



18,000 children die from drowning every year

Publish Date: Sunday, 5 December, 2010, at 02:32 AM Doha Time

By Mizan Rahman
Dhaka

Drowning, the leading killer of children aged between 10 months and 17 years, has turned into a 'silent epidemic' in Bangladesh and some other countries in South and South East Asia, public health researchers from home and abroad said in Dhaka yesterday.

They disclosed that more than 18,000 children die each year from drowning in Bangladesh, while an estimated 350,000 minors die in Asia. Majority of the minors can be saved provided preventive measures are taken right now, they observed.

"Drowning is a silent epidemic in Bangladesh and Asia as a whole, but nobody looks into it," said Justin Scarr, chief operating officer of Royal Life Saving Society, an Australian charity, at a conference in the Bangladesh capital.

"If you look at the figure of deaths, it clearly reflects a picture of silent epidemic," Justin said, adding that Bangladesh needed to do much more on cutting child mortality further among the age of group of 1-5 years.

Public health researchers, government officials and NGO representatives from Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia and Australia have arrived in Dhaka to discuss and devise new strategies to stop child deaths from drowning, which also leads 68,000 children to morbid status every year alone in Bangladesh.

The strategy would be further revised and finalised at the first world conference on drowning in Vietnam next year, organisers said yesterday.

International Centre for Drowning Research (IDRC) in co-operation with Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh (CIPRB) and Royal Live Savings has organised the Dhaka conference.

"Children in Bangladesh, who can not swim, are 4.5 times more susceptible to drowning than those who can swim in this riverine country," Dr Michel Linnen, technical director of RLS, said at his presentation at a hotel in Baridhara.

CIPRB executive director Dr A K M Fazlur Rahman said more than 12,500 children die from drowning before they celebrate the fifth birthday, while the rest 5,500 die between their age of 5-17 years.

The deaths are common among rural children mainly because of households close proximity to water bodies, especially ponds, ditches, canals and rivers. The deaths among urban children are less, although only 30% urban children know swimming as compared to 65% of rural children.

The executive director said only half of Bangladesh's children, who make up nearly 40% of total population, know swimming. The scenario in urban areas are frustrating, he pointed out.

He said the child deaths in rural areas mainly happened between 9am and 2pm and caused because of non-supervision by mothers and family members during the period.

Most of the children die within one minute of their drowning, he said, adding children who were rescued at later stage of their drowning suffer from major brain injuries.

Superstitions and lack of awareness also contribute adversely to child mortality and morbidity even after their recovery from water.

IDRC sources said over 96% deaths from drowning occur in low and middle income countries and it claims lives of 50 children everyday in Bangladesh.

Swimming is the prime answer to stop child drowning. It also requires some low-cost household arrangements that are being piloted in Bangladesh and some other Asian countries.

"We have already trained 80,000 children in three sub-districts of Bangladesh and encouraging results are coming out of the interventions," viewed IDRC director Dr Aminur Rahman.

He said the low cost arrangements in rural areas and portable swimming pools for urban children can help swimming practice and reduce deaths from drowning.