Sexual and Reproductive Health Of Young Women in Philippines

• Approximately five million women aged 15–19 currently live in the Philippines; they account for 10% of the total female population.

• Some 89% of primary school–aged Filipino girls were enrolled in school in 2009; the proportion enrolled was only 67% for secondary school–aged young women.

• In 2008, among young women aged 15–19, 70% reported at least weekly exposure to radio, 88% to television and 34% to newspapers. Media exposure was higher among young women in urban areas than among those in rural areas.

SEXUAL ACTIVITY AND MARRIAGE

• In 2008, 14% of Filipino women aged 15–19 reported ever having had sex.

• Among women aged 18–24, 17% said they had had sex before age 18. This proportion was higher among the poorest young women (22%) and those in rural areas (37%).

• One in ten 15–19-year-old Filipino women (11%) had ever been married, as of 2008. Teenage marriage was five times as common for young women living in the poorest households as for those in the wealthiest (22% vs. 4%).

USE OF REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE

• As of 2013, 37% of married women aged 15–19 used some method of contraception. However, less–effective, traditional methods accounted for nearly half of overall use.

• This level of use represents an encouraging 11 percentage point increase since 2008. However, use of traditional methods increased more than use of modern methods over this period.

• As of 2008, 36% of married 15–19-year-old women had an unmet need for contraception, meaning they wished to avoid a pregnancy in the next two years but were not using a contraceptive method. This proportion was higher in urban areas (41%) than in rural areas (32%).

PREGNANCY AND CHILDBEARING

• High levels of unmet need for contraception lead to high rates of unintended pregnancy. As of 2008, 30% of recent births to women younger than 20 were unplanned (that is, wanted later or not at all).

• The proportion of recent births that were unplanned was slightly higher in urban areas than in rural areas (34% vs. 27%) and increased with household wealth (from 21% among the poorest young women to 41% among the wealthiest).

• The proportion of 15–19-year-olds who have ever given birth has increased over time: Just 4% of women in this age group were mothers in 2002, compared with 11% in 2013.

• The birthrate among young women also increased slightly over the same period, from 53 to 57 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19. This small increase masks diverging trends by area of residence: The rate declined from 74 to 63 per 1,000 in rural areas, but rose from 40 to 52 per 1,000 in urban areas.

• Giving birth in a medical facility is becoming more common in the Philippines: As of 2013, 61% of mothers younger than 20 had their most recent delivery at a health facility, compared with only 38% in 2008.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH KNOWLEDGE

• In 2008, women aged 15–19 had heard of an average of four modern contraceptive methods.

• Two-thirds of Filipino women aged 15–24 knew where to get a condom, while just over one-third (35%) reported they were able to obtain a condom on their own.

• Levels of HIV/AIDS knowledge among young women appear to be declining: In 2013, slightly more than half of 15–24-year-olds were aware that one can reduce the risk of HIV infection by using condoms or having only one uninfected partner; in 2008, 54% and 75%, respectively, were aware of these two risk reduction strategies.
those in the wealthiest).

Households to 26% among 15–24-year-olds in the poor-

hold wealth (from 14% among urban areas, even as it declined in rural areas, resulting in a slight increase overall.

- Comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS also appears to be quite low: In 2008, just 21% of 15–24-year-old women knew that using condoms and having one uninfected partner could reduce the risk of HIV, knew that a healthy person could be HIV positive, and were able to reject two common misconceptions about HIV transmission.

- Levels of comprehensive knowledge were somewhat higher in urban areas (23%) than in rural areas (17%) and increased uniformly with household wealth (from 14% among 15–24-year-olds in the poorest households to 26% among those in the wealthiest).

**GENDER INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL NORMS**
- In 2008, 15% of women aged 15–19 agreed with at least one of five reasons offered for why a husband would be justified in hitting his wife.

- Seventeen percent of all 15–19-year-old women had experienced physical or sexual violence, including forced sexual initiation. This proportion was slightly higher than average among married young women (22%).

- The vast majority (89%) of married 15–19-year-old women reported in 2008 that they made health care decisions by themselves or jointly with their husband. This indicates that the remaining 11% of married young women did not consider themselves primary decision-makers about their own health care.

**POLICY ENVIRONMENT**
- Abortion is illegal in the Philippines in all circumstances, even when pregnancy endangers a woman’s life.

- In April 2014, the Philippines Supreme Court lifted a ban preventing enactment of the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012, a policy that includes several progressive measures, including provision of free contraceptive services, reproductive health education in schools and a national multimedia awareness-raising campaign.

- The Philippines’ National Policy and Strategic Framework on Adolescent Health and Development 2013 provides strong rights-based guidance for ensuring that young people have access to sexual and reproductive health services and, in particular, to confidential care.

- Despite this, young people under the age of 18 (legal minors) must obtain parental consent to obtain HIV testing and contraceptive services in the Philippines.

**POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS**
- The recent increase in childbearing among young women suggests that greater efforts are needed to ensure access to youth-friendly contraceptive services and information that are affordable, confidential and nonjudgmental.

- Given the relatively high level of unmet need for contraception, many young women are at risk for unintended pregnancy. The complete prohibition of abortion may mean that some of them will resort to illegal abortion, which can severely jeopardize their health.

- The many married young women in the Philippines who rely on traditional methods, which have relatively high failure rates, may also be at high risk for unintended pregnancy. Policies and programs should emphasize improving the availability of a range of modern contraceptives, including long-acting and reversible methods. More needs to be done to increase acceptability of modern methods, including community-based activities to dispel myths about the negative health effects of modern contraceptive use.

- Although the Reproductive Health Act is an important tool for advocating young people’s reproductive rights, additional efforts are needed to address the factors underlying their sexual and reproductive health outcomes. Concerted education campaigns need to address stigma toward nonmarital sexual activity and lack of agency among young women.

- The majority of young women have regular access to television and radio; these media could be effective channels through which to provide accurate sexual and reproductive health information. Additionally, the possibility of using new media, including social media, to reach young people should be explored.

For references, please go to: http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/FB-DD-Philippines.html

Support for this fact sheet and the report on which it is based was provided, via a subgrant from IPPF, by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Choices and Opportunities Fund.