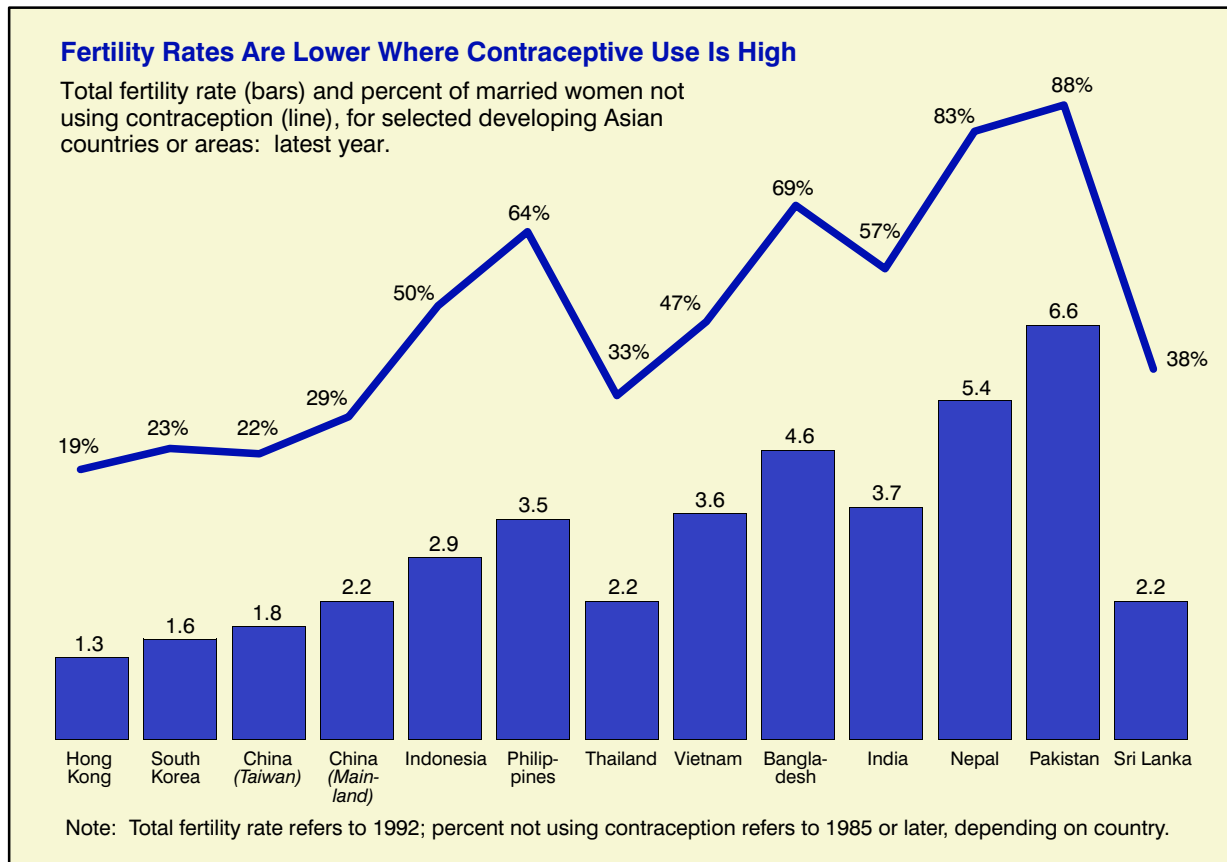


Statistical Indicators on Women: An Asian Perspective



The developing nations of Asia (east of Iran) and the Pacific are home to the majority of the world's women. The state of

women in this part of the world varies widely from country to country. This Brief looks at the demographic and socioeconomic state of women in 32 developing Asian and Pacific Island nations or areas (see the table on the next page for countries and areas covered). It examines how their situation has changed in recent decades and, when appropriate, how it compares to that of men. Data come from the International Data Base, housed at the Census Bureau's Center for International Research.

Women are outnumbered by men in most countries.

The table on page 2 shows that, in 1992, men outnumbered women in most of the 32 countries or areas. The highest ratios of men to women belonged to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Vanuatu, each with 108 men per every 100 women. India (107 per 100) also had a high ratio. Three nations of Southeast Asia had the lowest ratios of men to women: Cambodia (91 men per 100 women), Vietnam (96), and Laos (97).



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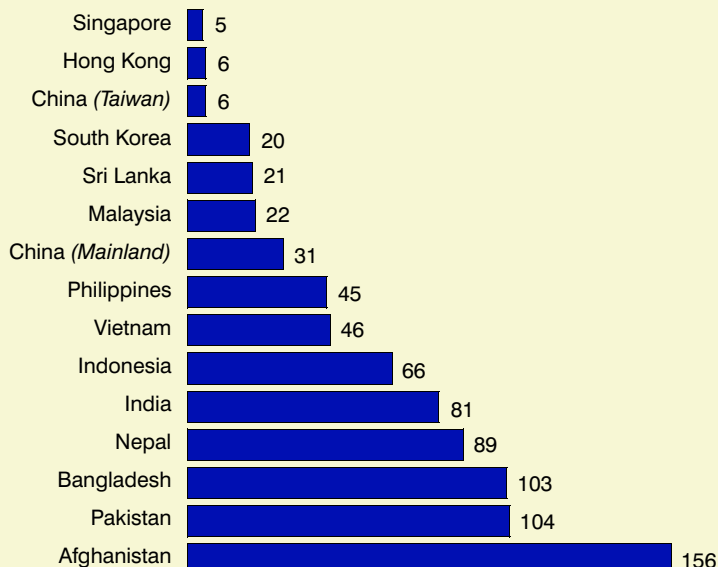
U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

An Overview of the 32 Countries or Areas: 1992

Country or Area	Total population	Sex ratio (men per 100 women)	Median age of women	Life expectancy for women (years)
China (<i>Mainland</i>)	1,168 mil.	106	26	69
India	886	107	22	58
Indonesia	194	100	23	62
Pakistan	122	106	18	57
Bangladesh	119	108	18	54
Vietnam	70	96	22	67
Philippines	67	99	21	68
Thailand	58	102	24	72
South Korea	44	101	28	73
Burma	43	100	22	61
China (<i>Taiwan</i>)	21	106	28	78
Nepal	20	105	18	51
Malaysia	18	100	22	71
Sri Lanka	18	100	26	74
Afghanistan	16	108	18	43
Cambodia	9	91	20	50
Hong Kong	6	106	33	84
Laos	4	97	18	52
Papua New Guinea	4	107	18	56
Singapore	3	103	31	78
Mongolia	2	100	19	68
Bhutan	2	106	20	49
Fiji	750 thous.	102	22	67
Solomon Islands	360	104	16	72
Maldives	234	106	17	64
Western Samoa	195	107	19	70
Vanuatu	162	108	18	60
Micronesia	115	105	20	69
Tonga	103	102	18	70
Kiribati	75	105	20	56
Marshall Islands	50	105	15	64
Cook Islands	18	102	18	73

Infant Mortality Rates Reflect the Wide Variety of Conditions

Female infant deaths per 1,000 female births, selected developing Asian countries or areas: 1992

**Life expectancy is highest in Hong Kong.**

In 1992, life expectancy at birth for women was highest in three "newly industrialized" societies: Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan; the figure was 84 years in Hong Kong and 78 years in the latter two (see table at left). In most of the region, the figure was between 60 and 75 years.

However, in 10 of the 32 countries or areas — mostly in South Asia — life expectancy was under 60 years. These countries include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. In four nations of South Asia — Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Afghanistan — men live longer than women; in all 28 others, the reverse was true.

Thanks to improving health conditions, life expectancy climbed between 5 and 10 years from 1970 to 1992 in most countries in the region. A few, though, saw it rise even more, notably Indonesia, where it increased by 17 years. As the graph and the table (last column) show, low levels of infant mortality go hand in hand with high life expectancy.

Women are having fewer children.

In all 32 nations or areas studied, women in 1992 were having fewer children than they were in 1970. In most countries or areas (24), the drop in the fertility rate has been significant — over one birth per woman. And in many of them (15), the decline has been substantial — more than two births. China (*Mainland*), where the rate plummeted from 5.8 births per woman in 1970 to 2.2 in 1992, Thailand (6.1 to 2.2) and South Korea (4.5 to 1.6) had among the sharpest declines.

In 8 of the 32 nations or areas, however, the drop was much less sharp — under one birth. Most of them were in South Asia. These countries include

Pakistan, where rates fell only from 7.0 to 6.6 births over the period, Afghanistan (7.1 to 6.4), and Laos (6.4 to 6.3). But such high fertility rates have become the exception. In 1970, half the 32 countries or areas had fertility rates of 6 or higher; only 6 nations had rates this high in 1992. In countries where fertility remains high, the median age of women is very young (see graph on page 1 and table on page 2).

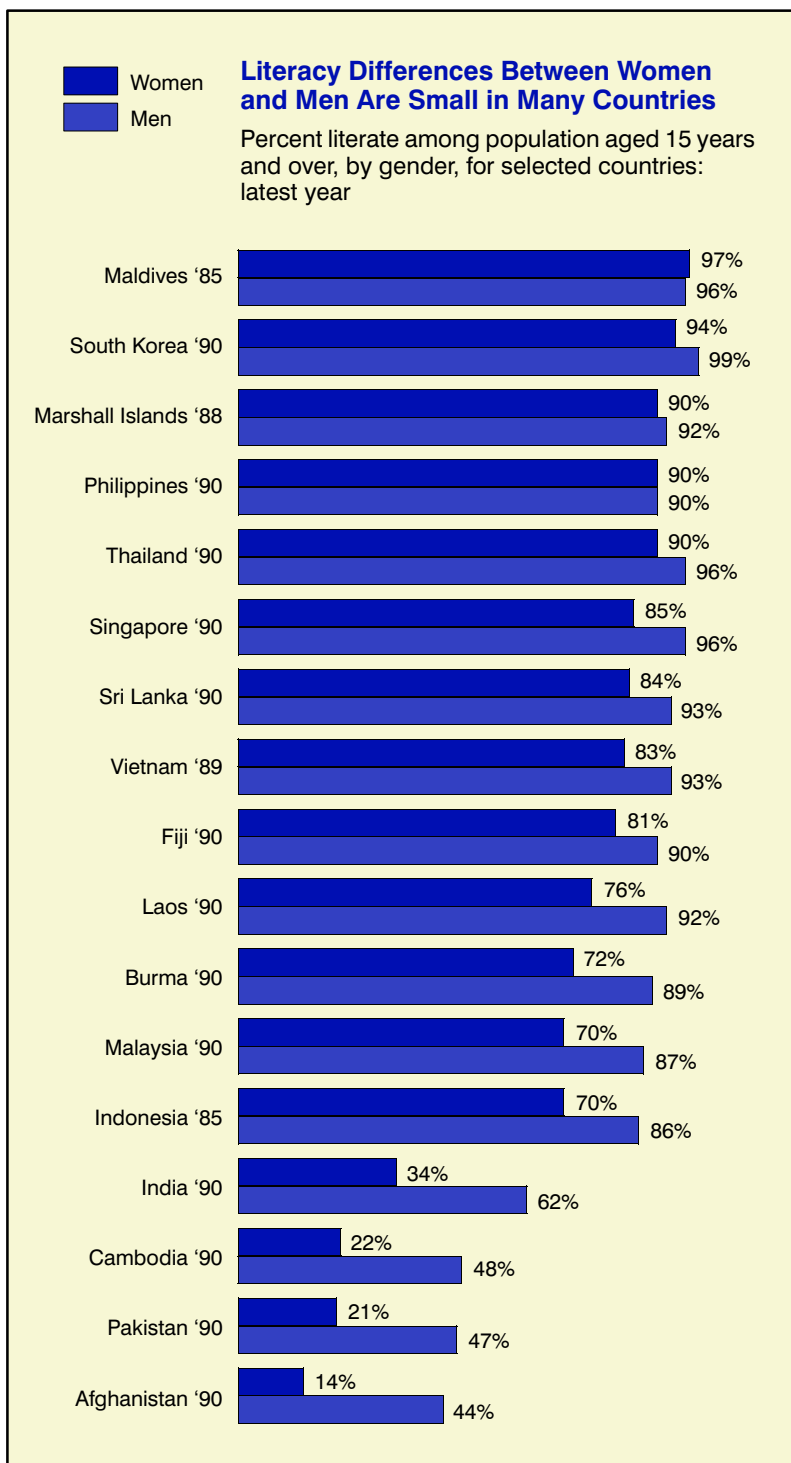
Fertility levels are related to contraceptive use.

Not coincidentally, the countries with the lowest fertility rates also had the highest rates of contraceptive prevalence (see graph on the front page). For example, in South Korea, where 77 percent of married women used contraception, women averaged under two births. Conversely, in Pakistan, where 12 percent of married women used contraception, women averaged more than six births.

Literacy and educational attainment are on the upswing.

Educated women tend to have smaller families, raise healthier children, be healthier themselves, and — if they work — have a better job and higher income. In most of the countries with data available, 70 percent or more of women aged 15 and over could read and write. Maldives and South Korea, both well over 90 percent, had the highest rates. Literacy was lowest in Cambodia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, each under 25 percent. The graph at the right illustrates how women compared with men.

Improved literacy for women in the region is apparent in contrasts between age groups. For instance, in Indonesia in 1985, 91 percent of women 15 to 24 years old could read and write; in contrast, only 67 percent aged 35-44 years were literate.

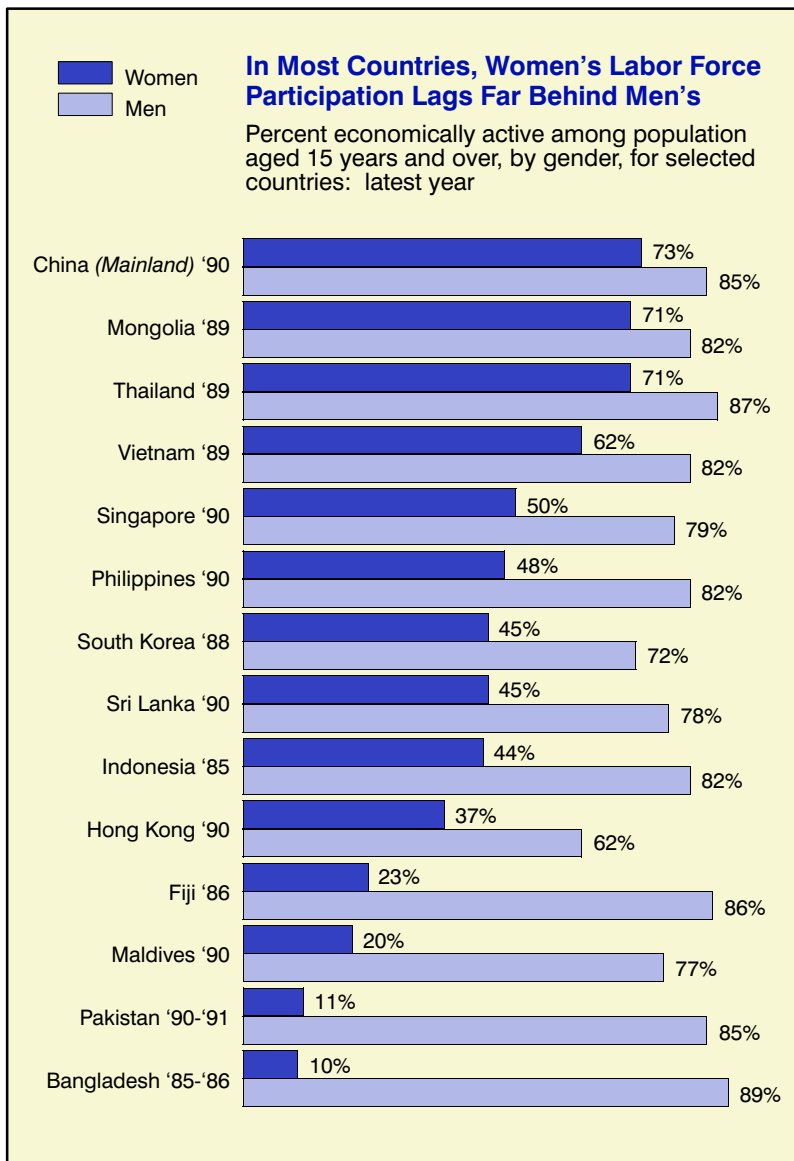


Secondary school completion rates are another indicator of improving education. Again, we can measure gains by comparing different age groups:

- In Hong Kong, South Korea, and China (*Mainland and Taiwan*) during the early 1980's, over 40 percent of

women aged 20-24 years had completed secondary school as their highest level of education.

- Among women 40-44 years old in these four countries or areas, the corresponding proportion was under 20 percent.



Even in societies like these four, where secondary school completion rates are relatively high, few women go on to achieve a university degree. In South Korea in 1985, for instance, 26 percent of women aged 20 and over had completed secondary school as their highest level of education; just 4 percent aged 25 and over had a college degree.

Far fewer women than men are in the labor force.

In general, women's labor force participation rates are gaining on men's, but still lag behind, particularly in South Asia. The

region's rates run the gamut. Women aged 15 and over were most likely to be in the labor force if they lived in China (Mainland), Mongolia, and Thailand, where rates just exceeded 70 percent. At the low end were Bangladesh and Pakistan, where 10 and 11 percent, respectively, were economically active. In most countries, participation rates for women tend to be under-reported, primarily because of the failure to count women in subsistence agriculture and other areas of the informal sector. Reported rates for men topped 80 percent in all these countries (see graph above).

Where did women work? In general, they were more likely than men to work in the service sector and less likely to be employed in the industrial sector. Women dominated the supply of unpaid family workers.

In 13 of the 22 countries or areas with data available around 1980, proportionately more economically active women than men worked in professional or managerial occupations. These include the Philippines (12 percent versus 4 percent) and Pakistan (18 percent versus 5 percent).

More information:

This Brief is a summary of the report, *Gender Indicators of Developing Asian and Pacific Countries*, published by the Asian Development Bank. For a free copy of the report, write to: Assistant Chief Economist, Statistics and Data Systems Division, Economics and Development Resource Center, Asian Development Bank, P. O. Box 789, 1099 Manila, Philippines.

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This Brief is one of a series that presents information of current policy interest. It includes data from the International Data Base as well as other sources. The data base comprises information for individual countries derived from numerous sources, such as administrative and government records, and statistical agencies. These data are subject to certain limitations including differences due to collection methodologies and definitions as well as classification, reporting, and processing errors. Therefore, as with all data from different sources, use caution when making comparisons.