

Background of the National Family Health Surveys

Since 1992, the National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) have provided reliable and relevant data to assist policymakers and programme administrators in planning and implementing population, health, and nutrition programmes. An important objective of the NFHS surveys has been to provide national and state level estimates of fertility, family planning, infant and child mortality, reproductive and child health, nutrition of women and children, the quality of health and family welfare services, and socioeconomic conditions. In addition to information on these topics, the latest survey, NFHS-3, provides important new findings about HIV prevalence. For the first time, the survey provides information on men and unmarried women, as well as data on slum populations in eight cities.

Conducted under the stewardship of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW) and with the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai, as the nodal agency, the NFHS surveys have come to represent a key resource for evaluating and monitoring family welfare and the health of the Indian population.

The NFHS surveys use standardized questionnaires, sample designs, and field procedures to collect data which is representative at the national and the state level. This permits comparisons across states and over time. The first NFHS was conducted in 1992-93 and the second in 1998-99. Data from these first two rounds of NFHS are based on a representative sample of ever-married women.

In NFHS-3, face-to-face interviews were conducted with nearly 200,000 people (124,385 married and unmarried women ages 15-49 and 74,369 married and unmarried men ages 15-54) from all 29 states. In addition to interviewing women and men, NFHS-3 tested the cooking salt used by households for iodine content; weighed and measured women, men, and children below age five years; tested for blood haemoglobin of women, men, and children age 6-59 months to check for anaemia; and collected the blood of over 100,000 women and men to test for HIV.

Fieldwork for NFHS-3 was conducted in two phases by 18 research organizations from November 2005 to August 2006. Financial assistance for NFHS-3 was provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Government of India. Technical assistance for NFHS-3 was provided by Macro International, USA. Assistance for the HIV component of the survey was provided by the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) and the National AIDS Research Institute (NARI).