



About Towards 4+5



Towards 4+5 is a five year Research Programme Consortium on maternal and newborn health.

The goal is to support evidence-based policy and practice for maternal and newborn health, in order to facilitate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 - to improve child health and reduce maternal mortality.

We hope to achieve this goal by:

- Working with partners to generate evidence on interventions to improve the survival of women and infants
- Increasing capacity in partner countries to generate knowledge and influence policy in maternal and newborn health
- Communicating our findings effectively so as to influence policy and management decision making on large-scale programmes

Research themes



Towards 4+5 supports research in five developing countries. These are Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Malawi and Nepal. The research focuses on ways to improve mother and infant care at both the facility and community levels.

Our key research themes are:

- Levels and trends in maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity
- Improving maternal and newborn health services
- Community based activities to improve maternal and newborn health
- Evaluating the effectiveness of micro-nutrient interventions

In addition, two-cross-cutting themes span all the partner countries. These are

- Integration of maternal, newborn and child health services
- Translating research into policy and practice

Integration of maternal, newborn and child health services

Our research looks at the challenges of integrating maternal, newborn and child health services from a health systems perspective. We are also developing a tool which shows how maternal and newborn health interventions can be integrated to provide the maximum benefits for women and newborns. This is available as a series of tables, sorted by the means of delivery. It will also be converted into a searchable database that will be available on the Towards 4+5 website.

Translating research into policy and practice

Research focuses on the role of evidence-based policymaking in maternal and newborn health. We have identified factors that constrain the effective use of research in policy including: the influence of powerful international actors, a preference for experimental research methods, and conflicting attitudes within countries about research agendas and the capacity of local researchers. Recommendations, outlined in detail in a Towards 4+5 briefing paper, suggest increasing support for context specific and local researchers, and promoting new research models to investigate complex health systems issues.

Research projects



Examples of research projects include:

Women's groups in Nepal, Bangladesh, Malawi and India

Researchers are looking at the role of women's groups in improving the health of pregnant mothers and newborn infants. Findings from an initial study in Nepal show statistically significant declines in neonatal, and these findings are replicated in Jharkhand in India. Further findings from India and Bangladesh will be available in 2009.

Consequences of obstetric complications in Burkina Faso and Bangladesh

Research explores the impact of maternity and its complications on economic, social and physical well-being, and examines whether such events lead to sustained impoverishment in the longer term (3-4 years). It builds on a recently completed study of 1014 women in Burkina Faso which investigated the consequences of severe complications and normal facility based births up to one year postpartum.

Newborn home intervention trial in Ghana

This trial aims to develop a feasible and sustainable community based approach to improve neonatal survival in rural Ghana. This will be achieved through routine home visits by community based surveillance volunteers who will provide a package of essential newborn care interventions in the third trimester of pregnancy and first week of life. The study is a cluster-randomized trial and will span a period of three years from 2006 to 2009.

The effectiveness of facility-based audits in West Africa

Research aims to find out whether facility-based audits help West African hospitals to provide better care for patients with obstetric emergencies. A cluster-randomised controlled trial in district hospitals is being undertaken to assess the effectiveness of two types of facility-based audits: criterion-based clinical audits (CBCA) and patient-centred case reviews (PCCR). The three countries involved in the trial are Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger.

Effects of micronutrient supplements in Nepal

Having carried out a trial of antenatal multivitamin and mineral supplementation in Nepal - which showed that it increased the weights of newborn babies but did not clearly improve their survival, Towards4+5 members have been involved in the meta-analysis of 12 studies from low-income countries. The results of this will be published in 2009.



Photo of a women's group meeting in Bangladesh

Partners

Towards 4+5 is directed by Professor Anthony Costello at the Institute of Child Health and Dr Veronique Filippi at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The consortium comprises a number of organisations worldwide. These are:



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