

Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue

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According to a recent report from the WHO, 289,000 women around the world died in pregnancy or childbirth in 2013. In addition to the absolute number of deaths, maternal mortality is notable because of striking inequalities in rates of maternal death, both between developed and developing countries, and within countries – for example, in the U.S., maternal mortality rates differ sharply according to racial identification. Do any of these facts about maternal mortality suffice to show that maternal mortality is a human rights issue? To answer this question, we need some account of what kinds of inequality, if any, constitute human rights problems. I argue that several prominent accounts are inadequate, and sketch some elements of a better way forward.