

# **Social attitudes contributing to postponement of parenthood in South Africa: is there a gender differential?**

## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

South Africa has been undergoing a fertility transitions since as early as the 1950's. The decline in the rates of fertility in South Africa is well documented (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1993; Moultrie and Timaeus, 2003; Chimera-Dan, 1999; Udjo, 1997; DoH, 1999). Albeit data sources used to derive estimates were defective and often fragmented, the decline of fertility in South Africa dates as far back as the 1950s (Caldwell and Caldwell, 2003; Sibanda and Zuberi 1999). Various studies point to South Africa leading the fertility transition in sub-Saharan Africa, declining from an average of 6 to 7 children per woman to 4.5 children per woman in the 1980s, and further decreasing to 3.3 children per woman in the 1990s (Chimera-Dan, 1993; Moultrie and Timaeus, 2003; Sibanda and Zuberi, 1999; Palamuleni, Kalule-Sabiti and Makiwane, 2007). In addition to this, South Africa's median age at first birth has remained consistently high at 27.4 years old in 1998 to 27 years old in 2015 (Statistics South Africa, 2010). For the region of sub-Saharan Africa this is high, since the median age at first birth in 19 years old and in Mali is 18 years old (CIAFactbook, 2018). This further suggests that South African females are able to postpone first birth.

Both the decline in Total Fertility Rates in the country and the high age at first birth have been attributed to the abolishment of segregation laws which prevented many African/Black females from accessing education, employment and family planning, as well as the current governments efforts to promote the employment and education of the previously disadvantaged racial groups in the country (Barbarin, O. and Richter 2013). In addition to this, the weak presence of cultural practices such as child marriage in the country, have allowed females to remain childless for longer (Coovadia, et. al. 2009). While relatively strong acceptance and uptake of contraception, at 19% of sexually active adult females using an oral pill and 51% using an injectable contraceptive, has also contributed to this effect (Chola et al, 2015). Therefore, with this and other demographic and socioeconomic determinants of increasing age at first birth are known little is known on the gendered differences in attitudes toward having children and marriage that is contributing to this.

The purpose of this study is to (1) estimate the rates of positive and negative perceptions toward children and marriage among 25-30 year olds in South Africa and (2) determine the gendered differences in responses.

### **Methods**

Data for this cross-sectional study come from the 10th round of the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), which was conducted in late 2012 by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The survey round included a dedicated questionnaire on family structure, family-related roles and values, as well as policy preferences. With financial support from the Department of Science and Technology, the survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of 2,547 respondents, aged 16 years and older, living in private households.

The unweighted sample for the study is 266 (28%) 30-40 year olds who have not yet had a first child. Of this sample, 57.58% are male and 42.42% are female. Sexes, all races and all geographical locations of residence are included in the study.

Key outcome variables include attitudes toward children and marriage. For the children perceptions variables, questions regarding agreement or disagreement on a Likert scale with the following statements are used: (i) watching children grow up is life's greatest joy; (ii) having children interferes too much with the freedom of parents; (iii) children are a financial burden on parents; (iv) having children restricts the employment and career chances of one or both parents; (v) having children increases people's social standing in society; (vi) adult children are an important source of help for elderly parents. Principle Component Analysis is used to create an index variable for children attitudes. For attitudes toward marriage, two questions in the survey are analysed: (i) marriage is an old-fashioned, outdated tradition and (ii) to what extent do you approve or disapprove of the payment of 'lobola' (dowry or bride price) as part of marriage.

Control variables in the study include race, highest level of education, employment status, type of place of residence (urban/rural) and marital status. The variable on sex (male or female) of the respondent is the key independent variable of the study.

Descriptive statistics, including cross-tabulations and rates are used to describe the study sample. Regression models are fit to predict the odds of positive and negative attitudes toward children and marriage.

## Preliminary Results

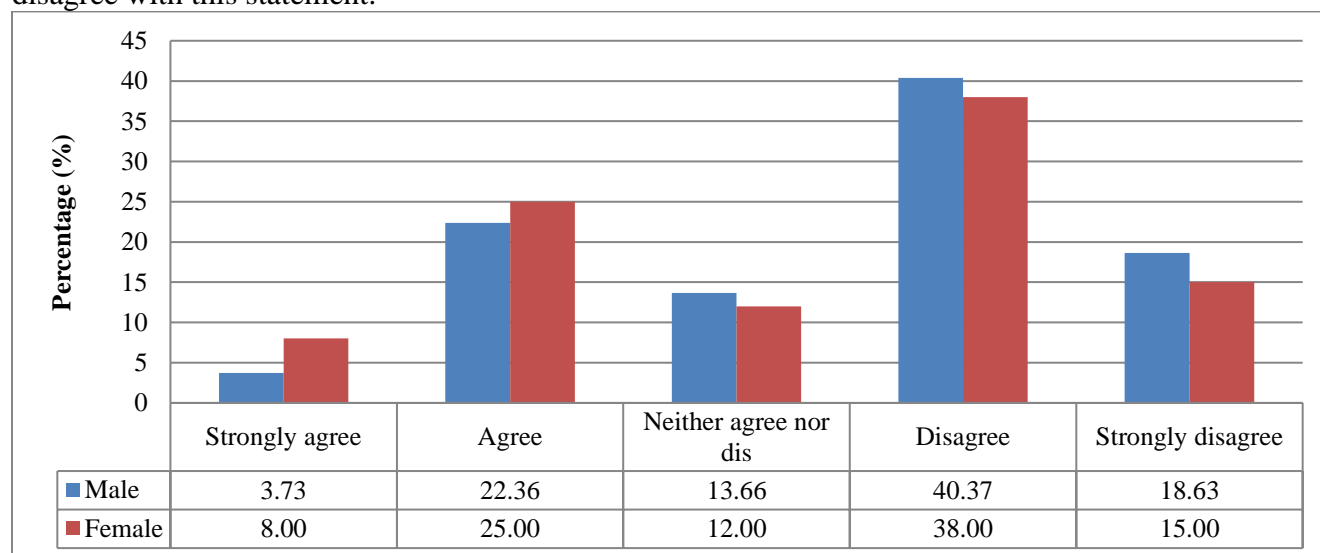
The sample characteristics seen in Table 1, reflect the population structure in South Africa at present. The participants in the study were mostly African/ Black, with more male than female participants. Education levels also show higher levels of education among males than females. By marital status, more males were formally married than females, however more females were separated or widowed compared to males.

**Table 1: Select characteristics of the sample, 30-40 year olds who have no children**

| Characteristics                                     | Male |        | Female |        |
|---|------|--------|--------|--------|
|   | n    | %      | n      | %      |
| <b>Race (p-value&lt;0.05)</b>                       |      |        |        |        |
| Black or African                                    | 104  | 61.90  | 64     | 38.10  |
| Coloured  | 20   | 58.82  | 14     | 41.18  |
| Indian or Asian                                     | 17   | 65.38  | 9      | 34.62  |
| White   | 22   | 62.86  | 13     | 37.14  |
| Other   | 1    | 100.00 | 0      | 0.00   |
| <b>Highest level of education (p-value&lt;0.05)</b> |      |        |        |        |
| Primary   | 17   | 58.62  | 12     | 41.38  |
| Incomplete Secondary                                | 59   | 67.05  | 29     | 32.95  |
| Complete Secondary                                  | 62   | 62.63  | 37     | 37.37  |
| Tertiary education                                  | 22   | 53.66  | 19     | 46.34  |
| Other/Don't know                                    | 0    | 0.00   | 1      | 100.00 |

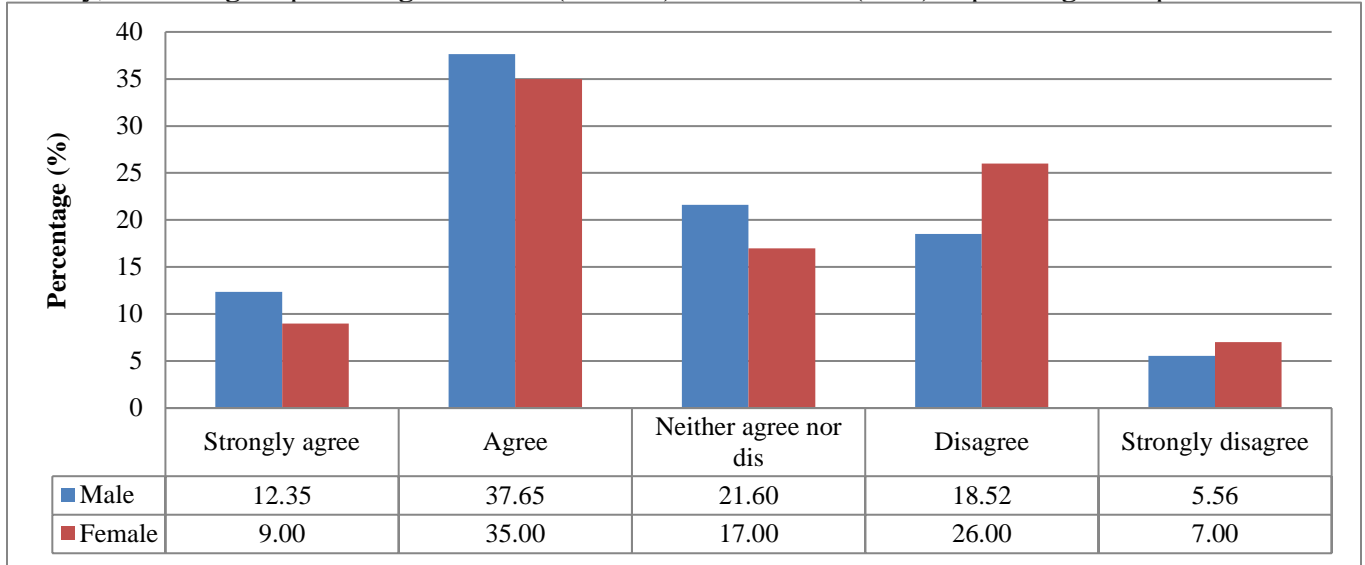
| <b>Place of Residence (p-value&lt;0.05)</b> |    |        |    |       |
|---|----|--------|----|-------|
| Urban - formal                              | 82 | 53.95  | 70 | 46.05 |
| Urban - informal                            | 20 | 74.07  | 7  | 25.93 |
| Rural - traditional                         | 39 | 72.22  | 15 | 27.78 |
| Township                                    | 23 | 74.19  | 8  | 25.81 |
| <b>Marital Status (p-value&lt;0.05)</b>     |    |        |    |       |
| Married                                     | 55 | 74.32  | 19 | 25.68 |
| Separated                                   | 2  | 28.57  | 5  | 71.43 |
| Divorced                                    | 8  | 61.54  | 5  | 38.46 |
| Widowed                                     | 2  | 18.18  | 9  | 81.82 |
| Never married but engaged                   | 9  | 75.00  | 3  | 25.00 |
| Never married and not in union              | 87 | 59.59  | 59 | 40.41 |
| (Refused to answer)                         | 1  | 100.00 | 0  | 0.00  |

Results from Figure 1 show that overall few males and female agree that children interfere with personal freedom of parents. A higher percentage of males (40.37%) than females (38%) disagree with this statement.



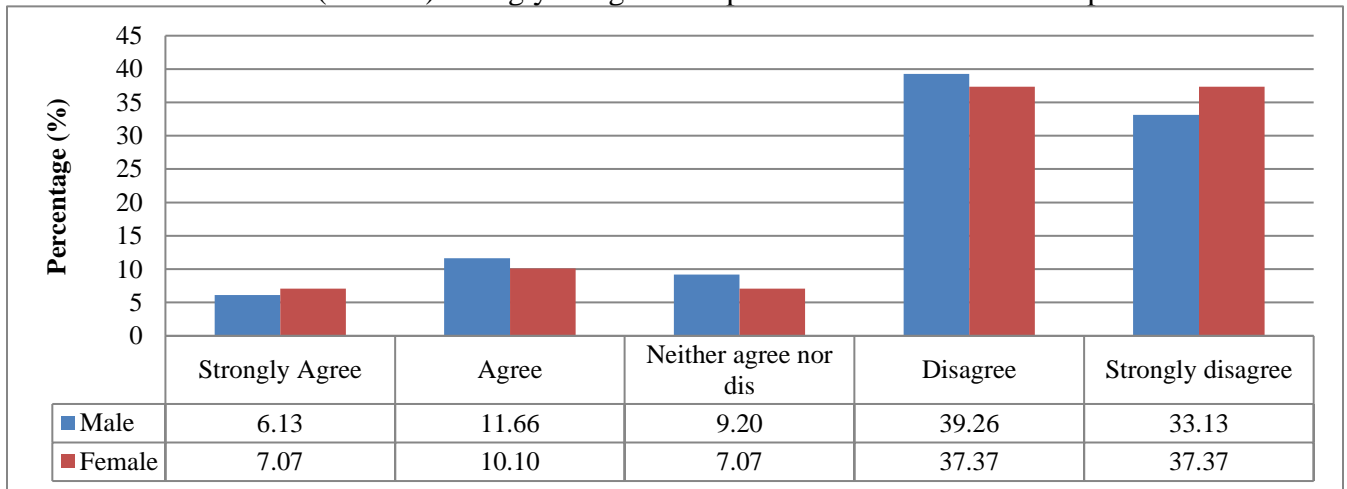
**Figure 1: Percentage distribution of attitudes toward children: Having children interferes too much with the freedom of parents, by sex of the respondent**

Figure 2 shows that most of the males and females agree that children increase social standing in society, with a higher percentage of males (37.65%) than females (35%) expressing this opinion.



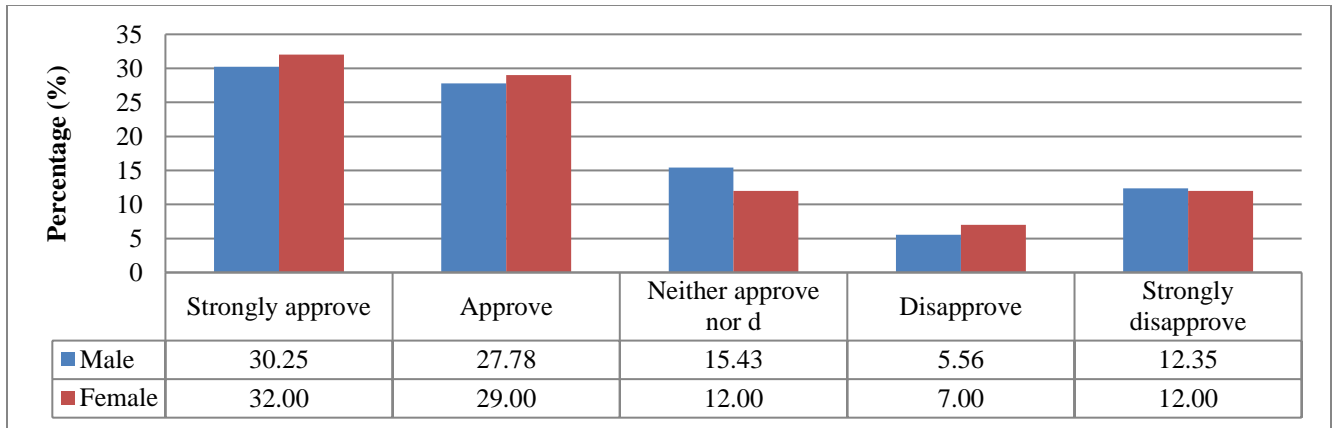
**Figure 2: Percentage distribution of attitudes toward children: having children increases people's social standing in society**

In Figure 3, most males and females do not agree that marriage is an old-fashioned, outdated tradition. More females (37.37%) strongly disagree compared to 33.13% of male respondents.



**Figure 3: Percentage distribution of attitudes toward marriage: marriage is an old-fashioned, outdated tradition**

Figure 4 shows that 32% of females and 30.25% of males see 'lobola' as a necessary part of marriage, with only about 12% of males and females seeing 'lobola' as unnecessary.



**Figure 4: Percentage distribution of attitudes toward marriage: ‘Lobola’ (bride price) is a necessary part of marriage**

### **Preliminary Conclusion and Ways Forward**

Preliminary results show that there is a positive attitude toward children among adults who do not have children and this suggests postponement instead of a non-willingness to start families. Further, marriage is still regarded as important, as is the customary practice of ‘lobola’ or bride-price. Recent literature shows that marriage rates are declining because males are unable to pay ‘lobola’ due to financial constraints and poverty (James, 2017).

Further analysis of economic variables and regression analysis of the determinants of these perceptions are the next steps in this research.

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