

FATAL DROWNING IN COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

FACT SHEET

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COMMONWEALTH
DROWNING
PREVENTION

Drowning is the process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid; outcomes are classified as death, morbidity and no morbidity. The focus of this fact sheet is on fatal drowning in Commonwealth countries, a significant yet preventable cause of loss of life.

KEY FINDINGS



In 2021 over 121,000 people died from drowning in Commonwealth countries. The fatal drowning rate was 4.7 per 100,000 per year.¹



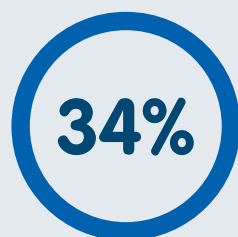
Two-fifths (40%) of global drowning deaths occurred in Commonwealth countries.



Approximately two thirds of all drowning deaths in Commonwealth countries were males, with males at greater risk than females across all age groups.



54% of fatal drowning in Commonwealth countries occurred among children and adolescents aged 0-14 years.



34% of drowning fatalities in the Commonwealth countries occurred among children under 5 years.

¹ Global Health Estimates 2021: Deaths by Cause, Age, Sex, by Country and by Region, 2000-2021. Geneva, World Health Organization; 2024.

FATAL DROWNING GLOBALLY

Drowning fatality rates differ across Commonwealth regions and countries. The Pacific Region recorded the highest rates of drowning (3.3 per 100,000), in comparison to Europe which recorded the lowest rates of drowning (0.5 per 100,000) (Figure 1). A breakdown of drowning by region is presented at the end of this report.

Globally, fatal drowning disproportionately impacts children and young people. This is also true in Commonwealth countries, where the highest drowning rates are among children under five years of age (16 per 100,000 people). As our population ages, drowning rates increase among older people. In the Commonwealth, the second highest drowning rate is now among those aged 70 years and over (8.3 per 100,000 people). See Figure 1 for a breakdown of fatal drowning rates in Commonwealth countries by age group and Appendix 1 for the full list of Commonwealth countries by population.

The number of drowning deaths a country experiences can be influenced by the size of its population. Table 1 shows the top 20 countries in the Commonwealth ranked by their estimated total number of drowning deaths in 2021. India records the highest number of drowning deaths across Commonwealth countries, with 54,682 deaths estimated to have occurred in 2021.

Pakistan and Nigeria are the second and third leading Commonwealth countries in terms of numbers of drowning deaths in 2021. The United Kingdom has the lowest number of drowning deaths of the top 20 nations, with 270 deaths in 2021.

Table 1: Commonwealth countries ranked by **estimated number of fatal drownings** (top 20 countries) in 2021

Rank	Country	Estimated Number			Rate/100000		
		Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both
1	India	34868	19811	54682	5.0	3.1	4.1
2	Pakistan	14523	8621	23107	10.1	6.1	8.1
3	Nigeria	8530	5537	14069	6.0	3.7	4.8
4	Bangladesh	5317	4287	9623	6.1	5.0	5.5
5	South Africa	2089	623	2726	6.6	1.9	4.3
6	Cameroon	1518	714	2233	9.8	4.1	6.9
7	Uganda	1328	689	2015	6.3	2.4	4.2
8	Mozambique	1142	561	1718	8.9	3.3	5.9
9	Kenya	939	604	1541	4.2	2.2	3.1
10	Ghana	739	379	1116	4.8	2.1	3.4
11	Zambia	633	323	954	6.7	2.8	4.6
12	Malaysia	800	170	952	4.5	1.1	2.8
13	Malawi	577	290	866	6.8	2.6	4.5
14	Rwanda	532	261	794	8.6	3.5	5.8
15	Sri Lanka	603	152	751	5.5	1.2	3.2
16	Sierra Leone	429	242	672	9.6	4.9	7.2
17	Papua New Guinea	498	151	650	9.5	2.8	6.2
18	Togo	393	179	572	9.1	3.5	6.3
19	Canada	231	67	298	1.1	0.3	0.7
20	United Kingdom	200	69	270	0.6	0.2	0.4

Drowning fatality rates differ across Commonwealth countries. Table 2 shows the top 20 Commonwealth countries in terms of fatal drowning rates. The Solomon Islands recorded the highest fatal drowning rate at 12.7 per 100,000, followed by Vanuatu (10.4) and Guyana (9.9).

For every Commonwealth country in the top 20, male drowning rates are higher, in many countries significantly higher than those among females. The Solomon Islands records the highest drowning rate among males at 22.1, followed by Guyana (18.7) and Vanuatu (18.4).

Pakistan records the highest drowning rate among females (6.1), followed by Bangladesh (5.0) and Sierra Leone (4.9).

The number of drowning deaths in Commonwealth countries also differs by age group. Table 3 shows the ranked estimated number of drowning deaths by age group and country. For children under five (0-4 years), Pakistan records the highest number of drowning deaths at 11,903 in 2021. India records the highest number of drowning deaths for all other age groups from 5-14 years through to people aged 70+ years.

Table 4 shows the ranked order of Commonwealth countries for fatal drowning rates per 100,000 population by age group. Pakistan records the highest fatal drowning rate for children under five (0-4 years) at 38.1 deaths per 100,000 population, followed by Bangladesh (a rate of 35.2) and Kiribati (24.4). Sierra Leone records the highest drowning rates among children and adolescents 5-14 years of age at 15.9, followed by Cameroon (14.6) and Eswatini (11.5). The Solomon Islands records the highest fatal drowning rate of any Commonwealth country for the 15-29 years and the 30-49 years age groups at rates of 15.2 and 18.8 per 100,000 population respectively. Guyana records the highest fatal drowning rates of any Commonwealth country for the 50-59 years (a rate of 21.1) and 60-69 years (18.9) age groups. Among those aged 70 years and older, the Maldives (a rate of 30.7 per 100,000 population), followed by the Seychelles (20.0) and Mozambique (18.8) records the highest fatal drowning rates.

Table 2: Commonwealth countries ranked by **fatal drowning rates** (Top 20 countries) in 2021

Rank	Country	Rate/100,000			Estimated Number		
		Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both
1	Solomon Islands	22.1	3.3	12.7	76	11	87
2	Vanuatu	18.4	2.7	10.4	25	4	29
3	Guyana	18.7	2.0	9.9	69	8	78
4	Eswatini	15.0	3.4	9.1	89	23	114
5	Lesotho	13.6	3.9	8.6	142	48	192
6	Pakistan	10.1	6.1	8.1	14523	8621	23107
7	Sierra Leone	9.6	4.9	7.2	429	242	672
8	Cameroon	9.8	4.1	6.9	1518	714	2233
9	Samoa	11.3	2.3	6.9	11	2	13
10	Seychelles	9.7	3.2	6.5	6	2	8
11	Togo	9.1	3.5	6.3	393	179	572
12	Papua New Guinea	9.5	2.8	6.2	498	151	650
13	Bahamas	10.8	2.0	6.2	21	4	25
14	Kiribati	7.5	4.8	6.1	5	4	9
15	Tonga	12.2	0.0	5.9	5	0	6
16	Mozambique	8.9	3.3	5.9	1142	561	1718
17	Fiji	8.8	2.9	5.9	40	13	53
18	Rwanda	8.6	3.5	5.8	532	261	794
19	Bangladesh	6.1	5.0	5.5	5317	4287	9623
20	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	7.9	1.8	4.9	4	1	5

Table 3: Top 20 Commonwealth countries ranked by **estimated number of drowning deaths by age** in 2021

RANK	0-4 YRS		5-14 YRS		15-29 YRS		30-49 YRS		50-59 YRS		60-69 YRS		70+ YRS	
	Countries	Estimate number of drowning deaths	Countries	Estimate number of drowning deaths	Countries	Estimate number of drowning deaths	Countries	Estimate number of drowning deaths	Countries	Estimate number of drowning deaths	Countries	Estimate number of drowning deaths	Countries	Estimate number of drowning deaths
1	Pakistan	11903	India	7288	India	9127	India	10485	India	5813	India	5070	India	5867
2	India	11033	Nigeria	5230	Pakistan	2650	Pakistan	1585	Pakistan	625	Pakistan	536	Pakistan	604
3	Nigeria	7056	Pakistan	5204	Bangladesh	782	South Africa	964	Bangladesh	227	Nigeria	235	Bangladesh	337
4	Bangladesh	5656	Bangladesh	2008	South Africa	528	Nigeria	551	Nigeria	223	Bangladesh	206	Bangladesh	293
5	Kenya	871	Cameroon	1037	Nigeria	480	Bangladesh	406	South Africa	215	Malaysia	92	Kenya	128
6	Uganda	802	Uganda	698	Mozambique	296	Malaysia	256	Malaysia	118	Kenya	89	Kenya	116
7	Cameroon	726	Mozambique	591	Malaysia	261	Mozambique	213	Sri Lanka	82	Mozambique	77	Malaysia	101
8	South Africa	554	South Africa	354	Sri Lanka	207	Sri Lanka	202	Mozambique	76	Mozambique	70	Mozambique	92
9	Zambia	512	Sierra Leone	326	Papua New Guinea	189	Cameroon	154	Uganda	67	Uganda	58	Uganda	83
10	Ghana	456	Rwanda	313	Uganda	169	Papua New Guinea	141	Kenya	59	South Africa	56	Ghana	75
11	Mozambique	375	Ghana	261	Cameroon	154	Uganda	139	Cameroon	56	Ghana	55	Canada	58
12	Malawi	356	Malawi	206	Kenya	129	Ghana	115	Ghana	56	Cameroon	51	Cameroon	56
13	Togo	236	Zambia	174	Ghana	97	Kenya	103	United Kingdom	43	Rwanda	39	Malawi	55
14	Rwanda	217	Kenya	161	Malawi	95	Zambia	95	Canada	40	Canada	39	South Africa	53
15	Sierra Leone	198	Papua New Guinea	137	Zambia	90	Malawi	86	Malawi	36	Malawi	33	Rwanda	48
16	Papua New Guinea	117	Togo	137	Rwanda	75	Canada	80	Papua New Guinea	36	United Kingdom	30	United Kingdom	46
17	Lesotho	58	Malaysia	74	United Kingdom	57	United Kingdom	78	Zambia	36	Australia	29	Australia	30
18	Malaysia	50	Namibia	54	Canada	55	Rwanda	70	Rwanda	32	Togo	28	Togo	24
19	Namibia	44	Sri Lanka	46	Togo	54	Togo	62	Togo	30	Zambia	25	Zambia	23
20	Gambia	43	Gabon	32	Sierra Leone	46	Lesotho	55	Australia	23	Sierra Leone	20	Sierra Leone	21

Table 4: Top 20 Commonwealth countries ranked by fatal drowning rates / 100,000 population by age in 2021

RANK	0-4 YRS		5-14 YRS		15-29 YRS		30-49 YRS		50-59 YRS		60-69 YRS		70+ YRS	
	Countries	Rates/ 100,000	Countries	Rates/ 100,000	Countries	Rates/ 100,000	Countries	Rates/ 100,000	Countries	Rates/ 100,000	Countries	Rates/ 100,000	Countries	Rates/ 100,000
1	Pakistan	38.1	Sierra Leone	15.9	Solomon Islands	15.2	Solomon Islands	18.8	Guyana	21.1	Guyana	18.9	Maldives	30.7
2	Bangladesh	35.2	Cameroon	14.6	Vanuatu	12.8	Vanuatu	14.0	Solomon Islands	15.3	Solomon Islands	12.1	Seychelles	20.0
3	Kiribati	24.4	Eswatini	11.5	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	9.2	Guyana	12.3	Grenada	15.1	Togo	9.5	Mozambique	18.8
4	Nigeria	21.2	Rwanda	9.5	Samoa	8.9	Eswatini	10.1	Lesotho	11.1	Vanuatu	9.3	Rwanda	17.7
5	Lesotho	21.2	Pakistan	8.9	Bahamas	8.9	Lesotho	9.9	Vanuatu	10.4	Seychelles	8.9	Togo	16.5
6	Togo	18.0	Nigeria	8.8	Fiji	7.1	Samoa	9.2	Eswatini	9.4	Mozambique	8.8	Malawi	15.8
7	Sierra Leone	17.3	Namibia	8.4	Tonga	7.1	Bahamas	8.4	Tonga	8.3	Rwanda	7.6	Gambia	15.4
8	Cameroon	16.9	Mozambique	6.7	Papua New Guinea	6.8	Tonga	8.0	Samoa	7.5	Sierra Leone	7.6	Uganda	14.8
9	Zambia	16.8	Papua New Guinea	6.2	Saint Lucia	5.7	Seychelles	6.1	Seychelles	7.4	Malawi	7.4	Sierra Leone	14.2
10	Eswatini	15.5	Bangladesh	6.1	Eswatini	5.7	Papua New Guinea	5.6	Fiji	6.1	Cameroon	6.8	Kenya	14.0
11	Kenya	12.5	Togo	6.0	Guyana	5.0	South Africa	5.4	Togo	5.8	Gambia	6.7	Cameroon	12.9
12	Malawi	11.9	Gabon	5.8	Lesotho	4.6	Belize	5.1	Mozambique	5.7	Samoa	6.6	Zambia	12.2
13	Rwanda	11.7	Uganda	5.4	Kiribati	4.5	Kiribati	5.1	Bahamas	5.6	Lesotho	6.5	Ghana	11.1
14	Gambia	11.4	Lesotho	5.1	Trinidad and Tobago	4.3	Fiji	4.9	Papua New Guinea	5.0	Tonga	6.2	Solomon Islands	11.0
15	Namibia	11.0	Gambia	4.5	Belize	4.1	Saint Lucia	4.1	Rwanda	4.6	Fiji	6.2	India	10.8
16	Ghana	10.9	Seychelles	4.3	Sri Lanka	4.1	Trinidad and Tobago	3.9	India	4.5	Uganda	6.0	Saint Vincent And The Grenadines	10.7
17	Uganda	10.5	Fiji	4.2	Seychelles	4.0	Mozambique	3.6	Malawi	4.4	Kenya	6.0	Pakistan	10.6
18	Gabon	10.3	Malawi	3.7	Pakistan	4.0	Sri Lanka	3.3	Sierra Leone	4.4	Zambia	5.9	Guyana	10.0
19	South Africa	9.7	Saint Lucia	3.7	Barbados	3.8	Gabon	3.2	Mauritius	4.3	India	5.8	Vanuatu	9.8
20	Papua New Guinea	9.6	Guyana	3.6	Brunei	3.5	Togo	3.2	Cameroon	4.2	Pakistan	5.6	Cyprus	7.9

DROWNING BY COMMONWEALTH REGIONS: DROWNING IN AFRICA

The African region records the highest all age fatal drowning rate of any region of Commonwealth countries, at a rate of 5.4 per 100,000 population. By age group, children under five record the highest drowning rates in the African region at 15.8 per 100,000 population, more than double that of 5-14 year olds. See Figure 1 for the age group breakdown of fatal drowning rates in the Commonwealth countries within the African region.

Nigeria is the Commonwealth country in Africa with the highest number of drowning deaths, estimated to be 14,069 in 2021, followed by South Africa (2,726) and Cameroon (2,233). When ranked by drowning fatality rates, Eswatini has the highest rate (9.4), followed by Lesotho (8.5) and Sierra Leone (8.3). Table 5 depicts the ranked order of Commonwealth countries in the African region by estimated number of drowning deaths and fatal drowning rate per 100,000 population in 2021.

Fig 1: Fatal drowning rates by age in Commonwealth countries of the African region in 2021

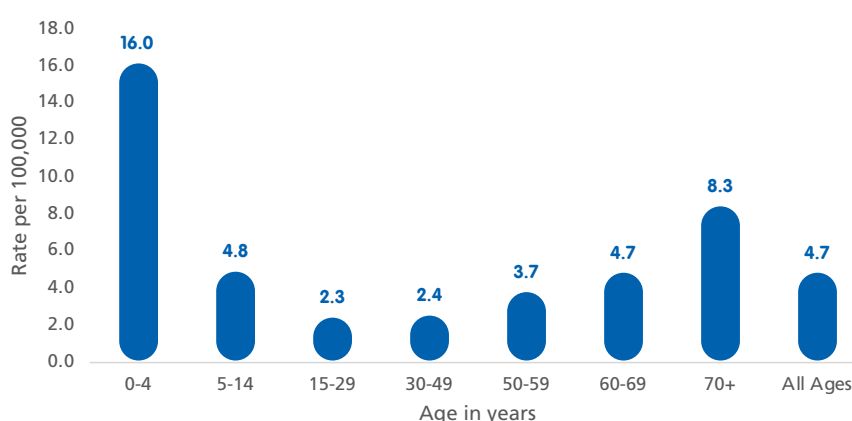


Table 5: Fatal drowning **estimated number and rates** by sex in Commonwealth countries in Africa region in 2021

Rank	Estimated Number				Rate/100000			
	Country	Male	Female	Both	Country	Male	Female	Both
1	Nigeria	8530	5537	14069	Eswatini	7.4	1.9	9.4
2	South Africa	2089	623	2726	Lesotho	6.3	2.1	8.5
3	Cameroon	1518	714	2233	Sierra Leone	5.3	3.0	8.3
4	Uganda	1328	689	2015	Cameroon	5.6	2.7	8.3
5	Mozambique	1142	561	1718	Seychelles	5.2	1.5	6.6
6	Kenya	939	604	1541	Togo	4.4	2.0	6.4
7	Ghana	739	379	1116	Nigeria	3.9	2.5	6.4
8	Zambia	633	323	954	Rwanda	4.0	2.0	5.9
9	Malawi	577	290	866	Mozambique	3.6	1.8	5.4
10	Rwanda	532	261	794	Namibia	3.7	1.4	5.0
11	Sierra Leone	429	242	672	Zambia	3.2	1.6	4.9
12	Togo	393	179	572	Gabon	3.5	1.1	4.7
13	Lesotho	142	48	192	South Africa	3.4	1.0	4.4
14	Namibia	103	39	142	Uganda	2.9	1.5	4.4
15	Eswatini	89	23	114	Malawi	2.9	1.4	4.3
16	Gabon	84	26	111	Gambia	2.8	1.5	4.3
17	Gambia	72	38	110	Ghana	2.3	1.2	3.4
18	Botswana	53	20	73	Botswana	2.2	0.8	3.0
19	Mauritius	30	4	33	Kenya	1.8	1.1	2.9
20	Seychelles	6	2	8	Mauritius	2.3	0.3	2.6

DROWNING IN ASIA

The Asian region records the second highest all age fatal drowning rate of any region of Commonwealth countries, at a rate of 4.7 per 100,000 population. By age group, children under five record the highest drowning rates in the Asia region at 17.0 per 100,000 population, the highest drowning rate for this age group across any region of Commonwealth countries. See Figure 2 for the age group breakdown of fatal drowning rates in the Commonwealth countries within the Asian region.

India is the Commonwealth country in Asia with the highest number of drowning deaths, estimated to be 54,682 in 2021, followed by Pakistan (23,107) and Bangladesh (9,623). When ranked by drowning fatality rates, Pakistan has the highest rate for both sexes (9.6), followed by Bangladesh (5.7) and India (3.9). Table 6 depicts the ranked order of Commonwealth countries in the Asian region by estimated number of drowning deaths and fatal drowning rate per 100,000 population in 2021.

Fig 2: Fatal drowning rates by age in Commonwealth countries of Asia region in 2021

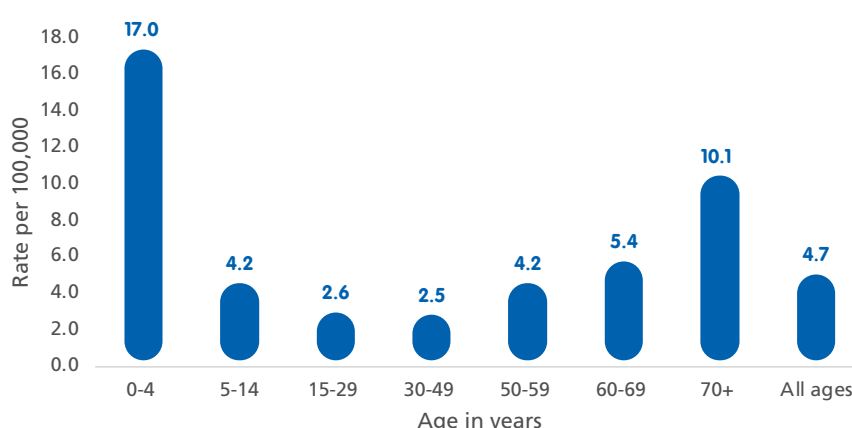


Table 6: Fatal drowning **estimated number and rates** of by sex in Commonwealth countries in Asia region in 2021

Rank	Estimated Number				Rate/100000			
	Country	Male	Female	Both	Country	Male	Female	Both
1	India	34868	19811	54682	Pakistan	6.1	3.6	9.6
2	Pakistan	14523	8621	23107	Bangladesh	3.2	2.6	5.7
3	Bangladesh	5317	4287	9623	India	2.5	1.4	3.9
4	Malaysia	800	170	952	Sri Lanka	2.7	0.7	3.3
5	Sri Lanka	603	152	751	Malaysia	2.3	0.5	2.8
6	Singapore	19	3	22	Maldives	1.9	0.3	2.2
7	Maldives	10	2	11	Brunei	2.0	0.1	2.0
8	Brunei	9	0	9	Singapore	0.3	0.1	0.4

CASE STUDY: Preventing drowning among young males 15-29 years in Australia

The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 is the overarching document guiding the strategic efforts of those working to prevent drowning in Australia. It focuses efforts across five key pillars of People, Places, Activities, Risk Factors and Populations, with the overarching goal of a 50% reduction in drowning by the year 2030.

One of the key areas within the people pillar of the Strategy is prioritized action to prevent drowning among young males aged 15-29 years. This group is overrepresented in drowning fatalities, with an average of 47 drowning deaths per year between 2002 and 2023. Disproportionate drowning risk for this age group exists at a range of aquatic locations including beaches and rivers, and drownings are also known to regularly involve alcohol consumption and occur among males born outside Australia.

The Strategy outlines a range of key activities across research, policy, advocacy, collaboration, education, safe environments and workforce. A recent workshop on the topic encourages a renewed focus on high school-based water safety education, involving young males in young male drowning prevention efforts, enhancing campaign messaging strategies and collaborating for collective impact.

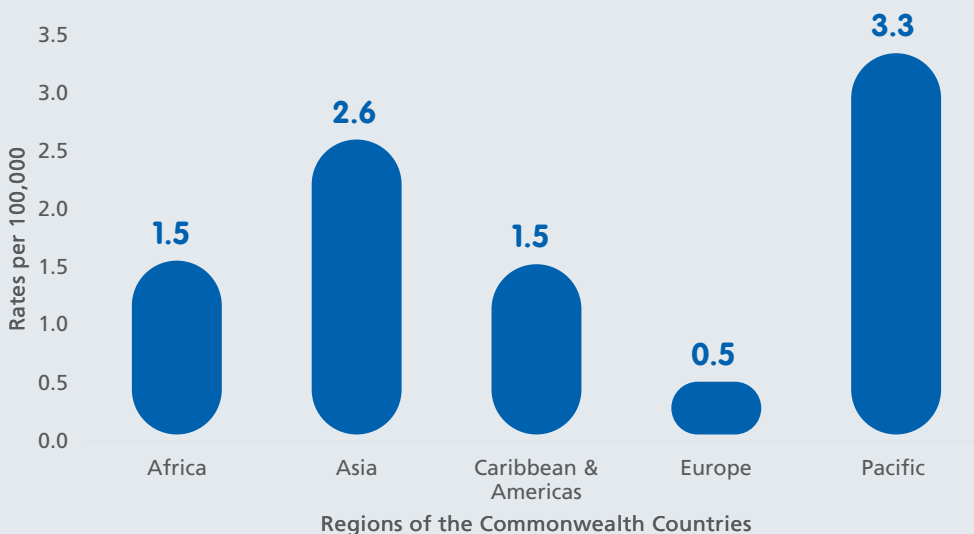
CASE STUDY: Rashtriya Life Saving Society of India Swim N Survive program

Committed to reducing the high number of drowning fatalities recorded in India, the Rashtriya Life Saving Society runs a range of water safety and drowning prevention initiatives. One such initiative is 'Swim N Survive' a survival swimming program. Across four modules – Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced and Competitive Swimming, children aged 4-12 years gain skills in water familiarization, swimming endurance and stroke improvement, contributing to improved confidence in the aquatic environment. To date, the program has trained over 82,000 children with informal program evaluation indicating positive feedback from parents, trainers and the children participating.

Teaching school age children swimming and water safety skills is a drowning prevention strategy recommended by the World Health Organization. Such education not only helps to equip children with skills to keep safe in the water but it can also open up employment opportunities, as well as enhance health and fitness.



Fig 3: Fatal drowning rates in 15-29 year-old-persons by region in Commonwealth countries



Baffsky R, Koshiba C, Muna EL, Maua RF, Ivers R, Peden AE. Assessing violence and injury prevention plans, strategies and indicators in eighteen Pacific Islands countries: an environmental scan. The Lancet Regional Health–Western Pacific. 2024 Mar 1;44.

CASE STUDY: Anchals, an effective child drowning prevention initiative in Bangladesh

Research conducted by the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research Bangladesh (CIPRB) shows that 10,000 children aged 1-4 years die from drowning in Bangladesh.

To address child drowning in Bangladesh, the Center for Injury Prevention and Research Bangladesh (CIPRB) initiated a child supervision and Early Childhood and Development (ECD) intervention. An Anchal (Community-based childcare center provides a safe and nurturing environment for rural children aged 1 to 4 years. The childcare center is run by a trained female caregiver and her assistant who provide childcare and ECD services to at least 25 children who reside within the surrounding 100 households. Children receive supervision and education from 9 am to 1 pm, six days a week. During the operational hours, caregivers facilitate various age specific developmental activities such as rhymes, storytelling, various play sessions and other developmental activities. Prior to joining, both the caregiver and her assistant receive basic training on ECD, psychosocial support, nutrition and health, child safety and security, child safeguarding, assessing developmental progress, and first aid services.

Anchal both prevents child drowning and improves ECD outcomes for children. The intervention has proven effective for child drowning prevention (Rahman et al., 2012) and positively changed children's overall early years' development outcomes. Following the positive impact of reducing child drowning risks and improving child development, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) scaled up the Anchal model in 45 sub-districts of 16 districts in rural Bangladesh in 2022.

The overall objective of the multiyear project is to provide ECD services and reduce child drowning by setting up 8,000 community-based childcare centers to enroll 200,000 children aged between one and five.

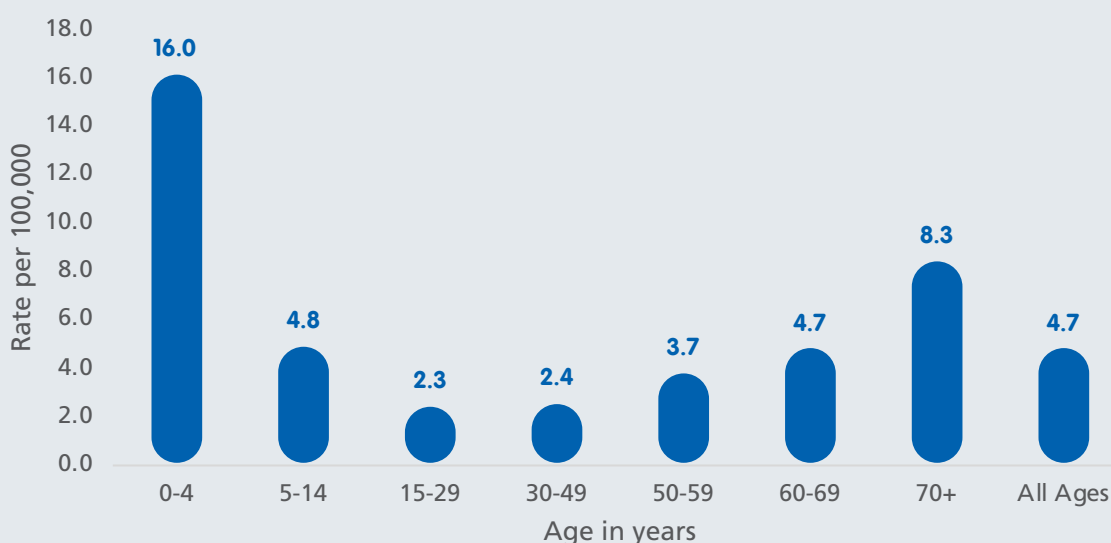
The charter and programs of the Commonwealth take a specific focus on engaging and empowering young people between the ages of 15 and 29 years. Given this focus, it is important to examine drowning risk for this age group across Commonwealth countries. Drowning rates for 15-29 year olds are highest in Pacific countries at a rate of 3.3 drowning deaths per 100,000 population. They are lowest in Europe at a rate of 0.5. Figure 4 shows drowning rates for the 15-29 years age group across Commonwealth countries by region.

Child drowning prevention strategies

There are key actions that parents and caregivers can take to reduce a child's risk of drowning. These are:

- Always actively supervise children around the water
- Restrict access to water through barriers or pool fencing
- Familiarise young children with water including through swimming lessons
- Learn safe rescue and resuscitation skills (CPR) to have the skills to act quickly in an emergency

Fig 4: Fatal drowning rates by age in Commonwealth countries



Rahman F, Bose S, Linnan M, Rahman A, Mashreky S, Haaland B, Finkelstein E. Cost-effectiveness of an injury and drowning prevention program in Bangladesh. *Pediatrics*. 2012 Dec 1;130(6):e1621-8.

DROWNING IN THE CARIBBEAN AND AMERICAS

Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean and Americas region record the second lowest all age fatal drowning rate of any region of Commonwealth countries, at a rate of 1.3 per 100,000 population. By age group, children under five record the highest drowning rates in the Caribbean and Americas region at 1.9 per 100,000 population, closely followed by children aged 5-14 years at a rate of 1.7 See Figure 5 for the age group breakdown of fatal drowning rates in the Commonwealth countries within the Caribbean and Americas region.

Within the Caribbean and Americas region, Canada is the Commonwealth country with the highest number of drowning deaths, estimated to be 298 in 2021, followed by Guyana with 78 deaths and Trinidad and Tobago 51 deaths. When ranked by drowning fatality rates, Guyana has the highest rate for both sexes (9.5), followed by Bahamas (6.4) and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (5.0). Table 7 depicts the ranked order of Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean and Americas region by estimated number of drowning deaths and fatal drowning rate per 100,000 population in 2021.

Fig 5: Fatal drowning rates by age in Commonwealth countries of Caribbean and Americas in 2021

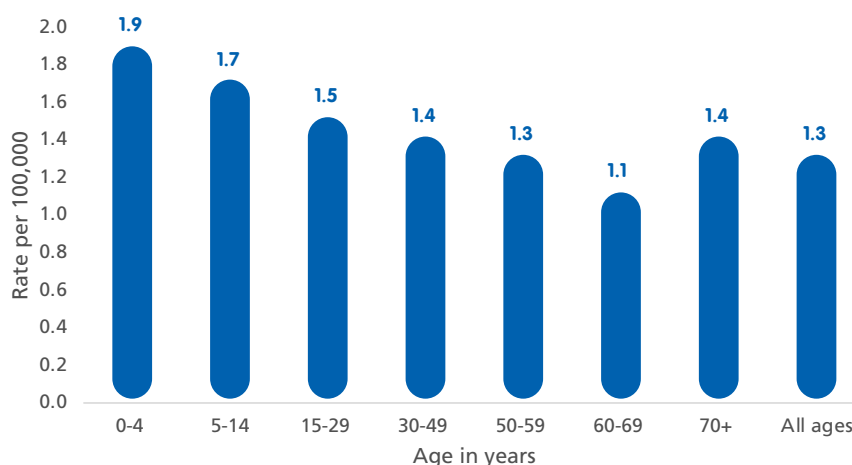


Table 7: Fatal drowning **estimated number and rates** by sex in Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean and Americas in 2021

Rank	Estimated Number				Rate/100000			
	Country	Male	Female	Both	Country	Male	Female	Both
1	Canada	231	67	298	Guyana	8.4	1.0	9.5
2	Guyana	69	8	78	Bahamas	5.4	1.0	6.4
3	Trinidad and Tobago	45	6	51	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	4.0	1.0	5.0
4	Bahamas	21	4	25	Saint Lucia	3.6	0.4	4.0
5	Jamaica	17	2	20	Belize	3.0	0.9	4.0
6	Belize	12	4	16	Trinidad and Tobago	3.0	0.4	3.4
7	Barbados	7	1	8	Barbados	2.4	0.5	2.9
8	Saint Lucia	6	1	7	Grenada	2.3	0.1	2.3
9	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	4	1	5	Canada	0.6	0.2	0.8
10	Grenada	3	0	3	Jamaica	0.6	0.1	0.7
11	Antigua and Barbuda	0	0	0	Antigua and Barbuda	0.4	0.0	0.5

DROWNING IN EUROPE

Commonwealth countries in the European region record the lowest all age fatal drowning rate of any region of Commonwealth countries, at a rate of 0.4 per 100,000 population. By age group, people aged 70 years and older record the highest drowning rate (0.6 per 100,000), while children under five record the second lowest drowning rate of any age group at 0.3 per 100,000 population. See Figure 6 for the age group breakdown of fatal drowning rates in the Commonwealth countries in the European region.

Within the European region, the United Kingdom has the highest number of drowning deaths, estimated to be 270 in 2021, with Cyprus and Malta the other two Commonwealth countries in Europe coming in with the second and third highest number of drowning fatalities. In contrast, when examined as a rate per 100,000 population, Cyprus has the highest drowning rate at 1.8 drowning deaths per 100,000 population for both sexes, followed by Malta (1.0) and the United Kingdom (0.4). Table 8 depicts the ranked order of Commonwealth countries in the European region by estimated number of drowning deaths and fatal drowning rate per 100,000 population in 2021.

Fig 6: Fatal drowning rates by age in Commonwealth countries of Europe region in 2021

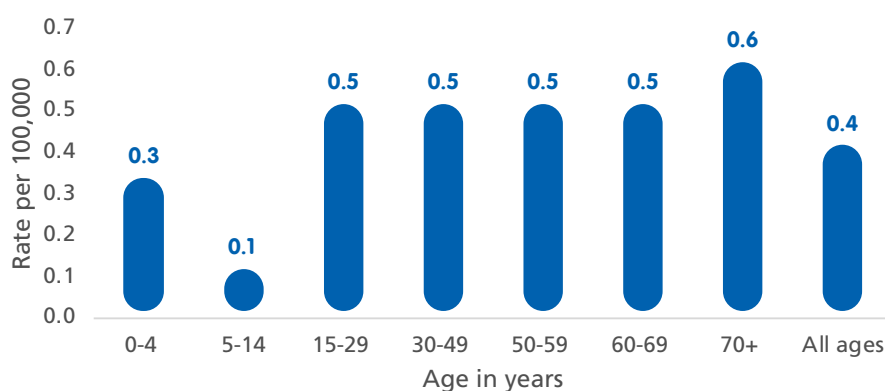


Table 8: Fatal drowning **estimated number and rates** of by sex in Commonwealth countries in Europe in 2021

Rank	Estimated Number				Rate/100000			
	Country	Male	Female	Both	Country	Male	Female	Both
1	United Kingdom	200	69	270	Cyprus	1.4	0.4	1.8
2	Cyprus	18	5	23	Malta	0.5	0.5	1.0
3	Malta	3	3	5	United Kingdom	0.3	0.1	0.4

DROWNING IN THE PACIFIC

Commonwealth countries in the Pacific region record a fatal drowning rate of 2.5/100,000 population of Commonwealth countries, at 2.5 per 100,000 population. Children aged 0-4 years recorded the highest fatal drowning rate at 4.9 per 100,000 people, followed by the 15-29 years age group (3.3). See Figure 7 for the age group breakdown of fatal drowning rates in the Commonwealth countries in the Pacific region.

Within the Pacific region, Papua New Guinea is the Commonwealth country with the highest number of drowning deaths, estimated to be 650 in 2021, followed by Australia with 198 deaths and the Solomon Islands with 87 deaths. When ranked by drowning fatality rates, the Solomon Islands records the highest rate for both sexes (11.4), followed by Vanuatu (9.6) and Kiribati (6.7). Table 9 depicts the ranked order of Commonwealth countries in the Pacific region by estimated number of drowning deaths and fatal drowning rate per 100,000 population in 2021.

Fig 7: Fatal drowning rates by age in commonwealth countries of Pacific region in 2021

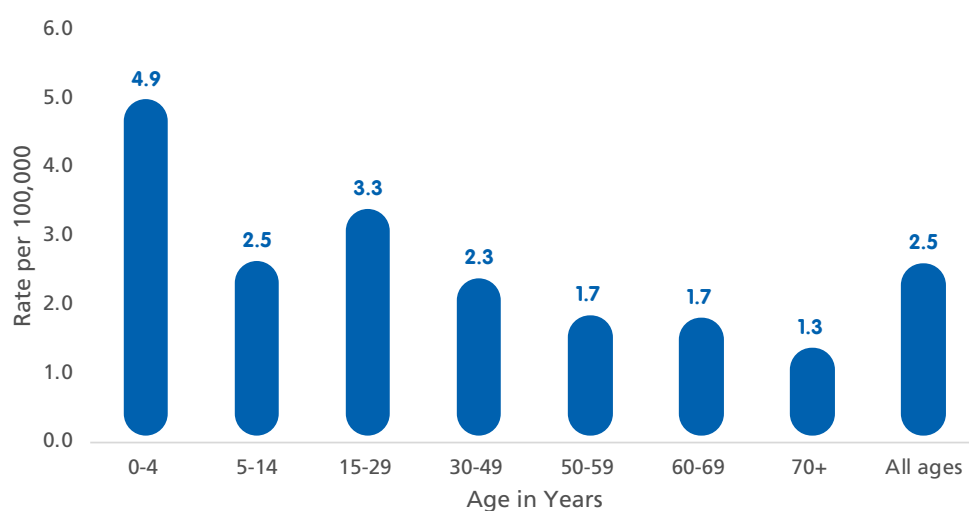


Table 9: Fatal drowning **estimated number and rates** by sex in commonwealth countries in the Pacific region in 2021

Rank	Estimated Number				Rate/100000			
	Country	Male	Female	Both	Country	Male	Female	Both
1	Papua New Guinea	498	151	650	Solomon Islands	10.0	1.5	11.4
2	Australia	160	38	198	Vanuatu	8.3	1.4	9.6
3	Solomon Islands	76	11	87	Kiribati	3.8	2.9	6.7
4	New Zealand	47	16	62	Papua New Guinea	5.0	1.5	6.5
5	Fiji	40	13	53	Samoa	4.9	1.1	6.1
6	Vanuatu	25	4	29	Fiji	4.3	1.4	5.8
7	Samoa	11	2	13	Tonga	5.1	0.0	5.3
8	Kiribati	5	4	9	New Zealand	0.9	0.3	1.2
9	Tonga	5	0	6	Australia	0.6	0.1	0.8

CASE STUDY: Opportunity to formalize drowning prevention across Pacific Islands nations

Drowning is a significant cause of death and morbidity in Pacific Islands countries. The region is vulnerable to the effects of a changing climate and relies on significant water-based transport between islands, as well as for income such as through occupational fishing.

Despite the vulnerability and high drowning burden in the Pacific region, recent research has highlighted an absence of plans and strategies to address drowning. An environmental scan (Baffsky et al, 2024) found no mention of drowning prevention in Pacific Islands nations national health plans. Further no dedicated plans or strategies were in place to address drowning.

There remains tremendous opportunity to embed drowning prevention in injury prevention and more broadly health strategies within the region.

THE ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY

The Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS), established in 1891, is a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) charity registered in the United Kingdom (Charity Commission No: 306094) and is governed by Royal Charter. RLSS is accredited to the Commonwealth Secretariat as a Civil Society Organisation. Our vision is: **“No person in the Commonwealth should drown”**.

The RLSS is working to eliminate drowning in the Commonwealth. With active Member Branches in 33 Commonwealth Nations, we aim to reduce the incidence of drowning around the world by developing community-based drowning prevention strategies and lifesaving education programmes, and providing advice and education to Governments, NGOs and individuals on the development of water skills.

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Data and Limitations

There are 56 Commonwealth nations with a total population of 2.7 billion people. The data in this factsheet relates to Commonwealth countries; some countries have Overseas Territories or Protectorates, but their data is not aggregated, and so drownings in those Territories or Protectorates are not reflected in this publication.

Consistent with the WHO Global Status Report on Drowning Prevention, the drowning rates and numbers throughout this report have been taken from WHO Global Health Estimates (GHE), which provide a comprehensive and comparable set of cause of death estimates from year 2000 onwards. The latest estimates (2021) are accessible on the WHO Global Health Estimates website (who.int).

A considerable limitation of these estimates for informing drowning prevention is that they do not include drowning deaths that occur in water-related disasters (e.g. floods or cyclones), water-transportation incidents or self-harm. From this database the fatal drowning information of the Commonwealth countries was retrieved and analysed.

Furthermore, in some countries the infrastructure and resources are not available to support a fully functioning health information system. In others, core systems exist but there is a need to augment existing data with new data collection. As there are no available non-fatal drowning estimates for the data sections in this Fact Sheet, only fatal drowning data is shown.

APPENDIX A - COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES BY POPULATION

Rank	Flag	Country	Population 2024
1		India	1,414,203,897
2		Pakistan	239,477,805
3		Nigeria	218,529,287
4		Bangladesh	167,658,855
5		United Kingdom	67,668,789
6		South Africa	61,502,603
7		Tanzania	67,462,000
8		Kenya	53,219,167
9		Uganda	45,910,933
10		Canada	38,454,061
11		Malaysia	34,282,406
12		Ghana	32,518,662
13		Mozambique	31,707,798
14		Cameroon	26,915,765
15		Australia	25,956,417
16		Sri Lanka	22,700,377
17		Malawi	20,047,265
18		Zambia	19,603,610
19		Rwanda	13,355,262
20		Papua New Guinea	10,012,899
21		Sierra Leone	8,094,603
22		Singapore	5,546,293
23		New Zealand	5,107,698
24		Jamaica	2,837,682
25		Namibia	2,810,553
26		Gambia	2,576,015
27		Botswana	2,401,449
28		Lesotho	2,261,549

Rank	Flag	Country	Population 2024
29		Trinidad and Tobago	1,487,716
30		Mauritius	1,279,628
31		Cyprus	1,317,312
32		Eswatini (Swaziland)	1,206,599
33		Fiji	916,719
34		Guyana	815,486
35		Solomon Islands	762,594
36		Maldives	516,163
37		Malta	524,384
38		Brunei	451,723
39		Belize	395,356
40		Bahamas	396,381
41		Vanuatu	305,883
42		Barbados	282,157
43		Samoa	213,793
44		Saint Lucia	178,540
45		Kiribati	128,387
46		Grenada	116,697
47		Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	102,848
48		Tonga	105,504
49		Seychelles	123,001
50		Antigua and Barbuda	92,358
51		Dominica	71,293
52		Saint Kitts and Nevis	46,763
53		Tuvalu	10,194
54		Nauru	11,709
55		Gabon	2,376,729
56		Togo	8,878,385



COMMONWEALTH
DROWNING
PREVENTION

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