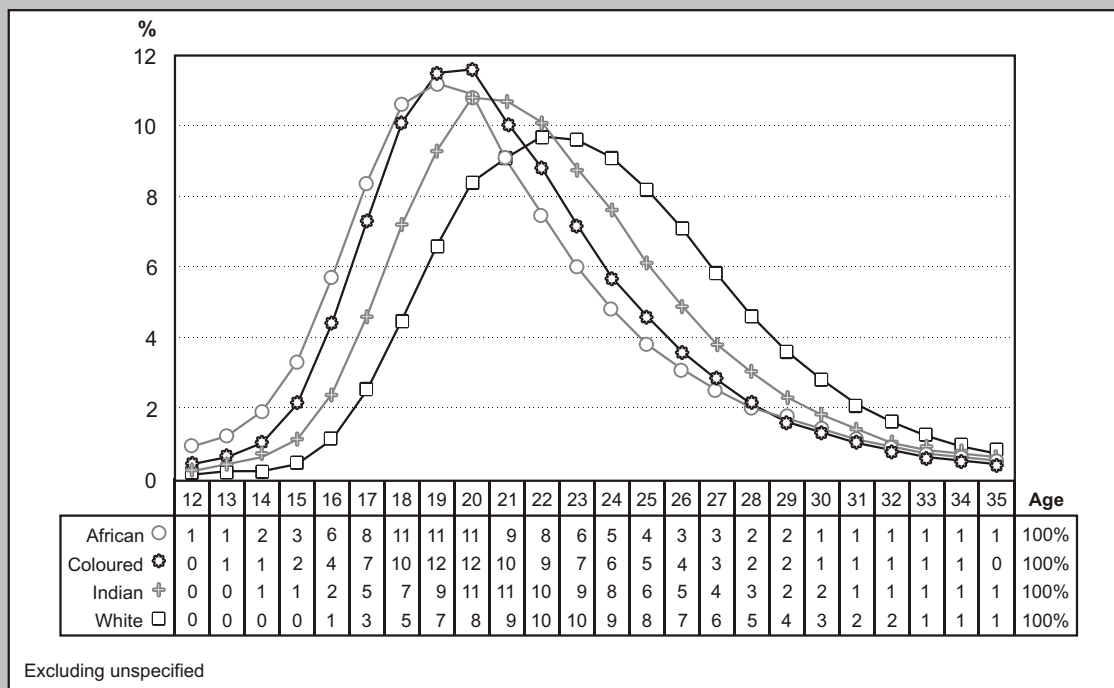


Figure 3.3: Percentage of mothers in each age category at birth of first child, for each population group



Generally, African women tend to have given birth to their first children at a younger age than women in other population groups. Slightly under 1% of African young women compared to 0,4% of coloured, 0,2% of Indian, and 0,1% of white female youth reported having given birth to their first child at 12 years of age.

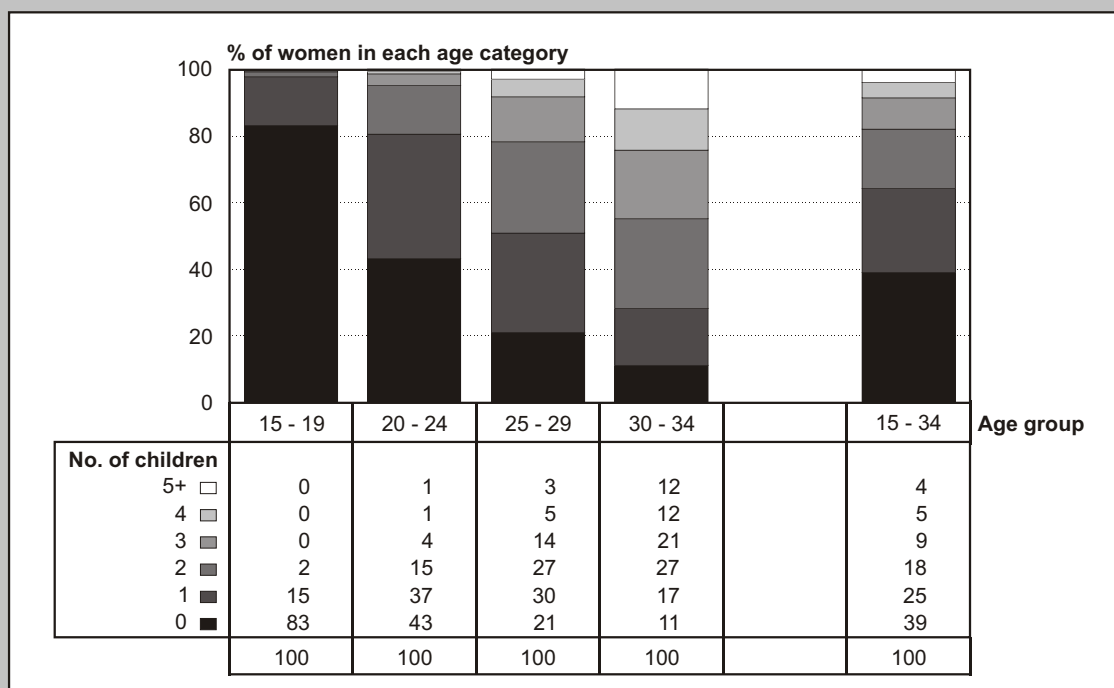
Among African women, the largest proportion had given birth to their first child at 18, 19 or 20 years of age (11%). For coloured women, the peak age is 19-20 years (12%), and for Indian women, 20-21 years (11%). Among white women the peak age is 22-23 years (10%).

Figure 3.4 indicates that, on average, among female youth aged 15 to 34 years (right hand column), two in every five (39%) had never given birth to any children. One in every four (25%) had given birth to one child, and 18% had given birth to two children. Those who had given birth to five or more children make up 4% of the entire population of young women.

In October 1996, 83% of women in the 15-19 years age category had never given birth to any children, 15% had given birth to one child, and 2% to two children.

The proportion of women who had never given birth drops to 43% in the 20-24 years age category. In this category, 37% had given birth to one child, 15% to two children and 4% to three children.

Figure 3.4: The percentage of women in each age category by the number of children they had given birth to



Among women aged 25-29 years, 30% had given birth to one child, followed by 27% who had given birth to two children, and 14% to three. Three per cent of women in this age bracket indicated having given birth to five or more children.

The proportion of young women who had given birth to five or more children was highest (12%) among those aged 30-34 years. Similarly, the proportion of those who had given birth to four children (12%) and three children (21%) was higher than in other categories. However, those who had given birth to only one child (17%) were proportionately fewer. About one in every ten women in this age category (11%) had not given birth.

## Implications

There is a growing tendency among the youth to either postpone or disregard marriage. For instance, while by age 30-34 years many female youth (50%) were married in October 1996, a large proportion (36%) indicated that they had never been married.

One of the important aspects about childbirth to emerge from Census '96 is that some female youth become mothers for the first time in their early adolescent years. There are females, particularly among African and coloured youth, who indicated that they had their first children at the age of 12 years. This situation demonstrates the need for efficient intervening strategies and policies to empower youth, particularly females, with regard to decisions on reproduction.

Adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive behaviour and health has become one of the major population concerns in South Africa. The devastating impact of HIV/Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases on the youth of South Africa adds to the complexity of adolescent sexual and reproductive problems.