

## StatNews #18

### Demographic and Health Surveys on the Web

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Important comparative international survey data for demographers, epidemiologists, and health researchers are now available free of charge on the World Wide Web. Since 1984, the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) program has assisted countries in conducting national surveys on fertility, family planning, and maternal and child health. The DHS program, which is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, is a primary source of information on the health and reproductive behavior of women throughout Africa, the Near East, Asia, and Latin America.

DHS data are currently available for 47 countries, and new data sets are made available as countries are added to the program and as surveys are repeated over time. For each country several data sets are available, including individual women's data, household data, and in many countries male or husband's data and additional survey topics. The standardized format of the surveys allows researchers to make comparisons among different countries and to estimate trends over time.

The standard DHS survey consists of a household schedule and a women's questionnaire, which is administered to a nationally representative sample of women aged 15-49. The women's questionnaire contains information on the following topics:

- Background characteristics
- Lifetime reproduction
- Contraceptive knowledge and use
- Maternity and breastfeeding
- Immunization of children
- Diarrhea, fever and cough in children
- Height and weight of children
- Marriage
- Fertility preferences
- Husband's background
- Woman's work status

Additional topics addressed in some surveys include natural family planning, social marketing, sterilization, pill compliance, woman's employment, maternal mortality, causes of death, and AIDS.

While the data collected in the DHS program have always been available to the public, the cost has been prohibitive for many researchers. Macro International, the firm which provides technical support to the DHS program, recently made the DHS data sets available on their World Wide Web site free of charge. For more information please contact [cscu@cornell.edu](mailto:cscu@cornell.edu).

Before downloading the data, users must submit an on-line registration form including name and address; title, description, and duration of the research project; and a list of all participating researchers. Separate data sets are available for each country in the program, and users are granted access only to the data sets for the countries

they specify on the registration form. The standard file documentation can be downloaded from this site, or you can browse through a printed copy at the Cornell

Institute for Social and Economic Research (CISER) data archive in Caldwell Hall. Some of the data sets are already available from CISER, but you must still register your research project with Macro International before using these data.

If you wish to download files for your own research, there are several issues to consider. The files are available in three different formats, and the choice of format is determined by the software and operating system you will use to analyze the data. The files are quite large, so you should be sure you have sufficient computer resources before attempting to download the data. If you would like to discuss these and other issues related to using DHS data, or need help downloading or working with these files, contact [cscu@cornell.edu](mailto:cscu@cornell.edu).

Author: Cara Olsen

Update 2012: Most data sets are available free of charge for the purpose of research or study. However, a request needs to be made and approved before being able to download the data. Data is currently available for over 90 countries. For more information, go to <http://www.measuredhs.com/>

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