

## 9 *Attitudes towards marriage in postapartheid South Africa*

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It is widely accepted that humans are fundamentally social animals that have an inherent desire to belong. This need is thought to commonly apply to both women and men from two-parent and single-parent families (Walsh 2008). Marriage is believed to be one of the more established ways of realising the need to belong. It is further regarded as offering benefits such as living together, functional division of labour, financial security, emotional support and rearing children together.

Despite the considerable diversity that exists in marital patterns and practices between and within societies across the continent, marriage historically played a pivotal role in many traditional African societies. This was reflected in, among other things, almost universal marriage for both sexes, early marriage especially for women, prompt remarriage for widowed or divorced women of childbearing age and polygamy (Bledsoe 1990; Mokomane 2006). All in all, as Evans-Pritchard (1965) states, marriage was a given and there was no such person as an unmarried adult woman. According to Dyson-Hudson and Meekers (1996), those who failed to marry were to some extent 'considered less than a full person' because,

for African peoples, marriage [was] the focus of existence...Marriage [was] a drama in which everyone [became] an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore marriage [was] a duty, a requirement from corporate society, a rhythm of life in which everyone [had to] participate. Otherwise, he who [did] not participate in it [was] a curse to the community, he [was] a rebel and law breaker, he [was] was not only abnormal but 'under human.' Failure to get married under normal circumstances [meant] that the person [had] rejected society and society [rejected] him in return. (Mbiti 1969: 133)

The high value accorded to marriage was attributed to the societal functions that the institution performed, including being a defining marker in the transition from childhood to adulthood, fulfilment of the economic needs of married couples, forming and perpetuating kinship network, and providing a base for the care and enculturation of children (Espenshade 1985; Nyanungo 2014).

While marriage is still seen as an important societal institution, the past four decades have seen marriage patterns undergoing significant transformations in many parts of the continent, particularly in North and southern Africa. A culture-wide redefinition of marriage has affected the rates of marriage over time. Marriage seems to have lost much of its paramountcy in some cultures but not in others (Walsh 2008). Supporting

this perspective, Edin and Kefalas (2011) argue that the practical consequentiality of marriage has diminished in some cultures, but the symbolic importance of it has grown. Marriage rates in South Africa are believed to have declined even further during the postapartheid period. The decline is more prominent in both absolute and relative terms among black African women than among white women. By 2008, only 24% of all black African women aged 20–45 years were married, compared to 67% of white women in the same age category (Moore & Govender 2013). In 2013, for example, the crude civil marriage rate was estimated at 3.0 per 1 000 among the resident population (Stats SA 2015).

The prevalence of marriage among women of childbearing age (15–49 years) has been reported to be exceptionally low by global standards: only 27% of all women aged 15–49 years were currently married in 2014, and this was particularly so among black African (23%) and coloured (34%) women. Conversely, Indian and white women were more likely to have been married, with marriage rates at 55% and 53%, respectively (Chimere-Dan 2015). According to Chimere-Dan, this declining trend, which has been in progress for more than two decades, has also seen marriage losing its status as the most common type of relationship for family formation. For example, 70% of children born in 2014 were to women who were never married and this was, again, particularly the case among black African (75%) and coloured (63%) women, and less so among Indian (15%) and white (18%) women.

The changes are mainly reflected in the increase in the age of first marriage for women, and the amount of time spent out of marriage during adult years (Hertrich 2002). Several potential causes for delay in first marriage have been cited, including extended schooling for women and the effect of women's entry into the labour force resulting in increased levels of employment and income (Garenne 2004), thus, fulfilling the economic needs traditionally associated with marriage. While these socioeconomic changes may be sound or reasonable for certain classes in society, the picture may be different for lower strata, in that change may result from undesirable external pressures rather than the exercise of choice enabled by improved situation.

Furthermore, economic, politico-structural and ideological reasons have been put forward for the decline in marriage rates (Moore & Govender 2013). The historical and sociopolitical context of South Africa has had an enormous impact on black African families and relationship structures and, thus, should be accounted for in relation the low marital rates among Africans (Shisana et al. 2015). The migrant labour system created by colonial and apartheid laws forced black African men to work in urban areas, while black African women were stationed in the rural areas (bantustans). Consequently, long separation periods weakened long-term relationships and hampered possibilities for marriage (Hunter 2007; Posel & Rudwick 2013; Preston-Whyte 1981).

Further high rates of unemployment among black African men in postapartheid South Africa (Casale & Posel 2010; Denis 2006; Hunter 2004; Posel & Casale 2009) meant that financial constraints could hamper payment of customary dowry

(lobola), thus, reducing possibilities for marriage even further (Casale & Posel 2010; Posel et al. 2011). Casel and Posel (2010) claim that probability of marriage has been found to be positively related to an increase in black African men's income; thus, high unemployment rates mean that black African women face a shortage of marriageable men (Posel & Rudwick 2013). Recently, the costs of hosting marriage ceremonies, both customary and civil religious, have also been cited as possible barriers to marriage among the black African population (Hosegood et al. 2009).

Attitudinal changes towards partnerships are also among the possible contributory factors for declining marriage levels in South Africa. Interestingly, individual experience and demographic variables have, for some time, been known to affect attitudes toward marriage (Caldwell & Woolley 2008). As indicated by Strong et al. (2011), cultural influences as well as qualities and convictions about what families are, or ought to be, guide how we choose to live in relationships and families. Furthermore, although each of us settles on choices about the sort of families we want, the decisions we make are frequently the result of the social orders we live in. Although, traditionally, marriage has been regarded as a prescription for women in particular, recently, such beliefs have started to shift. It is evident that in many societies women no longer prioritise getting married. Research indicates that South African women increasingly do not wed or are deferring the age of marriage, which stands in contrast with many other African nations, and has resulted in a high rate of single parenthood (Amoateng cited in Amoateng & Heaton 2007).

Among the issues is the powerlessness, for some women, to shape enduring connections that stretch to adulthood, and this might likewise demonstrate a failure to keep up connections sufficiently long to promote marriage (Ndwandwe 2009). In agreement with this perspective, Hognas and Carlson (2010) state that having unmarried parents remains a critical indicator of daughters deferring marriage or not wedding at all and hence having children out of wedlock.

While some view these trends as signs of the demise of marriage, it has also been argued that marriage remains the ideal for most South Africans. Rather than a reduction in the value attached to marriage, circumstances brought about by prevailing socioeconomic and demographic changes are making it difficult to realise marriage in contemporary South Africa (Hosegood et al. 2009).

The aim of this chapter is to contribute to the discussion by examining attitudes towards marriage among South Africans aged 16 years and older, with a particular focus on views about the timing of marriages, the extent to which marriage is seen as an 'old-fashioned and outdated tradition', attitudes towards different types of marriages and unions, and attitudes towards lobola (dowry or bride price/wealth). Given the deep-rooted racial differences in marriage rates in South Africa (Posel et al. 2011), race will be used as a cross-cutting variable in the analysis presented.

## Methods

The SASAS 2012 questions we analysed to examine attitudes on marriage among South Africa population are tabulated below (Table 9-1).

**Table 9-1: Assessment of attitudes on marriage**

Variable	Items
Marriage timing	Q.166: At what age is it best to get married?
Views and attitudes on marriage	Q.169: Marriage is an old-fashioned, outdated tradition. Q.20: Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can't seem to work out their marriage problems. Q.17: People who want children ought to get married.
Marriage satisfaction	Q.18: Married people are generally happier than unmarried people.
Attitudes towards marriage types	Q.171: A man having more than one wife at the same time. Q.173: A person marrying someone of a different race. Q.19: It is all right for a couple to live together without intending to get married.
Marriage practices	Q.174: Payment of lobola (dowry or bride price) as part of marriage Q.175: The payment of lobola is the main reason why many people do not get married these days. Q.176: The tradition of lobola strengthens the relationship between two families.
Government support for marriage	Q.167: The government should assist families to stay together. Q.168: The government should spend more on providing advice to married couples.

Source: SASAS 2012

Descriptive analysis was conducted on the variables of interest and sociodemographic variables including age, sex, race, education, employment, religion and marital status.

## Theoretical framework

Extensive evidence is available that shows parental attitudes on a number of issues, such as sexuality, relationships and family life, have an influence on how their children perceive life (Willoughby et al. 2012). The delay of marriage is said to be a product of a plethora of factors, such as cultural shift, secularisation, women's independence, changes in law, changing stigma on divorce, changing stigma on alternatives of marriage, family diversity and economic growth (Hosegood et al. 2009; Lesthaeghe 2010; Posel & Rudwick 2012). For example, in 1960, the median age at first marriage in the United States was 22.8 years old for men and 20.3 years old for women; today, the median age at first marriage is 28.7 years old for men and 26.5 years old for women (Bureau of the Census 2011). Because of marriage postponement, 'emerging adulthood' has been established as a new developmental stage (Arnett 2000; Willoughby & Dworkin 2009). According to Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood is a phase between adolescence and young adulthood, and is characterised by self-exploration and identity formation, which informs the type of attitudes we have towards certain issues pertaining to life.

Martin Fishbein (1963) postulated a relationship between attitudes and behaviours, and this came to be known as the 'reasoned action' approach (Ajzen 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen 1975, 2011). This approach states that an attitude, meaning and understanding of a particular behaviour are culturally and historically bound. Within each social setting, such as family, there are ideas about life and modes of behaviour influenced by political, religious and traditional notions. These ideologies form the platform for shared understanding and expectations between members (Fishbein & Ajzen 2011). Thus the intersection of the above factors accounts for the kaleidoscope of behavioural intentions; and intention and perceived control can be used to predict actual behaviour (Ajzen 2012).

This chapter examines attitudes towards marriage among South Africans aged 16 years and older, with a particular focus on how the intersection of various factors such as family, economic background, race, gender, age, education and religion influence attitudinal shifts regarding marriage. The intergenerational theory argues that the behaviour encountered at home is often exhibited by children as they enter adulthood. For example, a number of studies dealing with intergenerational transmission of violence (Black et al. 2010; Ehrensaft et al. 2003; Islam et al. 2014; Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2005) have highlighted that intergenerational and familial relations influence meanings and understanding of relationship dynamics, and these perceptions either negate or perpetuate the likelihood of hostility and violence in adulthood. Much of the theoretical impetus of the intergenerational theory is based on Bandura's (1971) social learning theory. The theory postulates that, through observations, people are able to learn certain behaviours and acquire attitudes. The association of certain behaviours with particular circumstances goes on to serve as a guide for future behaviour.

Social capital is an abstract concept that describes a network of shared dependencies and obligations within a community. The extent of intergenerational transmission of social capital is seen in the context of families as a major mechanism by which the adolescents' intra-ethnic and interethnic social contacts are shaped, and their social identification is structured (Caputo 2009; Laureau 2001; Martin 2012; Patacchini & Zenou 2011). For example, when Bradshaw mentions how poverty is caused by cumulative and cyclical interdependencies, he says, 'it shows how people become disadvantaged in their social context which then affects psychological abilities at the individual level. The various structural and political factors in the cyclical theory reinforce each other, with economic factors linked to community and to political and social variables' (Bradshaw 2006: 15).

When talking about marriage attitudes, extensive literature acknowledges the influential nature of the family in the development of sexual and relational attitudes and behaviours among adolescents and young adults (Hutchinson & Cederbaum 2011). Notwithstanding the importance of family on attitudes and behaviours of young people, parent-child relations have also been identified as one of the significantly influential processes associated with the transference of attitudes (Amato 1996; Willoughby et al. 2012). According to Willoughby et al. (2012), if

a mother is not a constant feature within the household, or does not live in the same household, there is a tendency for those children to have flexible views on marriage. For example, a study by Moen et al. (1997) examined the transmission of gender roles and attitudes between mothers and their daughters. The mothers were interviewed in 1956 and then, 30 years later, the daughters were interviewed. They found that, although family socialisation had had an influence on the attitudes of the children, they were, however, contingent on context and also on changing societal and cultural norms.

However, Greenberg and Nay (1982: 336) postulate that, because children's prolonged exposure to marriage is most likely through their parents, their attitudes are most likely mostly influenced by what they have witnessed between their mothers and fathers. Willoughby et al. (2011) postulates that, if the marital quality is high, then the transmission of attitudes is stronger. The present study focuses on the transmission of attitudes, and seeks to understand how people's attitudes are influenced by their everyday lives and if factors such as race, gender, age, geography and socioeconomic statuses are influential in the way that people think and feel about marriage.

## *Findings*

### *Marriage timing*

One of the simplest ways of determining the popularity of marriage in a particular society is by examining the age at first marriage. This is a good proxy for measuring not only potential fertility but also other health and socioeconomic indicators relating, particularly, to the role and status of women in society (Stats SA 2015). To this end, respondents were asked: 'At what age is it best to get married?' It emerged that the average preferred age at first marriage by women aged 16 and older was 25.9 years, with men overall, reporting a marginally higher average age at marriage than women (27.1 versus 25.7 years, see Table 9-2). To the extent that age at first marriage is currently 30 years for women and 35 years for men (Stats SA 2015), this is an indication that South Africans prefer marriage to take place at an earlier stage. The variation in the average preferred timing of first marriage among South African adults older than 15 years is relatively circumscribed if we look at the 95% confidence interval, ranging between 26.1 and 26.7 years.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of this broad consensus about the desired timing of marriage, several patterns of difference are worth mentioning. Most notable among these is an apparent inverse age effect: as age increases, so the preferred age of first marriage shows a moderate decline. Those aged 16–29 years reported average timing of marriage scores that were higher than those aged 30–49 years, who reported a higher average preferred age at first marriage than those 50 years and above. This was more evident among men, with a difference approximating two years across generations. These age patterns are reflected in preferences by marital status. Those who had

**Table 9-2: Preferred age of marriage by sex and other sociodemographic attributes, 2012 (mean scores)**

	All	Male	Female
South Africa	26.4	27.1	25.7
<b>Age group</b>			
16–29	26.8	27.6	25.9
30–49	26.5	27.6	25.7
50+	25.3	25.5	25.1
<b>Population group</b>			
Black African	26.6	27.4	25.8
Coloured	26.3	26.8	25.8
Indian/Asian	25.2	25.5	24.9
White	25.4	26.0	24.9
<b>Educational attainment</b>			
Primary or no schooling	25.7	26.5	25.2
Some secondary	26.4	27.3	25.6
Matric or equivalent	26.6	27.1	26.1
Tertiary	26.5	27.4	25.5
<b>Marital status</b>			
Married	25.2	25.5	24.9
Separated or divorced	25.8	26.5	25.4
Widowed	25.2	25.2	25.2
Never married	27.2	28.0	26.3

Source: SASAS 2012

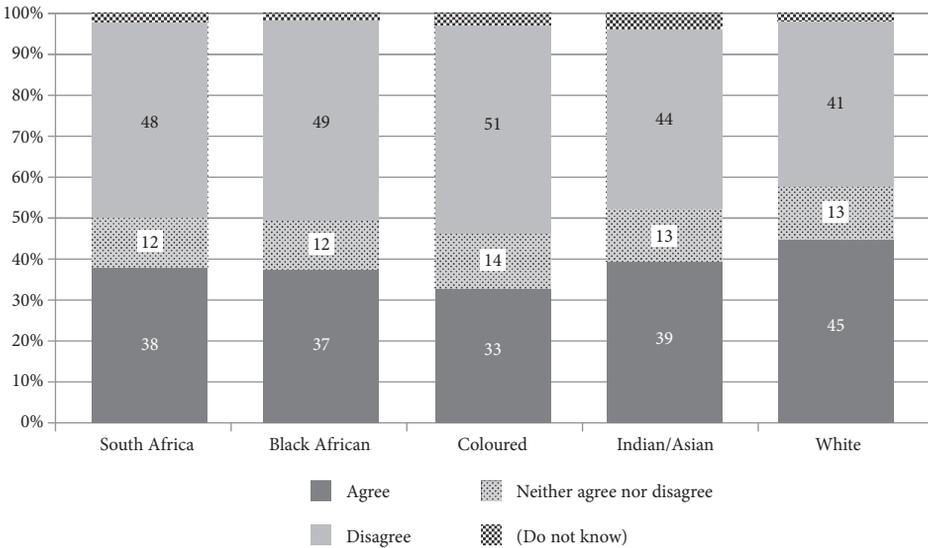
never married report a higher preferred age of first marriage than those currently married, widowed, divorced or separated: a pattern that is true on aggregate and for both sexes. As for racial differences, Indian men and women tend to express the desire for getting married slightly younger than black African and (to a lesser degree) coloured adults.

By contrast, only marginal educational differences are observed and no statistically significant differences in preferences were evident with regard to living standard level, subjective poverty status or geographic location (rural/urban residence). This suggests that class does not exert much influence on preferences for the timing of marriage, although the generational and marital status variation does raise questions about whether signs of normative change are beginning to emerge.

### *Views on marriage*

To provide a sense of the public's attachment to the institution of marriage, respondents were asked whether or not they believed that 'marriage is an old-fashioned and outdated tradition.' A sizable majority (75.4%) of adults disagreed

**Figure 9-1:** Views of divorce as the best solution when a couple has problems they can't work out, national distribution and race group differences



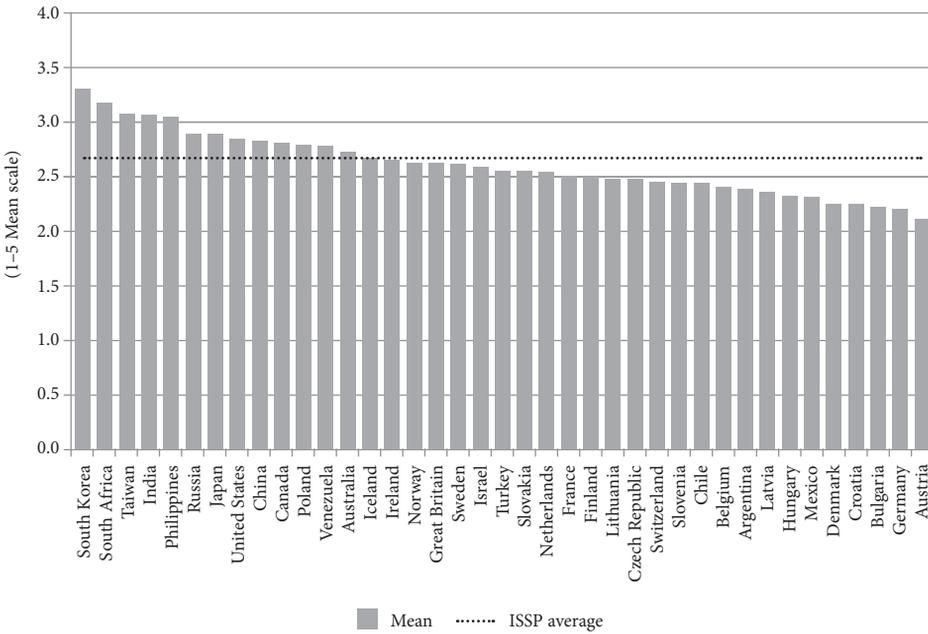
Source: SASAS 2012

with the statement, about 7% were neutral, while only 17% supported it. This highlights that South Africans are supportive of marriage and, thus, still consider marriage to be valuable in modern times. When disaggregated by race, all groups tended to endorse positive attitudes towards marriage, with Indian (82.6%) and coloured (80.4%) adults scoring the highest.

The support for marriage among South Africans was also evident to some degree in their anti-divorce responses. In response to the statement 'divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can't seem to work out their marriage problems,' nearly half (48%) of the adult population either disagreed or strongly disagreed, compared to 38% who agreed and 14% who were neutral or uncertain how to respond (Figure 9-1). Overall, more white adults supported the statement (45%) relative to other race groups. While the views on divorce may seem fairly ambivalent, based on first impressions, in a cross-national perspective the South African results show on average less acceptance of divorce and greater support for married couples working through their problems. Indeed, in relation to the 36 countries that fielded this ISSP question in 2012, South Africa was among the countries that scored lowest for support for divorce (Figure 9-2), placing it alongside countries such as South Korea, India, Philippines and Russia.

What sociodemographic groups are the most and least supportive of marriage? The following subsections explore this by examining sociodemographic differentials in relation to the question of whether marriage is an old-fashioned and outdated tradition.

**Figure 9-2:** Cross-national variation in views of divorce as the best solution when a couple has problems they can't work out



Source: International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) 2012

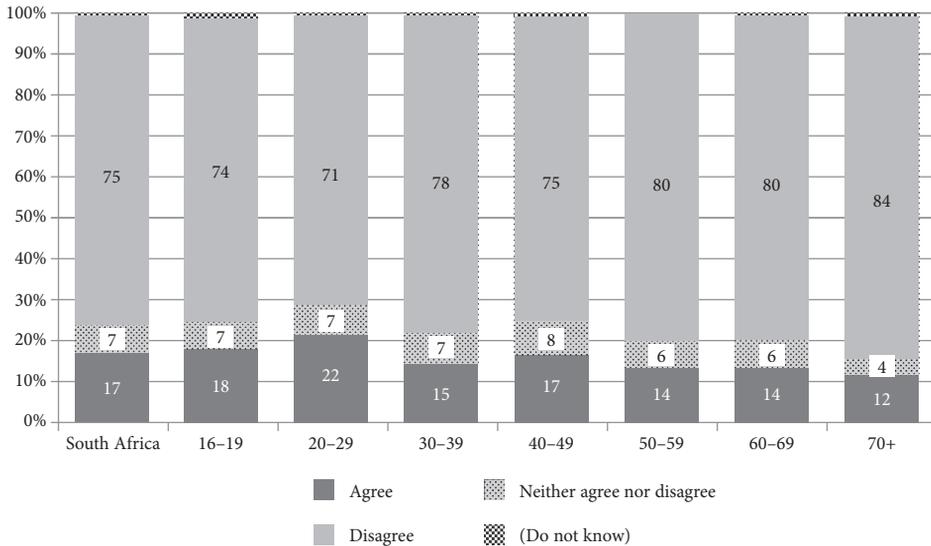
Note: Mean scores are based on a reversed 5-point scale with a value of 1 representing strong support for divorce as the best solution to marital difficulties, and 5 indicating strong opposition to divorce. 'Don't know' responses were omitted.

*Age*

Previous research has revealed that attitudes are often cohort-driven, with younger cohorts typically adopting less traditional perspectives than older generations (Gubernskaya 2010). According to Gubernskaya (2010), with regards to marriage, it can be argued that the early socialisation of older cohorts occurred when the institution was stronger and, for this reason, older people are likely to be more supportive of marriage than younger people. The results (see Figure 9-3) show that older age groups (50 years and older) are more likely to support marriage compared to younger adults (16–29 years). Although the differences are not significant, a slightly higher proportion of younger people agreed with the statement that 'marriage is old-fashioned, outdated tradition' compared to older people.

*Gender*

Ethnographic studies have highlighted that gendered perspectives exist in negotiating and entering marriage in contemporary South Africa (Hosegood et al. 2009). For women, expectations of a 'traditional' wife are often at odds with modern female identity as empowered, income-earner, educated and able to control their own

**Figure 9-3: Views on marriage as an old-fashioned, outdated tradition by age group**

Source: SASAS 2012

fertility (Van der Vliet 1991). For men, on the other hand, entry into marriage is often hampered by fears of being prevented from playing authoritarian, provider and family-builder roles (Hosegood et al. 2009). The results showed that 78% of males and 73% of females disagreed with the statement that marriage is outdated, meaning marriage is perceived as valuable by both men and women. Although there was no significant difference, men seemed marginally more likely to support marriage compared to women. White women (63%) accounted for the lowest proportion of those in support of marriage compared to other race groups.

### *Marital status*

A number of cross-sectional studies have revealed that, largely due to self-selection into marriage, married people are more likely to be supportive of marriage and disapproving of divorce, cohabitation and remaining single (Axinn & Barber 1997; Kaufman & Goldscheider 2007; Trent & South 1992). By the same token, people's experience with divorce, either as involved parties or as children of divorced parents, may lead to negative attitudes towards marriage (Whitton et al. 2008). Selectivity has also been noted in cohabitation, with a number of studies showing that people who cohabit do so partly because they have less commitment to, or negative or unconventional attitudes towards, the institution of marriage (Brüderl et al. 1999; Lillard et al. 1995; Mokomane 2004). The findings of this analysis highlight that married people (80%) were more likely to oppose the statement that 'marriage is outdated' compared to those who are divorced or separated (61%).<sup>2</sup> However,

irrespective of one's marital status, South Africans still express positive attitudes towards marriage.

### *Education*

Besides leading to higher income, education brings exposure to non-traditional ideas about family and gender roles, which has enduring effects on attitudes. In many countries, better-educated individuals place less emphasis on marriage and, thus, delay it and view family roles as less central to life (Gubernskaya 2010). In Africa, studies have also shown that education enhances women's socioeconomic self-reliance, making them less likely to tolerate the direct control by husbands that characterises most marriages in the continent (Arnaldo 2004). Therefore, rather than entering into a formal marriage contract, educated women prefer unmarried cohabitation or being single because this allows them to maintain their liberty (Meekers 1993). However, in our analysis, there were not any significant differences by educational level, with most adults offering positive views of marriage regardless of their educational achievement.

### *Employment status*

Participation in the labour force increases the share of non-kin in personal networks. Consequently, employed men and women tend to have less traditional attitudes toward marriage, family and children compared to those who are not in the labour force. For example, in a six-country study of Austria, Germany, Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands and the US, Gubernskaya (2010), found that, due to the need to combine or choose between career and family women were, to a large extent, less enthusiastic about marriage than men. These results showed that employment status can exert an influence on attitudes towards marriage. In the South African case, the 2012 results show that unemployed adults were *not* more likely to support marriage compared to those that were employed. However, pensioners were significantly more inclined to support the institution of marriage (81%), which is likely to reflect the age and marital status effects outlined above. There were gender-based differences by employment status; interestingly, unemployed men (82%) were more likely to support marriage compared to unemployed women (72%), while female students (79%) were marginally more supportive than male students (76%). Basically, older men valued marriage more compared to their younger counterparts, despite their unemployed status, while younger women were more supportive compared to older women.

### *Religiosity*

Religious institutions typically promote traditional views on marriage and family. The results show that those who considered themselves to be religiously affiliated rejected the statement, and were more likely to be supportive of marriage (78%)

compared to those who were not (67%) and, thus, were likely to perceive marriage as outdated.

### *Attitudes towards different types of marriage and unions*

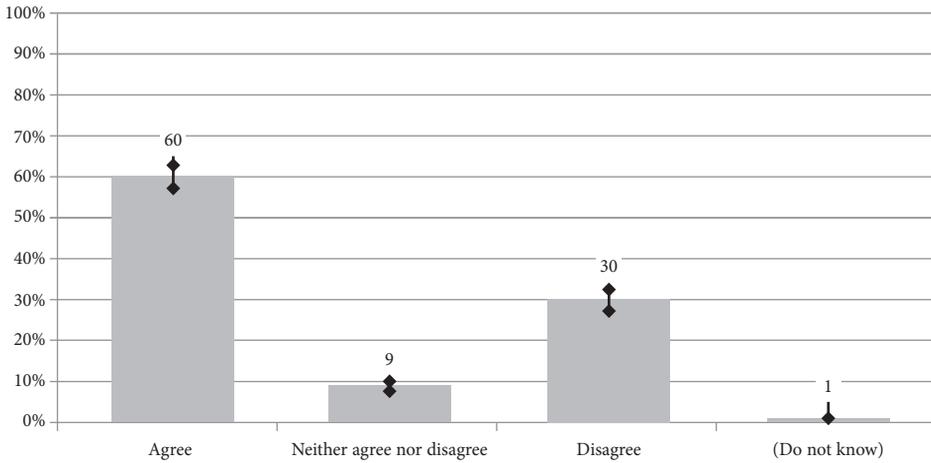
South Africa has a rich history related to legal union formations. The diversity of religions and cultures in South Africa means that marriage unions in South Africa take a number of forms. Historically the legal definition of marriage, derived from the Roman-Dutch law, was limited to monogamous marriages between opposite-sex couples (Marriage Act, No. 25 of 1961). A number of Acts during the apartheid era prohibited the mixing of races. The Immorality Act (No. 5 of 1927) prohibited sexual relations between white people and people of other races. Originally, it only prohibited sex between a white person and a black person but, in 1950, it was amended to apply to sex between a white person and any non-white person. Furthermore, interracial marriages were not allowed in South Africa according to the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (No. 55 of 1949). This was shaped by notions of protecting white women from a supposed black threat (Hyslop 1993). However, the prohibition was finally lifted by the Immorality and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Amendment Act (No. 72 of 1985).

In 1998, the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act (No. 12 of 1998) was passed in parliament. Before 1998, the Marriage Act (No. 25 of 1961) was the main law governing marriages in the country. The Act was racially and culturally prejudiced in that it did not recognise marriages formalised by African ceremonies (customary unions) or in accordance with Hindu or Muslim law. As of 1998, the law has recognised other forms of marriage, including polygamous marriages conducted under African customary law. The Civil Union Act (No. 17 of 2006) legalised same-sex marriage in South Africa. It allows two people, regardless of their gender, to get married or form a civil partnership (see Chapter 7). South Africa became the fifth country in the world to allow same-sex marriage. This section will examine attitudes towards interracial marriage, polygamous marriages and cohabitation.

### *Interracial marriage*

The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 was revoked more than a quarter century ago, in 1985 (Ratele 2003). Although interracial relational unions are currently lawful and are beginning to be increasingly common, they remain a contentious subject. Attitudes towards interracial relational unions and relationships in South Africa are, in some sense, a measuring stick with which to gauge the level of transformation the nation has achieved in promoting tolerance of alternative family forms (Morrell 1994; Ross 1990). Three-fifths (60%) of South African adults reported that they were supportive of interracial marriages (Figure 9-4). However, just under a third (30%) of the adult population were opposed to such marriages, which is a significant minority share of the public. Research has found that numerous interracial relational unions occur due to racial contrasts, not in spite of them. From

Figure 9-4: Attitudes towards interracial marriage



Source: SASAS 2012

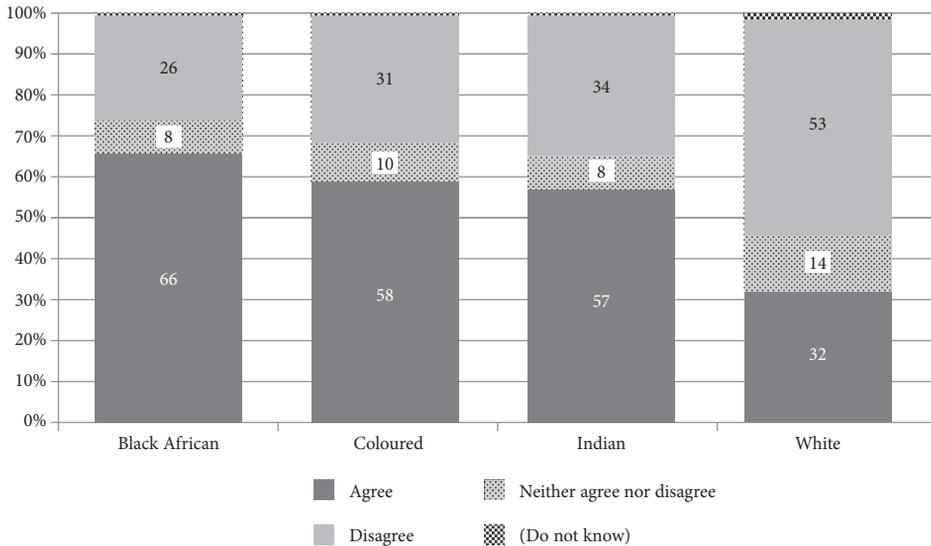
this perspective, it is believed that interest about individuals from different cultural backgrounds heightens the sexual interest one might have towards an alternate race. Furthermore, it has been suggested that intermarriage is an approach for individuals to express their autonomy and to show nonconformity towards endogamy (see Brunzman 2005; Childs 2005; Qian & Lichter 2011; Ratele 2002).

Figure 9-5, below, highlights that black African adults were the most likely to support interracial marriages (66%) and white adults were least likely to support such marriages (32%). Similarly, younger age groups (16–39 years) were more likely to support interracial marriage than older generations (60–69 and 70+ age cohorts). For instance, a higher proportion of 16- to 19-year-olds voiced approval or strong approval (71%), compared to those in their 60s (42%) or older (47%). Those who have never married were significantly more accepting of interracial marriage (67%) than those who are married (52%), separated or divorced (48%) or widowed (46%). This reflects the generational effect underlying support for this form of marriage, and can again be seen in employment status differences, with students exhibiting the greatest level of acceptance (74%) and pensioners the least (46%).

*Polygamous marriage*

A small share (12%) of South Africans were in favour of polygamy, the majority of whom were black African adults, while other race groups were more likely to oppose such marriages. Those belonging to Nguni ethnic groups displayed the highest support for this type of marriage, ranging from a fifth of isiZulu- (21%) and isiNdebele-speaking (24%) adults to 16% of isiXhosa speakers. A few other black African groups also seemed to express above-average support for polygamy, including Xitsonga- (21%) and Setswana-speaking (13%) adults. Men were also

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**Figure 9-5: Attitudes towards interracial marriage by race**

Source: SASAS 2012

more likely than women to endorse this type of marriage (16% vs 9%). According to Pierre de Vos,

it is often said that polygamous marriages are unconstitutional. The equality clause trumps the privilege to culture in the South African Bill of Rights and polygamy discriminates against women – so the argument goes – because it allows a man to marry many wives but not a woman to marry many husbands, and because the emotional and financial position of the existing wives is said to be weakened when their husband takes another wife.<sup>3</sup>

This is one of the reasons typically provided to explain why fewer women are partial to polygamy (Baloyi 2013). However, those who agree with the tradition believe that polygamy is a remedy for the problem of infertility, helps against social exclusion, is a source of labour, fulfils the desire for a male heir and is a way of taking care of widows (Baloyi 2013).

### *Cohabitation*

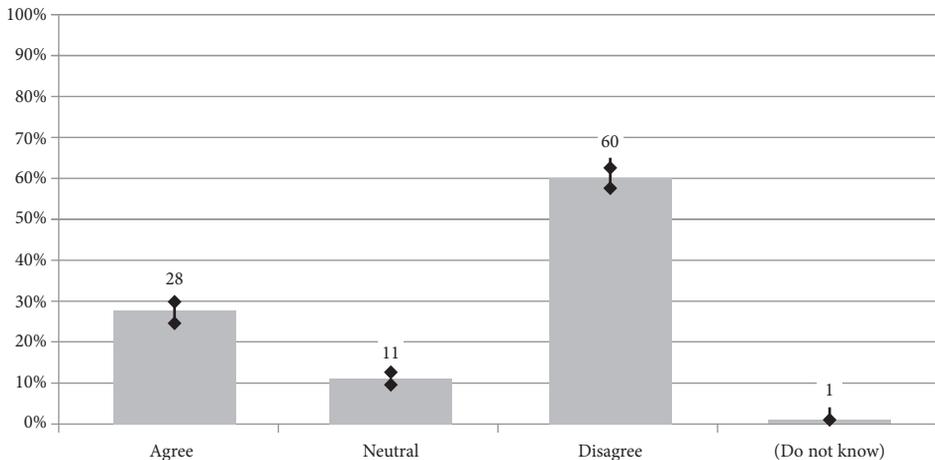
To explore views on and attitudes towards cohabitation, respondents were asked to respond to: 'It is all right for a couple to live together without intending to get married.' In response, 28% agreed with the statement while 60% were opposed to it (Figure 9-6). Again, this is consistent with the fact that South Africans are pro-marriage and tend not to support alternative living arrangements. In comparison to other race groups, Indian and coloured adults were more likely to oppose cohabitation (73% and

65%, respectively). Posel and Rudwick (2013) have highlighted racial discrepancies in terms of likelihood of cohabitation, particularly among white and black African women. As marriage rates dropped, there were significant increases in cohabitation among younger and older African women between 1995 and 2010, 5% to 15%, respectively. In comparison to white women, rates remained higher among black African women. Furthermore, when examined in relation to unmarried women, white women were more likely than black African women to cohabit. Nonetheless, despite the increases in cohabitation rates among black African women, a larger proportion were single and not in cohabitation partnerships compared to their white counterparts. By 2010, a higher proportion of younger and older African women who were single mothers were not cohabiting, compared to younger and older white women; 73% and 28% versus 52% and 8%, respectively.

These racial differences reflect the nature of partnership formation in South Africa, and how it is shaped by, among several factors, cultural beliefs in the case of black African, isiZulu-speaking society. For instance, although marriage rates were decreasing overall, cohabitation rates among black African single mothers remained low, a possible reason being that, according to Zulu culture, cohabitation was an unacceptable form of partnership unless there were marriage intentions and lobola negotiations taking place – meaning people opted to remain unmarried (Posel et al. 2011).

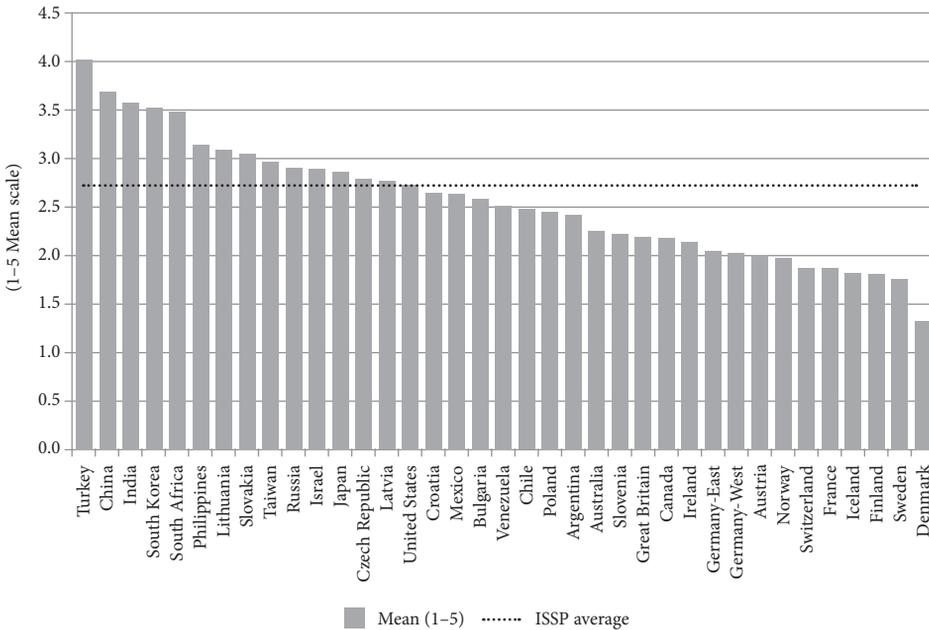
In comparative perspective, South Africa ranked again among the four countries (others being Turkey, China and India) that, in relation to cohabitation, provided the lowest support on average of the 26 ISSP countries (see Figure 9-7). All in all, the countries with the lowest cohabitation scores had high scores in relation to support for marriage.

Figure 9-6: Attitudes towards cohabitation



Source: SASAS 2012

**Figure 9-7:** Cross-national variation in views of whether it is all right for a couple to live together without intending to get married



Source: ISSP 2012

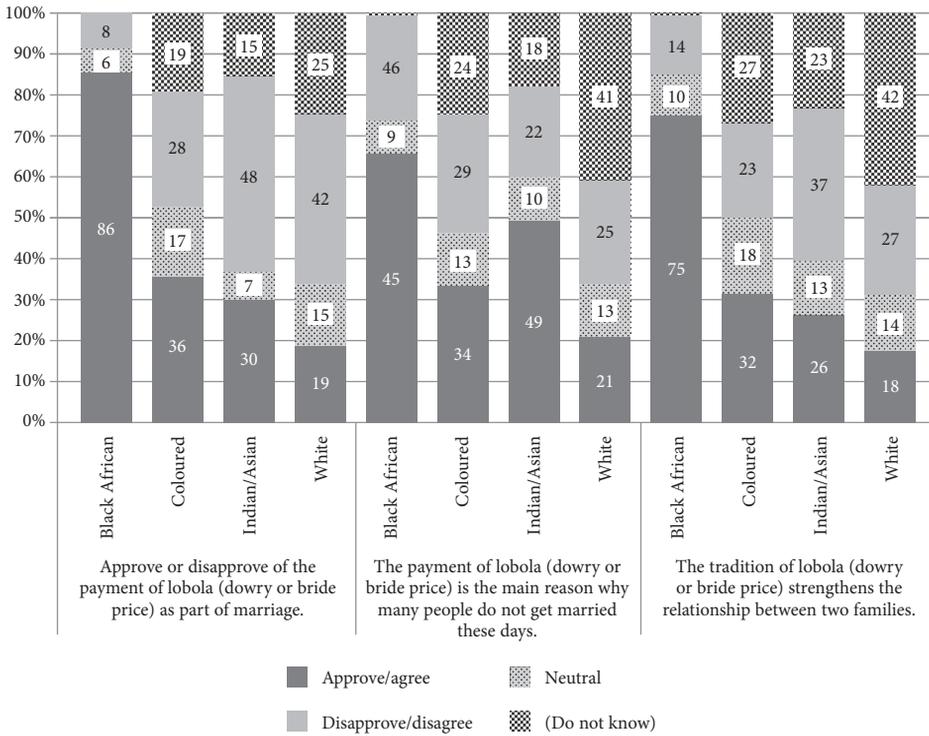
Note: Mean scores are based on a reversed 5-point scale with a value of 1 representing strong support for a couple to live together without intending to get married, and 5 indicating strong opposition to such. 'Don't know' responses were omitted.

### *Attitudes towards bride wealth/lobola*

In addition to the perceived threat of opposition from female partners, financial constraints in paying bride wealth (lobola) have been widely cited as one of the main barriers to marriage in South Africa (Hosegood et al. 2009; Posel et al. 2011). Traditionally, this was regarded as a noble custom (Meekers 1991) that signified establishment of kinship bonds between two families (Ansell 2001), while also celebrating the addition of the woman into the man's family (Shope 2006). It involved merely the exchange of a few cattle with the aim of generating expectations of mutual aid between the two families (Shope 2006). However, recent years have seen a growing commercialisation of lobola.

While 70% of the South African population agree that lobola is a necessary part of marriage, 16% opposed such a view. Furthermore, a majority agreed that lobola served the role of strengthening kinship ties (62%). This confirms the fact that lobola as a cultural practice is highly valued by South Africans, despite the controversies that surround it. As Figure 9-8 shows, black African adults were appreciably more likely to support this marital custom than other race groups. In late 2012, 86% of black African adults approved of the payment of lobola as part of marriage, and

Figure 9-8: Attitudes towards lobola by race group



Source: SASAS 2012

slightly over three-quarters (75%) believed that this tradition strengthens family bonds. There were no major differences between African women and men in relation to these measures (89% and 82%, respectively, on support lobola in general; 76% vs 75% on lobola strengthening family ties).

In spite of these positive views on the necessity of lobola and its role is fostering inter-familial relations, most especially among black African adults, there is nonetheless ambivalence regarding the effect of lobola on the timing of marriage. In response to the statement, ‘The payment of lobola (dowry or bride price) is the main reason why many people do not get married these days,’ overall 41% agreed, 40% disagreed, 10% were neutral, and 9% uncertain of how to respond. Among black African adults, almost equal shares agreed and disagreed (45% and 46%, respectively), while the remaining tenth was neutral or uncertain. This serves as an acknowledgement that, for all its perceived benefits, in the opinion of many South Africans, the cost and time involved in paying lobola has a constraining effect on marriage in that it serves as a barrier to the realisation of preferences regarding the ideal timing of marriage.

### *Preference for government support for married couples*

Marriage remains a popular form of partnership in many societies for its role in combating instability and social breakdown; thus, some governments have realised the need to support married couples and sustain marriages (Brotherson & Duncan 2004). Governments have embarked on various efforts to strengthen marriage, including interventions focusing on preparation for marriage, the formation of marriage, rights and responsibilities within marriage as well as the dissolution of marriage. While, on one hand, some policymakers support the initiative of prioritising marital strengthening as a matter of social justice (Ooms 1998 cited in Brotherson & Duncan 2004), on the other hand, conservative policymakers embrace the idea without increasing government intervention (Horn 2003). There is evidence in the 2012 survey that South Africans would prefer support from the government. Over three-fifths (62%) agreed with the statement that 'the government must assist families to stay together'.

### *Discussion and recommendations*

The findings of this analysis highlight that South Africans generally display strong support for the importance of marriage as an institution. Furthermore, the majority were opposed to divorce and cohabitation, meaning that there is a preference for stable and formal arrangements. However, the study also revealed that interracial marriages are less favourable to certain groups. Sociodemographic factors such as marital status, age, sex, race and religious affiliation seem to influence attitudes towards the nature and choice of partnership.

Age at first marriage for South African males and females is 35 and 30 years, respectively (Stats SA 2015), yet this study reveals that South Africans prefer marriage to take place at a much younger age (25.9 years). However, a study by Garenne (2004) highlights that South Africa is among the few countries (Botswana and Namibia) where age at first marriage is classified under late marriage (> 25 years), compared to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa where it is 15–19 years. Age at first marriage, Garenne (2004) argues, is stable over time but susceptible to changes that occur with modernisation, such as a preference for education and new attitudes towards partnership. Interestingly, despite profound changes over the last two decades, positive attitudes towards marriage still prevail among South Africans during these modern times.

Married people and older people were more likely to express pro-marriage attitudes compared to single and younger people. Similarly, married people were more likely to disapprove of divorce and cohabitation. However, while a higher proportion of Indian adults opposed divorce and cohabitation, white adults seemed to hold more liberal attitudes towards the two compared to other race groups. Amoateng and Heaton (2012), in their analysis of marital patterns in South Africa, confirm that white adults were more likely to opt for divorce compared to other race groups. They reported that, in terms of marital stability, divorce rates were higher among

white adults and lowest among Indian adults. This is confirmed by Stats SA (2012), which highlights that divorce rates in 2011 were highest among the white population followed by black African adults. This highlights that fact that, although the majority of South Africans express support for marriage, in practice, the opposite is true amongst some groups. Nonetheless, Fagan (2001) suggests that strong marriages are key to improving social and personal wellbeing, particularly for children. As such, there should be a concerted effort to sustain existing marriages and, thus, reduce the damaging effects of family breakdown.

The analysis also provided insight into public attitudes towards different family forms in contemporary South African society, such as polygamy, interracial marriage and cohabitation. Polygamous marriage, although legal in South Africa (South African Law Commission 1998), is a type of marriage that received the least support from South Africans, with only a tenth of the adult public showing support for it. Nonetheless, black Africans were more likely to endorse this type of marriage, most especially among the Nguni ethnic groups. Furthermore, greater support for this type of marriage was evident among men relative to women. This finding concurs with previous research by Gwanfogbe et al. (1997). Their study in rural Cameroon reported that women were less accepting of polygamy compared to men.

Other studies that have compared attitudes towards polygamy also reported great differences according to gender. While married men considered polygamy to be a personal choice, women perceived it as undesirable (Dorjahn 1988). Some argue that, in communities where the practice is less frequent, attitudes may tend to oppose it rather than be accepting of it (Al-Krenawi et al. 2006). Those who showed the highest support for polygamy amongst the African population were isiZulu-speaking nationals, which may be because the practice is prevalent among Zulu communities. A possible factor may be the influence of the Shembe, an African-initiated religion that permits and favours polygamous marriages (Krige 1965 cited in Hosegood et al. 2009).

Attitudes towards interracial marriage vary by race as well as by age in this study. While interracial marriages were highly supported by black Africans compared to other racial groups, white South Africans were least likely to support such marriages. Similar findings were reported by Amoateng & Heaton (2012) from SASAS 2005 whereby Indians and whites were more likely to support homogamy compared to other racial groups. In a country that is transitioning from a past characterised by racial discrimination to an order that is democratic and more accepting of diversity, it is ironic that, more than twenty years down the line, racial separatism remains prevalent in South African societies. Amoateng and Kalule-Sabiti (2014) highlight that interracial marriages have been used as proxy measures for race relations and acceptance of other groups. However, these findings are indicative of the fact that positive global attitudes towards interracial marriage do not necessarily translate into personal attitude change among individuals (Herman & Campbell 2012).

Further, older people were less likely to support interracial marriages compared to younger people. Amoateng and Heaton observe that family processes are shaped by race, gender and class and, as such, awareness of racial differences has grown over the years to the extent that race has become a significant indicator of cultural beliefs. Thus, there are bound to be diverse attitudes in terms of racial differences as a result of socialisation of members on identity formation (Amoateng & Heaton 2012). Mwamwenda (1998), in a study that assessed attitudes towards interracial relationships among black South African college students, found that 76% of females and 63% of males preferred to marry someone of the same race.

Approximately two-thirds of South Africans, of which the majority were black African, were in favour of the practice of lobola as part of marriage, of which the majority are black African, with no significant differences between men and women. This indicates that lobola as a marriage practice is valued and plays a significant role among the black African population. However, as Posel and Rudwick (2011) conclude, based on analysis of data from the 2005 SASAS round, although men and women support lobola as a custom, they viewed it as a hindrance to marriage. This finding, they argue, is consistent with the fact that marriage rates among black African women aged 20–30 years are much lower compared to white women in the same age cohort. Additionally, cohabitation among black African women was higher compared to white women, with significant increases between 1995 and 2008 for African women (Posel et al. 2011). Our findings using the 2012 SASAS reaffirm the Posel and Rudwick (2011) findings, with support for lobola in principle clearly juxtaposed with recognition among many that it imposes an economic constraint to marriage, especially the preferred timing of marriage.

About two-thirds of South Africans in the survey agreed with the statement that ‘the government must assist families to stay together’, an indication that the majority realises the value of marriage. Thus, the government in collaboration with civil society should develop initiatives that strengthen marriages at grassroot levels. This may include strengthening already-existing initiatives within churches that provide premarital counselling courses for those planning to get married, and mentorship and support for those who are married. Additional initiatives, such as making information on marriage accessible through public education campaigns and outreach programmes to change the attitudes of young people about marriage, have been implemented successfully in other contexts (Fagan 2001).

The foregoing findings have important policy implications against the background of the White Paper on Families’ strategic priorities that called for, among other things, respect for diverse family types, the fostering of stable marital unions and nationally representative studies to illuminate the key factors underlying low marriage prevalence and increased cohabitation – and workable recommendations to effectively address these factors.

### Notes

- 1 The 95% confidence interval for the estimated mean preferred age of first marriage ranges between 25.4 and 26.0 years for women, and 26.6 and 27.6 years for men.
- 2 Significance tests using One-Way ANOVA post hoc Scheffe tests, and based on the full 5-point agreement scale, confirm that married adults are more supportive of the institution of marriage than those who are separated or divorced, widowed or never married.
- 3 De Vos P, Is polygamy unconstitutional? *Constitutionally Speaking* (blog), 4 January 2010. Accessed July 2016, <http://constitutionallyspeaking.co.za/is-polygamy-unconstitutional/>

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