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Interview: Better data show gender differences in China, world

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by Lyndal Rowlands

UNITED NATIONS, Oct. 24 (Xinhua) -- Men and women have different experiences of health, education, work and even violence across their lifetimes, as shown by more detailed data collected in China, Haoyi Chen, a statistician with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), told Xinhua in a recent interview.

"There's a lot of difference between women and men, there are a lot of disparities throughout life," said Chen. "That's why we need the data to show us there is difference."

A new comprehensive report released by the DESA this week, entitled "The World's Women 2015," helps compare how women are doing in different parts of the world. The report, published once every five years, is based on a comprehensive assessment of available data from international and national statistical agencies, including statistics collected by the Chinese government.

"There are some areas women are doing very well, but not in others," said Chen. For example, she said, better performance in education hasn't necessarily been translated into better work outcomes for women.

"If we zoom into tertiary education, in developed regions women are doing better than men -- the ratio enrolled in tertiary education is higher for girls than for boys," said Chen. "But if we on the other hand go to the area of work, the gender disparity is so much larger."

Chen, who is from China, has worked as a UN statistician since 2002, specializing in gender and migration statistics. She has a PhD diploma in statistics from the University of Florida and a bachelor's degree from Shanghai University of Finance and Economics.

The report's biggest overall finding, however, is that there are 62 million more men than women around the world.

China has 52 million more men than women while India has 43 million more men. The global figure is balanced out by other regions, such as Latin America, where there are more women than men.

The numbers also vary according to different age groups, said Chen.

"Globally men outnumber women before the age of 50, but after 50 there are more women than men," she said.

Another key finding of the report was that globally just over one quarter of women still get married before they turn 18.

"We have a quarter at global level, but if you go into Sub-Saharan Africa we have 40 percent of the girls aged 20 to 24 get married before the age of 18," she said.

Women who marry young are likely to have more children which may limit their education opportunities, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa where education levels for girls are also the lowest worldwide.

By contrast, the marrying age in China is closer to the global averages of 25 for women and 29 for men.

"Marrying age for China is 25 for women and 27 for men -- so for women it's at the same as the global average -- for men it's actually slightly younger," said Chen.

UN statisticians are getting a better idea of how women and men fare because more countries are collecting data about women and men separately.

"China's doing really great in terms of data collection and has a lot of investment in data collection," said Chen.

New, richer data collected from household surveys, time-use surveys and censuses conducted every 10 years have provided useful information about differences between men and women in China, according to Chen.

A new sample survey of 1 percent of China's population, which will take place on Nov. 1, will provide more insights, she added.

One area where more information is needed is violence against women, said Chen, who believed measuring violence against women is difficult because so few women go to the police whenever they fall victim to violence.

"It's such a sensitive issue and as we have shown in our data, women when they seek help they rarely go to the police so there's no way that you can get the right magnitude from the police report," she said.

Editor: An



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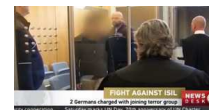


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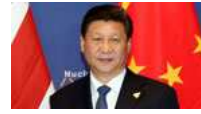
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