



A different kind of family

Anushka Virahsawmy



CHAPTER 6

Health

Article 26



Challenging gender stereo types. Men can also care!

Photo: Danny Philippe

KEY POINTS

- Mauritius tops the region for the SGDI score for health at 91%.
- Citizens gave a score of 84% based on the Citizen's Score Card.
- Mauritius has an effective system of Family Planning and good health system.
- Mauritius has the lowest maternal mortality rates in the region; about 28 women die in child birth out of every 100,000 live births.
- Mauritius has the highest rate in the region for women using contraceptives at 76%.

Table 6.1: SGDI and CSC scores for health

	SGDI	CSC
Scores	91%	67%
Ranks	1	2

Table 6.1 shows the SGDI score at 91% is 24 percentage points higher than the CSC score at 67%. The SGDI is

based on the following indicators: women between the ages of 15-49 years reporting use of at least one form of modern contraceptive method, births attended by skilled personnel, and the maternal mortality rate. The citizens' perceptions are may have been influenced by lack of adequate infrastructure in some locations and sometimes long distances to travel to hospital compromising access to health facilities.



The Protocol provides for state parties to by 2015, adopt and implement legislative frameworks, policies, programmes and services to enhance gender sensitive, appropriate and affordable quality health care; reduce the maternal mortality ratio by 75% and ensure the provision of hygiene and sanitary facilities.

Mauritius adopted a comprehensive National Sexual & Reproductive Health Policy in 2007. Greater emphasis is being laid on promoting sexual reproductive health (SRH) needs of women and men.

Table 6.2: Key sexual, reproductive and health indicators

Indicators	Country statistic/policy	Comment
Current maternal mortality rate	28 women die per 100,000 live births	
% births attended by skilled Personnel	99.6% are attended by skilled personnel	
% Contraceptive use among sexually active women 20-24	N.A.	
% Contraceptive use among married women	75.9% (contraceptive prevalence survey 2002, Ministry of Health)	Despite a relatively high contraceptive prevalence rate, women in Mauritius tend to favour traditional methods, such as withdrawal over modern methods.
Number of deaths annually as a result of illegal abortions	1,635	The number of cases admitted in hospitals and private clinics due to complications following illegal unsafe abortions is alarming.
Country policy on abortion	Abortion is illegal but is allowed to preserve the life of the woman	
Total coverage of sanitation facilities	89%	Refuse collection is regularly carried out by local authorities. All households are connected to waste water system. Access to drinkable water is available throughout the country.
Urban coverage	88%	
Rural coverage	91%	

Source: Mauritius Family Planning Association; WHO/UNICEF 2012.

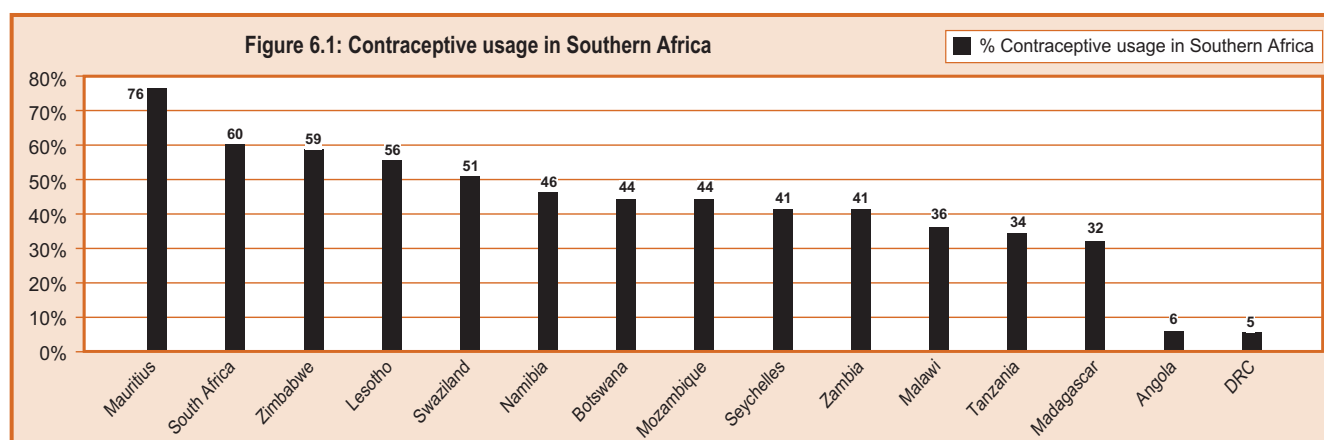
While most of these indicators reveal high gender-responsiveness of health policies, there is a need to remove barriers for adolescents and young people to access family planning and sexual reproductive health (SRH) services without parental consent.

Family Planning and contraceptive usage

With a current population of nearly 1.3 million people, a population growth rate of 0.47% and a total fertility

rate of 1.48 in 2009, the family planning programme has shifted its focus from achieving demographic targets to improving the quality of SRH services in line with the recommendations of the ICPD Plan of Action.

The policy is guided by the principles of human rights, gender equality and equity, social justice, quality service provision and universal access to comprehensive SRH services.



Source: SADC Gender Protocol Barometer, 2012.

Figure 6.1 shows that at 76% Mauritius is top in the region and is one of five SADC countries (including Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe) that now has contraceptive use rates of more than 50%. Male involvement and participation have been identified in the policy as one of the priority areas to be addressed.

The 2002 CPS results indicate that Mauritian women tend to favour use of traditional methods over modern methods. Withdrawal is the most commonly used method (27.1%) among currently married Mauritian women age 15-49 years, followed by the pill (15.8%); whereas, injectable (25.1%) and the pill (23.4%) are the most popular methods among their Rodriguan counterparts.

Use of withdrawal method is slightly higher among rural women (28.9%) than among urban women (24.6%). Use of any family planning method is higher among Mauritian women who have received formal education beyond the primary level (13.7%) than among those who have not completed primary education (5.8%).

The SHR policy calls on all stakeholders to provide a comprehensive range of contraceptive methods and to promote dual protection for individuals and couples to protect them from STIs, HIV and avoid unwanted

pregnancy. The policy promotes the use of and calls on improved accessibility to female condoms.

Stakeholders conduct regular awareness campaigns on female condoms and other family planning methods through various channels such as community centres, women's centres, youth centres, secondary schools, tertiary institutions and at the work place.



Kamila Jagambrum giving a demonstration of how to use the Female Condom properly and explains its various benefits.

Photo: Ghirish Singh Abdhoosee

Young people are becoming sexually active at an increasingly earlier age with high rates of unwanted teenage pregnancy and STIs, including HIV and AIDS. Teenage pregnancy is on the increase as well as abortion and its complications. There is a high need for information, education and SRH services for adolescents and young people.

The right to choose

The Mauritius National Assembly adopted the Criminal Code Amendment Bill for the Termination of Pregnancy in specified circumstances on 12 June 2012. Although this does not amount to choice of termination of pregnancy, the amendment is a significant milestone in this conservative Indian Ocean Island. Read in tandem with case study in Chapter one.

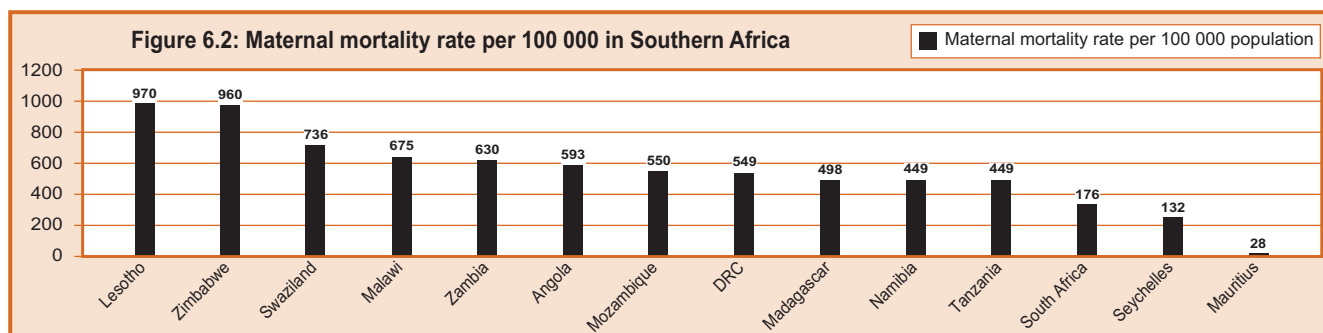
Men's involvement in sexual and reproductive health issues

In Mauritius there is a "Men As Partners Initiative", which promotes men's responsibility and participation within the family and community so as to enable the effective empowerment of women and the enhancement of the quality of life of the family as a whole.

Maternal mortality



The SADC gender protocol calls on member states to reduce maternal mortality by 75% by 2015.

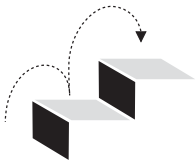


Source: WHO Health Statistics 2012, Malawi DHS 2010, Zimbabwe DHS, 2010-2011.

Figure 6.2 reveals that Mauritius is the best performer in the SADC region with a rate of only 28 per 100,000. This is low compared to countries such as Lesotho with a rate as high as 970 per 100,000.

Sanitation

Table 6.2 at the beginning of the chapter shows that sanitation coverage throughout the country remains high though there are concerns that there is a drop of overall coverage recorded in 2008 (WHO 2008) compared WHO 2012 data.



Next steps

- More research is required on drug use in Mauritius. Research on the impact of drug use on women's sexual and reproductive health, on child health and on HIV prevalence.
- More quality research is needed at the national level to inform the development and revision of policies and programmes that address the sexual and reproductive health needs of women in vulnerable situations. This includes prisons, sex workers, elderly women and women with disabilities.



Women in vulnerable situations need special programmes to address their sexual and health needs. Young ladies living in a shelter.

Photo: Loga Virahsawmy