Neonatal Mortality and Its Determinates in Public Hospitals of Gamo and Gofa Zones, Southern Ethiopia: Prospective Follow up Study

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Abstract

Abstract Background: The neonatal period is the most vulnerable time for child survival. The declines in the neonatal mortality rate have been slower than the post-neonatal under-five mortality rate in the majority of countries. This trend is also similar in Ethiopia, that neonatal mortality was high as compared to the post-neonatal mortality rate. A large proportion of neonatal deaths occur during the 48 hours after delivery. Different studies were conducted in assessing determinates for neonatal mortality but there is a need to assess the immediate postnatal (within two days following delivery) cause of neonatal mortality that the majority of deaths occurred at that time. So, this study is to fill those gaps of the aforementioned studies, in assessing the determinate factors affecting neonatal mortality in public hospitals of Gamo and Gofa Zones, Southern Ethiopia.

Methods: A prospective follow up study was conducted among 6,986 study participants from April 5, 2018, to March 5, 2019. All live births at the hospitals during the study period were included in this study. Data on causes of neonatal death were collected by using a structured verbal autopsy questionnaire. Data were entered into Epi data version 3.1 and exported to Stata version 15 for analysis. Crude and adjusted estimate $\beta$ with 95%CI was calculated in the binary logistic regression model. The goodness of fit was tested by a log-likelihood ratio (LR). In this study P-value $< 0.05$ was considered to declare a result as a statistically significant association.

Results: In this study, neonatal mortality incidence ratio was 9.6 (95%CI: 7.5, 12.2) per 1000 live births. Age of the mother, number of antenatal care, hemorrhage, sex of the neonate, presentation, gestational age and birth weight were identified as the significant determinates for neonatal mortality. Prematurity, infection, and birth asphyxia were the most common causes of neonatal mortality cases.

Conclusions: This study indicated that a significant number of neonates died during the neonatal period. Both maternal and neonatal factors were identified. Therefore, early identification of obstetric complications and immediate interventions, strengthening the provision of quality antenatal and postnatal care services are recommended.

Keywords: Neonatal Mortality; Neonatal Deaths

Background

Globally, there is impressive advancements have been made on many health fronts from 2000 to
2017. However, to meet the Sustainable Development Goals’ health targets by 2030, progress must be accelerated, in particular regions with the highest burden of disease[1]. The third Sustainable Development Goals (SDG3) aimed to end preventable deaths of newborns and reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1000 live births in all countries[2].

Despite all efforts to decrease neonatal mortality, recent data show that neonatal mortality has declined at a slower rate than overall childhood mortality, which has resulted in neonatal mortality now accounting for 46% of overall under-five childhood deaths [3]. The neonatal mortality is 18 globally, and 26.7 in Africa in 2017, and 30 in Ethiopia per 1000 live births in 2019[4, 5]. Ethiopia Mini-Demographic Health Survey, 2019 indicated that there is a slight increase in neonatal mortality, and it was high as compare to the post-neonatal mortality rate. A large proportion of neonatal deaths occur during the 48 hours after delivery, and these first two days following delivery are critical for monitoring complications arising from the delivery [4, 6].

The period around birth constitutes a critical window of opportunity for the prevention and management of maternal and newborn complications, which can otherwise prove fatal. A large “proportion of” newborn illnesses and deaths can also be prevented using simple, low-cost interventions during delivery and the week following partum[7]. Reducing neonatal mortality is increasingly important not only because deaths that occur during the neonatal period is increasing as under-five mortality declines but also health interventions needed to address the major causes of neonatal deaths generally differ from those needed to address other under-five deaths [8]. A significant proportion of these neonatal deaths could be prevented by the appropriate management of the neonate presenting complications, such as very low birth weight, < 30 gestational weeks at birth or an Apgar score at the 5th minute of life <7[9].

Analysis of different studies in Ethiopia showed that the incidence of the neonatal mortality rate was ranged from 17.2 to 35.5 per 1000 live births [10-15]. The most determinate factors which were identified by previous studies were birth order, frequency of antenatal care, delivery place, twin delivery and size of neonate [10, 16, 17]. Birth asphyxia, neonatal infections, and prematurity were the three leading causes of neonatal mortality [10, 11].
Newborns in Ethiopia gaining attention through the Global Maternal Child Survival Program:
Contributes to reductions of neonatal morbidity and mortality through capacity-building in high-impact services both at the community and the primary health care unit levels. The activity supports the government of Ethiopia to improve community maternal and newborn health practices and care-seeking behaviors; increases the provision of quality community-based newborn care services including management of newborn sepsis; and strengthens the supportive systems with a focus of district capacity building [18]. This program is underway, but to scale up a comprehensive way of implementation identifying determinate factors intensively is very important to reduce neonatal mortality further. Different studies were conducted in assessing determinates for neonatal mortality but there is a need to assess the immediate postnatal (within two days following delivery) cause of neonatal mortality that the majority of deaths occurred at that time. Therefore, there is a need for research in public hospitals of Gamo and Gofa Zones to assess the incidence, underlying causes and determinate factors for neonatal mortality.

Methods

**Study setting, period and design**
This prospective follow up study was conducted in public hospitals of Gamo and Gofa Zones from April 5, 2018, to March 5, 2019. There are six hospitals in Gamo and Gofa Zones but this study was done in selected three public hospitals (Arba Minch General Hospital (AMGH), Sawla General Hospital (SGH) and Chencha Primary Hospital (CPH)). The total population of the study area is 2,019,687. The estimated number of women of reproductive age (15-49) is 470,587 from this, the estimated number of delivery is 69,881 and the estimated number of live birth is 69,881. In Gamo and Gofa Zone, the institutional skilled delivery rate is 51.2% [19, 20].

**Sample size determination**
Sample size for this study was estimated by using Epi info7 software Stat Cal. The sample size was calculated by taking the most determinate factors for neonatal mortality; which was gestational age at birth from the study pervious conducted in Southwest Ethiopia [10]. Based on this, the prevalence of neonatal mortality among unexposed group (gestational age greater than 37 weeks) was 2.9%
and the prevalence of neonatal mortality among exposed group (gestational age less than 37 weeks) was 5.8 (p2 = 0.058) and by considering 95% level of confidence, power of 90 and ratio of 1:1. So, the calculated sample for this study was 2433 after adding a non-response rate of 10%. But, the sample size used for this study was 6,986 based on the number of live births in the respective hospitals in one year period.

Data collection tool
A structured interviewer-administered pre-tested questionnaire and standard abstraction checklist to review data from medical records were used to collect the data. The tools were developed adapted by reviewing different works of literature. Data on causes of neonatal death were collected by using a structured verbal autopsy (VA) questionnaire adapted from the standard VA questionnaire developed and validated by WHO, Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine [21].

Data collection procedures
Neonates who experienced mortality cases during the follow up period were identified prospectively by trained six BSc holder midwives and supervised by two MSc holder nurses. As this was a prospective follow-up study; data were collected in different phases: In the first phase: all the baseline information in the hospital was collected either by interviewing or by abstracted from medical records. The data were collected from the delivery ward, postnatal ward and neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) of each hospital. For the neonates that died in the hospital stay, VA was conducted at a point in time. But, for those neonates who survived in the hospital stay the second phase proceeded at the end of the neonatal period. So, newborns were assessed for mortality cases whether they died within 28 days of life or survived and for those who don’t survive VA was conducted.

Study variables
Neonatal mortality case was the dependent variable and socio-demographic and economic characteristics, maternal factors, maternal and child health services and obstetric factors were independent variables for this study.

Data quality control
In order to ensure quality, the questionnaire was initially drafted in the English language and then translated into the local language, “Gammogna and Amharic” by verified translators. Finally, before data collection again re-translated back to English. The reliability of the tool was maintained by pre-tested the questionnaires in the hospital with similar status and validity was maintained by using standard VA tool and abstraction checklist. In addition, extensive training was given for data collectors and supervisors. Data were checked for completeness, accuracy, clarity, and consistency before data entry into the software. Proper coding and categorization of data were maintained for the quality of the data to be analyzed. Double data entry was done for its validity and compare to the original data.

**Data analysis and processing**

Data were coded, cleaned, edited and entered into Epi data version 3.1 and then exported to Stata version 15 for analysis. Binary logistic regression was done to see the association between each independent variable and outcome variable. The goodness of fit was tested by a log-likelihood ratio (LR). All variables with P<0.25 in the bivariate analysis were included in the final model of multivariable analysis in order to control all possible confounders. Variance inflation factor (VIF) >10 and Tolerance (T) <0.1 were considered as suggestive of the existence of multi co-linearity. A crude and adjusted Beta (β) coefficient with 95%CI was estimated in order to identify determinates for the neonatal mortality cases. In this study P-value < 0.05 was considered to declare a result as a statistically significant association.

**Results**

**The overall process of the study**

In this study, 6986 study participants were interviewed in the baseline after excluding 131 twin deliveries from total live births in three selected public hospitals from two zones of Southern Ethiopia. During follow up for 28 days 153 study participants became lost to follow up and 64 were excluded from the study because of inconsistent and incomplete information. At the end of follow up, 6769 study participants stayed in the cohort and interviewed the end line which gave a response rate of 96.9%. During follow up 6704 neonates were survived and 65 died. A verbal autopsy had conducted
among 52 died neonates and the rest were refused (Figure 1).

**Socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the respondents**

Of the neonate’s mother, 3384 (50.0%) were age ranged 25-34 years old and with mean and standard deviation (SD) of 25.3±5.02. The majority (95.0%) were married and 3727 (55.0%) had from Gamo ethnicity group. Regarding the educational status of neonates mother, 1439 (21.3) had no formal education and 2069 (30.6%), 1822 (26.9%) and 1439 (21.3%) had primary (grade 1-8), secondary (grade 9-12) and college and above respectively. Two thousand eighty (30.7%) of the neonate’s father had the educational status of college and above and 2497 (36.9%) had merchant. Out of neonates mother 2885 (42.6%) had Orthodox religion follower and 420 (6.2), 2966 (43.8%), 451 (6.7%) and 47 (0.7%) were Catholic, Protestant, Muslim and traditional respectively. More than half (57.7%) of the neonates mother was housewife and 1057 (15.6%), 1403 (20.7%), 123 (1.8%) and 283 (4.2) were merchant, government employer, daily labor and student respectively and 4067 (60.1%) had urban residents (Table 1).

**Table 1: Socio-demographic and economic characteristics of study participants in public hospitals of Gamo and Gofa Zones, Southern Ethiopia, 2018/9 (n=6769)**

| Characteristics                             | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| **Age**                                     |           |            |
| 15-24                                       | 3002      | 44.3       |
| 25-34                                       | 3384      | 50.0       |
| ≥35                                         | 383       | 5.7        |
| **Marital status**                          |           |            |
| Married                                     | 6430      | 95.0       |
| Other*                                      | 339       | 5.0        |
| **Ethnicity**                               |           |            |
| Gamo                                        | 3725      | 55.0       |
| Gofa                                        | 1519      | 22.4       |
| Other†                                      | 1525      | 22.6       |
| **Educational status of the father**         |           |            |
| No formal education                         | 1026      | 15.2       |
| Primary (1-8)                               | 1636      | 24.2       |
| Secondary (9-12)                            | 2027      | 29.9       |
| College and above                           | 2080      | 30.7       |
| **Occupation of the father**                |           |            |
| Farmer                                      | 1773      | 26.2       |
| Merchant                                    | 2497      | 36.9       |
| Government employer                         | 1974      | 29.2       |
| Wavier                                      | 275       | 4.1        |
| Daily laborer                               | 250       | 3.7        |
| **The average income per month**            |           |            |
| <70.8USD                                    | 1775      | 26.2       |
| 70.8-177USD                                 | 3195      | 47.2       |
| >177USD                                     | 1799      | 26.6       |

*single, divorced and separated due to work
Maternal and child health, and obstetric factors

Out of the neonate’s mother 3900 (57.6%) had multipara (birth order ≥2), only 350 (9.0%) had a history of the stillbirth and 434 (11.1%) encountered loss of conceptus. Two thousand eight hundred (71.8%) of the mothers of the neonates were birth inter of 24-48 month and 329 (8.4%) had a history of neonatal death. Of the neonate’s mothers, 6004 (88.7%) had antenatal care (ANC) and 6674 (98.6%) had immediate postnatal care. Regarding mode of delivery 4943 (73.0%) gave birth by spontaneous vaginal delivery, 243 (3.6%) were instrumental and 1583 (23.4) were by caesarean section. One thousand two hundred sixty-two (18.6%) encountered premature rupture of membrane and 524 (7.7%) developed hypertension (HTN) during pregnancy. Out of the neonate’s mothers, 193 (2.9%) had anemic and 682 (10.1%) faced dystocia. From those who faced labor dystocia, 24 (3.5%) had due to uterine pre-rupture, 465 (68.2%) had due to prolonged labor and 193 (28.3%) had due to feto-pelvic disproportion. Two hundred thirty (3.4%) of the neonate’s mothers encountered infection and 130(1.9%) had developed other pathologies. Of the mothers who developed infection 33 (14.4%) had an unspecified infection and 50 (21.7%), 100 (43.5%) and 47 (20.4%) had puerperal endometritis, pyelonephritis and others (syphilis and malaria) respectively. From the mothers who developed other pathologies 33 (25.4%) had HIV/AIDS, 58 (44.6%) had heart diseases and 39 (0.3%) had others (DM, thyroid disorder, embolism, and DIC). Regarding the presentation of neonates, 5818 (86.0%) delivered with vertex and 3606 (53.3%) were male neonates. Of the neonates, 65 (1.0%) encountered birth trauma during delivery. From those 24 (36.9%) of the neonates had cephalhematoma, 9 (13.8%) developed caput succedaneum and 32 (49.3%) had others (fracture, bruising and subgaleal hemorrhage) (Table 2).

Table 2: Maternal and child health and obstetric factors of study participants in public hospitals of Gamo and Gofa Zones, Southern Ethiopia, 2018/9 (n=6769)
| Variables                                      | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Number of ANC visit                           |           |            |
| No visit                                      | 765       | 11.3       |
| 1-3                                           | 1820      | 26.9       |
| ≥ 4                                           | 4184      | 61.8       |
| Hemorrhage                                    |           |            |
| Yes                                           | 315       | 4.7        |
| No                                            | 6454      | 95.3       |
| Cause of hemorrhage                           |           |            |
| Placenta praevia                              | 108       | 34.3       |
| PPH                                           | 153       | 48.6       |
| Other®                                        | 54        | 17.1       |
| Premature rupture of membrane                 |           |            |
| Yes                                           | 1262      | 18.6       |
| No                                            | 5507      | 81.4       |
| Hypertension during pregnancy                 |           |            |
| Yes                                           | 524       | 7.7        |
| No                                            | 6245      | 92.3       |
| Classification of HTN                         |           |            |
| Pre-eclampsia                                 | 297       | 56.7       |
| Eclampsia                                     | 74        | 14.1       |
| Chronic hypertension                          | 77        | 14.7       |
| Gestational hypertension                     | 76        | 14.5       |
| Presentation                                  |           |            |
| Vertex                                        | 5818      | 86.0       |
| Non-vertex®                                   | 951       | 14.0       |
| Sex of the neonates                           |           |            |
| Male                                          | 3606      | 53.3       |
| Female                                        | 3163      | 46.7       |
| Gestational age                               |           |            |
| <37 week                                      | 808       | 11.9       |
| ≥37 week                                      | 5961      | 88.1       |
| Birth weight                                  |           |            |
| <2500g                                        | 600       | 8.9        |
| ≥2500g                                        | 6169      | 91.1       |
| Baby referred to other health facilities       |           |            |
| Yes                                           | 77        | 1.1        |
| No                                            | 6692      | 98.9       |

®accreta/increta/percreta, hemorrhage during delivery, uterine rupture, and other obstetric hemorrhages, and ©breech, transverse, face, and brow

**Incidence of neonatal mortality**

In this study inter and intra-hospital neonatal mortality incidence ratio was estimated with a 95% level of confidence per 1000 live births. The highest proportion of neonatal mortality was reported from Chencha Primary Hospital that 1.0% (95%CI: 0.5, 2.20%) Overall, neonatal mortality incidence ratio in selected three public hospitals was 0.96% (95%CI: 0.75, 1.22%) (Table 3).

Table 3: Incidence of neonatal mortality among study participants in selected hospitals of Gamo and Gofa Zones, Southern Ethiopia, 2018/9 (n=6769)
| Name Hospital | n(%) of NM | Total number of live births | NMIR® with 95%CI per 1000 live birth |
|---------------|------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| AMGH          | 42(64.6)   | 4455(65.8)                  | 9.4(6.9,12.7)                       |
| CPH           | 8(12.3)    | 794(11.7)                   | 10.1(5.0,20.0)                      |
| SGH           | 15(23.1)   | 1520(22.5)                  | 9.9(5.9,16.3)                       |
| Overall       | 65(100)    | 6769(100)                   | 9.6(7.5,12.2)                       |

®Neonatal mortality incidence ratio

**Causes of neonatal mortality**

In this study, 65 neonatal deaths occurred during the follow-up period in selected three public hospitals of Gamo and Gofa Zones, Southern Ethiopia. Of the neonatal deaths, only 52 respondents were agreed and interviewed for verbal autopsies but rest were refused for verbal autopsy. Almost half (51.9%) of the neonatal deaths were happened due to prematurity or gestational age less than 37 week, 13 (25%) due to neonatal infection, 7 (13.5%) were by birth asphyxia, 3(5.8%) congenital malformation due congenital malformation and the rest were with unspecified cause (Figure 2).

**Determinates of neonatal mortality**

After adjusting in the multivariable model age of the mother, the number of ANC visits, hemorrhage, and presentation, gestational age at birth, birth weight and sex of the neonate were significantly associated with neonatal mortality. Advanced maternal age above 35 years old increased neonatal mortality significantly as compared to the age group 15 to 24 years old ($\beta =1.34; 95\%\ CI:0.55,2.14$). The number of the antenatal visit from 1 to 3 significantly reduced neonatal mortality as compared to four or more visits ($\beta =-0.80; 95\%\ CI:-1.47,-0.13$) and hemorrhage increased neonatal mortality significantly ($\beta =0.95; 95\%\ CI: 0.19, 1.71$). Non-vertex presentation ($\beta =1.19; 95\%\ CI: 0.64, 1.74$), gestational age of less than 37 week ($\beta =1.17; 95\%\ CI: 0.47, 1.88$), birth weight of less than 2500g ($\beta =0.73; 95\%\ CI: 0.01, 1.45$) and being male neonate ($\beta =0.90; 95\%\ CI: 0.19, 1.60$) had significantly increased neonatal mortality (Table 4).

Table 4: Bivariate and multivariable analysis of determinates for neonatal mortality among study participants in selected hospitals of Gamo and Gofa Zones, Southern Ethiopia, 2018/9 ($n=6769$)
| Variables                          | Crude estimate β (95%CI) | Adjusted estimate β (95%CI) |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Place of residence                |                          |                             |
| Urban                             | -0.69(-1.19,-0.20)       | -0.35(-0.93,0.23)           |
| Age of the mother                 |                          |                             |
| 25-34                             | -0.26(-0.86,0.34)        | -0.65(-1.41,0.11)           |
| ≥35                               | 2.07(1.47,2.66)          | 1.34(0.55,2.14)*            |
| Birth interval                    |                          |                             |
| Not applicable (primi)            | NA                       | NA                          |
| <24 month                         | -1.34(-2.74,0.06)        | -0.89(-2.54,0.74)           |
| 24-48 month                       | -0.66(-1.86,0.53)        | -0.43(-1.80,0.95)           |
| Number of ANC visits              |                          |                             |
| No visit                          | 2.12(1.57,2.68)          | -0.69(-1.41,0.03)           |
| 1-3 visit                         | 0.35(-0.34,1.05)         | -0.80(-1.47,-0.13)          |
| Party                             |                          |                             |
| Multipara                         | 0.37(-0.15,0.88)         | 0.46(-1.08,1.99)            |
| Haemorrhage                       |                          |                             |
| Yes                               | 1.34(0.66,2.02)          | 0.95(0.19,1.71)*            |
| Premature rupture of membrane     |                          |                             |
| Yes                               | 1.08(0.58,1.58)          | 0.23(-0.42,0.89)            |
| Presentation                      |                          |                             |
| Non-vertex                        | 1.56(1.06,2.05)          | 1.19(0.64,1.74)*            |
| Gestational age                   |                          |                             |
| <37 week                          | 1.94(1.45,2.43)          | 1.17(0.47,1.88)*            |
| Birth weight                      |                          |                             |
| <2500g                            | 2.22(1.73,2.72)          | 0.73(0.01,1.45)*            |
| Sex of the neonate                |                          |                             |
| Male                              | 1.47(0.82,2.12)          | 0.90(0.19,1.60)*            |

©breech, transverse, face and brow, NA: not applicable and *Significant at P<0.05

Discussion

In this study neonatal mortality incidence ratio were 9.6(95%CI: 7.5, 12.2) per 1000 live births. Age of the mother, number of ANC visit, haemorrhage, non-vertex presentation, gestational age, birth weight, and sex of the neonate had significant risk factor for neonatal mortality. The major causes of neonatal mortality were prematurity, infection, and birth asphyxia.

The incidence of neonatal mortality was lower than studies done in northern Ethiopia (18.6 per 1000 live births), Kersa Health and Demographic Surveillance system site in Ethiopia (27.5 per 1000 live births) and two studies in southwest Ethiopia (35.5 and 27 per 1000 live births). But, it was higher than one study done in South Central Ethiopia (4.8 per 1000 live births) [10, 12-15]. The reason for this is the study period difference along with advance in the health care system that people's attitudes and awareness about conditions that put the newborn for ill health and increase in health-seeking behavior from time to time. The causes of neonatal mortality (prematurity, infection, birth asphyxia, and anomalies) in this study were in line with different studies done in Ethiopia [10, 13, 14, 17].
Advanced maternal age (age greater than or equal to 35 years old) had a significant risk factor for neonatal mortality as identified in this study. This is the fact that advanced maternal age increases the risk that predisposes for different complications for the fetus, and for the neonates as well as for the mother. As indicated in this study, hemorrhage, and non-vertex presentation was a determinate factor for neonatal mortality. This was in line with studies done in Southeast Brazil, South Africa, Uganda, and two studies in Ethiopia [10, 11, 14, 22, 23]. The reason for this is that those stated conditions are the ones or in another way can affect the neonate during intra-uterine as well as extra-uterine life and predispose to life-threatening even for loss of life during the neonatal period.

A number of the ANC follow up had significant risk for neonatal mortality as point out in this study. This is congruent with studies done in Southeast Brazil, and three studies in Ethiopia [10, 14, 17, 22]. This is obvious that the pregnant mother avoids preventable risk factors after having several ANC follow up, early identification and treatment of pre-existing conditions, and early screening of conditions that occur during pregnancy. In this study, gestational age less than 37 weeks, and birth weight less than 2500g were the most determinate factor for neonatal mortality. This was consistent with the study done in Ethiopia [10]. This is because those newborns whose gestation age less than 37 weeks (preterm) and birth weight less than 2500g were more likely to develop different complications during and after delivery and results for severe morbidity and mortality.

Being a male neonate was a significant risk for neonatal mortality as showed in this study. This is in line with some of the studies done in Ethiopia [14, 16, 17]. This is maybe due to the nature that male neonates more risk for different complication as stated in many studies.

The public health importance of this study is: Neonates are the risk population group for different complications and most likely affected by preventable causes of morbidity and mortality. Nowadays the neonatal mortality is on the way of decreasing but it is not that much satisfactory as compared to under-five child mortality. So, studies on risk factors that predispose the newborn for ill health and mortality are very important to prevent the underlining causes and to give immediate solutions.

The main strength of this study that the design was prospective follow up that it gave a true measure of the incidence of neonatal mortality and to develop cause and effect relationship. Standard and
validated verbal autopsy tool was used to measure the causes for neonatal mortality to maintain the validity and reliability. The large sample size was used for this study that resulted in high power and greater precision.

The limitations are: response of the verbal autopsy was written based on the respondent’s view and some of the causes were difficult to classify in one category. Besides, during follow up some mothers did not come to health care institutions for immunization as well as for other services and very challenged to trace those mothers as they were out of health facilities.

Conclusion
This study showed that the incidence of neonatal mortality ratio was optimum. Age of the mother, number of ANC visits, hemorrhage, non-vertex presentation, gestational age, birth weight and sex of the neonate had significant risk factor neonatal mortality. The major causes of neonatal mortality were prematurity, infection, and birth asphyxia as identified by this study. Both maternal and neonatal risk factors for neonatal mortality were identified in this study. Therefore, early identification of obstetric complications and immediate interventions, strengthen antenatal care services both at the community as well as in the health care institutions, screening the conditions early during intrapartum and postnatal period to give immediate measures to avoid preventable causes of neonatal mortality. The health professionals are responsible to provide quality antenatal care services for pregnant mothers both at health care institutions and in the community. The community is also responsible to seek health information during the prenatal and postnatal period which is provided by health professionals and put in practice. Other scholars should incorporate some of the variables that are not addressed in this study such as wealth index, nutritional status, and cultural aspects. It is also very important if the mixed study design is applied.

Abbreviations
ANC: Antenatal Care, HTN: Hypertension, NICU: Neonatal intensive care unit, NM: Neonatal mortality, and VA: Verbal Autopsy

Declarations

**Ethics approval and consent to participate**

Ethical clearance was obtained from Arba Minch University, College of Medicine and Health Sciences,
Institutional Research Ethics Review Board (IRB). Adequate explanation about the purpose of the study and a letter of support was given to Gamo and Gofa Zones Health Departments and CEOs of each hospital. All study participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to refuse participation and written and signed voluntary consent was obtained from all study participants before the interview. The respondents were also informed that the information obtained from them was treated with the utmost confidentiality.

**Consent for publication**

Not applicable

**Availability of data and materials**

The data will not be shared to preserve participant anonymity.

**Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests

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**Authors’ contributions**

AM designed the study, involved in data collection, done analysis and interpretation of the result and drafted the paper and participated in preparing all versions of the manuscript. AB and SS assisted in the design and the proposal development, monitored data collection, assisted during analysis and revised subsequent drafts of the paper. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Additional Files
Tool (pdf) (See additional file 1)
STROBE checklist (pdf) (See additional file 2)
Figures
Figure 1
Overall process of the study conducted in public hospitals of Gamo and Gofa Zones,
Southern Ethiopia, 2018/9
Figure 2

Causes of neonatal mortality among study participants in public hospitals of Gamo and Gofa Zones, Southern Ethiopia, 2018/9 (n=6769)

Supplementary Files
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