Introduction

The Safe Motherhood Symposium
Nijmegen, The Netherlands, 30th September, 1995

Each year 150 million women become pregnant. For many of them pregnancy and childbirth is not the joy that it is to the more privileged.

Worldwide at least half a million women die annually from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. All but 6000 occur in developing countries, where 86% of the world's births take place. One of the most important causes of maternal mortality is obstetric haemorrhage, claiming 150,000 lives annually.

Perinatal mortality is a major international health problem, accounting for 7.5% of the world's total disease burden.

Again, the difference between the developed and developing world is striking: 98% of all perinatal deaths occur in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania. Most of these deaths are preventable, like tetanus with 500,000 deaths annually.

Of 24 million low birth weight infants born worldwide every year, more than 23 million live in developing countries.

Moreover, more than 50% of all births in these countries are not assisted by trained medical personnel.

The day before the symposium two theses were defended with topics concerning safe motherhood by Akosua de Groot, Nijmegen, The Netherlands (The role of oral (methyl)ergometrine in the prevention of postpartum haemorrhage) and Gijs Walraven, Sumve, Tanzania (Perinatal assessment in rural Tanzania).

Being together with many experts in this field it was decided to have this symposium in order to distribute the current knowledge on maternal health in both The Netherlands and abroad. This special issue to the European Journal of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Biology gives an even better opportunity to achieve this goal.

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