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Women pregnancy, birth and risk in Papua New Guinea: Documenting risk and lack of care**Lin Lock**

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For women of Papua New Guinea pregnancy and birth is not a joyful, positive experience but one of the significant risk underscored by an estimated maternal mortality of 733/100,000. In its near neighbor, Australia, 7.1 women die for every 100,000 pregnancies and birth a hundredfold reduction in risk. This presentation examines some contributing factors to the tragic costs to women of childbearing including availability of health services, preparation of care providers, acceptance of care by population groups and cultural factors that influence care. The range of health care providers includes doctors, midwives, nurses and community health workers at a ratio of 6/10,000 in comparison to the WHO recommended 23/10,000 with a distribution that strongly favors urban over rural environments where most of the populations live. Community health workers, who make up the largest number of health workers and are the biggest providers of health care including birthing services, are educated to a technical certificate standard. Nurses comprise the next largest group and have a three year diploma education with few going further to take an additional midwifery qualification. Both nurses and midwives provide care for healthy and at risk pregnant and birthing women as need demands. Medical doctors including specialists are centered at provincial level with many taking administrative positions. Health services to Papua New Guinea's mainly rural population are hampered not only by the inadequacy of providers but by its mountainous and notoriously difficult terrain. Women's lives in PNG are not regarded as highly as those of men with large proportions of women being beaten and abused. The effects of giving birth too young, too old, too often and too close together, a frequently used description, are exacerbated by poor underlying health status and nutritional levels. Strategies developed by the PNG Department of Health include increasing the number of better prepared health care workers, improving resources available to and number of health care centers and raising awareness of the importance and value of health care to pregnant and birthing women.

Biography

Lin Lock has years of experience in clinical practice, education and consultancy works in Papua New Guinea. She is an expert Teacher, Academic and Researcher with particular expertise in Midwifery. Her recent work includes the preparation of a New National Midwifery Curriculum for Papua New Guinea prepared to meet International Confederation of Midwives standards, audit of community health worker schools across the country and first stage preparation of a national nursing curriculum.

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