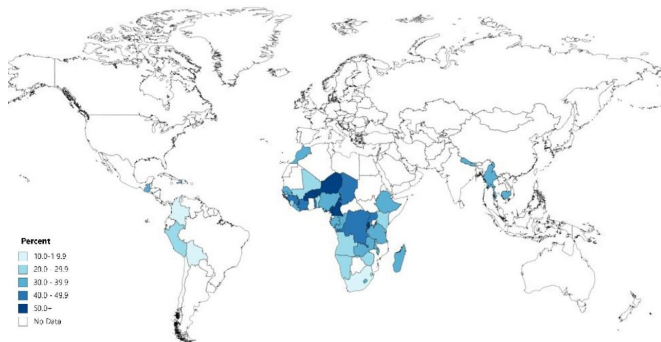


# New study shows about 1/3 of young people in 43 LMIC have lost a sibling before age 25

14 October 2020



Estimates calculated based on Demographic and Health Survey data (<https://dhsprogram.com/>). All women ages 15-34 at the time of the survey were born after 1984. See S1 Table 1 for a full list of countries and point estimates. Figure created using mapchart.net

Percentage of young women (15-34) who have at least one deceased sibling before age 25 in 44 countries across Western, Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Estimates calculated based on Demographic and Health Survey data (<https://dhsprogram.com/>). All women ages 15-34 at the time of the survey were born after 1984. See S1 Table for a full list of countries and point estimates. Figure created using mapchart.net. Credit: Smith-Greenaway E., Weitzman A. (PLOS ONE, 2020) CC BY 4.0

On average, about a third of women between 15 and 34 years old from 43 low-and-middle-income countries (LMIC) have lost at least one sibling before the age of 25, according to a study published October 7, 2020 in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Emily Smith-Greenaway from the University of Southern California Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, U.S., and co-author Abigail Weitzman.

Though research examining the impact of sibling [death](#) on children and families is growing, much of this new literature focuses only on data from high-income countries in North America and Europe. In this study, Smith-Greenaway and Weitzman seek to address this gap by studying the experiences of women from 43 different LMIC in sub-Saharan

Africa, South/Southeast Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The authors used data from nationally representative samples of 348,314 15- to 34-year-old women, born between 1985 and 2003, to document experiences of sibling death (before turning 25). The dataset comes from the Demographic and Health Survey Program, which has administered regular household-based surveys across more than 90 LMIC for the past 30 years.

Across all 43 studied countries, roughly one third of the young women in the representative dataset had at least one deceased sibling. (In comparison, approximately eight percent of US youth have experienced a sibling's death before age 25.) However, the dataset showed significant regional variation: countries affected by conflict and war tended to show even higher numbers of sibling deaths (over half of respondents in Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, Niger, Burundi, and Rwanda had experienced at least one sibling death). Sibling loss was relatively less common, at slightly more than ten percent of respondents, for respondents in South Africa, Bolivia, and Columbia. Most of these reported sibling deaths occurred during the respondent's lifetimes, rather than prior to the respondent's birth.

Across the studied countries in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, over one-third of bereaved respondents experienced the loss of two or more siblings. Multiple sibling losses were reported at higher rates from respondents in Western, Central, and Eastern African countries, contexts with high fertility and high rates of under-five mortality. However, bereaved respondents in the majority of studied countries—including those who experienced numerous sibling deaths— still had a comparable number of remaining living siblings relative to peers whose siblings were all still alive.

The survey data represents only those sibling

deaths that the respondents were aware of and remembered, so may undercount deaths. However, these results are an important step to understanding the implications of sibling mortality for [young people](#) across the world, especially in understudied regions.

The authors add: "Siblings influence each other's development in powerful ways, yet we know little about how often these intimate bonds are broken by premature death—especially in the global south. We find that, in many low- and [middle-income countries](#), more than one-third of young people experience a sibling death during their formative years, confirming that [sibling](#) loss is a very common early life adversity in many global contexts that must be acknowledged and interrogated."

**More information:** Sibling mortality burden in low-income countries: A descriptive analysis of sibling death in 44 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, *PLOS ONE* (2020).  
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