

MALDIVES — Country Profile

Overview

The Republic of Maldives is an archipelago in the Indian Ocean located 600 km south of India. Only 196 of the islands are officially inhabited, although another 84 islands are used as resorts, and 14 islands serve an industrial purpose. The capital of Malé, with an area of about 2 square km, accommodates one-third of the country's population of about 300,000. The total land area is estimated to be 300 square km, of which only 10 percent are suitable for agriculture. The climate is tropical: warm and humid, with two pronounced monsoon seasons. The Republic of Maldives has always been a sovereign and independent state except for brief periods of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries and today remains solely a Muslim state.

As an archipelago of many islands that are home to fewer than 500 inhabitants, Maldives has unique development problems. The population is extremely dispersed and fragmented. In addition, the survival of the country's low-lying islands is threatened by the constant rise in sea level due to global warming. The unique geographical nature of the country poses a challenge to service provision. Though the size of the population is comparatively small, it is geographically dispersed. Such isolated island communities require many facilities to provide service at a variety of locations. Nonetheless, the Maldives has recorded significant achievement in human development. The infant mortality rate declined from 63 deaths in 1986 to 11 deaths per 1,000 births in 2009 and the crude death rate declined from 17 deaths per 1,000 population in 1971 to 4 deaths per 1000 population.

Source: *extracted from Maldives Demographic & Health Survey (MDHS) 2009*

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Key findings from the 2009 MDHS on the situation of SRHR in Maldives are as follows:

Maternal Health:

- Almost all women (99 percent) received antenatal care from a skilled provider.
- Eighty-five percent of women who had a live birth in the five years preceding the survey reported visiting antenatal clinics at least four times during pregnancy, and 2 percent reported two or three antenatal visits during their last pregnancy.
- The majority of women (90 percent) had their first antenatal visit in the first trimester of pregnancy.
- The median number of months of pregnancy at the first ANC visit is 1.8 months.
- Eighty-seven percent of women take iron supplements during pregnancy. A higher proportion of mothers age 20 or older take iron supplements compared with younger women.
- More than half of the women (52 percent) who received antenatal care during their last pregnancy were informed of the symptoms of pregnancy complications.
- 82 percent of women's last births were protected against neonatal tetanus.

- 67 percent received a postnatal checkup within two days of delivery, and 3 percent of women had a checkup 3 to 41 days after delivery.

Contraception:

- Knowledge of family planning methods is virtually universal among married women in Maldives.
- Almost all currently married women age 15-49 interviewed in the MDHS knew at least one modern family planning method.
- The peak age of childbearing for urban women is at age 25-29 and for rural women is at age 20-24, with 152 births per 1,000 women and 165 births per 1,000 women, respectively.
- Women nearing the end of their reproductive years have a parity of 5.5 children.
- The median age at first birth has increased from 19.3 years to 23.9 years.
- The male condom is the most popular method among women under age 40, with around one in ten women age 20-39 using the condom.
- Female sterilization is the widely used method among women age 35 and over; around one in four women age 40-49 report they use female sterilization.
- Emergency contraception, introduced in the Maldives in 2007, was the least widely recognized, with only 29 percent of married women aware of the method.

Abortion:

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

HIV & AIDS:

- Around eight in ten women age 15-49 recognize that using condoms and abstaining from sex are different methods of avoiding HIV infection.
- Seventy-six percent of women recognize that using condoms and limiting sex to one partner who is not HIV positive are ways to prevent transmission of HIV.
- Two in three women correctly said that a healthy-looking person can have an HIV infection.
- 85 percent of ever-married women age 15-49 know the virus can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy, and 70 percent of the women are aware the virus can be transmitted during delivery.
- 82 percent of women age 15-49 know where to go for an HIV test.
- Comprehensive knowledge of AIDS positively relates to the woman's education; increasing from 20 percent for women with primary education to 63 percent for women with more than secondary education.

Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Child Early & Forced Marriage (CEFM):

- Because of the small number of married respondents interviewed, the data for women age 15-24 have been omitted.
- Pregnancies among teenagers in Maldives are rare. Only 2 percent of adolescents have started childbearing, 1 percent are mothers, and less than one percent are pregnant with their first child.

Violence Against Women (VAW):

- Acceptance of wife beating ranges from 6 percent (if they burn the food) to 19 percent (refusing to have sexual intercourse).
- Thirty-one percent of women agree with at least one specified reason that purportedly justify a husband's beating his wife.
- The youngest and oldest women are more likely than other women to agree that a husband is justified in beating a wife in any of the specified circumstances.

Current initiatives in Maldives

- ARROW and its partners Society for Health Education (SHE) and Huvadhoo Aid (HAD) in Maldives continue 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 Maldives. In-depth monitoring is currently underway on SRH information and services seeking behaviour among youth in Maldives.