

WELLBEING OF SINGLES

Structure of Report

1. Introduction

2. Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics

- By Gender
- By Ethnicity
- By Highest Qualification Attained

3. Family

- Attitudes towards Marriage
- Attitudes towards Parenthood
- Family Ties
- Attitudes towards Out-of-Wedlock Births and Divorce

4. Conclusion

WELLBEING OF SINGLES

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This chapter gives an overview of the key trends pertaining to singles aged 15 years and over, especially in the context of the family.

2. DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

By Gender (Tables 6.1 and 6.2)

2.1 Of policy concern are older singles aged 35 years and above. According to Census 2000, singles aged between 35-64 years old made up 21 percent of the total population of singles (aged above 15 years old), up from 12 percent in 1990. Of this age group of singles in 1990, 55 percent were males and 45 percent were females. In 2000, the gender ratio of singles aged 35-64 was almost equal at 51 and 49 percent for males and females respectively. There was generally a higher proportion of female singles in the older age groups from 45 years onwards. In the 50-54 age group, 59 percent were females. This is likely because of the longer life expectancy of females.

By Ethnicity (Tables 6.3 and 6.4)

2.2 According to Census 2000, 81 percent of singles aged 15 years and above are Chinese, 12 percent Malay, 6 percent Indian and 1 percent others.

2.3 In 2000, Chinese singles aged 35-64 years formed 18 percent of the total single population (138,540) – up from 11 percent in 1990 – while the Malays and Indians only constituted 2 percent and 1 percent respectively. Within the respective ethnic groups, the Chinese had the highest proportion of singles aged 35-64 years (7 percent). This was closely followed by the Others ethnic group (5 percent) and the Malays and Indians (4 percent). This is in contrast with the 1990 trend where there was a higher proportion of singles in the Chinese population (13 percent) than the other ethnic groups (Malay: 7 percent, Indian, 11 percent, Others: 6 percent).

By Highest Qualification Attained (Tables 6.5 and 6.6)

2.4 Census 2000¹ showed that the majority of singles possessed secondary and below education. This trend was more pronounced for the older age groups. 64 percent of singles aged 35-39 years had secondary and below education and this proportion rose to 88 percent of those in the 60-64 age group.

2.5 The trends indicate that female singles aged 35-64 years are generally better educated than their male counterparts. Females made up 17 percent of the singles with post secondary and university education compared to 11 percent of males.

3. FAMILY

Attitudes towards Marriage (Table 6.7 -6.9)

3.1 In the MCYS Marriage and Parenthood Study 2004, only 5 percent of the 3,097 single respondents in the study revealed no intention to marry at all. The majority, more than seven out of ten, were positively inclined towards marriage. However, there was also a substantial 20 percent who were undecided/ambivalent/fatalistic (leave it to fate, etc).

3.2 Of the small proportion of singles who revealed no intention to marry at all, More than 60 percent of the men and 47 percent of the women were aged 30 years or older. Men and women at both ends of the education spectrum were over-represented in this group. Among males, it was the secondary and below and the post-graduates, and among women, it was the primary and below and university (first degree) graduate who were over-represented. The most important reason for not intending to marry, given by the most respondents (about one third of men and women) was the belief that they would not be able to find a suitable partner. A second reason was rather more selfish – preference for personal freedom and comfort (about one in five). Age was also a factor – about 15 percent felt they were too old to think about marrying and having children. Women were also more likely to say it was because they did not care to have children.

3.3 Those who expressed intention to marry were younger than those who did not intend to marry. The majority were in their 20s, with a mean age of about 25 years. It is interesting to note that nearly one third had never dated in spite of

¹ There are no available data before 2000, which cross-tabulates age, marital status and highest educational level attained.

their intention to marry. The reasons for this had to do with not having a partner, and related to this, lack of money, career development, and lack of time.

3.4 While the majority of singles are positively inclined towards marriage, all three SAS surveys consistently found that singles were much less likely than married persons to agree that getting married is better than remaining single (SAS 2001: Single – 66 percent, Married – 91 percent; SAS 2002: Single – 73 percent, Married – 91 percent; SAS 2003: Single – 71 percent, Married – 88 percent).

3.5 The three surveys consistently found that female singles, in comparison to male singles, were much less positive about the desirability of marriage. Eight out of 10 male singles (SAS 2001: 77 percent, SAS 2002: 83 percent, SAS 2003: 82 percent) agreed that it is better to get married than to remain single but only 6 out of 10 female singles (SAS 2001: 57 percent, SAS 2002: 63 percent, SAS 2003: 61 percent) shared the same view. For singles from each gender group as a whole, there were no significant changes across all three surveys.

3.6 The precise magnitude of gender differences in perceived desirability of marriage was dependent on the education level of the singles. One noteworthy result concerns gender differences in the trend of attitudes among university graduate singles. Unlike in SAS 2001 and SAS 2002 which found no gender difference in proportion among university graduate singles, SAS 2003 found a large gender difference of 21 percentage points, with female university graduate singles less likely than male university graduate singles to agree that it is better to get married than to remain single (61 percent vs. 82 percent). Compared to SAS 2002 as well as SAS 2001, SAS 2003 found that female university graduate singles were much less positive about the desirability of marriage.

Attitudes towards Parenthood (Tables 6.10 and 6.11)

3.7 Similar to SAS 2001 and SAS 2002, SAS 2003 found that singles were less likely than married persons to agree that married couples should have children (SAS 2001: 74 percent; SAS 2002: 85 percent; SAS 2003: 80 percent). There was no change among married persons across all three SAS surveys, with the same proportion agreement of 94 percent in all surveys.

3.8 All three SAS surveys found that singles were less likely than married persons to agree that married couples should have children but the magnitude of difference was dependent on age group and specific SAS survey. In SAS 2002, while there was no difference in proportion agreement between younger singles and younger married persons (82 percent for both groups), in SAS 2003, younger singles were less likely than younger married couples to agree that

married couples should have children (Single: 77 percent; Married: 90 percent). This difference was due to a decrease in proportion among younger singles (by 5 percentage points from 82 percent in SAS 2002 to 77 percent in SAS 2003) and an increase among younger married persons (by 8 percentage points from 82 percent in SAS 2002 to 90 percent in SAS 2003).

Family Ties

3.9 The SAS shows that singles have strong bonds within their family, with the majority of singles indicating that they talk about their problems to family members and hear from their family members when the latter have personal problems. However, all three surveys show that singles were slightly less likely than married persons to talk about their problems to their family members (SAS 2001 -- single: 80 percent, married: 91 percent; SAS 2002 -- single: 81 percent, married: 93 percent; SAS 2003 -- single: 81 percent, married: 87 percent). Similarly, all three surveys found that singles were also less likely than married persons to hear from their family members when the latter have personal problems (SAS 2001 -- single: 84 percent, married: 90 percent; SAS 2002 -- single: 86 percent; married: 91 percent; SAS 2003 -- single: 84 percent, married: 87 percent). This is not surprising since, compared to singles, married persons have their spouses as the additional family member to share personal problems with.

3.10 All three SAS surveys found that the vast majority of Singaporeans (SAS 2001: 97 percent, SAS 2002: 97 percent, SAS 2003: 93 percent) indicated that they have a close-knit family, suggesting that the large majority of Singaporeans have a positive assessment of one's bonds within the family. While the large majority of singles indicate that they have a close-knit family, their proportion was lower than the married Singaporeans (SAS 2001 -- single: 93 percent, married: 98 percent; SAS 2002 -- single: 95 percent, married: 99 percent; SAS 2003 -- single: 90 percent, married: 95 percent).

3.11 While these findings indicate that singles have relatively weaker bonds within the family compared to married Singaporeans, all three surveys show that their ties with their family are still healthy.

Attitudes towards Out-of-Wedlock Births and Divorce (Table 6.12)

3.12 All three surveys consistently found that singles were more liberal than married persons. SAS 2003, similar to SAS 2001 and SAS 2002, continued to find large differences between singles and married persons on the issue of divorce. Only 48 percent of singles found divorce unacceptable compared to 67 percent of married persons. Although more singles agreed that couples with

children should not divorce or separate, it was much lower in proportion compared to the married persons (Single: 62 percent; Married: 80 percent).

3.13 Similar to SAS 2001 and SAS 2002, SAS 2003 found smaller but nevertheless substantial single-married differences in proportion agreement on the issue of unmarried persons having children (Single: 69 percent; Married: 78 percent).

3.14 The vast majority of Singaporeans (SAS 2002: 94 percent; SAS 2003: 95 percent) felt that divorce should not be the first option when a marriage breaks down. For both SAS 2002 and SAS 2003, this high proportion generalized across all demographic groups.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Surveys show the majority of singles are positively inclined towards marriage and that only 5 percent would probably be “confirmed” singles i.e. they showed no intention to marry and were not likely to change their minds. The rest would marry, primarily if they found the right partner – by which they meant someone of good character and with compatible values that they were able to get along with.

4.2 While the SAS surveys consistently show that singles indicated relatively weaker bonds with their family compared to married persons, the findings are still encouraging as most singles enjoy strong family ties, with strong support felt between the singles and their family members.