

Maternal mortality



Figure 1: Maternal mortality, 1990-94

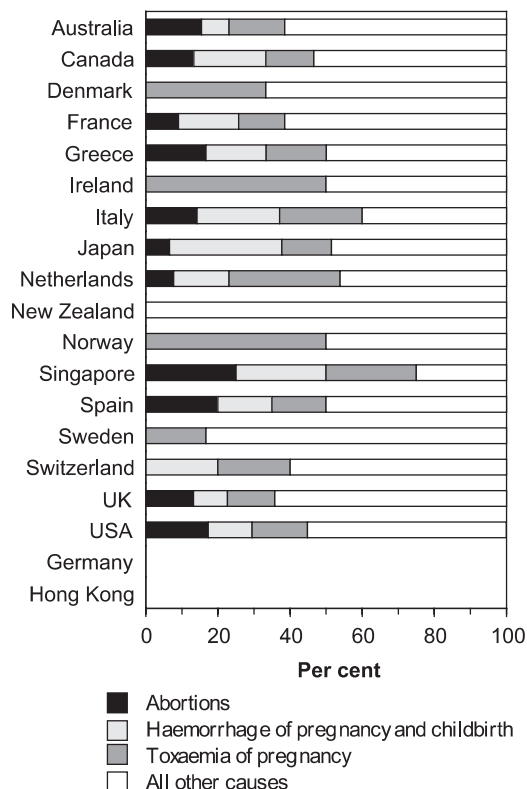


Figure 2: Maternal mortality, by cause, 1985-89

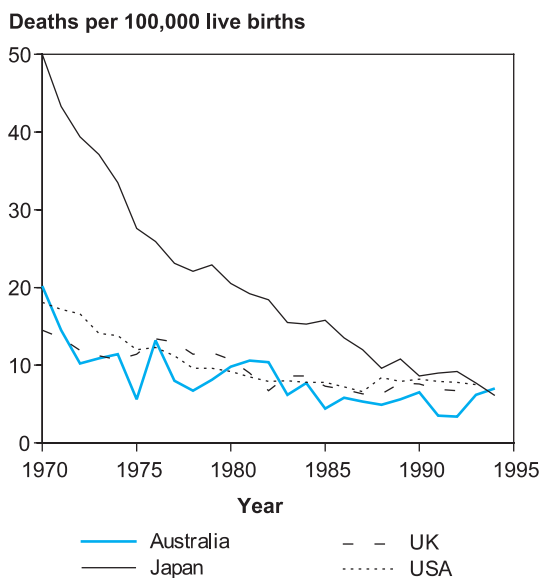


Figure 3: Trends in maternal mortality rates, 1970 to 1994

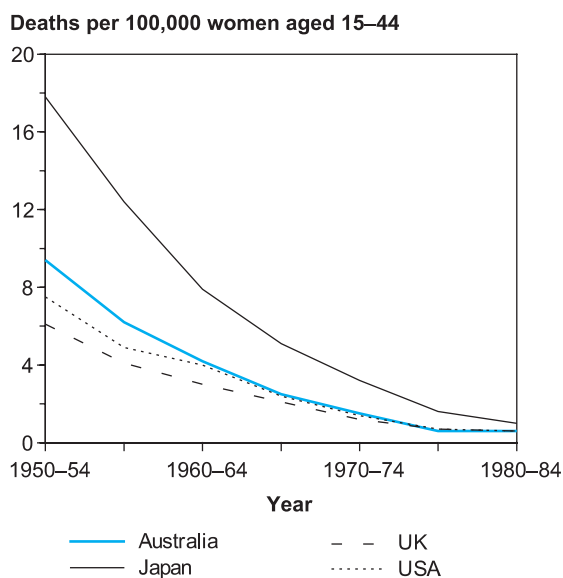


Figure 4: Trends in maternal mortality rates, 1950-54 to 1980-84

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Numbers and rates of maternal mortality

Country	Year	Maternal deaths per 100,000 live births	Estimated number of maternal deaths, 1990	Lifetime risk of maternal death, 1990
Australia	1994	7.0	25	1 in 4,900
Canada	1994	3.6	25	1 in 7,700
Denmark	1993	7.4	5	1 in 5,800
France	1994	11.7	110	1 in 3,100
Germany	1994	5.2	190	1 in 2,700
Greece	1994	1.9	10	1 in 5,600
Hong Kong	1994	11.2	5	1 in 9,200
Ireland	1992	5.9	5	1 in 3,800
Israel	1994	5.2	5	1 in 4,000
Italy	1994	12.4	65	1 in 5,300
Japan	1994	6.1	230	1 in 2,900
Netherlands	1994	6.1	25	1 in 4,300
New Zealand	1993	20.4	15	1 in 1,600
Norway	1993	3.4	5	1 in 7,300
Singapore	1994	6.1	5	1 in 4,900
Spain	1993	6.2	30	1 in 9,200
Sweden	1993	5.1	10	1 in 6,000
Switzerland	1994	3.6	5	1 in 8,700
UK	1992	6.7	70	1 in 5,100
USA	1993	7.5	480	1 in 3,500
Asia			323,000	1 in 65
North America			500	1 in 3,700
Europe			3,200	1 in 1,400
Oceania			1,400	1 in 26
World			585,000	1 in 60

Sources: WHO 1994, 1996c; United Nations 1980, 1997.

- Deaths due to pregnancy-related causes are not solely a problem of the developing world. In developed countries in 1991, there were more than 200,000 deaths of women aged 15 to 44, of which 4,000 were ascribed to maternal causes (WHO 1995c). These causes include haemorrhage, sepsis, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy and obstructed labour (Figure 2).
- The Australian maternal mortality rate in 1994 was 7.0 deaths per 100,000 live births—a total of 18 deaths. This places Australia in the upper half of developed countries. It should be noted, however, that most developed countries have only small numbers of maternal deaths each year, and that rates may vary substantially from year to year. In 1992 for example, there were 9 maternal deaths in Australia—a rate of 3.4 deaths per 100,000 live births. About 30% of maternal deaths occur in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, who are responsible for only about 3% of all confinements (AIHW 1996).
- Averaged over the years 1990–94, Australia's maternal mortality rate of 5.3 deaths per 100,000 live births ranked 13th among 20 developed countries (Figure 1). New Zealand and France had rates in excess of 10 deaths per 100,000 live births—in comparison, Canada, Denmark, Greece, Singapore, Sweden and Switzerland all had less than 5 deaths per 100,000 population. The rates for Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States have shown steady declines over recent decades. The decline for Japan since 1970 has been substantial (Figures 3 and 4).
- WHO has calculated lifetime risks for maternal deaths. In 1990, these were 1 in 1,400 for a mother in Europe and 1 in 3,700 for a mother in North America. The Australian rate was calculated at 1 in 4,900, and that for Oceania at an unacceptably high 1 in 26. Maternal mortality among several Melanesian countries is extremely high.

For more information, see:

Abou Zahr C et al. 1996. Maternal mortality. *World Health Stat Q* 49: 77–87
 WHO 1996. New estimates of maternal mortality. *Weekly Epidem Rec* 71: 120–124