

# RELATIONSHIPS



**WOMEN IN UNION** From the teenage years onward, the majority of women are married.\*

*In around one-fourth of the countries surveyed, at least 70 percent of reproductive age women are in union.*

Single women are particularly rare in Niger and Mali, where upwards of 85 percent of women between ages 15 and 49 are in union. In contrast, in Botswana and Namibia, the majority of women remain single; only 39 and 42 percent of women, respectively, report that they are married.

In most of the surveyed countries, 10 percent or less of reproductive age women are divorced, widowed, or separated.

\*Throughout report, marriage refers to women who are either formally married or are living with a partner.



# MARITAL STATUS

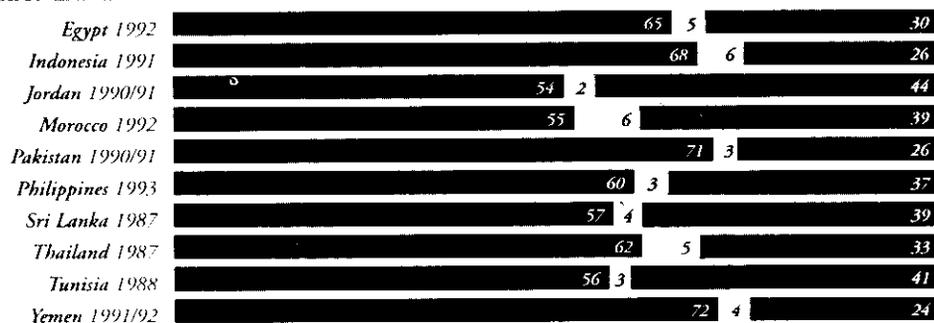
Percent distribution of women 15 to 49 by marital status

■ Married/Living Together  
 ■ Widowed/Divorced/Separated  
 ■ Never Married

## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



## ASIA/NEAR EAST



## LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN



0 25 50 75 100

\*Women 15 to 44

**POLYGyny AND MARRIAGE WITH RELATIVES** In some countries, traditional marital practices are prevalent: Substantial numbers of women are married to men who have more than one wife or are married to blood relatives.

In a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, many women are married to men who have more than one wife. *More than 40 percent of women ages 15 to 49 are in polygynous marriages in Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo.*

Marriages between relatives are also common in various countries. Women in consanguineous unions typically marry earlier in life, have more children, and have higher mortality rates among their children than women married to nonrelatives. Consanguineous marriages are usually arranged marriages.

In Pakistan, which is reported to have one of the highest rates of consanguineous marriage in the world, 63 percent of women are married to a relative, usually a first or second cousin.

**WOMEN 15 TO 49 MARRIED  
TO RELATIVES**

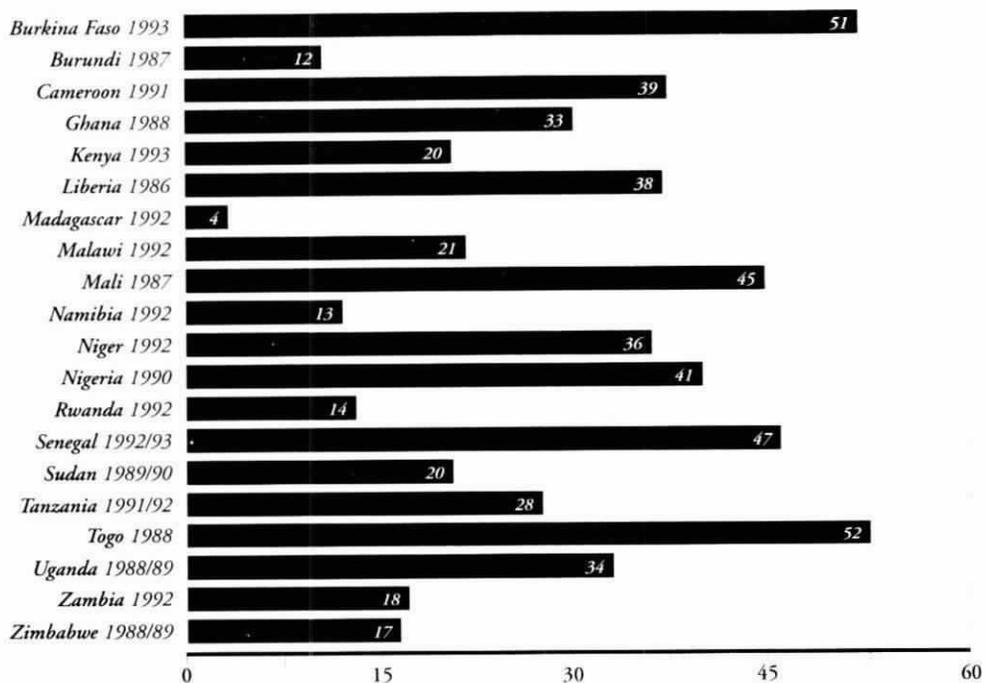
Egypt, 1992	40%
Pakistan, 1990/91	63%
Tunisia, 1988	49%
Yemen, 1991/92*	36%

\*Refers to first husband



## POLYGYNY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Percentage of currently married women 15 to 49 in a polygynous union\*



\*Women in polygynous unions are married to men who have other wives.



**WHEN WOMEN FIRST MARRY** Many women go straight from teenage life to married life. Typically, women spend little or almost no time single as adults prior to their first marriage.

The age at which a woman marries often affects the rest of her life, influencing her level of education obtained, her participation in the labor force, and the number of children she has.

In 14 out of 42 countries surveyed, at least half of women were married before age 18. Some women were barely out of childhood. *In Mali, Niger, and Yemen, the median age at marriage is approximately 15 years: One-half of women in these countries were married before they reached age 16.*

Teenage brides are relatively rare in only two sub-Saharan countries surveyed. The median ages at first marriage in Botswana and Namibia are approximately 24 and 25, respectively.

Outside of sub-Saharan Africa, women tend to marry slightly later in life. The median age at marriage is 20 years or older in four out of 10 countries surveyed in Asia and the Near East.

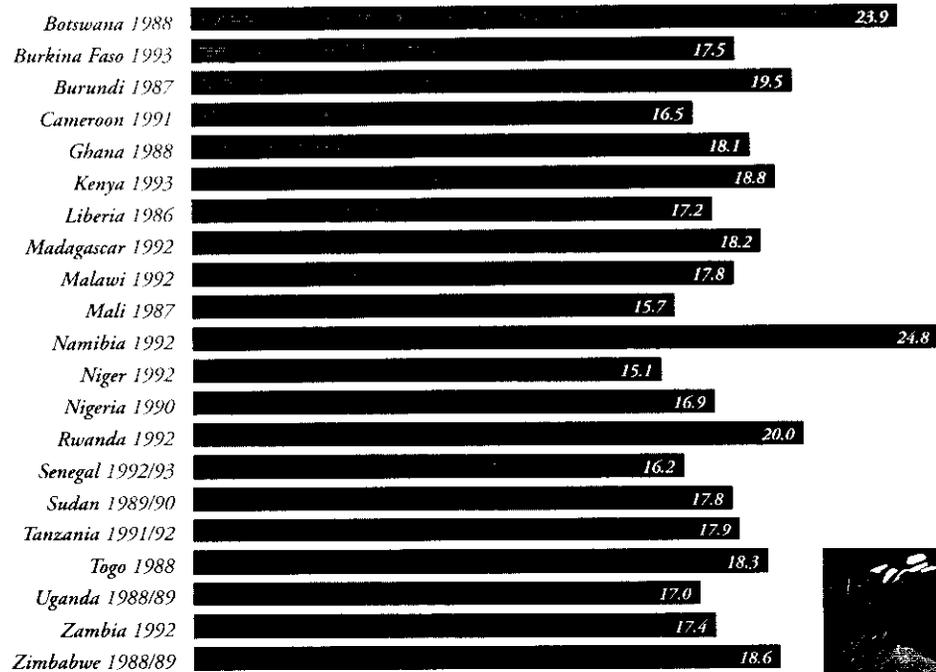
Among women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the median age at first marriage is 20 years or higher in six out of 11 countries surveyed.



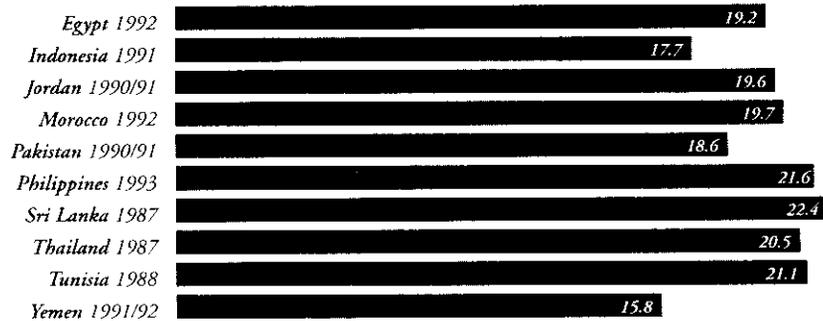
## AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

Median age at first marriage among women 25 to 49

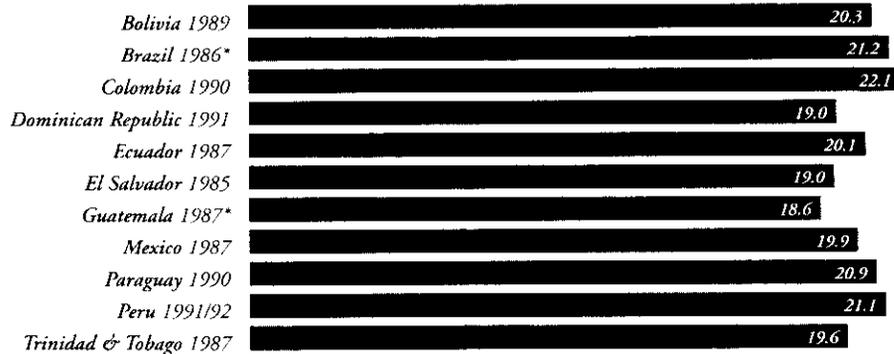
### SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



### ASIA/NEAR EAST



### LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN



0 12.5 25

\*Women 25 to 44

**PREMARITAL SEXUAL ACTIVITY** *On average, women in the countries surveyed are sexually active before they are married and first have sexual intercourse as teenagers.*

Social custom, however, often discourages premarital sex and places family planning services outside the reach of teenagers. Many of the young women engaging in premarital sex are at increased risk of unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, and school dropout.

Among the sub-Saharan countries, young women first have intercourse about a year and a half before they marry. On average, young women in these countries have sex for the first time between ages 16 and 17 and get married between 18 and 19. There is a great deal of variation within the region. The difference between the median ages at first intercourse and first marriage is less than two months in Mali and Niger, but more than seven years in Botswana.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the average difference between age at first sexual intercourse and age at first marriage is approximately one year. Women tend to have intercourse and marry at older ages in this region than in sub-Saharan Africa.

In Indonesia and the Philippines, there is a much closer correspondence among younger women between marriage age and the age at first sexual intercourse.

**AIDS**

In a number of countries, AIDS poses one of the gravest threats to women's health and well-being.

Recent results from a few sub-Saharan countries suggest that while most women have heard of AIDS, many are not adequately informed. Only 63 percent of Zambian women, for instance, believe that the disease is preventable. In the countries surveyed, relatively few of the women who have heard of AIDS mention condom use as a preventive measure. In Senegal, more than 60 percent of women can name a preventive measure, but only 6 percent mention condom use.

More commonly, women mention limiting partners or staying with one partner as preventive measures. Monogamy, however, may not afford a woman protection if her partner has multiple partners. While sexual behavior is difficult to measure, men are much more likely to report multiple partners than women in the countries surveyed. In Kenya and Tanzania, for instance, more than 25 percent of men reported having multiple partners in a recent period, compared to less than 6 percent of women.

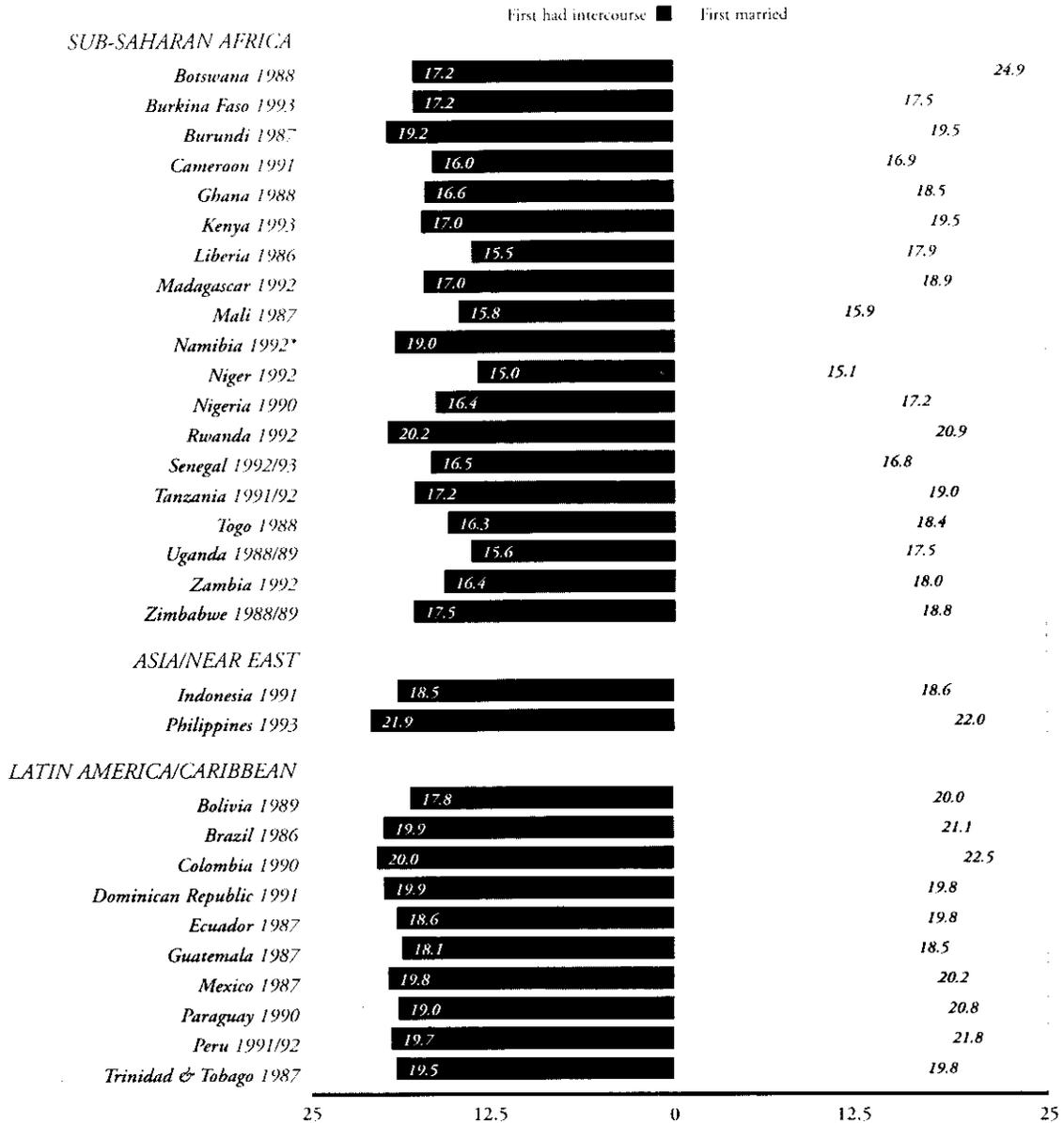
Within their relationships, many women are at a disadvantage in protecting themselves. Some may not be in a position to negotiate condom use, sexual activity, or the fidelity of their partners. In the countries surveyed, men also tend to know more about AIDS. In Burkina Faso, 84 percent of men know that the disease is sexually transmitted, compared to 61 percent of women. Typically, men report that most of their information on AIDS comes from the mass media, while women tend to report less reliable primary sources, such as friends and relatives.

Surveys in sub-Saharan countries with AIDS information:

- Botswana, 1988
- Burkina Faso, 1993
- Kenya, 1993
- Malawi, 1992
- Senegal, 1992/93
- Tanzania, 1991/2
- Zambia, 1992
- Zimbabwe, 1988/89

## PREMARITAL SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Median age at first intercourse and first marriage among women 25 to 29



\*Median age at first marriage omitted because less than 50 percent married by age 25.