

CHAPTER 3

FERTILITY

3.1 Introduction

In the SADHS, data were collected on current and completed fertility. Utilising the birth histories of women interviewed during the survey, this chapter provides direct estimates of current levels, trends and differentials in fertility. During the interviews the women were requested to provide information on the total number of sons and daughters they had given birth to that were still living with them, the number living elsewhere and the number who had died. Interviewers obtained a birth history for each woman, including details on each live birth separately, according to the month and year of birth, sex and survival status. In the case of children who had died, their age at death was also recorded. The fertility indicators reported here are based on the answers provided by women aged 15-49 years regarding their reproductive histories.

3.2 Fertility Levels

The total fertility rate (TFR) and age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) are a common measure of recent fertility. The TFR is defined as the number of children a woman would have by the end of her childbearing years if she were to pass through these years bearing children at the prevailing age-specific rates. Table 3.1 shows the age-specific and other aggregate fertility measures calculated from the 1998 SADHS data for the three-year period prior to the survey (roughly 1995- early 1998). The TFR for South Africa, derived from the survey data was 2.9. Using data from the 1996 population census, indirect methods yielded a slightly higher TFR level of 3.3 for 1996, two years before the SADHS. (Udjo, 1999). Another study utilising indirect methods and the same Census data, estimated the TFR at 3.1 (Dorrington *et al.*, 1999).

Fertility in urban areas (TFR=2.3) is substantially lower than in rural areas (TFR=3.9). This lower fertility in urban areas is apparent at all ages. Peak childbearing occurs between the ages of 20 and 34. Rural women continue to bear children at later ages than urban women. The derived crude birth rate is only 22 births per 1 000 population.

Age group	Residence		Total
	Urban	Non-urban	
15-19	56	99	76
20-24	113	178	139
25-29	123	174	143
30-34	88	149	109
35-39	53	111	74
40-44	18	50	29
45-49	1	24	9
TFR women 15-49	2.25	3.92	2.90
TFR women 15-44	2.25	3.80	2.85
General fertility rate	79	133	100
Crude birth rate	19.2	25.4	21.9

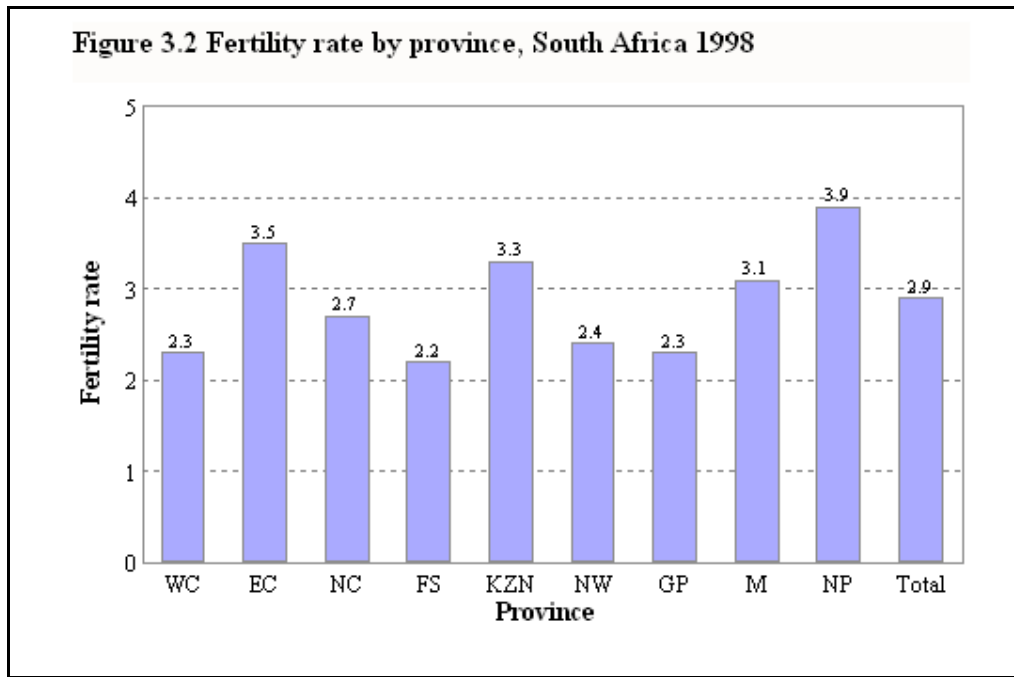
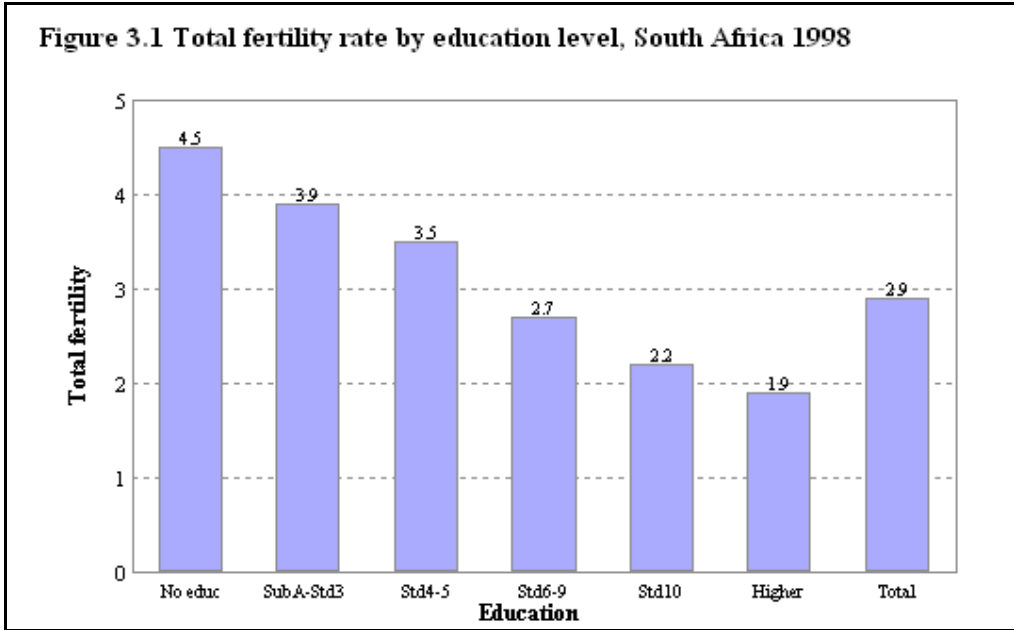
3.3 Fertility Differentials

Differentials in fertility are shown in Table 3.2. The SADHS data indicate a strong negative linear association between education and fertility. Whereas women with no education had a TFR of 4.5, those who have completed Standard 10 have 2.2 children on average (see Figure 3.1). The Northern Province has the highest TFR (3.9), while Free State has the lowest (2.2) (see Figure 3.2). The TFR for African women is 3.1, for coloured women 2.5 and 1.9 for white women.

Unfortunately, despite attempts to design the sample so as to over sample Asian households, the sample of Asian women was too small to allow a reliable estimate of the TFR. Table 3.2 also allows for the assessment of differential trends in fertility over time. The mean number of children ever born to women aged 40-49 is a measure of past fertility. By comparing current (total) fertility with past (completed) fertility, it is clear that substantial declines in fertility occurred among all sub-groups of the population. For instance, among urban African women there was a decline from 3.5 to 2.4.

Table 3.2 Fertility by background characteristics			
Total fertility rate for the three years preceding the survey, percentage currently pregnant and mean number of children ever born to women age 40-49, by selected background characteristics, South Africa 1998			
Background characteristic	Total fertility rate ¹	Percentage currently pregnant	Mean number of children ever born to women age 40-49
Residence			
Urban	2.3	2.7	3.2
Non-urban	3.9	4.7	4.7
Province			
Western Cape	2.3	3.2	3.0
Eastern Cape	3.5	3.4	4.0
Northern Cape	2.7	3.6	3.6
Free State	2.2	3.6	3.6
KwaZulu-Natal	3.3	4.3	4.0
North West	2.4	3.2	3.7
Gauteng	2.3	2.2	3.2
Mpumalanga	3.1	4.6	4.5
Northern	3.9	4.6	4.9
Education			
No education	4.5	3.3	4.9
Sub A - Std 3	3.9	4.8	4.4
Std 4 - Std 5	3.5	4.0	4.1
Std 6 - Std 9	2.7	3.0	3.2
Std 10	2.2	3.5	2.4
Higher	1.9	3.8	2.5
Population group			
African	3.1	3.7	4.1
Afr. urban	2.4	2.8	3.5
Afr. non-urban	4.0	4.7	4.9
Coloured	2.5	3.5	3.2
White	1.9	2.5	2.5
Total	2.9	3.5	3.7
Note: The number of Asian women interviewed was too small to provide a reliable measure of the total fertility rate.			
¹ Women age 15-49 years			

Less than 4 percent of women reported they were pregnant at the time of the survey. Although this underestimates the proportion of pregnant women, as many women in the early stages of pregnancy would not have known that they were pregnant, the differentials in pregnancy status closely follow the differentials in current fertility.



3.4 Fertility Trends

Adequate historical demographic statistics are only available for certain sections of the population. For the white population, birth statistics are available from 1910 and for the Indian and coloured population from about the 1940s. For the African population incomplete birth registration statistics created a vacuum in our knowledge of demographic trends. Fertility rates for the African population were calculated with the aid of census statistics by Sadie (1970). In addition, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) conducted a number of small-scale surveys from the 1960s to the 1980s, the results of which were used to estimate fertility levels (Mostert and Malherbe, 1974; Lötter and van Tonder, 1976; Van Tonder, 1985). Probably the most comprehensive source of information on fertility patterns before the 1998 SADHS was a large DHS-type survey conducted in 1987-1989 (Mostert, 1990). This collection of vital statistics, analytical work and surveys provide reasonably accurate pointers to historical fertility trends (see Figure 3.3) for different population groups.

The data in Figure 3.3 show that fertility among whites started to decline during the 19th century and then remained at a level of between 3 and 4 for more than six decades before declining below 3 towards the late 1960s. Thereafter the decline continued to below the replacement level. In 1990 the TFR was 1.7. The fertility of the Asian segment of the population started its decline in the 1950s, largely due to increasing age at marriage and the use of contraception. By 1990, the fertility of this population (TFR of 2.3) was nearing the replacement level. The fertility of the coloured population gradually increased in the two decades before the 1960s. Thereafter, the introduction of modern contraception heralded a decline which continues to the present. The fertility of the African population was at a high level during the middle of this century (a TFR of nearly 7). After 1960, African fertility started to decline, slowly at first, but subsequently gained momentum. By the mid-1980s, African fertility was about 4.5, and by 1990 it had declined to an estimated level of around 4.0.

