

## OTHER PROXIMATE DETERMINANTS OF FERTILITY

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Fertility levels in most populations can be explained by five key proximate determinants that define the risk of becoming pregnant: marriage, sexual intercourse, postpartum amenorrhea and postpartum abstinence from sexual relations, onset of menopause, and contraceptive use. This chapter addresses the major factors other than contraception that influence fertility. Marriage is a principal indicator of women's exposure to the risk of pregnancy. Early age at marriage in a population is usually associated with a longer period of exposure to the risk of pregnancy and higher fertility levels. The durations of postpartum amenorrhea and postpartum abstinence affect the length of time a woman is unsusceptible to pregnancy and the interval between births. The onset of menopause marks the end of a woman's reproductive life cycle. Taken together, these factors determine the length and pace of reproduction; hence, they are important in understanding fertility levels and differences.

### 6.2 CURRENT MARITAL STATUS

Current marital status refers to marital status at the time of the survey. Respondents who are married but for whom *gauna* has not been performed are referred to as 'married but *gauna* not performed'. *Gauna* is a tradition practiced primarily in the northern states of India in which a young bride lives with her parents until another ceremony is performed, after which time the bride goes to live with her husband. Respondents who are widowed, divorced, separated, or deserted are referred to as 'formerly married'. The term 'ever married' includes respondents who are currently married or formerly married.

Table 6.1 shows the percent distribution of women and men by current marital status, according to age and residence. One-fifth of Indian women age 15-49 have never been married. Seventy-five percent are currently married, less than 1 percent are married but *gauna* has not been performed, 3 percent are widowed, and 1 percent are divorced, separated, or deserted. Compared with women, the proportion of men age 15-49 who have never been married is considerably higher (36 percent). Sixty-two percent of men are married, less than 1 percent are married but *gauna* not performed, and 1 percent are divorced, separated, widowed, or deserted.

The proportion never married is higher among urban women and men than it is among their rural counterparts, especially for men. One-quarter of urban women age 15-49 have never been married, compared with 17 percent of rural women. Forty-two percent of urban men age 15-49 have never been married, compared with 32 percent of rural men.

The proportion of women and men who marry young has important policy and programme implications. At the national level, 27 percent of 15-19 year old women are currently married (15 percent of urban women and 33 percent of rural women). Very few men in this age group are currently married (only 1 percent of urban men and 4 percent of rural men). One percent of women and men age 45-49 have never been married, indicating that marriage is still nearly universal in India.

Table 6.1 Current marital status

Percent distribution of women age 15-49 and men age 15-54 by current marital status, according to age and residence, India, 2005-06

Age	Marital status							Total	Number of respondents
	Never married	Currently Married	Married, <i>gauna</i> not performed	Widowed	Divorced	Separated	Deserted		
URBAN WOMEN									
15-19	84.6	14.5	0.7	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	100.0	7,463
20-24	38.5	60.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.1	100.0	7,468
25-29	10.5	86.2	0.1	1.3	0.4	1.1	0.4	100.0	6,787
30-34	2.9	92.5	0.0	2.7	0.2	1.2	0.5	100.0	5,793
35-39	1.8	91.0	0.0	4.8	0.5	1.4	0.5	100.0	5,486
40-44	1.0	89.2	0.0	7.2	0.5	1.6	0.5	100.0	4,437
45-49	1.1	84.8	0.0	11.6	0.5	1.3	0.7	100.0	3,383
Total	25.1	70.1	0.2	3.1	0.3	0.9	0.3	100.0	40,817
URBAN MEN									
15-19	98.9	0.7	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	4,725
20-24	80.0	18.9	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	100.0	4,711
25-29	41.9	57.3	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	100.0	3,931
30-34	12.6	86.2	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.1	100.0	3,513
35-39	4.0	94.9	0.0	0.7	0.1	0.2	0.1	100.0	3,350
40-44	2.5	95.6	0.0	1.0	0.2	0.7	0.1	100.0	2,864
45-49	1.3	96.1	0.0	1.6	0.2	0.7	0.2	100.0	2,411
50-54	1.1	96.2	0.0	2.0	0.2	0.4	0.1	100.0	1,650
Total age 15-49	42.2	56.6	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.1	100.0	25,504
Total age 15-54	39.7	59.0	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.1	100.0	27,154
RURAL WOMEN									
15-19	63.1	32.5	3.8	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	100.0	17,348
20-24	17.3	80.2	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.7	0.3	100.0	15,311
25-29	3.5	93.1	0.0	1.7	0.4	1.0	0.3	100.0	13,630
30-34	1.3	93.6	0.0	3.3	0.3	0.9	0.5	100.0	11,863
35-39	0.8	91.5	0.0	5.9	0.3	1.0	0.5	100.0	10,380
40-44	0.7	88.8	0.0	8.6	0.2	1.3	0.4	100.0	8,612
45-49	0.4	87.4	0.0	10.7	0.2	0.9	0.4	100.0	6,424
Total	17.2	77.2	0.9	3.3	0.3	0.8	0.3	100.0	83,568
RURAL MEN									
15-19	93.4	4.1	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	8,283
20-24	57.0	40.5	1.7	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.1	100.0	7,278
25-29	22.3	75.9	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.2	100.0	6,922
30-34	6.5	91.6	0.0	1.1	0.2	0.3	0.2	100.0	6,231
35-39	2.4	95.5	0.0	1.3	0.1	0.5	0.2	100.0	5,951
40-44	1.6	95.5	0.0	1.9	0.1	0.4	0.5	100.0	5,241
45-49	1.1	95.2	0.0	2.7	0.1	0.5	0.3	100.0	4,340
50-54	1.9	93.9	0.0	3.3	0.2	0.3	0.5	100.0	2,968
Total age 15-49	31.9	65.7	0.8	0.9	0.1	0.3	0.2	100.0	44,247
Total age 15-54	30.0	67.5	0.8	1.1	0.1	0.3	0.2	100.0	47,215
TOTAL WOMEN									
15-19	69.6	27.1	2.9	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	100.0	24,811
20-24	24.3	73.7	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.3	100.0	22,779
25-29	5.8	90.8	0.1	1.6	0.4	1.0	0.3	100.0	20,417
30-34	1.8	93.2	0.0	3.1	0.3	1.0	0.5	100.0	17,656
35-39	1.1	91.3	0.0	5.5	0.4	1.1	0.5	100.0	15,866
40-44	0.8	88.9	0.0	8.1	0.3	1.4	0.4	100.0	13,049
45-49	0.6	86.5	0.0	11.0	0.3	1.0	0.5	100.0	9,807
Total	19.8	74.8	0.7	3.2	0.3	0.8	0.3	100.0	124,385
TOTAL MEN									
15-19	95.4	2.8	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	13,008
20-24	66.1	32.0	1.4	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.1	100.0	11,989
25-29	29.4	69.2	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.1	100.0	10,854
30-34	8.7	89.7	0.1	0.8	0.3	0.3	0.2	100.0	9,744
35-39	3.0	95.3	0.0	1.1	0.1	0.4	0.2	100.0	9,302
40-44	1.9	95.5	0.0	1.6	0.1	0.5	0.3	100.0	8,105
45-49	1.1	95.5	0.0	2.3	0.1	0.6	0.3	100.0	6,750
50-54	1.6	94.7	0.0	2.8	0.2	0.3	0.4	100.0	4,618
Total age 15-49	35.7	62.4	0.6	0.8	0.1	0.3	0.2	100.0	69,751
Total age 15-54	33.5	64.4	0.6	0.9	0.1	0.3	0.2	100.0	74,369

### 6.3 AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

Marriage in India marks the point in a woman's life when childbearing becomes socially acceptable. Age at first marriage has a profound impact on childbearing because women who marry early have on average a longer period of exposure to pregnancy and a greater number of lifetime births. Information on age at first marriage was obtained by asking respondents the month and year, or age, at which they started living with their first partner.

Table 6.2 shows the percentage of women age 15-49 and men age 15-54 who have married by specific exact ages, the percentage who have never married, and the median age at first marriage and first cohabitation with spouse, according to current age. The median age at first marriage and at first cohabitation with one's spouse for a cohort of respondents is the age by which 50 percent of the cohort marries or cohabits. Marriage occurs relatively early in India. More than one-quarter (27 percent) of Indian women age 20-49 married before age 15; over half (58 percent) married before the legal minimum marriage age of 18, and three-quarters (74 percent) married before reaching age 20. There has been a steady rise in age at first marriage, which is reflected in the gradual decline in the proportion of women married by ages 15, 18, and 20 years from the oldest to the youngest age groups. A particularly notable decline is seen in the proportions married by age 15 in the three youngest age groups, from 25 percent of women age 25-29 to 12 percent of women age 15-19.

Table 6.2 Age at first marriage									
Percentage of women age 15-49 and men age 15-54 who were first married by specific exact ages, percentage never married, and median age at first marriage and first cohabitation with spouse, according to current age, India, 2005-06									
Current age	Percentage first married by exact age:					Percentage never married	Number of respondents	Median age at first marriage	Median age at first cohabitation
	15	18	20	21	25				
WOMEN									
15-19	11.9	na	na	na	na	69.6	24,811	a	a
20-24	18.2	47.4	64.4	na	na	24.3	22,779	18.3	18.5
25-29	25.4	55.4	72.4	78.6	91.3	5.8	20,417	17.4	17.8
30-34	28.5	61.2	76.5	82.0	93.2	1.8	17,656	16.8	17.4
35-39	31.0	63.4	79.1	84.3	93.8	1.1	15,866	16.6	17.2
40-44	32.4	64.6	79.8	85.5	94.6	0.8	13,049	16.5	17.1
45-49	32.9	64.2	79.1	85.1	94.5	0.6	9,807	16.5	17.3
20-49	26.9	57.9	74.0	na	na	7.4	99,574	17.2	17.7
25-49	29.4	61.1	76.8	82.5	93.2	2.4	76,795	16.8	17.4
MEN									
15-19	1.3	na	na	na	na	95.4	13,008	a	a
20-24	2.8	9.5	18.8	na	na	66.1	11,989	a	a
25-29	4.1	13.3	25.6	32.3	58.5	29.4	10,854	23.7	24.0
30-34	6.3	18.1	31.0	38.8	63.6	8.7	9,744	22.7	23.1
35-39	6.2	18.5	31.9	41.0	66.3	3.0	9,302	22.3	22.7
40-44	8.0	19.9	34.7	43.6	68.2	1.9	8,105	22.0	22.5
45-49	6.6	18.5	31.9	41.3	67.1	1.1	6,750	22.4	22.9
50-54	7.1	17.9	31.7	39.9	65.3	1.6	4,618	22.5	23.0
20-49	5.4	15.7	28.2	na	na	22.0	56,742	23.4	23.8
25-49	6.1	17.4	30.7	38.9	64.3	10.2	44,754	22.7	23.0

na = Not applicable due to censoring  
a = Omitted because less than 50 percent of the women or men were married or began living with their spouse for the first time before reaching the beginning of the age group

However, increases in the median age at first marriage are proceeding at a very slow pace, and a considerable proportion of women still marry below the legal minimum age at marriage. The median age at first marriage among women age 20-49 is 17.2 and the median age at the first cohabitation is 17.7. The difference of half a year between the median age at first marriage and first cohabitation is a consequence of the tradition of the *gauna* system or similar cultural practices that result in a lag time between marriage and cohabitation. The *gauna* system prevails primarily in communities where age at marriage is very young. In these cases, women either do not start living with their husbands immediately after marriage, or return to their parental home after only a couple days of living with the husband (actual cohabitation with their husband starts after a gap of a few months or even one or more years). Over time, however, there has been a considerable increase in the median age at first marriage. The median age at first marriage in India is almost two years higher for women age 20-24 than for women age 45-49. The increase in the median age at first cohabitation is just over one year. The difference between the median age at first marriage and the median age at first cohabitation is no more than one year among women in any age group.

Table 6.3.1 Median age at first marriage: Women

Median age at first marriage among women age 20-49, by current age, according to background characteristics, India, 2005-06

Background characteristic	Age						Women age 20-49	Women age 25-49
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49		
<b>Residence</b>								
Urban	a	19.2	18.6	18.1	18.1	18.1	18.8	18.5
Rural	17.4	16.6	16.1	16.0	15.8	15.8	16.4	16.1
<b>Education</b>								
No education	15.8	15.5	15.4	15.3	15.3	15.5	15.5	15.4
<5 years complete	16.9	16.4	16.4	16.6	16.4	16.5	16.5	16.5
5-7 years complete	17.6	17.1	17.0	17.3	17.2	16.9	17.3	17.1
8-9 years complete	19.0	18.5	18.4	18.5	18.3	19.0	18.7	18.5
10-11 years complete	19.9	19.6	19.5	19.7	19.9	19.8	19.7	19.7
12 or more years complete	a	23.1	22.8	22.6	22.5	22.5	a	22.8
<b>Religion</b>								
Hindu	18.1	17.3	16.7	16.5	16.3	16.3	17.0	16.7
Muslim	18.2	17.3	16.8	16.3	16.5	16.3	17.0	16.7
Christian	a	20.3	20.9	20.6	20.2	21.3	a	20.6
Sikh	a	20.4	19.7	19.6	19.8	19.7	a	19.9
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	19.1	18.3	16.6	16.2	16.2	17.1	17.4	16.9
Jain	a	22.5	20.8	20.0	19.9	19.7	a	20.8
Other	17.8	17.6	17.2	17.8	18.4	19.0	17.8	17.7
<b>Caste/tribe</b>								
Scheduled caste	17.5	16.5	16.0	15.8	15.6	15.5	16.3	15.9
Scheduled tribe	17.3	16.7	16.1	16.4	16.1	16.1	16.5	16.3
Other backward class	17.8	16.8	16.5	16.0	16.1	16.0	16.7	16.3
Other	19.7	18.7	18.1	17.9	17.7	17.5	18.4	18.1
Don't know	19.0	16.3	17.7	16.8	16.5	17.9	17.2	16.9
<b>Wealth index</b>								
Lowest	15.9	15.4	15.5	15.4	15.2	15.1	15.5	15.4
Second	16.6	16.0	15.7	15.6	15.4	15.2	15.8	15.6
Middle	17.8	16.8	16.4	16.1	15.9	16.0	16.7	16.3
Fourth	19.2	18.2	17.7	17.1	16.9	16.8	17.9	17.5
Highest	a	20.9	20.1	19.4	18.9	18.5	a	19.7
Total	18.3	17.4	16.8	16.6	16.5	16.5	17.2	16.8

Note: Total includes women with missing information on education, religion, and caste/tribe, who are not shown separately.

a = Omitted because less than 50 percent of the women or men were married for the first time before reaching the beginning of the age group

Men in India tend to marry at much older ages than women. Among men age 20-49, only 16 percent were married by age 18, 28 percent by age 20, and 58 percent by age 25. More than one-third of men in India marry before attaining the minimum age at marriage for men (age 21 years) set by the Child Marriage Registration Act of 1978. The proportion of men married by age 20 has decreased steadily in recent years, from 35 percent among men age 40-44 to 19 percent among men age 20-24. The median age at marriage for men age 20-49 is 23.4 years, over six years older than the median for women in the same age group. The median age at first cohabitation is about half a year older than the median age at marriage for men in all age groups.

Table 6.3.1 shows the median age at first marriage for women age 20-49 by current age and background characteristics. The median age at marriage has been increasing in both urban and rural areas, but urban women marry more than two years later than rural women, on average. The rural-urban difference in the median age at first marriage exists among women in all age groups.

There is a steady increase in age at marriage with increasing education, resulting in a seven year difference in the median age at marriage between women age 25-49 with no education and women with at least 12 years of education. Differentials in the median age at marriage by religion show the highest median age at marriage among Jain women (20.8 years), followed by Christian women (20.6 years) and Sikh women (19.9 years). Hindu and Muslim women have the lowest median age at first marriage of 16.7 years. Women not belonging to a scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, or other backward class have a median age at first marriage that is about two years higher than women from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, or other backward classes. The median age at marriage has shown an increase among women in all caste/tribe groups.

Wealth has a positive association with the median age at first marriage. Women age 25-49 in the highest wealth quintile marry over four years later than women in the lowest wealth quintile. The gap in the median age at marriage across wealth quintiles has widened over time. Among women age 45-49 years, the median age at first marriage for those in the highest wealth quintile (18.5 years) is almost three and half years higher than for those in the lowest wealth quintile (15.1 years). Among women age 25-29, the median age at first marriage is five and half years higher for those in the highest wealth quintile than those in the lowest wealth quintile.

Table 6.3.2 presents the median age at first marriage among men by current age and background characteristics. The median age at first marriage among men age 25-49 is 23 years, nearly six years higher than the median age at first marriage among women. As observed in the case of women, there is a slow but steady rise in the median age at first marriage of men from age 40-44 to age 25-29. The patterns and strong associations in age at marriage by urban-rural residence, educational attainment, and wealth quintiles are similar to those observed for women. Variations in the median age at first marriage for men by religion and caste/tribe reveal more or less a similar pattern as observed for women.

Table 6.3.2 Median age at first marriage: Men

Median age at first marriage among men age 25-54, by current age, according to background characteristics, India, 2005-06

Background characteristic	Age						Men age 25-49
	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	
<b>Residence</b>							
Urban	a	25.1	24.6	24.3	24.5	24.5	25.0
Rural	22.3	21.4	21.2	20.9	21.2	21.3	21.5
<b>Education</b>							
No education	20.4	19.8	20.2	20.2	20.7	20.5	20.3
<5 years complete	21.3	21.1	21.2	21.3	21.4	22.2	21.4
5-7 years complete	22.5	21.5	21.7	21.0	21.8	22.0	21.8
8-9 years complete	23.9	22.6	22.8	22.4	22.7	22.5	22.9
10-11 years complete	a	24.6	24.4	24.0	24.7	23.9	24.5
12 or more years complete	a	26.8	26.3	26.5	26.0	26.4	a
<b>Religion</b>							
Hindu	23.7	22.6	22.3	21.8	22.2	22.2	22.5
Muslim	23.5	22.6	21.7	22.1	22.4	23.5	22.5
Christian	a	25.6	26.2	26.5	25.5	26.4	a
Sikh	24.8	23.3	22.7	23.2	25.0	24.9	23.8
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	a	25.7	23.8	21.0	22.5	22.8	23.9
Jain	a	(24.9)	(28.0)	(24.6)	(26.9)	(23.4)	a
Other	21.0	22.0	20.8	23.3	25.7	25.6	22.6
<b>Caste/tribe</b>							
Scheduled caste	22.5	21.4	21.2	20.7	21.2	21.1	21.5
Scheduled tribe	21.5	20.8	20.7	19.8	20.9	20.5	20.7
Other backward class	23.2	22.1	21.9	21.4	21.9	21.9	22.1
Other	a	24.5	23.8	23.8	23.8	24.0	24.3
Don't know	(24.7)	*	(25.2)	(25.4)	*	*	a
<b>Wealth index</b>							
Lowest	20.2	19.6	20.1	20.1	20.4	20.4	20.1
Second	21.5	20.4	20.7	20.6	21.2	20.8	20.9
Middle	22.8	22.0	21.7	21.0	21.4	21.6	21.9
Fourth	a	24.3	23.3	22.7	22.7	23.2	23.7
Highest	a	26.6	25.9	25.7	25.3	24.9	a
Total	23.7	22.7	22.3	22.0	22.4	22.5	22.6

Note: Total includes men with missing information on education, religion, and caste/tribe, who are not shown separately.

( ) Based on 25-49 unweighted cases.

\* Percentage not shown; based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases.

a = Omitted because less than 50 percent of the men were married for the first time before reaching the beginning of the age group

Table 6.4 presents the percentage of women age 18-29 who married before reaching age 18 and the percentage of men age 21-29 who married before reaching age 21, by place of residence and state. Nearly half of women age 18-29 (46 percent) and more than one-quarter of men age 21-29 (27 percent) marry before reaching the legal minimum age at marriage. There are considerable differences across states in the proportion of women and men who marry before reaching the legal minimum age at marriage.

More than half of women marry before reaching the legal minimum age at marriage age in Bihar (64 percent), Jharkhand (60 percent), Rajasthan (58 percent), Andhra Pradesh (56 percent), West Bengal (53 percent), Madhya Pradesh (53 percent), Uttar Pradesh (52 percent), and Chhattisgarh (51 percent). The proportion of women who marry before reaching the legal minimum age of 18 is lowest in Goa (11 percent), Himachal Pradesh (14 percent), Manipur (14 percent), Jammu and Kashmir (16 percent), Kerala (17 percent), and Mizoram (19 percent). Nearly half of men marry before the minimum legal age of 21 in Rajasthan (49 percent). Men who marry before the minimum legal age are in the minority in all other states, although in many states they still constitute a substantial percentage. In addition to Rajasthan, more than one-third

**Table 6.4 Age at first marriage by state**

Percentage of women age 18-29 who were first married by exact age 18 and percentage of men age 21-29 who were first married by exact age 21, by residence and state, India, 2005-06

State	Women			Men		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
<b>India</b>	29.7	53.4	45.6	14.6	33.9	26.6
<b>North</b>						
Delhi	22.6	34.7	23.4	14.0	33.3	15.3
Haryana	32.9	45.2	41.4	20.8	31.9	27.7
Himachal Pradesh	13.7	14.4	14.4	6.5	10.6	10.1
Jammu & Kashmir	9.2	18.6	16.1	9.8	16.3	14.4
Punjab	19.4	22.9	21.6	26.7	24.0	25.3
Rajasthan	36.3	67.4	58.4	27.8	59.4	49.2
Uttaranchal	16.7	29.5	26.0	7.2	26.0	18.8
<b>Central</b>						
Chhattisgarh	26.4	57.6	50.5	15.2	46.9	39.9
Madhya Pradesh	33.7	60.4	52.6	18.8	50.8	40.7
Uttar Pradesh	31.8	59.4	52.2	22.2	49.4	40.5
<b>East</b>						
Bihar	37.8	68.6	63.7	18.7	42.3	36.9
Jharkhand	32.7	70.1	60.2	19.5	50.0	40.7
Orissa	27.8	39.5	37.5	9.5	19.7	17.7
West Bengal	31.3	62.3	53.3	11.9	30.8	24.7
<b>Northeast</b>						
Arunachal Pradesh	38.7	43.0	41.7	33.3	23.3	26.7
Assam	25.7	40.9	38.2	9.2	14.5	13.2
Manipur	10.9	15.5	14.0	7.8	13.9	11.7
Meghalaya	13.3	28.2	24.1	7.5	26.1	21.5
Mizoram	15.6	24.4	19.4	20.8	26.0	23.2
Nagaland	19.4	23.7	22.4	10.0	18.6	15.8
Sikkim	17.1	31.9	28.7	12.0	26.4	23.0
Tripura	37.0	42.1	41.2	7.9	12.7	12.1
<b>West</b>						
Goa	14.7	7.3	11.4	5.8	4.4	5.2
Gujarat	28.2	40.9	35.4	17.5	33.5	26.8
Maharashtra	29.2	51.8	40.2	9.6	16.7	12.8
<b>South</b>						
Andhra Pradesh	43.4	62.9	56.2	16.5	36.2	28.9
Karnataka	29.7	48.8	41.0	7.3	15.9	12.1
Kerala	12.1	20.1	17.2	1.1	2.4	2.0
Tamil Nadu	20.7	29.5	25.2	5.8	10.2	7.8

of men marry before the minimum legal age in Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh (41 percent each), Chhattisgarh (40 percent), and Bihar (37 percent). The proportion marrying before age 21 is at a minimum in Kerala (2 percent), Goa (5 percent), and Tamil Nadu (8 percent).

The proportions of women and men who marry before the legal minimum age at marriage are considerably lower among urban residents than among rural residents in all states, with the exception of Goa for women and Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, and Punjab for men. Rural-urban differences in the proportion of women marrying before age 18 are largest in Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. Rural-urban differences among men in the proportion marrying before reaching age 21 are largest in the same states (with the exception of West Bengal).

#### 6.4 AGE AT FIRST SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

Age at first marriage is often used as a proxy for first exposure to intercourse and the risk of pregnancy. The two events may not occur at the same time, however, because some women

and men may engage in sexual activity before marriage. In NFHS-3, all women and men were asked how old they were when they first had sexual intercourse.

Table 6.5 shows the percentage of women age 15-49 and men age 15-54 who first had sexual intercourse by specific exact ages, the percentage who never had sexual intercourse, and the median age at first sexual intercourse by current age. Among women age 25-49, 20 percent had sexual intercourse before they were 15 years old, 55 percent before age 18, and 72 percent before age 20. By age 25, nine-tenths of Indian women have had sexual intercourse. However, the age at first sex is substantially lower among men. Only 3 percent of men age 25-49 had sex by age 15, 14 percent by age 18, 29 percent by age 20, and 66 percent by age 25. Much of the difference between the observed pattern in age at first sexual intercourse among women and men can be attributed to the median age at marriage, which is almost six years higher among men age 25-49 than it is among women.

Table 6.5 Age at first sexual intercourse									
Percentage of women age 15-49 and men age 15-54 who had first sexual intercourse by specific exact ages, percentage who never had intercourse, and median age at first intercourse, according to current age, India, 2005-06									
Current age	Percentage who had first sexual intercourse by exact age:					Percentage who never had sexual intercourse	Number of respondents	Median age at first sexual intercourse	
	15	18	20	21	22				25
WOMEN									
15-19	8.0	na	na	na	na	na	72.2	24,811	a
20-24	12.5	43.0	62.0	na	na	na	24.4	22,779	18.7
25-29	17.8	49.7	68.3	74.8	79.4	88.2	5.9	20,417	18.0
30-34	20.1	54.9	72.1	77.9	82.0	90.0	1.9	17,656	17.5
35-39	21.3	56.9	74.5	80.1	83.9	90.1	1.2	15,866	17.4
40-44	22.0	57.6	75.3	81.1	84.7	91.2	0.9	13,049	17.3
45-49	20.5	55.9	74.6	80.8	85.0	91.3	0.7	9,807	17.4
20-49	18.4	51.9	70.0	na	na	na	7.5	99,574	17.8
25-49	20.1	54.5	72.4	78.4	82.5	89.9	2.5	76,795	17.6
MEN									
15-19	2.7	na	na	na	na	na	88.8	13,008	a
20-24	1.8	11.2	24.4	na	na	na	56.0	11,989	a
25-29	2.6	12.9	26.9	35.1	42.4	63.5	23.9	10,854	23.1
30-34	2.7	14.3	29.5	38.3	45.0	65.0	6.8	9,744	22.7
35-39	2.7	14.6	30.0	39.6	47.3	67.6	2.3	9,302	22.3
40-44	2.8	14.2	30.4	39.8	47.5	67.8	1.6	8,105	22.3
45-49	2.7	13.4	28.4	38.3	45.5	67.1	0.8	6,750	22.6
50-54	2.1	11.9	27.8	36.1	44.1	65.6	1.2	4,618	22.7
20-49	2.5	13.3	28.0	na	na	na	18.3	56,742	a
25-49	2.7	13.9	29.0	38.1	45.4	66.0	8.2	44,754	22.6

na = Not applicable due to censoring  
a = Omitted because less than 50 percent of the women or men had intercourse before reaching the beginning of the age group

Far more women than men have begun sexual relations by their early twenties. Almost 80 percent of women age 25-29 have had sex by age 22, whereas more than half of men the same age have not had sex. The median age at first sexual intercourse for women age 25-49 years is 17.6 years, which is almost identical to the median age at cohabitation. This clearly reveals that Indian women generally begin sexual intercourse at the time of their first marriage. The median age at first sexual intercourse among women has increased over the past two decades, from 17.4 among women age 45-49 to 18.7 years among women age 20-24. The median age at first intercourse among men age 25-49 is 22.6 years, five years higher than the median for women. There has not been any significant change in the median age at first sexual intercourse among



men over the past 20 years. The median age at first sex for men is lower than the median age at first cohabitation, but the difference is very small.

Table 6.6.1 presents median ages at first sexual intercourse among women age 20-49 by current age and background characteristics. The median age at first sexual intercourse among women age 20-49 follows a similar pattern as observed for the median age at marriage. Urban women have their first sexual intercourse about two years later than rural women, and the urban-rural differences in the median age at first intercourse are similar for women in all age groups. Women with at least 10 years of education have their first intercourse three and a half years later than women with no education. The median age at first intercourse increases with the educational attainment of women and the differentials by education are similar in all age groups. Religion, caste/tribe, and wealth quintiles reveal a similar pattern of variation in the median age at first intercourse as observed for the median age at first marriage.

Table 6.6.1 Median age at first intercourse: Women								
Median age at first sexual intercourse among women age 20-49, by current age, according to background characteristics, India, 2005-06								
Background characteristic	Current age						Women age 20-49	Women age 25-49
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49		
<b>Residence</b>								
Urban	a	19.6	19.0	18.5	18.5	18.6	19.2	18.9
Rural	17.9	17.3	16.9	16.8	16.7	16.9	17.2	17.0
<b>Education</b>								
No education	16.6	16.4	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.7	16.4	16.4
<5 years complete	17.3	16.9	16.8	17.1	17.0	17.3	17.1	17.0
5-7 years complete	17.9	17.6	17.4	17.7	17.6	17.4	17.7	17.6
8-9 years complete	19.2	18.8	18.8	18.7	18.6	19.2	18.9	18.8
10-11 years complete	20.0	19.9	19.8	20.0	20.1	19.9	19.9	19.9
12 or more years complete	a	23.2	22.9	22.8	22.6	22.5	a	22.9
<b>Religion</b>								
Hindu	18.6	18.0	17.5	17.3	17.1	17.3	17.7	17.5
Muslim	18.5	17.8	17.2	16.8	17.1	17.0	17.6	17.2
Christian	a	20.4	21.1	21.1	20.5	21.9	a	21.0
Sikh	a	20.6	20.1	20.0	20.1	20.1	a	20.2
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	19.2	19.1	17.6	16.7	16.4	17.5	17.8	17.4
Jain	a	22.5	20.9	20.2	20.0	20.0	a	20.9
Other	18.1	18.2	17.5	18.7	19.0	20.1	18.3	18.3
<b>Caste/tribe</b>								
Scheduled caste	17.9	17.2	16.8	16.7	16.5	16.7	17.1	16.8
Scheduled tribe	17.7	17.2	16.8	17.0	16.8	17.1	17.2	17.0
Other backward class	18.3	17.7	17.3	17.1	17.0	17.3	17.5	17.3
Other	19.9	19.1	18.5	18.3	18.2	18.2	18.8	18.5
Don't know	19.1	16.6	18.3	17.4	17.2	18.5	17.9	17.5
<b>Wealth index</b>								
Lowest	16.6	16.3	16.3	16.4	16.3	16.5	16.4	16.4
Second	17.1	16.8	16.5	16.4	16.3	16.6	16.7	16.5
Middle	18.1	17.5	16.9	16.9	16.8	16.9	17.3	17.0
Fourth	19.5	18.6	18.2	17.7	17.5	17.6	18.4	18.0
Highest	a	21.1	20.4	19.7	19.3	19.0	a	20.0
Total	18.7	18.0	17.5	17.4	17.3	17.4	17.8	17.6

Note: Total includes women with missing information on education, religion, and caste/tribe, who are not shown separately.  
a = Omitted because less than 50 percent of the women had intercourse before reaching the beginning of the age group

Table 6.6.2 presents median ages at first sexual intercourse among men age 25-54 by current age and background characteristics. Urban men have their first sexual intercourse three years later than rural men. Men with at least 10 years of education have their first intercourse three and a half years later than men with no education. The educational differentials in median age at first intercourse among men age 25-54 are similar in all age groups. As is the case for

women age 20-49, the variation in the median age at first intercourse among men age 25-54 by religion, caste/tribe, and wealth quintiles follows a similar pattern as observed for the median age at first marriage.

Table 6.6.2 Median age at first intercourse: Men							
Median age at first sexual intercourse among men age 25-54, by current age, according to background characteristics, India, 2005-06							
Background characteristic	Age						Men age 25-49
	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	
<b>Residence</b>							
Urban	a	24.8	24.3	24.2	24.4	24.4	24.6
Rural	22.0	21.6	21.4	21.5	21.7	21.8	21.6
<b>Education</b>							
No education	20.4	20.1	20.5	20.7	21.2	21.1	20.6
<5 years complete	21.1	21.4	21.4	21.6	21.6	22.2	21.5
5-7 years complete	22.1	21.3	21.5	21.4	22.0	22.5	21.8
8-9 years complete	23.1	22.6	22.6	22.6	22.6	22.4	22.7
10-11 years complete	24.0	24.3	24.4	24.1	24.6	24.1	24.2
12 or more years complete	a	26.3	26.1	26.4	26.0	26.2	a
<b>Religion</b>							
Hindu	23.1	22.6	22.4	22.2	22.4	22.5	22.5
Muslim	22.8	22.4	21.7	22.3	22.5	23.1	22.4
Christian	24.4	24.8	25.4	26.2	24.7	26.1	a
Sikh	23.1	22.8	22.6	23.3	23.8	23.8	23.2
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	23.8	25.5	23.1	21.8	22.9	22.5	23.3
Jain	a	(24.9)	(27.9)	(25.2)	(26.1)	(24.5)	a
Other	20.9	21.8	20.9	23.1	26.6	25.6	22.4
<b>Caste/tribe</b>							
Scheduled caste	21.9	21.5	21.5	21.2	21.5	21.9	21.6
Scheduled tribe	20.9	20.9	20.7	20.3	20.9	20.6	20.7
Other backward class	22.9	22.2	22.1	22.2	22.3	22.3	22.3
Other	24.5	24.3	23.6	23.6	23.7	24.0	24.0
Don't know	(24.6)	*	(25.2)	(25.7)	(23.6)	*	24.4
<b>Wealth index</b>							
Lowest	20.4	20.2	20.5	20.8	21.0	21.2	20.6
Second	21.1	20.7	20.8	21.0	21.5	21.3	21.0
Middle	22.5	21.9	22.0	21.6	21.7	22.0	22.0
Fourth	24.2	24.0	23.0	22.7	22.7	23.2	23.4
Highest	a	26.2	25.7	25.6	25.2	24.8	a
Total	23.1	22.7	22.3	22.3	22.6	22.7	22.6

Note: Total includes men with missing information on education, religion, and caste/tribe, who are not shown separately.  
 ( ) Based on 25-49 unweighted cases.  
 \* Percentage not shown; based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases.  
 a = Omitted because less than 50 percent of the men had intercourse before reaching the beginning of the age group

## 6.5 RECENT SEXUAL ACTIVITY

In the absence of contraception, the probability of pregnancy is related to the frequency of intercourse. Therefore, information on sexual activity can be used to refine measures of exposure to pregnancy. Women and men were asked how long ago their last sexual activity occurred.

Tables 6.7.1 and 6.7.2 show the percent distribution of women and men by recent sexual activity. The question on most recent sexual intercourse was only asked to those women and men who reported ever having had sexual intercourse. Twenty percent of women age 15-49 have never had sexual intercourse. More than half of all women age 15-49 had sexual intercourse within the four weeks prior to the survey. One-third of women age 15-49 were sexually activity in the week prior to the survey and an additional one-fifth (22 percent) were sexually active in

the four weeks prior to the survey (not including those sexually active in the week prior to the survey). Seventeen percent were sexually active in the year prior to the survey (but not in the four weeks prior to the survey), and 7 percent had not been sexually active for one or more years.

Table 6.7.1 Most recent sexual activity: Women

Percent distribution of women age 15-49 by timing of last sexual intercourse, according to background characteristics, India, 2005-06

Background characteristic	Timing of last sexual intercourse					Never had sexual intercourse	Total	Median number of days since last sexual intercourse <sup>3</sup>	Number of women
	Within the last week	Within the last four weeks <sup>1</sup>	Within one year <sup>2</sup>	One or more years	Missing				
<b>Age</b>									
15-19	14.6	5.2	6.8	0.7	0.6	72.2	100.0	5.9	24,811
20-24	37.6	17.5	16.7	2.3	1.5	24.4	100.0	7.0	22,779
25-29	47.2	24.3	16.8	4.1	1.8	5.9	100.0	6.9	20,417
30-34	44.5	30.4	15.9	6.1	1.2	1.9	100.0	7.3	17,656
35-39	37.6	32.4	17.9	10.1	0.8	1.2	100.0	7.9	15,866
40-44	24.9	31.7	25.1	16.5	0.8	0.9	100.0	15.0	13,049
45-49	17.8	27.8	27.8	25.1	0.8	0.7	100.0	30.3	9,807
<b>Marital status</b>									
Never married	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.0	99.2	100.0	a	25,462
Currently married	43.6	29.6	21.5	4.1	1.1	0.0	100.0	7.5	93,089
Widowed/divorced/separated/deserted	0.7	0.4	7.7	83.9	5.9	1.5	100.0	a	5,834
<b>Marital duration<sup>4</sup></b>									
Married only once									
0-4 years	52.0	21.3	23.4	1.2	1.9	0.2	100.0	6.0	16,842
5-9 years	51.5	26.1	18.8	1.7	1.9	0.0	100.0	6.3	18,046
10-14 years	50.9	30.1	16.0	1.8	1.1	0.0	100.0	6.7	15,863
15-19 years	44.5	34.5	17.3	3.0	0.6	0.0	100.0	7.4	14,605
20-24 years	34.2	36.0	23.4	6.0	0.4	0.0	100.0	8.4	12,161
25+ years	21.8	33.1	31.8	13.0	0.3	0.0	100.0	15.7	13,741
Married more than once	42.4	29.0	21.9	5.4	1.3	0.1	100.0	7.7	1,831
<b>Residence</b>									
Urban	31.0	22.2	13.8	6.8	0.8	25.3	100.0	7.6	40,817
Rural	33.5	22.2	17.9	7.2	1.2	18.0	100.0	7.9	83,568
<b>Education</b>									
No education	35.5	25.9	21.2	9.7	1.4	6.4	100.0	8.6	50,487
<5 years complete	34.1	23.6	16.2	10.1	1.2	14.8	100.0	7.9	9,918
5-7 years complete	33.9	22.2	15.1	6.6	1.2	21.0	100.0	7.6	18,820
8-9 years complete	28.3	18.3	12.8	4.3	0.9	35.4	100.0	7.5	17,383
10-11 years complete	28.2	17.1	12.0	3.9	0.6	38.1	100.0	7.3	12,887
12 or more years complete	29.5	17.6	11.0	2.8	0.8	38.3	100.0	7.1	14,882
<b>Religion</b>									
Hindu	33.0	22.3	16.8	7.2	1.1	19.6	100.0	7.8	100,151
Muslim	31.1	22.1	15.8	6.6	1.2	23.2	100.0	7.8	16,936
Christian	30.0	20.2	13.3	8.6	0.9	27.0	100.0	7.5	3,053
Sikh	36.1	21.2	11.2	5.3	0.7	25.5	100.0	7.1	2,222
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	21.5	23.2	20.4	8.9	1.6	24.5	100.0	14.6	1,010
Jain	39.0	19.4	8.2	3.5	0.5	29.3	100.0	5.9	406
Other	27.9	15.0	21.4	11.0	3.3	21.5	100.0	14.6	484
<b>Caste/tribe</b>									
Scheduled caste	33.8	21.2	17.0	7.8	1.2	19.0	100.0	7.8	23,125
Scheduled tribe	34.9	21.3	15.9	7.8	1.5	18.6	100.0	7.7	10,119
Other backward class	31.3	22.6	18.3	7.2	1.1	19.6	100.0	8.0	48,880
Other	33.2	22.4	14.4	6.3	0.9	22.7	100.0	7.6	41,207
Don't know	26.8	23.5	16.4	13.4	1.8	18.0	100.0	8.9	649
<b>Wealth index</b>									
Lowest	34.3	21.9	20.3	8.3	1.5	13.6	100.0	8.5	21,718
Second	33.3	22.9	18.4	7.8	1.3	16.2	100.0	8.0	23,616
Middle	31.7	22.6	16.5	7.7	1.3	20.2	100.0	7.9	25,088
Fourth	32.4	22.2	14.9	6.6	0.9	23.0	100.0	7.6	26,106
Highest	32.0	21.4	13.4	5.5	0.6	27.0	100.0	7.4	27,856
Total	32.7	22.2	16.5	7.1	1.1	20.4	100.0	7.8	124,385

Note: Total includes women with missing information on education, religion, and caste/tribe, who are not shown separately.

<sup>1</sup> Excludes women who had sexual intercourse within the last 1 week.

<sup>2</sup> Excludes women who had sexual intercourse within the last 1 and 4 weeks.

<sup>3</sup> Among those who have ever had sexual intercourse.

<sup>4</sup> Excludes women who are not currently married.

a = Omitted because less than 50 percent of the women had intercourse before reaching the beginning of the age group.

The proportion of women who were sexually active in the week before the survey increases with age among those below 30 years as the proportion who never had sexual intercourse decreases with age, and then decreases with increasing age thereafter. The proportion increases from 15 percent among women age 15-19 to 47 percent among women age 25-29, and decreases 18 percent among women age 45-49. Only 1 percent of never married women reported ever having had sexual intercourse. Three-quarters of currently married women reported being sexually active in the four weeks preceding the survey. Only 1 percent of formerly married women reported being sexually active in the four weeks preceding the survey, and less than 10 percent were sexually active within one year prior to the survey.

One in every two women who have been married for less than 15 years was sexually active in the week prior to the survey. Women with longer marital durations (15 years or more) were less likely to have had sexual intercourse in the previous week. Only 22 percent of women who have been married for 25 years or more had sexual intercourse in the week before the survey.

The proportion of women who had sex in the month before the survey generally decreases with increasing education, but this is primarily due to the steadily increasing proportions who have never had sexual intercourse. Over one-third of women with eight or more years of schooling have never had sex. The proportion of women who have never had sex also increases with increasing wealth quintiles. A somewhat larger proportion of Jain women (29 percent) and Christian (27 percent) women have never had sex than Hindu and Muslim women.

As was true for women, half of men age 15-49 had sexual intercourse in the four weeks prior to the survey. One-third of men age 15-49 (32 percent) were sexually active in the week prior to the survey, an additional 19 percent had sexual intercourse in the four weeks prior to the survey (not including those sexually active in the week prior to the survey), 13 percent had sexual intercourse within one year of the survey (but not in the month prior to the survey), and 5 percent had not been sexually active for one year or more. Thirty-one percent of men age 15-49 said they have never had sexual intercourse.

The proportion of men having sex in the week prior to the survey increases with age into the early thirties (peaking at 52 percent), and declines thereafter with age (to 21 percent among men age 50-54). Fourteen percent of never married men age 15-49 reported ever having sexual intercourse, but only 2 percent reported having had sex in the four weeks prior to the survey. Eighty percent of currently married men had sex within the four weeks prior to the survey. Three percent of formerly married men had sexual intercourse in the four weeks prior to the survey.

Lower proportions of men report having been sexually active in the four weeks prior to the survey as marital durations increase beyond 10-14 years. As is true for women, the proportion of men who had sex in the month prior to the survey decreases with increasing education but this can be accounted for by the rising proportion of men who have never had sexual intercourse. The proportion of men who have never had sexual intercourse increases steadily from 13 percent among those with no education to 45 percent among those with 10-11 years of schooling. The proportion of men who have never had sex also steadily increases with increasing wealth quintiles, from one-fifth of men in the lowest wealth quintile to 39 percent of men in the highest wealth quintile.

Table 6.7.2 Most recent sexual activity: Men

Percent distribution of men age 15-49 by timing of last sexual intercourse, according to background characteristics, India, 2005-06

Background characteristic	Timing of last sexual intercourse					Never had sexual intercourse	Total	Median number of days since last sexual intercourse <sup>3</sup>	Number of men
	Within the last week	Within the last four weeks <sup>1</sup>	Within one year <sup>2</sup>	One or more years	Missing				
<b>Age</b>									
15-19	2.2	1.6	4.0	3.4	0.0	88.8	100.0	a	13,008
20-24	19.5	7.4	10.7	6.2	0.2	56.0	100.0	7.8	11,989
25-29	40.5	16.4	14.4	4.6	0.2	23.9	100.0	5.7	10,854
30-34	51.6	24.3	13.9	3.2	0.2	6.8	100.0	5.4	9,744
35-39	49.6	30.6	14.1	3.2	0.3	2.3	100.0	6.6	9,302
40-44	40.7	34.1	17.0	6.2	0.3	1.6	100.0	7.6	8,105
45-49	32.1	34.9	22.1	9.8	0.3	0.8	100.0	10.1	6,750
<b>Marital status</b>									
Never married	0.7	1.4	5.0	6.3	0.0	86.5	100.0	a	25,307
Currently married	50.4	29.5	17.2	2.5	0.3	0.0	100.0	6.8	43,501
Widowed/divorced/separated/deserted	1.6	1.6	13.9	81.0	0.4	1.6	100.0	a	942
<b>Marital duration<sup>4</sup></b>									
Married only once									
0-4 years	57.1	21.0	20.3	1.2	0.3	0.1	100.0	4.9	8,719
5-9 years	57.1	26.3	14.8	1.3	0.5	0.0	100.0	5.1	8,600
10-14 years	55.0	30.0	13.4	1.5	0.2	0.0	100.0	5.5	7,976
15-19 years	47.2	34.6	15.2	2.9	0.1	0.0	100.0	7.2	7,161
20-24 years	38.5	37.3	19.3	4.5	0.4	0.0	100.0	7.8	5,508
25+ years	30.0	35.5	26.4	7.8	0.4	0.0	100.0	14.1	3,258
Married more than once	52.2	29.0	16.2	2.5	0.1	0.0	100.0	6.0	2,280
<b>Residence</b>									
Urban	27.9	18.0	12.4	4.2	0.1	37.4	100.0	7.4	25,504
Rural	33.9	19.5	13.0	5.4	0.2	28.0	100.0	7.2	44,247
<b>Education</b>									
No education	39.3	24.9	16.4	6.5	0.3	12.5	100.0	7.4	12,571
<5 years complete	37.4	23.8	13.1	6.1	0.4	19.2	100.0	7.3	7,109
5-7 years complete	33.5	19.4	13.5	5.1	0.1	28.5	100.0	7.3	11,523
8-9 years complete	27.1	15.3	12.2	4.9	0.1	40.4	100.0	7.4	14,398
10-11 years complete	25.3	15.6	10.5	3.9	0.2	44.5	100.0	7.3	10,380
12 or more years complete	30.1	16.9	10.9	3.6	0.2	38.3	100.0	7.1	13,754
<b>Religion</b>									
Hindu	31.8	19.0	12.9	5.2	0.2	30.9	100.0	7.3	57,112
Muslim	31.5	18.8	11.7	3.7	0.2	34.2	100.0	7.2	8,747
Christian	31.2	18.0	11.7	5.3	0.2	33.7	100.0	7.2	1,567
Sikh	31.5	20.6	13.0	4.3	0.1	30.4	100.0	7.3	1,270
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	26.6	19.4	13.4	7.0	0.0	33.5	100.0	7.6	596
Jain	40.2	18.8	3.9	1.6	0.0	35.5	100.0	4.1	213
Other	29.4	21.5	18.0	4.7	0.2	26.2	100.0	7.6	232
<b>Caste/tribe</b>									
Scheduled caste	32.3	18.8	13.8	6.1	0.2	28.8	100.0	7.4	13,188
Scheduled tribe	36.8	20.0	13.6	6.6	0.1	23.0	100.0	7.2	5,725
Other backward class	31.7	19.1	12.7	4.9	0.2	31.4	100.0	7.3	27,219
Other	30.2	18.6	12.0	4.0	0.2	35.0	100.0	7.3	23,214
Don't know	28.6	22.3	12.4	3.1	0.4	33.2	100.0	7.5	177
<b>Wealth index</b>									
Lowest	35.9	21.2	15.1	6.5	0.2	21.1	100.0	7.4	11,031
Second	34.0	20.3	13.3	5.9	0.2	26.3	100.0	7.3	12,666
Middle	31.4	18.7	13.5	4.9	0.1	31.3	100.0	7.4	14,301
Fourth	29.6	17.4	12.6	4.8	0.3	35.3	100.0	7.3	15,493
Highest	29.5	18.1	10.1	3.4	0.2	38.8	100.0	7.1	16,260
Total age 15-49	31.7	18.9	12.8	5.0	0.2	31.4	100.0	7.3	69,751
Age 50-54	21.1	32.0	29.3	16.0	0.4	1.2	100.0	20.1	4,618
Total age 15-54	31.1	19.8	13.8	5.6	0.2	29.5	100.0	7.5	74,369

Note: Total includes men with missing information on education, religion, and caste/tribe, who are not shown separately.

<sup>1</sup> Excludes men who had sexual intercourse within the last 1 week.<sup>2</sup> Excludes men who had sexual intercourse within the last 1 and 4 weeks.<sup>3</sup> Among those who have ever had sexual intercourse.<sup>4</sup> Excludes men who are not currently married.

a = Omitted because less than 50 percent of the men had intercourse before reaching the beginning of the age group.

Forty percent of Jains report having had sex in the week prior to the survey, higher than the 27 percent of Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist men and the 31-32 percent of men in other religious groups. Differences across castes/tribes are not large.

The median duration since last sexual intercourse reported by men age 15-49 is slightly shorter (7.3 days) than the median among women age 15-49 (7.8 days). Men age 30-34 report the shortest duration of time since their most recent sex, with a median duration of 5.4 days. The median duration since last sexual intercourse has a strong positive association with marital duration.

## 6.6 POSTPARTUM AMENORRHOEA, ABSTINENCE, AND INSUSCEPTIBILITY

Postpartum amenorrhoea is the interval between the birth of a child and the resumption of menstruation. It is the period following childbirth during which a woman becomes temporarily and involuntarily infecund. Postpartum protection from conception can be prolonged by the intensity and length of breastfeeding. Postpartum abstinence refers to the period of sexual inactivity after childbirth. A woman is considered insusceptible if she is not exposed to the risk of pregnancy, either because she is amenorrhoeic or because she is abstaining from sexual intercourse following a birth. In NFHS-3, information was obtained about the duration of amenorrhoea and the duration of sexual abstinence following childbirth for births in the five years preceding the survey.

Table 6.8 shows the percentage of births in the three years preceding the survey for which mothers are still postpartum amenorrhoeic, abstaining, and insusceptible at the time of the survey, by number of months since birth. Because these percentages are based on cross-sectional data (women are categorized according to the time that has elapsed since their last birth), they do not represent the experience of any one cohort of births over time. Median and mean durations of amenorrhoea, abstinence, and insusceptibility are presented in the last two rows of the table. Overall, 96 percent of women in India are amenorrhoeic within the first month after a birth, and over three-quarters (77 percent) are still amenorrhoeic two months after a birth. As expected, the proportion amenorrhoeic gradually decreases with the increasing number of months since birth. About half of

Table 6.8 Postpartum amenorrhoea, abstinence, and insusceptibility

Percentage of births in the three years preceding the survey for which mothers are postpartum amenorrhoeic, abstaining, and insusceptible, by number of months since birth, and median and mean durations, India, 2005-06

Months since birth	Percentage of births for which the mother is:			Number of births
	Amenorrhoeic	Abstaining	Insusceptible	
0	96.2	93.5	99.5	426
1	91.8	77.4	95.3	902
2	76.8	52.6	86.0	955
3	68.4	35.0	76.4	971
4	66.6	25.4	72.4	1,030
5	55.2	24.5	63.3	1,044
6	53.8	14.7	58.9	967
7	50.2	13.0	54.3	1,008
8	46.5	11.3	52.8	1,059
9	40.0	9.6	44.6	937
10	34.8	7.0	38.1	810
11	30.2	9.3	34.3	721
12	23.8	6.4	27.5	826
13	18.3	5.7	22.4	880
14	16.0	4.5	19.5	952
15	16.9	2.5	18.9	929
16	12.3	1.7	13.1	935
17	11.8	3.8	14.3	966
18	8.1	4.1	10.9	1,105
19	7.4	4.2	10.5	976
20	6.4	4.1	9.2	937
21	4.1	2.0	5.6	855
22	7.3	2.6	8.9	842
23	4.6	1.9	6.3	736
24	3.8	2.9	6.4	821
25	3.0	2.4	5.4	946
26	2.0	1.0	3.0	989
27	1.3	1.0	2.1	1,036
28	1.5	1.3	2.4	980
29	1.2	1.3	2.2	932
30	1.0	1.9	2.5	980
31	1.1	1.4	2.4	973
32	1.1	2.0	3.0	912
33	0.9	2.8	3.5	890
34	1.1	1.0	2.2	841
35	1.2	1.4	2.4	790
Median <sup>1</sup>	7.0	2.3	8.1	na
Mean	9.2	4.9	10.3	na

Note: Estimates are based on status at the time of the survey.

na = Not applicable

<sup>1</sup> Based on a three-month moving average of two month intervals since birth.

mothers (54 percent) are still amenorrhoeic six months after a birth; the proportion declines rapidly thereafter, down to 8 percent 18 months after a birth. The proportion of mothers abstaining from sexual intercourse in the first month after a birth is nearly the same as the proportion amenorrhoeic (94 percent and 96 percent, respectively), but the proportion abstaining falls far more quickly with the passage of time since birth than does the proportion who are amenorrhoeic. Only one-quarter of mothers are still abstaining from sexual intercourse four months after a birth, and by six months, 85 percent of women have resumed sexual relations.

When amenorrhoea and abstinence are considered together, nearly six-tenths of mothers are still insusceptible to pregnancy six months after a birth and 28 percent are insusceptible 12 months after a birth. The median duration of postpartum amenorrhoea (seven months) is three times as high as the median duration of abstinence (just over two months). The duration of amenorrhoea and abstinence together shows that women in India on average remain insusceptible to conception for about eight months after a birth, primarily due to the effect of postpartum amenorrhoea.

Table 6.9 shows the median durations of postpartum amenorrhoea, abstinence, and insusceptibility by background characteristics. On average, women abstain for about two months following a birth across most background characteristics shown in the table. Exceptions are seen by education, where the length of abstinence increases slightly with increasing education, and among Jain women and women who do not know their caste, each with median durations of abstinence of six months. The median duration is more than four months for Buddhists/Neo-Buddhists and women belonging to 'other' religions. The median duration of amenorrhoea shows more variation across background characteristics than does the duration of abstinence. The duration of amenorrhoea is much shorter among urban women (five months) than among rural women (eight months), and is shorter among women age 15-29, women with 10 or more years of education, Sikh and Jain women, and women who do not belong to schedule castes, scheduled tribes, or other backward classes. Median durations of postpartum amenorrhea decline steadily with increasing wealth

Table 6.9 Median duration of amenorrhea, postpartum abstinence, and postpartum insusceptibility

Median number of months of postpartum amenorrhoea, postpartum abstinence, and postpartum insusceptibility following births in the three years preceding the survey, by background characteristics, India, 2005-06

Background characteristic	Postpartum amenorrhoea	Postpartum abstinence	Postpartum insusceptibility	Number of births
<b>Mother's age</b>				
15-29	6.6	2.3	7.8	26,416
30-49	8.7	2.1	9.9	6,443
<b>Residence</b>				
Urban	5.0	2.4	6.0	8,291
Rural	8.0	2.3	8.9	24,568
<b>Mother's education</b>				
No education	9.2	2.1	9.9	15,864
<5 years complete	8.4	2.1	8.9	2,270
5-7 years complete	5.9	2.4	7.7	4,949
8-9 years complete	6.0	2.4	6.8	4,121
10-11 years complete	4.5	2.9	6.1	2,612
12 or more years complete	4.3	2.9	5.6	3,041
<b>Religion</b>				
Hindu	7.0	2.4	8.2	25,719
Muslim	7.1	2.1	7.8	5,579
Christian	7.7	2.6	8.4	659
Sikh	2.8	1.6	3.6	423
Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist	10.7	4.4	10.8	230
Jain	2.6	6.1	8.1	53
Other	12.1	4.4	12.3	165
<b>Caste/tribe</b>				
Scheduled caste	7.8	2.2	8.5	6,761
Scheduled tribe	10.0	3.0	10.5	3,136
Other backward class	7.0	2.3	8.3	13,256
Other	5.3	2.3	6.4	9,473
Don't know	5.5	6.1	8.5	122
<b>Wealth index</b>				
Lowest	10.0	2.3	10.6	8,270
Second	8.6	2.2	9.3	7,371
Middle	6.9	2.3	8.0	6,474
Fourth	5.5	2.4	6.6	5,986
Highest	3.7	2.4	5.0	4,759
Total	7.0	2.3	8.1	32,859

Note: Total includes births with missing information on mother's education, religion, and caste/tribe, who are not shown separately. Medians are based on current status.

quintiles. Variation in the median duration of postpartum insusceptibility by background characteristics by and large reflects a similar pattern to that observed for median durations of amenorrhoea.

A comparison with data from NFHS-2 indicates that there has been a decline in the median duration of postpartum amenorrhoea from 9 months to 7 months and a decline in the median duration of abstinence from 3 months to 2 months, resulting in a three-month decline in the median duration of postpartum insusceptibility (data not shown).

## 6.7 MENOPAUSE

The risk of childbearing in a population declines with increasing age. Menopause is the culmination of a gradual decline in fecundity with increasing age. After attaining age 30, women's susceptibility to pregnancy declines with age as an increasing proportion of women become infecund. The term infecundity denotes a process rather than a well-defined event. Although the onset of infecundity is difficult to determine for an individual woman, there are ways of estimating it for a group of women. In NFHS-3, menopause is defined as the absence of menstruation for six or more months preceding the survey. Women who report that they are menopausal or that they have had a hysterectomy are also included in this category. Women who are pregnant or postpartum amenorrhoeic are assumed not to be menopausal.

Table 6.10 presents the percentage of women age 30-49 who are menopausal. In India, less than 10 percent of women in their thirties are menopausal. One-fifth of women age 40-41 have reached menopause, and the prevalence of menopause increases rapidly thereafter to 65 percent at age 48-49.

## 6.8 NON-LIVE BIRTHS

In addition to information on live births, NFHS-3 collected information on pregnancies that did not result in a live birth. Retrospective information on pregnancies is more difficult to collect than information on live births, especially pregnancies that terminate in a non-live birth. NFHS-3 included a set of questions on non-live births within the reproduction section of the interview. All women age 15-49 were asked: 'Have you ever had a pregnancy that miscarried, was aborted, or ended in a stillbirth?' If the answer was 'yes', the respondent was further asked: 'When did the last such pregnancy end?' and 'How many months pregnant were you when the last such pregnancy ended?'

Table 6.11 shows the percentage of women age 15-49 who have ever had a non-live birth, the percentage who had a non-live birth in the five years preceding the survey, and the percentage of pregnancies that occurred in the five years preceding the survey that ended in a non-live birth by the current age of the woman. Fourteen percent of women age 15-49 have experienced a stillbirth, miscarriage, or abortion in their lifetime and 6 percent have had a non-

Table 6.10 Menopause

Percentage of women age 30-49 who are menopausal, by age, India, 2005-06

Age	Percentage menopausal <sup>1</sup>	Number of women
30-34	3.3	17,656
35-39	8.2	15,866
40-41	19.6	6,344
42-43	25.0	4,743
44-45	39.5	4,979
46-47	50.3	3,702
48-49	65.1	3,088
Total	18.0	56,378

<sup>1</sup> Percentage of all women who are not pregnant and not postpartum amenorrhoeic whose last menstrual period occurred six or more months preceding the survey.



**Table 6.11 Non-live births**

Percentage of women age 15-49 who have ever had a non-live birth and have had a non-live birth in the five years preceding the survey and percentage of pregnancies (not including current pregnancies) that ended in a non-live birth in the five years preceding the survey by current age of mother, India, 2005-06

Mother's current age	Women age 15-49			Pregnancies in the past 5 years	
	Percentage who have ever had a non-live birth	Percentage who have had a non-live birth in the past five years	Number of women	Percentage that ended in a non-live birth	Number of pregnancies
15-19	2.5	2.5	24,811	11.2	5,697
20-24	11.4	9.5	22,779	9.4	24,678
25-29	18.0	10.3	20,417	9.6	21,994
30-34	21.3	8.2	17,656	12.4	10,654
35-39	20.3	5.0	15,866	14.1	4,240
40-44	17.5	2.9	13,049	15.1	1,215
45-49	17.4	2.2	9,807	9.4	272
Total	14.4	6.2	124,385	10.4	68,750
Age 20-49	17.3	7.1	99,574	10.4	63,053
Age 25-49	19.1	6.4	76,795	11.0	38,375

Note: Non-live births include stillbirths, abortions, and miscarriages.

live birth in the five years preceding the survey. The percentage of women who ever had a non-live birth increases with age until age 30-34 (peaking at 21 percent) and then declines with age to 17 percent among women age 45-49 years. The distribution of those experiencing a non-live birth in the five years before the survey also shows an inverted U-shaped pattern, increasing with age until age 25-29 (peaking at 10 percent), and then declining with increasing age to 2 percent among women age 45-49. Overall, 10 percent of pregnancies to women age 15-49 in the five years preceding the survey resulted in a non-live birth.

Table 6.12 presents state differentials in non-live births. The states with the highest proportion of pregnancies that did not result in a live birth are Bihar (21 percent), Assam and Uttar Pradesh (20 percent each), Tripura (19 percent), and Manipur (18 percent). States with the lowest percentages experiencing pregnancy loss are Meghalaya (2 percent), Sikkim (5 percent), Himachal Pradesh (6 percent), and Nagaland (7 percent). The states with the highest proportion of pregnancies in the past five years that resulted in stillbirths, miscarriages, or abortions are Assam and Manipur, where 17 percent of recent pregnancies resulted in non-live births.

Table 6.12 Non-live births by state

Percentage of women age 15-49 who have ever had a non-live birth and have had a non-live birth in the five years preceding the survey and percentage of pregnancies (not including current pregnancies) that ended in a non-live birth in the five years preceding the survey by state, India, 2005-06

State	Women age 15-49		Percentage of pregnancies in the past 5 years that ended in a non-live birth
	Percentage who have ever had a non-live birth	Percentage who have had a non-live birth in the past five years	
<b>India</b>	14.4	6.2	10.4
<b>North</b>			
Delhi	12.4	5.9	11.0
Haryana	11.0	4.7	8.8
Himachal Pradesh	5.9	2.5	6.4
Jammu & Kashmir	11.4	4.5	10.1
Punjab	10.6	4.1	9.3
Rajasthan	13.8	5.8	9.9
Uttaranchal	13.4	4.8	9.9
<b>Central</b>			
Chhattisgarh	12.2	4.6	8.9
Madhya Pradesh	11.4	4.2	7.3
Uttar Pradesh	19.9	9.3	11.8
<b>East</b>			
Bihar	20.8	7.5	9.8
Jharkhand	16.7	7.6	10.3
Orissa	16.9	7.9	13.4
West Bengal	13.7	5.2	10.3
<b>Northeast</b>			
Arunachal Pradesh	9.2	4.4	6.7
Assam	20.3	10.2	17.0
Manipur	17.9	9.5	17.4
Meghalaya	2.4	0.9	1.6
Mizoram	8.4	3.5	5.5
Nagaland	7.4	3.5	5.8
Sikkim	5.0	1.4	3.3
Tripura	18.9	7.0	15.3
<b>West</b>			
Goa	11.8	5.8	11.7
Gujarat	15.6	6.6	12.2
Maharashtra	9.6	4.8	8.1
<b>South</b>			
Andhra Pradesh	9.3	3.7	8.2
Karnataka	7.9	3.8	7.0
Kerala	15.0	7.0	10.9
Tamil Nadu	16.6	6.7	16.5

Note: Non-live births include stillbirths, abortions, and miscarriages.