

Deaths from drowning turn into 'silent epidemic'

Say experts suggesting preventive measures

Bss, Dhaka

Drowning, one of the leading cause of deaths of children aged between 10 months and 17 years, has turned into a "silent epidemic" in Bangladesh and some other countries in South and Southeast Asia, maintained public health researchers from home and abroad yesterday.

They said more than 18,000 children, mostly 1-4 years of age, die each year from drowning in Bangladesh, while an estimated 350,000 minors die in Asia. Majority of the children lives 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, on the sidelines of a three-day conference in the city.

"If you look at the figure of deaths, it clearly reflects an picture of silent epidemic," said Justin adding that Bangladesh needs 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 converged to 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.

International Centre for Drowning Research (IDRC) in cooperation with Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh (CIPRB) and Royal Live Savings has organised the 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 in his presentation at a hotel in Baridhara.

CIPRB Executive Director Dr AKM 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.