

The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of overlapping, organic shapes in shades of green, red, blue, and brown. A large, stylized silhouette of a woman's face is rendered in a bright red color, with dark, thick outlines for the eyes, nose, and mouth. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century graphic design.


WOMEN'S LIVES & EXPERIENCES

*A decade of research
findings from the
Demographic and
Health Surveys Program*

WOMEN'S LIVES & EXPERIENCES

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For more information about the DHS Program, contact:

Macro International Inc.
DHS Program
11785 Beltsville Drive, Suite 300
Calverton, MD 20705 USA
Telephone: (301) 572-0200
Fax: (301) 572-0999

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Editing:
Jennifer Woodhouse
Sidney Moore

Design:
Supon Design Group

THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH SURVEYS PROGRAM

The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) program is one of the world's single largest sources of information on women. DHS provides a statistical portrait of women's lives and experiences in more than 40 developing countries. Since 1984, the DHS program has interviewed over 360,000 women and 35,000 men. Combined, the survey respondents represent the experiences of more than 280 million women of reproductive age.

The results are a vital resource for decision-makers worldwide who seek to understand and improve the living conditions and life opportunities of women and their families. The surveys provide information on basic national indicators of social progress, including fertility, mortality, family planning, maternal and child health, household living conditions, and educational attainment. In some countries, DHS has produced the first information of its kind on these indicators, providing new data on women's experiences and living conditions.

Over the years, DHS has been among the first survey programs to document positive changes in women's health and well-being in many countries. DHS research has provided evidence of:

- increases in educational attainment among women in all regions;
- sharp fertility declines in many countries, including some in sub-Saharan Africa;
- decreases in desired family size and increases in modern contraceptive use;
- increases in age at first marriage and age at first birth;
- greater access to medical care during pregnancy; and
- improved survival of children.

In short, DHS has found that increasing numbers of women are gaining access to the means by which they can better their lives and those of their children.

At the same time, DHS also depicts the extent to which many women's lives have not changed over time.

- In 13 countries, more than half of reproductive age women have no education.
- In 14 countries, at least half of women marry before age 18.
- In 18 countries, women receive medical assistance at delivery for fewer than half of births.
- In 10 countries, fewer than half of married women know a source for a contraceptive.
- In 22 countries, more than one-fourth of married women have "unmet need" for contraception.
- In 30 countries, at least one-fourth of women have experienced the death of a young child.

This report summarizes information on different dimensions of women's lives and experiences, including education, relationships, childbearing experiences, childbearing choices, children, and home life. The results reflect both the experiences of women whose lives have been affected by positive change and of women whose lives are as yet untouched by such change.

