

## 7 Summary and Conclusions

The study of reproductive preferences is important both for population policy and for family planning program concerns. In this report, attitudes and intentions toward childbearing have been compared for 28 countries, most of which participated in the second round of DHS.

The number of children desired by women in the sub-Saharan African countries remains high, an average of 5.8 children, although several countries in that region show significant declines. The pattern in other regions is very different, with levels roughly between 2.5 and 4.0 children desired. The number desired has declined appreciably in most of these countries over the last 15 years or so. Similar patterns are evident for the WFR and its trends and for the proportions of women who want no more children. In Turkey, Bangladesh, Colombia and Peru, the WFR is at or below the replacement level. High potential rates of population growth are implicit in many of the other countries, although preferences have changed rapidly in many countries and could accelerate even more in the near future.

Because the preference for fewer children is spreading widely and the number preferred declining more rapidly than actual fertility, the level of unwanted childbearing is rising. An average of 25 percent of women outside of sub-Saharan Africa report having more children than they want. Only 7 percent of women in sub-Saharan Africa with a birth in the past year reported the pregnancy as unwanted, compared with just under 20 percent elsewhere.

Outside of sub-Saharan Africa, most women report having discussed the number of children desired with their partners and typically report that they want the same number. In the sub-Saharan African countries, on the other hand, there is a very high proportion who do not know their partner's view. Almost without exception, in all of the countries, more women perceive their partners as wanting more rather than fewer children.

The preferred length of birth intervals was also investigated, but its measurement is not straightforward. Three different approaches indicate that the preferred length ranges between 30 and 48 months.