

SRI LANKA — Country Profile

Overview

Sri Lanka is a multiethnic and multi-religious country. The total population of Sri Lanka is 20.3 million, with 51.6% of the population being female. Almost 75% of the population are Sinhalese, while 11.2% are Sri Lankan Tamils, 9.3% are Moors, 4.1% are Indian Tamils, and 0.5% comprise of other ethnic groups. In terms of religion, 70.1% are Buddhist, 12.6% are Hindus, 9.7% are Islam, and 7.6% are Christian. The life expectancy at birth for females is 77.9 years while it is 70.3 years for males. Literacy rates for females at 92.6 are slightly lower than 94.2 for men. Although education data indicates that women are at an advantage, employment data indicate that there are significantly lesser proportions of females in the workforce than men. 86% of women migrating overseas for foreign employment sought jobs as housemaids.

Source: *extracted from Sri Lanka Country Profile*

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Key findings from the Sri Lanka Country Profile on the situation of SRHR in Sri Lanka are as follows:

Maternal Health:

- The maternal mortality rate stands at 32.5 deaths per 100,000 live births.
- 99.9% of all births were institutional deliveries, with only 0.1% of births being conducted by untrained personnel.
- 56% of maternal deaths which occur are preventable, while 67% of maternal deaths are due to delays in service provision.
- 91.6% of mothers reported at least one postnatal care visit following the first 10 days following delivery.
- Virtually all mothers received antenatal care from a health professional.

Contraception:

- The total fertility rate is 2.13 in 2009.
- The proportion of usage of modern and traditional contraception methods is 55.4% and 9.5% respectively.
- The percentage of registered pregnant mothers in the fifth pregnancy and above has steadily declined to 2.8%.
- The median interval between births is more than 4 years.
- 7.3% of eligible couples had an unmet need for family planning.

Abortion:

- Maternal death due to septic abortion is the third highest cause for maternal death, at 13%.

- Induced abortion practices include using traditional abortifacients such as inserting twigs into the cervix or drinking traditional toxic poisons which are known to cause intense vomiting.
- These non-professional practices are mostly used by low-income women mainly when a family is unable to provide for another child, when contraceptives fail, social stigma arising from single parent status, pregnancy of a widow, or the shame associated with the birth of a baby when the eldest child in a family is well into adulthood.
- According to the UN Abortion Policies and Reproductive Health around the World (2014), abortion is permitted to save a woman's life.

HIV & AIDS:

- Sri Lanka has a low prevalence level of HIV/AIDS with an estimate of 3000 people living with HIV; less than 0.1% of adults 15-49 years old.
- The HIV prevalence is observed to be below 1% even among individuals considered to have a higher risk of infection based on their occupation, behaviors, and practices.
- Homosexual/bisexual conduct accounts for 12% of transmissions, while mother-to-child transmissions were 3.8%.

Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Child Early & Forced Marriage (CEFM):

- 14% of girls marry before reaching 18 years of age.
- During the conflict years, early marriage was adopted as a mechanism to safeguard girls and boy against conscription by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam terrorists.
- The Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act governs 7% of Sri Lanka's Muslim population and does not specify a minimum age of marriage, nor does it enforce prosecution of male Muslims for underage rape.

Violence Against Women (VAW):

- 78% of victims of grave sexual abuse (grooming, rape, incest, and procreation) were younger girls under 16 years of age.
- 20-25% of reported rape cases had complaints filed.
- Only 3.2% of those who admitted to committing rape had been arrested, and only 2.2% had been jailed.
- In 96.5% of rape cases, the rapist had experienced no legal consequences.
- As many as 94% of school girls have reported experiencing sexual harassment in public transport.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):

- Female circumcision is a very closely guarded social practice, considered a private family matter within the Muslim community.

Current initiatives in Sri Lanka

- In Sri Lanka, ARROW works with its partner Women and Media Collective (WMC) to monitor the status of SRHR in the country, advocate for universal access to SRHR in the country and publish country reports on the status of SRHR in the country. The Women and Media Collective also explores interlinkages between SRHR and religious fundamentalism by identifying gaps in the availability and accessibility of SRHR and services in Sri Lanka and identifying gaps caused by religious influences.