



Maternal and Fetal Risk Factors for Still Birth at a Tertiary Care Center – A Cross Sectional Study

Short Title: Stillbirth Risk Factors in Tertiary Care

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: To gain understanding of maternal and fetal risk factors for still birth by evaluating number of risk factors responsible, prevalence of maternal and fetal risk factors, study the modifiable and unmodifiable antenatal risk factors associated and study percentage of MSB and FSB in tertiary care centre.

METHODS: The study population included patients with presentation and diagnosis of intrauterine fetal death or patient with fresh stillbirth during delivery admitted in hospital. History and examination of patients are done and mode of delivery was decided accordingly.

RESULTS: Based on this study, both maternal and fetal factors contribute to the risk of stillbirth. Maternal factors include age, body mass index (BMI), comorbidities (such as anemia, hypertension, diabetes, liver disease), gestational age, and antenatal care(ANC) registration, while fetal factors include birthweight, congenital anomalies, and abnormal ultrasound findings. Among these, BMI, ANC registration, and maternal comorbidities are considered modifiable risk factors. In contrast, factors such as maternal age, gestational age, fetal weight, and congenital anomalies are non-modifiable. These remain important in risk assessment, monitoring, and counselling during pregnancy.

CONCLUSION: In order to avoid untoward pregnancy outcomes- It is necessary to manage any associated comorbidities pre-conceptionally. Preconceptional folic acid supplements can help reduce complications such as neural tube defects. For diabetic patients, achieving normal HbA1c levels, controlling sugar levels before pregnancy, thyroid disorders be addressed by correcting TSH levels, anemia correction and weight reduction is recommended.

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Keywords: antenatal care, comorbidities, congenital anomalies, cross-sectional study, fetal risk factors, maternal risk factors, Obesity, stillbirth

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1. Introduction

Stillbirth refers to death of a baby at or after 28 weeks of pregnancy, either before or during delivery.¹

The way stillbirth is defined and reported varies significantly around the world.

In the United States, miscarriage is loss of pregnancy before 20 weeks of gestational age, and stillbirth is loss of a baby at or after 20 weeks gestational age.

Every year, nearly 2 million stillbirths occur globally, which averages out to one every 16 seconds.¹ More than 40% of these stillbirths happen during labor, and many of these losses could be prevented with better quality and respectful care during childbirth.

Complications during pregnancy, such as anemia, eclampsia, preeclampsia and other hypertensive disorders, gestational or overt diabetes mellitus, cholestasis of pregnancy, as well as APH (Antepartum Hemorrhage), abnormal fetal positions/presentation, and obstructed labor, greatly raise the risk of stillbirth. Therefore, a high rate of stillbirths often indicates the quality of antenatal care (ANC) in a particular area.²

Stillbirths are categorized into:

- **In-Facility Stillbirth:** stillbirth where the fetus was known to be alive upon admission at the healthcare facility (FHS heard).

- **Antepartum Stillbirth:** intra-uterine fetal death occurring before labor begins.

- **Intrapartum Stillbirth:** stillbirth that occurs during labor.³

Additionally:

- **Macerated Stillbirth (MSB):** stillbirth showing signs of maceration (skin changes like skin discoloration or darkening, edema, peeling, redness and breakdown due to prolonged death) at delivery; usually seen in antepartum stillbirth.

- **Fresh Stillbirth (FSB):** stillbirth that has a fresh appearance with no signs of maceration during delivery, indicating that death occurred recently.³

Certain risk factors for stillbirth include:

- African/Black race
- Age 35 years or older
- Low socioeconomic status
- Addictions such as smoking during pregnancy
- High BMI
- Medical conditions: hypertension, diabetes, anemia, cholestasis of pregnancy, obesity, thrombophilia, APLA syndrome

- Erythrocyte/thrombocyte isoimmunization
- Infections during pregnancy: malaria, parvovirus, toxoplasma and others which can directly cause stillbirth or can induce preterm labor
- Multiple pregnancies
- Pre/post-term pregnancies
- History of previous pregnancy losses
- Male fetus
- Lack of education about ANC care
- Not registered at health institute
- Placental abruption
- Major fetal congenital anomalies

When investigating stillbirth, workup includes thorough review of medical history, including antenatal visits and care, as well as autopsy, placental examination, and karyotype analysis. Additional tests include Kleihauer-Betke test, antiphospholipid antibodies, serologies for parvovirus, malaria and syphilis, toxicology screening, and indirect Coombs test. Further testing should be tailored to the specific clinical situation and medical history.

The approach to delivering the baby after a diagnosed in-utero stillbirth varies based on the gestational age and obstetric history. Typically, labor is induced using prostaglandins or oxytocin.⁴

Supporting the patient involves emotional support and providing clear communication about test results.

1.1. Objectives

1. To evaluate risk factors responsible for stillbirth.
2. To study modifiable and unmodifiable antenatal risk factors associated with stillbirth.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design

A prospective observational case-control study.

2.2. Study Area

Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology in a Tertiary Care Hospital in Mumbai.

2.3. Study Population

Patients with presentation and diagnosis of intrauterine fetal death or patients with fresh stillbirth during delivery admitted in the hospital.

2.4. Sample Size

Includes 88 cases and 88 controls, total sample size of 176.

2.5. Selection Criteria for Cases

Inclusion Criteria:

- All patients admitted to labor ward with stillbirth
- Given informed consent
- Fetal weight > 500 g

- Gestational age > 28 weeks

Exclusion Criteria:

- Gravidas with live births

2.6. Selection Criteria for Controls

Inclusion Criteria:

- All patients with live fetus admitted for termination of pregnancy or in labor
- Given informed consent
- Fetal weight > 500 g
- Gestational age > 28 weeks

Exclusion Criteria:

- Gravidas with stillbirths

3. Results and Observations

3.1. Age

Table 1. Maternal Age Distribution

Maternal Age (years)	Stillbirth	Live Births
< 19	6 (6.81%)	1 (1.11%)
20–24	16 (18.18%)	22 (25.0%)
25–29	27 (30.68%)	36 (40.9%)
30–34	25 (28.4%)	22 (25.0%)
35–39	10 (11.3%)	5 (5.68%)
> 40	4 (4.54%)	2 (2.27%)

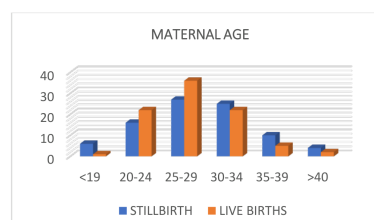


Figure 1. Maternal Age Distribution

Mean age among stillbirths is 28.36 years and among live births is 27.68 years.

At extremes of age, the percentage of stillbirths is higher compared to live births.

Table 2. Stillbirth Rate at Extremes of Age

Age Group	Stillbirths	Livebirths
Extremes of age (< 19 and > 40 yrs)	10	3
20 to 39 years	78	85

Chi-square test: $p = 0.043655$ ($p < 0.05$), statistically significant.

3.2. Parity

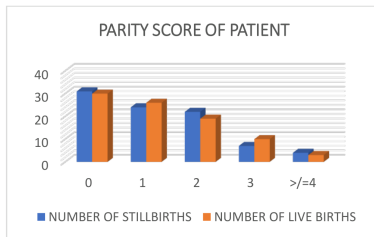
Maximum stillbirths occurred in nulliparous patients (35.22%).

In grand multiparity (4 or more previous deliveries), the percentage of stillbirth deliveries (4.54%) was higher compared to that of live births (3.40%).

By Chi-square test: $p = 0.69$ ($p > 0.05$), which is not statistically significant.

Table 3. Distribution of Cases and Controls According to Parity

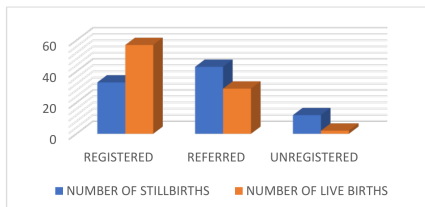
Parity Score	Stillbirths	Live Births
0 (Nulliparous)	31 (35.22%)	30 (34.09%)
1	24 (27.27%)	26 (29.54%)
2	22 (25.00%)	19 (21.59%)
3	7 (7.95%)	10 (11.36%)
≥ 4	4 (4.54%)	3 (3.40%)

**Figure 2.** Parity Score of Patients

3.3. ANC Registration

Table 4. Antenatal Care (ANC) Registration Status

Registration Status	Stillbirths	Livebirths
Registered	33 (37.50%)	57 (64.77%)
Referred	43 (48.86%)	29 (32.95%)
Unregistered	12 (13.63%)	2 (2.27%)

**Figure 3.** Antenatal Care (ANC) Registration Status

The percentage of unregistered patients was higher in stillbirths (13.63%) compared to live births (2.27%).

By Chi-square test: $p = 0.005341$ ($p < 0.05$), which is statistically significant.

3.4. BMI (Body Mass Index)

Table 5. Distribution According to Body Mass Index (BMI)

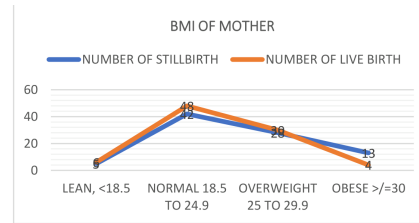
BMI (kg/m^2)	Stillbirth	Livebirth
Lean (< 18.5)	5 (5.68%)	6 (6.81%)
Normal (18.5–24.9)	42 (47.72%)	48 (54.54%)
Overweight (25–29.9)	28 (31.81%)	30 (34.09%)
Obese (≥ 30)	13 (14.77%)	4 (4.54%)

The percentage of obesity was higher in stillbirths (14.77%) compared to live births (4.54%).

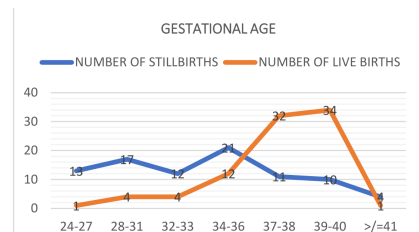
By Chi-square test: $p = 0.216$ ($p > 0.05$).

3.5. Gestational Age at Delivery

Stillbirths were more prevalent in preterm deliveries and post-datism (> 41 weeks).

**Figure 4.** BMI of Mother**Table 6.** Distribution According to Gestational Age at Delivery

Gestational Age (weeks)	Stillbirths	Live Births
24–27	13 (14.65%)	1 (1.13%)
28–31	17 (19.16%)	4 (4.54%)
32–33	12 (13.63%)	4 (4.54%)
34–36	21 (23.86%)	12 (13.63%)
37–38	11 (12.50%)	32 (36.36%)
39–40	10 (11.36%)	34 (38.63%)
≥ 41	4 (4.54%)	1 (1.13%)

**Figure 5.** Gestational Age at Delivery**Table 7.** Comparison of Preterm/Postdatism vs Term Deliveries

Category	Stillbirths	Live Births
Preterm and Postdatism	67	22
Term	21	66

By Chi-square test: $p = 0.00001$ ($p < 0.05$), statistically significant.

3.6. Fetal Birth Weight

Table 8. Distribution According to Fetal Birth Weight

Fetal Birth Weight (g)	Stillbirth	Live Births
500–1000	23 (26.13%)	2 (2.27%)
1001–1500	18 (20.45%)	2 (2.27%)
1501–2000	9 (10.22%)	9 (10.22%)
2001–2500	14 (15.90%)	12 (13.60%)
2501–3000	9 (10.22%)	33 (37.50%)
3001–3500	13 (14.77%)	21 (23.86%)
3501–4000	2 (2.27%)	6 (6.81%)
> 4001	0 (0%)	1 (1.13%)

The highest percentage of stillbirths (26.13%) weighed in the range of 500–1000 g, whereas among live births, the maximum proportion (37.50%) weighed between 2501–3000 g.

By Chi-square test: $p < 0.00001$ ($p < 0.05$), statistically significant.

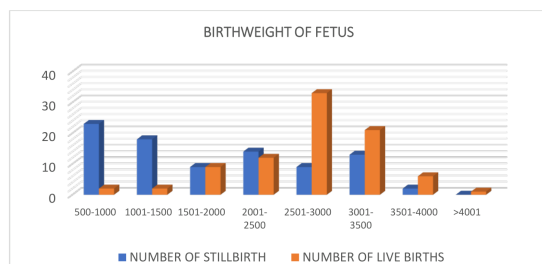


Figure 6. Birth Weight of Fetus

3.7. Fetal Congenital Anomalies

Table 9. Prevalence of Fetal Congenital Anomalies

Congenitally Anomalous Fetus	Stillbirths	Live Births
Yes	9 (10.22%)	2 (2.27%)
No	79 (89.77%)	86 (97.72%)

By Chi-square test: $p = 0.0292$ ($p < 0.05$), which is statistically significant.

Stillbirth is significantly associated with congenital anomalies of the fetus.

3.8. Maternal Comorbidities

Table 10. Distribution of Maternal Comorbidities

Maternal Comorbidities	Stillbirths	Live Births
Yes	56 (63.13%)	30 (33.82%)
No	32 (36.07%)	58 (65.38%)

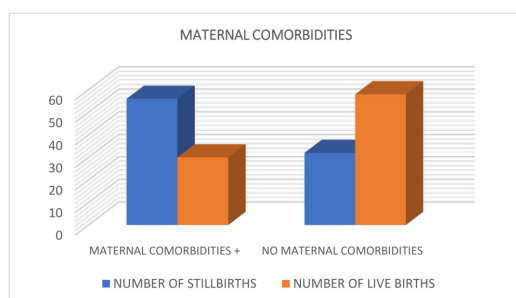


Figure 7. Distribution of Maternal Comorbidities

Among stillbirths (63.13%), the percentage of cases with comorbidities was significantly higher than that of live births (33.82%).

By Chi-square test: $p = 0.000088$ ($p < 0.05$), statistically significant.

Table 11. Types of Comorbidities and Association with Stillbirth

Comorbidities	Stillbirths
Anemia alone	5 (5.68%)
Hypertension alone	16 (18.18%)
Diabetes alone	6 (6.81%)
Antepartum hemorrhage	1 (1.13%)
Multiple comorbidities	21 (23.86%)
Others	5 (5.68%)

In total, 63.13% of patients with stillbirth had comorbidities, such as anemia, preeclampsia, eclampsia, chronic hypertension, overt/gestational diabetes mellitus, hypothyroidism, cholestasis of pregnancy, and infections (including HIV, HBsAg, Dengue, Malaria).

Table 12. Percentage of Overt DM and GDM Among Patients with Stillbirths and Live Births

Status	Stillbirths	Livebirths
Non-diabetic	77 (87.50%)	83 (94.31%)
GDM	5 (5.68%)	4 (4.54%)
Overt DM	6 (6.81%)	1 (1.13%)

Stillbirths and live births have almost equal distribution in GDM. However, Overt DM is 6 times more prevalent in patients with stillbirths.

3.9. USG Obstetrics Abnormality

Table 13. Prevalence of Previous USG Obstetrics Abnormality

Previous USG Abnormality	Stillbirths	Live Births
Yes	38 (43.18%)	21 (23.86%)
No	50 (56.81%)	67 (76.13%)

USG abnormality includes abnormality in liquor volume, fetal weight (FGR/SGA/LGA), abnormal Doppler studies, and placental abnormalities.

By Chi-square test: $p = 0.006638$ ($p < 0.05$), statistically significant.

Stillbirth is significantly associated with abnormal ultrasound findings.

4. Discussion

The present study is an observational, descriptive case-control study conducted in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, including 88 cases (stillbirths) and 88 controls (live births).

As per this study, the mean age of patients with stillbirths was 28.36 years. At extremes of age (below 20 and above 40 years), the stillbirth rate was higher than live births. In comparison, a 2022 study by Cande V. Ananth found that the highest rates of stillbirth occurred in the 25–29 age group, while also showing that both very young (12–19 years) and older women (35 years and above) were associated with a higher stillbirth rate.⁵

In this study, stillbirth was not significantly associated with parity of the patient. However, the percentage of grand multiparity was comparatively higher in stillbirths (4.54%) than live births (3.40%), though not statistically significant.

This study showed a significant difference in ANC registration between stillbirths and live births. Patients with stillbirths had a higher percentage of being unregistered. In a 2020 study by Gwako et al., the odds of stillbirth were four times higher among those who did not attend antenatal care.⁶

Obesity was found to be associated with stillbirths. Among stillbirths, 14.77% were obese ($\text{BMI} \geq 30 \text{ kg/m}^2$), which was significantly higher than in live births (4.54%). A study by Bodnar et al. regarding maternal prepregnancy obesity and cause-specific stillbirth showed that the rate of stillbirth among lean, overweight, obese, and severely obese women was 7.7, 10.6, 13.9, and 17.3 per 1000 live-born and stillborn infants, respectively.⁷

In the present study, stillbirths and live births were grouped according to their gestational age at delivery. Stillbirth deliveries peaked at 34–36 weeks gestational age, followed by 28–31 weeks, whereas among live births, the peak was at 39–40 weeks of gestation. The percentage of preterm delivery was much higher in stillbirths than live births. According to a study by Lawn and Blencowe et al., stillbirth risk was highest for SGA pregnancies prior to 29 weeks of gestation, remained stable between 30 and 34 weeks, and increased gradually from 35 weeks to a peak rate of 8.4 per 1000 fetuses at risk at ≥ 42 weeks.⁸

Grouping by fetal birth weight showed that stillbirths usually had low birth weight of less than 1000 g compared to live births. A study by Martínez-Varea et al. (2024) also showed that SGA and FGR were significantly associated with stillbirth in singleton pregnancies across all gestational ages at delivery.⁹

Male stillbirths were slightly more frequent than female stillbirths, but the difference was not statistically significant and sex of the fetus was not identified as an independent risk factor for stillbirth.

Congenital anomalies were identified as a significant risk factor for stillbirth. The percentage of congenitally anomalous fetuses was higher in stillbirths than live births (10.22% vs 2.27%, $p = 0.0292$). This compares to a study by Son et al. (2021), where 23.4% of singleton stillbirths had one or more major anomalies compared to 4.3% of live births.¹⁰

Of the total 88 patients having stillbirths, 33% were intrapartum stillbirths and 67% were antepartum stillbirths. The prevalence of antepartum stillbirth was higher compared to intrapartum stillbirth. A study by Boo et al. (2024) similarly showed a higher percentage of antepartum stillbirth (77.8%) compared to intrapartum stillbirth (22.2%).¹¹

Maternal comorbidities were a major risk factor for stillbirth. Among stillbirths, 63.13% presented with maternal comorbidities, significantly higher than live births (33.82%). This aligns with a study by Nyarko et al. (2024), which reported a rate of severe maternal morbidity during delivery of 791 cases per 10,000 deliveries for stillbirths compared to 154 cases per 10,000 for live births.¹²

Among the 56 patients with stillbirth who had comorbidities, 23.86% had multiple comorbidities including anemia, preeclampsia/eclampsia, chronic hypertension, overt/gestational DM, hypothyroidism, cholestasis of pregnancy, and infections such as HIV, HBsAg, Dengue, and Malaria.

The percentage of previous USG obstetric abnormalities was 43.18% in stillbirths versus 23.86% in live births, which was statistically significant.

Vaginal delivery occurred in 68% of stillbirths and LSCS in 26%, whereas among live births, 51% had vaginal delivery and 47.7% had Cesarean section. This reflects a lower rate of Cesarean section among stillbirths, similar to findings by Buinoiu et al. (2017), where Cesarean section rates were 41.7% for live births versus 17.24% for stillbirths.¹³

Complications occurred in 27.27% of stillbirth cases (1.4 times higher than live births at 11.36%). Wall-Wieler et al. (2021) similarly reported that the risk of postpartum readmission for women with stillbirths was nearly 1.5 times greater compared to live births, with common indications including uterine/pelvic infections, psychiatric conditions, hypertensive disorders, and urinary tract infections.¹⁴

Therefore, maternal age, BMI, comorbidities, gestational age, and ANC registration are key risk factors for stillbirth. Fetal

factors such as birth weight, congenital anomalies, and ultrasound abnormalities are also major risk factors.

BMI, ANC registration, and manageable comorbidities represent modifiable risk factors that can be targeted for prevention. In contrast, maternal age, gestational age, birth weight, and fetal structural anomalies represent non-modifiable risk factors.

5. Conclusion

In this study, stillbirths occurring before labor (MSB) were more common than those occurring during labor (FSB). The study highlights both modifiable and unmodifiable risk factors. Modifiable factors include BMI, maternal health conditions such as anemia, hypertension, and diabetes, as well as proper registration at a healthcare center and adherence to iron and folic acid supplementation. On the other hand, unmodifiable factors encompass mother's age at conception, congenital anomalies of the fetus, gestational age at delivery, and birth weight.

Hence, to prevent adverse pregnancy outcomes, pre-conceptional management of comorbidities prior to planning pregnancy is essential. Preconceptional folic acid supplementation helps reduce complications such as neural tube defects. For diabetic patients, achieving target HbA1c levels and glycemic control before pregnancy, correcting TSH levels in thyroid dysfunction, correcting anemia, and weight optimization are recommended.

Additionally, early pregnancy support with micronized progesterone, low-molecular-weight heparin (LMWH), and low-dose aspirin is advisable in high-risk pregnancies.

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