

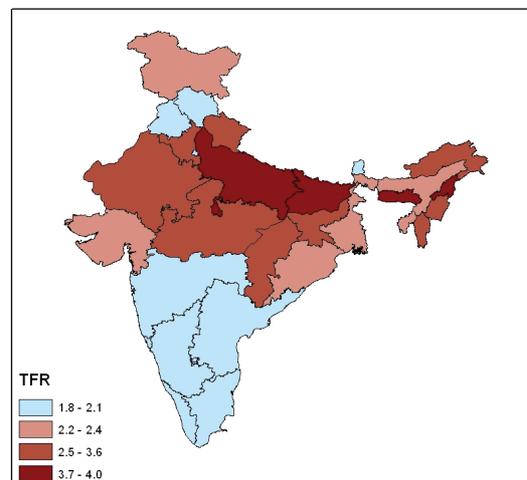
Fertility Continues to Decrease but Still Too High in Some States

India's population continues to grow faster than necessary to replace itself. In its National Population Policy, 2000, the Government of India set a goal of achieving replacement level fertility of 2.1 children per woman nationally by the year 2010. With only a few years left to go, this goal is still unrealized. NFHS-3 has determined that at current fertility rates, India's women will have an average of 2.7 children per woman, slightly lower than 2.9 children per woman measured in 1998-99 by NFHS-2, but still well above the replacement level.

Fertility

Urban women have already achieved replacement level fertility, having a total fertility rate (TFR) of 2.1, but the TFR among rural women (3.0) is still too high. If all women in India had only the number of children they say they want, replacement level fertility would be achieved.

Ten states are already at or below the replacement level of fertility and several other states are close to achieving that level. The total fertility rate is much higher (3 or more children per woman) in 8 states, and is particularly high (3.7-4.0) in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Nagaland.



Marriage

The percentage of women who get married before the legal minimum age at marriage of 18 years has been dropping over time, but even now 46% of younger women age 18-29 get married before reaching their 18th birthday. More than half of women age 18-29 marry before reaching the legal minimum age at marriage in Bihar (64%), Jharkhand (60%), Rajasthan (58%), Andhra Pradesh (56%), West Bengal (53%), Madhya Pradesh (53%), Uttar Pradesh (52%), and Chhattisgarh (51%). Men get married about six years later than women, but 27% of men age 21-29 got married before the legal minimum age of 21 years for men.

Knowledge of Contraceptive Methods

To facilitate the informed choice of family planning methods, it is desirable that people are aware of a wide variety of contraceptive methods. Knowledge of at least one method of modern contraception is universal since nearly every man and woman of reproductive age has heard of female sterilization (97 percent of women age 15-49 and 95 percent of men age 15-49), but other methods are less well known. Only sixty-one percent of women and 49 percent of men reported knowledge of all three modern spacing methods offered by the government family planning programme (pill, IUD, and condom).

Awareness of spacing methods is much higher in urban areas than in rural areas. For example, 74 percent of women age 15-49 in urban areas know all three spacing methods, compared with 54 percent in rural areas. Female sterilization is the most widely known method in 26 of the 29 states.

Use of Modern Contraception

For the first time ever, more than half of currently married women in the country (56%) are using some method of contraception. Almost half (49%) are using a modern method of contraception. Female sterilization accounts for more than three-quarters (77%) of all modern method use. Among modern spacing methods, the most widely used method is condoms (used by 5 percent of currently married women). One in five currently married users of a modern method of contraception (21 percent) uses one of the three modern spacing methods in the government programme (pill, IUD, condom).

The overall contraceptive prevalence rate is much higher in urban areas (64%) than in rural areas (53%). Urban and rural women are equally likely to be sterilized (37 percent of currently married urban and rural women age 15-49 are sterilized). The use of modern spacing methods (pill, IUD, and condom), however, is considerably higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Condom use is three times as high in urban areas as in rural areas.

Use of Contraception over Time and across States

Over the past 13 years there has been a steady increase in the use of modern contraceptive methods, from 37 percent in NFHS-1 (1992-93) to 43 percent in NFHS-2 (1998-99) and further to 49 percent in NFHS-3. While use of modern methods in rural areas lags behind use in urban areas, use of modern methods has increased steadily in both urban and rural areas. However, urban women are more likely than rural women to begin contraceptive use when they have fewer children.

Use of any method of contraception among currently married women age 15-49 varies substantially across states, from a low of 24 percent in Meghalaya to a high of 73 percent in Himachal Pradesh. More than two-thirds of married women use modern methods only in Himachal Pradesh (71 percent) and Andhra Pradesh (67 percent).

Men's Attitudes about Contraception

Twenty-two percent of men think that contraception is women's business and that a man should not have to worry about it. Sixteen percent of men believe that women who use contraception may become promiscuous. Almost half of men believe that a woman who is breastfeeding cannot become pregnant.

Need for Family Planning

Thirteen percent of currently married women are not using contraception, yet say they either want to stop having children, or want to wait two or more years before having their next child. Their need for family planning is not being met. Unmet need for family planning has declined slightly over the last seven years, from 16 percent in NFHS-2 to 13 percent in NFHS-3.

For more information about fertility, please see Chapter 4 of the NFHS-3 final report. For more information about marriage, see Chapter 6. For more information about family planning, see Chapter 5.