



Asia-Pacific CRVS Research Forum

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Study to understand the existing mechanisms and reasons for weaknesses, challenges and bottlenecks in the vital events registration system in Pakistan and how they can be effectively addressed

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Introduction/Motivation

Registration of vital events is the function of local government departments in Pakistan¹. An extensive network of union councils exists under the local governments but the registration rate is dismal. According to the latest Pakistan Demographic and Household Survey (PDHS), under five years registrations is only 42% while it is less than 5% for death registrations. No information is available for marriages and divorces registrations as the same is negligible. PDHS 2017-18² also indicates that children under age 2 are less likely to be registered (39%) than children age 2-4 (44%). This state of affairs prompted to look into the missing links that are vital to universality of the registrations.

The research study aims to understand the existing mechanisms and reasons for weaknesses, challenges, and bottlenecks in the vital events registration system in Pakistan. The study will identify barriers to vital events registration for the people and how they can be effectively addressed.

Methods/Work performed

An operational research was employed with desk review and key informant interviews (KIIs) components. Desk review was done to explore organizations (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, NADRA, Ministry of Law and Justice, Provincial Local Government Departments, Union Councils, Provincial Health Departments, Provincial Law Departments) and their rules of business linked with vital events notifications and registrations and to look into the various processes and flows. KIIs were conducted with the various fonctionnaires of the mandated organizations, field staff and the general public.

Results/Findings

The government's civil registration system requires a newborn to be registered within 30 days after birth and death registration within 60 days after the event¹, however, public is not aware of the importance of birth/death and other vital events registration. Birth registration is considerably higher in urban (60%) than in rural (34%) areas. Moreover, huge disparities exist in terms of Birth Registration coverage among the provinces as only 2% of children in FATA and 19% of children in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are registered as compared with 82% of children in ICT Islamabad.

People either don't get the birth and death notifications or they don't report to the registering entity (union councils under the local government department) to get the event registered. Virtually no authentic information is available regarding the registration of marriages and divorces.

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Mechanism for verification of particulars of reporter/parents/ guardians, and for authentication/verification of issued certificates is difficult because of the manual registers. Regular reporting system is almost non-existent to support flow of information at provincial and national level.

Moreover, the linkage is missing across different components that represent a multiplicity of information flows from different sources and agencies and comprise the overall civil registration system. For example, verbal autopsy (VA) systems collecting cause of death (COD) information should be able to speak to the CR system dealing with death registration.

In practice, civil registration of vital events is fragmented and compartmentalized; different sectors, for example health, population statistics and social security, are typically not able to access the same database and to generate vital statistics from the civil registration data. Findings of the study also commensurate and add to various assessments using University of Queensland Australia rapid assessment tool and comprehensive assessment of CRVS earlier conducted by Government of Pakistan³.

Discussion

Health sector is not mainstreamed within the vital events notifications of births and deaths. Due to demand side issues, parents or family members of the deceased do not collect event notification from the health facility or community nor do they report to the registering entity for getting the event registered. Similarly, there is need to strengthen the institution of union councils under the local governments to optimize them in the registrations of such events. This entails use of digital technologies to institute real-time notifications of vital events from health sector (fixed health facilities and community) to the registering entities. Capacity of health sector in recording death and cause of death is vital to optimally utilize the phenomenon of universality of death registration to generate evidence for informed policy and planning.

Conclusion / recommendations / implications

Health sector (fixed health facility and grass root community health workers) should be mandated to report vital events notifications (births, deaths and cause of deaths) as a matter of system to the registering entity (union councils under local government departments) instead of parents or family members of the deceased. This should ideally be IT enabled and real-time making use of a *vital Events Notification Software* and for this purpose births and deaths notification counters should be established within the vicinity of health facilities and the same information would be communicated by the community health workers through android based gadgets in case the event



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is happening in community. During the interim period, the same policy shift would continue to be enforced manually whereby the health sector would communicate such notifications in paper mode to the registering entities until the IT related and other such issues are resolved.

For the reformed system, capacity building of the health sector staff would be required particularly an improvement plan for certification of cause of death and its coding according to International Classification of Diseases in vogue.

Potential role of other sectors like education, religious affairs etc as notifiers of the vital events would have to be accelerated and enhanced in order to ensure universality of vital events notifications and registrations.

Keeping in view the devolved nature of the subject in Pakistan, a bridging and suggestive legislation at national level would be required to enable the provincial governments modify and conform their legislative milieu in accordance with the policy shift in notifications of vital events and reformed processes and flows, and optimally mainstream private sector in notification of the vital events of births and deaths.

References

- 1 Provincial Local Government Acts
- 2 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18
- 3 Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan