

UNDERSTANDING DROWNING IN TANZANIA

In order to put effective prevention activities in place, at-risk regions and countries first need to understand how and why people are drowning. This can prove difficult as drowning is often underrepresented in official health statistics – drowning deaths are rarely reported.

The RNLI is working with partners in Tanzania to develop a framework to understand how often drowning occurs in different groups of people and why. More specifically, we're assessing the epidemiology (patterns, causes and effects) of drowning using secondary data (data that has already been collected by organisations other than the RNLI).

Why are we doing this?

Drowning is a leading cause of death. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that drowning claims the lives of 360,000 people annually worldwide, with more than 90% of these deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries.

Collecting data on drowning is challenging in low-resource countries, where cause of death data is not systematically collected, nor is data coverage sufficient to understand drowning as a health issue. This is a problem observed throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, where health information systems are weak and, as suggested by statistical models, rates of drowning may be high.

The absence of nationally representative data on drowning is likely to prevail in many countries due to chronic underinvestment and logistical challenges for the foreseeable future. The RNLI is interested in exploring to what extent cost-efficient methods can be deployed to develop some evidence on the burden of drowning, to then inform decisions about drowning prevention planning.



Photo: RNLI/Mike Lavis



Each year almost 360,000 people die from drowning – over 90% of them in low- and middle-income countries



Photo: RNLI/Mike Lavis

What do we want to achieve?

The aim of this project is to determine how feasible it is to use secondary data to understand the epidemiology of drowning in Tanzania, and to develop a framework that other countries may use. If successful, this will help the RNLI and our partners to gain greater understanding of the nature of drowning, and help us target our programmes correctly.

How are we doing it?

1. Secondary data is identified through a systematic literature review, conducted by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and through a local institutional review by the Ifakara Health Institute in Tanzania. Data holders are contacted and data on drowning is requested.
2. The partners are developing a report summarising the findings of the data review, and detailing the challenges and opportunities faced during the process. The research findings are to be presented to key governmental and non-governmental stakeholders who have the capacity to act on the findings.
3. If suitable, a framework will be developed that could be used by others looking to quickly determine the epidemiology of drowning.

Who are the project team?

Recognising the value of a collaborative approach, this initiative brings together three world-leading organisations:



Lifeboats

Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)
RNLI.org/international



London School of Hygiene
and Tropical Medicine
LSHTM.ac.uk



Ifakara Health Institute
IHI.or.tz