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Journalists' Guide *to the* Demographic and Health Surveys



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What are the Demographic and Health Surveys?

Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) are the most widely recognized source of health and population data in the developing world. DHS are national surveys of family planning, health and nutrition knowledge and practices, and in some countries, HIV prevalence. Since 1984 more than 200 surveys have been carried out in 75 countries. The survey reports and survey data are free to everyone.

What does DHS offer?

- Information from interviews with women and sometimes men age 15–49.
- Typical surveys cover more than 10,000 people representing urban and rural areas and provinces/states.
- DHS surveys are conducted every 4 to 5 years in most countries. The same questions are asked in each survey so that comparisons can be made over time and between countries.

What kind of information is collected?

HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): knowledge and attitudes about AIDS and STIs, availability of counseling and testing, high risk sexual behavior, orphanhood, and in some countries, HIV prevalence.



Malaria: ownership and use of mosquito nets, use of preventive treatment, treatment of symptoms.

Infant and Child Mortality, Child Health: child survival, vaccination, acute respiratory infection and diarrhea symptoms and treatment.

Households: age, sex, schooling of all household members, ownership of goods, access to electricity and water.

Women's Status: literacy, education, employment, decisionmaking, domestic violence.

Fertility: rates and trends, women's age at birth and marriage, fertility preferences.

Family Planning: knowledge and use of contraceptive methods, source of methods, exposure to family planning messages, unmet need for family planning.

Women's Health: antenatal, delivery and postpartum care, access to health care, female circumcision.

Nutrition: infant feeding practices, duration of breastfeeding, malnutrition, vitamin A supplementation, anemia levels.



Philippines, © 2000 Liz Gilbert/David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Courtesy of Photoshare

The MEASURE DHS Project

The MEASURE DHS project (www.measuredhs.com) helps implement survey research, dissemination of data and capacity building in the areas of health and population. MEASURE DHS provides technical assistance for the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), the Service Provision Assessment Survey (SPA) and the AIDS Indicator Survey (AIS).

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Glossary of Health and

Fertility and Contraception:

Contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR): The percentage of women age 15-49 who currently use any method of family planning.

Total fertility rate (TFR): The average number of births per woman.

Modern contraceptive methods (also known as modern methods of family planning): Most common methods are: contraceptive pill (oral contraceptives), intrauterine device (IUD), injectables (Depo), implants, male condom, female condom, female sterilization (tubal ligation, voluntary surgical contraception), male sterilization (vasectomy, voluntary surgical contraception for men) and lactational amenorrhea (LAM).

Traditional family planning methods: Periodic abstinence (rhythm, calendar method), withdrawal, country-specific traditional methods of proven effectiveness, folk methods (locally described or spiritual methods that have not been proven effective, such as herbs, amulets, gris-gris, etc.).

Unmet need for family planning: The percentage of sexually active women who are not using contraception but say they do not want another pregnancy or want to wait at least 2 years before having another child.

Infant and Child Health

Birth interval: The amount of time between two successive live births. Doctors recommend that women wait at least 3 years between births.

Infant mortality rate: The number of children who die by their first birthday per 1,000 live births.

Under-five mortality rate: The number of children who die between birth and age five per 1,000 live births.

Fully immunized/vaccinated: Children age 12-23 months who have received all recommended immunizations against infectious diseases (tuberculosis, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, polio, and measles).

Oral rehydration therapy (ORT): Treatment for diarrhea consisting primarily of a solution prepared from commercially produced packets of oral rehydration salts (ORS) or a homemade mixture prepared from sugar, salt, and water (recommended home fluids).

Maternal Health:

Antenatal care (or prenatal care): The health care a woman receives while she is pregnant. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that women receive antenatal care at least 4 times.

Maternal mortality ratio: In the DHS, maternal mortality refers to any death of a woman that occurs during pregnancy, childbirth, or in the two months after childbirth or termination of the pregnancy. The maternal mortality ratio is expressed as the number of maternal

Demographic Terms*

deaths per 100,000 live births.

Trained health care provider: Medically trained providers, such as doctors, nurses, midwives, and community health workers are included in this group. Traditional birth attendants are not included.

Nutrition

Anemia: A disease caused by low levels of the oxygen-carrying material (hemoglobin) in the blood. Anemia is often caused by too little iron in the blood and in food, or by too frequent pregnancies. Anemia in women (especially pregnant women) and children can have serious health effects, including illness and death.

Exclusive breastfeeding: Feeding an infant nothing but breastmilk; exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first 6 months of life.

Stunting: Being too short for one's age; usually a sign of chronic malnutrition.

Vitamin A: A vitamin that prevents blindness and infection. Vitamin A is particularly important for children and new mothers. It is found in certain foods and vitamin supplements.

Wasting: Being too thin for one's height; usually a sign of severe malnutrition.

Gender

Domestic violence or interspousal violence: Violence against women by their current or former husbands or consensual partners; can be emotional, physical or sexual violence.

Female genital cutting (FGC) (also called female circumcision): A general term for a number of traditional operations that involve cutting away parts of the female external genitalia. It is often performed during infancy, childhood, or adolescence.

Gender analysis: An examination of the differences in roles, activities, needs, constraints, opportunities, and power associated with being male or female. The standard DHS includes questions on gender issues including the status of women, domestic violence, and FGC.

Disease

ITNs: Insecticide treated bednets, used to prevent malaria.

IPT (Intermittent preventive treatment): treatment of pregnant women to prevent malaria. Treatment consists of 3 doses of SP (Fansidar) at monthly intervals during the second trimester of pregnancy.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs): A group of diseases that are generally transmitted through sexual activity, including HIV. These diseases affect both men and women (and sometimes children), and, if left untreated, may lead to infertility or death.

*These definitions are based on those usually used in the Demographic and Health Surveys. Please refer to individual country reports for exact definitions.

Why Do Reporters Need DHS Data?

- DHS gives you the latest data to put a story in context for readers.
- DHS data support many of the stories you report on everyday, such as the economy, living conditions, international aid, health care, and politics.
- Behind these numbers are real people who are having children, using contraception, going to school, and living with HIV/AIDS.
- Audiences like to learn how health status changes over time; DHS allows you to describe how health and family planning practices have changed, for better or worse.
- Often DHS data influence policymakers' decisions to implement new policies or develop new programs. These decisions can be controversial—and newsworthy.
- DHS data provide background information for questions at a press conference, radio or TV interview.

Newspaper in Mozambique Cites DHS:

HIV/AIDS Programmes Budgeted At 54 Million Dollars

Agencia de Informacao de Mocambique (Maputo)

January 14, 2005

So the number of people receiving the life-prolonging anti-retroviral drugs in Mozambican public health units has grown from just over 2,000 in March 2004, to about 4,000 in June, to over 6,500 by the end of December.

...As for the results, or lack of them, from years of prevention campaigns, Libombo said that knowledge of the disease and how to avoid it had clearly increased.

A comparison of the two Demographic and Health Surveys undertaken by the National Statistics Institute in 1997 and 2003 showed a greater level of understanding of how to avoid infection, and also that a larger number of adolescents were now using condoms.

Here are some of the many questions DHS data can answer as you report your story.

News Story

Droughts are affecting part of the country. →

Migrant labor is on the rise—many men are leaving their families to find work. →

Domestic violence (DV) cases hit the news. →

Minister of Education calls for more funding for primary schools. →

Fertility in one province is very high. →

A measles outbreak occurs in the country. →

The government is considering building a new women's hospital. →

WHO recommends that infants should be breastfed until 6 months of age. →

Ministry of Health announces new government initiative to teach AIDS prevention in schools. →

Government hospitals start providing antiretroviral drugs →

DHS data tells you:

Where households get their drinking water, distance to water source

Percent of woman-headed households, percent of women who work for cash earnings

Men's and women's attitudes about wife beating, prevalence of DV

Trends in school attendance for boys and girls

Comparisons by province of knowledge and use of family planning

Percent of children currently vaccinated, areas of the country with lowest vaccination rates

Percent of women who deliver their babies in hospitals

Percent of infants who are breastfed, length of breastfeeding, rates of malnutrition

Percent of people who know how to prevent HIV, where people learn about HIV/AIDS

Percent of the population infected with HIV, prevalence of HIV infection in different regions

Accessing *free* DHS data:

Press releases and data can be viewed at the MEASURE DHS website (www.measuredhs.com). You can view full country reports or search for a few specific facts. Publications can also be ordered.

STATcompiler: www.statcompiler.com

An online database of population, health and nutrition indicators from DHS surveys. It contains more than 600 indicators from over 60 countries. Compare a given indicator over many countries or view trends within one country over time.

STATmapper: www.statmapper.com

An interactive mapping tool that allows users to create maps based on a large variety of DHS population and health indicators. Maps can also be saved as pictures for use in presentations or reports.

HIV/AIDS Survey Indicators Database:

www.measuredhs.com/hivdata

This database includes dozens of internationally recognized HIV/AIDS indicators compiled from sources including DHS, UNICEF, and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Create your own tables with data from different countries.

Gender Corner: A page on our website focusing on gender data, publications and links.

Dissemination in your country: Look out for a national seminar presentation of your country's DHS results. Press are encouraged to attend and are usually provided with a press briefing and press releases.

Questions? Contact us at press@measuredhs.com

Sign up to receive press releases and publication notices at www.measuredhs.com.



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