

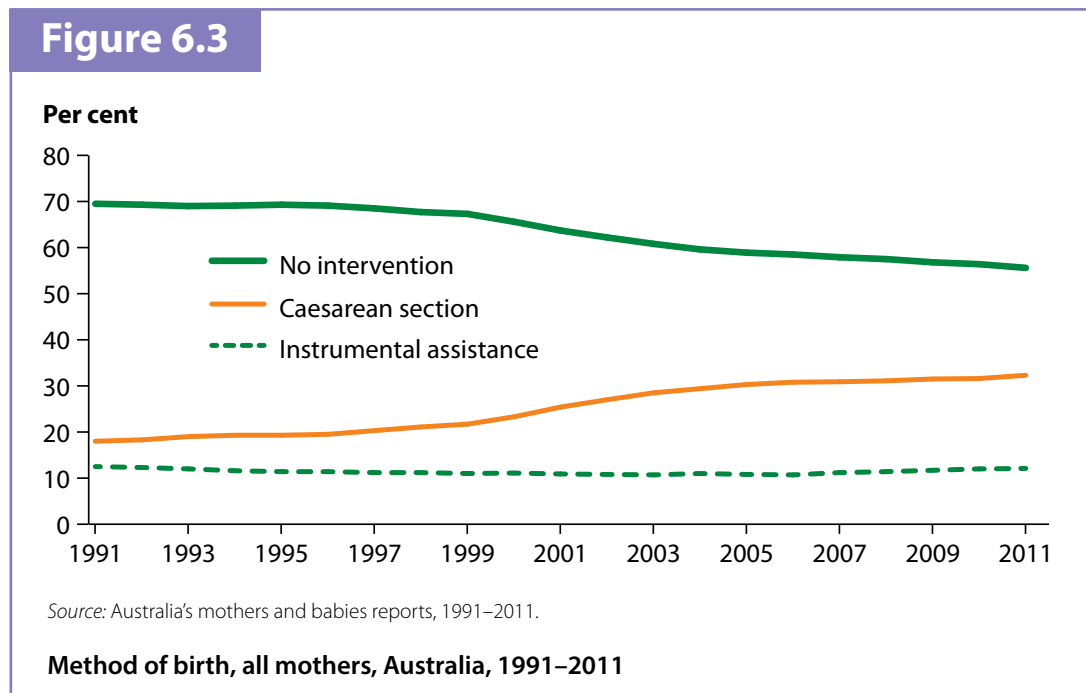
## 6.2 Caesarean section

A baby is born by caesarean section when it is delivered through a cut in the mother's abdomen and uterus. This may be necessary if signs indicate that a normal birth will be risky to the health of the mother or the baby. The decision to have a caesarean section may be planned during pregnancy or made during labour if problems occur.

Rates of caesarean section in Australia have risen over the past 2 decades. At the same time, there have been changes in the population of women giving birth in Australia, including a rise in maternal age, fewer births per woman and increasing use of assisted reproductive technology.

### Caesarean section rates in Australia

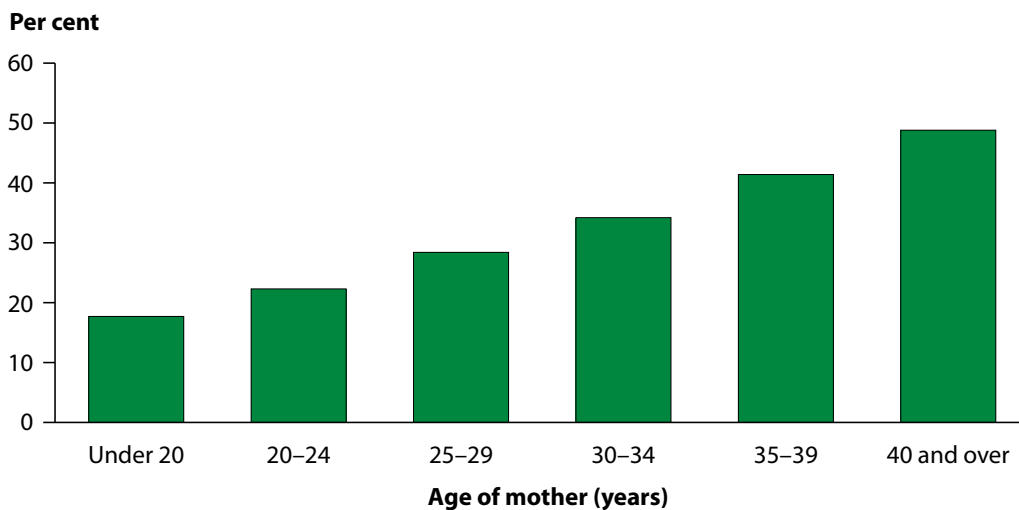
- In 2011, 95,894 women gave birth by caesarean section, which is about 1 in 3 deliveries (32%).
- Rates of caesarean section have risen from 18% in 1991 to 32% in 2011 (Figure 6.3). At the same time, vaginal births without intervention fell from 70% to 56%. Births requiring instrumental assistance, such as forceps or vacuum extraction, have remained relatively stable between 1991 (13%) and 2011 (12%).



## Characteristics of mothers who deliver by caesarean section

- Caesarean sections are more common among older mothers, first-time mothers and women who have given birth by caesarean section before.
- The rate of caesarean section was 41% among mothers aged 35–39 and 49% for mothers aged 40 and over (Figure 6.4).
- In 2011, 1 in 3 first-time mothers (33%) gave birth by caesarean section compared with 1 in 10 women (10%) who had given birth before.
- In 2011, 84% of mothers with a history of caesarean section had a repeat caesarean section, 12% gave birth without intervention and 4% gave birth with instrumental assistance.

**Figure 6.4**

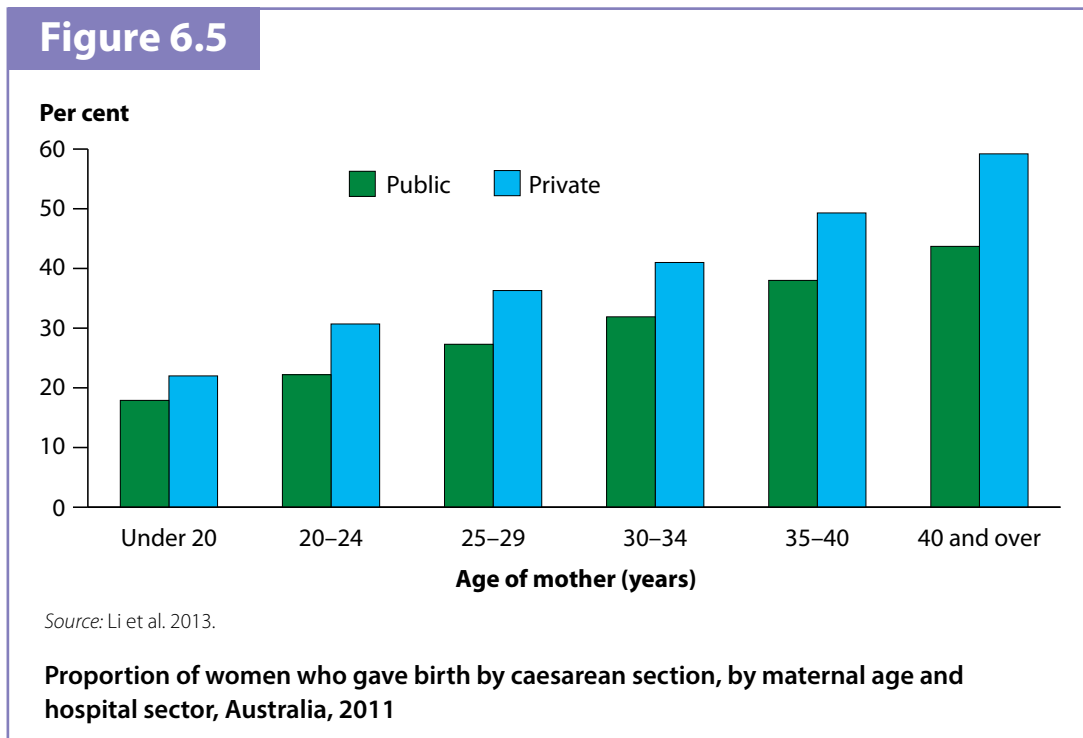


Source: Li et al. 2013.

**Proportion of mothers who delivered by caesarean section, by maternal age, Australia, 2011**

## Hospital sector

- Caesarean section rates are higher in private hospitals than in public hospitals across all age groups (Figure 6.5).
- In 2011, 43% of women in private hospitals gave birth by caesarean section compared with 30% in public hospitals.
- The difference between sectors was greatest among mothers aged 40 and over (59% in private hospitals had a caesarean section compared with 44% in public hospitals).
- Women who give birth in private hospitals tend to be older and live in less disadvantaged areas. After adjusting for age differences, 40% of women in private hospitals gave birth by caesarean section in 2011 compared with 30% in public hospitals.



#### What is missing from the picture?

There are no data available on the urgency of caesarean section and the health condition(s) associated with the procedure. This is essential information for evaluating the outcomes of caesarean section.

National data development is being pursued with the states and territories to improve data used to generate information on caesarean section. Data being developed on maternal risk factors and the clinical indication for caesarean section will provide a more complete picture of an individual woman's risk profile. This should better inform policy and care aimed at minimising caesarean delivery.

#### Where do I go for more information?

More information on caesarean section is available at [www.aihw.gov.au/mothers-and-babies](http://www.aihw.gov.au/mothers-and-babies). AIHW reports available for free download include [Australia's mothers and babies 2011](#) and [National core maternity indicators](#).

#### Reference

Li Z, Zeki R, Hilder L & Sullivan EA 2013. Australia's mothers and babies 2011. Perinatal statistics series no. 28. Cat. no. PER 59. Canberra: AIHW National Perinatal Epidemiology and Statistics Unit.