

## **MARRIAGE AND PARENTHOOD**

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## **MARRIAGE**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This chapter gives examines key trends pertaining to marriage and parenthood.

### **2. MARRIAGE TRENDS**

#### Number of Marriages (Tables 2.1 and 2.2)

2.1 The total number of marriages registered in 2003 was 21,962. This was 5 percent lower than the number registered in 2002. Under Women's Charter, the number of marriages fluctuated between 18,000 to 22,000 over the period 1990-2003. For Muslim marriages, the number decreased 19 percent from 4,762 to 3,871 over the same period.

2.2 21,282 resident marriages were registered in 2003, a 10 percent decrease from 23,551 in 1990.

#### Marriage Rates (Table 2.3)

2.3 The general marriage rate<sup>1</sup> decreased from 58.8 to 44.3 over the period 1993-2003. Marriage rates also fell across all age groups between 1980 and 2003. Females aged 20-24 years experienced the steepest fall in marriage rate during this period. Males aged 35-39 had the highest fall in marriage rate between 1993-2003.

#### Singlehood Rates (Tables 2.4 and 2.5)

2.4 The singlehood rate has increased during the decade. The proportion of Singapore residents remaining single at the age group 40-44 years<sup>2</sup> has increased from 11 percent in 1990 to 15 percent in 2000 for males and from 12 percent to 14 percent for females. Singlehood was more prevalent among males with below secondary qualifications (21 percent in 2000) and graduate females (22 percent in 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> The female general marriage rate refers to the number of resident brides aged 15-44 years during the year, out of every thousand unmarried resident females in the same age group in that year.

<sup>2</sup> Known in demographic parlance as the permanent celibacy rate

Mean Age at First Marriage (Tables 2.6-2.8)

2.5 Brides and grooms are getting married later. Over the period 1990-2003, the mean age at first marriage for non-Muslim grooms increased from 29 years to 30.5 years and for non-Muslim brides, it increased from 26.2 years to 27.5 years. The mean age at first marriage for Muslim grooms increased from 27.2 to 28.4 years and for brides, it increased from 24.4 to 25.2 years.

By Educational Qualification (Charts 2.1 – 2.6)

2.6 Over the period 1990-2003, there has been an increase in the proportion of grooms marrying brides with the same or better educational qualifications at all educational levels. Under Women's Charter, a large proportion of first-time marriages are between brides and grooms who are at least Upper Secondary and University educated (67 percent). Under Muslim Law Act, a large proportion of marriages are between brides and grooms with secondary education (33 percent).

2.7 Over the past decade, there has been an increase in the proportion of university grooms and brides. In 2003, 31 percent of marriages under the Women's Charter were between university graduates compared to 8 percent in 1990. The Muslim brides and grooms are largely between those with primary and secondary educated (60 percent).

Singapore-Foreigner Marriages (Table 2.9)

2.8 In 1990, Singapore-Foreigner marriages in Singapore numbered 3,900 and accounted for 16 percent of the total number of marriages solemnised in Singapore. The number and proportion rose to 4,900 and 21 percent respectively in 2002. These figures exclude all marriages contracted/solemnised outside Singapore.

### **3. PARENTHOOD TRENDS**

Total Fertility Rate (TFR)<sup>3</sup> (Table 2.10-2.11)

3.1 In 2003, the total number of births declined to 37,633 from 40,760 in 2002. The TFR declined from 1.37 in 2002 to 1.25 births per woman aged 15-44 years in 2003. Since 1977, Singapore's fertility rate has been below the replacement level of 2.1.

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<sup>3</sup> It is the average number of children that would be born per female, if all females lived to the end of their childbearing years and bore children according to a given set of age-specific fertility rates. It is derived by aggregating the age-specific fertility rates of females in each of the reproductive ages for a specific year.

Average age of Mothers at 1<sup>st</sup> Birth (Table 2.12-14)

3.2 There has been a delay in child bearing over the last ten years. The median age of mothers at 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order births increased from 28.7 to 29.8 from 1991 to 2001. In 2002, the average age of first time mothers was 29 years.

3.3 Among the main ethnic groups in 2002, Malay mothers had their first child at 25 years against 30 years, 28 years and 31 years for Chinese, Indians and other ethnic group respectively. First time mothers who were university graduates had the highest median age of 30 years.

Completed Family Size (Table 2.15)

3.4 In 1990, the average number of children born per ever-married female is 2.8. The figure fell to 2.5 in 2000. The Malays have the highest average number of children born, with a figure of 3.1 in 2000, above the total average of 2.5 in 2000.

**4. ATTITUDES TOWARDS MARRIAGE AND PARENTHOOD (Tables 2.16 - 2.29)**

Marriage

4.1 The majority of Singaporeans desire marriage, with 82 percent of the respondents in SAS 2003, agreeing that it is better to get married than to remain single. The Marriage and Parenthood Study 2004 also revealed similar findings. While singlehood rates in Singapore have been rising, only 5 percent of the 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. The most important reason for not intending to marry, given by most respondents was the belief that they would not be able to find a suitable partner (33 percent for males and 36 percent for females). A second reason was a preference for personal freedom and comfort (21 percent for males and 16 percent for females). Compatibility and character were the two most important attributes cited in their choice of a life partner.

4.2 A significant 20 percent of single respondents were ambivalent/fatalistic towards marriage. There was an over-representation of the 30 years and older age groups. Men at both ends of the education spectrum, better-educated women and women with secondary education were also over-represented. Not having found a suitable partner was the most important reason cited among respondents for not having married (40 percent).

4.3 Singaporeans are largely conservative and believe in the institution of marriage, especially when children are involved. In SAS 2003, 76 percent of respondents felt that couples have to be married in order to have children.

#### Parenthood

4.4 The SAS 2001-2003 survey findings revealed that the majority of Singaporeans hold positive attitudes towards procreation. In SAS 2003, 90 percent of Singaporeans agreed that married couples should have children (SAS 2001: 89 percent, SAS 2002: 92 percent). All three surveys found that this high proportion (9 out of 10 Singaporeans) generalized across gender, ethnic and household income groups. However, younger married persons as well as higher educated Singaporeans were less likely to agree that married couples should have children.

4.5 The Marriage and Parenthood Study 2004 found with regard to the ideal family size, nearly four out of five felt that the three-child family norm was “just nice”. However, at the individual level, the overall intended and actual family size was 2 children on average, largely because of constraints. These were lack of time and energy for children, as well as concerns about financial support.

4.6 The survey also found that the majority of Singaporeans wanted children because they loved them and not for their utilitarian value. 73 percent of the married respondents surveyed agreed “I believe that in our modern world, the only place where you can feel completely happy and at ease is at home with your children” and 75 percent agreed “I always enjoy having children near me”. In comparison, only 37 percent agreed “It is important to have children so that they can look after you in your old age”.

#### Fertility

4.7 Fertility declines with age. The Marriage and Parenthood Study 2004 found that most married persons who had been trying to conceive a child for more than 12 months were from the older age groups. 35 percent of married women aged 35-39 years and a significant 43 percent aged 40-44 years had been trying for more than 12 months to conceive, but have not been successful. For married men, about 23 percent aged 35-39 years and 30 percent aged 40-44 years found that their wives did not conceive despite trying for more than 12 months.

4.8 Although Singaporeans generally hold positive attitudes towards parenthood, of concern is Singaporeans misconception that procreation can happen at will. The Marriage and Parenthood Study 2004 showed more than 80 percent of the women and men surveyed in the study were aware of declining fertility as they aged. Women were more aware of this fact as compared to men. There also seemed to be less awareness of the decline in male fertility with age. However, there appeared to be over-confidence placed

in technology to overcome problems in conception. Between 50 percent to 60 percent of all surveyed believed that fertility treatment would help women to conceive at *any* age. This percentage was about the same for both men and women, married or single. In particular, more than half (65 percent) of the career-minded women<sup>4</sup> said that with a fertility treatment programme, a woman could conceive at any age. 85 percent of these career-minded women said that the fertility treatment programme was painful and expensive.

## **5. WORK AND FAMILY (Table 2.30; Charts 2.7-2.8)**

5.1 The Marriage and Parenthood Study 2004 showed that most women in Singapore want to have children and keep their jobs. Some are prepared to quit their jobs to look after their family, but others prefer to stay on in the workforce if there are flexible work arrangements to help them juggle their time between career and family.

5.2 Out of all single and married females who desired children, 80 percent would like to have some form of a job or career while raising their children. Out of these 80 percent, 38 percent would work full-time while raising their children, 26 percent desired some form of flexi-work to help them balance work and family, and 16 percent would return to the workforce when their children are older. The remaining 20 percent would quit their jobs permanently when they get married or have children.

5.3 The desire for flexible work arrangements increases with the educational level of respondents. Graduates have the greatest desire for flexible work arrangements (34 percent). The desire among women to quit their jobs permanently or temporarily while getting married or having children decreases with educational attainment.

5.4 In addition, a significant percentage of males (54 percent) and females (56 percent) strongly agreed or agreed that a part-time job is the best way to reconcile family and work for a mother.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

6.1 Resident singlehood rates have been on the rise in Singapore. The proportion of Singapore residents remaining single at the age group 40-44 years<sup>5</sup> has increased from 12 percent in 1995 to 15 percent in 2001 for both males and females. Singlehood is more prevalent among better-educated females and lower educated males. Those who marry are doing so later. Over the period 1990-2002, the median age at first marriage for resident grooms increased from 27.9 years to 29 years and for resident brides, it increased from 25.3 years to 26.5 years.

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<sup>2</sup> In the study, career-minded women are defined as those for whom work in the labour market is central to their identities and lifestyle.

<sup>5</sup> Known in demographic parlance as the permanent celibacy rate

6.2 While rising singlehood rates, delayed first marriages and a falling TFR remain the dominant trends, surveys show that Singaporeans desire marriage and hold positive attitudes towards parenthood. 82 percent of the respondents in SAS 2003 agree that it is better to get married than to remain single. The SAS findings were consistent with findings from the Marriage and Parenthood Study 2004 which found that only 5 percent of the single respondents in the study revealed no intention to marry at all. The majority was positively inclined towards marriage if they could find a suitable partner. In addition, the majority of Singaporeans believe that married couples should have children. Nearly four out of five feel that the three-child family norm was “just nice”.