

Iraq, South Africa buck rising life expectancy

May 13 2011, By FRANK JORDANS , Associated Press

(AP) -- Average life expectancies are increasing steadily in most of the world, but men in Iraq and women in South Africa are bucking that trend with notable drops in their time on Earth.

The [World Health Organization](#) said Friday the average [life expectancy](#) in Iraq fell to 66 years in 2009 from 68 years in 2000, when dictator Saddam Hussein was still in power.

But while Iraqi girls born in 2009 - the most recent year for which figures are available - could still expect to live to 70, boys' life expectancy dropped sharply to 62 years, compared with 65 years in 2000.

"The figures reflect the chaos from the conflict and the impact on [health](#) systems," said Colin Mathers, one of the coordinators of WHO's annual World Health Statistics report.

In South Africa, life expectancy for women fell to 55 years from 59 years in 2000 and 68 years in 1990 - a reflection of the country's high HIV infection rate. Men's life expectancy in 2009 remained stable at 54 years compared with the figure nine years earlier, but was down from 59 in 1990.

Chad, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica were the only other countries where average life expectancy dropped between 2009 and 2000.

Figures on life expectancy are the clearest single indicator of health around the world. And globally, they are increasing.

A girl born today can expect to live for 71 years. This was up from 68 years at the start of the century.

Men lagged behind, with a global average life expectancy of 66 years, up from 64 years, the report found.

The combined figure showed an increase of two years since 2000, to 68.

However, among both sexes there are still wide variations from country to country.

Girls born in the Central African Republic and Chad today are likely to live for just 48 years - a combination of poverty, limited [medical care](#) and high maternal mortality rates. Male life expectancy is lowest in the small southern African country of Malawi, at 44 years.

On the other end of the scale is Japan, where women can expect to live for 86 years - almost until the end of the 21st century. Men can expect to live longest in the tiny state of San Marino, which is surrounded by Italy.

In the United States, female life expectancy at birth averaged 81 years in 2009, up from 80 years in 2000. American boys born today can expect to live for 76 years, WHO said. A five-year gap between the sexes is average across much of the world.

The small East African country of Eritrea has continued its steep rise in life expectancy. In 2009 the average was 66 years, up from 61 years in 2000 and just 36 years in 1990.

The figures are among over 100 health indicators that WHO tracks in its

193 member states, including mother and child mortality, obesity, disease prevalence and health expenditure.

More information:

<http://www.who.int/whosis/whostat/2011/en/index.html>

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