

CHAPTER 7

FERTILITY, CONTRACEPTION AND FAMILY PLANNING

A. Fertility, Sexual Activity and Maternal Health Care in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka leads the South Asian region in terms of health care. Declining population growth combined with a nationwide health care system led to declining mortality rates. Since 1962, family planning services have been included in the government's maternal and child health care system.¹⁷⁵

The country's fertility rates are declining due to the trend towards delayed age of marriage and the desire among married couples to limit childbearing.¹⁷⁶ This has contributed to the declining population growth rate that will reduce resource requirements on the health sector. Table 43 shows that fertility rates across all reproductive ages have also been declining. Fertility rate declined from 35 per 1,000 in 1993¹⁷⁷ to 27 between the periods of 1995 and 2000 among adolescents (15-19).¹⁷⁸ In the peak fertility age groups 20-24 and 25-29 years, which account for about fifty six percent of births, fertility rates dropped by forty-two and thirty-one percent, respectively in the period between 1980 and 2000.¹⁷⁹

Table 43. Age-Specific Fertility Rates, 1963-2000

Age (In years)	1963	WFS 1975	DHS 1987	DHS 1993	DHS 2000
15-19	52	31	38	35	27
20-24	228	146	147	110	83
25-29	278	161	161	134	118
30-34	240	158	122	104	98
35-39	157	126	71	54	40
40-44	46	43	23	14	8
45-49	7	6	3	4	1
TFR	5.0	3.4	2.8	2.3	1.9

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, 2001. Census of Population and Housing

The country's birth rates have also gone down. From 20.6 births per 1,000 population between 1988 and 1993, birth rate fell to 17.5 between the periods of 1995 and 2000.¹⁸⁰ The actual number of pregnancies among adolescents is not known, since data on abortion and miscarriages, especially for this group, are lacking. Estimates in 1995 suggest that seven percent of all live births occurred to women aged 15-19 years.¹⁸¹ The Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in Asia (RHIYA) attributes almost nine percent of all births to teenage mothers and in rural areas, this figure rises to 12 percent.¹⁸² Unplanned pregnancies among married adolescent girls were estimated to be about 30 percent in 1998.¹⁸³ No recent data on age of first birth are available. The Demographic Health Survey of 1987 showed that among women aged 20 and 24 years (at the time of the survey) median age of first birth was 24 years while among women aged 40 and 49 years (also at the time of the survey), median age at first birth was 21 years.¹⁸⁴ This indicates that age at first birth is rising and is consistent with trends towards delayed marriage and declining birth rates. Truncation effects might also affect the information.