

AGEING AND SOUTH AFRICA

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The growth or decline of a population during any given time period is determined by the balance of additions through births and immigration and subtractions by death and emigration. In the Republic of South Africa there has been a general increase in the total population during the

TABLE I. POPULATION OF SOUTH AFRICA^{1,2}

	<i>White</i>	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Bantu</i>	<i>Total</i>
1904 ..	1,117,234	444,991	122,311	3,490,291	5,174,827
1911 ..	1,276,319	525,466	152,094	4,018,878	5,972,757
1921 ..	1,521,343	545,181	163,594	4,697,285	6,927,403
1936 ..	2,003,334	769,241	219,691	6,595,597	9,587,863
1946 ..	2,372,044	928,062	285,260	7,830,559	11,415,925
1951 ..	2,641,689	1,103,016	366,664	8,560,083	12,671,452
1960 ..	3,067,638	1,488,267	477,414	10,807,809	15,841,128

past 50 years^{1,2} (Table I, Fig. 1). This has been brought about mainly by the excess of births over deaths.^{3,4}

The four racial groups have shown different rates of growth, however¹ (Table II). Although the Asian and Coloured communities are the smallest they have shown the most rapid increase. The Bantu have shown the lowest

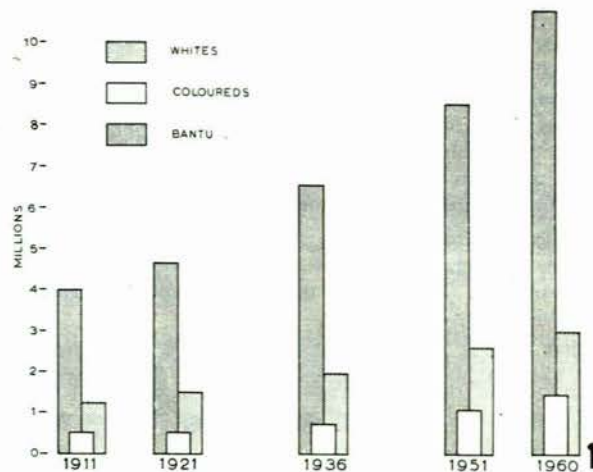


Fig. 1. Growth of the population of the Union of South Africa between 1911 and 1960, divided into racial groups.

rate of increase, but their total numerical gain has, nevertheless, been the greatest. This increase may also be partly

TABLE II. AVERAGE ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE OF INCREASE SINCE PREVIOUS CENSUS^{5,2}

	White %	Coloured %	Asian %	Bantu %	Total %
1904 ..	—	—	—	—	—
1911 ..	1.93	2.41	3.12	2.03	2.07
1921 ..	1.76	0.37	0.86	1.57	1.49
1936 ..	1.86	2.32	1.90	2.29	2.19
1946 ..	1.70	1.89	2.65	1.73	1.76
1951 ..	2.18	3.51	5.15	1.79	2.10
1960 ..	1.78	3.89	3.33	2.89	2.78

accounted for by the recent more complete enumeration and the influx from adjoining territories.³

The White section shows only a moderate increase from natural processes. White immigration has played little part in this growth since 1911, because of the balance by equivalent emigration.⁵

The result has been that the White percentage of the total population has fallen slightly during the past 50 years, from 21.6% in 1904, to reach 20.9% by 1951¹ (Table III). But with the present trends in fertility and

TABLE III. SOUTH AFRICAN PERCENTAGE RACIAL COMPOSITION¹

	White	Coloured	Asian	Bantu	Total
1904 ..	21.6	8.6	2.4	67.5	100.0
1911 ..	21.4	8.8	2.6	67.3	100.0
1921 ..	22.0	7.9	2.4	67.8	100.0
1936 ..	20.9	8.0	2.3	68.8	100.0
1946 ..	20.8	8.1	2.5	68.6	100.0
1951 ..	20.9	8.7	2.9	67.6	100.0

mortality rates, and in the absence of large-scale White immigration, the percentage is expected to fall further to the low level of 17.8% by 1980.⁴

Coupled with this increase in the total population and the change in the proportion of the various groups, there has been an absolute and relative increase of the older people in relation to the other age groups in White sections. The general trends are along the same lines as in other economically developed Western communities.⁶

Demography is the study of the factors which determine the changing composition of human population and their growth or decline. A study of these determinants, of course, can provide the answer to the causes of the present situation and the future trends.

In the Republic of South Africa only the White population is ageing, and for simplicity only this section will be considered. The causes of the change, however, will be excluded for the present.

What then is 'ageing' when applied to a population and what are the features in the Republic of South Africa?

AGEING OF POPULATIONS⁷

The concept of 'ageing of a population' is complex and refers to the structural change of the population. It is best conceived as a frequency distribution according to the age of its members, and best described in the form of a pyramid. There are, therefore, three main possibilities:

1. Total ageing, which is used to denote the fact that all the members of a population are older.

2. Ageing at the apex, where the proportion of older persons increases.

3. Ageing from the base, where the proportion of young persons decreases.

It is obvious that ageing at the apex and ageing from the base can occur simultaneously.

The term 'ageing of the population', when used without further qualification, applies to ageing from the base of the pyramid, ageing at the apex, or a combination of both. For our present purpose the consequences may be taken as equivalent.

The pyramids depicting the population structural changes of South Africa show the above features of ageing progressively from 1911, being most marked in 1960 (Fig.

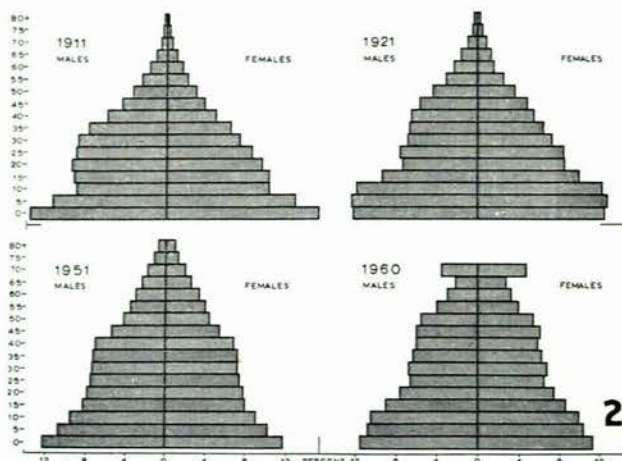


Fig. 2. Population pyramids of White South Africans, 1911-1960.

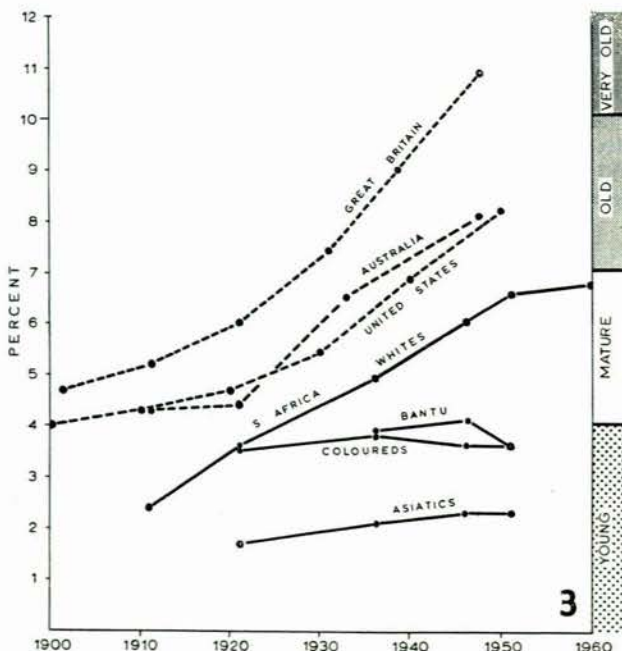


Fig. 3. Percentage of persons aged 65 and over in various countries, 1900-1960.

2).^{1,2} These trends are expected to continue. The population pyramid for 1960 is based on the preliminary figures supplied by the Bureau of Census and Statistics, Pretoria.⁸ The group aged 70 and over has not yet been subdivided into the quinquennial sub-groups and is therefore represented as a single block.

The percentage of persons over the age of 64 years may also be used to denote ageing of a population. The United Nations Population Commission⁷ arbitrarily classified populations as 'young' if there were less than 4% of individuals over the age of 64; 'mature' when the percentage was between 4% and 7%; and 'aged' when it exceeded 7%. By this the White population of South Africa can be classified as *mature* or even *aged* by now (Fig. 3). The preliminary figure for 1960 shows that 6.65% are over 64 years. These trends are along the same lines as those of Britain, the USA and Australia,⁷ and will continue; by 1980 the figure could stand at 8.6%.⁴

The increase in the proportion of the elderly is preceded and later accompanied by an increase in the proportion of persons of working age, i.e. 15-64 years. This is also reflected as a bulge in the population pyramid in the middle-age levels. At the same time the proportion of the older to the younger adults, in this group, has also been increasing. This latter phenomenon is usually referred to as 'ageing of the potential labour force'.

MALE - FEMALE POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

The increase in the total female population and the rapid proportional rise of older females are also well depicted in pyramid form (Fig. 2). According to the estimate for 1960 the total female population outnumbers the males by over 10,000.⁵

The female group, aged 65 and over, increased from approximately 89,000 to an estimated figure of 116,000 between 1951 and 1960. The proportional rise has been from 6.7% to 7.5% for the same period. This rapid ageing of the female population is, therefore, a most noticeable feature.

URBAN-RURAL POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

Since 1911 there has been a rapid shift of the population from the rural to the urban areas. Up to 1931 the rural areas lost a smaller number of individuals than the total natural increase. Since 1931, however, although the variations in mortality and fertility have favoured the increase of the population in the rural areas, the loss to

TABLE IV. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF WHITE OCCUPANCY OF RURAL AND URBAN AREAS^{9,12}

Year	Rural			Urban		
	0-14	15-64	65+	0-14	15-64	65+
1911	40.5	57.0	2.5	36.5	61.1	2.4
1921	40.6	56.2	3.2	37.2	59.6	3.2
1936	34.5	60.6	4.9	31.2	63.8	5.0
1951	33.1	59.9	7.0	31.7	61.8	6.5
1960						

* Urban and rural areas have been approximated to the same respective areas during all the census years.

the cities has been more than the natural increase. The character of this internal migration, therefore, accounts for the marked absolute and relative decrease in the rural population, and the resultant growing proportion of the urban population (Table IV).⁹

Coupled with these changes there has been a more rapid rural ageing as compared with the South African population as a whole (Table V).⁹ In spite of the persistently higher proportion in the age group 0-14 years, in 1951 the old-age group represented 7.0% of the rural population,

TABLE V. PERCENTAGE OF WHITE PERSONS IN DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS IN RURAL AREAS AND IN SOUTH AFRICA AS A WHOLE⁹

Year	Rural			South Africa		
	0-14	15-64	65+	0-14	15-64	65+
1911	40.5	57.0	2.5	36.5	61.1	2.4
1921	40.6	56.2	3.2	37.2	59.6	3.2
1936	34.5	60.6	4.9	31.2	63.8	5.0
1951	33.1	59.9	7.0	31.7	61.8	6.5

as compared to 6.5% for the country as a whole. This is probably related to the shift of the young and middle-aged adults to the cities.

There is also a large preponderance of males in the rural areas, however. In 1951 the proportion of males over the age of 65 was 7.5% and females 6.5%. This is in direct contrast to the increasing female population of South Africa as a whole.

The urban areas, as a consequence of the trends indicated above, have shown a rapidly increasing population which is somewhat younger and has a proportionately larger number of females. There is, however, a noticeable difference in the population structure between the larger and smaller centres. Green¹⁰ has pointed out that in metropolitan regions, such as the Witwatersrand, there is a tendency for the 15-64-year age group to migrate from the outer to the inner municipal areas. When they reach retiring age, however, they tend to remain there. This will accentuate with time the ageing trend in the central population of Johannesburg.

The Witwatersrand metropolitan area, from 1936 to 1951, showed a rise in the proportion of persons of 65 years and over from 3.7% to 5.2%. The Johannesburg magisterial area, however, has shown a much greater rise, from 4.3% to 6.6% over the same period.¹⁰ The estimate for 1960 stands at about 7.6%.⁸ This trend is most noticeable in the female population.

There is, therefore, a marked ageing of the population of the centre of Johannesburg, most noticeable among the females. This trend is probably also to be found in the other city centres, such as Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban.

NON-WHITE POPULATION CHANGES

In direct contrast to the changes taking place among the White section, the percentage over the age of 64 among the Bantu, Coloured and Asian sections of the population is actually getting less.

Estimates by projection methods reveal that these trends will continue for some time to come.⁴

EFFECTS OF AGEING TRENDS

Britain, the Americas and the other economically developed Western communities have shown the influence of the ageing of their population on the values, institutions and organizations of their respective societies.¹¹ With the recent changes in the White section of the population of the Republic of South Africa similar changes are taking place here.

Gerontology, as a study of these changes, has been classed as a branch of a science. As a pure science it has no important place in South Africa at present. As an applied science, however, it has already achieved some prominence, particularly in the medical field.

In South Africa the recent upsurge of thought and activity by various individuals and organizations in the field of social gerontology has not taken a unified form or direction. It behoves one, therefore, to record and attempt to clarify certain facts and concepts at this stage in order to facilitate future progress in this field of study.

SUMMARY

In the Republic of South Africa the White section of the population has shown only a moderate increase in

numbers, but a rapid ageing, from natural processes, since 1911. This is in contrast to the non-White sections.

There has also been an absolute and relative increase in the numbers of older females in the population as a whole.

With the natural shift of the population to the urban areas these changes have become accentuated in the centres of the larger cities.

The rural population is decreasing in numbers and shows an increasing proportion of elderly males.

The social effects of these structural changes and the ageing of the White population of South Africa are still to be assessed.

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