

Poverty, Educational Attainment, and Livelihoods: How Well Do Young People Fare in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa?

Societal transformations in South Africa and elsewhere have contributed to lengthening the period between puberty and marriage, particularly for girls, and have led to greater opportunities for youth to extend their education and skills development. But they have also increased adolescents' exposure to sexual activity, with its attendant health and social consequences, including unwanted pregnancy and HIV infection. What happens during the adolescent years sets the boundaries for what is possible later in life.

Transitions to Adulthood in the Context of AIDS in South Africa is a longitudinal study that documents and analyzes patterns and trends in key events during an adolescent's transition to adulthood, including leaving school, pregnancy, childbearing, and work opportunities. The study aims to clarify the relationships among these events and the ways household and community characteristics influence them, with the goal of helping policymakers improve adolescent opportunities and capacities in order to foster positive behavior and choices. Funded by USAID, the Rockefeller Foundation, and DFID, Transitions is a collaborative effort among the School of Population and Poverty Studies at the University of Natal, Durban, the Horizons Program, the Policy Research Division of the Population Council, Focus on Young Adults (FOCUS), and the MEASURE/Evaluation Project of Tulane University. The data collection was carried out by an independent South African research organization, Development Research Africa (DRA).

Methods

Transitions is a longitudinal study of youth based in KwaZulu Natal Province, South Africa. Two districts within the province were purposively chosen for the study site: Durban Metro and the larger, rural Mtunzini Magisterial District. Together, these represent urban, transitional, and rural areas of the province. Interviews were conducted with 3,052 14- to 22-year-olds residing in 1,974 households in 1999. A modified multi-stage cluster sampling method was used with enumerator areas (EAs) from the 1996 Census serving as the primary sampling unit.

In 2001, youth were followed up as 16- to 24-year-olds. In addition, youth 14 to 24 years old residing in original sample households at that time were newly interviewed. Non-sample households in each study EA segment were also re-visited

to inquire whether youth were present; those eligible and willing were interviewed. In Wave 2, 2,223 Wave 1 youth were successfully re-interviewed, along with 993 additional youth. The overall lost-to-follow-up rate between the Wave 1 and 2 surveys among youth was 27 percent, with out-migration the primary cause.

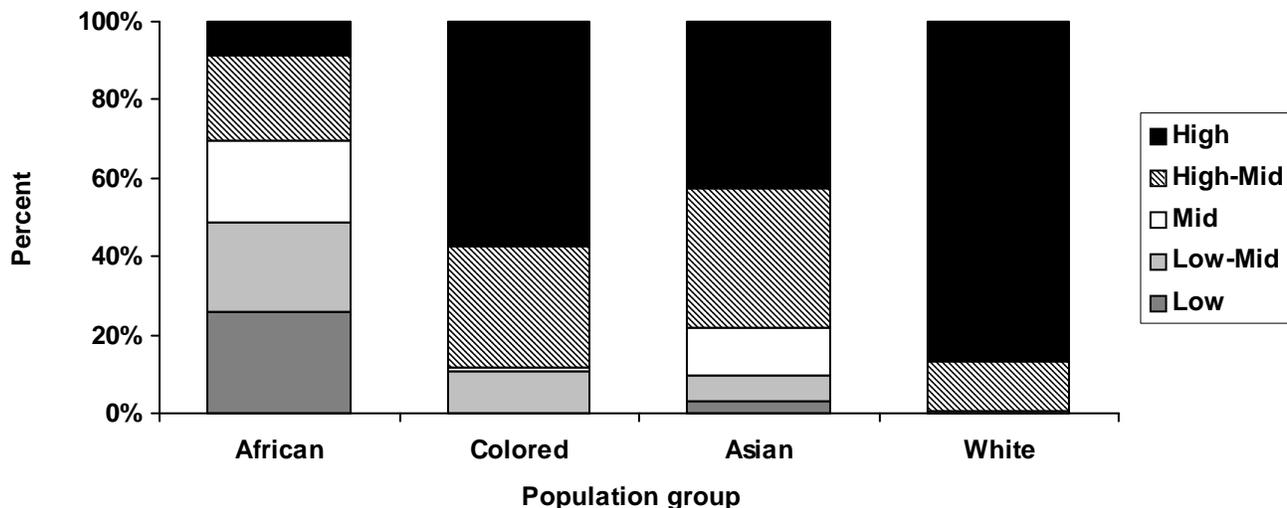
Many aspects of transitions to adulthood were covered in the youth survey, including schooling, paid and unpaid work, sexual and reproductive health behavior, HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes, childbearing, marriage, and perceptions of social connectedness and safety. The study also includes interviews with heads of youth households, mainly parents, about household demographic composition, living conditions, economic status and shocks, and HIV/AIDS issues.

This report summarizes the key findings related to poverty, pregnancy, educational attainment, and livelihood activities from the second wave panel survey collected in 2001. These findings build on the results from the Wave 1 survey (see Rutenberg et al. 2001) and the impact assessment of life skills education on adolescent sexual risk behaviors (see Magnani et al. 2003).

Key Findings

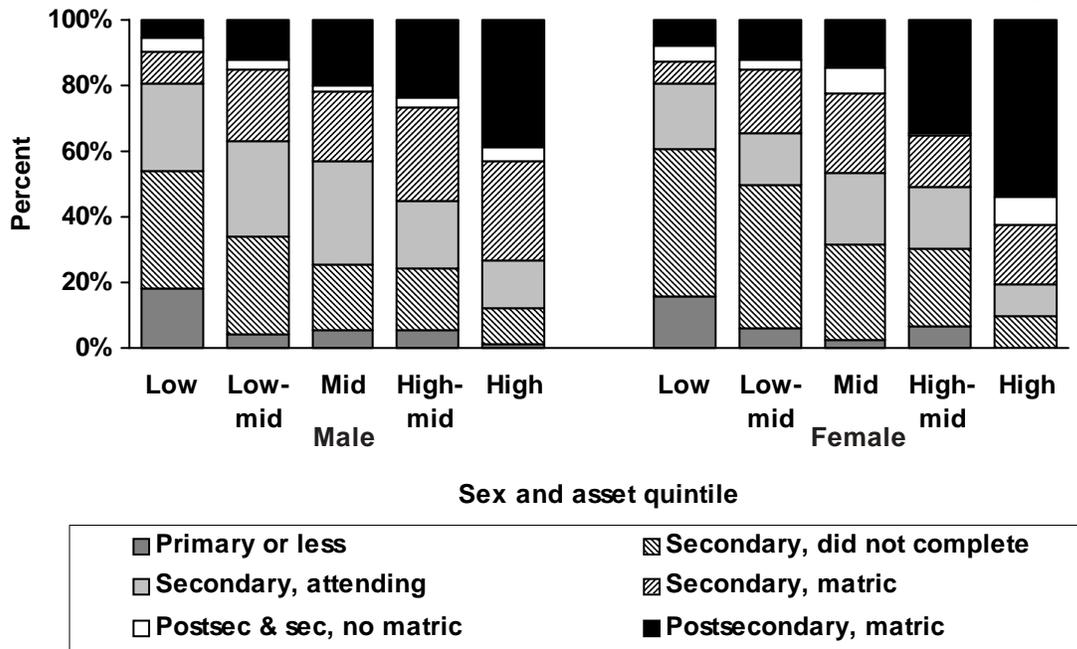
Although Africans account for most of the poorest households in the sample, there is substantial variation in economic status within this population group. Figure 1 shows the distribution of household wealth within each of the four population group classifications that were used under the apartheid system and continue to be used in South Africa today: African, Colored, Asian, and White. An index of household wealth was constructed by adding up the number of consumer durables owned by each study household. These values were then grouped into quintiles, reflecting the relative wealth status of each household. The resulting distribution is consistent with earlier evidence from Moll (1998) that showed an increase in economic inequality within races since apartheid, even as inequality between races has declined. Lam (1999) attributes this trend to a combination of historically limited schooling opportunities for non-Whites along with improved educational and economic opportunities for better-resourced non-Whites since apartheid.

Figure 1 Proportion of youth respondents that belong to each asset quintile, by population group



The negative effect of poverty on low educational attainment is stronger for females than for males. Poor females fare worse than those in richer households. Among 14- to 15-year-olds, 40 percent of girls in the poorest quintile of households have not advanced beyond primary school, versus only 3 percent among the richest one-fifth of respondents. Even among 20- to 22-year-olds, only 16 percent in the poorest wealth quintile have achieved primary school or less, while over one-half of the richest quintile had their “matric” (i.e., a secondary school completion certificate) plus some post-secondary education (Figure 2). Educational attainment of males also shows very strong wealth patterns. Among 14- to 15-year-olds, just over one-half of boys in the poorest two wealth quintiles have not advanced past primary school versus 10 percent among the richest one-fifth of respondents. For 20- to 22-year-olds, 18 percent in the poorest quintile have achieved only primary education or less, while over a third of the richest one-fifth have their “matric” plus some post-secondary education (Figure 2). Multivariate findings indicate that the negative effects of poverty are larger for females than males.

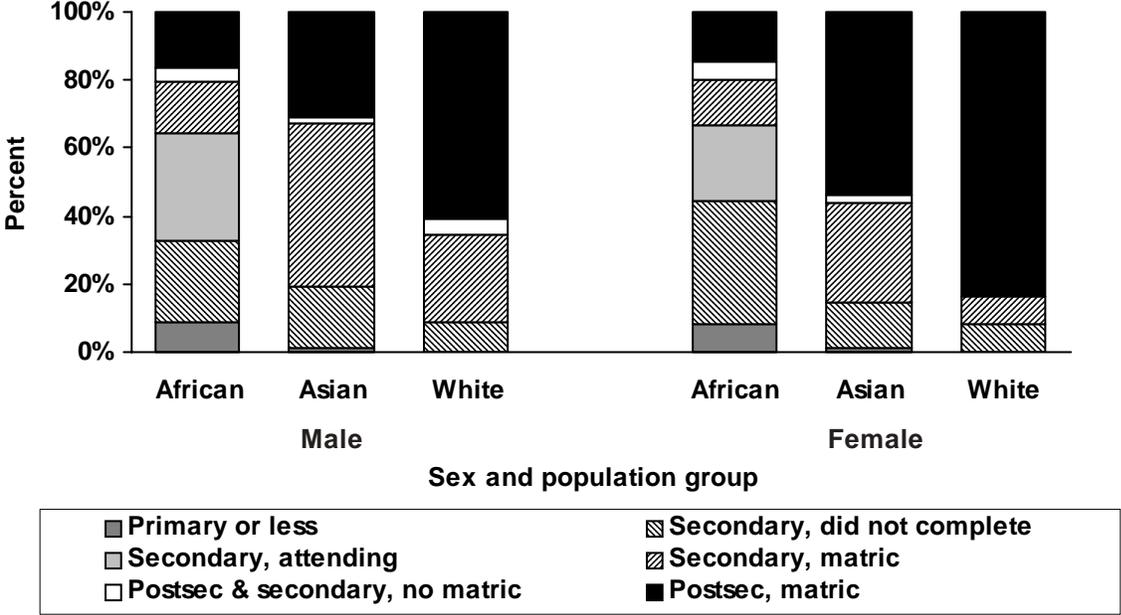
Figure 2 Educational attainment of 20- to 22-year-old respondents, by asset quintile



While most young people have attained at least primary education by age 20, there are large differences by population group. The data show that Africans fare worse than Asians, who in turn have lower educational attainment than Whites. For example, only one-third of Africans in the 20 to 22 year age group completed secondary school compared with 80 percent of Asians and 90 percent of Whites,¹ as shown in Figure 3. Multivariate analysis found that both household wealth and population group had significant effects on the highest grade passed. Within population groups there are no large differences by sex in educational attainment. While African girls advance more quickly through primary than African boys, by age 20, attainment is virtually equal by sex. Among 20- to 22-year-olds, Asian and White females are more likely to have had some post-secondary education than their male counterparts.

¹ Percentages for Whites should be interpreted with caution as there are only 12 females and 23 males aged 20 to 22 in the sample.

Figure 3 Educational attainment of 20-22 year-old respondents, by population group



Males and females of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to have had school delays. Table 1 presents the percentage of respondents who have ever had a school delay by age, sex, and asset quintile. A delay is defined as a year of non-advancement because of either not having enrolled at all during a particular year (but having eventually returned to school), withdrawal during a year, or repeating a grade because of poor performance during the previous year. Household wealth status is an important factor in school delay at all ages for both males and females. Even among 14- to 15-year-olds, more than half of youth in the two lowest socioeconomic quintiles have had a delay in their schooling, compared to 15 percent of females and 27 percent of males in the highest wealth category. This pattern continues across all age groups. Pregnancy is the most common reason for slow grade advancement among females, followed by own illness, inability to pay school fees, and child-care responsibilities. African females are particularly vulnerable to pregnancy and being unable to afford school fees. For males, inability to pay school fees is the most common reason for school delay, followed by own illness, and having to work.

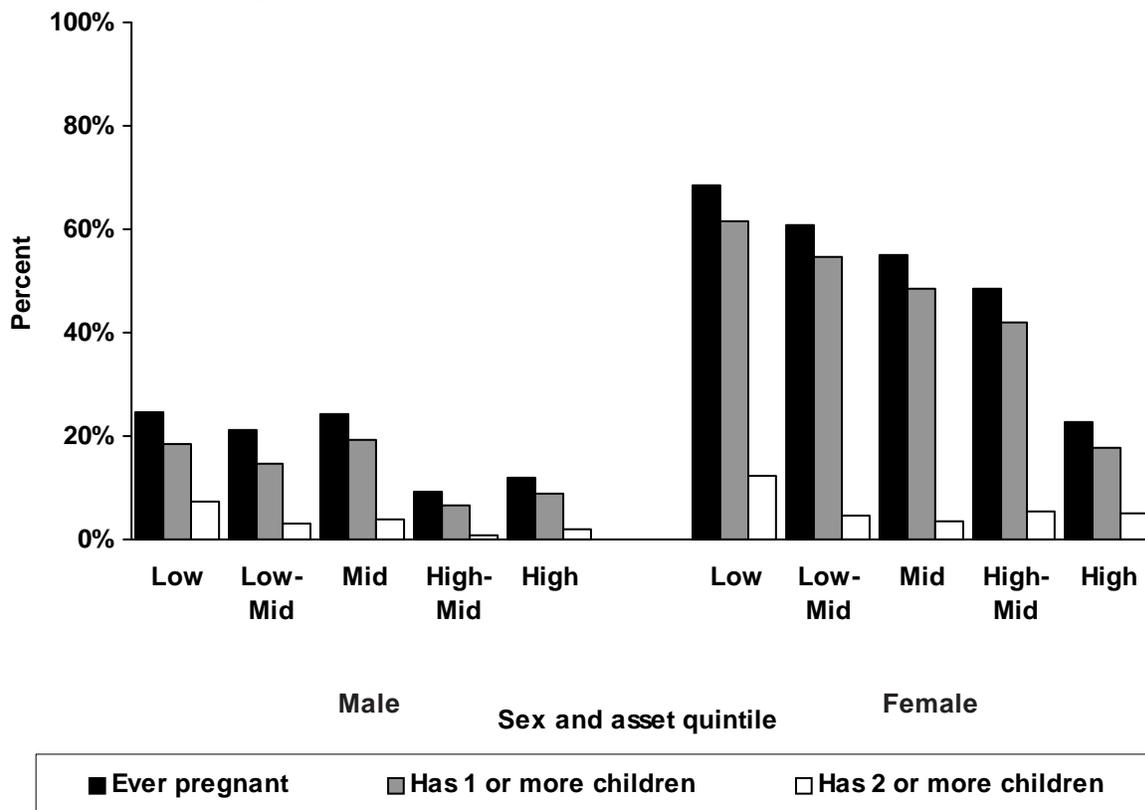
Table 1 Proportion of youth who have ever had a school delay, by asset quintile

| Asset quintile | Male | | | | | Female | | | | |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 14-15 | 16-17 | 18-19 | 20-22 | 23-24 | 14-15 | 16-17 | 18-19 | 20-22 | 23-24 |
| Low | 54 | 61 | 65 | 70 | 78 | 52 | 48 | 62 | 66 | 65 |
| Low-mid | 64 | 62 | 65 | 62 | 81 | 54 | 58 | 57 | 65 | 55 |
| Mid | 41 | 67 | 63 | 66 | 75 | 28 | 50 | 54 | 59 | 69 |
| High-mid | 41 | 40 | 46 | 50 | 64 | 30 | 36 | 43 | 55 | 65 |
| High | 27 | 27 | 33 | 35 | 27 | 15 | 19 | 15 | 32 | 36 |
| Total | 45 | 51 | 53 | 56 | 68 | 35 | 42 | 47 | 57 | 60 |

Although African females advance more quickly than males through primary school, during secondary school, many young women withdraw due to pregnancy. Among all 14- to 15-year-old African respondents, 10 percent more males than females have had a school delay. However, by ages 20 to 22, there is essentially no difference by sex. A considerable proportion of the school delays experienced between the ages of 16 and 24 by African women are because of a pregnancy: 5 percent of 16- to 17-year-olds, 20 percent of 18- to 19-year-olds, 25 percent of 20- to 22-year-olds, and 28 percent of 23- to 24-year-olds. However, the high proportion returning to school after a pregnancy delay is encouraging. Ninety percent of the thirty-three 23- to 24-year-olds in our sample who had a pregnancy delay reported returning to school.

Poor females are more likely to become pregnant by their early twenties than females in higher asset households. Among 20- to 22-year-olds, almost 70 percent of female respondents in the lowest wealth quintile versus 23 percent of girls in the highest wealth quintile have been pregnant. For women in their early twenties, greater wealth is associated with lower rates of pregnancy and childbearing, as shown in Figure 4. Among males there also appears to be some gradient by socioeconomic status for having gotten a girl pregnant, but it is much less pronounced and the prevalence is much lower than for females. Figure 4 also shows that very few 20- to 22-year-olds have had more than one child; only in the lowest wealth category have more than 10 percent of women had two or more children. Examining the data from 20- to 22-year-olds by race reveals that 60 percent of Africans have been pregnant versus 21 and zero percent of Asians and Whites, respectively. Multivariate results indicate that both wealth and population group have large and statistically significant effects on female pregnancy risk.

Figure 4 Pregnancy and childbearing status among 20- to 22-year-olds, by asset quintile



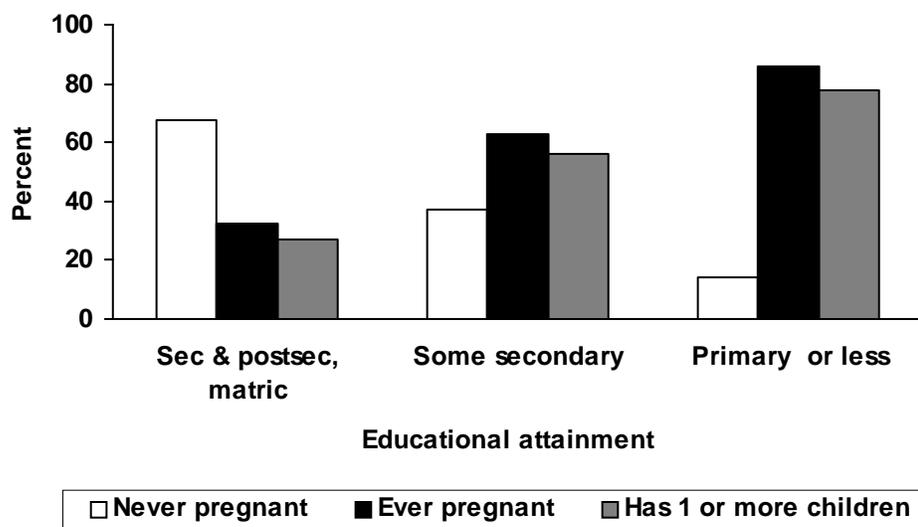
Young women in their early twenties who have had a pregnancy are half as likely to have their secondary matriculation certificate than those who have never been pregnant.

Among 18- to 19-year-old females who have been pregnant, one-fifth have primary level education or less, in contrast to only 5 percent of those who have never been pregnant. Only 9 percent of ever-pregnant young women in this age group have finished secondary school versus 38 percent among those who have never been pregnant. Pregnancy-related differences in educational achievement continue for women in the early twenties age group. Among never pregnant, 20- to 22-year-old women, 55 percent have their matriculation certificate, versus only 23 percent of those who have been pregnant or had a child.

Many young women with low educational attainment have been pregnant and have had a child.

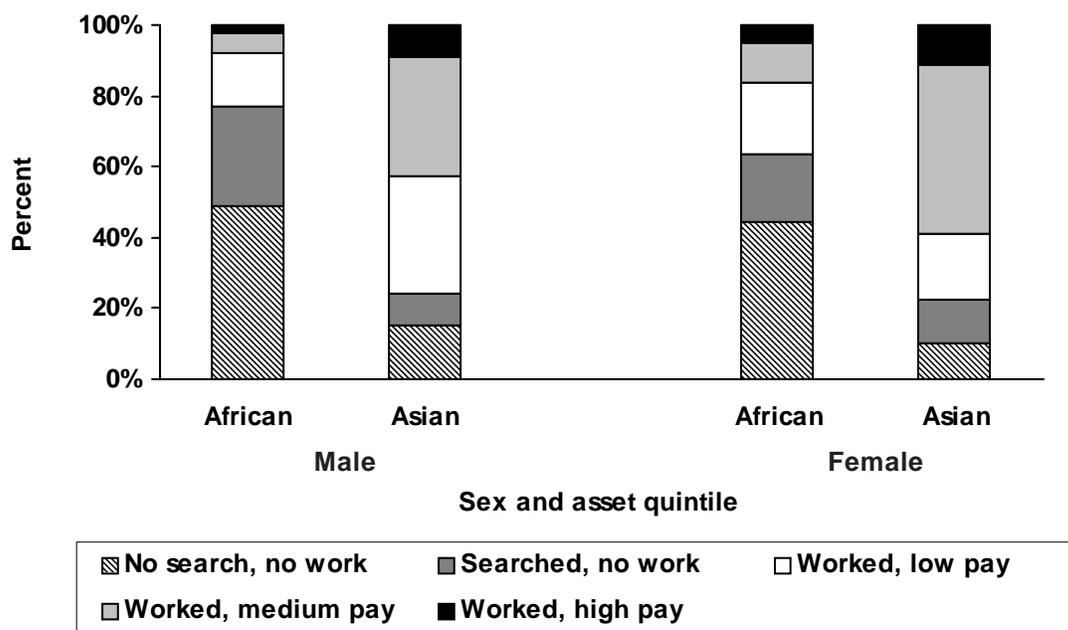
Although only 8 percent of 20- to 22-year-old females have primary or less education, 85 percent of these have been pregnant, compared with 32 percent of females who have a matriculation certificate, as shown in Figure 5. In contrast to many other countries, young mothers in South Africa are allowed to return to school after giving birth. The policy is often credited with the observed lack of gender differences in adult educational attainment and is believed to contribute to the observed long delay before the birth of a second child to adolescent mothers in South Africa. While the policy is indeed progressive, much work remains with regard to reducing the rate of adolescent pregnancy to begin with. Our results indicate large and negative associations of pregnancy and birth with female schooling.

Figure 5 Pregnancy and childbearing status among 20- to 22-year-old females, by educational attainment



African females have less attachment to the work force compared to males and females of other racial groups. In 1999, the unemployment rate (expanded definition) was 36 percent nationally, but 52 percent for African women, and 60 percent for those between the ages of 15 and 24 (Statistics South Africa 2001). Figure 6 highlights the disparities in employment with respect to sex and race. In the year preceding the survey, African women ages 20 to 22 years, are less likely to have been employed, more likely to have not found work after searching, and to have worked for a lower wage, when employed.

Figure 6 Work status of 20- to 22-year-old respondents during 12 months prior to survey, by sex and population group



Young women who were able to work for pay while attending school have higher matriculation rates and lower rates of pregnancy. Although only 11 and 12 percent of sample females and males, respectively, ages 19 to 24 years worked for pay while enrolled in school, this group had more favorable later outcomes. Among both sexes, this group has statistically higher matriculation rates; among females this group has statistically lower chances of pregnancy. Combining paid work with school attendance may therefore be positive for secondary school learners in KZN. Kirby (2001) discusses ways in which such “youth development” experiences may reduce pregnancy risk by increasing access to adult mentors, boosting self-confidence and negotiating skills, instilling a sense of hope for the future, and curtailing discretionary time. A caveat to the results, however, is to consider who is more able to gain access to paid work: non-Africans and the non-poor, who are likely to have more favorable education and reproductive health outcomes to begin with.

The portfolio of livelihood options for young people shows distinct gender, population group, and poverty patterns. Tables 2 and 3 show the various livelihood situations of 20- to 22-year-olds in the sample. A large percentage are pursuing education. Among Africans, school attendance is overwhelmingly at the secondary level in the hopes of attaining a matriculation certificate. Among non-Africans and the non-poor, time spent in education involves studying at higher-level institutions.

With regard to parenting, only two percent of 20- to 22-year-old young men reside with a child they have fathered (although 13 percent of males in this age range report having fathered a child). Among females, 35 percent reside with a child of their own (46 percent have a child). Wealth and population group differences in active, residential parenting roles are quite large, with the rates being very high among poor women and African women.

Table 2 Proportion of 20- to 22-year-old females in various livelihood situations

| | Attending secondary | Attending technikon or university | Has a child | Has co-resident child | Married/resides with partner | Searched but did not work | Any work for pay | Any work for unpaid | Resides with pensioner |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Asset quintile | | | | | | | | | |
| Low | 20 | 4 | 62 | 47 | 7 | 26 | 28 | 57 | 13 |
| Low-mid | 17 | 4 | 53 | 41 | 3 | 28 | 25 | 58 | 19 |
| Mid | 22 | 12 | 49 | 38 | 3 | 21 | 32 | 44 | 21 |
| Mid-high | 19 | 17 | 40 | 30 | 5 | 24 | 35 | 27 | 22 |
| High | 10 | 36 | 18 | 15 | 7 | 21 | 57 | 38 | 14 |
| Pop. group | | | | | | | | | |
| African | 23 | 9 | 53 | 40 | 2 | 28 | 24 | 50 | 20 |
| Asian | 0 | 29 | 15 | 12 | 17 | 9 | 77 | 24 | 5 |
| Total | 18 | 13 | 47 | 35 | 5 | 24 | 34 | 45 | 18 |

Marriage is often considered a livelihood strategy, especially for women in developing countries. Age at marriage, however, is late and rising in South Africa (Quisumbing and Hallman 2003). Only a small proportion of 20- to 22-year-olds in the Transitions sample were married; Africans are very unlikely to be married in their early twenties.

Females are more likely to have searched for but not found any paid work in the twelve months before the survey; African women had the highest rates of unsuccessful job search. Males were more likely to have found paid work in the year before the survey. Among low-asset individuals, the gender differences in having had any remunerated work are very large. Performing unpaid work was the most prevalent among females, with Africans and the poor having much higher percentages.

Fewer than one in five young people resides in a household with a pensioner (a female age 60 or older or male age 65 or older). Co-residence with a pensioner has been shown in other literature (Edmonds 2004) to increase the chances of school fee payment of co-resident young people in South Africa; unfortunately, very few young people in our sample have access to this form of social assistance.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Despite high rates of enrollment—even among young adults—educational attainment remains a challenge in South Africa, with many young people progressing slowly through school. The results show that being from a poor household or belonging to a traditionally disadvantaged population group strongly reduces educational advancement and achievement. The negative effects on education of being poor are larger for females than males. Pregnancy is another major factor inhibiting school advancement of females, and higher rates of pregnancy are observed among poorer young women, indicating that poverty inhibits schooling both directly and indirectly by

Table 3 Proportion of 20- to 22-year-old males in various livelihood situations

| | Attending secondary | Attending technikon or university | Has a child | Has co-resident child | Married/resides with partner | Searched but did not work | Any work for pay | Any work for unpaid | Resides with pensioner |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Asset quintile | | | | | | | | | |
| Low | 27 | 5 | 17 | 3 | 1 | 19 | 47 | 34 | 13 |
| Low-mid | 30 | 6 | 15 | 2 | 0 | 21 | 46 | 43 | 20 |
| Mid | 32 | 11 | 19 | 1 | 2 | 18 | 32 | 32 | 23 |
| Mid-high | 21 | 17 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 16 | 51 | 36 | 21 |
| High | 15 | 24 | 10 | 2 | 2 | 15 | 53 | 46 | 15 |
| Pop. group | | | | | | | | | |
| African | 32 | 11 | 16 | 2 | 1 | 19 | 37 | 41 | 20 |
| Asian | 0 | 19 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 12 | 77 | 30 | 17 |
| Total | 24 | 14 | 13 | 2 | 2 | 18 | 46 | 38 | 19 |

increasing the risk of getting pregnant. These findings have implications for policymakers concerned about improving the design and targeting of reproductive health education and service provision to young people in South Africa.

With the strong household wealth effects found for educational attainment, especially among females, revisiting options for waiving or reducing school fees among the poor, with perhaps a targeting mechanism toward girls, deserves attention and commitment from policymakers. Extending such incentives beyond age 18 is also worth consideration, as the results show that secondary school attendance continues well into the early twenties (consistent with Statistics South Africa 2001).

The results also present a picture of limited livelihood options and unequal access to the infrastructure and tools required to prepare a young person to compete for the few paid jobs that are available in South Africa. Disparities cut not only along racial lines, but are also very apparent in many instances by sex and poverty status. Paid work opportunities are slim for Africans. Moreover, despite gender equality in adult educational attainment within population groups, African females have by far the lowest access to remunerated work. These same young women have the highest unpaid work burdens. Young women who were able to combine schooling and paid work appear to have better subsequent livelihood outcomes. Marriage as a livelihood strategy is not prominent among this young group; marriage age is rising in South Africa, probably due to the dire economic situation, including the effects of AIDS on families and the economy.

Few social assistance programs are available to adolescents and young adults. The child support grant is the only obvious form, and only young people who are poor and are primary caregivers of children under nine years of age are eligible. The vast majority of young people in our sample do not live with a pensioner, so are unlikely to have access to income from old-age pensions. In the absence of immediate and large-scale job creation, a more general form of social assistance, not tied to age, may do better at helping under-privileged young people prepare for the challenges the South African environment presents. Programs to enhance female preparedness for paid work

