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# Maternal Morbidity and Disability: Getting the Attention It Deserves

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July 14, 2015



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# Context of maternal morbidities

## THE SILENT ENDURANCE: Social conditions of women's reproductive health in rural Egypt

by  
Hind A. S. Khattab  
edited by  
Gilliam Potter  
1992

- Women's "culture of silence"
- Women give lower priority to their health status
- Women's position in the family hierarchy of power will affect health related behaviors
- Lack of awareness among women concerning their own health
- Health professionals patronizing attitude...
- Health professionals lack of knowledge of the life conditions of patients



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# BETTER OFF DEAD?

A report on maternal morbidity  
from the UK All Party  
Parliamentary  
Group on Population,  
Development  
and Reproductive Health

May 2009

*“We always hear the Millennium Development Goals emphasis on maternal mortality....We have to add ...that millions of women are permanently disabled and have their lives ruined by childbirth every year – some of them might even be better off dead!”*

....Baroness Tong  
Hearings Chair



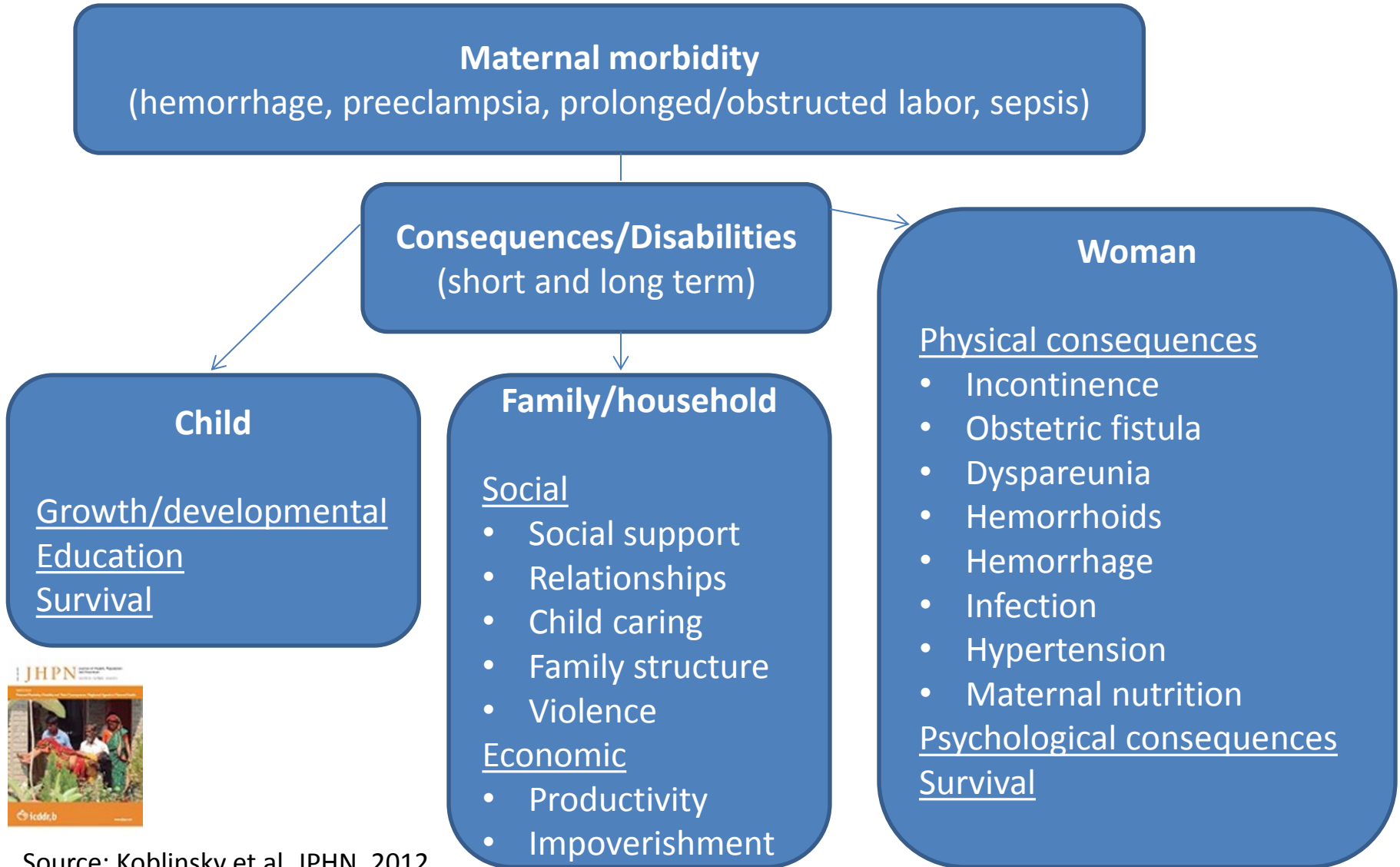
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## Maternal Morbidity, Disability and Their Consequences: Neglected Agenda in Maternal Health



Marge Koblinsky, Editor  
2012

- A set of studies (9 original papers ) and two commentaries
- in two geographic areas of Bangladesh (Matlab and Chandpur),
- a comprehensive snapshot of short- and long-term consequences of acute maternal morbidity
- an extensive data set and robust methodology
- quantitative and qualitative
- retrospective and prospective, combined with postpartum physical examinations
- to examine, maternal morbidity, disability and their consequences





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# Maternal morbidities and disabilities

## Maternal morbidity

*An overarching term that refers to any physical or mental illness or disability directly related to pregnancy and/or childbirth. These are not necessarily life threatening but can impact quality of life.*

## Acute maternal morbidities

- Obstetric complications – direct and indirect
- Severe obstetric complications
  - Absolute maternal indications (AMIs)--life-threatening or severe
  - Severe acute maternal morbidities (SAMMs)—organ failure
  - Near miss—nearly died but survived

## Postpartum maternal morbidities and disabilities

## Chronic morbidities





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## Summary conclusion -- quantitative

*For every maternal death, there are about 40 severe/less severe complications and over 160 postpartum morbidities/disabilities.*

*These numbers are far higher than previous estimates of 20 women with complications and 40 with postpartum morbidities/disabilities for every maternal death.*





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## Maternal complications Key findings from Matlab, Bangladesh

- 10% of women have maternal complications in the intrapartum period
  - Severe dystocia is the most common complication, but hemorrhage causes the most deaths
- 25% died at home; most died in a public or private health facility
- 40% suffer physical complications postpartum—but most are relatively mild – first degree prolapse, hemorrhoids, hypertension







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## 'Consequences of the consequences' ...of maternal complication

In cases of chronic maternal disabilities, such as uterine prolapse, women may experience...

- *khota* (insult) – ridicule by neighbors and in-laws
- Physical and sexual violence for not meeting husbands' demands

*"If people can find a deficiency, they will castigate me. During quarrels they will take the upper hand and stigmatize me."*

...Woman with stress incontinence

*"If I cannot sleep with you what is the use of keeping you? I'll divorce you."*

...Husband of woman with 2<sup>nd</sup> degree prolapse





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## 'Consequences of the consequences' ...of maternal complication

In cases of chronic maternal morbidity, economic consequences for the family include

- taking out loans
- selling assets

*“Even among the poorest households in Bangladesh, there is an unexpected resiliency to the economic shock of paying the cost for obstetric emergencies”*





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# 'Consequences of the consequences' ...of perinatal complication

*“Vast array of  
quality of life  
issues”*

In the case of perinatal death

- women may be “sequestered for years” and be unable to even carry out religious rituals they consider fundamental to their spiritual well-being
- Postpartum depression
- Emotional violence and controlling behavior by the family and community





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## Consequences of maternal death on child mortality from Bangladesh study

- The cumulative probability of survival up to age 10 years was 24% in children whose mothers died before their tenth birthday compared to 89% in those whose mothers remained alive
- Infant mortality is approximately 8x higher for those infants who died than if the mother survived



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# Maternal Mental Morbidity

Extensive review in low and lower middle income countries

Manifestations:

- Anxiety -- common
- Depression --common
- Psychosis – uncommon

Prevalence in low and lower middle income countries of common mental disorders

- Pregnancy 16%
- Postnatal 20%

➤ Suicide rates are underestimated

Summary conclusions—  
selected

- Perinatal common disorders are prevalent among women in resource constrained settings
- Few have access to any form of mental health care
- Infants of women with common mental disorders are at risk for poorer growth, health and development



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## A Call to Action

*Highlight the importance of the postpartum and postnatal care that goes beyond the standard 4-6 week period*



- Communications to women and families about the importance of postpartum **care—assessing risk and actual occurrence of complications** (physical problems, depression, violence) and responding with special attention to children whose mothers died and the mothers of perinates who died
- Beyond screening, **build capacity –individual expertise and organizational capacity to effectively respond** to repair prolapse and fistula, treat mental illness, provide family planning for all who desire it, and so forth
- **Social protection** for the most economically and socially vulnerable
- Spotlight the **fundamental issues of the status and human rights**



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Thank you