

Recent Marriage patterns in South Africa 1996-2007

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Abstract

Marriages in South Africa, like elsewhere in the world, are undergoing changes. Early and universal marriages if they ever existed are no longer the norm. The aim of this study is to examine emerging marriage patterns in South Africa using the 1996 and 2001 population censuses and the 2007 Community Survey. The study indicates that mean age at marriage for men and women in South Africa is high and increasing and more men and women are staying single or not marrying at all. The percent of the population in the childbearing age groups that has never married has declined from 55% in 1996 to 54% in 2001. The percentage of married women has decreased from 35% to 30% whereas the percentage living together has increased from 6% to 9% over the same period. These changes are attributed to social and economic conditions such as increasing education levels, employment of women, urbanisation and modernisation. More studies should be undertaken in order to understand the causes and consequences of the changing marriage patterns in South Africa.

Introduction

In traditional societies, marriage marks the beginning of socially sanctioned exposure to pregnancy and sets the course of subsequent childbearing. In Sub-Saharan Africa marriage has been described as early and universal (van de Walle, 1968; Lesthaeghe, 1971). Early and virtually continuous marriage throughout a woman's reproductive years is also maintained by several related marriage customs including polygyny, levirate marriage, and bride wealth or bride price (van de Walle, 1968; Goldman and Pebley, 1986). However, this is not the case with marriage patterns in South Africa where some researchers have lamented, "marriage has lost its value" (Chimere-Dan, 1999).

Furthermore, in most traditional societies, the age at first marriage, especially age of a woman at first marriage, is one of the most important proximate determinants of the aggregate level of fertility (Bongaarts and Potter, 1983). Age at first marriage is also an important indicator of women's status (Safilios-Rothschild, 1986). Early entry into marriage exposes women to the risks of early childbearing and may also impede improvements in their educational, economic, and social status. Where young females marry older males, large age gaps between spouses could contribute to marginalization of females and low status of women. Other things being equal, in societies where childbearing takes place within marriage, an increase in the age at marriage also means minimizing first births to teenage mothers, which is known to carry a higher risk for the mother and child (Hobcraft, 1987). Because of its role in determining the fertility level, improving women's and children's health, and enhancing women's status, increasing age at first marriage has been an important domain of public policy-making (Henry and Piotrow, 1979). Most countries, for example, have imposed legal sanctions on age at first marriage. The identification of factors affecting the age at marriage is therefore of paramount interest for multiple reasons.

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South Africa has experienced very rapid socioeconomic development in recent years. This has contributed to a significant improvement in the status of women through expanding education and participation in the modernized sectors of the labour force. Such changes have affected attitudes towards marriage and divorce, patterns of marriage, marital dissolution and remarriage, and the roles and status of women in the family.

This paper examines the changes in the incidence of marriage patterns in South Africa and suggests reasons for the observed trends.

Sources of Data

Data on the population by age, sex, and marital status collected in the South African censuses of 1996 and 2001 are used in this study (Statistics South Africa, 1999, 2002). The 1996 and 2001 population censuses are the first and second censuses to be conducted in the country after the first democratic elections in 1994. However, given the high costs associated with population censuses, quinquennial censuses have been abandoned in favour of decennial ones, as is the case in most developing countries. This means that the next census is expected in October 2011. In order not to have a gap in the availability of demographic data in the country a community survey was conducted in 2007 (Statistics South Africa, 2008). Both censuses and the community survey collected information on current marital status that is useful in the analysis of marriage pattern.

Data on current marital status should be considered in the context of potential problems raised for data collection by differences in the definition of marriage in various South African cultures.

There are differences between marital status tabulations based on the 1996 and 2001 censuses that make comparisons between the two data sets difficult. First, the 1996 census collected information on "Divorced/separated" whereas the 2001 census and 2007 Community Survey separated the two marital status categories. Given that divorced and separated as responses to the question on marital status were combined in 1996 may result in an exaggerated picture of marital dissolution since all separations may not end in divorce. Second, the 2001 census included a category on "polygamous marriage" in a bid to collect information on polygyny. Surprisingly no females reported that they are in polygamous marriage. This may stem from the fact that those female respondents may not be aware of the fact that their husbands have other wives apart from themselves. Also, it is possible that female respondents are reluctant to reveal that they are sharing their husbands.

Evaluation of age and sex distributions has been done elsewhere (Palamuleni, 2003; Simelane, 2002). Thus, no attempt has been made in this study to correct the reported ages. It suffices to mention here that, generally speaking, the South African age-sex data are of good quality and fairly acceptable and compared favourably to data from countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Methods of Analysis

Among the measures used to describe marriage patterns in South Africa are percentages single, married, divorced and separated and widowed. These percentages were calculated for each five-year age group for women and men in the childbearing age range, 15 to 49, and for all women and men aged above the age 15 years.

The measure of the timing of family formation used in this analysis is singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM). SMAM refers to the mean number of years spent in the single (never married) state by those in the hypothetical cohort who marry by age 50 (Hajnal, 1953). The SMAM values are computed by applying Hajnal's technique to data obtained from the 1996 and 2001 censuses for each of South Africa's nine provinces and four population groups (African, Coloured, Asian and White). Udjo (2002) calculated SMAM for South Africa and its provinces using the 1996 census. SMAM is based on the assumption that no marriage occurs before age 15 or after age 50 and that sex only occurs in marriage. These assumptions can be misleading in societies where abstinence until marriage is not adhered to, because high estimates of SMAM are likely to be estimated thus portraying a false picture. In the sense that it will be saying that exposure to sexual intercourse begins at a late stage though it starts earlier in actual fact but SMAM fails to capture this.

Results

In this section, results of the analyses described in the preceding section are presented and discussed. These are presented in terms of proportion never married and SMAAM, proportion married; proportion living together; proportion separated/divorced and proportion widowed.

Proportion Never Married

The percentages of never married women and men obtained from the 1996 and 2001 censuses and the 2007 Community Survey are presented in Table 1 and illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. As expected, for both males and females population never married declines with increasing age. For South Africa as a whole, the proportion of never married women have increased for all age groups with exception of age group 15-19 where it has slightly decreased.

Overall for women of reproductive age group the proportion of never married has increased from 54% in 1996 to 55% in 2001 and 58% in 2007. These figures indicate that more than half of women in childbearing are never married.

For population groups, the proportions never married indicate that there is a high proportion of single at all ages among Africans and colored as opposed to Asians and Whites. For the male population aged 15 years and over, proportion never married is highest among the African population (57.5 %), followed by Coloured (46.3%), then Asian (35.0%) and lowest among the White population (27.8%). Similar proportion for the female population are 50.5%, 41.4%, 27.9% and 21.4% respectively.

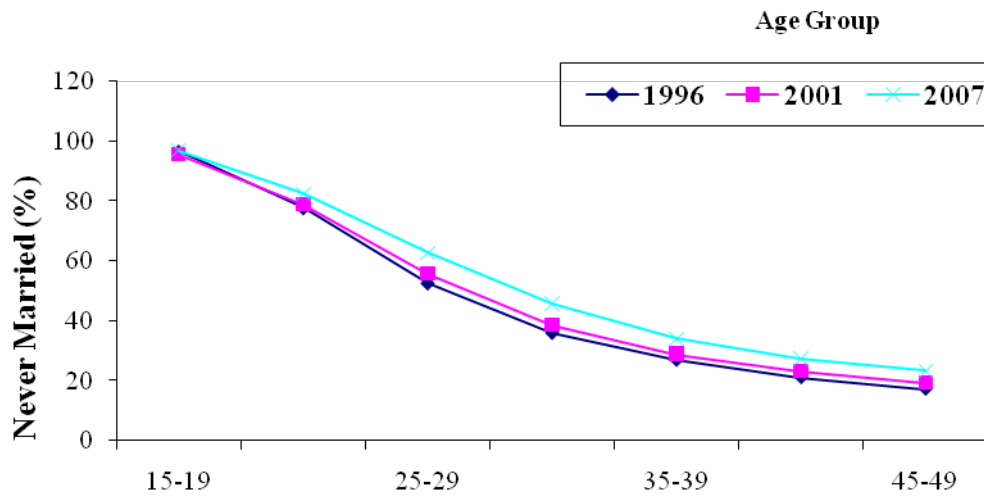
In addition, there are high proportions single at young ages and relatively low proportions single at middle and old ages.

At provincial level, the male population indicates a high proportion of never married in Kwazulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West, Northern Cape, Gauteng, Free State and Western Cape. The female population indicates a high proportion of never married in Kwazulu-Natal, North West, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Northern Cape, Gauteng, Western Cape and Free State.

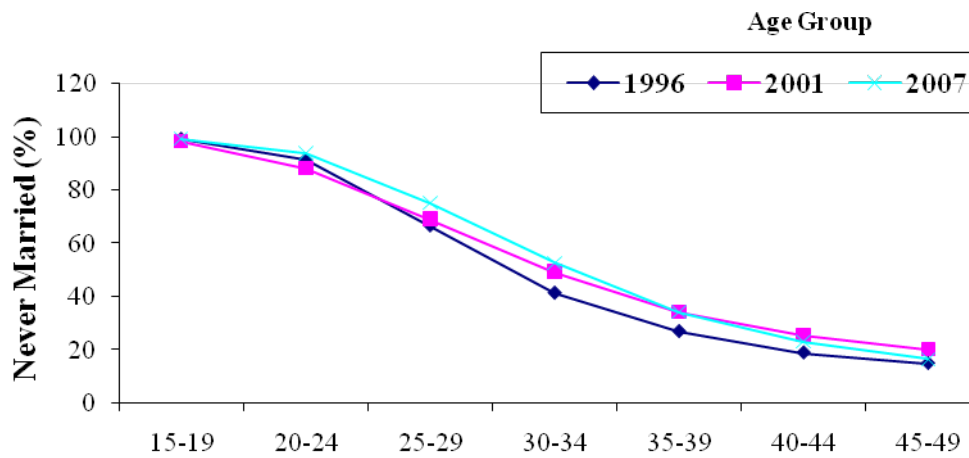
**Table 1: Percentage Never Married by Age Group for South Africa
1996, 2001 and 2007**

Age Groups	Female			Male		
	1996	2001	2007	1996	2001	2007
15-19	96.6	95.6	96.9	99.2	98.1	99.3
20-24	77.7	79.0	82.5	91.4	88.1	93.9
25-29	52.5	55.8	62.8	66.7	69.0	75.3
30-34	35.9	38.7	45.8	41.4	49.3	52.8
35-39	26.9	29.0	34.0	27.0	34.2	34.4
40-44	21.1	23.2	27.3	19.0	25.5	23.3
45-49	17.2	19.4	23.3	15.0	20.3	16.8
15-49	53.9	55.2	58.9	60.0	61.8	64.8

With exception for 2001 censuses, the proportion never married for males are higher for all age groups below 40 years whereas the opposite is true for age groups above 40.



Figur 1: Percentage Never Married for South Africa (Female), 1996-2007



Figur 2: Percentage Never Married for South Africa (Male), 1996-2007

For South Africa as a whole, the proportion of never married women have increased for all age groups with exception of age group 15-19 where it has slightly decreased.

The percentage never married for age group 20-24 for female population increased from 77.7% in 1996 to 79% in 2001 and 82.5% in 2007. For the male population, the percentage never married for age group 20-24 increased from 91.4% in 1996 to 91.9% in 2001 and 93.9% in 2007.

The changes may imply that both men and women in South Africa are postponing the onset of marriage.

Age at First Marriage

The postponement of marriage is also reflected by the increase in age at first marriage. Table 2 shows singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) for South Africa, Regions and population groups for 1996 and 2001 censuses and 2007 Community Survey.

Table 2 indicate that SMAM for South African males was 31.0 years in 1996 remaining unchanged in 2001 and increasing to 32.5 years in 2007. Similar values for South African females are 28 years in 1996 and remaining unchanged in 2001 and increasing to 30 years in 2007.

In South Africa, the legal age for individuals to marry (enter into marriage or civil union) is 18, but most girls marry between 25 and 30 years of age and men between 27 and 33 years of age (see Table 2). This means that marriage does not take place at very early ages (say ages below 20 years) as it is the case with traditional societies. In general Table 2 indicates that on average South African men marry around age 30 whereas women marry around age 28. These are very high mean age at first marriage by any standard. Commenting on median age at first marriage, Udjo(2002) observed that the SMAM values for 1996 "give the impression that South Africa has about the highest mean age at first marriage in the world". However, it should be pointed out that SMAM values for South Africa compare favorably with those of neighboring countries. For instance, Rakgoasi and Gaise(1999) found out that SMAM for Botswana in 1991 was 28 years for females and 30.8 years for males. Shemeikka, Notkola, and Siiskonen (2005) reported that the mean age at first marriage for females in Namibia in 1990s was around 30 years and median age at first marriage for females was around 29 years. The mean age at first marriage for males in Namibia in 1990s was around 34 years. Garenne (2004) noted, "late marriage (above age 25) seems to be a common feature of modern societies as well as some atypical South African societies (South Africa, Namibia, Botswana)".

There are variations in SMAM by province and population groups. Table 2 indicates that Kwazulu-Natal has the highest mean age at marriage whereas Gauteng has the lowest mean age at marriage. In fact from highest to lowest the provinces can be ranked as follows: Kwazulu-Natal, North West, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, Limpopo, Western Cape, Free State and Gauteng. However, one should be cautious in interpreting the observed provincial differentials. As Udjo(2004) pointed out the observed differences by province "may partly be a reflection of varying degrees of inaccuracies in the interpretation of the marital status question in these provinces during the census".

Table 2: Singulate Mean Age at Marriage for population group and provinces in South Africa, 1996, 2001 and 2007

Province, Population Group and Country	Male			Female		
	1996	2001	2007	1996	2001	2007
Eastern Cape	32.9	32.1	33.8	29.1	28.2	30.2
Free State	28.6	29.2	31.0	26.8	26.7	28.3
Gauteng	30.1	29.8	31.5	27.7	26.3	27.6
KZN	33.0	32.0	34.7	31.0	29.7	32.2
Mpumalanga	31.0	30.4	32.6	28.8	27.2	29.5
N Cape	30.3	30.8	32.8	28.6	27.8	30.1
Limpopo	30.7	29.7	33.1	27.4	27.3	29.9
N West	31.7	31.3	32.7	29.5	28.4	30.2
W Cape	29.5	29.3	30.7	27.9	27.0	29.0
African	32.0	31.2	33.4	29.6	28.1	30.2
Coloured	28.9	28.7	30.7	27.9	27.0	28.7
Asian	26.9	27.3	29.0	23.9	24.5	25.5
White	27.0	27.2	28.8	24.6	24.8	25.9
South Africa	31.0	30.5	32.53	28.7	27.7	29.62

Furthermore, Table 2 indicates that mean age at first marriage is very late among African and coloured males and females (above 27 years), and a moderately high mean age at first marriage among Indians and whites (24-27 years). Since Africans constitute over three quarters of the population and the observed mean age at first marriage among Africans is very high, the national average is high (31 years for males and 28.7 years for females). In addition, the observed mean ages at first marriage suggest that on average among Africans, Indians and Whites, males tend to be 2-3 years older than their spouses while among Coloureds, the difference in age at first marriage among spouses tends to be 1 year on average. Overall, compared to other African countries the difference in mean age at first marriages between spouses is minimal in South Africa. Among other things, this is a good thing as it may be seen to influence better communication between spouses which in turn lead to more stable marriages. Indeed, Amoateng (2004) noted that "even though South African women may be relatively slower to marry, once they tie the knot they tend to be committed to the institution of marriage". Amoateng(2004) further notes that in South Africa, marriage is much more likely to be dissolved through death than through divorce.

The pattern described above regarding differentials in age at marriage is different from the picture presented by other researchers for early 1990s. For instance Chimere-Dan (1998) observed "whites marry latest at an average age of 20.9 while Africans marry youngest at an average age of 18.9 years". Accepting these estimates leads on to conclude that age at first marriage is increasing for all the population groups in the country with Africans and coloureds having the largest increase and whites and Asians the smallest increase. The factors responsible for such observed patterns remain to be established.

The estimated SMAM for South Africa have important demographic consequences. Women who marry late will have on average shorter exposure to the chance of becoming pregnant implying late age at childbearing and lower fertility for a society. However, the cases of early motherhood are found abundantly. The phenomenon of early motherhood has been causing fatal impact on the health of both mother and infant causing higher infant and maternal mortality.

Another aspect observed in Table 2 is that the difference between male and female mean age at marriage is about 2-3 years, which is considered small by African standards. The demographic consequences of this are many and include better spouse communication and more stable relationships. It can be argued that since the age differentials of the partners is small, couples are able to discuss such issues as contraceptive use and the number of children they should have. In addition, because South African men and women marry when they are relatively mature they tend to be committed to marriage. On this aspect, Amoateng(2004) observed that "even though South African women may be relatively slower to marry, once they tie the knot they tend to be committed to the institution of marriage".

Proportion Married

In most traditional societies, marriage not only signals the onset of a woman's exposure to the risk of childbearing, but also determines the length and pace of reproductive activity. Although this may not be the case in most modern societies, where an increasing proportion of childbearing takes place outside formal unions, a substantial amount of childbearing still takes place within marriages. In South Africa for example nearly two-thirds of all birth occurs to married women (Amoteng, 2004). In most countries in Africa, marriage takes place at an early age and is universal. On the one hand, early and universal marriage practice leads to, among other consequences, higher fertility. On the other hand, late marriages and non-universal marriages lead to lower fertility.

In the case of South Africa, although motherhood begins early, marriage takes place later in life. Available statistics indicate that adolescent fertility is very high in South Africa (Department of Health, 1998). According to 1998 DHS one-sixth of the more than 26000 children born to African women in the 36 months preceding the survey were to women younger than 20 years at the time of birth (Department of Health, 1998).

The proportion of married women and men obtained from 1996 and 2001 censuses and 2007 community survey are presented in Table 3 and displayed in Figures 3 and 4.

According to the information presented in Table 3 the proportion of married women has decreased for all age groups in the childbearing period. Overall for women of reproductive age group the proportion married has decreased from 35% in 1996 to 31% in 2001 and to 28% in 2007. Similar percentages for males are 33%, 26% and 25% respectively.

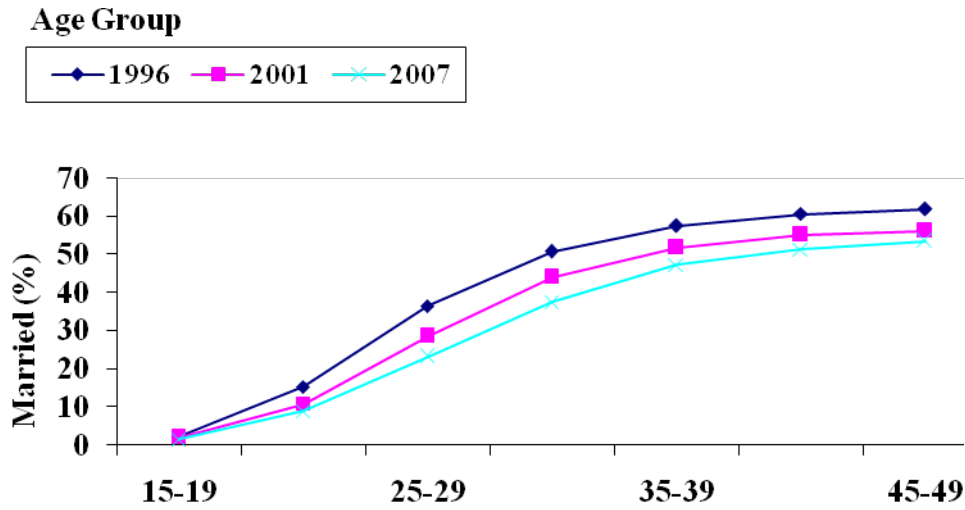


Figure 3: Percentage Married for South Africa (Female), 1996-2007

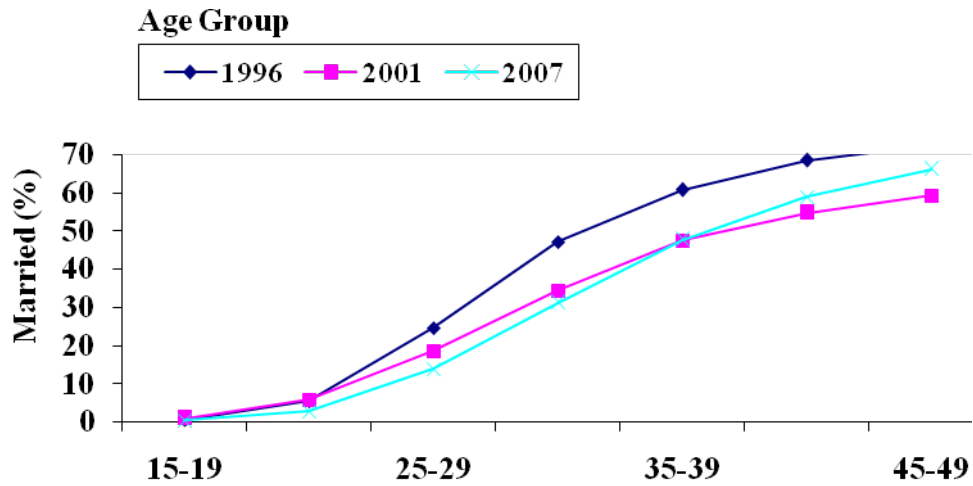


Figure 4: Percentage Married for South Africa (Male), 1996-2007

Table 3 Percentage Married by Age Group for South Africa, 1996 2001 and 2007

Age Group	Female			Male		
	1996	2001	2007	1996	2001	2007
15-19	2.1	1.9	1.4	0.5	0.9	0.4
20-24	15.3	10.8	8.8	5.5	5.8	2.8
25-29	36.5	28.5	23.2	24.6	18.5	13.8
30-34	50.7	44.0	37.4	47.1	34.3	31.2
35-39	57.5	51.7	47.2	60.8	47.5	47.7
40-44	60.6	55.1	51.2	68.5	54.7	58.9
45-49	61.9	56.1	53.4	72.4	59.2	66.1
15-49	35.2	30.6	27.6	32.5	26.3	24.9

Several factors could be suggested for the observed decline in the percentage married. First the recent declines in marriage could be a reflection of the improvement of women's economic independence that has made marriage less attractive to them. This is in line with the argument advanced by Gary Becker an American economist. According to Becker, individuals marry because each individual gains from the other party's specialized investments in skills. In traditional societies, married women tend to specialize in childbearing and other domestic activities and participate in long-term "contracts" with husbands who have specialized in market activities. In modern societies however both men and women are involved in domestic and economic activities.

It is this gender-based division of labour and the comparative advantage that men and women were believed to have in market work and home production, respectively, that constitute the primary gains from marriage. Other economic disincentives exist for women. A rising wage rate creates increasing foregone opportunities

In the South African context the establishment of migrant labour system, which meant that there was long absence of men from their homes and in some cases, desertion,

Proportion Living Together

In South Africa, cohabitation (commonly known as living together), is defined by Statistics South Africa as unmarried couples of the opposite sex living together as husband and wife in the same household. Some social scientist argue that the movement towards late marriages or the decreased proportion of married lie in the ever-increasing proportion of individuals reporting that they are living together (cohabitation) especially, amongst the younger generation of South Africans. In other words, cohabitation is no longer viewed as just a prelude to, but increasingly as a substitute for legal marriages.

The available statistics indicate that more males than females reported that they are cohabiting. Looking at the population aged 15 years and over, 8.1% of the males reported that they were

cohabiting as opposed to 7.2% of the females. Similar percentages were 8.1% and 7.1% in 2001 and 5.1% and 4.9% in 1996 respectively (see Appendix 1).

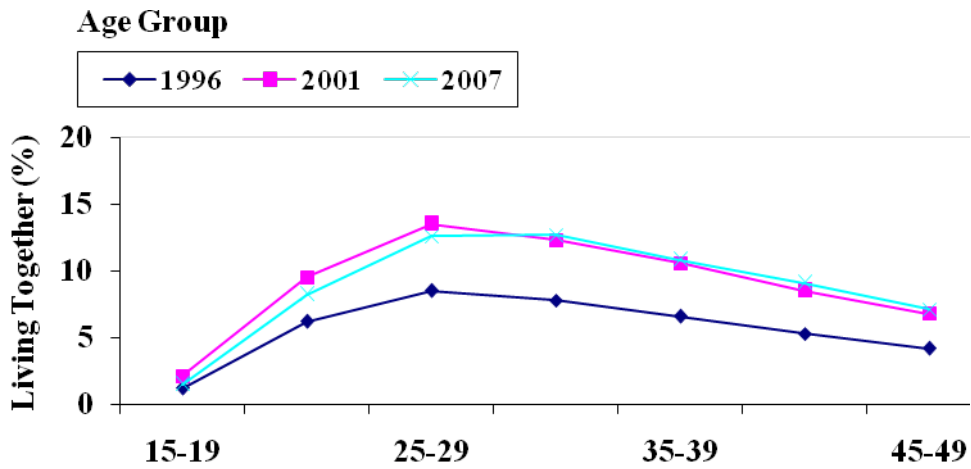
Appendix 2 indicates that 9 percent of the African men aged 15 years and over reported that they were cohabiting, closely followed by the coloured men at 8 percent, then the White men at 4 percent and the Asian men at almost 2 percent. Similar proportions cohabiting were 8 percent, 8 percent, 4 percent and 2 percent for African, Coloured, White and Asian women population. Furthermore, Figures x-x shows that proportion living together is lowest for the Asian population in all age groups, is more or less the same for all population groups for age groups 15-19 and 20-24 and is highest for the Africans and coloureds after age group 20-24. These figures suggest that the proportion cohabiting is higher amongst the African population, closely followed by the coloured, then the white and least amongst the Asians.

For the male population aged 15 years and over, proportion living together is highest among the African population (9.0%), followed by Coloured (7.9%), then White (4.4%) and lowest among the Asian population (1.6%). Similar proportion for the female population are 8.2%, 7.8%, 4.1% and 1.7% respectively.

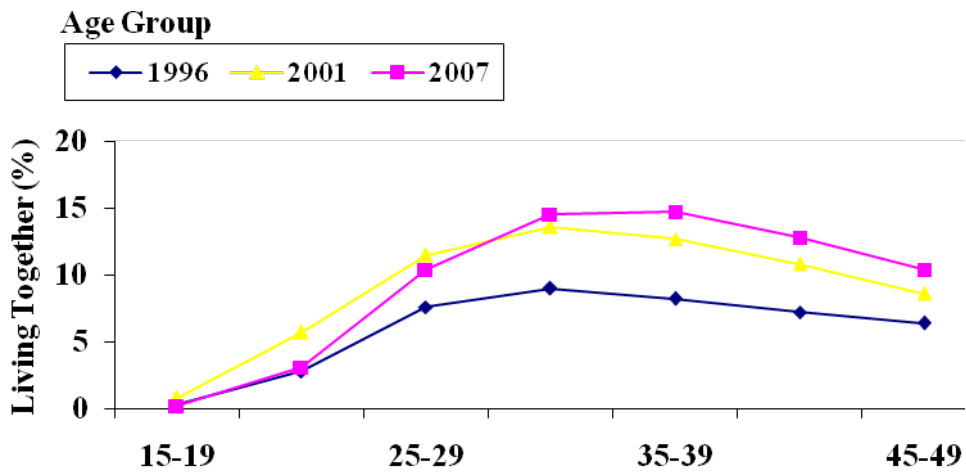
At provincial level, the proportion cohabiting among the male population is highest in Northern Cape, Kwazulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, North West, Gauteng, Free State, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Limpopo. Similar values for the female population range from Northern Cape, Mpumalanga, Kwazulu-Natal, North West, Gauteng, Free State, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Limpopo.

At provincial level, the male population indicates a high proportion of living together in Northern Cape, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Kwazulu-Natal, North West, Free State, Western Cape, Limpopo, and Eastern Cape. The female population indicates a high proportion of living together in Northern Cape, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Kwazulu-Natal, North West, Free State, Western Cape, Limpopo and Eastern Cape.

Cohabitation is not just popular among young people. Statistics in Table 4 (and Figures 5 and 6) appear to suggest that cohabitation is also a popular life-style among young adults above the age of 35 years. As American demographer Robert Schoen pointed out, cohabitation poses a greater challenge to the institution of traditional marriage than does divorce. This is because although both events undermine the permanence of the marriage as an institution, only cohabitation can replace marriage with an alternative institutional form. The South Africa data seem to provide some evidence to support this argument.



Figur 5: Percentage Living Together for South Africa (Female), 1996-2007



Figur 6: Percentage Living Together for South Africa (Male), 1996-2007

Table 4: Percentage Living Together by Age Group for South Africa, 1996 2001 and 2007

Age Groups	Female			Male		
	1996	2001	2007	1996	2001	2007
15-19	1.2	2.1	1.5	0.3	0.8	0.2
20-24	6.2	9.5	8.2	2.8	5.7	3.1
25-29	8.5	13.5	12.6	7.6	11.5	10.4
30-34	7.8	12.3	12.7	9.0	13.6	14.5
35-39	6.6	10.6	10.8	8.2	12.7	14.7
40-44	5.3	8.5	9.1	7.2	10.8	12.8
45-49	4.2	6.8	7.1	6.4	8.6	10.4
15-49	5.7	8.9	8.5	5.4	8.5	8.4

Proportion Separated and/or Divorced

An indication of marital instability and dissolution in any population could be obtained by examining the proportions separated and/or divorced. On the one hand, if re-marriage commonly takes place soon after divorce, this would understate the magnitude of marital instability and dissolution at any point in time. On the other hand, in addition to frequent re-marriage, the magnitude of marital dissolution may be under-stated from census or survey data due to cultural factors.

Table 5 shows that the proportion of women divorced and separated has decreased for all age groups in the childbearing period. Overall for women of reproductive age group the proportion divorced and separated has decreased from 3.2% in 1996 to 3.0% and 2.5% in 2001 and 2007 respectively.

In addition, a closer look at Table 5 and Figures 7 and 8 suggest that divorce is more prevalent during the prime reproductive (age 20-39). It rises with age until late 30s, then levels off thereafter. The reasons for this are many and include the fact that at men and women in age groups above 39 years would have been in marital union much longer and would have had more children than younger women. Children may be a binding factor in long marital unions hence the seemingly more enduring marriages among those over 39 years of age. There have been stories of couples who are separated or divorced and living apart. However, because of the need to visit children, after sometime reconcile and start living together once more.

The table and graphs suggest that in each population group there are proportionately more divorced or separated women than men (except among Africans and Indians in the first reproductive age group). This pattern may be due to two factors: (1) at any age and relative to females, some men may have reported they were single when in fact they were divorced. (2) Due to the preponderance of females in the population in adulthood as evident from age-sex ratios, men are more likely to re-marry sooner than women are after a divorce.

At provincial level proportion divorced for the population aged 50 years and over is highest in Gauteng, followed by Western Cape, Limpopo, Free State, North West, Northern Cape,

Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape and Kwazulu Natal. These findings are similar to those published by Statistics South Africa (2005) based on recorded marriage statistics that showed that “Gauteng had the highest modified divorce rate (for married couples) in 2003 (797 per 100 000 married couples), followed by Western Cape (726 per 100 000 married couples)”.

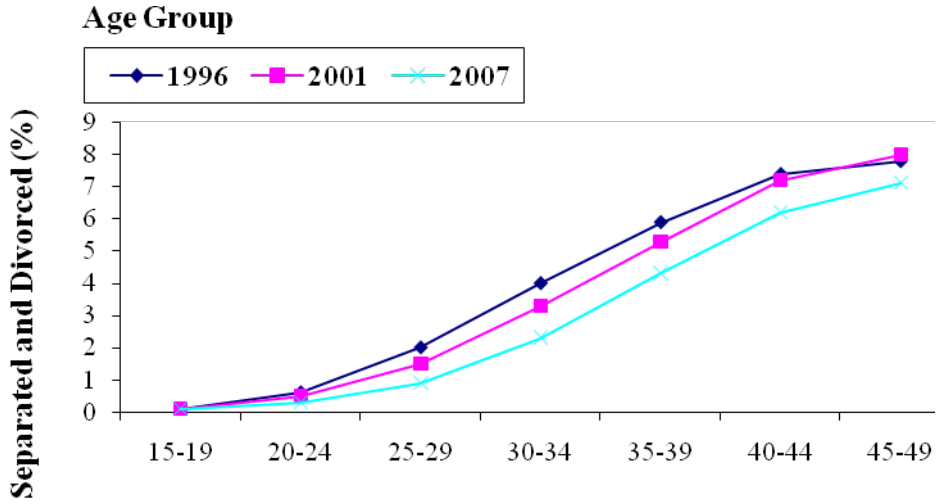


Figure 7: Percentage Separated and Divorced (Female) for South Africa, 1996-2001

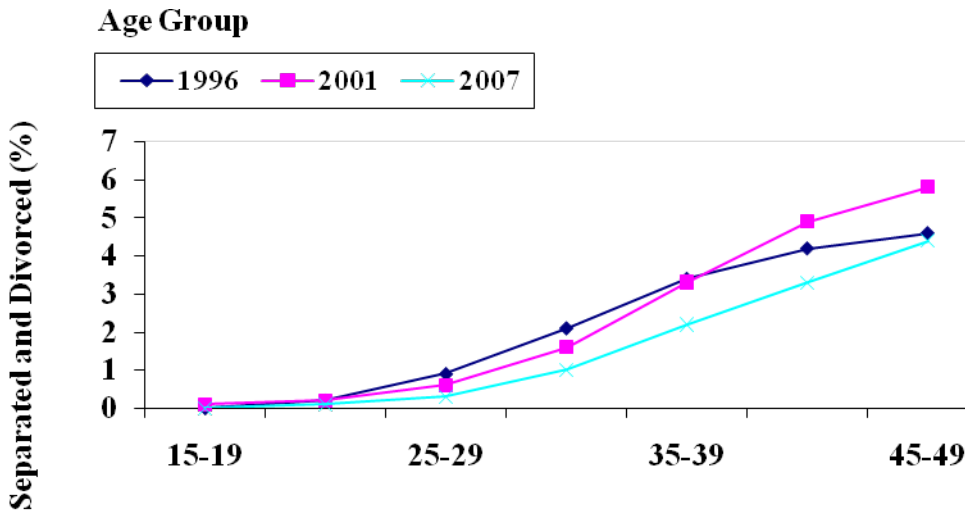


Figure 8: Percentage Separated and Divorced (Male) for South Africa, 1996-2001

Table 5: Percentage Separated/Divorced by Age Group for South Africa, 1996 2001 and 2007

Age Groups	Female			Male		
	1996	2001	2007	1996	2001	2007
15-19	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0
20-24	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1
25-29	2.0	1.5	0.9	0.9	0.6	0.3
30-34	4.0	3.3	2.3	2.1	1.6	1.0
35-39	5.9	5.3	4.3	3.4	3.3	2.2
40-44	7.4	7.2	6.2	4.2	4.9	3.3
45-49	7.8	8.0	7.1	4.6	5.8	4.4
15-49	3.2	3.0	2.5	1.7	1.9	1.2

For the male population the observed pattern is not very clear. First, the proportion separated and divorced for the male population are lower than those of the females. Second, the proportion separated and divorced for males increased slightly from 1.7% in 1996 to 1.9% in 2001 and declined to 1.2% in 2007. This pattern among the male population could be due to high incidence of remarriage rates for the males as opposed to the females.

For the male population aged 15 years and over, proportion separate/divorced is highest among the white population (4.4%), followed by Coloured (2.6%), then Asian (2.3%) and lowest among the African population (1.7%). Similar proportion for the female population are 6.9%, 4.8%, 4.1% and 2.9% respectively.

Proportion Widowed

Widowhood refers to the status of a person whose spouse has died and who has not remarried. Women in this situation are referred to as widows, and men as widowers. Widowhood is similar to divorce in that it signifies the end of a marriage, but widowhood differs from divorce in some important ways. Death is often an unexpected ending of a marriage whereas divorce is usually the mutually agreed upon conclusion of a troubled relationship and the result of a long series of events. Death is also final, whereas many divorced persons maintain at least a superficial relationship with each other.

In the United States and other Western nations, approximately 6 percent of the total population is widowed and this proportion increases to about one-third of the population sixty-five years of age or older (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2001). Recent trends indicate that widowhood is becoming less common, largely because more people either never marry or are separated or divorced (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2001).

Table 6 presents the percentage widowed for South Africa for childbearing age groups for 1996 and 2001 censuses and 2007 Community Survey. Table 6 shows that the proportion of women widowed has slightly increased for all age groups in the childbearing period with the exception of

age groups 20-24 and 25-29 where it has remained constant. The highest increase is observed in age group 45-49. Overall for women of reproductive age group the proportion widowed has increased from 2.1% in 1996 to 2.4% in 2001. The slight increase in number of widowed may be due to rise of mortality among adults probably arising from HIV/AIDS.

For the male population aged 15 years and over, proportion widowed is highest among the coloured population (2.3%), followed by Africans (2.2%), then Asian (2.0%) and Whites (1.6%). Similar proportions for the female population are 11.4% and 11.4% for whites and Asian, 9.4% for African and 8.2% for coloured population.

There are differences in proportion widowed by province. For the female population proportion widowed is highest in Limpopo, followed by Eastern Cape, Free State, Kwazulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, North West, Northern Cape, Gauteng and Western Cape. For the male population, proportion widowed is highest in Free State, Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, North West, Limpopo, Western Cape, Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal.

The available statistics indicate that there are noticeable differences between males and females within each population group and province. The differences are more marked after age group 20-24 years. Within each age group and population group, relatively more females are widowed than are males. This observation may be due to the fact that mortality is usually higher among males than female at any given age in most human populations. Moreover, since women are generally younger than their spouses, and mortality increases with age, one would naturally expect a higher proportion of widowhood among females than males.

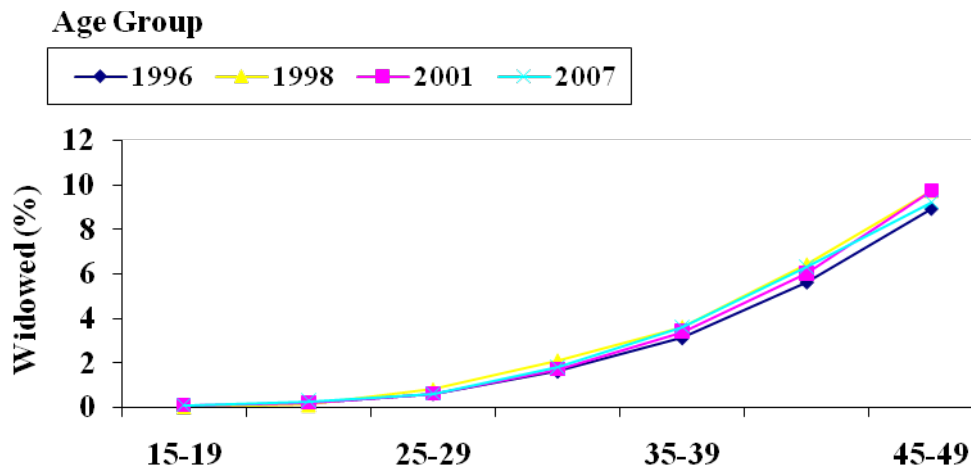


Figure 9: Percentage Widowed (Female) for South Africa, 1996-2007

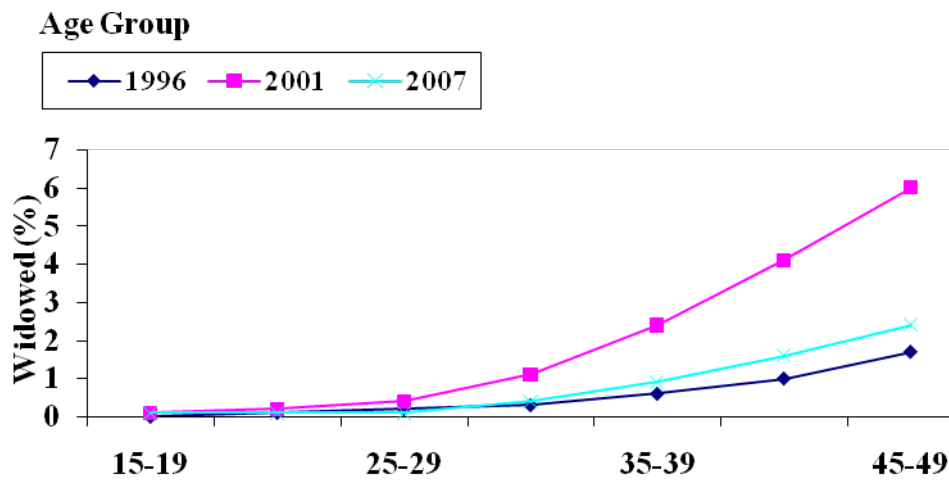


Figure 10: Percentage Widowed (Male) for South Africa, 1996-2007

Table 6: Percentage Widowed by Age Group for South Africa, 1996 2001 and 2007

Age groups	Female			Male		
	1996	2001	2007	1996	2001	2007
15-19	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1
20-24	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.1
25-29	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.4	0.1
30-34	1.6	1.7	1.8	0.3	1.1	0.4
35-39	3.1	3.4	3.6	0.6	2.4	0.9
40-44	5.6	6.0	6.3	1.0	4.1	1.6
45-49	8.9	9.7	9.2	1.7	6.0	2.4
15-49	2.1	2.4	2.5	0.4	1.6	0.6

Most studies on widowhood have focused on women, partly because widows outnumber widowers by nearly five to one. It is estimated that half of all marriages end with the death of the husband, whereas only one-fifth end with the death of the wife in Western societies, and women generally outlive men and men usually marry women who are younger than they are. Further, while older widowed people do not remarry, widowers have remarriage rates over eight times as high as those of widows.

Different societies attach very different customs and values to widowhood, and these have a strong influence on how it is experienced. Most widows go through an intense grieving process early in widowhood, marked by feelings of depression, mood changes, disrupted sleep patterns,

obsessive thoughts about the deceased, and disorientation. However, the intensity of grief usually decreases significantly within a year. Many widows and widowers begin to develop new strengths and talents and remake their social networks to include new friends and contacts. Intense grief is not required for recovery from widowhood.

Discussions and conclusion

Based on data from the 1996 and 2001 population censuses and 2007 community survey, statistics on current marital status were examined. These sources of demographic data reveal some salient features regarding nuptiality patterns in South Africa. First, for South Africa as a whole age at marriage for males has increased from 31 years in 1996 to 33 years whereas for females' age at first marriage has increased from 29 to 30 years over the same period. The age differences between spouses have remained almost unchanged during the period under study. Second, there has also been an increase in the proportions never married and living together and a decline in proportion married.

Like with other aspects of South African demography, marriage patterns presented in this study show variations by population group and province. Notwithstanding the problems of data quality, the data indicate a higher incidence of formal marriage among Whites and Indians than among Africans and Coloureds. More Africans and coloureds tend to cohabit than whites and Indians. Marriages for Asians and whites are more stables than those of Africans and coloured. The percentages of the white population that are widowed and divorced are the highest for all racial groups. The rate of divorce is highest among whites and lowest among Indians. The available data indicate that fundamental changes are in progress in the South African nuptiality. Many marriageable African adults are postponing marriage and the percentage of African people who have not married by the end of their reproductive lives appears fairly high.

The aforementioned changes could be linked to a multitude of social and economic changes including long lasting effects of colonization and apartheid system that are taking place in the country. Increasing educational opportunities for young women, urbanization and modernization and a greater participation of women in the labour force have played a major role in raising age at marriage and will continue to do so in the near future. However there is need to establish by further research the changes that are taking place and how these affect marriage patterns.

The above discourse has presented a lot of facts that need to be tested with actual data. There is, therefore, need to conduct large-scale demographic studies in and well-conducted in the country as well as in other regions of Africa. Data from these studies will help to model demographic and nuptiality transitions and execute relevant policy programmes.

Changing marriage patterns have had important effects on fertility and population growth among South Africans. Fertility has declined steadily in the last 30 years or so. The changing marriage patterns such as declining proportion married in the younger age groups has been one of the main reasons for declining fertility among the various population groups in South Africa. There is also some evidence that marital dissolution has only a minor depressing effect on the overall level of marital fertility. The available demographic research in the country appears to focus on the role of family planning and not changing marriage patterns.

The increase in the percentage of men and women remaining single and the increasing pattern of age at marriage may, in part, reflect changes in social attitudes and structures related to marriage and singlehood. The lives of the never married are varied and complex. Similarities and differences that exist between the never married and other marital groups are more likely to be influenced by individual characteristics such as gender, age, social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and level of education, than by marital status group membership. Further research that examines how these and other factors intersect to shape the lives of the never married within and across different cultures and social contexts will help us to learn more not only about those who remain single, but also about the structure and experiences within marriage, families, and social roles and relationships more broadly.

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Appendix 1: Population aged 15 years and over by marital status, province and sex, 1996

	Male						Female	
	Never married	Married	Living Together	Widowed	Divorced	Never married	Married	Living Together
Western Cape	43.3	47.2	4.7	1.9	2.9	39.6	43.0	4.3
Eastern Cape	57.2	35.6	3.2	1.9	2.1	46.4	38.8	2.6
Northern Cape	48.1	38.8	9.0	2.3	1.8	43.3	37.0	8.3
Free State	41.3	47.8	5.7	2.2	3.0	38.0	41.8	5.3
KwaZulu-Natal	58.4	33.4	5.7	1.3	1.2	51.6	33.7	5.6
North West	53.4	38.0	5.2	1.6	1.7	48.9	35.9	5.1
Gauteng	44.1	45.6	6.3	1.4	2.5	39.5	41.2	6.6
Mpumalanga	52.7	38.3	6.1	1.4	1.5	47.2	37.8	6.0
Northern Province	56.3	37.9	2.6	1.4	1.9	43.0	41.9	2.3
African	56.6	34.8	5.7	1.4	1.5	49.7	34.6	5.3
Coloured	46.0	43.4	5.9	2.3	2.5	42.3	39.7	5.5
Asian	34.2	61.0	1.0	1.9	2.0	27.5	57.2	0.9
White	27.1	63.4	2.6	2.1	4.7	21.0	59.1	2.5
South Africa	51.0	40.2	5.1	1.6	2.1	44.7	38.8	4.9

Appendix 2: Population aged 15 years and over by marital status, province and sex, 2001

	Male					Female		
	Never Married	Married	Living Together	Separated/Divorced	Widowed	Never Married	Married	Living Together
Eastern Cape	58.1	32.8	4.5	2.3	2.3	47.6	33.5	
Free State	46.2	40.2	7.9	3.2	2.6	40.4	36.4	
Gauteng	46.5	39.6	10.1	2.4	1.4	41.4	36.1	1
Kwazulu-Natal	59.4	28.7	9.2	1.2	1.5	52.4	27.7	
Limpopo	56.6	34.9	5.1	2.0	1.5	44.6	35.3	
Mpumalanga	54.3	32.5	10.0	1.5	1.6	48.3	31.2	
Northern Cape	48.3	35.3	12.0	1.9	2.4	42.7	33.4	1
North West	53.3	34.4	8.4	2.0	2.0	48.5	31.3	
Western Cape	44.8	43.6	6.9	2.8	2.0	40.7	39.7	
African	57.5	30.2	9.0	1.7	1.6	50.5	29.0	
Coloured	46.2	40.9	7.9	2.6	2.3	41.5	37.6	
Asian	35.0	59.1	1.6	2.3	2.0	27.9	54.9	
White	27.8	61.2	4.4	4.4	2.2	21.4	56.1	
South Africa	52.4	35.6	8.1	2.1	1.8	45.8	33.5	

Appendix 3: Population aged 15 years and over by marital status, province and sex, 2007

			Male					Female	
	Never Married	Married	Living Together	Separate/Divorced	Widowed	Never Married	Married	Living Together	S
Eastern Cape	60.4	30.2	4.6	2.0	2.7	49.9	30.2	3.6	
Free State	46.5	39.0	8.2	2.7	3.6	42.0	33.3	7.3	
Gauteng	47.9	38.8	9.7	2.0	1.6	43.9	35.1	9.3	
KwaZulu-Natal	63.3	25.2	9.0	0.8	1.6	55.8	24.8	7.9	
Limpopo	58.9	33.1	4.3	2.0	1.8	48.0	32.7	3.6	
Mpumalanga	56.2	30.5	9.6	1.7	2.0	50.5	28.6	8.8	
North West	52.6	33.6	9.8	1.7	2.4	50.4	27.9	9.6	
Northern Cape	52.1	33.6	10.2	1.7	2.4	46.5	31.3	9.0	
Western Cape	45.7	43.3	6.9	2.3	1.8	42.6	39.1	6.1	
African	59.6	28.2	8.8	1.5	2.0	53.2	26.3	7.7	
Coloured	47.8	40.3	7.3	2.3	2.3	6.9	36.3	3.6	
Asian	37.6	56.3	2.0	2.0	2.1	1.8	53.5	3.0	
White	28.6	60.5	5.5	3.5	2.0	4.8	57.1	5.6	
South Africa	54.2	34.0	8.1	1.8	2.0	48.3	31.4	7.2	