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## Reproductive Health and Rights: The Facts of Life

*Ensuring that every child is wanted, and every childbirth is safe, leads to smaller and stronger families.*

The worldwide trend toward smaller families—average family size has declined by half since 1950<sup>i</sup>—is linked to advances in education and health care and increased opportunities for women. This great global success story can continue only if access to family planning continues to grow worldwide.

Individual decisions determine global population growth. However, some 215 million women in developing countries lack access to effective family planning and are not able to exercise their reproductive rights. Meanwhile, development assistance for contraception has stalled at US\$400 million a year, 50 percent below 1995 levels.<sup>ii</sup>

Too many women give birth too young, too often or with too little time between pregnancies to survive: every day 1,000 women die giving life, one every 90 seconds. This year an estimated 5.8 million newborns will die before their first birthday.<sup>iii</sup> The risk is greatest for women in poor countries and for poor women in all countries.

These tragedies leave gaping holes in families, diminish the prospects of the surviving children and weaken communities.

The health of the mother is inseparable from the health of newborns, to the point that the World Health Organization now talks in terms of “maternal-newborn health.”<sup>iv</sup>

Providing quality reproductive health care and other economic and social encouragements for safe motherhood is a cost-effective strategy that can also help countries concerned about low fertility rates.

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### The Situation

- Some 215 million women in the developing world want family planning but cannot get it. This unmet need for contraception results in 82 percent of all unintended pregnancies.<sup>v</sup>
- Becoming a mother can be dangerous and life-threatening. More than 350,000 women die annually in pregnancy and childbirth, most from preventable causes: one every 90 seconds. Ninety nine percent of all maternal deaths occur in the developing world.<sup>vi, vii</sup>

## The Trends

- World Bank studies have found reproductive health care extremely cost-effective: an investment of US\$4.10 per person could avert 8 percent of the global burden of disease. (That's 90 cents for family planning, \$3 for prenatal and delivery care, and 20 cents to fight sexually transmitted infections.) Another \$1.70 in HIV/AIDS prevention could avert another 2 percent of the disease burden.<sup>viii</sup>
- Strengthening systems to improve maternal health care also benefits many other areas of health, such as emergency treatment facilities, HIV/AIDS prevention, transportation and the availability of trained medical personnel.<sup>ix</sup>
- Educating women has a direct impact on reducing child mortality. According to a recent analysis published in *The Lancet*, half the reduction in child mortality over the past 40 years can be directly attributed to better education for women.<sup>x</sup>
- Providing pregnant women and their newborns with adequate maternal and newborn care would cost US\$23 billion a year (in 2008 dollars). Also satisfying the unmet need for family planning would add \$3.6 billion – but by averting 50 million pregnancies it would reduce health care costs by \$5.1 billion, thus saving \$1.5 billion: a very cost-effective investment.<sup>xi</sup>
- Investing to both satisfy the unmet need for family planning and provide adequate maternal and newborn care in the developing world would reduce maternal deaths by more than two-thirds, from 356,000 to 105,000 per year; newborn deaths by more than half, from 3.2 million to 1.5 million; unintended pregnancies by more than two-thirds, from 75 million to 22 million; and unsafe abortions by almost three-quarters, from 20 million to 5.5 million.<sup>xii</sup>

Contact: Abubakar Dungus, +1 212-297-5031, [dungus@unfpa.org](mailto:dungus@unfpa.org)

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