

CHAPTER 5

OTHER PROXIMATE DETERMINANTS OF FERTILITY

This chapter focuses on the principal factors, other than contraception, that affect a woman's risk of becoming pregnant. These include: nuptiality, sexual activity, postpartum amenorrhoea and abstinence from sexual relations. Marriage and sexual initiation signal the onset of women's exposure to the risk of childbearing; postpartum amenorrhoea and abstinence affect the interval between births. These factors determine the length and pace of reproductive activity and are, therefore, important in understanding fertility.

5.1 Marital Status

The distribution of women according to their marital status¹ is shown in the upper panel of Table 5.1. The data shows that 27 percent of women of reproductive age in Zimbabwe have never married, 62 percent are currently married, and 11 percent are widowed or divorced. The proportion never married

Table 5.1 Current marital status

Percent distribution of women and men by current marital status, according to age, Zimbabwe 1994

Age	Marital status				Total	Number
	Never married	Married	Widowed	Divorced		
WOMEN						
15-19	79.2	18.8	0.1	1.9	100.0	1,472
20-24	28.4	62.9	0.7	8.1	100.0	1,269
25-29	7.5	79.3	2.6	10.4	100.0	915
30-34	3.3	82.9	3.9	9.9	100.0	871
35-39	1.2	80.2	7.0	11.6	100.0	661
40-44	2.3	79.8	8.8	9.0	100.0	532
45-49	0.6	76.4	13.0	10.0	100.0	407
Total	26.9	61.8	3.5	7.8	100.0	6,128
MEN						
15-19	98.2	1.6	0.0	0.2	100.0	604
20-24	73.5	24.7	0.0	1.8	100.0	399
25-29	32.2	61.5	0.6	5.7	100.0	288
30-34	5.8	84.8	0.8	8.6	100.0	241
35-39	1.9	90.0	0.0	8.0	100.0	195
40-44	2.1	90.4	0.6	6.9	100.0	190
45-49	0.9	91.2	1.0	6.9	100.0	111
50-54	0.9	89.2	3.1	6.9	100.0	113
Total	46.9	48.5	0.4	4.2	100.0	2,141

Note: Figures may not add to 100.0 due to rounding

¹ In the ZDHS, *marriage* includes both formal and informal unions. Informal unions are those in which a man and woman stay together intending to have a lasting relationship, even if a formal civil or religious ceremony has not yet occurred.

declines sharply from 79 percent in age group 15-19 to less than 1 percent among women 45-49 years of age. Marriage is thus nearly universal in Zimbabwe.

The proportion of women who are currently married increases with age until age group 30-34 and then declines slowly because of the increasing levels of widowhood with age. The proportion divorced is evenly distributed across all age groups except age group 15-19 where the proportion is very small.

The lower panel of Table 5.1 shows that 47 percent of the men interviewed have never been married, 49 percent are currently married and 4 percent are divorced, while less than 1 percent are widowed. Compared with women, a much greater proportion of the interviewed men (20 percentage points more) have never been married. Widowhood is almost nonexistent for men, suggesting that men are more likely than women to remarry upon the death of a spouse. Divorce is also lower among men than women.

Virtually no change has occurred in marital patterns over the 6-year period since the 1988 ZDHS except that the proportion of women who are widowed increased slightly from 3 percent in the 1988 ZDHS to 4 percent in the 1994 ZDHS. Men were not interviewed in the 1988 ZDHS.

5.2 Marital Exposure

Table 5.2 presents information on variations in marital exposure by age and background characteristics. The calendar part of the ZDHS female questionnaire collects information about the marriage experience of women during the five years preceding the survey. The proportion of this period spent in union depends on the age at first union, marital disruption (divorce and widowhood) and remarriage. Since the

Table 5.2 Marital exposure

For all women 15-49, the percentage of months in the five years prior to the survey spent in marital union, by age and selected background characteristics, Zimbabwe 1994

Background characteristic	Current age							Total
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	
Residence								
Urban	4.6	35.8	73.5	81.8	74.6	76.1	65.7	50.5
Rural	7.4	51.6	78.1	87.1	87.4	85.7	82.9	58.7
Province								
Manicaland	7.3	52.0	83.0	98.0	82.2	82.7	(83.2)	58.6
Mashonaland Central	10.3	55.9	78.1	79.3	88.4	90.2	(84.7)	60.1
Mashonaland East	4.7	55.9	78.8	90.4	87.6	88.6	(94.0)	61.1
Mashonaland West	10.4	56.9	80.9	83.0	77.5	78.4	(74.5)	59.1
Matabeleland North	11.7	48.6	(73.1)	(86.4)	(88.5)	(86.6)	(88.6)	58.6
Matabeleland South	3.3	38.5	(64.3)	(78.5)	(88.4)	(82.5)	(79.0)	53.5
Midlands	5.4	40.4	70.0	85.4	87.0	85.6	75.1	54.9
Masvingo	5.1	50.3	80.0	86.0	82.5	84.1	(79.5)	55.9
Harare	5.3	33.7	79.8	85.4	76.4	(79.0)	(57.7)	51.4
Bulawayo	2.2	34.6	65.1	67.8	86.0	72.6	(72.6)	47.8
Education								
No education	(41.4)	(71.0)	81.2	89.0	87.3	80.6	81.3	82.7
Primary	10.7	61.4	84.4	85.9	81.8	83.7	77.4	65.1
Secondary+	3.1	35.9	70.0	81.3	84.4	85.1	(84.9)	38.6
Total	6.5	45.7	76.5	85.3	83.5	83.1	79.1	56.1

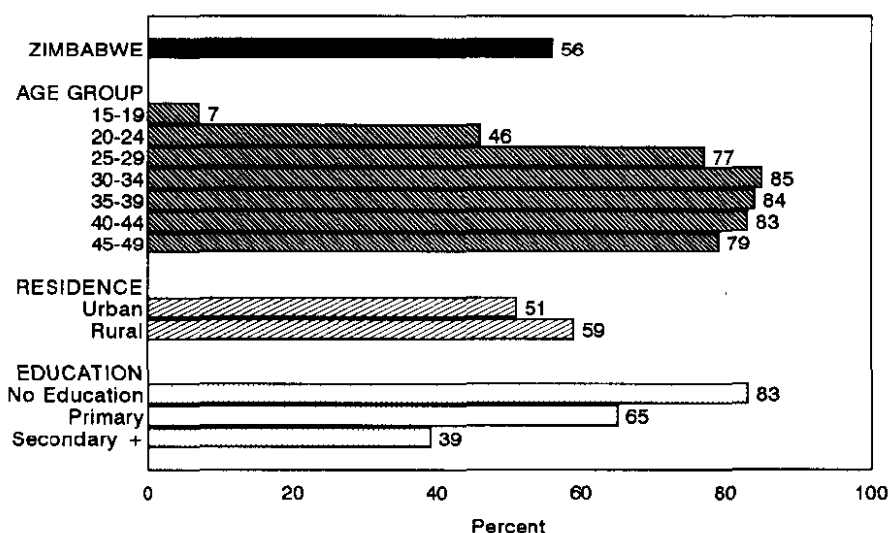
Note: Figures in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 women.

proportion of women age 15-19 who are widowed or divorced is usually very small (about 2 percent in Zimbabwe), marital exposure for this age group is affected mainly by age at first marriage. At the older age groups, widowhood and divorce may be more important, especially within the context of universal marriage.

The percentage of months in the five years before the survey spent in marital union displays an inverted J-shape curve when presented according to age of women; increasing from 7 percent among women age 15-19 to 85 percent in age group 30-34 and then declining to 79 percent in age group 45-49 (see Figure 5.1). At every age, rural women are more likely to be in union in the five years prior to the survey than urban women, which is reflected in provincial variations as well. Bulawayo and Harare (both highly urbanized) have the lowest marital exposure in the five years prior to the survey, while Mashonaland East, Mashonaland Central, and Mashonaland West have the highest exposure levels.

Marital exposure is negatively related to female education. Overall, marital exposure declines from 83 percent among women with no formal education, to 65 and 39 percent, respectively, among women with primary and secondary or more education. However, the relationship between marital exposure and education varies with age. In younger age groups, marital exposure declines with increasing level of education, but appears to increase with education at older ages. Among women age 15-19 years, marital exposure declines from 41 percent for those with no education to 3 percent for those with secondary or higher education. The same pattern is observed for age group 20-24. However, for the two oldest age groups, women with secondary or higher education have the longest marital exposure in the five years prior to the survey. The low marital exposure of more educated women in the younger age groups reflects increasing age at entry into union, while higher exposure in older age groups may reflect lower divorce or widowhood rates in the past among more educated women.

Figure 5.1
Percentage of Months in Last 5 Years
Spent in Marital Union by Women Age 15-49



ZDHS 1994

5.3 Polygyny

The extent of polygyny in Zimbabwe was measured by asking all currently married female respondents the question: "Besides yourself, how many other wives does your husband have?" For currently married men, the question was: "How many wives do you have?" The proportion of currently married women in a polygynous union according to age group and selected background characteristics is shown in Table 5.3.1 and in Figure 5.2. Overall, 19 percent of currently married women in Zimbabwe are in polygynous unions. Older women are more likely to be in polygynous unions than younger women. Also, polygyny is higher among rural women than urban women. There are provincial variations in polygyny levels with Harare having the lowest level (11 percent) and Manicaland the highest (27 percent). Provincial variations in polygyny levels cut across ethnic and geographic boundaries. For instance, the level of polygyny in Matabeleland North is twice that in Matabeleland South.

Table 5.3.1 Polygyny: women

Percentage of currently married women in a polygynous union, by age and selected background characteristics, Zimbabwe 1994

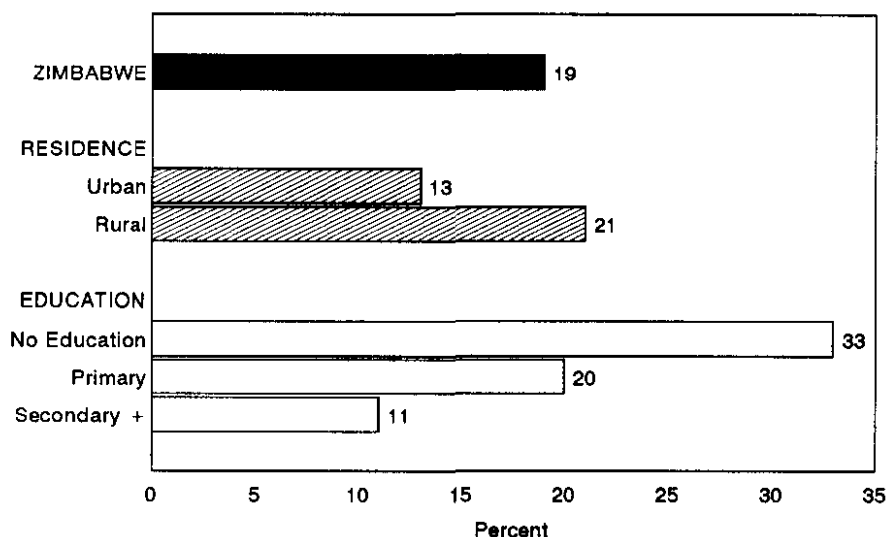
Residence	Age of woman							Total
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	
Residence								
Urban	7.5	8.6	16.8	12.6	10.9	13.7	22.7	12.8
Rural	14.5	14.2	18.9	22.8	24.8	26.0	30.2	21.1
Province								
Manicaland	(12.6)	16.9	20.5	33.3	37.2	(31.8)	(38.1)	26.5
Mashonaland Central	(6.9)	19.0	15.3	17.6	30.1	28.7	(31.3)	20.7
Mashonaland East	*	10.0	11.9	10.0	24.0	(19.0)	(23.2)	14.7
Mashonaland West	(18.9)	10.6	16.1	13.3	13.1	(18.9)	(23.2)	15.0
Matabeleland North	(32.0)	21.0	22.7	27.9	31.1	23.3	(28.6)	25.9
Matabeleland South	*	9.8	12.1	6.8	19.9	(15.6)	(15.5)	12.7
Midlands	(17.4)	11.3	21.5	21.0	19.8	(27.7)	(31.7)	20.6
Masvingo	(11.2)	12.2	26.1	29.4	18.6	(24.4)	(27.4)	21.8
Harare	(4.8)	4.5	12.5	15.0	(6.8)	(15.2)	*	10.9
Bulawayo	*	24.4	26.2	10.7	13.0	(16.2)	*	19.1
Education								
No education	*	(35.0)	24.2	36.3	29.1	33.6	39.6	32.8
Primary	17.3	17.4	21.4	17.3	20.1	20.3	27.3	19.8
Secondary+	6	7.2	14.7	12.1	9.5	(18.9)	(3.7)	10.5
Total	12.8	12.4	18.2	19.4	21.1	23.1	28.8	18.6

Note: Figures in parentheses are based on 25-49 women, an asterisk indicates that a figure is based on fewer than 25 women and has been suppressed.

There is an inverse relationship between female education and polygyny. The proportion of currently married women in a polygynous union decreases from 33 percent among women with no formal education to 11 percent among those with at least some secondary education.

Compared with the 1988 ZDHS, polygyny appears to be on the increase in Zimbabwe, especially in urban areas and among women with at least primary education. Overall, polygyny increased from 17 percent in the 1988 ZDHS to 19 percent in the current survey. Among urban women, the increase is from 9 to 13

Figure 5.2
Percentage of Currently Married Women
Whose Husbands Have at least One Other Wife



ZDHS 1994

percent. For women with only primary education, polygyny increased from 16 to 20 percent between the two surveys, and from 7 to 11 percent for those with secondary or higher education. This trend has not been commonly observed in sub-Saharan Africa; most countries have shown modest declines in the practice of polygyny. The finding does, however, parallel results from other countries in the province, especially with respect to surprising rises in polygyny among educated women.²

The data for currently married men is shown in Table 5.3.2. Only 8 percent of the men interviewed are in a polygynous union and this varies greatly with age. Less than 2 percent of men under age 30 are in a polygynous union, compared with about 17 percent of those age 45 and over. Rural men are also more likely to have multiple wives than urban men. There is substantial provincial variation in the distribution of men who are in a polygynous union, ranging from 4 percent in Mashonaland East to 15 percent in Matabeleland North. Men with primary or no education are more than twice as likely to be in a polygynous union as those with secondary or more education. While polygyny is 66 percent higher among women with no education compared with those with only primary education, there is no difference in polygyny levels between men with primary education and those with no education.

² Pebley, Ann., Wariara Mbugua, and Noreen Goldman. 1988. Polygyny and fertility in sub-Saharan Africa. *Fertility Determinants Research Notes* 21:6-10.

Table 5.3.2 Polygyny: men

Percentage of currently married men in a polygynous union, by age and selected background characteristics, Zimbabwe 1994

Residence	Age of man							Total
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	
Residence								
Urban	1.4	0.0	7.7	14.4	4.4	(11.9)	(11.1)	6.8
Rural	1.9	3.5	5.6	10.4	11.7	21.3	17.5	9.7
Province								
Manicaland	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	14.2
Mashonaland Central	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	7.1
Mashonaland East	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	4.2
Mashonaland West	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	8.0
Matabeleland North	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	14.8
Matabeleland South	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	8.3
Midlands	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	12.5
Masvingo	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	9.6
Harare	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	5.4
Bulawayo	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	5.2
Education								
No education	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	11.9
Primary	*	(1.5)	(4.9)	14.9	8.8	17.6	18.8	11.1
Secondary+	*	2.0	7.7	7.5	9.5	*	*	5.1
Total	1.7	1.9	6.6	12.2	8.3	18.0	15.3	8.4

Note. Figures in parentheses are based on 25-49 men; an asterisk indicates that a figure is based on fewer than 25 men and has been suppressed. There are too few married men age 15-19 to show separately.

Table 5.4.1 shows the distribution of currently married women by number of co-wives, according to selected background characteristics. The table shows that 81 percent of all currently married women are in a monogamous union, 14 percent are in polygynous unions with one co-wife, and only a small proportion (5 percent) are in polygynous marriages with two or more co-wives. In general, women in groups with relatively high levels of polygyny are also more likely to have more than one co-wife. This is true of women over age 30, rural women, those with no formal education, and women in Manicaland and Matabeleland North provinces. Less than 2 percent of the men have three or more wives (see Table 5.4.2).

Table 5.4 1 Number of co-wives: women

Percent distribution of currently married women by number of co-wives, according to background characteristics, Zimbabwe 1994

Background characteristic	Number of co-wives			Missing	Total	Number of women
	0	1	2+			
Age						
15-19	87.2	10.4	2.5	0.0	100.0	276
20-24	87.6	9.7	2.7	0.1	100.0	798
25-29	81.8	13.4	4.2	0.5	100.0	726
30-34	80.6	12.7	6.4	0.2	100.0	722
35-39	78.9	16.0	4.8	0.3	100.0	530
40-44	76.9	16.4	6.3	0.4	100.0	425
45-49	71.2	21.9	6.2	0.8	100.0	311
Residence						
Urban	87.2	9.2	2.8	0.8	100.0	1,114
Rural	78.9	15.5	5.5	0.1	100.0	2,674
Province						
Manicaland	73.5	18.3	8.2	0.0	100.0	543
Mashonaland Central	79.3	17.1	3.3	0.3	100.0	342
Mashonaland East	85.3	10.7	4.0	0.0	100.0	377
Mashonaland West	85.0	11.5	3.2	0.3	100.0	429
Matabeleland North	74.1	18.5	7.2	0.2	100.0	239
Matabeleland South	87.3	8.2	4.2	0.3	100.0	183
Midlands	79.4	15.5	4.7	0.5	100.0	472
Masvingo	78.2	17.3	4.5	0.0	100.0	393
Harare	89.1	6.1	3.9	0.8	100.0	619
Bulawayo	80.9	16.3	2.1	0.7	100.0	191
Education						
No education	67.2	24.3	8.3	0.2	100.0	552
Primary	80.2	14.4	5.2	0.2	100.0	1,992
Secondary+	89.5	7.7	2.2	0.6	100.0	1,244
Total	81.4	13.7	4.7	0.3	100.0	3,788

Table 5.4.2 Number of wives: men

Percent distribution of currently married men by number of wives, according to background characteristics, Zimbabwe 1994

Background characteristic	Number of wives			Missing	Total	Number of men
	1	2	3+			
Age						
20-24	98.3	1.7	0.0	0.0	100.0	99
25-29	98.1	1.0	0.8	0.0	100.0	177
30-34	93.4	5.8	0.8	0.0	100.0	204
35-39	86.3	8.4	3.8	1.5	100.0	176
40-44	90.7	7.7	0.6	1.0	100.0	171
45-49	82.0	12.6	5.4	0.0	100.0	101
50-54	84.7	13.5	1.8	0.0	100.0	101
Residence						
Urban	92.5	5.9	0.9	0.7	100.0	452
Rural	89.9	7.3	2.4	0.3	100.0	586
Province						
Manicaland	84.5	11.8	2.4	1.4	100.0	125
Mashonaland Central	92.9	6.2	0.9	0.0	100.0	90
Mashonaland East	94.7	4.2	0.0	1.1	100.0	89
Mashonaland West	92.0	4.1	3.9	0.0	100.0	127
Matabeleland North	85.2	12.3	2.4	0.0	100.0	42
Matabeleland South	91.7	8.3	0.0	0.0	100.0	32
Midlands	85.4	8.6	3.9	2.2	100.0	121
Masvingo	90.4	8.3	1.3	0.0	100.0	83
Harare	94.6	4.7	0.8	0.0	100.0	243
Bulawayo	94.8	4.4	0.7	0.0	100.0	86
Education						
No education	88.1	10.2	1.6	0.0	100.0	67
Primary	87.9	8.8	2.3	1.1	100.0	500
Secondary+	94.9	4.0	1.2	0.0	100.0	472
Total	91.1	6.7	1.7	0.5	100.0	1,038

Note. There are too few married men age 15-19 to show separately.

5.4 Age at First Marriage

For most societies, marriage marks the point in a woman's life when childbearing first becomes socially acceptable. Women who marry early will, on average, have longer exposure to reproductive risk; therefore, early age at first marriage often implies early age at childbearing and higher fertility for a society. Information on age at first marriage was obtained by asking all ever-married respondents the month and year they started living together with their first spouse.

The median age at first marriage in Zimbabwe has risen slowly from 18.9 years among women age 40-49 to 19.8 years among women age 20-24 (representing recent marital patterns) (see Table 5.5). The proportion of women married by age 15 declined from 11 percent among those age 45-49 to 3 percent among women age 15-19 years. Overall, 62 percent of Zimbabwean women currently age 25-49 were married by age 20.

Table 5.5 Age at first marriage

Percentage of women and men who were first married by specific exact age and median age at first marriage, according to current age, Zimbabwe 1994

WOMEN								
Current age	Percentage who were first married by exact age:					Percentage who had never married	Number of women	Median age at first marriage
	15	18	20	22	25			
15-19	3.1	NA	NA	NA	NA	79.2	1,472	a
20-24	6.4	31.0	51.7	NA	NA	28.4	1,269	19.8
25-29	9.4	34.2	56.4	73.0	87.7	7.5	915	19.3
30-34	11.4	41.9	64.8	78.0	89.8	3.3	871	18.7
35-39	9.5	40.1	65.0	82.5	93.5	1.2	661	18.8
40-44	9.4	37.0	62.1	77.2	87.4	2.3	532	18.9
45-49	10.9	40.5	61.7	78.4	89.6	0.6	407	18.9
20-49	9.1	36.5	59.0	74.5	84.7	10.3	4,656	19.2
25-49	10.1	38.5	61.7	77.4	89.6	3.5	3,387	18.9
MEN								
Current age	Percentage who were first married by exact age:					Percentage who had never married	Number of men	Median age at first marriage
	20	22	25	28	30			
20-24	7.3	NA	NA	NA	NA	73.5	399	a
25-29	5.6	17.7	45.5	65.6	67.8	32.2	288	a
30-34	8.7	20.9	45.5	71.8	86.1	5.8	241	25.5
35-39	13.6	32.1	61.7	76.2	82.9	1.9	195	23.8
40-44	12.0	27.2	52.3	77.1	83.2	2.1	190	24.7
45-49	5.9	19.7	45.9	63.0	71.6	0.9	111	25.5
50-54	12.1	21.5	40.7	56.5	63.5	0.9	113	26.7
30-54	10.7	24.8	50.1	70.8	79.8	2.8	849	25.0

NA = Not applicable

^aOmitted because less than 50 percent of the women or men in the age group x to $x+4$ were first married by age x .

Comparison with data from the male survey shows that men enter into first union at a much later age than women: the median age at first marriage for men is 25 years, compared with 19 years for women. Only 11 percent of men are married by age 20, compared with 62 percent of women.

Table 5.6 examines the median age at first marriage for women age 20-49 by selected background characteristics. The overall median age at first marriage observed for women age 25-49 is 18.9 years. However, the table shows large differentials in the median age at first marriage by background characteristics. Urban women marry about one year later than rural women. There are even greater variations by province. Mashonaland West has the lowest median age at first marriage (17.5 years) while Bulawayo and Matabeleland South have the highest (20.8 and 20.1 years, respectively). The median age at marriage in the other provinces ranges from 18.4 to 19.6 years.

Table 5.6 Median age at first marriage

Median age at first marriage among women age 20-49 years, by current age and selected background characteristics, Zimbabwe 1994

Background characteristic	Current age						Women age 20-49	Women age 25-49
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49		
Residence								
Urban	a	20.0	19.5	19.2	19.3	18.7	20.0	19.5
Rural	19.1	19.0	18.3	18.6	18.8	18.9	18.8	18.7
Province								
Manicaland	19.7	18.2	17.5	19.3	18.9	18.9	18.7	18.5
Mashonaland Central	18.3	19.0	18.3	17.9	18.7	17.7	18.4	18.4
Mashonaland East	18.6	18.8	18.3	18.1	18.6	19.0	18.5	18.5
Mashonaland West	18.3	17.7	17.7	17.2	17.4	17.6	17.7	17.5
Matabeleland North	19.3	20.1	19.0	18.8	18.6	20.4	19.3	19.3
Matabeleland South	a	21.1	19.8	20.0	19.2	19.4	a	20.1
Midlands	a	20.4	19.0	19.4	19.1	20.0	19.8	19.6
Masvingo	19.1	18.7	18.7	18.9	18.8	18.9	18.8	18.8
Harare	a	19.7	19.3	19.4	18.8	18.3	19.9	19.3
Bulawayo	a	21.3	20.3	19.8	22.1	20.8	a	20.8
Education								
No education	(16.5)	16.2	16.6	17.7	18.2	19.4	17.4	17.5
Primary	18.0	18.0	18.4	18.9	18.8	18.5	18.4	18.5
Secondary+	a	20.7	21.0	20.4	21.0	20.5	a	20.8
Total	19.8	19.3	18.7	18.8	18.9	18.9	19.2	18.9

Note: The median for women 15-19 could not be determined because some women may still get married before reaching age 20. Figures in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 women.

^a Omitted because less than 50 percent of the women in the age group x to $x+4$ were first married by age x .

There is a marked relationship between female education and median age at first marriage. The median age at first marriage for women with no formal education is 17.5 years, compared with 18.5 years for those with primary education and 20.8 years for women with secondary or higher education. Within educational groups, age at first marriage has remained virtually constant since the 1988 ZDHS. Overall age at marriage has increased solely because the proportion of women who are educated to the secondary level (and marry later) has increased substantially.

5.5 Age at First Sexual Intercourse

Age at first marriage is often used as a proxy for the onset of women's exposure to the risk of pregnancy. However, since some women are sexually active before marriage, the age at which women initiate sexual intercourse more precisely marks the beginning of their exposure to reproductive risk.

The percentage of women and men who have ever had intercourse by specific ages is given in Table 5.7. The median age at first sexual intercourse for women has risen slowly in recent years from 18.0 years for cohort age 30-34 to 18.8 for cohort age 20-24.³ This corresponds roughly to the one-year rise in age at first marriage discussed in the previous section. Among women in the 15-19 age group, 70 percent have never had sex. This proportion drops to 17 percent for women age 20-24, and by age 25-29 almost all women have become sexually active.

³ The decrease in median age at first sex observed between the cohort age 45-49 and the cohort age 30-34 is almost certainly an artifact of recall problems among the older women who tend to overestimate their age at first sex.

Table 5.7 Age at first sexual intercourse

Percentage of women and men who had first sexual intercourse by exact age 15, 18, 20, 22, and 25, and median age at first intercourse, according to current age, Zimbabwe 1994

Current age	Percentage who had first intercourse by exact age:					Percentage who never had intercourse	Number of women/ men	Median age at first intercourse
	15	18	20	22	25			
WOMEN								
15-19	5.2	NA	NA	NA	NA	70.3	1,472	a
20-24	7.4	38.6	64.5	NA	NA	17.3	1,269	18.8
25-29	10.8	45.1	68.9	82.4	90.4	2.1	915	18.4
30-34	12.1	49.4	72.8	84.8	89.1	0.7	871	18.0
35-39	12.0	49.1	74.5	86.5	90.9	0.3	661	18.1
40-44	10.2	40.9	67.3	79.9	85.7	0.1	532	18.6
45-49	13.6	46.6	66.6	77.9	85.7	0.0	407	18.3
20-49	10.5	44.4	68.8	81.1	86.5	5.3	4,656	18.4
25-49	11.6	46.5	70.5	82.9	88.9	0.8	3,387	18.3
MEN								
15-19	7.9	NA	NA	NA	NA	67.1	604	a
20-24	7.6	38.3	71.8	NA	NA	13.9	399	18.7
25-29	6.8	34.0	61.8	80.3	92.4	1.1	288	19.0
30-34	5.0	29.4	58.9	79.4	88.9	0.0	241	19.1
35-39	7.0	31.3	55.7	78.6	92.8	0.0	195	19.6
40-44	3.4	22.5	52.1	77.4	88.7	0.0	190	19.8
45-49	5.8	24.9	49.4	73.5	82.4	0.0	111	20.0
50-54	4.4	11.3	32.8	56.8	80.4	0.0	113	21.0
25-54	5.6	27.5	54.5	76.3	88.9	0.3	1,137	19.6

NA = Not applicable

^a Omitted because less than 50 percent in the age group x to $x+4$ had had intercourse by age x

The data from male respondents show a different picture, one of decreasing age at first sex from about 21.0 years in the cohort currently age 50-54 to 18.7 years for the cohort age 20-24.

The median age at first sex for men (all ages) is 19.6 years, compared with 18.3 years for women. Although men enter into marriage, on average, six years later than women, they start sexual relations only 16 months later than women. Looking at trends over age cohorts, it can be seen that the difference in the median age at first sex between men and women has declined considerably from over 20 months in the cohort age 45-49 years, to only seven months for the cohort age 25-29 years, to essentially no difference in the cohort age 20-24 years.

Tables 5.8.1 and 5.8.2 show differentials in the median age at first sexual intercourse by background characteristics for women age 20-49 years and men age 20-54 years. With respect to place of residence, on average, rural women start sexual relations six months earlier than urban women. There is little variation by province. Harare province has the highest median age at first sexual intercourse (18.9 years) while Mashonaland West and Matabeleland South have the lowest (17.3 years). Women with secondary or more education initiate sexual relations at least two years later, on average, than those with no formal education.

Table 5.8.1 Median age at first intercourse: women

Median age at first sexual intercourse among women age 20-49 years, by current age and selected background characteristics, Zimbabwe 1994

Background characteristic	Current age						Women age 20-49	Women age 25-49
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49		
Residence								
Urban	19.9	18.8	18.7	18.3	18.8	18.6	19.0	18.6
Rural	18.2	18.2	17.7	17.9	18.5	18.3	18.1	18.1
Province								
Manicaland	*	*	*	*	*	*	18.6	18.3
Mashonaland Central	*	*	*	*	*	*	18.5	18.5
Mashonaland East	*	*	*	*	*	*	18.2	18.1
Mashonaland West	*	*	*	*	*	*	17.5	17.3
Matabeleland North	*	*	*	*	*	*	17.4	17.4
Matabeleland South	*	*	*	*	*	*	17.3	17.3
Midlands	*	*	*	*	*	*	18.7	18.7
Masvingo	*	*	*	*	*	*	18.2	18.2
Harare	*	*	*	*	*	*	19.4	18.9
Bulawayo	*	*	*	*	*	*	18.6	18.5
Education								
No education	17.5	16.0	16.8	17.0	18.3	19.3	17.4	17.4
Primary	17.4	17.2	17.8	18.0	18.5	17.7	17.8	17.9
Secondary+	19.7	19.5	19.3	19.2	20.1	20.3	19.6	19.5
Total	18.8	18.4	18.0	18.1	18.6	18.3	18.4	18.3

Note: Figures in parentheses are based on 25-49 women; an asterisk indicates that a figure is based on fewer than 25 women and has been suppressed.

^a Omitted because less than 50 percent of the women had had intercourse for the first time by age 20.

Table 5.8.2 Median age at first intercourse: men

Median age at first sexual intercourse among men age 20-54 years, by current age and selected background characteristics, Zimbabwe 1994

Background characteristic	Current age							Men age 25-54
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	
Residence								
Urban	19.0	19.6	18.8	19.4	20.1	19.4	20.5	19.6
Rural	18.4	18.6	19.4	19.7	19.5	20.2	21.8	19.6
Province								
Manicaland	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	19.5
Mashonaland Central	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	20.8
Mashonaland East	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	20.1
Mashonaland West	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	19.2
Matabeleland North	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	18.0
Matabeleland South	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	18.9
Midlands	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	19.6
Masvingo	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	20.3
Harare	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	19.4
Bulawayo	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	20.0
Education								
No education	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	20.6
Primary	18.2	18.6	18.9	20.0	19.3	19.8	20.9	19.6
Secondary+	18.8	19.2	19.2	19.0	20.6	19.6	(21.5)	19.4
Total	18.7	19.0	19.1	19.6	19.8	20.0	21.0	19.6

Note: Numbers in parentheses are based on 25-49 men; an asterisk indicates that a figure is based on fewer than 25 men and has been suppressed.

^a Omitted because less than 50 percent of the men had had intercourse for the first time by age 20.

For men, the median age at first sexual intercourse does not vary much by urban-rural residence. By province, it ranges from 18.0 years in Matabeleland North to 20.8 years in Mashonaland Central province. Education is negatively related to the median age at first sexual intercourse among men. Men with no formal education have a median age of 20.6 years when they first become sexually active, which declines to 19.6 and 19.4 years for men with primary and secondary or more education, respectively. Thus, while educated women initiate sexual activity much later than those with no education, the reverse is true for men. For both men and women, however, the gap between age at first sexual intercourse and age at first marriage increases with education. For women, those with no education spend only one month, on average, between their first sexual encounter and marriage. This increases to 7 and 16 months respectively, for those with primary and secondary or more education. For men, the increase is from 4.9 years among those with no education to 6.0 years among those with secondary or more education.

5.6 Recent Sexual Activity

Although only 5 percent of the women age 20-49 have never had sexual intercourse, not all those who have ever had sex are currently sexually active. In the absence of effective contraception, the probability of becoming pregnant is highly dependent upon the frequency of intercourse. Information on sexual activity, therefore, can be used to refine measures of exposure to pregnancy. Men and women who have ever had sex were asked how long ago their last sexual activity occurred and the frequency in the last four weeks. Tables 5.9.1 and 5.9.2 show the distribution of sexual activity by background characteristics for all female and male respondents.

A little over half (53 percent) of all women interviewed were sexually active in the four weeks preceding the survey, 7 percent were in postpartum abstinence, 16 percent were abstaining for reasons other than recent childbirth, and 21 percent had never had sex. Recent sexual activity is higher among women between the ages of 25 and 44, women married for less than 25 years, women living in the urban areas, women with little or no education, and those using some type of contraception. There also exist small provincial variations in sexual activity, ranging from 46 percent among women in Matabeleland South to 57-58 percent of those in Harare and Mashonaland West.

The proportion of women who are postpartum abstaining for under two years declines at older ages and at longer marital durations. Women in rural areas, those with no education, and those who are not using any form of contraception are much more likely to be postpartum abstaining. Abstinence unrelated to childbirth increases sharply with increasing age and duration of marriage, especially for abstinence exceeding two years in length. There are substantial differences among the provinces, ranging from 12 percent in Harare to over 20 percent in Matabeleland North and South.

More educated women tend to start sexual activity later than less educated women but are more active once they start. Only 1 percent of uneducated women 15-49 have not yet had sex, compared with 14 percent of women with primary schooling and 35 percent of women with secondary education or more. On the other hand, among women who have ever had sex, all forms of abstinence decline with increasing level of education.

Half of the men interviewed were sexually active in the four weeks preceding the survey, 21 percent have never sex, and the remaining 28 percent have had sex but not recently. Only 46 percent of men who have never been married have never had sex, compared with 78 percent of women. Current sexual activity is only slightly higher among men in a polygynous union (87 percent) than men in a monogamous union (82 percent). Only 40 and 18 percent of formerly and never-married men, respectively, were sexually active in the four weeks preceding the survey.

Table 5.9.1 Recent sexual activity: women

Percent distribution of women by sexual activity in the four weeks preceding the survey, and among those not sexually active, the length of time they have been abstaining and whether postpartum or not postpartum, according to selected background characteristics and contraceptive method currently used, Zimbabwe 1994

Background characteristic/ contraceptive method	Sexually active in last 4 weeks	Not sexually active in last 4 weeks				Never had sex	Missing	Total	Number of women
		Abstaining (postpartum)		Abstaining (not postpartum)					
		0-1 years	2+ years	0-1 years	2+ years				
Age									
15-19	16.3	4.2	0.4	7.4	0.6	70.3	0.7	100.0	1,472
20-24	53.8	8.2	1.5	14.9	1.2	17.3	3.0	100.0	1,269
25-29	70.7	7.3	0.2	13.2	2.8	2.1	3.6	100.0	915
30-34	70.3	8.2	1.1	14.7	2.2	0.7	2.8	100.0	871
35-39	68.4	5.2	0.8	16.8	5.3	0.3	3.3	100.0	661
40-44	69.3	5.0	0.4	14.8	6.3	0.1	4.0	100.0	532
45-49	63.0	0.4	0.3	19.0	13.1	0.0	4.4	100.0	407
Duration of union (years)									
Never married	5.4	3.1	1.4	10.0	1.4	77.5	1.2	100.0	1,646
0-4	71.0	10.9	0.2	14.2	0.7	0.5	2.5	100.0	1,088
5-9	73.0	7.1	0.6	13.5	2.1	0.1	3.5	100.0	883
10-14	70.8	7.1	0.8	14.7	3.5	0.0	3.2	100.0	744
15-19	73.3	6.6	0.8	13.9	2.9	0.0	2.5	100.0	739
20-24	71.5	4.3	0.2	14.1	5.5	0.0	4.5	100.0	532
25-29	64.9	2.8	0.5	16.7	10.9	0.0	4.3	100.0	345
30+	55.6	0.7	0.0	19.8	18.8	0.0	5.1	100.0	151
Residence									
Urban	56.4	3.3	0.8	10.5	3.2	23.7	2.0	100.0	1,975
Rural	51.7	7.3	0.7	14.6	3.1	19.6	3.0	100.0	4,153
Province									
Manicaland	47.6	7.9	0.5	12.1	3.9	23.3	4.7	100.0	839
Mashonaland Central	55.9	6.0	1.4	12.0	3.0	17.8	3.9	100.0	510
Mashonaland East	50.9	5.9	0.7	15.8	3.1	22.7	0.9	100.0	579
Mashonaland West	57.6	8.1	0.3	11.9	3.7	14.9	3.4	100.0	632
Matabeleland North	50.6	11.4	0.9	21.0	2.8	11.2	2.2	100.0	366
Matabeleland South	46.3	10.9	0.9	24.7	1.1	13.1	2.9	100.0	305
Midlands	54.7	5.5	0.4	11.8	3.5	21.3	2.9	100.0	810
Masvingo	53.5	3.5	0.5	15.3	1.5	24.3	1.3	100.0	652
Harare	57.1	2.1	1.2	7.7	4.1	26.0	1.8	100.0	1,048
Bulawayo	51.9	5.1	0.9	14.7	1.7	22.4	3.4	100.0	388
Education									
No education	63.5	9.7	1.0	14.5	5.8	1.2	4.3	100.0	682
Primary	58.9	5.9	0.6	14.2	3.7	13.5	3.1	100.0	2,898
Secondary+	44.0	5.1	0.8	11.9	1.7	34.6	1.8	100.0	2,547
Contraceptive method									
No method	38.2	7.4	0.8	14.4	4.4	32.2	2.6	100.0	3,976
Pill	82.5	4.0	0.6	9.8	0.7	0.0	2.4	100.0	1,449
IUD	(85.6)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(10.5)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(3.9)	100.0	38
Sterilisation	76.9	0.0	0.0	13.2	5.9	0.0	4.0	100.0	112
Condom	78.6	0.4	0.0	17.3	0.0	0.0	3.7	100.0	149
Other	76.5	3.8	1.3	13.4	0.4	0.0	4.6	100.0	392
Total	53.2	6.0	0.7	13.3	3.1	20.9	2.7	100.0	6,128

Note: Total includes 11 women using periodic abstinence. Figures in parentheses are based on 25-49 women.

Table 5.9.2 Recent sexual activity: men

Percent distribution of men by sexual activity in the four weeks preceding the survey, according to selected background characteristics, Zimbabwe 1994

Background characteristic	Sexually active in last 4 weeks	Not sexually active in last 4 weeks	Never had sex	Missing	Total	Number of men
Age						
15-19	9.9	23.0	67.1	0.0	100.0	604
20-24	40.8	45.3	13.9	0.0	100.0	399
25-29	66.3	32.6	1.1	0.0	100.0	288
30-34	80.9	19.1	0.0	0.0	100.0	241
35-39	77.3	22.7	0.0	0.0	100.0	195
40-44	79.1	20.5	0.0	0.4	100.0	190
45-49	77.1	20.7	0.0	2.2	100.0	111
50-54	71.9	26.3	0.0	1.8	100.0	113
Marital status						
Never married	17.8	35.9	46.3	0.0	100.0	1,004
Polygynous union	87.4	12.6	0.0	0.0	100.0	93
Monogamous union	82.1	17.4	0.0	0.5	100.0	945
Formerly in union	40.2	59.1	0.0	0.8	100.0	99
Residence						
Urban	58.3	26.9	14.6	0.2	100.0	797
Rural	45.5	28.3	25.9	0.3	100.0	1,344
Education						
No education	53.5	39.6	6.9	0.0	100.0	88
Primary	55.2	25.2	19.5	0.1	100.0	860
Secondary+	46.5	28.8	24.3	0.3	100.0	1,193
Total	50.3	27.8	21.7	0.2	100.0	2,141

5.7 Postpartum Amenorrhoea, Abstinence and Insusceptibility

Postpartum amenorrhoea refers to the interval between childbirth and the return of menstruation. During this period, the risk of pregnancy is much reduced. How long this protection from conception following childbirth lasts, depends on the length and intensity of breastfeeding and the length of time before the resumption of sexual intercourse. Women who gave birth during the three years prior to the survey were asked about their breastfeeding practices, the duration of amenorrhoea, and sexual abstinence. Women are considered insusceptible if they are not exposed to the risk of pregnancy, either because they are amenorrhoeic or are still abstaining from sex following a birth. The results are presented in Table 5.10.

The period of postpartum amenorrhoea is considerably longer than the period of postpartum abstinence and is, therefore, the principal determinant of the length of postpartum insusceptibility (to the risk of pregnancy) in Zimbabwe. The median duration of amenorrhoea is 13 months, the duration of abstinence four months, and the period of insusceptibility is 14 months. All women are virtually insusceptible to pregnancy during the first two months following a birth, and both amenorrhoea and abstinence are important factors in their insusceptibility. However, starting from the second month after a birth, the contribution of abstinence to the period of insusceptibility is greatly reduced as more women resume sexual relations. At 12-13 months after a birth, more than half of the women are still amenorrhoeic, while only 11 percent are still abstaining. At 18-19 months postpartum, the proportion amenorrhoeic drops sharply from 24 percent to 9 percent in the 20-21 months postpartum. This coincides with the modal age at full weaning for children in

Table 5.10 Postpartum amenorrhoea, abstinence and insusceptibility

Percentage of births in the three years preceding the survey for which mothers are postpartum amenorrhoeic, abstaining and insusceptible, by number of months since birth, and median and mean durations, Zimbabwe 1994

Months since birth	Amenorrhoeic	Abstaining	Insusceptible	Number of births
< 2	92.2	97.0	100.0	126
2-3	82.9	57.8	89.5	138
4-5	80.8	29.4	84.3	124
6-7	77.1	29.4	84.1	141
8-9	69.2	16.8	71.8	153
10-11	57.4	9.6	61.8	135
12-13	54.9	11.4	59.7	118
14-15	41.5	11.8	48.8	109
16-17	27.6	10.3	34.3	105
18-19	24.1	5.3	28.2	145
20-21	8.5	7.5	15.6	122
22-23	9.1	12.7	19.7	117
24-25	2.9	10.0	12.9	134
26-27	1.2	4.8	5.9	138
28-29	3.0	2.9	6.0	111
30-31	1.8	4.3	5.2	122
32-33	0.0	4.0	4.0	154
34-35	0.0	2.1	2.1	137
Total	35.6	18.2	41.0	2,331
Median	12.9	3.5	14.1	-
Mean	13.0	6.8	14.9	-
Prevalence/ Incidence mean ¹	12.6	6.5	14.6	-

¹The prevalence-incidence mean is borrowed from epidemiology and is defined as the number of children whose mothers are amenorrhoeic (prevalence) divided by the average number of births per month (incidence).

Zimbabwe (see Chapter 9). Only 5 percent of postpartum women are still abstaining at durations 18-19 months.

Table 5.11 shows the median durations of postpartum amenorrhoea, abstinence, and insusceptibility by various background characteristics. Postpartum insusceptibility does not vary much by age. Rural women have longer periods of amenorrhoea, sexual abstinence, and insusceptibility than urban women. Harare and Midlands provinces have the shortest durations of postpartum amenorrhoea (about 11 months) while Mashonaland Central and Matabeleland North have the longest durations (about 17 months). Postpartum abstinence is shortest in Harare (2 months) and longest in Matabeleland South (7 months). Overall, therefore, women in Harare have the shortest period of insusceptibility (11 months) while those in Matabeleland North have the longest (17 months). Provincial variations in the duration of insusceptibility closely parallel provincial variations in the length of breastfeeding (see Chapter 9).

Postpartum amenorrhoea and abstinence are inversely related to mother's education. Postpartum amenorrhoea varies from 16 months for women with no education to 13 and 12 months, respectively, for those with only primary and secondary or more education. Similarly, abstinence varies from 7 months for women with no education to 4 and 3 months for those with primary and secondary or more education, respectively. Women with no education have a median period of insusceptibility of 16 months, compared with 14

Table 5.11 Median duration of postpartum insusceptibility by background characteristics

Median number of months of postpartum amenorrhoea, postpartum abstinence, and postpartum insusceptibility, by selected background characteristics, Zimbabwe 1994

Background characteristic	Postpartum amenorrhoea	Postpartum abstinence	Postpartum insusceptibility	Number of women
Age				
<30	12.3	3.2	13.9	1,472
30+	13.5	4.2	14.3	859
Residence				
Urban	10.6	2.5	11.2	607
Rural	13.6	3.9	14.7	1,724
Province				
Manicaland	13.3	5.3	14.3	307
Mashonaland Central	15.6	3.6	15.6	199
Mashonaland East	13.1	3.1	13.9	238
Mashonaland West	12.3	3.5	14.6	275
Matabeleland North	15.5	4.7	17.1	181
Matabeleland South	13.2	7.0	14.6	134
Midlands	10.6	2.8	11.0	328
Masvingo	13.4	2.6	14.4	242
Harare	10.5	2.2	10.5	310
Bulawayo	12.5	4.7	15.2	117
Education				
No education	16.2	7.4	16.3	294
Primary	12.7	3.6	13.5	1,163
Secondary+	11.7	3.0	14.6	874
Total	12.9	3.5	14.1	2,331

Note. Medians are based on current status.

and 15 months for those with primary and secondary or more education, respectively. These findings suggest that many educated women consciously use postpartum abstinence to protect themselves from the risk of pregnancy. They appear to abstain from sexual intercourse only when they are not amenorrhoeic, thereby extending the period of protection from the risk of pregnancy. Less educated women may abstain because of tradition; much of their period of abstinence occurs when they are in breastfeeding-induced amenorrhoea.

5.8 Termination of Exposure to Pregnancy

Above age 30, the risk of pregnancy declines with age as increasing proportions of women become infecund. Although the onset of infecundity is difficult to determine for an individual woman, there are ways of estimating it for a population. Table 5.12 presents data on two indicators of decreasing exposure to the risk of pregnancy for women age 30 years and over: menopause and long-term abstinence.

Table 5.12 Termination of exposure to the risk of pregnancy

Indicators of menopause and long-term abstinence among currently married women age 30-49, by age, Zimbabwe 1994

Age	Menopause ¹		Long-term abstinence ²	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
30-34	1.6	482	0.2	722
35-39	3.8	392	0.2	530
40-41	3.8	176	0.8	205
42-43	8.7	138	0.9	157
44-45	16.7	122	2.1	133
46-47	22.1	132	1.7	139
48-49	44.5	100	0.5	102
Total	8.8	1,542	0.6	1,988

¹Percentage of non-pregnant, non-amenorrhoeic currently married women whose last menstrual period occurred six or more months preceding the survey or who report that they are menopausal.

²Percentage of currently married women who did not have intercourse in the three years preceding the survey.

The percentage of women who have reached menopause refers to the proportion of currently married women who are neither pregnant nor postpartum amenorrhoeic and have not had a menstrual period in the six months preceding the survey or who report being menopausal. The table shows that the proportion of menopausal women increases steadily with age, particularly after age 40, from 2 to 4 percent among women age 30-41 to 45 percent among women age 48-49.

The percentage of women practising long-term abstinence refers to the proportion of currently married women who did not have sexual intercourse in the three years preceding the survey. As the table shows, long-term abstinence is not a major contributor to lower fertility. The proportion of currently married women who have not had sexual intercourse for the last three years is less than 1 percent, except among those age 44-47 (2 percent).