crist said. "But we've already taken up the most lush, arable land for cultivation, and we've squeezed wild nature into increasingly narrow pockets around the world. How can we make more food without destroying more nature?"

In an effort to solve this issue, agricultural experts are pursuing "sustainable intensification," which aims to increase food production without additional biodiversity declines or more natural areas coming under cultivation. Yet Crist and her coauthors argue that while these critical measures are needed they are not likely, by themselves, to succeed.

"It's important to work on the supply side, but, in parallel, we need to work on lowering the demand side," Crist said. "Without concerted attention to stabilizing and gradually reducing the global population, nature will continue to take the fall."

The authors contend that achieving a sustainable world -- one that provides an equitable, high quality of life for all people while safeguarding the planet's biodiversity -- calls for bringing population growth to the forefront of international concerns. The authors believe policy discussions on population levels have been muted in the past few decades in part because of discomfort around global imbalances. High-income countries, which account for a disproportionate use of resources, are more likely to have stable or even declining populations, while low-income countries have growing populations.

Yet excessive consumption of resources is no longer the sole province of the developed world, the authors write. Instead, the global middle class of 3.2 billion in 2016 is expected to rise to roughly 5 billion by 2030. Forty percent of India's population is predicted to join the ranks of the middle class by midcentury, adding almost half a billion consumers to the global economy -- up from 50 million in 2006 -- from one nation alone.

"A key solution to unsustainable population growth is the empowerment of women," Crist said. "By enhancing their human rights, giving them and their partner's access to reproductive health services and contraceptive technologies, and improving their educational attainment, we can help address this planetary crisis."

Education of girls and women has been shown to have a direct correlation in slowing childbearing rates.

"Wherever women are empowered educationally, culturally, economically, politically, and legally, fertility rates fall," the authors write. "Populations tend to move toward states of zero or negative growth when women achieve equal standing with men, as long as family planning services and contraceptives are readily available."

Crist's coauthors are Camilo Mora, an assistant professor and marine biodiversity specialist at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and Robert Engelman, a senior fellow at the Worldwatch Institute, a globally focused environmental research organization based in Washington, D.C.

"The human population is not the only variable stressing Earth," the authors conclude. "But it is a powerful force that is also eminently amenable to change, if the international political will can be mustered."

Four ways in which shipping can help us achieve SDG's.

Trade is central to global and national economies, and ships and ports are the workhorses of trade.

Take Africa: A healthy global shipping system is fundamental for the continent's imports and exports of food, energy and basic raw materials. Much of Africa's \$500 billion of export revenue is only possible because it travelled at low cost, by sea, to consumers in overseas markets. Shipping is crucial to enabling African competitiveness, export-led economic development and allowing the continent to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

But there are two sides to the coin. Ships burn vast amounts of fossil fuels, and release 2 to 3 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions on an annual basis.

Like all sectors, shipping needs to decarbonize, and move to lower and ultimately zero carbon fuels as part of a global effort to mitigate the potentially dangerous impacts of climate change. Also, like all sectors, there is an opportunity to do this whilst also meeting the SDGs ambitions.

Here are four ways the industry can help achieve the United Nations 2030 targets.

1. Help deliver an ambitious maritime climate plan in 2018 (SDG 13)

The sector accounts for around 2 to 3 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. According to the International Maritime Organisation, greenhouse gas emissions from shipping are expected to increase by 50 to 250 percent by 2050. U.N. discussions are ongoing to define an initial climate strategy in 2018, and a revised strategy in 2023.

Taking a lead from the Paris Agreement, many in the industry have already started to form policy, on the assumption that shipping will approximately need to halve emissions by 2050.

In the context of growing demand for shipping due to continued global — and African — population and economic growth, this implies a 60 to 90 percent reduction in CO2 emitted for every ton of goods shipped, over the next three decades.

2. Build the 'right' shipping infrastructure (SDG 9)

The "right" infrastructure can solve many problems simultaneously.

It can enable electrification of ships as they approach or are at berth in port, can reduce energy demand, enable access to low-cost energy sources, reduce negative health impacts related to fossil fuel combustion, and reduce GHG emissions.

The careful design of the same port could ensure its resilience against climate change impacts such as extreme weather events and sea level rise.

Smart design can boost port efficiency, enable access by larger ships — all reducing transport costs, reducing cost of living and increasing opportunities for export-led economic growth.

As Antwerp and Rotterdam are already demonstrating, ports often act as hubs for land-side transport and energy storage, becoming the cornerstone of transport innovation and wider transport energy decarbonisation initiatives.

Finance for large infrastructure projects — for example the Nigerian government is investing \$1.5 billion in the Lekki Port development off Lagos — can often be obtained or made cheaper by associating to GHG reduction efforts, such as climate finance, or SDGs.

Increasingly, private as well as public finance is looking at sustainability and GHG criteria.

3. Get radical on cleaner shipping fuels (SDG 7)

The opportunity to "leapfrog" is often applied to Africa's development — missing out a costly and unnecessary step in the evolution of infrastructure and systems.

The same concept can be applied for Africa's shipping — considering how shipping's technology and fuels are likely to change over coming decades now, will help to ensure that the right systems are in place to ensure an efficient and well-managed transition.

This is crucial for ensuring lower costs over the longer term and avoiding expensive stranded assets or technology lock-in.

A good example here is that of liquid natural gas, when used as a marine fuel and alternative to conventional oil-derived fossil fuels. LNG has attracted some western government investment to support its use.

But as it is still a fossil fuel, LNG will very shortly need to be replaced with non-fossil alternatives, leaving these LNG investments as stranded assets.

Far better to invest now in infrastructure and machinery that will be economically and physically resilient, with a proper plan in line with the multi-decadal technology and fuels transition that shipping can expect.

4. Developing countries must get involved in the sector

At the IMO's last meeting that discussed the sector's GHG emissions in October 2016, only 15 of the 43 African countries that are members of the IMO were present. Only seven of those 15 countries actually spoke in the debate on GHG. This is despite the implications both to the direct risks of dangerous climate change on the African continent, and to impacts on states.

It's understandable that the IMO's technically detailed and expensive-to-attend meetings are not an attractive proposition for governments with limited resources. More effort needs to be made by those already active in those discussions to engage, consult and attempt to empathize, if we are to make sure that Africa's opportunities are taken, and risks avoided.

John 19th May, 2017.