

Japanese women, at 86, live longest in world: WHO

GENEVA (AP) The average girl born in Japan today will likely live to celebrate her 86th birthday, the longest life expectancy anywhere in the world. Men, however, fare best in the tiny European nation of San Marino, where the average boy will live to 81, the World Health Organization said Thursday.

The West African country of Sierra Leone has the shortest life expectancy for men at just 39, while Afghanistan fares badly for both sexes, with men living on average to 41 years and women to 42.

The figures in the WHO's annual World Health Statistics report are from 2007, the latest year available.

They show that some countries have made remarkable progress in increasing life expectancy since 1990 — partly by ending wars, partly through successful health initiatives.

Eritrea increased its average life expectancy by 33 years to 61 for men, and by 12 years to 65 for women. In Liberia the figure for men jumped 29 years to 54, and rose 13 years to 58 for women. Angola, Bangladesh, Maldives, Niger and East Timor also increased the average life expectancy for men and women by 10 years.

Other countries showed a sharp decline over the same period.

Women's life expectancy in Zimbabwe fell by 19 years to 44. Zimbabwean men live to 45 on average, compared with 57 in 1990. Lesotho recorded a 16-year drop for both men and women to 43 and 47, respectively.

Women in Swaziland live to 49 on average, a drop of 14 years, while life expectancy for men in the southern African country declined by 12 years to 47.

Botswana, Congo, Kenya, South Africa and Zambia

also reported significant drops in life expectancy for both sexes.

In the United States, the life expectancy for men rose to 76 from 72 years, and for women to 81 from 79 years.

In Russia, the average life expectancy for men dropped to 60 from 64 years since the time of the Soviet Union. For women the drop was less marked, to 73 from 74 years.

The figures are only one of more than 100 health indicators WHO tracks in its 193 member states.

Others include mother and child mortality, prevalence of diseases such as HIV, malaria and tuberculosis, access to doctors and medical facilities, and health expenditure per person.

Some of these indicators form part of the U.N.'s so-called Millennium Development Goals that are to be achieved by 2015.

The WHO said the trend for deaths in young children was promising overall, with a global drop of 27 percent since 1990.

Some 9 million children under 5 years old died in 2007, compared with 12.5 million in 1990.

"The decline in the death toll of children under five illustrates what can be achieved," said the WHO's director of statistics, Ties Boerma.

The increased use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets for malaria, oral rehydration therapy for diarrhea, better access to vaccines and improved water and sanitation in developing countries are proving particularly effective, he said.

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