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The relationship between mothers' maternal age and infant mortality in Zimbabwe.

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Abstract:

Background: This study examined the relationship between mothers' age at first birth and infant mortality in Zimbabwe. Childbearing at a significantly young age has been noted to be a predictor of infant mortality, as children born to young mothers are at a greater risk of early death.

Methods: This is a cross-sectional, secondary study which uses the data from the Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey 2005-2006. The population of interest in this study are women of reproductive ages in Zimbabwe, who have had children within the last five years prior to the survey. A total of 4074 women are used as the sample in this study. The dependent variable is infant mortality, which is understood as the deaths of infants between the period of birth and their first birthday. The independent variables include demographic, socio-economic and reproductive characteristics of the women. The analysis of data was undertaken at three levels. Univariate analysis, binary logistic regression and multivariate logistic regression were conducted. In addition, stepwise logistic regression was applied to the multivariate analysis to analyse the relationship between the significant variables found in the study in relation to infant mortality.

Results: This study confirmed an association between mothers' age at first birth and infant mortality as infants born to mothers of 18 years and younger suffer higher risk of infant mortality, as they have a 33% increased risk in comparison to infants born to older women. This indicates the need for policy development focused on the issue adolescent childbearing and how childbearing can be delayed in Zimbabwe in order to reduce infant mortality. Furthermore the reproductive characteristics of the mother prove to have great impact on infant mortality within the country. Thus the importance of policies focused on women's reproductive health care.

Conclusions: This study confirms that mothers' age at first birth is a central influential factor in infant mortality in Zimbabwe. Infant mortality cannot be isolated from the characteristics of mothers, in particular her age at first birth, as they are more often the primary care-givers thus have immense influence on whether the infants survive or not.