

Demography of South Africa's children

Katharine Hall, Helen Meintjes and Winnie Sambu (Children's Institute, University of Cape Town)

The UN General Guidelines for Periodic Reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, paragraph 7, says that reports made by states should be accompanied by "detailed statistical information ... Quantitative information should indicate variations between various areas of the country ... and between groups of children ...".¹

The number and proportion of children living in South Africa

In mid-2012, South Africa's total population was estimated at 52 million people, of whom 18.6 million were children (under 18 years). Children therefore constitute 36% of the total population.

It is not uncommon in South Africa for children to live separately from their biological parents, in the care of other relatives. The distribution of children across provinces is slightly different to that of adults, with a greater proportion of children living in provinces with large rural populations and with greater proportions of adults in the largely metropolitan provinces. Together, KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo accommodate half of all children in South Africa. A further 19% of children live in Gauteng, a mainly metropolitan province, and 10% of children in the Western Cape. Despite being the smallest province in the country, Gauteng accommodates more than a quarter of all households and adults, but less than a fifth of children. This is because of the relatively large number of adult-only households in that province.

There have been striking changes in the provincial child populations over time. While there has been a decrease in the number of children living in the Free State, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Northern Cape provinces from 2002 to 2012, the number of children living in Gauteng and Western Cape has risen by 23% and 15% respectively. This is caused partly by population movement (for example, when children are part of migrant households or move to join existing urban households), and partly by natural population growth (new births within the province).

We can look at inequality by dividing all households into five equal groups or quintiles, based on total income to the household (including earnings and social grants): with quintile 1 being the poorest 20% of households, quintile 2 being the next poorest and so on. Quintile 5 consists of the least-poor 20%. Nearly two-thirds of children live in the poorest 40% of households.

Children are fairly equally distributed across the age groups, with on average just over one million children in each year under 18. The gender split is equal for children, while it is slightly skewed towards females (52%) in the adult population.

These population estimates are based on analyses of the General Household Survey (GHS), which is conducted annually by Statistics South Africa. The population numbers derived from the survey are weighted to the general population using weights provided by Statistics South Africa. The weights are revised from time to time, and the estimated child population size changes as a result. Using previously weighted data, it appeared that the child population had grown by about 6% (a million children) between 2002 and 2012. However the most recently revised weights, applied retrospectively, produce a slight reduction (of 0.2%) in the child population over the 11-year period from 2002 to 2012. There is considerable uncertainty around the official population estimates, particularly in the younger age groups.²

Table 1a: Distribution of households, adults and children in South Africa, by province, 2012

PROVINCE	Households		Adults		Children	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Eastern Cape	1,655,000	12	3,890,000	12	2,696,000	15
Free State	821,000	6	1,823,000	5	925,000	5
Gauteng	3,751,000	27	8,935,000	27	3,529,000	19
KwaZulu-Natal	2,551,000	18	6,274,000	19	4,071,000	22
Limpopo	1,378,000	10	3,222,000	10	2,230,000	12
Mpumalanga	1,033,000	7	2,517,000	7	1,558,000	8
North West	999,000	7	2,274,000	7	1,273,000	7
Northern Cape	308,000	2	735,000	2	418,000	2
Western Cape	1,586,000	11	4,031,000	12	1,873,000	10
South Africa	14,083,000	100	33,701,000	100	18,574,000	100

Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2013) *General Household Survey 2002*; *General Household Survey 2012*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

The number and proportion of children living with their biological parent(s)

Many children in South Africa do not live consistently in the same dwelling as their biological parents. This is a long-established feature of childhoods in South Africa, and is related to many factors including historic population controls, labour migration, poverty, housing and educational opportunities, low marriage rates and cultural practice. It is common for relatives to play a substantial role in child-rearing. Many children experience a sequence of different caregivers, are raised without fathers, or live in different households to their biological siblings.

Virtually all children live with at least one adult, and the vast majority live in households where there are two or more co-resident adults. This indicator examines co-residence between children and their biological parents specifically. Although many children live with just one of their biological parents (usually the mother), this does not mean that the mother is a “single parent” as she is not necessarily the only adult caregiver in the household. In most cases, there are other adult household members such as aunts, uncles and grandparents, who may contribute to the care of children.

The proportion of children living with both parents decreased from 39% in 2002 to 35% in 2012. Thirty-nine percent of all children – more than seven million children – live with their mothers but not with their fathers. Only 3% of children live in households where their fathers are present and their mothers absent. Twenty-three percent do not have either of their biological parents living with them. This does not necessarily mean that they are orphaned: in most cases (81%), children without any co-resident parents have at least one parent who is alive but living elsewhere.

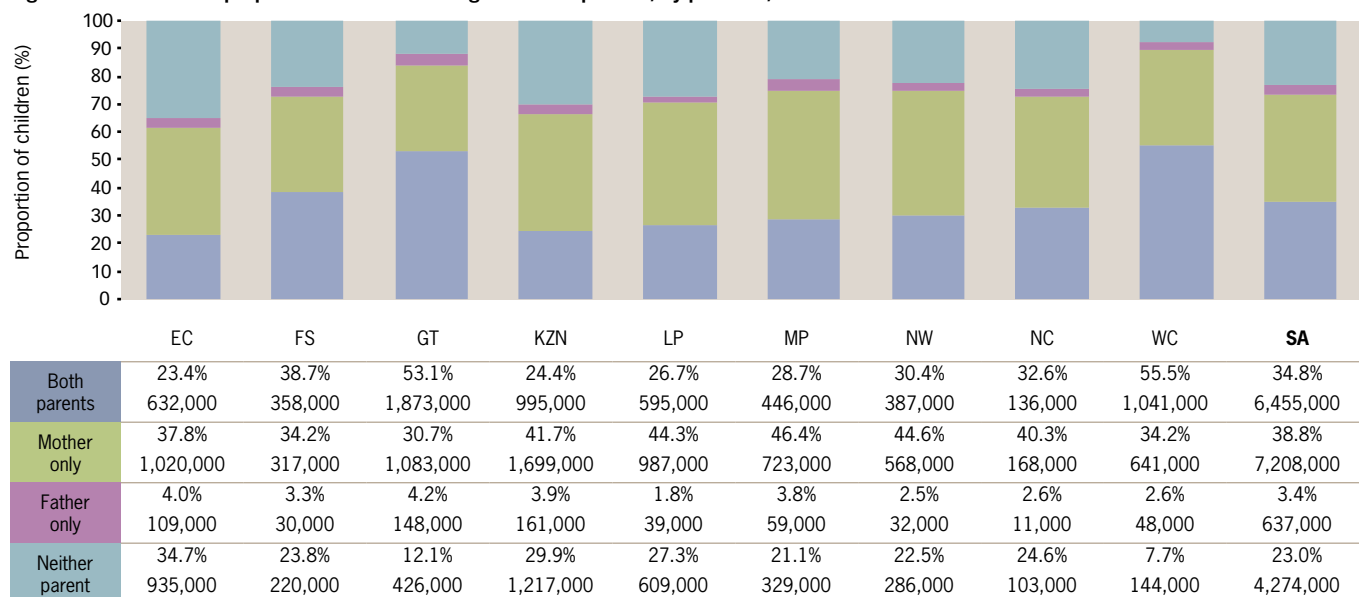
There is some provincial variation in these patterns. In the Western Cape and Gauteng, the proportion of children living with both parents is significantly higher than the national average, with around half of children resident with both parents (56% and 53% respectively). Similarly, the number of children living with neither parent is low in these two provinces (8% and 12%). In contrast, over a third of children (35%) in the Eastern Cape live with neither parent. These patterns are consistent from 2002 to 2012.

Children in the poorest 20% of households are least likely to live with both parents: only 18% have both parents living with them, compared with 78% of children in the least-poor 20% of households.

Less than one third (29%) of African children live with both their parents, while the vast majority of Indian and White children (79% and 78% respectively) are resident with both biological parents. Just over a quarter (26%) of all African children do not live with either parent and a further 42% of African children live with their mothers but without their fathers. These figures are striking for the way in which they suggest the limited presence of biological fathers in the domestic lives of large numbers of African children.

Younger children are more likely than older children to have co-resident mothers while older children are more likely to be living with neither parent. While 8% of children under two years were not resident with either parent in 2012, this situation applied to a quarter of children aged 7 – 9 years, and to 30% of children aged 12 – 17 years. Overall, 18% of children aged 0 – 9 years were not resident with their biological parents in 2012.

Figure 1a: Number and proportion of children living with their parents, by province, 2012



Source: Statistics South Africa (2003, 2013) *General Household Survey 2002*; *General Household Survey 2012*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children’s Institute, UCT.

The number and proportion of orphans living in South Africa

An orphan is defined as a child under the age of 18 years whose mother, father or both biological parents have died (including those whose living status is reported as unknown, but excluding those whose living status is unspecified). For the purpose of this indicator, orphans are defined in three mutually exclusive categories:

- A maternal orphan is a child whose mother has died but whose father is alive.
- A paternal orphan is a child whose father has died but whose mother is alive.
- A double orphan is a child whose mother and father have both died.

The total number of orphans is the sum of maternal, paternal and double orphans. This definition differs from those commonly used by United Nations agencies and the Actuarial Society of South Africa (ASSA), where the definition of maternal and paternal orphans includes children who are double orphans. As the orphan definitions used here are mutually exclusive and additive, the figures differ from orphan estimates provided by the ASSA models.

In 2012, there were approximately 3.54 million orphans in South Africa. This includes children without a living biological mother, father or both parents, and is equivalent to 19% of all children in South Africa. The total number of orphans has increased by 19% since 2002, with 560,000 more orphaned children in 2012 than in 2002.

Orphan numbers do not indicate the nature or extent of care that children are receiving. It is important to disaggregate the total orphan figures because the death of one parent may have different implications for children than the death of both parents. In particular, it seems that children who are maternal orphans are slightly more at risk of poorer outcomes than paternal orphans – for example, in relation to education.³

The vast majority (around 60%) of all orphans in South Africa are paternal orphans (with living mothers). In 2012, 3% of children were maternal orphans with living fathers, 12% were paternal orphans with living mothers, and a further 4% were recorded as double orphans. This means that 16% of children in South Africa did not have a living biological father and 8% did not have a living biological mother. The numbers of paternal orphans are high because of the higher mortality rates of men in South Africa, as well as the frequent absence of fathers in their children's lives (280,000 children have fathers whose vital status is reported to be "unknown").

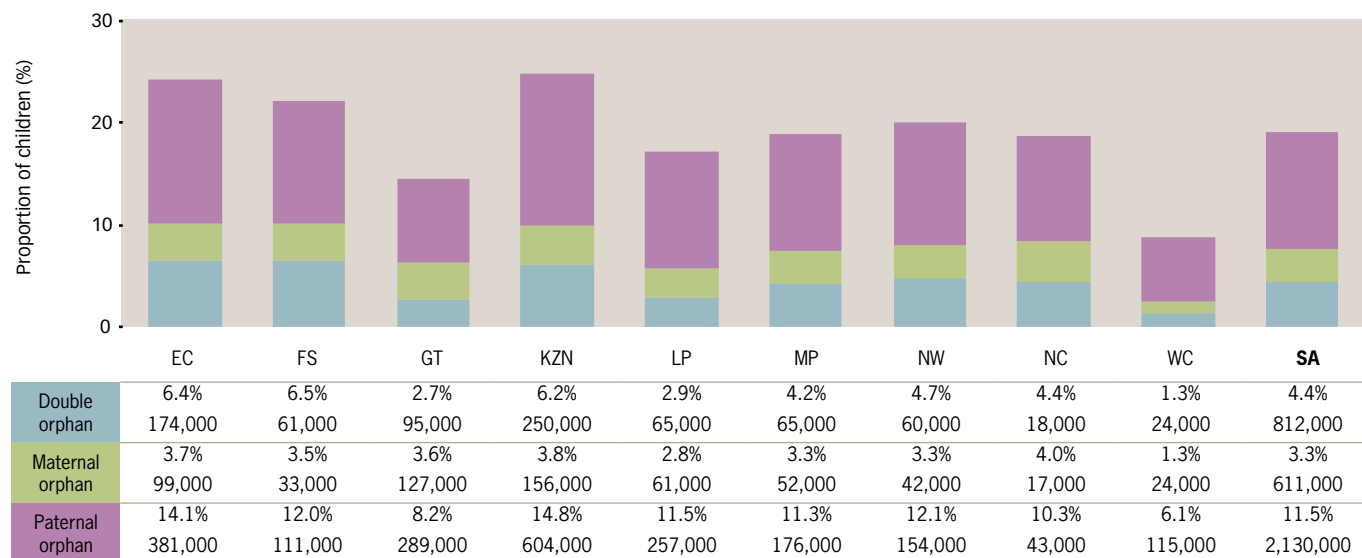
The number and proportion of double orphans has more than doubled since 2002 (from approximately 360,000 to 810,000), translating to an increase of two percentage points in double orphans in South Africa (2002: 2%; 2012: 4%). These increases are likely to be driven primarily by AIDS. Three provinces carry particularly large burdens of care for double orphans: 6% of children living in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape have lost both parents. In the Free State, 7% of children have lost both parents.

Throughout the period 2002 – 2012, roughly half of all orphans in South Africa have been located in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. KwaZulu-Natal has the largest child population and the highest orphan numbers, with 25% of children in that province recorded as orphans who have lost a mother, a father or both parents. Orphaning rates in the Eastern Cape are similarly high, at 24%, followed by the Free State, at 22%. The lowest orphaning rates are in the Western Cape (9% of children have lost at least one parent) and Gauteng (15%).

The poorest households carry the greatest burden of care for orphans. Close to half (47%) of all orphans are resident in the poorest 20% of households. Around a quarter of children in the poorest 20% of households are orphans, compared with the richest 20% where total orphaning rates are around 2%.

Figure 1b: Number and proportion of orphans, by province, 2012

(Y-axis reduced to 30%)



Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2013) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2012*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

The number and proportion of children living in child-only households

A child-only household is defined as a household in which all members are younger than 18 years. These households are also commonly known as “child-headed households”.

There has been much concern within government and civil society that the number of children living in child-only households is escalating as the number of orphaned children increases due to AIDS-related deaths of parents. It has been argued that kinship networks are stretched to their limits and are struggling to provide support to orphaned children. While orphaning undoubtedly places a large burden on families, there is little evidence to suggest that their capacity to care for orphans has been saturated, as commentators have feared. Rather than seeing increasing numbers of orphaned children living without adults, the vast majority of orphans live with family members, and child-headed households are not primarily the result of orphaning.⁴ Nevertheless it will be important to monitor the prevalence and nature of child-headed households as the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues.

There were about 87,000 children living in a total of 40,000 child-only households across South Africa in 2012. This equates to 0.5% of all children. While children living in child-only households are rare relative to those resident in other household forms, the number of children living in this extreme situation is of concern.

Importantly, however, there has been no significant change in the proportion of children living in child-only households in the period between 2002 and 2012, nor has there been any change in the proportion of child-only households over the same period. This is despite a marked increase in orphans in South Africa over the same period. Predictions of rapidly increasing numbers of child-headed households as a result of HIV are at this point unrealised. An analysis of national household surveys to examine the circumstances of children in child-headed households in South Africa reveals that most children in child-only households are not orphans.⁵ These findings

suggest that social phenomena other than HIV may play important roles in the formation of these households.

While it is not ideal for any child to live without an adult resident, it is positive that over half (53%) of all children living in child-only households are aged 15 years and above. Children can work legally from the age of 15, and from 16 they can obtain an identity book and receive grants on behalf of younger children. Only 7% of children in child-headed households are under six years.

Research suggests that child-only households are frequently temporary arrangements, and often exist just for a short period, for example while adult migrant workers are away, or for easy access to school during term-time, or after the death of an adult and prior to other arrangements being made to care for the children (such as other adults moving in or the children moving to live with other relatives).⁶

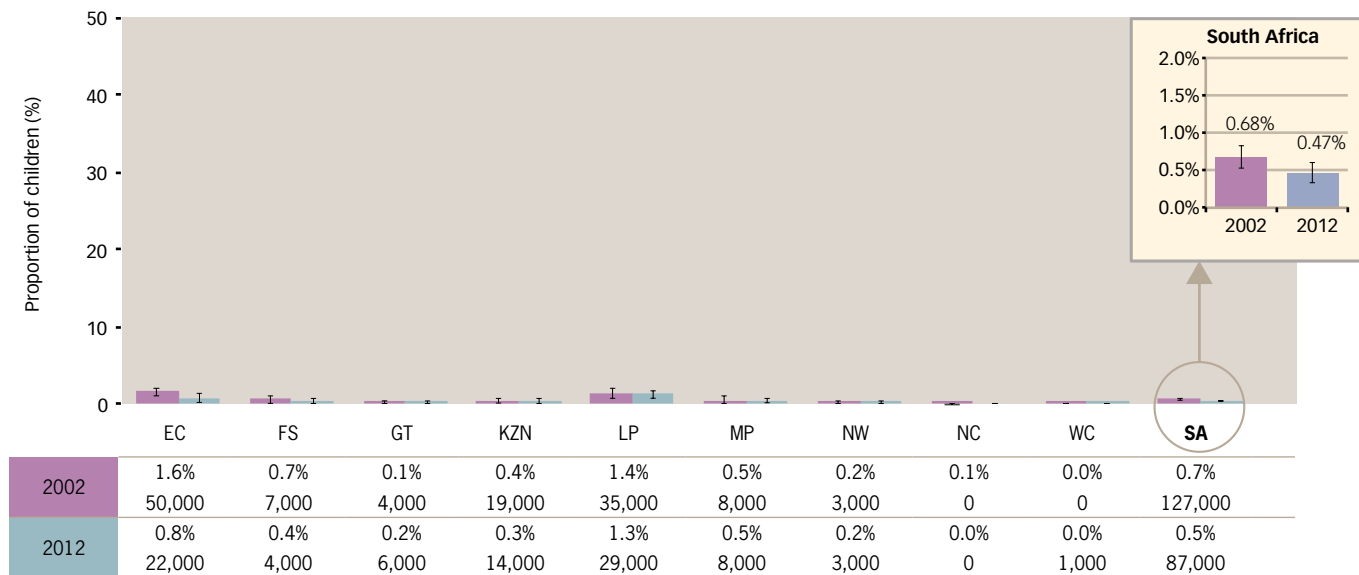
Three-quarters of all children in child-only households live in three provinces: Limpopo (which accounts for 33% of children in child-only households), Eastern Cape (26%) and KwaZulu-Natal (16%). From 2002 to 2012, these provinces have consistently been home to the majority of children living in child-only households.

Relative to children in mixed-generation households, child-only households are vulnerable in a number of ways. Child-only households are predominantly clustered in the poorest 20% of households. In addition to the absence of adult members who may provide care and security, they are at risk of living in poorer conditions, with poor access to services, less (and less reliable) income, and low levels of access to social grants.

There has been very little robust data on child-headed households in South Africa to date. The figures should be treated with caution as the number of child-only households forms just a very small sub-sample of the General Household Survey. In particular, we caution against reading too much into the provincial breakdowns, or into apparent differences between the 2002 and 2012 estimates.

Figure 1c: Number and proportion of children living in child-headed households, by province, 2002 & 2012

(Y-axis reduced to 50%)



Source: Statistics South Africa (2003; 2013) *General Household Survey 2002; General Household Survey 2012*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children’s Institute, UCT.

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