

## For Immediate Release

### New research confirms long-term impacts of maternal mortality on families and communities

**Boston MA** – New research in the journal *Reproductive Health* shows that the death of a woman during pregnancy and childbirth devastates her family's financial and economic stability as well as her children's health, education, and future opportunities.

Until now, research has focused on why women die during pregnancy and childbirth, but new evidence demonstrates that the consequences of a woman's death are far reaching and long lasting. Family Care International (FCI), the International Center for Research on Women, Harvard University's FXB Center for Health and Human Rights and partners conducted studies on the long-term effects of maternal mortality in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, and South Africa for a supplement to the journal *Reproductive Health*. These studies offer insight into the myriad challenges communities and families face after a maternal death.

A mother is central. When she dies during pregnancy or childbirth, her family scrambles to make up for her absence as an educator, guardian, health protector, and income-producer. Without their mothers' care, newborns are far less likely to survive their first year, compared with other babies, even those whose mothers die from other causes. In South Africa, babies whose mothers died due to pregnancy-related causes were 15 times more likely to die than those whose mothers survived. Older children often must drop out of school to help with chores, and girls are more likely to become pregnant and get married sooner, leading to higher maternal and neonatal mortality. Often, the family breaks up with children going to different care-takers.

"For the first time, we are able to trace the linkages between a maternal death and the resulting impacts on children, and quantify those risks, and the results are staggering," said Alicia Ely Yamin, Lecturer on Global Health and Policy Director, FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University. "These numbers will help advocates, as well as government officials and donors, better understand the implications of inaction on maternal health."

Families suffer crippling financial hardship following a maternal death. Along with forfeiting large sums for emergency obstetric care, families must pay exorbitant funeral costs, often exceeding their total annual expenditures on food, housing and other household needs. Fathers and other family members struggle to make up for the mother's share of earnings and work.

"Women's contribution to their families' wellbeing is immeasurable. They contribute as producers, as income earners, farmers and entrepreneurs, and at the same time take on most, if not all, of the household care work," says Aslihan Kes, an economist and gender specialist at ICRW. "Their loss can force households, particularly those already vulnerable, into poverty and can hinder a family's and community's development for decades."

These studies illustrate that leaders must prioritize maternal and child health and recognize the links between maternal mortality and education, economic opportunity, and empowerment when creating policies. To help families and communities better cope with the aftermath of a mother's death, government programs should provide support programs, such as financial assistance or childcare services.

"This powerful evidence makes it clear that improved policies and increased investment in maternal health are desperately needed in many countries." says Amy Boldosser-Boesch, Interim President of Family Care International. "The injustice of women continuing to die in pregnancy and childbirth is compounded by the impact of a woman's death on her family and community and cannot be ignored. Urgent action is needed to ensure that maternal health is prioritized in the post-2015 development agenda and at the country-level."

The research was conducted in collaboration with the Kenya Medical Research Institute, Partners In Health Malawi, Addis Ababa University, University of Washington, the Human Sciences Research Council, and the Ifakara Health Institute.

**Further details please contact:**

**International Center for Research on Women:** Erin Kelly, Communications Specialist, ICRW  
Mobile: +00 (1) 571 265 1110 Skype: smernkelly Email: [ekelly@icrw.org](mailto:ekelly@icrw.org)

**Harvard University's FXB Center for Health and Human Rights:** Alicia Yamin, Policy Director.  
Phone +00 (1) 617-432-6934 Email: [ayamin@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:ayamin@hsph.harvard.edu)

**Family Care International:** Adam Deixel, Vice President, Communications, Family Care International  
Phone: +00 (1) 212 646 9113 Email: [adeixel@familycareintl.org](mailto:adeixel@familycareintl.org)

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**ABOUT Family Care International (FCI):**

*Founded in 1986 as the first international organization dedicated to maternal health, FCI works toward a world where no woman suffers preventable pregnancy-related injury or death, where childbirth is safe for mothers and their babies, and where all people are able to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights.*

**ABOUT Harvard University's FXB Center for Health and Human Rights:**

*The FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University conducts research and provides capacity building and practical tools to advance the rights of marginalized children and their families worldwide.*

**ABOUT The International Center for Research on Women**

*For 40 years, ICRW has been the world's premier applied research institute focused on women and girls. Our evidence-based insight seeks to optimize programs, influence policies and identify scalable solutions that help women and girls lead safer, healthier, and more empowered lives. [www.icrw.org](http://www.icrw.org)*