

PERINATAL MORTALITY IN IRELAND: INEQUALITIES BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUP AND COUNTRY OF BIRTH

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Perinatal mortality in Ireland: inequalities by socio-economic group and country of birth^{1, 2}

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INTRODUCTION

Perinatal mortality includes stillbirths and deaths of live born infants during the first week of life. While there has been a significant reduction in the perinatal mortality rate in Ireland in recent years, it is not known if this reduction was shared equally among all groups. This research examined the perinatal mortality rate for various socio-economic and country of birth groups in Ireland between 2004 and 2019.

DATA AND METHODS

Data for the analysis was obtained from the National Perinatal Reporting System dataset. The dataset includes all births (including stillbirths) registered in Ireland. The perinatal mortality rate (the number of perinatal deaths relative to the number of births) was calculated for various socio-economic and country/region of birth groupings of the mother in two time periods (2004–2011 and 2012–2019).

Six country/region of birth groups were included in the analysis – Ireland, UK, Europe, Africa, Asia and other; eight socio-economic groups were also examined – higher professionals, lower professionals, employers and managers, intermediate non-manual, other non-manual and salaried employees, manual workers (including farming and agricultural workers), unemployed and home duties.

¹ This Bulletin summarizes the findings from: Duffy, K., Connolly, S., Nolan, A., and Maître, B., “Perinatal mortality in Ireland: inequalities by socio-economic group and country of birth”, *European Journal of Public Health*, Available online: <https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/advance-article/doi/10.1093/eurpub/ckac167/6827863>.

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FINDINGS

The perinatal mortality rate in Ireland has decreased over time, from 6.6 per 1,000 births for the period 2004-2011 to 5.2 per 1,000 births for the period 2012-2019. The perinatal mortality rates declined in all socio-economic groups over time. However, higher rates were found in both time periods in mothers classified as unemployed or engaged in home duties. In terms of country/region of birth, mothers born in Africa had the highest perinatal mortality rate in both time periods. While the rate for most groups decreased over time, this was not the case for African-born mothers, where the rate increased slightly between the two time periods. Adjusting for the age and socio-economic status of African-born mothers reduced but did not eliminate their increased risk of experiencing a perinatal death.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Recent reform proposals in Ireland have highlighted the need to address health inequalities. A first step in tackling inequalities in perinatal mortality will be identifying why some groups continue to experience higher rates. Then targeting of such groups may help reduce current health inequalities and potentially reduce the overall perinatal mortality rate.

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