



**6 February 2013**

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## **Walking down the aisle a path less travelled**

The number of marriages registered every year is declining despite an increasing population. Over a period of close to a decade, the number of civil and customary marriages registered every year has dropped by nearly 10%. This is according to the latest *South Africa Survey*, published by the South African Institute of Race Relations in Johannesburg recently.

Between 2003 and 2010, the country's population increased by 12%. In those seven years, household numbers also increased by 19%. Over the same period, the number of civil and customary marriages registered every year declined by 8%.

Thuthukani Ndebele, a researcher at the Institute, said the drop in customary marriages was considerably more pronounced than that of civil marriages. Customary marriages dropped by 42% from 17 283 registered in 2003 to 9 996 in 2010. Civil marriages decreased by 4% from 178 689 to 170 826.

The data was obtained from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA).

Civil marriages are administered through the Marriage Act of 1961 and are solemnised by licensed marriage officers, who include religious figures such as priests. Customary marriages are negotiated, celebrated, or concluded according to any of the indigenous African customary law systems in South Africa.

Marriage trends are an indicator of the changes in lifestyle choices that individuals adopt with time. 'The number of households is going up and the average household size is going down. This suggests that more people may be choosing to live on their own or with unmarried partners.'

The importance of marriage to families is also highlighted in the *Survey*. 'Children born to married parents are more likely to grow up living with both parents. Such children tend to be statistically less likely to become teenage parents, delinquents, school drop-outs or drug and alcohol abusers. On the other hand, children born to unmarried parents are more likely to end up living in single-parent households, which are also more vulnerable to poverty', said Mr Ndebele.

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