

Demography - Child-only households

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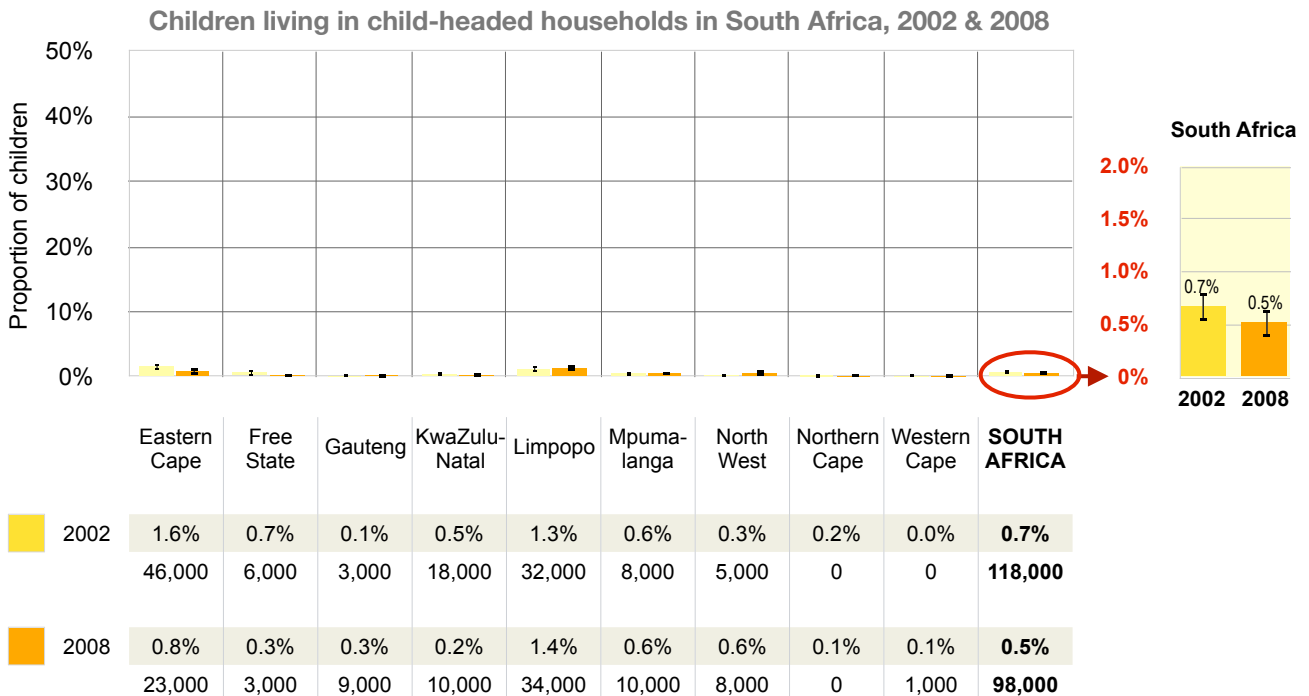
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Definition

A child-only household is defined as a household in which all members are younger than 18 years, i.e. a household consisting only of children. These households are also commonly referred to as 'child-headed households'.

Statistics South Africa, the agency responsible for the General Household Surveys, defines a household as consisting of people who have stayed in a common dwelling for an average of at least four nights a week in the month preceding the survey. The proportion of children living in child-only households in South Africa is calculated by identifying the number of children living in households where the oldest resident is no older than 17 years, and dividing this figure by the total child population in South Africa.

The proportion of child-only households is calculated by dividing the number of households where the oldest resident is no older than 17 years, by the total number of households in South Africa.



Source Statistics South Africa (2003 – 2009) General Household Survey 2002 – 2008. Pretoria, Cape Town: Statistics South Africa.

Analysis by Katharine Hall & Double-Hugh Marera, Children’s Institute, University of Cape Town.

- Notes**
- 1.Children are defined as persons aged 0 – 17 years.
 - 2.Population numbers have been rounded off to the nearest thousand.
 - 3.Sample surveys are always subject to error, and the proportions simply reflect the mid-point of a possible range. The confidence intervals (CIs) indicate the reliability of the estimate at the 95% level. This means that, if independent samples were repeatedly taken from the same population, we would expect the proportion to lie between upper and lower bounds of the CI 95% of the time. The wider the CI, the more uncertain the proportion. Where CIs overlap for different sub-populations or time periods we cannot be sure that there is a real difference in the proportion, even if the mid-point proportions differ. CIs are represented in the bar graphs by vertical lines at the top of each bar.

What do the numbers tell us?

There is much concern within government and civil society that the numbers of children living in child-only households will rapidly increase as the numbers of orphaned children increase due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Many argue that kinship networks are “stretched to their limits” and are struggling to provide support to orphaned children. While there is limited evidence to date that this is the case,¹ it will be important to monitor the prevalence and nature of child-headed households as the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues.

An analysis of the General Household Survey 2008 indicates that there were 100,000 children living in a total of 56,000 child-only households across South Africa at the time of the survey. This is equal to 0.5% of all children (0 – 17-year olds) and to 0.4% of all households in the country. The proportion of children living in child-only households relative to those living in households where adults are resident is therefore small. Importantly, there has been no significant change in the proportion of children living in child-only households in the period between 2002 and 2008, nor has there been any change in the proportion of child-only households over the same period.

While it is not ideal for any child to live without an adult resident, it is positive that half (48%) of all children living in child-only households are aged 15 years and above. Most children living in child-only households (77%) live in four provinces: Limpopo (35%), Eastern Cape (24%), KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga (10% respectively). Over the seven year period 2002 – 2008, these provinces have consistently been home to the bulk of children living in child-only households.

Research suggests that child-only households are frequently temporary households, and often exist just for a period, for example 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).²

Technical notes

There is no robust data on child-only (or ‘child-headed’) households in South Africa to date. In this instance, the figures should be treated with caution as the number of child-only households form just a very small sub-sample of the General Household Survey, which reduces the reliability of the weighted total. In particular, we caution against reading too much into the provincial breakdowns, or into any differences noted between the 2002 and 2008 estimates.

Strengths and limitations of the data

The data are derived from the General Household Survey³, a multi-purpose annual survey conducted by the national statistical agency, Statistics South Africa, to collect information on a range of topics from households in the country’s nine provinces. The survey uses a sample of 30,000 households. These are drawn from Census enumeration areas using multi-stage stratified sampling and probability proportional to size principles. The resulting estimates should be representative of all households in South Africa.

The GHS sample consists of households and does not cover other collective institutionalised living-quarters such as boarding schools, orphanages, students' hostels, old age homes, hospitals, prisons, military barracks and workers' hostels. These exclusions should not have a noticeable impact on the findings in respect of children.

Changes in sample frame and stratification

The current master sample was used for the first time in 2004, meaning that, for longitudinal analysis, 2002 and 2003 may not be easily comparable with later years as they are based on a different sampling frame. From 2006, the sample was stratified first by province and then by district council. Prior to 2006, the sample was stratified by province and then by urban and rural area. The change in stratification could affect the interpretation of results generated by these surveys when they are compared over time.

Provincial boundary changes

Provincial boundary changes occurred between 2002 and 2007, and slightly affect the provincial populations. Comparisons on provincial level should therefore be treated with some caution. The sample and reporting are based on the old provincial boundaries as defined in 2001 and do not represent the new boundaries as defined in December 2005.

Weights

Person and household weights are provided by Statistics South Africa and are applied in Children Count – Abantwana Babalulekile analyses to give estimates at the provincial and national levels. Survey data are prone to sampling and reporting error. Some of the errors are difficult to estimate, while others can be identified. One way of checking for errors is by comparing the survey results with trusted estimates from elsewhere. Such a comparison can give an estimate of the robustness of the survey estimates. For this project, GHS data were compared with estimates from the Statistics South Africa's mid-year estimates, as well as the Actuarial Society of South Africa's ASSA2003 AIDS and Demographic model.

Analyses of the seven surveys from 2002 to 2008 suggest that over- and under-estimation may have occurred in the weighting process:

- When comparing the weighted 2002 data with the ASSA2003 AIDS and Demographic model estimates, it seems that the number of children aged 0 – 9 years was under-estimated in the GHS, while the number of children aged 10 – 19 was over-estimated. The pattern is consistent for both sexes. The number of very young males aged 0 – 4 years appears to be under-estimated by 15%. Girls in this age group have been under-estimated by 15.8%. Males in the 10 – 14-year age group appear to be over-estimated by 5.7%.
- Similarly in 2003, there was considerable under-estimation of the youngest age group (0 – 9 years) and over-estimation of the older age group (10 – 19 years). The pattern is consistent for both sexes. The results also show that the over-estimation of males (9%) in the 10 – 19-year age group is more than double the over-estimation for females in this age range (3.8%).
- In the 2004 results, it seems that the number of children aged 7 – 12 years was over-estimated by 6%, as well as the number of persons aged 13 – 22 years. The number of very young children appeared to have been under-estimated. The patterns of over- and under-estimation appear to differ across population groups. For example, the number of White children appears to be over-estimated by 14%, while the number of Coloured persons within the 13 – 22-year age group appears to be 9% too low.
- In 2005, the GHS weights seem to have produced an over-estimate of the number of males within each five-year age group. The extent of the overestimation is particularly severe for the 10 – 14-year age group. In contrast, the weights produce an under-estimate of the number of girls – the error seems greatest in respect of the younger age groups. These patterns result in male-to-female ratios of 1.06, 1.13, 1.10 and 1.09 respectively for the four age groups covering children (ie 0 – 4, 5 – 9, 10 – 14 and 15 – 19 years).
- The 2006 weighting process yielded the same results as in 2005. The one exception is that the under-estimation of females is greatest in the 5 – 9 and 15 – 19-year age groups. This results in male-to-female ratios of 1.03, 1.10, 1.11 and 1.12 respectively for the four age groups covering children.
- The 2007 weighting process produced an over-estimation for boys and an under-estimation for girls. The under-estimation of females is in the range of 3 – 5% while the over-estimation is in the range of 1

– 7%. This results in male-to-female ratios of 1.07, 1.06, 1.08 and 1.08 respectively for the four age groups covering children.

- Overall, assuming the ASSA2003 Aids and Demographic model to be the ‘gold standard’, it appears that the GHS2008 over-estimates both male and female populations under the age of 19 years, except for 0 – 4- year-old females. The extent of over-estimation for boys is in the range 0 – 7%. It is particularly severe for boys aged 10 – 14 years. Over-estimation is in the range of 2 – 5% for girls aged five years and above. For girls aged 0 – 4 years, the ASSA2003 model suggests that these may have been under-estimated by about 1%. The GHS2008 suggests a sex ratio of 1.03 for children aged 0 – 4 years, which is higher than that of the ASSA model and Statistics South Africa's mid-year estimates.

The apparent discrepancies in the seven years of data may slightly affect the accuracy of the Children Count – Abantwana Babalulekile estimates. Since 2005 the male and female patterns vary in respect of a particular characteristic, which means that the total estimate for this characteristic will be somewhat slanted toward the male pattern. A similar slanting will occur where the pattern for 10 – 14-year-olds, for example, differs from that of other age groups. Furthermore, there are likely to be different patterns across population groups.

Disaggregation

Statistics South Africa suggests caution when attempting to interpret data generated at low level disaggregation. The population estimates are benchmarked at the national level in terms of age, sex and population group while at provincial level, benchmarking is by population group only. This could mean that estimates derived from any further disaggregation of the provincial data below the population group may not be robust enough.

Reporting error

Error may be present due to the methodology used, ie the questionnaire is administered to only one respondent in the household who is expected to provide information about all other members of the household. Not all respondents will have accurate information about all children in the household. In instances where the respondent did not or could not provide an answer, this was recorded as “unspecified” (no response) or “don’t know” (the respondent stated that they didn’t know the answer).

References and related links

- ¹ Meintjes H, Hall K, Marera D & Boulle A (2010) Orphans of the AIDS Epidemic? The extent, nature and circumstances of child-headed households in South Africa. *AIDS Care*, 22(1): 40-49
Meintjes H & Giese S (2006) Spinning the epidemic: the making of mythologies of orphanhood in the context of AIDS. *Childhood: A global journal of child research*, 13(3): 407-430
 - ² Ibid; Hill C, Hosegood V & Newell M-L (2008) Children's care and living arrangements in a high HIV prevalence area in rural South Africa. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 3(1): 65-77.
 - ³ Statistics South Africa (2003-2009). *General Household Survey 2002-2008 Metadata*. Cape Town, Pretoria: Statistics South Africa
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