Spectrum of Birth Defects Amongst Live Birth, Stillbirths and Abortions

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To the Editor : Worldwide, 7.9 million babies are born with birth defects (BD) and 94% of these are from low and middle-income countries [1, 2]. In India, the prevalence of BD among newborn and under-five children ranges from 61 to 69.9 per 1000 live births [3]. However there is limited data regarding the prevalence of BD among stillbirths and abortuses.

This study was conducted to determine the prevalence and distribution of BD among live births, stillbirths, and previable fetuses over a period of one year. All the live born and still-born fetuses with recognizable BD or those who were found to have BD in the antenatal period by an ultrasonography, fetal echocardiography, and chromosomal analysis were also included. Each birth defect was categorized as per International Classification of Diseases (ICD) 10 coding and the prevalence of BD was calculated [4].

A total of 6632 women delivered or aborted during the study period. Amongst them, 5508 (83.05%) were live births, 332 (5.0%) stillbirths (SB) and rest were abortions. There were total 606 cases of BD, out of which, 142 (23.4%) were previable and 58 (9.6%) stillbirths. The birth prevalence of BD among live births, stillbirths, and previable fetuses were 737.1, 105.3, and 257.8 per 10,000 live births, respectively. Almost 3/4th of cases were having isolated birth defects. Among previable, neural tube defects were highest, whereas in live births, cardiovascular system and musculoskeletal system were involved most commonly.

This study has shown a very high prevalence of BDs after including stillbirths and previable fetuses. Although this is a facility-based data, do not represent the true prevalence of the

total population. To know the exact burden of BD, it is mandatory to follow the outcome (stillbirths and previable BD) of all the pregnancies, and not just do the screening of the newborns only.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest None.

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