



**OPERATIONAL
RESEARCH
SNAPSHOT**

Reducing the Health Risks of Unregulated Labour-Inducing Medication in Pakistan



In Pakistan, the unregulated use of labour-inducing drugs like oxytocin or misoprostol poses serious health risks to mothers and neonates.

To induce labour, Pakistani health regulations allow oxytocin only to be administered by trained gynecologists in health facilities.

Yet labour-inducing drugs are known to be sold over-the counter in local pharmacies without prescription or regulatory control.

Health care workers such as community midwives and lady health visitors use them to accelerate both obstructed and regular labour, sometimes upon request from in-laws or community members.

This operational research study looked at the specific maternal and neonatal health complications unregulated oxytocin causes in the district headquarter hospital in Timurgara, Pakistan.





87% of all women who received labour-inducing medication before reaching the hospital in Timurgara were administered by non-authorized personnel. Overall, the hospital assisted approximately two cases with complications a day with unregulated oxytocin involved.



Women receiving unregulated labour-inducing medication are more than three times as likely to suffer uterine ruptures, and their babies are at significantly greater risk of birth asphyxia and stillbirth.



The study also suggests an association with maternal mortality, with four out of five deaths occurring amongst women receiving unregulated medication during the study period.



IMPLEMENTATION

MSF has developed a dedicated training session on the risks of oxytocin and correct administration for health workers, and a refresher course for gynecologists which are both piloted in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

In close collaboration with the ministry of health, MSF is advocating with national and regional stakeholders, reviewing regulatory frameworks, and developing a communication campaign reaching out to communities via social media, radio, and informative print materials.

MSF is also collaborating with partner offices in adjacent regions and UN-agencies to upscale the strategy on a national level.

Original Study: Shah, S; Van den Bergh, R; Prinsloo, J R; Rehman, G; Bibi, A; Shaeen, N; Auat, R; Daudi, S M; Njenga, J W; Khilji, T B-U-D; Maïkéré, J; De Plecker, E; Caluwaerts, S; Zachariah, R; Van Overloop, C. (2015) Unregulated usage of labour-inducing medication in a region of Pakistan with poor drug regulatory control: characteristics and risk patterns. *International Health*.

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