



Leaving the parental home in post-apartheid South Africa

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Abstract

The process by which young people leave home in South Africa is central for understanding the lives of the country's young adult population, as well as, their role in the structural household change that has occurred over the post-apartheid period. However, hardly any quantitative work has been conducted on this process and no work exists on trends. I provide nationally-representative trends of home-leaving for young adults in South Africa for the first time using a stacked series of annual cross-sections between 1995 and 2011. I answer questions like 'who leaves home and when?' 'how has this changed over time?' and 'what are the main reasons for leaving or staying?'. I find that different home-leaving rates by race converged in the late 90s and became roughly steady in the decade of the 2000s. Most South Africans only left home by age 25 - but whether this can be interpreted as 'delayed' or not is complicated by adherence to diverse family patterns and the continued relevance of stretched households. Home-leavers are especially dependent on labour market income in the absence of social grants targeted, in particular, at the large unemployed young adult population. Since young women face higher unemployment rates than young men, women were notably more reliant than men on marriage as a pathway out of the parental home. Over time, young male home-leavers are living alone at higher rates, meaning they have contributed to general household proliferation even if the rate at which they have left home has been mostly flat.

Keywords: home-leaving; gender; young adulthood

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1 Introduction

The process of young people leaving the parental home is closely connected to a range of social, demographic and economic outcomes. From a micro perspective, leaving the parental home is associated with ‘young adulthood’, usually defined as spanning ages 15-35 and described as a ‘demographically dense’ period of the life course (Rindfuss 1991). Many important life events cluster in this life period, such as the end of education, beginning of work, leaving the parental home, union formation, and onset of parenthood. The timing and sequencing of these events in young adulthood can have profound implications for other important outcomes over people’s lives (Settersten 2003). From a macro-level perspective, long-term drop in average household size and the rise in living alone around the world is a chief demographic trend of the modern era (Bradbury et al. 2014, Snell 2017). These changes represent adjustments to one of our most primary social networks, with immediate implications for livelihood strategies (Lanjouw & Ravallion 1995), care burdens (Hatch & Posel 2018), gender relations (Posel & Hall 2020), well-being (Smith & Victor 2019) and other social outcomes. A natural focal point in the study of household change is the extent to which young adults might be contributing to these broader changes as they transition out of the parental home (Ermisch 1999). Despite the relevance of this topic to a range of social outcomes, there has been hardly any empirical research on levels and trends of home-leaving in South Africa where young adults represent as much as 40% of the population.

In this paper, I study home-leaving both as an important aspect of young adulthood in South Africa, as well as, how this intersects with the household and single-person household proliferation that has occurred over the post-apartheid period (Wittenberg et al. 2017, Thornton 2021). There has been no other empirical study on this topic for South Africa that I am aware of beyond original work by Simkins (2017*a,b*) who used the 2015 wave of the General Household Survey (GHS) to show most South Africans aged 15-35 live at home (63%). Simkins (2017*a*) developed how to identify whether young adults live with their parents or not using the information in the GHS and I incorporate this definition into fifteen household surveys spanning 1995-2011, allowing me to plot trends in home-leaving for South Africa for the first time. These surveys are chosen for two reasons: first, they cover the beginning of the post-apartheid period allowing me to describe a baseline of home-leaving for democratic South Africa. Second, I am able to apply recently recalibrated survey weights to these surveys to extract more accurate counts of households, and especially single-person households, than was previously possible (Thornton & Wittenberg 2022*b*). I use these data to answer questions about when South Africans leave home; how much this has changed over the post-apartheid period; what the main reasons are for leaving home; and the characteristics of households home-leavers live in compared to home-stayers.

My work connects to the international literature on the ‘transition to adulthood’. Home-leaving and its relation to other events commonly understood as part of the ‘transition to adulthood’ have been the subject of a large and rich literature focused mainly on the West and also East Asia (Aassve et al. 2002, Billari 2004, Raymo & Ono 2007, Suzuki 2001). Around the world, age of home-leaving has been increasing as youth adjust to increasingly precarious economic conditions (Billari et al. 2001, Molgat 2002, Evans 2013). Home-leaving is also understood to be responsive to institutional factors. Young adults in Southern Europe, for example, leave home gradually between ages 15-35, usually upon union formation, with most only having left home by about age 25 (Billari & Wilson 2001). This is linked to strong family values in this region, high religiosity, and welfare spending that prioritises the Family over the Individual (i.e. more pension spending than unemployment spending). By contrast, young adults in

Nordic countries usually detach from the parental home around ages 18-19 and marriage is less of a focal point (Billari & Wilson 2001). There is a growing body of evidence on these topics for the developing world, although studies have focused more on the onset of parenthood, union formation, and sexual debut (Sironi et al. 2020, Grant & Furstenberg 2007). South Africa features in this literature (Sironi et al. 2020, Goldberg 2013), but the outcome of leaving the parental home itself, has not been studied for South Africa.

Interpretation of home-leaving patterns in South Africa must take local context into account. Whereas leaving home is a rite of passage in the Western world, adulthood has other cultural demarcations in South Africa e.g. initiation rituals, and a large portion of the population subscribe to consanguineal, rather than Western nuclear family patterns (Siqwana-Ndulo 1998, Sooryamoorthy & Makhoba 2016). This means home-leaving that may count as ‘delayed’ by Western standards is not necessarily so in South Africa. South Africa also has a long history of oscillating labour migration, whereby migrants spend extended periods away from a rural homestead working in urban areas and maintain ties by sending remittances (Wilson 2001). Households are therefore ‘stretched’ over space making it hard to tell if a young adult has truly ‘left’ their parental household (Spiegel et al. 1996). Despite these conceptual complications, there are good reasons why we might expect home-leaving in South Africa to be delayed. Marital rates have long been declining (Garenne 2016) and youth unemployment is extreme (De Lannoy & Mudiriza 2019). These factors in combination with a lack of social grants targeting this age group make leaving home financially infeasible for many.

My finding is that most South African young adults remain at home (66% in 2010-11) and this has been roughly stable for the decade of the 2000s. Prior to this in the 90s, I observe that whites delayed their home-leaving and Black Africans increased their home-leaving resulting in convergence of home-leaving rates by race. The onset of democracy may be behind the different adjustments by race to the trend in the 1990s, although my data do not allow me to fully disentangle whether this is the case. Home-leaving is diffused across age and most South Africans had only left home by age 25 in 2011. I find getting married almost guarantees women will leave home, but getting a job seems about as important as marriage for men. This is partly explained by home-leavers as a group being much more dependent than others (home-stayers or older adults) on labour market income whilst also facing excessive unemployment rates. South Africa resembles Southern European home-leaving to some extent and conforms with many of the socio-economic explanations for this pattern, such as more spending on pension support (van der Berg et al. 2010); high levels of religiosity (Chipkin & Leatt 2011); and poorer labour market conditions (Casale et al. 2021). However, local contextual factors are certainly also shaping these trends. In Italy, men are likely leaving home to start families since child-bearing happens almost universally within wedlock (Billari et al. 2001). In South Africa, a history of separating migrant men from their families combined with persistent decline in marriage rates has de-linked child-bearing from marriage (Hosegood et al. 2009). Searching for economic opportunities and the continued relevance of labour migration are more likely reasons South African men are leaving home, although data constraints limit my ability to fully explore the role of labour migration.

My work also contributes a new understanding about home-leaving to the expansive literature on household composition and change in South Africa. Many authors have documented the drop in average household size in South Africa over the post-apartheid period (Amoateng et al. 2007, Russell 2003, Ziehl 2002, Wittenberg & Collinson 2007, Posel & Hall 2020). Between census 1996 and 2011, the household

count increased by 58% whilst the population only changed by 28%, and the single-person household count alone increased by 150% (Thornton 2021). These changes are highly gendered with men mainly living alone and more women heading up their own households, which often include children and extended family members. Household change has immediate implications for welfare. Female-headed households are more reliant on female labour market earnings and grant income, raising their poverty risk compared to their male counterparts (Posel & Rogan 2012). So far, however, this literature has not dealt specifically with the role played by young adults leaving home.

I fill this gap by using my data to describe the connection between home-leaving trends and trends in household formation. I conceptualise of home-leaving and household formation as different phenomena. Since there is one head per household in my data, the number of household heads tallies with the count of households in the country. I therefore use household headship as a way to capture the person most likely to have formed a household. The extent to which young adults leave home to head their own households informs me about how home-leaving patterns are adding to the overall household count. Young adults leaving home may not necessarily contribute to the household count if they join already-existing homes e.g. moving into their spouse's existing household, or moving in with relatives. Household formation that happens when someone leaves the parental home is also different to, say, a household splitting after a divorce or being enabled by the onset of pension-income. Leaving the parental home is instead a choice almost all young adults have to face, meaning this topic represents a nexus of demographic change, the life course, and household formation.

I find that although the trend in home-leaving stabilised for both men and women in the decade of the 2000s, there has been notable change in the types of households in which home-leavers find themselves. Young men are increasingly living alone compared to young women who are more likely to be living in complex households often including children. The result is that young men have contributed new households to the household count, even if the rate at which they left home was steady over the 2000s. Young women, on the other hand, represent a very slightly declining share of heads over time. This aligns with findings from Thornton (2021) that identified prime-aged and older women as behind the increase in female household headship in South Africa.

This paper therefore provides several contributions. Firstly, I provide the first empirical description of home-leaving trends in South Africa and provide baseline levels of home-leaving for democratic South Africa. Secondly, my data has the advantage of re-calibrated survey weights which improve accuracy in the estimation of variables important for the study of home-leaving. Thirdly, I describe the types of households home-leavers and stayers occupy in detail for the first time, allowing me to connect home-leaving to household compositional change and the explosion in living alone. Fourthly, I specifically investigate the overlap between leaving the parental home and the important trend of household proliferation in South Africa. The next section provides an overview of the literature on home-leaving followed by a background section about South Africa. I motivate my choice of data, describe my survey weights, and detail how I identify home-leavers in Section 4. Thereafter, I profile home-leavers in Section 5. I explore the connection between home-leaving and growth of the household count in Section 6, as well as describing the types of households in which home-leavers are living.

2 Literature review

2.1 Leaving home in the developed world

Since about the 1970s, the age of leaving the parental home has been increasing slightly in the West (Billari et al. 2001, Molgat 2002, Evans 2013) and Japan (Suzuki 2001), and most clearly in Italy and Spain. This is partly attributed to increasing economic vulnerability owed to globalisation, making it more important to prolong education and to delay family formation due to the demands of studying and work (Evans 2013). The change has also been linked to ideational change stemming from the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) which emphasises the Individual over the Family (Lesthaeghe 2010).

Behind this overall pattern there is persistent regional variation which has been the topic of much research interest (Aassve et al. 2002, Billari et al. 2001). Billari (2004) analyses adulthood in a sample of European countries for 18-34 year olds. ‘Adulthood’ is defined as covering the three events of home-leaving, union formation, and the onset of parenthood. Two patterns emerge at the extremes, which Billari (2004) calls a ‘latest-late’ pattern versus an ‘earliest-early’ pattern. The ‘earliest-early’ pattern is associated with Nordic countries where age is a key factor in home-leaving: most young adults detach from the parental home at around 19-20 years. Union formation tends to come later in life and is less obviously connected to home-leaving. By contrast, the ‘latest-late’ pattern characterises Southern European countries where young adults stay at home longer and detachment from the parental home is more diffused across age. The median age of leaving home for cohorts born in 1960-65 was about 26 or 27 for men and about 23 for women in Spain and Italy (Billari et al. 2001). Instead, it is union formation that is more decisive in young people leaving the parental home.

These differences are linked to institutional and economic differences between these countries, often finding expression in the welfare state. The ‘earliest-early’ pattern is associated with States putting stronger emphasis on individual rights, as proxied through higher spending on unemployment benefits and participation in social clubs (i.e. social life outside the family is vibrant). The ‘latest-late’ pattern was associated with higher religiosity and with States that placed more emphasis on the Family as an institution and traditional family values (Reher 1998). This was proxied by less State spending on unemployment grants and strong spending on pensions instead (i.e. a prioritisation of older generations versus youth based on the important role the elderly play in maintaining strong family ties). Economic factors also play a role: labour markets in Nordic countries are generally better-functioning than in Southern Europe implying young adults are less likely to need to rely on parents as a private social security net.

2.2 Leaving home in the developing world

There is a smaller and less-cohesive body of evidence on home-leaving in the developing world. A number of country case studies exist and the main theme emerging from this literature is one of heterogeneity. For example, in Uruguay (Ciganda et al. 2010), China and South Korea (Yi et al. 1994, Suzuki 2001), home-leaving has been delayed, but has increased over time in Malaysia (Johnson & DaVanzo 1998). Entering the labour market triggers leaving the parental home in Mexico (Pérez Amador 2006, García-Andrés et al. 2021), but in Northern Ethiopia (Ezra 2000) and urban China (Ting & Chiu 2002), marriage remains

key. In Uruguay, those of both high and low socio-economic status delay home-leaving which Ciganda et al. (2010) interpret as reproducing intergenerational inequalities; whilst in Mexico, young adults of a lower socio-economic status leave home sooner (de Oliveira & Salas 2008) which was also interpreted as having potentially negative implications for future labour market and educational outcomes. Essentially, structural differences in political regimes, labour markets, marriage markets, educational attainment and cultural norms play a vital role in shaping local home-leaving behaviour. This makes setting up the context for the South African case of primary importance.

3 Background to South Africa

South Africa is a middle-income country that nevertheless suffers from high levels of poverty and income inequality that is amongst the worst in the world (Alvaredo et al. 2018). This income inequality is mainly propped up by a highly exclusive labour market that still reflects historical disadvantage for Black¹ populations and women encoded during the apartheid era. Key features of the labour market include high, open, and persistently increasing structural unemployment (DPRU 2017) alongside highly concentrated wage inequality (Wittenberg 2017). Labour migrants are an important feature of this labour market, continuing a pattern of circular migration between rural homesteads and urban workplaces set up before apartheid (Wilson 2001, Bank et al. 2020).

After apartheid ended, employment opportunities expanded slightly for women and Black people, but this was accompanied by a concomitant increase in unemployment (Casale & Posel 2002). The upshot is a high proportion of youth in South Africa are classified as ‘Not in any kind of Education, Employment or Training’ (NEET) (De Lannoy & Mudiriza 2019, Kraak 2013, Dickens & Marx 2020). In 2018, about 36.5% of 15-29 year-olds were NEET and this group is predominantly female, Black African, urban and in the 20-29 year-old age bracket. Most NEET youth are unemployed (48%) or discouraged workseekers (24%), although over 60% of NEET women classified as ‘inactive’ say they are occupied with childcare and housework (De Lannoy & Mudiriza 2019). High youth unemployment rates are part of why anthropological work by Honwana (2012) characterised South African youth as in a state of ‘waithood’ - a state of suspension between childhood and adulthood. According to this concept, whilst young adults are too old to be considered children, the binding constraints of their socio-economic circumstances restrict their ability to attain the usual markers of adulthood like getting a job, getting married, and leaving home (Honwana 2012, 2014).

Marital rates have been declining since probably the 1960s and apartheid policies which separated working men from their families in the labour migration system also contributed to the breakdown of family formation (Garenne 2016, Hosegood et al. 2009). As high male unemployment in the post-apartheid period has continued to destabilise the feasibility of marriage (Posel & Casale 2013), childbearing has largely been de-coupled from marriage (Hosegood et al. 2009). An astonishing 58% of children under 18 years did not live with a co-resident father in 2008 (Posel & Hall 2020). Cohabitation has also not increased to compensate for the decline in marital rates and divorce rates remain low (Posel &

¹I use the term ‘Black’ to apply to groups of the population classified as ‘African’, ‘Coloured’ (people of mixed-race heritage from the Cape and also associated with a distinct cultural identity); and ‘Indian/Asian’. These are apartheid-era classifications which Statistics South Africa still uses to collect demographic data owing to the continued importance of understanding, quantifying and monitoring the legacy of apartheid in the post-apartheid era. The fourth population group category is ‘white’.

Rudwick 2013) meaning that in South Africa men and women are increasingly living separately. Men are mainly living alone whilst women are living in complex households usually including children (Thornton 2021, Posel & Hall 2020). Greater reliance on social grants has resulted in female-headed households emerging as poorer than male-headed, connecting household compositional changes to welfare in general (Posel & Rogan 2012). The State provides welfare support for children and the aged amongst other populations, like the disabled; but critically, South Africa's large young unemployed population remain without welfare.² The highest-paying social grant is the Old Age Pension whilst the Child Support Grant, the welfare support most likely to land in the hands of young adults, constitutes a very small amount often not increasing with inflation and coming in at less than the official food poverty line in some years (van der Berg et al. 2010, StatsSA 2008*b*).

Despite difficulty in both getting a job and getting married, South Africans have formed households more quickly over the post-apartheid period than the population has grown (Thornton 2021). This may, in fact, be related to declining marital prospects as household heads are increasingly never-married and never-married people increased their household headship rate notably in the first 15 years of democracy (Thornton 2021). Average household size has then dropped by almost a full person between census 1996 and 2011, by which time the share of single-person households reached 27%, comparable to the United States in the same year (Ortiz-Ospina 2019).

The drop in household size triggered debates at the turn of the century about whether South African households were becoming more nuclear (Russell 2003, Ziehl 2002, Seekings 2008). Historically, Black African households in South Africa have followed a consanguineal and patrilineal system (Siqwana-Ndulo 1998, Russell 2003, Sooryamoorthy & Makhoba 2016) rather than the conjugal system associated with the West and the nuclear family. The primary unit of the conjugal system is the married couple who may go on to raise children and households only include these immediate family members. In the consanguineal system, the primary organising principal is the kinship network and common ancestry. Wives often move into the household of her husband's family and households include extended family members, resulting in household structure and size that is complex and fluid (Russell 2004, Seekings 2008).

More recent research though has established that there has been growth at the poles of complexity (Wittenberg & Collinson 2007, Posel & Hall 2020): although solo living has increased, complex households remain highly relevant particularly as woman leverage kin networks to cope with the triple burden of labour market production, household production, and childcare. In a context where oscillating labour migration remains relevant, one must be cautious about interpreting more single-person households as indicative of the spread of a nuclear family pattern.

This context sets up many interesting questions about home-leaving in South Africa. Simkins (2017*a,b*) shows that in 2015 more young adults aged 15-35 years remained in the parental home (63%) than had left (37%). But, what did home-leaving look like at the beginning of the post-apartheid period and how has this evolved to where it was in 2015? Another important question is about the extent to which home-leaving varies by race given how the transition to democracy differentially impacted the economic prospects of different race groups. For related reasons, it is not clear at the outset what to expect about the direction of the trend in home-leaving: although the rights of Black South Africans were now protected by the constitution after the democratic election in 1994, socio-economic conditions remain tough.

²The State only provides very limited support through the Unemployment Insurance Fund which is funded through employer contributions, only lasts a few months and which obviously makes prior (formal sector) employment a pre-requisite which is not necessarily the case for many young adults in South Africa.

How does home-leaving vary by gender, given persistently patriarchal gender norms (Timol et al. 2019) and the continued relevance of labour migration? And, where are home-leavers going and how does this connect with overall household proliferation, especially the explosive growth in single-person households? I introduce the data I use to answer some of these questions next.

4 Data

Many studies on home-leaving use panel or retrospective data which can often more easily identify the event of leaving the parental household and provide additional sequencing information about related events of young adulthood that may be of interest, e.g. a marriage, getting a job (Aassve et al. 2002, Billari 2004). Although panel data do exist for South Africa, this study is going to use a series of stacked cross-sections. The reason for this is that no other data source can provide such fine-grained nationally-representative long-term trends in home-leaving from the beginning of the post-apartheid period. Indeed, the most extensive movement in the trends happen in the 1990s, immediately after apartheid ended. However, South Africa’s only nationally-representative panel data set commences in 2008, and the panel data that exists for the 1990s is highly localised. Another advantage of the data I use is that I can combine it with a series of recalibrated survey weights (Thornton & Wittenberg 2022*b*) that specifically improve the accuracy of household counts and counts of single-person households in particular - statistics that are pertinent to the study of home-leaving. Accurately pinning down national trends is an important first-order step in developing the research agenda around home-leaving in South Africa.

I use fifteen nationally-representative cross-sectional surveys collected on an annual basis by StatsSA between 1995 and 2011. StatsSA collected the October Household Survey (OHS) between 1994 and 1999. Thereafter, labour market and socio-demographic outcomes were split into the Labour Force Surveys, which commenced in 2000, and the General Household Survey (GHS), which commenced in 2002. I use the OHS (StatsSA 2010-2013) and GHS (StatsSA 2011-2017) as the source material to create a stacked series of data across which I harmonise variable definitions. Both the OHS and the GHS survey approximately 30 000 dwelling units based on the 3 000 Primary Sampling units drawn from the Master Sample of enumerator areas used during the most recent censuses at the time. Exceptions are the 1996 and 1998 OHSs which only surveyed 16 000 and 20 000 dwellings, respectively. A stratified, two-stage cluster sampling design is employed in each case, stratified at the provincial level.³ Data is self-reported to the enumerator and covers the spectrum from demographic and household information to basic labour market data. Between the OHS and the GHS then, I have large samples of nationally representative cross-sectional data on individuals, households, and their composition for every year in the period 1994-present (with the exception of 2000 and 2001).

The survey weights (Thornton & Wittenberg 2022*a*) used with these data are an important contribution of this work. In previous research, a co-author and I reweighted this OHS-GHS series to deal with problems with the weights StatsSA supply (Thornton & Wittenberg 2022*b*). Contrary to what sampling practise implies, StatsSA provide two sets of survey weights (a person weight and a household weight) with the publicly released data, meaning researchers can extract two different estimates per statistic (e.g. two different total household counts per year). This is especially a problem for variables like household

³The 2004 Master Sample was stratified at the district council level.

headship rates and average household size which combine person and household information and therefore require coherence between the person- and household-level. Our reweighting ensures consistency between households and the people who comprise them in the data allowing more accurate estimation of these combination variables in particular.

Furthermore, we updated the benchmarks used to calibrate the weights to incorporate worker hostels⁴ at the beginning of the series and also constrained our new weights on the shares of one-, two-, and three-person households. These adjustments increased the household count by up to 5% in some years and especially improved the accuracy of counts of single-person households. In 2011, for example, our new weights increased the GHS count of single-person households by 25% to bring the survey estimate in line with the census estimate in the same year. We were only able to reweight these data until 2011, which is why this is the last year in our study. Although GHS data is now publicly available until 2021, estimates of statistics like headship rates and average household size are not as accurate without our new weight. Even if my time period is slightly shorter, this paper can rely on more accuracy in variables like household counts, single-person household counts, and household headship rates.

4.1 Identifying home-leavers and stayers

To measure home-leaving in the OHS-GHS series, we follow rules defined by Simkins (2017*a*) to identify home leavers and stayers appropriate for cross-sectional data. The OHS-GHS define a household as follows: people are considered part of the same household if they have spent at least four nights in the week leading up to the survey in that household. Simkins (2017*a*) uses questions about parental mortality and coresidence as well as the ‘relationship to the household head’ question to define home leavers and stayers. In the GHS and with some harmonisation in the OHS period, there are nine categories of relationship to the household head:

1. Head
2. Husband/wife/partner of head
3. Son/daughter/stepchild/adopted child of head
4. Brother/sister/stepbrother/stepsister of head
5. Father/mother/stepfather/stepmother of head
6. Grandparent/great grandparent of head
7. Grandchild/great grandchild of head
8. Other relative of head (e.g. in-laws or aunts and uncles)
9. Person not related to the head

⁴Worker hostels were single-sex dormitories built either by private companies or provincial authorities during the 20th century to house mostly male migrants at their location of work. Worker hostels were meant to transition to normal housing units after apartheid ended, but have become contested spaces as they have fallen into disrepair and some have become associated with gang violence (Xulu 2014, Thurman 1997).

The sample is restricted to people aged 15 to 35 and an individual is considered to be staying at home if they meet one of the following conditions, described in Simkins (2017*a*)’s words:

1. “At least one of the young person’s biological parents belongs to the household.
2. The young person is a son/daughter/stepchild/adopted child of the head or a grandchild/great grandchild of the head.
3. The young person belongs to relationship category 4 (brother or sister of head), provided that there is neither a father nor a mother known to be alive and living in a separate household.
4. The young person belongs to relationship category 8 (other relative of head), is no older than 24 and is at least 10 years younger than the head and that there is neither a father nor a mother known to be alive and living in a separate household.”

The most difficult relation of the head category to allocate is category 8, other relatives of the head, since this is a catch-all category and could be very diverse. It could include older or younger generations of the household head. With condition 4, Simkins (2017*a*) is trying to capture the case where younger nieces, nephews, or other relatives have moved in with a head who is old enough to be a parental figure. All other young people are considered home leavers. We follow Simkins (2017*a*) rules in all years but in addition, we allocate people to the home leaver category if they are heads, spouses of the head, or parents or grandparents of the head.

The OHS years 1997-1999 lacked questions about parental co-residence and 1999 additionally lacked questions about parental mortality. We still include 1997-9 in our sample, but keep this problem in mind. Table 1 shows a breakdown of how household members’ relation to the household head category is distributed by stayers and leavers along with the unweighted sample size. This initial breakdown looks sensible so far.

Table 1: Composition of home-stayers and home-leavers in the OHS-GHS 1995-2011

	% Staying	% Leaving	N
head	0	100	95 713
spouse	0	100	54 761
child	100	0	274 225
grandchild	100	0	57 784
parent	0	100	624
grandparent	0	100	1 240
brothersister	34.1	65.9	29 747
otherrelative	16.3	83.7	42 603
otherhhmem	3.6	96.5	7 549
Total	61.9	38.1	564 246

Notes: own calculations based on a sample of 15-35 year-olds in the OHS-GHS series. Unweighted.

5 Profiling home-leaving in South Africa

5.1 Who leaves home in South Africa?

Table 2 reports home-leaving rates by gender and race for the two years at the beginning and end of the period under study. Most young South Africans remain at home, with the overall rate of home-leaving only shifting from 40 to 44% between 1995-1996. This increase is the result of convergence in home-leaving rates by race. All groups except Black Africans and the small sub-population of Asian men delayed their home-leaving over time. The overall rise in the share of home-leavers is mainly a function of faster home-leaving by the majority Black African population group. Black African men and women started the period as the group most likely to be at home and then increased their rate of home-leaving by nine and six percentage points, respectively. Whites began the period as the group most likely to have left home, then men reduced their rate of home-leaving by eight percentage points and women, by seven. In 1995/6, there was a 22 percentage point difference in the share of white versus Black African home-leavers and this had reduced to just 7 percentage points by 2010/11.

Table 2: Youth aged 15-35 who have left home in the OHS-GHS by sex and race: weighted percentages and raw sample sizes in parentheses

	1995-1996			2010-2011		
	Male	Female	Overall	Male	Female	Overall
African	35%	39%	37%	44%	45%	44%
	(26 289)	(31 204)	(57 493)	(28 263)	(29 736)	(57 999)
Coloured	37%	39%	38%	32%	38%	35%
	(4 040)	(4 610)	(8 650)	(3 420)	(3 622)	(7 042)
Asian	38%	51%	44%	40%	48%	44%
	(1 313)	(1 369)	(2 682)	(762)	(707)	(1 469)
White	56%	62%	59%	48%	55%	51%
	(3 138)	(3 327)	(6 465)	(1 485)	(1 441)	(2 926)
Overall	37%	42%	40%	43%	45%	44%
	(34 780)	(40 510)	(75 290)	(33 930)	(35 506)	(69 436)

Notes: own calculations using the OHS-GHS series adjusted using weights from Thornton & Wittenberg (2022b).

Figure 1 reports the same information as Table 2, but with more detail about the intervening years. The greyed out section labelled ‘ID issues’ reminds the reader that these survey years lacked certain variables needed to identify home-leavers and we can expect home-leaving to be overestimated in these years. The figure underscores the importance of plotting trends because the OHS period (even in years without identification issues) looks very different to the GHS period.⁵ In panel A, the rate of home-leaving changed quickly year-to-year in this period followed by stability in the GHS. The dip between 2002-2004 is out of step with the rest of the trend in the GHS and could be related to the change in Master Sample that happened in 2005. The trends look slightly more credible if we look between the OHS and the start of the GHS in 2005.

In panel B, we differentiate by Black African and white race and find that, like we saw in Table 2,

⁵I deal with the concern that the structural break could be instrument-specific rather than real in Section 5.2. Plotting the trend by age cohort confirms the trend is real rather than an outcome of change in survey instrument.

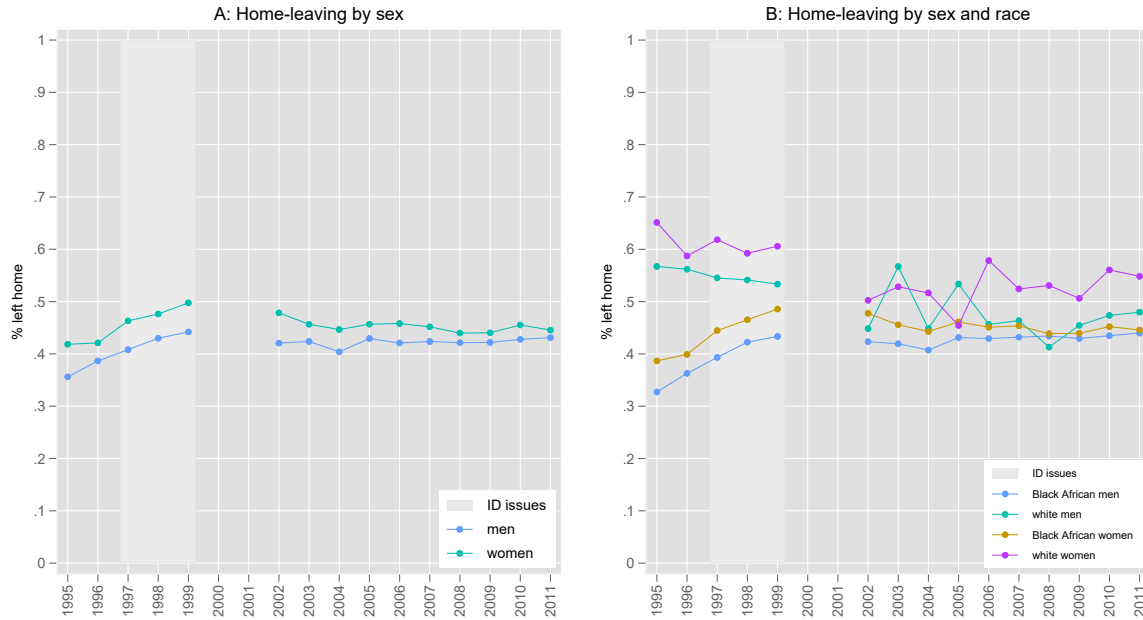
there are differences in the direction of the trend across race. The trends for white people are less stable because the sample is smaller. Years 2005 and 2006 look particularly problematic for white women; while 2008 looks problematic for white men. The latter case could be related to known problems with the 2008 GHS which recorded higher than usual levels of non-response (StatsSA 2008*a*). It appears though that white men have reduced their rate of home-leaving over time; while white women have followed a U-shape. Delayed home-leaving by whites - the group most closely associated with the nuclear family pattern - could be conforming with delayed home-leaving found elsewhere in the developed world (Billari et al. 2001, Molgat 2002, Evans 2013). However, the changes in the 90s are very likely also related to the first democratic election in 1994, signalling an end to the white legal monopoly on certain human rights and other economic advantages. This no doubt had profound repercussions for Black and white home-leaving.

Indeed, Black African home-leaving increased in the 90s and then stabilised in the GHS period, especially from 2005 onwards when male and female home-leaving converged. Given Western trends of slightly delayed home-leaving, this increase is unusual. There are many reasons why Black Africans in the 1990s might have stepped up their home-leaving that I cannot properly disentangle with these data: to escape crowded informal dwelling living arrangements; to better manage family relationships; oscillating labour migration; urbanisation; stronger association with nuclear family formation ideals (Russell 2003, 2004). However, based on the timing of this increase I think it is most likely that it was connected mainly to the onset of democracy and reflects Black Africans adjusting home-leaving behaviour to the expansion of political and economic freedoms immediately following the first democratic election in 1994. Thornton & Wittenberg (2022*b*) chart a very similar pattern in household headship rates. The new democratic period brought optimism about income opportunities for the Black African population as formal barriers to employment were removed and the State committed to a large social expenditure bill. However, the State makes effectively no provision for young adults who are unemployed and the relatively lower level of social grant support for young adults must be kept in mind when analysing home-leaving trends. We return to this point shortly.

The convergence between male and female home-leaving for the Black African population is noteworthy and I am not aware of this close-to-complete convergence in other countries. The international evidence is that women usually leave sooner (Chiuri & Del Boca 2010). In their analysis of the 'home-leaving gender gap', Chiuri & Del Boca (2010) conclude that women are more responsive to institutional factors such as the labour and housing market. In South Africa, this could again relate back to the provision (or lack of provision) of social grants for young adults and higher unemployment rates for young women than young men (Casale et al. 2021, Casale & Posel 2002).

Table 3 tries to establish how home-leavers look different to home-stayers and other adults in general. The table divides the adult (15+) population into youth (15-35) who are home-leavers or stayers and older adults in the next 20-year age range (36-55). The table pools across years to portray general profiles. Home-leavers are unsurprisingly older than home-stayers and we investigate age in more detail in the next section. Many more home-stayers are also full-time students in line with many younger people still being in school. The same table is produced in Appendix A restricting the age range to 19-35 to exclude school-age young adults. Home-leavers though tend to be more educated than older adults which is in line with the expansion of access to education that happened over the post-apartheid period (Spaull 2013). This is mainly reflected in higher shares of high school graduates. NEET status varies considerably by

Figure 1: The rate of home leaving over time for young adults in South Africa, by race and gender



Notes: own calculations using the OHS-GHS series adjusted using the weights from Thornton & Wittenberg (2022b). Sample restricted to those aged 15-35. 'ID issues' = years where the survey data lacked information about parental mortality and co-residence needed to properly identify home-leavers.

gender and home-leaver status. There is a remarkable gender gap in home-leaver NEET status: female home-leavers are NEET at about twice the rate of male home-leavers. This stark gender gradient persists for older adult NEET status.

About a third of female youth are unemployed, regardless of whether they have remained or left the parental home. By contrast, 32% of men staying at home are unemployed compared to 20% who have left home. Older men and women are more likely to be employed, and men more so than women. Female home-leavers are much more likely to report being NEA (28%) than male-home-leavers (16%), but not any more likely to be full-time students (both at 14%), contributing to higher rates of NEET female home-leavers. There is large disparity in marital status across home-leaver status also influenced by age difference. Home-stayers are almost universally never married (even in Appendix Table 5 excluding school-age adults); whereas about a quarter and a third of male and female home-leavers are married, respectively. Home-leavers are also much more likely to be never-married than older adults, and female home-leavers much more likely to be cohabiting than older women.

Home-leavers are the group least reliant on grant income according to Table 3. Home-leavers co-reside with pension recipients at about half to a third of the rate that older adults do; and about a quarter to a sixth of the rate that home-stayers do. Only 4 and 7% of male and female home-leavers, respectively, live with pension recipients. The Child Support Grant (CSG) appears to be the grant that is more important for home-leavers, and mainly for female home-leavers. About 23% of female home-leavers are living in households where a child is a CSG-recipient and this is comparable to 25% of older female adults but much less than 37% of female home-stayers. Instead, home-leaver households appear more reliant on

labour market income. Home-leavers are less likely to be living in households with zero employed adults than home-stayers and these households also tend to have higher ratios of employed to not employed adults. For example, in male home-leaver households, there were 0.57 employed adults for every not-employed adult compared to 0.27 in the case of male home-stayer households. These data do not provide information about remittance income and the extent to which labour market and other income is flowing in and out of households and so our profile is limited in this way. Based only on what we can tell from Table 3, it looks like home-leavers are much more reliant on labour market income given their more limited access to grant income. Female home-leaver access to grant income comes predominantly via their children.

The importance of the CSG for female home-leavers is of course related to this group being more likely to live with children than male home-leavers. Male home-leavers live with an average of 0.88 children compared to 1.61 in the homes of female home-leavers. These numbers are less than the number of children living with home-stayers and older adults, although in each case, women are living with more children than men. Relatedly, women live in bigger households across the spectrum; and home-leavers live in the smallest households. Whilst (by definition) no home-stayers are living alone, home-leavers are much more likely than older adults to be living alone. 26% of male and 12% of female home-leavers live alone; compared to 15% of male and 7% of female older adults. It is difficult to identify migrant labourers in these data, but the fact that home-leavers are more likely than both stayers and older adults to be living alone, living in urban locations, and living in informal dwellings speaks to typical characteristics of labour migrants (Posel & Marx 2013).

There are limits on the extent to which I can study how labour migration and home-leaving intersect because I can't follow people over time and space in my cross-sectional data and the surveys did not include questions specifically about migration. As one point of entry though, Table 4 reports the share of young adults who have left home by rural and urban location. The rural-urban divide is relevant for migrants since many young men and women are 'double-rooted', balancing urban livelihoods with maintaining family and cultural ties in rural areas (Bank et al. 2020). Despite efforts by the post-apartheid government to stimulate rural development, most economic opportunities remain in urban areas, attracting the young and able to the cities.

Young rural Black Africans are much more likely to be staying at home than their urban counterparts. This is likely partly related to rural areas being cultural homelands and therefore the consanguineal family pattern will exert a stronger pull in these areas. It also partly related to rural homesteads being 'home' to the labour migrant when they are spending time in rural areas. Urban Black African men and women have left home (and increased the rate at which they have left home) at remarkably similar rates. Urban Black African men increased their rate of home-leaving by as much as ten percentage points. By contrast there is a notable gender gap in rural areas and the rate at which rural Black African women have left home has been flat at about a third. Higher urban home-leaving by women is probably the result of urban women being both more likely to be employed and to be married in my data. Since Black African women are almost evenly divided between rural and urban areas, it is urban women who are driving the increase in the overall trend in Black African female home-leaving in Figure 1. The overall trend for Black African men, on the other hand, has been boosted by faster home-leaving in both rural and urban areas.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of Home-leavers, Home-stayers, and older adults in South Africa, 1995-2011

	Stayers aged 15-35		Leavers aged 15-35		Adults aged 36-55	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Individual Characteristics						
Age	22	22	27	27	44	44
Full-time student	44%	44%	15%	14%	1%	2%
NEET	37%	42%	23%	49%	30%	51%
Mental/Physical disability	8%	8%	7%	7%	11%	10%
Education Level						
No schooling	2%	2%	3%	4%	10%	13%
Incomplete primary	13%	9%	11%	10%	21%	21%
Primary	8%	7%	6%	6%	8%	9%
Incomplete secondary	52%	56%	41%	43%	33%	33%
Secondary (matric)	21%	23%	29%	26%	18%	15%
Tertiary	3%	4%	10%	11%	11%	10%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Labour Market Status						
Employed	20%	14%	64%	39%	70%	48%
Unemployed (broad)	32%	35%	20%	34%	19%	22%
NEA	48%	51%	16%	28%	12%	29%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Marital Status*						
Married	3%	3%	24%	35%	58%	51%
Cohabiting	1%	1%	13%	18%	12%	8%
Never married	95%	96%	61%	43%	23%	23%
Divorced/separated	0%	1%	1%	2%	5%	7%
Widowed	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%	10%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%
Household Characteristics						
Pensioner in HH	27%	27%	4%	7%	14%	13%
CSG recipient in HH	30%	37%	12%	23%	17%	25%
Other grant recipient in HH	14%	14%	4%	5%	10%	11%
No employed adults in HH	32%	34%	21%	28%	18%	25%
HH adult employment ratio	0.27	0.25	0.57	0.47	0.50	0.41
Average household size	7.00	7.51	3.44	4.31	4.67	5.30
Single-person HH	0%	0%	26%	12%	15%	7%
No. children (<15 yrs) in HH	2.09	2.61	0.88	1.61	1.37	1.75
Urban	55%	54%	71%	65%	70%	64%
Informal dwelling	10%	10%	32%	24%	20%	14%

Notes: own calculations based on a sample of 15-35 year-olds in the OHS-GHS series and weighted the weights from Thornton & Wittenberg (2022b). *Cohabitation and marriage were not separated in surveys 2002-2004 and so these years are excluded from estimates for 'married' and 'cohabiting'.

Table 4: Home-leaving by location and race, in 1995-6 and 2010-11

% of 15-35 y.o. in ... area who have left home	Rural		Urban		% of 15-35 y.o. in urban areas in 2011
	1995-6	2010-11	1995-6	2010-11	
African women	36%	36%	44%	52%	55%
African men	27%	32%	43%	53%	56%
White women	66%	56%	62%	55%	96%
White men	59%	45%	56%	48%	92%

Notes: own calculations using the OHS-GHS series adjusted using weights from Thornton & Wittenberg (2022b).

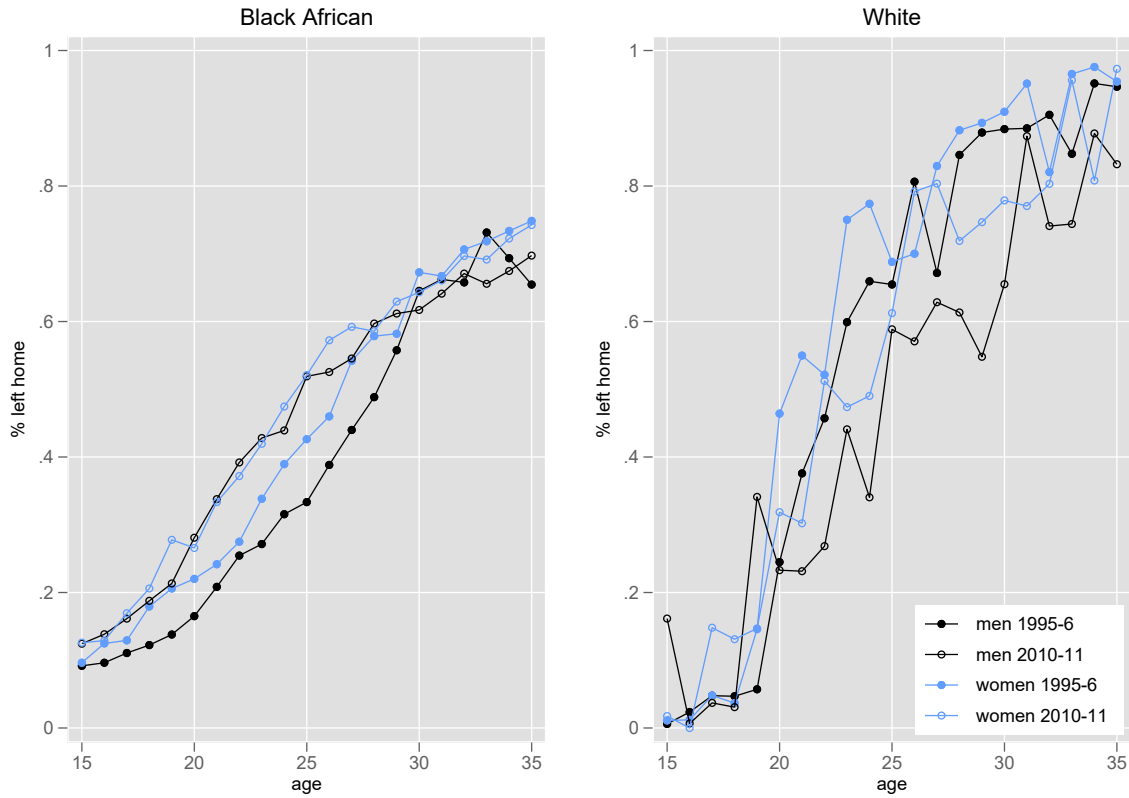
5.2 When do South Africans leave home?

Theoretically, getting older is associated with increasing preferences for privacy and autonomy (Fafchamps & Quisumbing 2007). Figure 2 charts the age-specific rate of home-leaving for the pooled sample of young adults between 1995 and 2011. As many as 10% of Black African 15-year-olds had left home. Greater home-leaving at this young age could point more to vulnerability rather than agency on the part of the home-leaver (Simkins 2017b). South Africa was very much in the grip of the HIV/AIDS epidemic over this period and this result could represent orphanhood as a passage to ‘home-leaving’. The age-profiles for Black Africans shift left over time so that home-leavers start representing the majority after about age 25 in 2010-11; whereas this had been more like age 26.5 (women) or 28 (men) in the 90s. It was mainly younger men under the age of 30 who closed the gap between male and female home-leaving; so that by 2010-11, Black African men and women were leaving home at remarkably similar rates. The key takeaway from this plot is that home-leaving is diffused across age and that home-leavers only start representing the majority after about age 25. In this sense, South Africans could be described as late home-leavers. Even by age 35, about 30% of Black Africans were still at home and this is possibly connected to consanguineal family patterns.

There is much more instability in the age-profiles for whites because of the smaller sample size. I cannot reliably interpret the age by which most whites had left home for this reason. What can be said reliably is that the age-profiles for white home-leaving is much steeper than that for Black Africans. Almost all whites are at home at age 15 during school-going years, and almost all whites have left home by age 35. This is in line with a nuclear family pattern emphasising the importance of establishing an independent household. Whites are much more likely than Black Africans to be at home between ages 15-20, likely owed to their higher socio-economic status acting as a protective barrier to keep very young adults in the parental household during school-going years.

Recalling the overall trend in home-leaving in Figure 1, one concern is that the structural break in the trend around 2000 and 2001 coincides with the change in survey instrument from the OHS to the GHS. The question is to what extent this structural break is ‘real’ versus influenced by the change in survey. One way to separate out these effects is to plot age-specific rates of home-leaving by birth cohort, which has the added advantage of informing us about the extent to which home-leaving has evolved over generations. In Figure 3 we focus on Africans (because they are the majority of the population and their trend was distinct from other groups) and chart home-leaving across age for seven birth cohorts between 1965 and 1995. The results are assuring that the trends in Figure 1 are real. We can see that for both men and women, it was the older generations (i.e. young adults in the 1990s) who moved out more slowly than their young counterparts. We can further observe that it was men and women under 30 years who

Figure 2: Age-specific rates of home-leaving by gender for South Africa, 1995-2011



Notes: own calculations using the OHS-GHS series weighted using the weights from Thornton & Wittenberg (2022b).

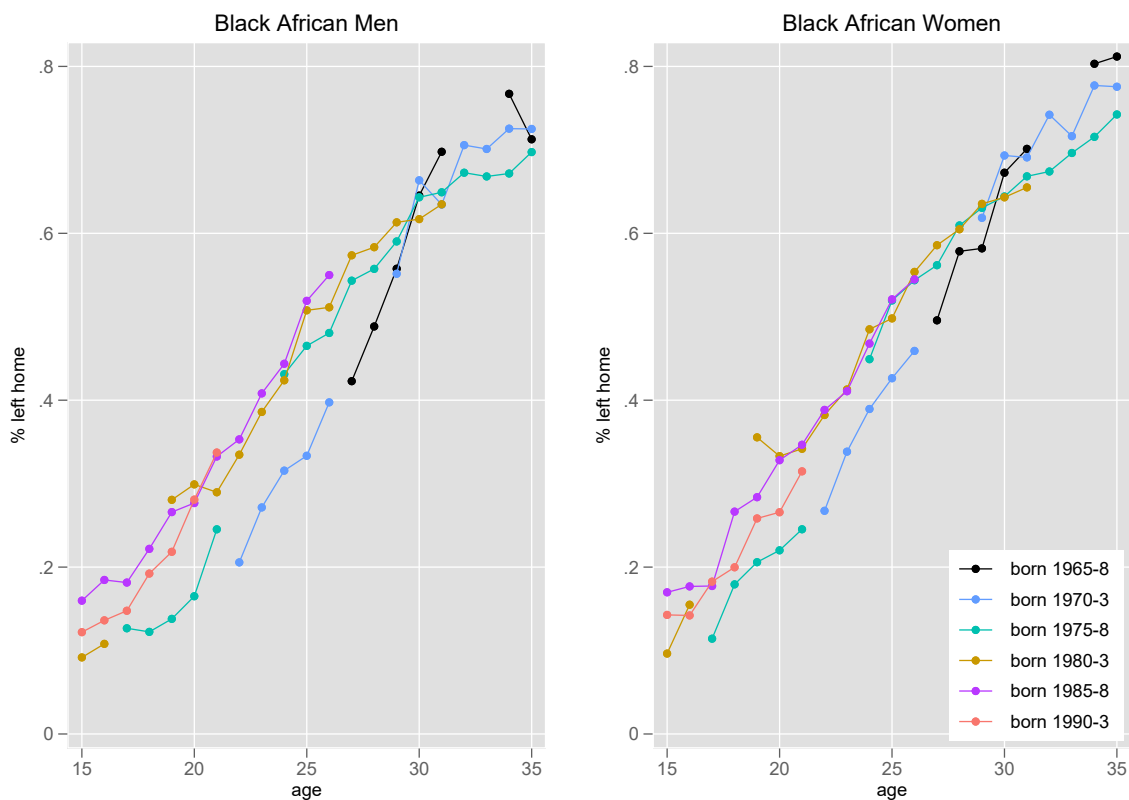
were responsible for the leftward-shifting of the profiles.

5.3 Why do South Africans leave home?

The main reasons the literature identifies for leaving the parental household are union formation, gaining employment, and getting older (Ermisch & Di Salvo 1996, Ermisch 1999). Having already described age profiles, I turn to marriage and employment. Figure 4 presents rates of home-leaving conditioned on marital and employment status. In this figure, ‘not married’ includes the statuses of never married, divorced or separated, and widowed. ‘Married’ then includes being either married or living together. ‘Not employed’ includes unemployed or not economically active (NEA) status. The share of home-leavers in combination categories of these variables are plotted against the unconditional rate of home-leaving over age. As I am plotting shares and not imposing a functional form, there is some instability in the estimates at young ages. This occurs simply because the samples get very small at these young ages, e.g. there are very few married and employed 15-year-old males. Naturally, this problem is eased as age increases.

Marriage is clearly of overriding importance for women’s home-leaving. Regardless of employment

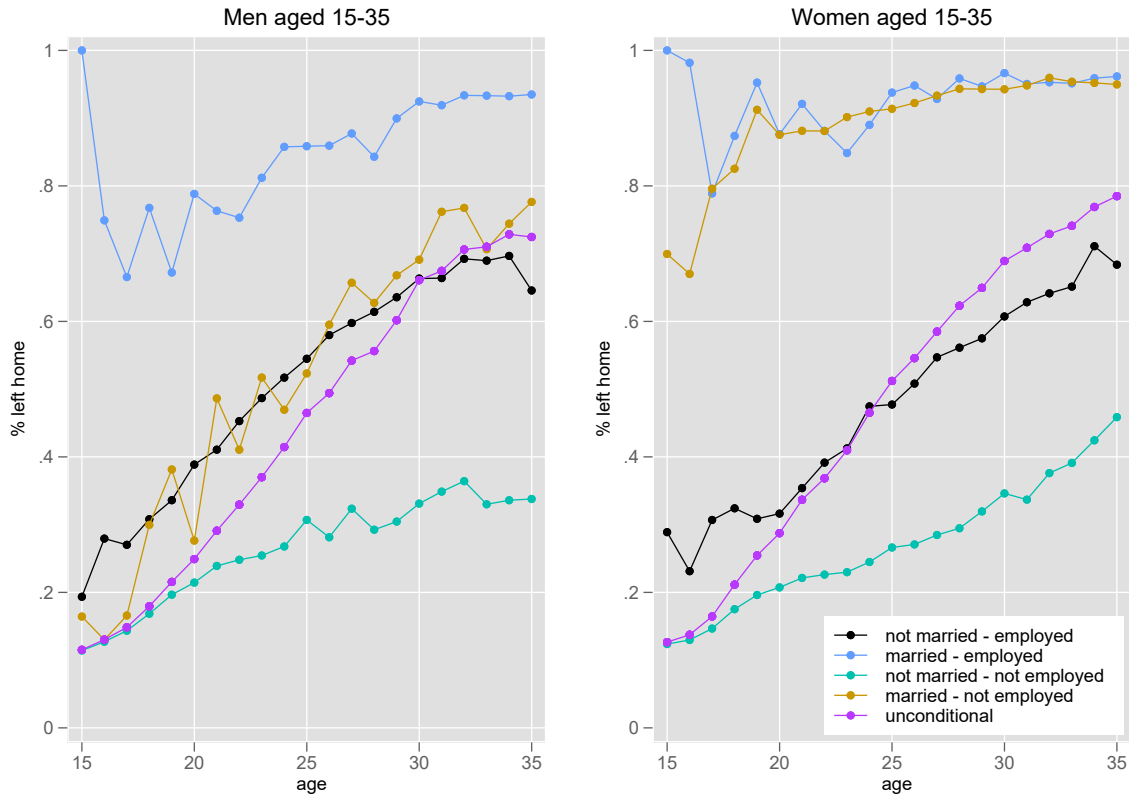
Figure 3: Age-specific rates of home-leaving for seven Black African birth cohorts, 1995-2011



Notes: own calculations using the OHS-GHS series weighted using the weights from Thornton & Wittenberg (2022b). Years on the legend denote year of birth.

status, being married almost guarantees that women will leave home with home-leaving rates exceeding 80% almost throughout. Employment without marriage seems to spur some female home-leaving prior to age 25, but thereafter the unconditional rate of home-leaving exceeds this conditional rate. For men, the combination of marriage and employment stands out for making male home-leaving more likely than all other combination categories and the unconditional rate. Quite interestingly, the unconditional rate of male home-leaving then appears not that different to the rates for both ‘married - not employed’ men *and* ‘not married - employed’ men. Either being married or being employed makes male home-leaving likely, but the combination makes it most likely by a substantial margin.

Figure 4: Age-specific rates of home-leaving in South Africa conditioned on labour market and marital status, 1995-2011



Notes: own calculations using a stacked series of the October Households Survey (1995-1999) and General Household Survey (2002-2011) weighted using the ‘Best CEW’ cross-entropy weight from ?. ‘Not married’ = never married, divorced/separated, or widowed. ‘Married’ = married or cohabiting. ‘Not employed’ = unemployed or not economically active. ‘Employed’ = employed.

6 How does home-leaving intersect with household formation?

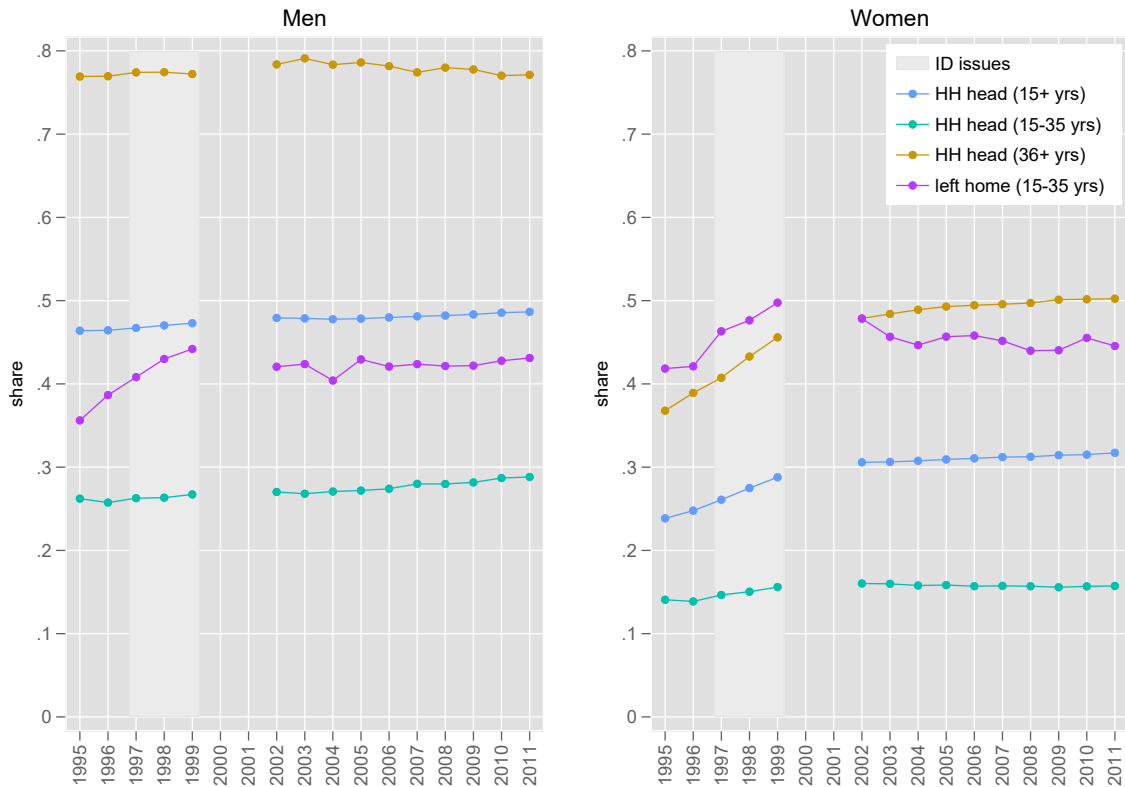
How might young adults leaving home contribute to the trend of household proliferation in South Africa? Between the 1996 and 2011 censuses, the household count expanded by 58% but the person count by only 28% (Thornton 2021). Household headship is one point of entry into household formation because in my survey data there is one head per household, implying the number of heads coheres with the number of households. Between 1995 and 2011, the headship rate - the share of adults who are household heads - increased by 5 percentage points from 35 to 40% (Thornton 2021). One immediate reason why we might think home-leavers are less likely to make an impact on household formation is that we have shown that most young adults remain at home. Nevertheless, young adults make up about 40% of the population over the period under study meaning even if less than half of them are leaving the parental household, that is a significant portion of the population. It turns out that the answer to this question varies by gender because home-leaving patterns, just like overall household formation patterns, are gendered.

To investigate this intersection more closely, I plot trends in household headship in Figure 5 and

single-person household headship as a household type of special interest in Figure 6. I chart household headship rates for young adults versus older adults (aged 36+ years), as well as, the overall household headship rate (15+ yrs) and trend in young adult home-leaving for comparison (and the analogous trends for single-person households). The headship rate for young women (green line) in both Figures 5 and 6 is very slightly declining or level, respectively, whilst the headship rate for older women (gold line) is increasing. This suggests it is older women who are the key constituency behind the overall increase in the female household headship rate (blue line), consistent with findings from Thornton (2021).

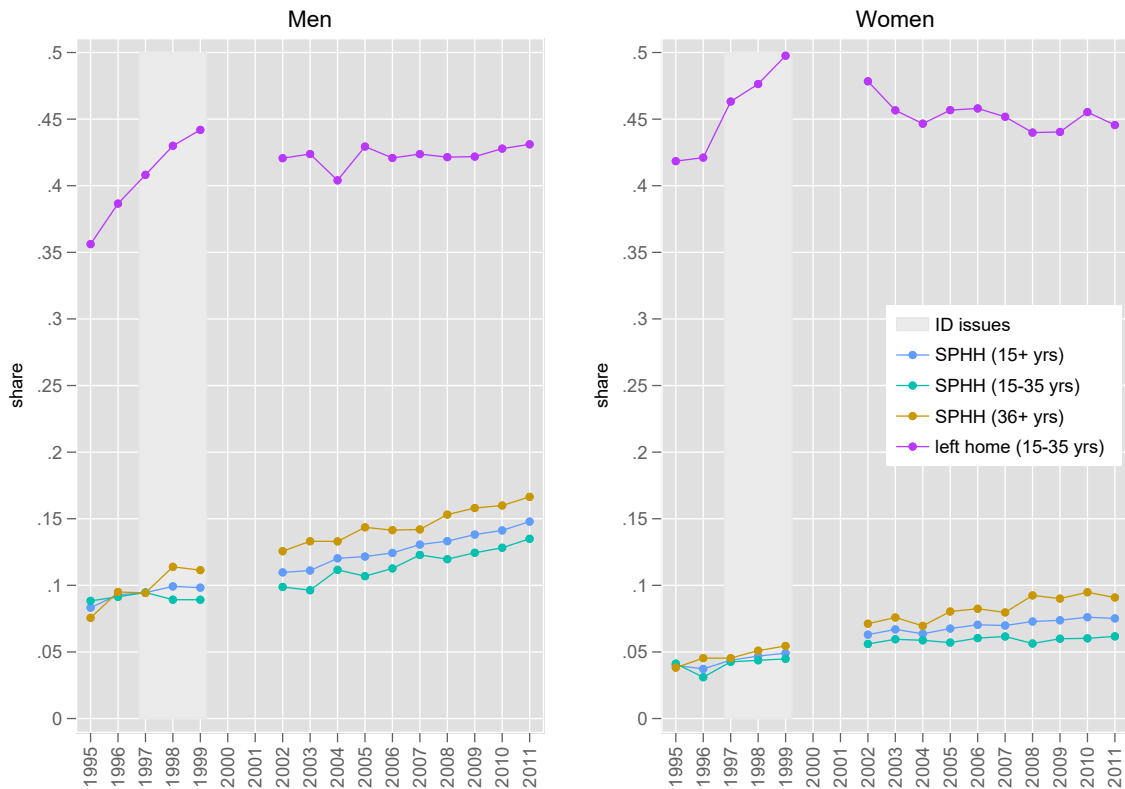
Young men, on the other hand, are contributing towards the household count both in general in Figure 5 and single-person households in Figure 6. There is an increase in both the household headship rate and single-person household headship rate for young men. On the other hand, the headship rate of older men is slightly declining resulting in an almost-level trend in the overall male headship rate. But, both young and older men are increasing the rate at which they live alone in a similar way, also consistent with Thornton (2021). Although the trend in male home-leaving is mainly flat in the 2000s (with the exception of problem year 2004), change in where male home-leavers are going means they are still contributing to overall household proliferation. It is therefore important to gain an understanding of change in home-leaver destination households.

Figure 5: Trends on the intersection of home-leaving and household headship



Notes: own calculations using the OHS-GHS series weighted using the weights from Thornton & Wittenberg (2022b). 'ID issues' = years where the survey data lacked information about parental mortality and co-residence needed to properly identify home-leavers. 'HH Head' = household head with sample in parenthesis.

Figure 6: Trends on the intersection of home-leaving and single-person household headship



Notes: own calculations using the OHS-GHS series weighted using the weights from Thornton & Wittenberg (2022b). ‘ID issues’ = years where the survey data lacked information about parental mortality and co-residence needed to properly identify home-leavers. ‘HH Head’ = household head with sample in parenthesis.

6.1 Where are home-leavers living and what are their household roles?

Figure 7 describes features of the destination households of home-leavers. In this figure, we describe two aspects. In panel A, we report the relationship of the home-leaver to the household head according to the categories in our survey data. The only amendment we make is to differentiate between married and cohabiting spouses, which necessitates the omission of data from 2002-2004. The questionnaire in these years did not separate out ‘cohabitation’ from ‘married’ when asking about marital status. In panel B, we classify households into six mutually exclusive household composition categories. These are single adult; a single adult with children (under 15 years); a couple; a couple with children (i.e. the classic nuclear family); a multi-adult household; and a multi-adult household with children.

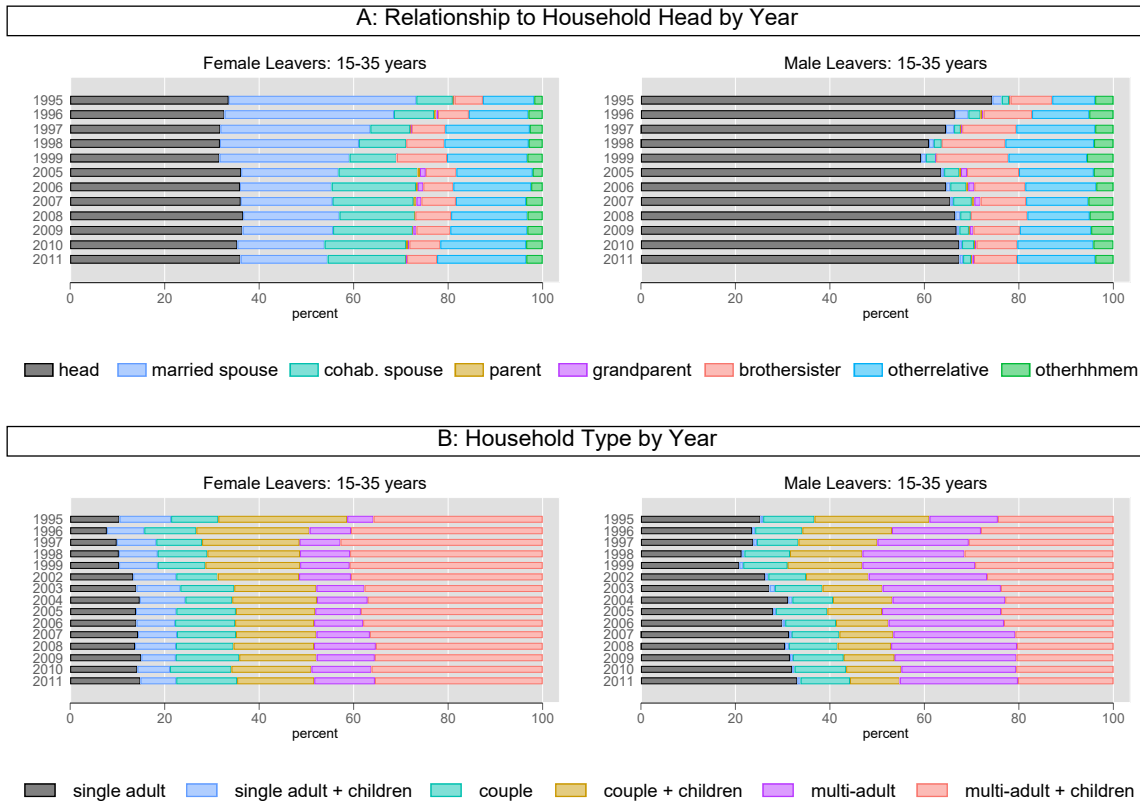
Looking at panel A, the share of women leaving to be spouses declined overall, but an increasing share are cohabiting versus married spouses. Both the overall drop in spouses and compositional change is probably linked to declining rates of marriage over the period. Two other trends are likely consequences of this as well: more women leaving to head their own households or live with other relatives. Between the mid-90s and mid-2000s we observe a step-up in the share of women who leave to head their own

households, whereafter this proportion remains stable at about 35%. About 11% of female home-leavers were co-residing with other relatives in 1995, but this had expanded to 18.8% by 2011; highlighting the continued importance of complex household structures in South Africa. This share also appears to bulge in 1997-9, but we remind the reader that these years suffer from identification issues for home-leaver status making the trend less reliable, especially for the 'other relative' allocation. Men are about twice as likely than women to leave to head their own households: 67% of male home-leavers were heads in 2011. The change for men in panel A is mainly comprised of first a drop and then an increase in the share of household heads. Again, some of the steep drop in headship is reported for problem years 1997-9. For male home-leavers, too, complex households remain relevant. In 1995, 9% of male home-leavers were living with other relatives but this share was 16.5% in 2011.

Panel B reports the two household types that appear to have grown over the period for both male and female home-leavers are single-person households and multi-adult households without children. More single-living was especially important for men: by 2011, about 35% of male home-leavers were living alone. Although more female home-leavers also started living alone, the more extensive growth for this group came from women living in multi-adult households. This likely coheres with the increase in female home-leavers living with other relatives in panel A. The decline in any type of household with children aligns with the general decline in fertility but there is a large gender imbalance with regard to who lives with children. Female home-leavers are much more likely than male to live with children. Hardly any men live alone with children, whereas this represents a relatively stable share of just under 10% of female home-leavers.

Figure 7 then contributes to the debate in the literature about whether South African households are becoming more nuclear. For home-leavers at least, there appears to be growth at the 'poles' of the household complexity spectrum: single-person but also multi-adult households have grown. In a context of high levels of migrant labour, it is hard to conclude that growth in single-person households is necessarily evidence of a trend towards more nuclear household living. Instead, both panels underscore the continued importance of complex household structures. The combined share of the most classic nuclear households - couples and couples with children - declined for both men and women. This was mainly the effect of fewer couples with children as fertility slowed.

Figure 7: Characteristics of home-leaver destination households and their relation to the household head



Notes: own calculations using a stacked series of the October Households Survey (1995-1999) and General Household Survey (2002-2011) weighted using the ‘Best CEW’ cross-entropy weight from ?.

7 Conclusion

Most young adult South Africans remain at home under conditions of high youth unemployment and a lack of social grants targeted at this age group. Home-leaving is diffused across age, with most South Africans moving out of home by age 25 in 2011. Marriage is decisive for women to leave home, but either a job or getting married are both important pathways for men. Men are often moving out to live on their own; whilst women often find themselves in complex households including children. Home-leaving trends diverge by race. Most race groups have delayed home-leaving between 1995 and 2011 under tough local and global economic conditions, but one puzzle is explaining why young Black Africans increased their rate of leaving home under the same circumstances in the late 1990s. There are many possible explanations I cannot properly disentangle with this data: the effect of new freedoms after the onset of democracy; the tension between traditional consanguineal family patterns and a more globalised post-apartheid economy; the evolving profile of the modern labour migrant, amongst others. The timing of the surge in Black African home-leaving makes me expect that the onset of democracy and the new freedoms it afforded to Black Africans is one of the more important explanations.

To some extent, the South African pattern is similar to the ‘latest-late’ pattern of home-leaving typified by Southern Europe in terms of the focal points of age and union formation (Billari 2004). South Africa additionally conforms with social explanations for such a pattern: rates of religiosity are high (Chipkin & Leatt 2011); there is no general unemployment benefit; and the highest-paying social grant is the Old Age Pension reflecting a State that supports the Family over the Individual. However, there are some South Africa-specific reasons why we would expect late home-leaving in South Africa anyway. Firstly, a large proportion of the population subscribe to consanguineal family patterns where leaving home as I have defined it here happens later in life or at later life stages than in a nuclear family pattern. Even by 2011, as many as 30% of Black African young adults were still ‘at home’ at age 35. Secondly, delayed home-leaving is also expected when a high proportion of young people lack the resources to move out because they are unemployed. Thirdly, the continued relevance of labour migration might interfere with my ability to identify whether a young person has left home if, for example, they are surveyed while residing with parents at the sending location.

A question I was particularly interested in was how young adult home-leaving patterns have contributed towards general household proliferation in South Africa. I find that young male home-leavers emerge as important role-players. Despite a mainly flat trend in male home-leaving in the 2000s, there has been important change in where these men end up that has contributed to the overall household count. Even if young men are leaving home at similar rates, more of them are leaving to live alone and therefore adding to the number of households in the country. More male solo-living is likely connected to modern labour migration (Bank et al. 2020), lower rates of marriage (Garenne 2016, Thornton 2021), and that it is easier for men to live alone owing to their greater attachment to the labour market (Casale et al. 2021). By contrast, young women represent a flat share of female household heads in general. Unemployment levels for young women are extremely high (higher than their male counterparts) meaning young women are particularly reliant on male income to leave home (e.g. via marriage), since there is little social support for youth other than through their children.

A Additional tables on characteristics of home-leavers and -stayers

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of Home-leavers and Home-stayers in the 19-35 year age bracket in South Africa, 1995-2011

	Stayers aged 19-35		Leavers aged 19-35	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Individual Characteristics				
Age	25	25	28	28
Full-time student	22%	22%	10%	9%
NEET	50%	57%	24%	51%
Mental/Physical disability	9%	8%	7%	7%
Education Level				
<i>No schooling</i>	2%	2%	3%	4%
<i>Incomplete primary</i>	11%	8%	10%	10%
<i>Primary</i>	6%	5%	6%	6%
<i>Incomplete secondary</i>	46%	48%	39%	41%
<i>Secondary (matric)</i>	30%	32%	31%	28%
<i>Tertiary</i>	5%	6%	11%	11%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
Labour Market Status				
<i>Employed</i>	28%	21%	69%	42%
<i>Unemployed (broad)</i>	43%	48%	21%	35%
<i>NEA</i>	28%	31%	10%	23%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
Marital Status*				
Married	4%	4%	26%	38%
Cohabiting	2%	1%	15%	19%
Never married	93%	94%	58%	40%
Divorced/separated	1%	1%	1%	2%
Widowed	0%	0%	0%	1%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
Household Characteristics				
Pensioner in HH	29%	29%	4%	6%
CSG recipient in HH	29%	40%	11%	23%
Other grant recipient in HH	15%	15%	4%	5%
No employed adults in HH	30%	33%	19%	26%
HH adult employment ratio	0.29	0.26	0.60	0.50
Average household size	7.01	7.76	3.30	4.24
Single-person HH	0%	0%	27%	12%
No. children (<15 yrs) in HH	1.97	2.70	0.82	1.60
Urban	57%	55%	73%	67%
Informal dwelling	10%	10%	34%	25%

Notes: own calculations based on a sample of 15-35 year-olds in the OHS-GHS series and weighted the weights from Thornton & Wittenberg (2022b). *Cohabitation and marriage were not separated in surveys 2002-2004 and so these years are excluded from estimates for 'married' and 'cohabiting'.

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Founded in 2008, the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) is a research-based social responsiveness initiative housed in the School of Economics at the University of Cape Town.

The unit carries out research and capacity building in applied empirical microeconomics with an emphasis on poverty and inequality, labour markets, human capital and social policy. We strive for academic excellence and policy relevance.

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