

LAOS — Country Profile

Overview

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) is a landlocked, mountainous and forested country and became a land linked country since 1997 as a member of ASEAN, with an estimated population of 6.6 million in 2012. 56% of the population are children and young people below the age of 25 years. The majority of population lives in rural areas (71%), including 8.9% who live in rural areas without road access. The annual population growth rate for Lao PDR is around 2.1%. The country is ethnically diverse, having 49 official ethnic groups with 167 ethnic subgroups. The Lao Constitution was proclaimed in 1991 and amended in 2003 to contain most key safeguards for human rights.

Source: *extracted from Laos Demographic & Health Survey (LDHS) 2009*

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Key findings from the 2009 LDHS on the situation of SRHR in Laos are as follows:

Maternal Health:

- The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) was 357 deaths per 100,000 live births during the seven year period preceding the survey.
- The total fertility rate for Lao PDR for the three-year period preceding the survey is 3.2 children per woman, and 3.6 and 2.2 in rural and urban areas, respectively.
- 54 per cent of women age 15-49 years who gave birth in the two years preceding the survey received antenatal care from a health professional.
- Nearly half of women (48 per cent) did not take any iron pills during their pregnancy.
- 42 per cent of women who gave birth in the previous two years were assisted at the time of delivery by a health professional.
- Only 41 per cent of newborns in the last two years received either a health check or post-natal care visit within two days of delivery.
- Only 40 per cent of mothers received either a health check after delivery or a postnatal care visit within two days of delivery.

Contraception:

- Over 90 per cent of women and men have heard of a modern contraception method.
- Both women and men are more familiar with modern methods of contraception (94 per cent and 95 per cent, respectively) than with traditional methods (68 and 69 per cent, respectively).
- 50 per cent of currently married women are using a method of contraception.
- The most popular method is the pill, used by 2 in 10 married women in Lao PDR. Injectables are the next most popular method, used by 14 per cent of currently married women.
- 42 per cent of married women are using a modern method of family planning.

- 35 per cent of users obtained their contraceptive method from a government hospital, and 30 per cent from a government health centre.
- Overall, 1 in 5 married women have an unmet need for contraception, with 12 per cent of married women having an unmet need for limiting and 8 per cent having an unmet need for birth spacing.

Abortion:

- According to the UN Abortion Policies and Reproductive Health around the World (2014), abortion is permitted to preserve a woman's physical health.

HIV & AIDS:

- 84 per cent of women and 92 per cent of men have heard of AIDS.
- Only 2 in 10 women and 3 in 10 men have comprehensive knowledge of AIDS.
- 44 per cent of women with no education or in the poorest households have never heard of AIDS.
- 67 per cent of women and 82 per cent of men know both of the main ways of preventing HIV transmission.
- 8 in 10 adults know that HIV can be transmitted from a mother to her child (77 per cent of women and 82 per cent of men).
- Only 4 in 10 women said they would be willing to care for a family member with AIDS in their household.
- 37 per cent of women and 47 per cent of men know where they can go to be tested for HIV.
- Only 3 per cent of both women and men were tested for HIV within the 12 months prior to the survey.

Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Child Early & Forced Marriage (CEFM):

- Almost half (45 per cent) of women age 20-49 in the Northern region were married before the age of 18 compared with one third of women in the Central and South regions.
- The strongest relationship to marriage before 18 is with education, where half of women age 20-49 with no education were married before 18 compared with only 2 per cent of women with some education.
- One in four young women age 15-19 is currently married, with wide variation across provinces.
- One in four women age 15-19 is currently married to a man who is older by five to nine years.
- The adolescent fertility rate is 94 for every 1,000 girls age 15-19.
- There is a big difference between rural and urban areas (114 and 44 births per 1,000 adolescents, respectively).
- 4 per cent of women age 25-49 have given birth by the age of 15.

Violence Against Women (VAW):

- A higher proportion of women (58 percent) than men (49 percent) feel that a husband or partner has a right to hit or beat his wife or partner for at least one of the reasons presented.

- Women and men most commonly agree and justify violence in instances when the woman neglects the children (46 per cent of women and 35 per cent of men).
- Some women and men also agree a husband is justified in beating his wife if she demonstrates her autonomy, for example, by going out without telling her husband (32 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men) or arguing with him (27 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men).
- Around a quarter of women and a fifth of men believe that a husband has a right to hit or beat his wife or partner if she refuses to have sex with him.
- The proportion of women expressing accepting attitudes towards wife beating is higher than the proportion of men, at all ages.
- The acceptance of both women and men to wife beating varies little with respect to education and household wealth.
- Accepting attitudes toward wife beating are most common among women in Hmong-Mien headed households (69 percent) and men in Mon-Khmer headed households (53 percent).

Current initiatives in Lao PDR

- ARROW partners with National University of Laos — University of Health Sciences in Lao PDR to work towards **ICPD+25: Revitalising and implementing the Sexual and Reproductive Rights Agenda in the Asia Pacific Region**. This ICPD+25 monitoring and advocacy initiative aims to show the progress gaps and challenges towards ICPD implementation in Lao PDR. In-depth monitoring is currently underway on the access to SRH services among young marginalised people and access to the youth friendly services.