

Project Title:

LOST CHILDHOOD: ADOLESCENT BIRTH IN RURAL INDIA

Project Summary:

The goal of this project is to examine and raise awareness on the health implications of adolescent childbearing in rural India.

Detailed Proposal:

Every minute a woman dies from pregnancy-related causes according to The United Nations Population Fund. In developing countries maternal mortality is the leading cause of death for women of reproductive age. But when the mother is under the age of 15, she is five times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than a woman in her 20's, and girls 15 to 19 are twice as likely.

This issue is no more acute than in India, where 47% of women are married before the legal age of eighteen. Many of these child brides give birth to children before their own bodies are fully developed, leading to appalling rates of maternal mortality. Adolescent mothers face a higher risk of obstructed labor than women in their twenties. Without adequate emergency obstetric care, which may be impossible to access for this mostly rural, poor women, this can lead to uterine rupture and a high risk of death for both the mother and child.

Indian NGO, Action Research and Training and Health (www.arth.in), based in southern Rajasthan (the largest and one of the least developed states of the country), works directly with rural communities to help lower reproductive mortality through training and field health programs. I will be coordinating with this organization to make connections and help develop the photo story.

Significance:

This will be a critical piece of a larger personal project that I have launched, in conjunction with local and international NGO's, examining the issues that endanger maternal health around the globe. The project will focus on the regions that are the most critically affected, examining various issues such as: pregnancy complications due to HIV/AIDS (Malawi), unsafe abortions (Mozambique), prohibitive distance from health care providers (Guatemala), unsanitary living conditions (Haiti), and under-trained midwives (Indonesia).

I am currently living in Haiti and beginning work on phase one—photographing pregnancy and birth in the post-earthquake tent camps with local NGO FONDEPH. For future portions of the project I am discussing a larger collaboration with multinational NGO Project HOPE as well as pursuing grant and other funding sources.

Final Destination:

The work will consist of a photo story and accompanying multimedia documentary that would serve as a standalone piece that could be published in magazines/newspapers and their websites. (My agency, Polaris, will be taking on the client search)

In addition, the grant would fund a photo exhibition that I would like to mount in Washington D.C. to raise awareness and benefit the partner NGO.

Eventually the piece will be integrated with the larger project and be part of a bigger awareness-raising campaign on the topic of maternal health.