

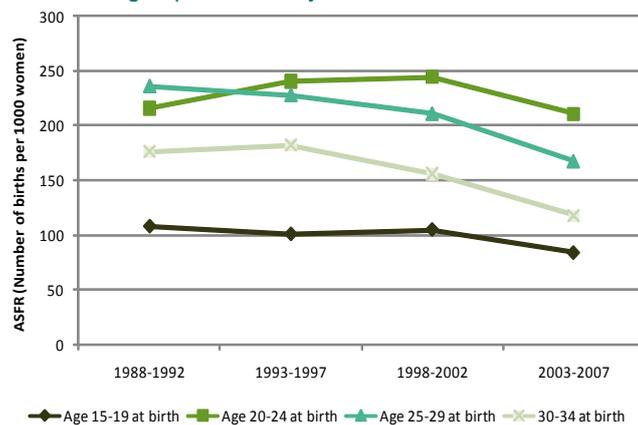


The 2007 Nauru DHS results indicate that on average, a Nauruan woman will have 3.4 children. This is a slight reduction from the fertility level of 4.0 recorded in the 2002 census.

Although fertility levels did not change dramatically in the period from 1988 to 1997, fertility levels are declining and have declined more during the past 10 years than they had previously. The most notable decline during the past 10 years affected women aged 25–29 and 30–34 years, with the fertility level of women aged 20–29 years declining by about 17%. Teenage fertility (15–18 years) remained stable during most of the 1990s, with modest declines recorded since then.

Children tend to be born with reasonably short intervals between each birth. More than half of all births take place fewer than three years following a preceding birth.

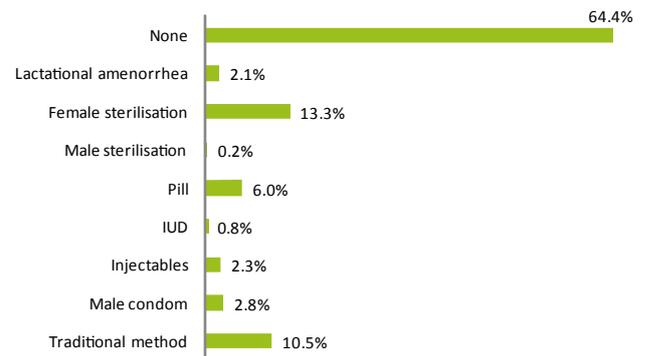
Trends in age-specific fertility rates



Family planning: knowledge versus practice

There was high awareness of contraception with 93% of Nauruan women and 99% of Nauruan men stating that they knew of at least one form of modern contraception. There appears to be a better understanding of modern contraception than more traditional methods. For example, only 11% of respondents were able to correctly identify a woman's most fertile period.

Current use of modern contraceptives by women 15–19 years



Current use of contraception is low, with only 36% of married Nauruan women reporting that they were using some form of contraception at the time of the survey. The reasons for non-use of contraception varied, with more than one quarter (27%) of the women surveyed stating that they currently did not use nor intend to use contraception in the future because they wanted as many children as possible. Another 25% of married women stated they did not use contraception because they were opposed to using it. In addition, a fear of the side effects that contraceptive use may have resulted in a further 9% of married women reporting that they did not currently use contraception and would not in the future.

Very few married women reported having started to use contraception prior to having any children (only 6%). Almost half of all married women who have five or more children are currently using a modern method of contraception.

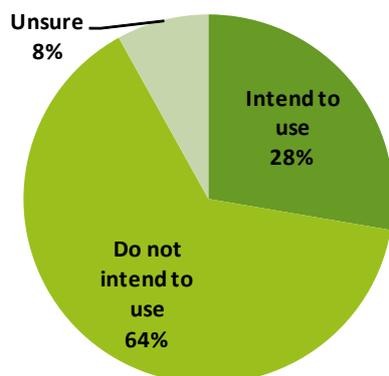
Nineteen per cent of unmarried women who participated in the survey claimed to be sexually active. Of these women, only 24% reported they were using a contraceptive method at the time of the survey. Caution should be taken when interpreting these data given the small sample size in Nauru as the total number of respondents who were unmarried women was only 40.

There is no clear correlation between a woman's educational attainment and her use of contraception. Although the use of modern contraceptive methods is highest among women with some secondary education (26%), this figure drops to 18% for women who have more than secondary education. This could be attributed to the very small number of women who attain more than a secondary education.





Intended future use of contraception by married women not currently using contraception



Because there is such low use of modern contraception, there appears to be considerable scope for strengthening family planning programs with the aim of increasing contraceptive use. Education could aim to dispel current fears and misconceptions concerning contraceptive methods and potential risks. The survey results indicated that the most common media channels through which people had been exposed to family planning messages were newspapers and magazines for women, and television for men. Only a very small number of 15–19 year olds had heard or seen a family planning message in any media source.

Field workers can also be a useful means of providing people with family planning information. However, only 5% of women had been visited by a health worker in the 12 months prior to the survey and had discussed family planning. This number was even lower for youth, with less than 3% of women aged 15–19 years having been visited by a health worker in the 12 months prior to the survey and having discussed family planning.

Other determinants of fertility

Childbearing begins early in Nauru and the median age at which women have their first child is 22 years. This means that half of all births occur before the mother is 22. The results indicate that there has been almost no change to the age childbearing starts in the previous 20 years. For example, the median age at first birth for women aged 45–49 was 21.6, and for women aged 30–34 was 21.1.

Teenage pregnancy and motherhood

Teenage pregnancy is common in Nauru. Fifteen per cent of adolescent Nauruan women aged between 15 and 19 were either pregnant or had a child at the time of the DHS survey. The 2007 Nauru DHS indicates that 43% of women aged between 20 and 49 were married by age 20, although the number of women who marry very young (before 15 years) appears to be decreasing.

Most teenagers have not discussed family planning with a health or field worker. This, in addition to the fact that 85% of women aged between 15 and 19 have not been exposed to any family planning messages via the media, indicates that there is a considerable knowledge void that must be addressed if contraceptives are to be better understood and used effectively.

Policy note:

The past 20 years saw a marked fertility decline in Nauru. This development was most pronounced amongst 25–34 year old women, whereas teenage fertility remained fairly constant, with 15% of 15–19-year-olds either pregnant or already having had a child at the time of the survey. The latter might be worthy of greater policy attention, considering not only the strong association of high risk pregnancies (in this case, 'too young') and neonatal and infant mortality, but also the obvious relationship between unprotected sex and exposure to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), including, HIV/AIDS.

Contraceptive use is low, with only one in three married women of reproductive age currently using some form of contraception. This, and the fact that few people reported having been exposed to family planning information, highlights the need to review current communication and dissemination strategies and practices. As newspapers and women's magazines are the main channel through which women were exposed to family planning information, and only 21% of Nauruan women reported having seen a family planning message in the print media in the past few months, there appears to be some urgency in the need for a communications strategy review.

*For more detailed information on fertility and family planning see chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 in the full Nauru 2007 DHS report.

