

Interpreting Incidence from Hospital Based Data Retrieval: A Comment on Incidence and Determinants of Stillbirth amongst Parturients in Two Hospitals in Southern Nigeria

Sir,

This is in reference to the article, "Incidence and determinants of stillbirth among parturients in two hospitals in Southern Nigeria" published in Journal of Basic and Clinical Reproductive Sciences (2014;3:15-21).^[1]

The authors have carried out a commendable job in highlighting fetal death, an important public health issue.

However, I have a few concerns regarding this study.

The authors have mentioned in their material and methods that this was a 5 year retrospective descriptive study of all fetal mortality (2007-2011) and they reviewed the hospital records and analyzed the data retrieved.

However, a review of hospital based records is unable to provide us with the incidence. Incidence primarily being a rate needs two comparison time units, wherein a specified population is followed through and hospital data retrieved from records is unable to provide that.

Incidence actually is a measure of probability of developing a particular condition during a specified period for the individuals in the population under observation^[2] and is calculated as the number of new cases occurring in a defined population during a specified period of time.^[3]

This point is further clarified once we have a look at the results. The authors have provided fetal mortality rate as

0.6% (as a percentage), whereas incidence being a rate, should have been quoted just as 6.1/1000 live births and not as percentage. As per the definition of incidence given above, incidence rate refers during a given time period in a specified population at risk. The measure most often used is person years and not percentage.^[2]

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Authors Reply

My comments on this piece of letter in reaction to the article "Incidence and Determinants of Stillbirth among Parturients in two hospitals in Southern Nigeria" published in Journal of basic and clinical reproductive sciences (2014;3:15-21)". I have reviewed the letter and my comments are below: (1) The writer certainly is confusing issues and misconstrues that "Incidence" is only calculable for prospective studies and that it is not applicable to retrospective descriptive studies. (2) Rightly defined by him, incidence is the number

of new cases of a given disease during a given period in a specified population. It is trite that incidence is calculable for both prospective and retrospective studies and the essential elements of its applicability to studies are that such studies have a well-defined period as was applicable to this study in question (January 2007 and December 2011), there is a specified population (in this case, the study population included all parturients [booked and unbooked] who were managed within the study period in this center) and there

is convincing evidence that new cases occurred within the defined period and in the defined population (clearly there were cases of fetal death with clear documentations of the medical records of the patients and the huge facts that were analyzed in this study retrieved). (3) The issue of whether it is expressed in percentage or proportion is also misconstrued. Incidence may be expressed as rates in which case it is computed as percentage (as was done in this study) or may be expressed as proportion in which case

it is expressed as a proportion of the person years of the study (as reflected in fetal mortality rate in this study). Either is a standard and acceptable scientific way of reporting incidences of any disease of clinical entity.

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