

Who's responsible for the death of these babies?

By Alexandria Lloyd

When you think of large numbers of deaths, do you picture young children and infants? Probably not.

Well for some that is not a luxury they can afford.

An infant left for dead in the Alto do Cruzeiro in Brazil is not a distant idea. When a mother has a child and he or she is sick at birth, she will often clean them, light candles, and leave, as her child lies there and slowly dies as the starvation and dehydration takes them away.

The World Health Organization stated that the number of deaths of children under 5 years of age fell from 12.7 million in 1990 to 6.3 million in 2013. While this is good news to hear, the issue of 6.3 million children dying has not yet gone away. Unfortunately there is not one complete reason for these deaths so there is no one absolute solution.

One of the main causes of these deaths in low-income countries is diarrhea from different illnesses. The parents, who have little education and little access to medicine, fear for their children when they get diarrhea and thus do what they can to stop it. Many times, they do not give their children water, thinking it will make the diarrhea worse, but in reality depriving them of water exacerbates dehydration and eventual death.

In the Alto do Cruzeiro diarrhea specifically was the main disease that took down a generation. The women would give their children powdered milk as a form of sustenance but when mixed with dirty water, the bacteria would eventually cause diarrhea and eventually kill them. Without proper sanitation or medical assistance and living in a constant state of starvation how else is a mother to provide for her child?

In Brazil in the Alto do Cruzeiro the average woman had 9.5 pregnancies, 8 live births, and 3.5 infant deaths. That means that nearly half of the children a woman had would die before the age of five. While this is never easy to read about, it is the reality that people live there. While this infant death rate was sky high the community found a way to cope. They started to think of all babies as angels. They weren't yet human so when they died it wouldn't be so hard to handle. Clearly there was a problem that needed to be fixed. The baby angels needed to be saved.

The program is set up in teams of at least one nurse and one physician, in some places a social worker and a dentist as well. The teams encompass neighborhoods of about 3,500 individuals, with incentives for reaching more neighborhoods. All the teams are subject to national regulations, which supervise the groups and deal with the financing of the groups. All their services are free of charge to the individuals who receive their care. These individuals perform a wide range of services for the individuals in their network.

To combat this Brazil enacted community-based public health programs to help them combat the rising death toll. They assisted and provided medical care to nearly 85 million people. With this, the infant mortality rate dropped 13% from 1999 to 2004. Also, the proportionate mortality from diarrhea decreased by 44%.

If people who had given up hope were able to turn around their dire situation why couldn't this work other places?

This is a clear sign that the program has worked well in this area. The only question is will this work in other low-income areas such as Angola, whose infant mortality rate is 180 deaths per 1000 births, or Sierra Leone, whose infant mortality rate is 154 deaths per 1000 births.

From the research done the only real answer is no answer. The program needs more assessment and a few kinks need to be worked out before this type of program can be taken to other areas.

What else can be done then? How can people thousands of miles away help save these children and babies from dying?

1. Get with an organization to establish a health program that provides a sugar, salt, and water drink to combat diarrhea. Since diarrhea is the number one killer of these infants combating the issue first will help reduce the mortality rate drastically. In Brazil the proportionate mortality from diarrhea decreased by 44% when a project like this was implemented.
2. Inform people of this happening around the world. No cause would ever be fixed without informing people. Write a blog post, make a status on facebook, anything to allow people to become educated on the topic.
3. Join the Peace Corps. Which is a volunteer program run by the United States government. The mission of the Peace Corps includes providing technical assistance, helping people outside the United States to understand American culture, and helping Americans to understand the cultures of other countries.

Anything someone does to bring awareness might be a saving grace to a child in need. So get out there and make people aware of the harsh realities going on in the world around them.

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