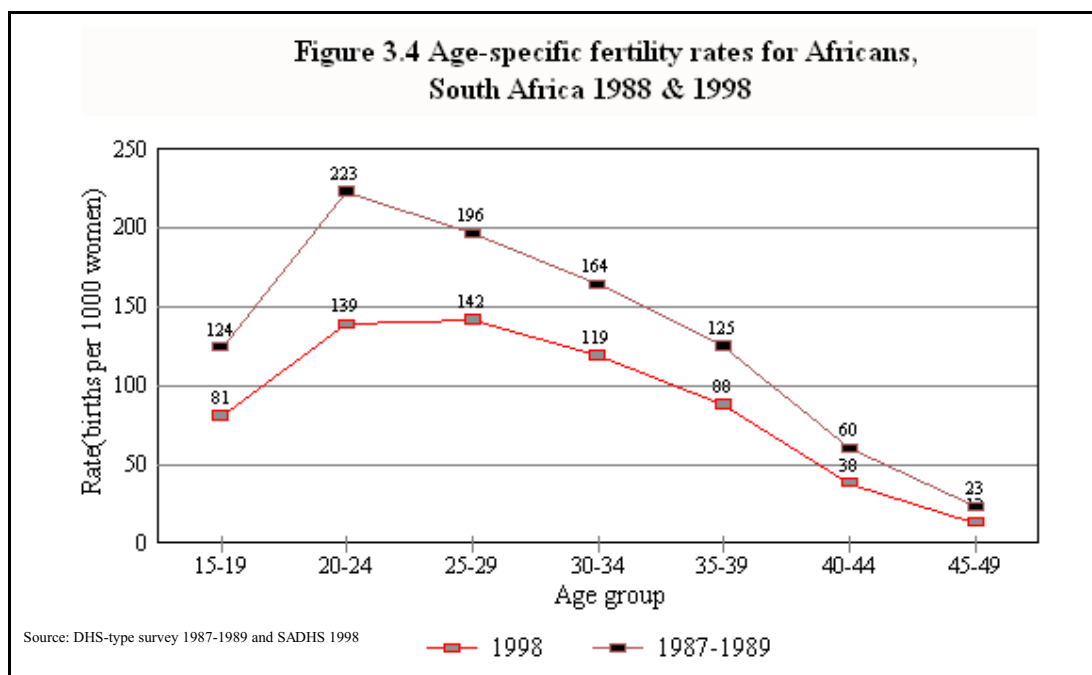


The fertility of the white population in South Africa mirrors fertility trends in the more developed world, where the transition from high to low fertility has been completed. The Asian and the coloured population have almost completed their fertility transition. The most interesting fertility transition taking place in South Africa at present is that of the African population. Besides the fact that Africans constitute the majority of the South African population, and therefore determine overall fertility levels, their fertility behaviour may also predict the path of future fertility trends in other African countries. Therefore it is useful to examine trends in African fertility by comparing the results of the 1998 SADHS with a large-scale DHS-type survey conducted in the period 1987-1989 (Mostert 1990). In both surveys similar methodologies were utilised. The age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) for the three years preceding the surveys are shown in Figure 3.4. Whereas the calculated total fertility rate for the African population was 4.6 in the first survey, it was 3.1 in 1998.



Fertility trends can also be examined by looking at rates reported for previous times in the birth histories of women interviewed in the SADHS. Such rates were calculated for four-year periods prior to the survey and are presented in Table 3.3. They also show a decline in fertility over the past 12-15 years, although a much gradual one than implied by comparing external data sources.

Table 3.3 Trends in fertility

Age-specific fertility rates for four-year periods preceding the survey, South Africa 1998

Age group	0-3	4-7	8-11	12-15	16-19
15-19	78	93	90	116	104
20-24	136	156	170	196	190
25-29	138	159	162	183	183
30-34	108	134	128	153	[143]
35-39	72	89	99	[122]	-
40-44	30	42	[57]	-	-
45-49	10	[12]	-	-	-

Note: Age-specific fertility rates per 1,000 women. Estimates enclosed in brackets are truncated.

3.5 Children Ever Born and Living

The distribution of women by the number of children ever born to them is shown in Table 3.4 for all women and currently married women. In addition, the table gives the mean number of children ever born to women in each five-year age group as well as the mean number of living children. It is clear that most women have had at least one birth by age 35. Women in their late thirties have given birth to an average of 3.2 children. The results also show that 5 percent of women in the age group 45-49 have never given birth, while a quarter of women in this age group have given birth to 6 children or more. In the age group 45-49 the mean number of children ever born is 4.0; of whom 3.6 were still living.

Differences in the findings for currently married women compared to all women are mainly found among the younger women. For example, nearly 80 percent of married women aged 20-24 have given birth, compared to 60 percent of all women in the same age category. Nearly 4 percent of currently married women aged 40 and older have never given birth, which can be regarded as a rough measure of primary infertility in the population, since voluntary childlessness is uncommon in most African societies.

Table 3.4 <u>Children ever born and living</u>															
Percent distribution of all women and currently married women by number of children ever born and mean number ever born and living children, by age of woman, South Africa 1998															
Age group	Number of children ever born (CEB)											Mean no. of living children			
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+		Total	Number of women	Mean no. of CEB
ALL WOMEN															
15-19	86.8	12.6	0.4	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	2,249	0.14	0.13
20-24	41.7	40.8	14.4	2.9	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	2,075	0.79	0.74
25-29	18.4	33.2	29.3	12.7	4.4	1.4	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	1,857	1.58	1.50
30-34	6.8	18.3	31.2	21.0	13.9	4.7	2.5	1.1	0.2	0.2	0.0	100.0	1,654	2.49	2.34
35-39	4.9	11.6	22.7	21.5	16.2	10.7	6.9	3.2	1.5	0.5	0.4	100.0	1,636	3.23	2.99
40-44	4.7	11.0	19.8	19.7	15.1	12.5	9.2	4.0	1.8	0.9	1.4	100.0	1,294	3.52	3.18
45-49	5.2	9.9	14.7	15.7	17.2	12.5	9.6	5.9	3.7	1.8	3.6	100.0	970	4.03	3.57
Total	29.5	21.1	18.2	12.0	8.0	4.8	3.2	1.5	0.7	0.3	0.5	100.0	11,735	1.94	1.79
CURRENTLY MARRIED WOMEN															
15-19	63.4	33.0	2.1	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	73	0.42	0.40
20-24	20.4	43.4	27.6	7.9	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	465	1.25	1.17
25-29	11.6	25.6	34.9	18.2	6.2	2.5	1.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	100.0	900	1.94	1.83
30-34	3.7	12.5	31.3	23.2	17.6	5.8	3.8	1.7	0.3	0.3	0.0	100.0	1,008	2.83	2.66
35-39	3.5	8.0	22.7	21.8	17.7	11.9	7.5	3.9	2.0	0.5	0.5	100.0	1,114	3.47	3.25
40-44	3.6	8.8	19.3	19.7	15.7	13.2	10.0	4.5	2.2	1.1	1.8	100.0	865	3.74	3.37
45-49	4.1	6.8	14.5	14.5	18.3	14.5	9.8	6.4	4.3	2.2	4.6	100.0	652	4.34	3.89
Total	7.5	15.6	25.1	18.6	13.6	8.3	5.5	2.8	1.4	0.6	1.0	100.0	5,077	2.98	2.75

3.6 Birth Intervals

The birth interval is a notable factor in the survival of infants. A baby born soon after a previous child is at an increased risk of poor health. As a general rule, births with an interval of less than 24 months are classified as high-risk births. Table 3.5 presents the percent distribution of births in the five years before the survey by interval since the previous birth, according to selected background characteristics.

Fourteen percent of second and higher order births take place within 24 months of the previous birth. More than 20 percent of births to women with a tertiary qualification take place less than 24 months after the previous birth, a higher proportion than found in any other educational category. Among white women short intervals are even more common, as 30 percent of births take place within 24 months of the previous birth.

Table 3.5 shows that 53 percent of second and third births occurred at an interval of more than 48 months. This suggests that many South African women have an early first birth, many while still teenagers, but postpone the birth of a second child for a considerable period of time.

The median birth interval was 47 months, a very long interval when compared to other sub-Saharan countries. Urban women have substantially longer birth intervals than rural women (54 months as opposed to 43 months). A significant difference in birth interval was also found when comparing the survival status of the previous baby. Where the previous baby has died, the interval is 17 months less than when the previous sibling survived.

Table 3.5 Birth intervals								
Percent distribution of births in the five years preceding the survey by number of months since previous birth, according to selected background characteristics, South Africa 1998.								
Characteristic	Number of months since previous birth					Total	Median no. of months since previous birth	Number of births
	7 - 17	18 - 23	24 - 35	36 - 47	48+			
Age of mother	*	*	*	*	*	100.0	28.4	15
15-19	7.3	11.0	22.4	20.7	38.6	100.0	40.7	1,312
20-29	4.0	6.6	17.5	16.8	55.1	100.0	53.0	1,586
30-39	5.7	4.7	15.3	15.6	58.8	100.0	60.5	416
40+								
Birth order								
2-3	4.8	7.9	17.2	17.2	52.9	100.0	49.7	1,997
4-6	6.4	8.4	20.4	18.4	46.5	100.0	45.6	1,082
7+	8.3	9.3	31.7	24.8	25.9	100.0	36.1	251
Sex of previous baby								
Male						100.0	47.1	1,745
Female	5.9	8.3	18.2	18.4	49.3	100.0	47.0	1,585
Survival of previous baby	5.3	7.9	20.6	17.9	48.3	100.0		
Living						100.0	47.9	3,122
Dead	4.4	7.8	19.2	18.6	49.9	100.0	30.6	208
Residence	22.9	13.2	21.2	10.8	31.8	100.0		
Urban						100.0	53.7	1,557
Rural	4.3	6.8	15.3	17.1	56.5	100.0	42.9	1,773
Province	6.7	9.3	22.8	19.0	42.1	100.0		
Western Cape						100.0	58.5	251
Eastern Cape	4.1	6.6	11.3	16.9	61.0	100.0	40.3	519
Northern Cape	7.9	10.6	24.1	17.6	39.8	100.0	53.9	64
Free State	4.2	4.2	13.5	17.4	60.8	100.0	54.9	169
KwaZulu-Natal	3.8	4.0	17.2	16.5	58.5	100.0	45.0	749
North West	7.6	9.0	19.7	18.8	45.0	100.0	52.4	212
Gauteng	3.7	6.4	17.3	16.9	55.7	100.0	53.7	614
Mpumalanga	2.9	7.4	14.2	17.5	58.0	100.0	46.7	247
Northern	5.4	8.5	18.7	19.2	48.2	100.0	41.5	504
	5.8	8.5	26.7	19.8	39.1	100.0		
Education								
No education						100.0	43.5	404
Sub A-Std 3	6.6	6.8	23.0	21.4	42.1	100.0	42.2	561
Std 4-Std 5	4.9	8.5	23.6	20.6	42.4	100.0	51.2	594
Std 6-Std 9	4.9	7.8	17.3	16.3	53.6	100.0	47.0	1,239
Std 10	5.3	8.9	19.2	17.5	49.1	100.0	58.3	372
Higher	5.0	6.5	14.6	14.0	59.9	100.0	41.3	159
	11.1	9.2	14.7	22.6	42.4	100.0		
Population group								
African						100.0	47.1	2,795
African urban	5.3	8.0	20.1	17.9	48.8	100.0	55.9	1,130
African rural	3.0	5.9	15.6	15.6	59.9	100.0	42.4	1,665
Coloured	6.8	9.4	23.2	19.4	41.2	100.0	58.2	290
White	2.9	5.7	11.0	15.7	64.7	100.0	35.4	149
Asian	13.6	16.6	20.6	21.6	27.6	100.0	39.1	71
	8.1	9.2	16.4	32.8	33.5	100.0		
Total	5.6	8.1	19.3	18.2	48.8	100.0	47.1	3,330

Note: An asterisk indicates a figure is based on fewer than 25 respondents and has been suppressed.

3.7 Age at First Birth

Table 3.6 shows the percent distribution of women by the age at the birth of their first child and the median age at first birth. The median age at first birth was approximately 21 years for most age cohorts. Forty-eight percent of women in the age group 30-34 interviewed by the SADHS had given birth before turning 20. However, there are indications that this trend is changing. For instance, 40 percent of respondents aged 20-24 and 25-29 had given birth before reaching age 20, eight percentage points lower than that of the older cohort of women. Teenage childbearing is discussed further in Chapter 9.

Table 3.6 Age at first birth										
Percent distribution of women 15-49 years by age at first birth, according to current age, South Africa 1998										
Current age	Women with no births	Age at first birth						Total	Number of women	Median age at first birth
		<15	15-17	18-19	20-21	22-24	25+			
15-19	86.8	0.6	8.8	3.8	NA	NA	NA	100.0	2,249	a
20-24	41.7	1.6	18.7	19.8	13.2	5.0	NA	100.0	2,075	a
25-29	18.4	2.9	16.9	20.6	17.8	15.6	7.8	100.0	1,857	20.9
30-34	6.8	3.6	21.0	23.4	16.6	14.3	14.3	100.0	1,654	20.2
35-39	4.9	2.8	19.0	20.6	18.7	19.1	14.9	100.0	1,636	20.7
40-44	4.7	3.1	15.2	21.2	20.9	17.6	17.2	100.0	1,294	21.0
45-49	5.2	2.7	15.3	23.2	16.8	19.3	17.4	100.0	970	21.0

Note: NA = Not applicable.
a = Half or more of women in these age groups had not given birth before entering the age group, making the calculation of a median age at birth unfeasible.

Table 3.7 shows the median age at first birth for the age cohorts 25-29 to 45-49 by selected background characteristics. No median age at first birth is provided for the age group 15-24 since a substantial proportion of women in this age cohort had not yet given birth at the time of the survey. The results show that median age at first birth is higher for women in urban areas than for women in rural areas. Similarly, age at first birth increases with higher levels of education. For example, in the age cohort 30-34, women without any formal education have their first birth around age 19, compared with age 26 for women with secondary or higher education.

There is considerable regional variation in age at first birth. Age at first birth is lowest in Mpumalanga (19.5) and highest in the Western Cape (21.8 years). Age at first birth also varies by population group. Whites have the highest age at first birth (23.8), followed by Asians (22.3) and coloureds (21.2). African women recorded the lowest age at first birth (20.3 years).

Table 3.7 Median age at first birth by background characteristics						
Median age at first birth among women 25-49, by current age and selected background characteristics, South Africa 1998						
Background characteristic	Current age					Women age 25-49
	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	
Residence						
Urban	21.9	20.9	21.2	21.3	21.0	21.3
Non-urban	20.0	19.5	20.0	20.6	21.0	20.1
Province						
Western Cape	23.4	21.4	21.9	21.2	21.9	21.8
Eastern Cape	20.8	20.5	20.9	21.5	21.9	21.1
Northern Cape	20.7	20.5	20.8	21.9	20.0	20.8
Free State	21.0	20.1	20.5	21.4	20.6	20.7
KwaZulu-Natal	20.6	20.5	20.7	21.1	22.2	20.9
North West	20.8	20.1	21.3	20.9	19.7	20.7
Gauteng	21.7	20.2	21.3	21.0	20.6	21.0
Mpumalanga	19.7	19.0	20.0	19.3	19.2	19.5
Northern	19.6	19.2	19.3	20.2	20.8	19.7
Education						
No education	19.5	18.6	19.8	20.3	20.3	19.8
Sub A - Std 3	19.5	18.9	19.8	20.2	20.8	19.8
Std 4 - Std 5	19.0	19.3	19.9	20.2	20.0	19.7
Std 6 - Std 9	20.5	20.1	20.5	20.9	20.6	20.5
Std 10	23.2	22.1	22.6	23.2	24.2	22.7
Higher	a	25.8	24.5	24.9	24.8	24.9
Population group						
African	20.6	19.8	20.3	20.6	20.5	20.3
Afr. urban	21.2	20.1	20.6	20.8	19.9	20.6
Afr. non-urban	19.9	19.4	19.9	20.5	21.1	20.0
Coloured	22.0	21.0	21.5	20.8	20.5	21.2
White	24.4	24.7	24.0	23.5	22.8	23.8
Asian	24.2	21.7	20.9	22.2	22.6	22.3
Total	20.9	20.2	20.7	21.0	21.0	20.8

Note: The medians for cohorts 15-19 and 20-24 could not be determined because half of the women had not had a birth before reaching the lowest age of the age group.
a = Omitted because less than 50 percent in the age group had given birth by age 20