

Gender and national statistics

The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics. United Nations Statistics, Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. New York, United Nations, 2006, 184 pp., \$25.00/paperback.

The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics is the fourth volume in a series from the United Nations Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, an international agency that compiles and disseminates global statistical information, develops standards and norms for statistical activities, and supports countries' efforts to strengthen their national statistical systems. *The World's Women* series was developed in response to the 1995 United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women, a conference with the goal of achieving greater gender equality. Whereas previous volumes in the series concentrated on trends in available data, the current volume explores the availability of national statistics disaggregated by sex that are used to monitor the status of women in various facets of society. The aim of this volume is to allow national statistical agencies and international bodies to assess the progress made in incorporating gender into national statistics.

The World's Women 2005 provides information on data in six categories: population, households, and families; health; education and training; work; violence against women; and poverty, political decisionmaking, and human rights. Each chapter begins with a discussion of the current state of statistics from 1995–2003: the number of countries that reported data for selected indicators during that period

as well as the number of countries that reported these data by sex and by sex and age at least once, and data by sex and age for at least 5 of the 9 years. The chapter then describes any progress made over a longer period—1975–2003—by comparing the frequency of reporting of given statistical indicators within the chapter's broad topic for three time periods: 1975–84; 1985–94; and 1995–2003. The volume does note that the most recent period is 1 year shorter than the first two periods, and data for the recent years may not have been reported to the UN by the time of publication, due to delays in processing and reporting, thus affecting some of the results on progress reported. The chapters conclude with a section on challenges to improving data for gender analysis. Each chapter of *The World's Women 2005* also includes special text boxes with definitions of indicators that may not be familiar to the general public as well as tables providing summaries of national reporting on that topic for the period 1995 to 2003. The volume includes a statistical annex that further elaborates on the availability of indicators by country and provides updated figures for many of the statistics and indicators published in earlier editions.

The World's Women 2005 indicates mixed progress in the number of countries that report—and the percent of the world's population that is covered by—data disaggregated by sex that are important to monitoring the state of gender-related issues. Although widely available since 1975 because most countries have population censuses, reports on sex-disaggregated statistics by population, households, and families have not changed much over the entire period studied. The number of countries reporting health

statistics by sex also has remained relatively steady over the three periods but, unlike the population statistics of the first chapter, relatively few countries report basic health statistics such as number of deaths, cause of death, and infant deaths. The reporting of education statistics varies widely by the topic; school enrollment statistics are widely reported by sex, but fewer than half of the countries report on literacy and educational attainment. Concerning violence against women, there have been considerable improvements in statistics on intimate partner violence; however, reliable statistics on many other forms of violence against women remain scarce. Progress has been slow regarding poverty, decisionmaking (for example, the percentage of legislative and managerial positions held by women), and human rights statistics; even statistical agencies in more developed countries often do not yet routinely collect and disseminate statistics specifically for these purposes. Overall, the more developed countries, which have more statistical capacity and financial resources, are doing well in collecting most statistics disaggregated by sex, whereas many developing countries have major deficiencies, particularly in Africa, where 16 of 55 countries have not conducted a recent census. According to the tables provided in *The World's Women 2005*, the availability of sex-disaggregated data in the United States is similar to that of other more developed countries.

The chapter on work-related statistics is probably of the most interest to readers of this journal. As *The World's Women 2005* highlights, the availability of statistics on economic activity, employment, and unemployment is far from universal, with slightly more than half of all countries providing data. However, if a country provides

data about labor, it almost always provides those data disaggregated by sex. The volume suggests this result is likely due to the source of labor-related statistics, which often come from labor force surveys or population censuses for which gender and age questions are a common component. For example, between 1995 and 2003, of the 115 countries and areas that reported unemployment data at least once, all but one country, Tunisia, reported these data by sex at least once. Of much greater significance, these 115 countries represent only two-thirds of the world's population. Additionally, only 72 of the 115 countries that reported data for at least 1 of the 9 years covered reported data for at least 5 years. This suggests that consistent reporting of these indicators remains an issue. Similar results can be found for the data on the economically active population, employment by occupation, and employed population by status in employment. An exception to the rule that reported work-related data are sex disaggregated is statistics on wages by major industry group—only 52 of the 108 reporting countries provided data by sex; these data often are collected through establishment censuses and surveys that rely on payrolls which may not contain gender information.

The chapter on work-related statistics briefly touches upon the topics of employment in the informal sector

and unpaid work data from time-use surveys. Although both of these concepts are fairly new in official statistics and are not part of the regular data collection of most countries, *The World's Women 2005* acknowledges that progress has been made in both areas in recent years.

Women's World 2005 concludes with a chapter outlining strategies to help improve the availability of data across regions and topics. The proposed strategies fall within three broad areas: strengthening national statistical systems; mainstreaming gender in all aspects of the production of statistics; and developing and improving concepts and methods.

A couple of topics not covered by the volume that may be of interest to those studying labor-related gender issues are: 1) child labor among young girls and 2) women and decent work conditions. According to the International Labor Office (ILO), currently available statistics show that 5- to 14-year-old males are more likely than their female counterparts to be economically active. However, the ILO does note that the surveys currently used to measure the level of child labor do not cover work performed inside and around the home. It is likely that many girls do not attend school because they are taking care of younger siblings and doing other household work, allowing their parents and guardians to do other work outside the home. Cre-

ating surveys that measure unpaid child labor at home is necessary to gaining a more comprehensive picture of the situation. With regards to decent work conditions, measuring the percent of working women who belong to unions and other collective bargaining units would be a useful indicator because these groups constitute powerful means to overcome the disadvantages and constraints that women confront in the labor market.

Overall, *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics* does well at providing a broad overview of the general state of the availability of sex-disaggregated statistics and the progress made in the availability of these data since 1975.

—Erin Lett
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