

Demography of South Africa's children

Katharine Hall (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 child population in South Africa

In mid-2018, South Africa's total population was estimated at 57.7 million people,² of whom 19.7 million were children under 18 years. Children therefore make up 34% of the total population.

The distribution of children across provinces is slightly different to that of adults, with a greater share of children living in provinces with large rural populations. Together, KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo accommodate almost half of all children in South Africa. Gauteng, the smallest province in terms of physical size, has overtaken KwaZulu-Natal to become the province with the largest child population: 21% of all children in the country live in Gauteng. Gauteng also has the largest share of the adult population (28%) and the largest share of households. The child population of Gauteng has grown by 42% since 2002, making it the fastest growing province.

There have also been striking changes in other provincial child populations since 2002. The number of children living in the Eastern Cape has decreased substantially (by 14%), while the number of children living in the Western Cape has risen by 22%. The North West has also seen a substantial increase of 19% in the child population since 2002. A rise in the child population is partly the result of population movement (for example, when children are part of migrant households or move to join existing urban households), and partly the result of natural population growth (new births within the province).

We can look at inequality by dividing all households into five equal groups or income quintiles, based on total income to the household (including earnings and social grants) and dividing

that by the number of household members, 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%. Two-thirds of children live in the poorest 40% of households (i.e. the poorest two quintiles).

The gender split is equal for children. In terms of the apartheid-era racial categories, 86% of children are African, 8% are Coloured, 4% White and 2% Indian.

These population estimates are based on the General Household Survey (GHS), which is conducted annually by Statistics South Africa. The GHS collects data on about 20,000 households and over 70,000 individuals. The population numbers derived from the survey are weighted to the mid-year population estimates using weights provided by Statistics South Africa. Using previously weighted data (the 2013 population model), it appeared that the child population had remained fairly stable, with a marginal reduction of 0.2% in the population size between 2002 and 2015. However, there was considerable uncertainty around the official population estimates, particularly in the younger age groups.³ In 2017, Statistics South Africa updated the model and recalibrated the mid-year population estimates all the way back to 2002,⁴ and re-released the data with new weights in 2018. The Children Count team reanalysed all the data retrospectively. Based on the recently revised weights it appears that the child population has grown by 8%, increasing from 18.1 million in 2002 to 19.7 million in 2018.

Table 1a: Distribution of households, adults and children in South Africa, by province, 2018

Province	Households		Adults		Children		% change 2002 – 2018
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Eastern Cape	1,685,149	10	3,994,247	11	2,514,000	13	-14%
Free State	901,319	5	1,869,794	5	1,021,000	5	2%
Gauteng	4,883,861	29	10,475,112	28	4,186,000	21	42%
KwaZulu-Natal	2,904,523	17	7,031,487	19	4,184,000	21	1%
Limpopo	1,578,772	9	3,479,374	9	2,374,000	12	-2%
Mpumalanga	1,288,862	8	2,850,795	8	1,673,000	8	10%
North West	1,209,525	7	2,542,741	7	1,382,000	7	19%
Northern Cape	341,651	2	793,830	2	436,000	2	10%
Western Cape	1,877,193	11	4,679,036	12	1,971,000	10	22%
South Africa	16,670,854	100	37,716,416	100	19,741,000	100	9%

Source: Statistics South Africa (2019) *General Household Survey 2018*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

Children living with their biological parents

Many children in South Africa do not live consistently in the same household as their biological parents. This is a long established feature of childhoods in South Africa, and international studies have shown that the country is unique in the extent that parents are absent from children's daily lives.^{5,6} Parental absence is related to many factors, including historic population control, labour migration, poverty, housing and educational opportunities, low marriage and cohabitation rates, as well as customary care arrangements.⁷⁻¹¹ 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.

Parental absence does not necessarily mean parental abandonment. Many parents continue to support and see their children regularly even if they have to live elsewhere.¹²⁻¹⁴

Virtually all children live with at least one adult, and nearly 90% of children 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 share of children living with both parents decreased from 39% in 2002 to 34% in 2018. Forty-three percent of all children (8.5 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 percent do not have

either of their biological parents living with them. This does not necessarily mean that they are orphaned: most children without any co-resident parents have at least one parent who is alive but living elsewhere.

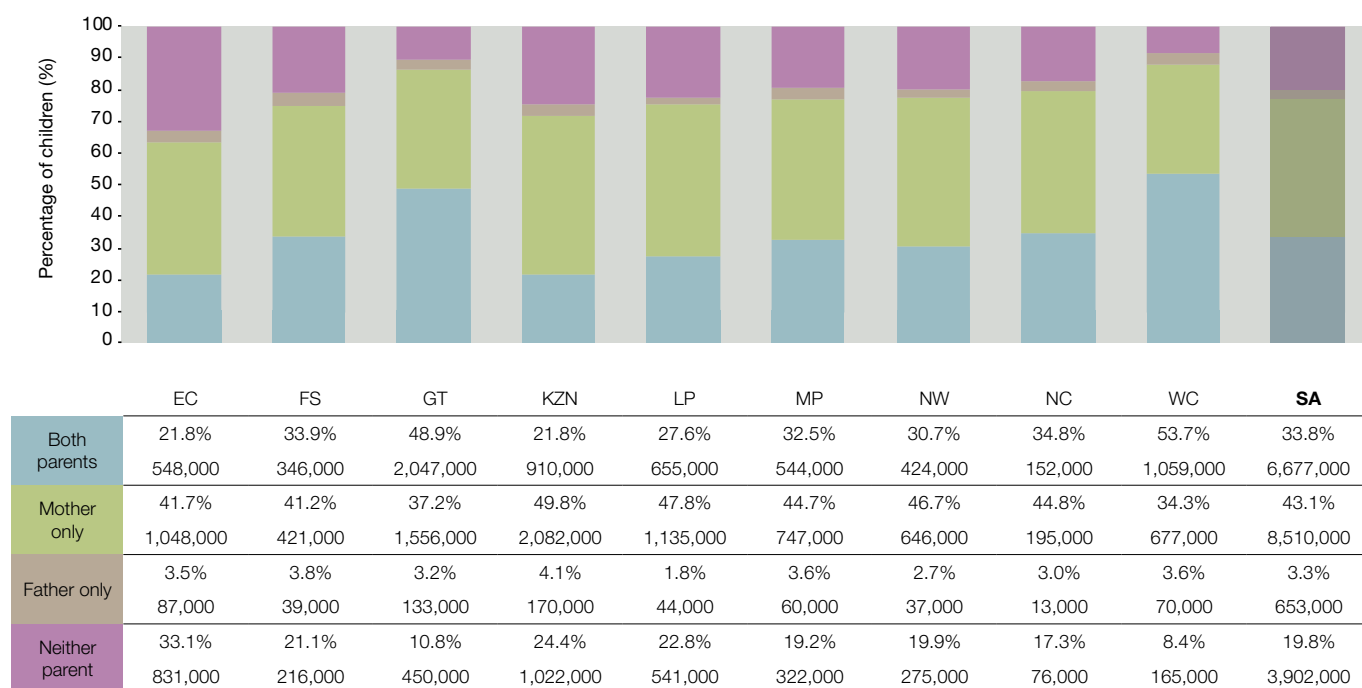
There is substantial provincial variation within these patterns. In the Western Cape and Gauteng, the share of children living with both parents is significantly higher than the national average, with around half of children resident with both parents (54% and 49%, respectively). Similarly, the number of children living with neither parent is relatively low in these two provinces (8% and 11%, respectively). In contrast, a third of children (33%) in the Eastern Cape live with neither parent. These patterns are consistent from 2002 to 2018.

Children in the poorest 20% of households are least likely to live with both parents: only 15% have both parents living with them, compared with 74% of children in the wealthiest 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 (85% and 78%, respectively) reside with both biological parents. Almost a quarter of all African children do not live with either parent and a further 46% live with their mothers but not their fathers. These figures are striking for the way in which they suggest the limited presence of biological fathers in the home lives of large numbers of 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 12% of children aged 0 – 5 years (875,000) live with neither parent, this increases to 27% (1.6 million) of children aged 12 – 17 years.

Figure 1a: Children living with their biological parents, by province, 2018



Source: Statistics South Africa (2019) *General Household Survey 2018*. Pretoria: Stats SA. Analysis by Katharine Hall & Winnie Sambu, Children's Institute, UCT.

References

1. United Nations Children's Fund. *First Call for Children. World Declaration and Plan of Action from the World Summit for Children*. New York: UNICEF; 1990.
2. Statistics South Africa. *Mid-year Population Estimates 2018*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa; 2018.
3. Dorrington R. *Alternative South African Mid-year Estimates 2013*. Monograph 13. University of Cape Town; 2013.
4. Statistics South Africa. *Mid-year Population Estimates 2017*. Pretoria; 2017.
5. Social Trends Institute. *World Family Map 2017: Mapping family change and child well-being outcomes*. New York, Barcelona; 2017.
6. Martin F. Who Cares for Children? A descriptive study of care-related data available through global household surveys and how these could be better mined to inform policies and services to strengthen family care. *Global Social Welfare*. 2016;3(2):51-74.
7. Hall K, Mokomane Z. The shape of children's families and households: A demographic overview. In: Hall K, Richter L, Mokomane Z, Lake L, editors. *Children, Families and the State: Collaboration and Contestation South African Child Gauge 2018*. Cape Town: Children's Institute, UCT; 2018.
8. Hall K, Posel D. Fragmenting the family? The complexity of household migration strategies in post-apartheid South Africa. *IZA Journal of Development and Migration*. 2019;10(4).
9. Hall K. Children's Spatial Mobility and Household Transitions: A study of child mobility and care arrangements in the context of maternal migration [Unpublished PhD thesis]: University of the Witwatersrand; 2017.
10. Makiwane M, Nduna M, Khalema E. *Children in South African Families: Lives and Times*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars; 2016.
11. Amoateng A, Heaton T, editors. *Families and Households in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Socio-demographic Perspectives*. Cape Town: HSRC Press; 2007.
12. Hatch M, Posel D. Who cares for children? A quantitative study of childcare in South Africa. *Development Southern Africa*. 2018;35(2):267-82.
13. Van den Berg W, Makusha T. *State of South Africa's Fathers 2018*. Cape Town; 2018.
14. Madhavan S, Townsend N, Garey A. Absent breadwinners: Father-child connections and paternal support in rural South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 2008;34(3):647-63.