with DHS data to examine estimates of child mortality and age at first sex.19–21 When considering the cohort of women aged 15–19 in each survey, only those exposed to the full period of interest are included. Thus, indicators for women younger than 15 are based on all women aged 15–19 at time of interview, whereas for indicators for women younger than 16, only those aged 16–19 at time of interval are included. The percentage difference between the two estimates and the absolute percentage-point difference between estimates are used as measures of consistency.

Second, to get a clearer picture of patterns over time by cohort, we used data from the first DHS in each country to calculate the percentage of women in five-year age-groups through 45–49* reporting that sexual debut, marriage or first birth occurred before age 16. For a subset of surveys in which the differences between surveys are marked, we also present findings of more detailed analyses, drawing on DHS data from three consecutive surveys conducted five years apart, highlighting specific inconsistencies and their possible causes.

RESULTS
We first estimate the proportion of women reporting each of the three outcomes of interest before ages 15, 16 and 19 (ages 15–19 in the first survey and 20–24 in the second). In the six Sub-Saharan African countries, the proportions of 20–24-year-old women in the second survey who report having had their first birth before age 15 or before age 16 are markedly higher than those among women in the 15–19 or 16–19 age-groups in the survey conducted five years earlier (Table 1, page 211). In Benin, Ghana and Uganda, the proportion in the second survey is at least twice that in the first survey. However, except in Benin and Ghana, the differences between surveys in estimates of births occurring before age 16 are much smaller in terms of percentage change than those for births occurring before ages 15 and 16, and in several countries, such as Senegal and Mali, the percentage differences and percentage-point differences are very small. Of the three countries in Latin America, Colombia and the Dominican Republic show no differences between the two cohorts, and the only marked difference (more than 50%) in Bolivia is for births before age 15. Confidence intervals are quite modest and cannot explain the differences in any country in Sub-Saharan Africa for first births before age 15 and age 16. However, confidence intervals overlap for a number of countries when births before age 19 are considered.

Further analyses suggest that in a number of countries, respondents aged 15–19 tend to concentrate reported ages at first birth in older adolescence. When we look at the reporting of births by individual year of age in Uganda, the 15–19 age-group in the first survey reports lower percentages of births occurring at age 16 or earlier than does the 20–24 age-group in the second survey, as well as higher percentages of births at age 18 (Figure 1). In Senegal, only levels of first births occurring before age 15 are lower among women aged 16–19 in the first survey than among women aged 20–24 in the second survey. For first births later in adolescence (e.g., at ages 17 and 18), the 15–19 age-group in the first survey provides estimates higher than those for the 20–24 age-group in the second survey. Similar patterns are seen in Mali, Madagascar and Bolivia, but not in Ghana or Benin, where the proportion of births at age 18 reported by the 15–19 age-group in the first survey was equal to or lower than the proportion reported by the 20–24 age-group in the second survey (not shown).

When we examine the data for age at first marriage or union, the differences between 15–19-year-olds in the first survey and 20–24-year-olds in the second survey are smaller, but follow the same pattern as those for first births (Table 2, page 213). The percentage differences are highest for marriages occurring before age 15 and lowest for those occurring before age 19 in terms of percentage change, although again the percentage-point difference increases for most of these countries. The one exception is Senegal, where the differences in reports of marriage before ages 15 and 16 are very small, and a lower proportion of marriage before age 19 was reported in the second survey than in the first. In all three Latin American countries, the differences for reported marriage are greater than those for first birth. Again, confidence intervals are modest, but could explain the differences for marriage before age 15 and before age 16 in Ghana, Senegal and Bolivia. There is also evidence that respondents in some countries, such as Uganda and Madagascar, concentrate reported age at marriage or

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*The youngest age-group (16–19 years) is a four-year, not a five-year, cohort.