

Spatial Variation of Age at Marriage in South Africa

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ABSTRACT Earlier studies in South Africa have shown that age at marriage has been rising gradually and that South Africa is characterized by late marriage as well as substantial numbers delaying marriage until into their 30s. Urbanization and educational development have been key factors associated with the increase in age at marriage. This paper examines inter-provincial differences in age at marriage in South Africa. The measure of the timing of family formation used in this analysis is Singulate Mean age at Marriage (SMAM). The SMAM values are computed by applying Hajnal's technique to data obtained from the 1996 and 2001 population censuses and the 2007 Community Survey for each sex for South Africa's nine provinces and four population groups. The usefulness of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in the presentation of spatially distributed differentials is demonstrated. Results shows that there is considerable variation in marriage patterns between provinces and population groups with Kwazulu-Natal having the highest mean age at marriage whereas Gauteng has the lowest mean age at marriage. Furthermore, 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). These variations could be due to the wide regional variations in economy, culture and living conditions.