

Beyond Grandparenting

Social capital and the dynamic transformation of the senior generation

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AGEING FAMILIES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES (MSF Conference, 29 Nov 2017)

Beyond grandparenting: Social capital and the dynamic transformation of the senior generation.

1. A brief story
2. How to avoid two core fallacies
3. Recommendations

1. A brief story shows that

- 1.1 **Social** capital means the “relations among persons [that] facilitate” and enhance their actions and interactions. “**Human** capital” refers to people’s skills and knowledge [see discussion of Coleman’s (1990) concept in Quah, S.R. (2009) *Families in Asia*, pp.45-46].
- 1.2 Grandparents create and protect the family’s social capital
 - * in times of conflict (i.e., divorce)
 - * in times of peace (value transmission, care, support)
- 1.3 **However**, each generation of seniors is different from those in the past. Today, seniors’ life goals, aspirations, attitudes and knowledge, go well beyond grandparenting.

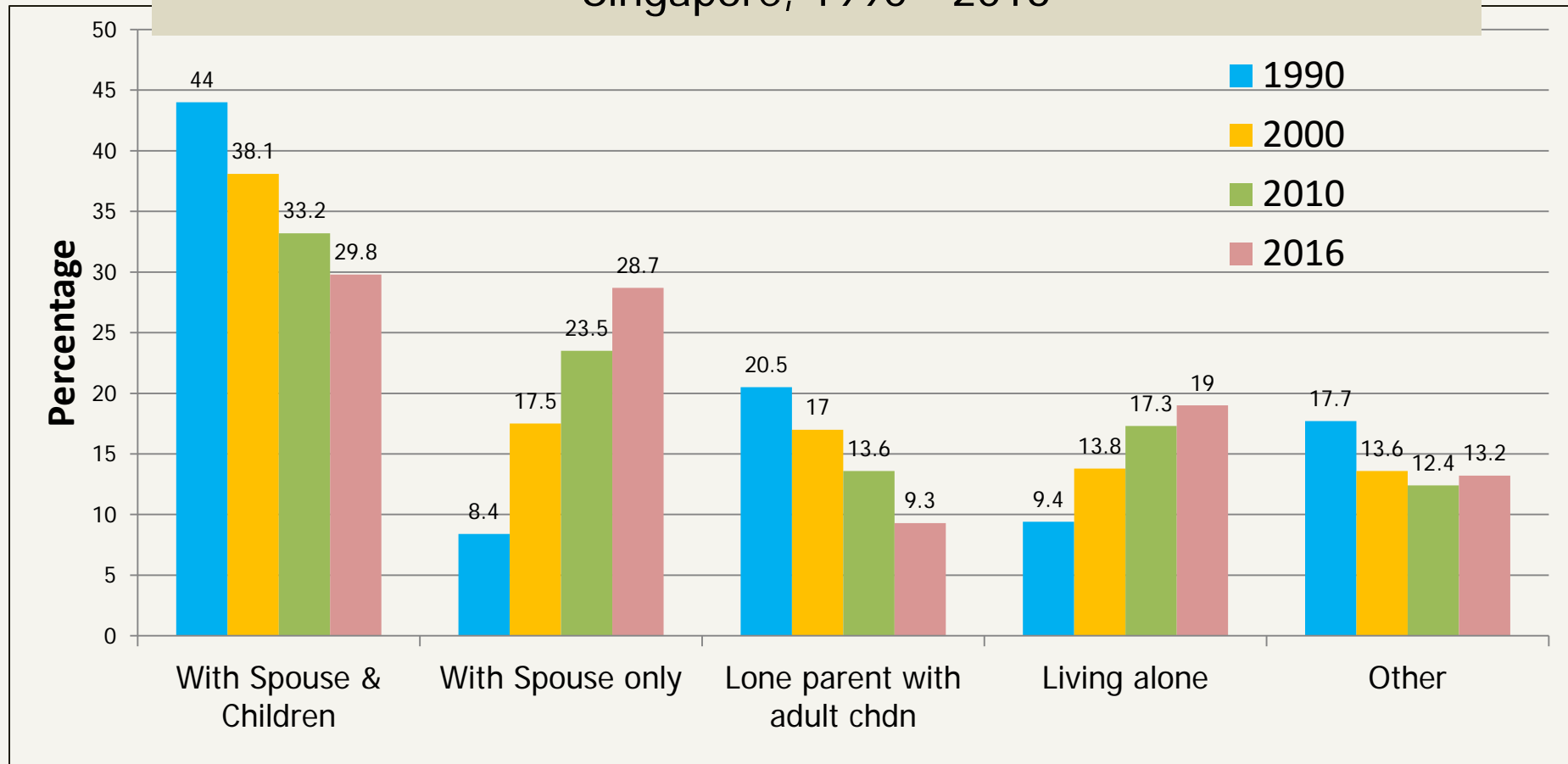
2. Let us avoid two core fallacies: that societies are “aging”; and that “elderly means sick”.

- ❑ Societies do not ‘age’; societies **change**.
- ❑ The senior generation (65 & older) is not a cohort of sickly individuals; it is a **multidimensional, dynamic** cohort, **healthier** than previous generations of seniors.
 - ✓ Seniors today seek autonomy
 - ✓ Healthy longevity is a sign of progress and it increases and extends social capital in the family and in society.

Autonomy in living arrangements of the senior generation:

The proportion of senior couples living independently increased from 8.4% of all seniors in 1990 to 28.7% in 2016:

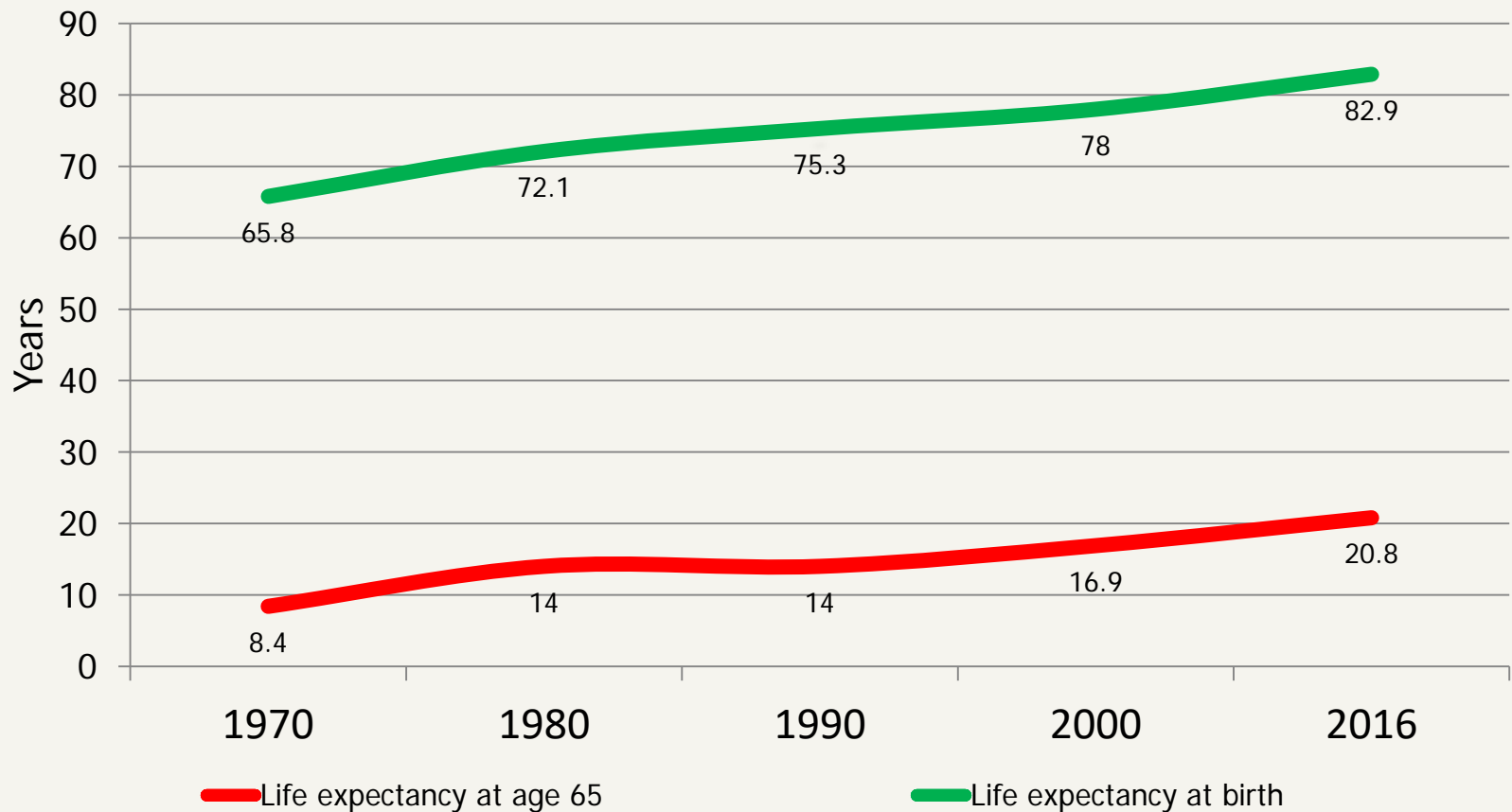
Figure 1. Living arrangements of Residents aged 65 & Over, Singapore, 1990 - 2016



Source: Compiled from DOS (2017) Singstat.gov.sg

Yes, Singaporeans are living longer:

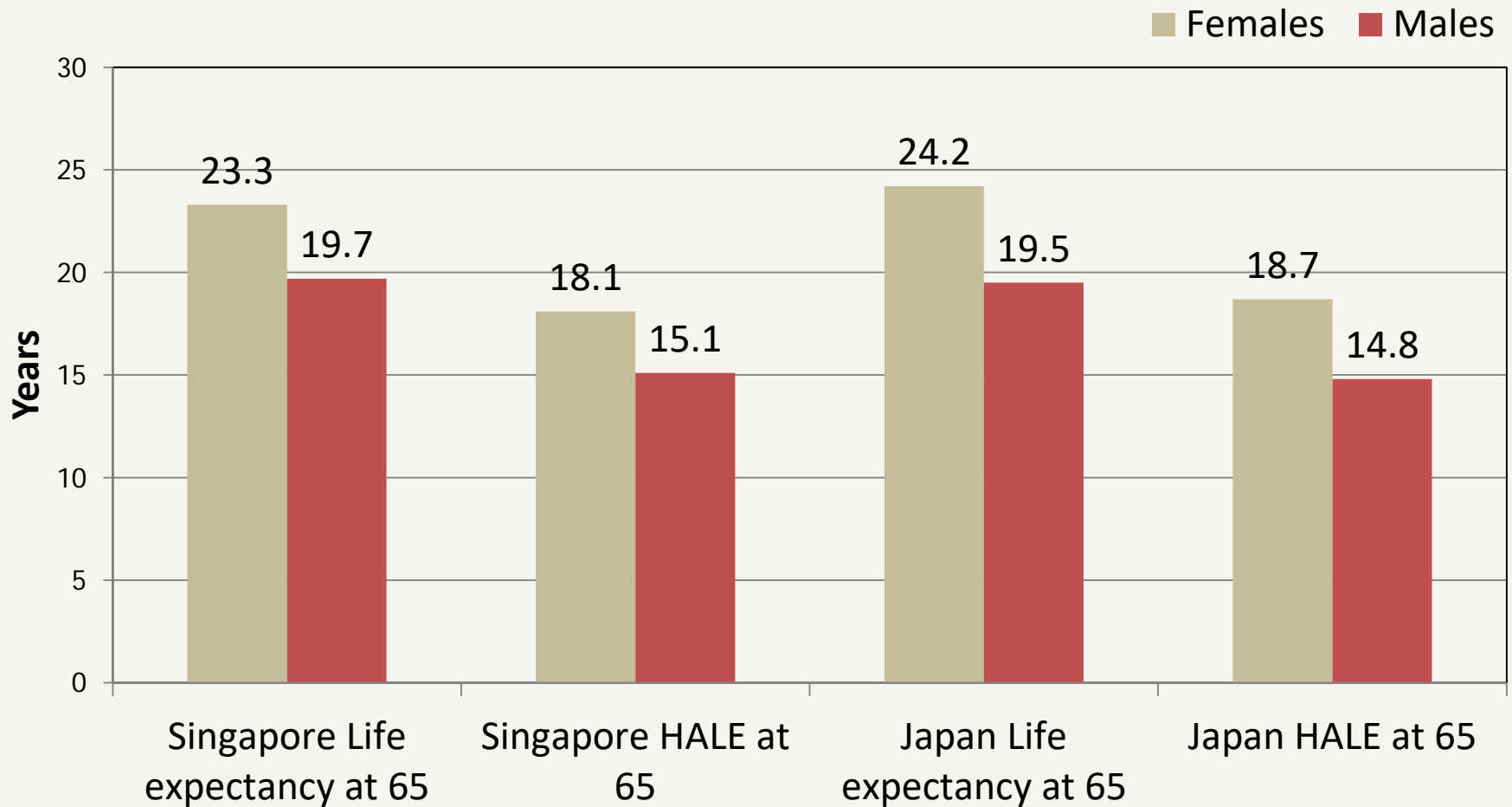
Figure 2. Increasing Longevity, Singapore, 1970-2016



Source: Compiled from DOS (2017) <http://www.singstat.gov.sg>

Living longer and **HEALTHIER** lives:

Fig 3. Years of **Healthy Life Expectancy (HALE)** at age 65, Singapore and Japan, 2016



Source: Compiled from GBD (2017), *Lancet*, 390, Table 3, p.1297.

2. Avoiding two core fallacies:

❑ Societies do not 'age', they change.

- 2.1 Global data show that societies do not 'age', they change but need direction.
- **Note that the featured active seniors are their own bosses.**
 - In contrast, for seniors who are employed, the institutional response is at best slow: labour market doors begin closing at 62 and shut down at 67.
 - Active and healthy longevity urges the removal of age restrictions in employment.

2. Avoiding two core fallacies:

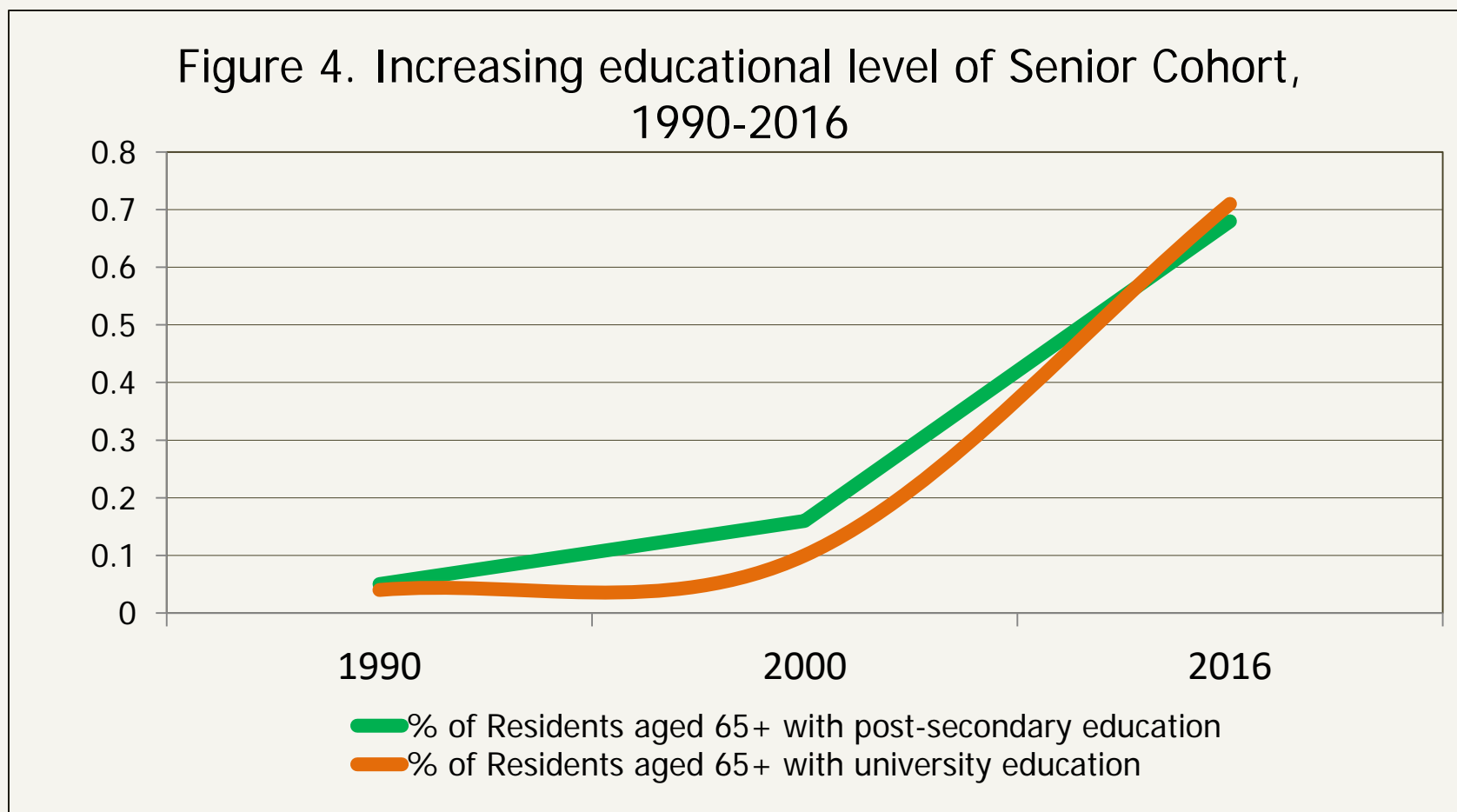
❑ Societies do not 'age'. They change.

2.2 Today's seniors have a **full range of multiple skills**: they are manual workers, technicians, experienced scientists and entrepreneurs, and creators of wealth (see CPF balances in *CPF Annual reports*, 1990, 2005, 2010 and 2016), in addition to being creators and protectors of social capital.

2.3 The **educational level** of the senior cohort is increasing (Figs 4 & 5)

2.4 The proportion of working seniors is increasing slowly (Fig 6).

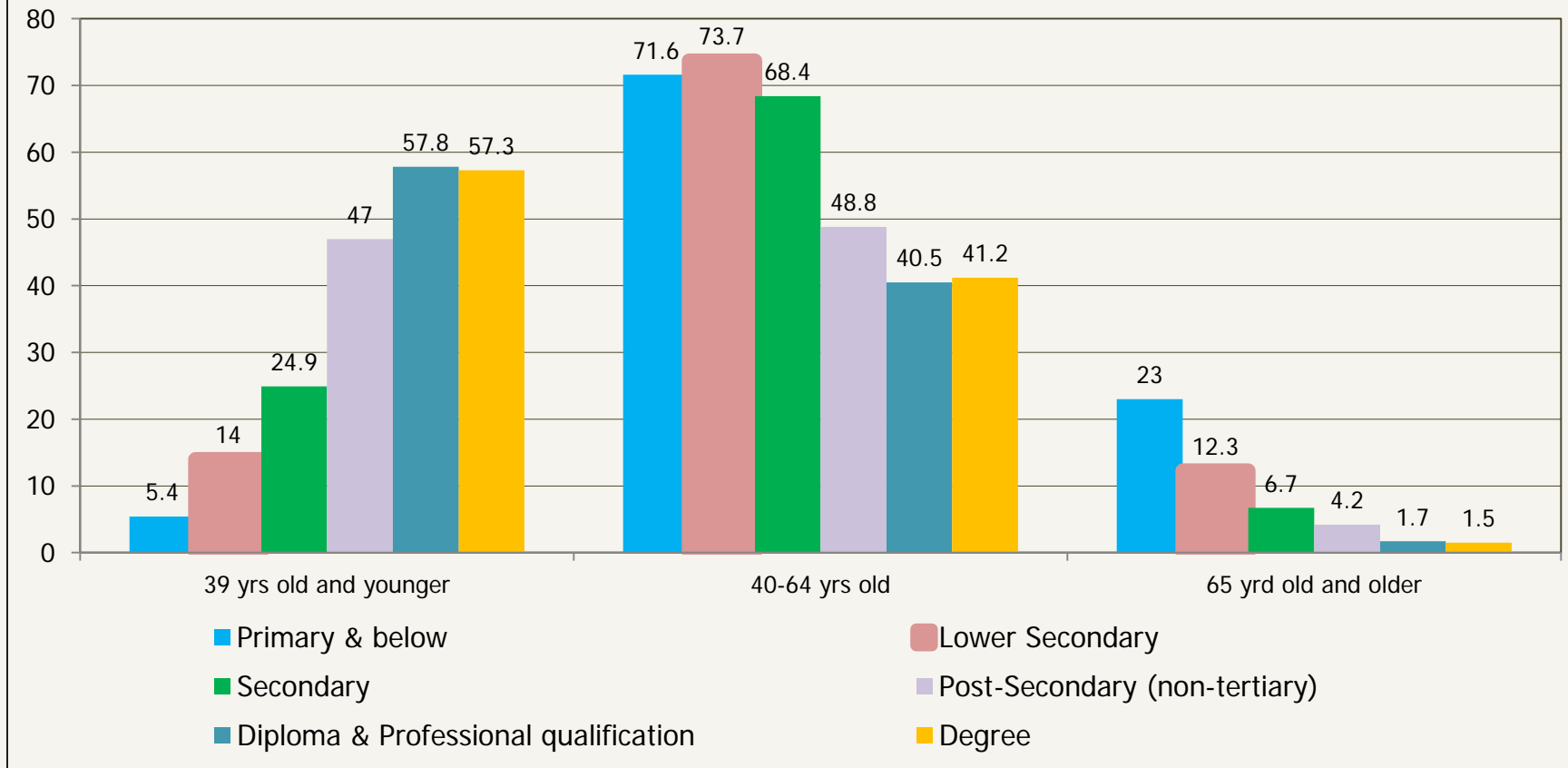
The **educational level** of the senior cohort is **increasing** as a normal reflection of the population's advances in education:



Source: Compiled from DOS (2017) Singstat.gov.sg

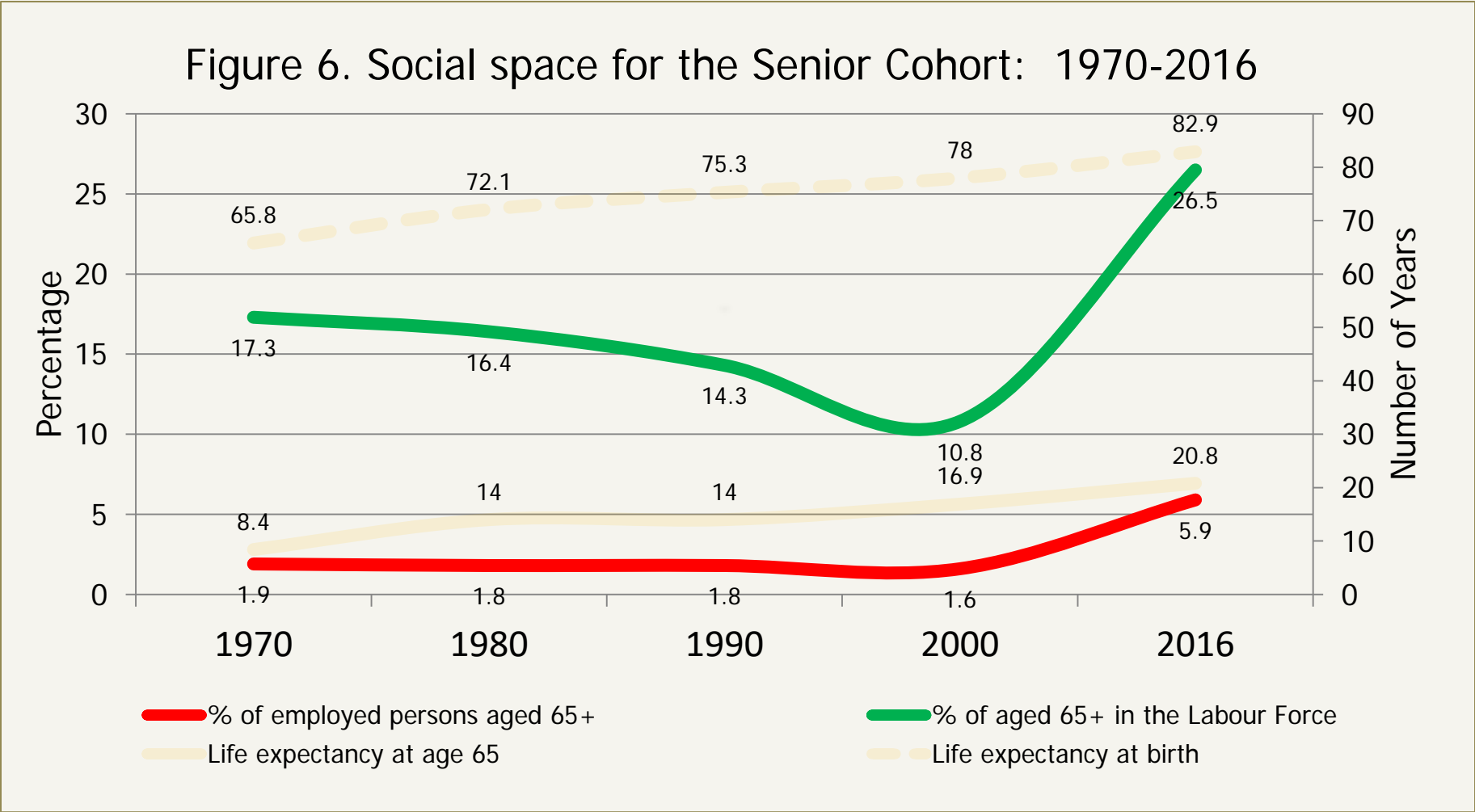
Due to the increase in our local and experienced labour force, the next generations of seniors will have even higher education and skills levels:

Figure 5. Educational level of Labour Force, Singapore, 2016



Source: Compiled from DOS (2017) Singstat.gov.sg

The increase in the proportion of workers aged 65 and older since 2000, reflects an opening of social space for the senior cohort:

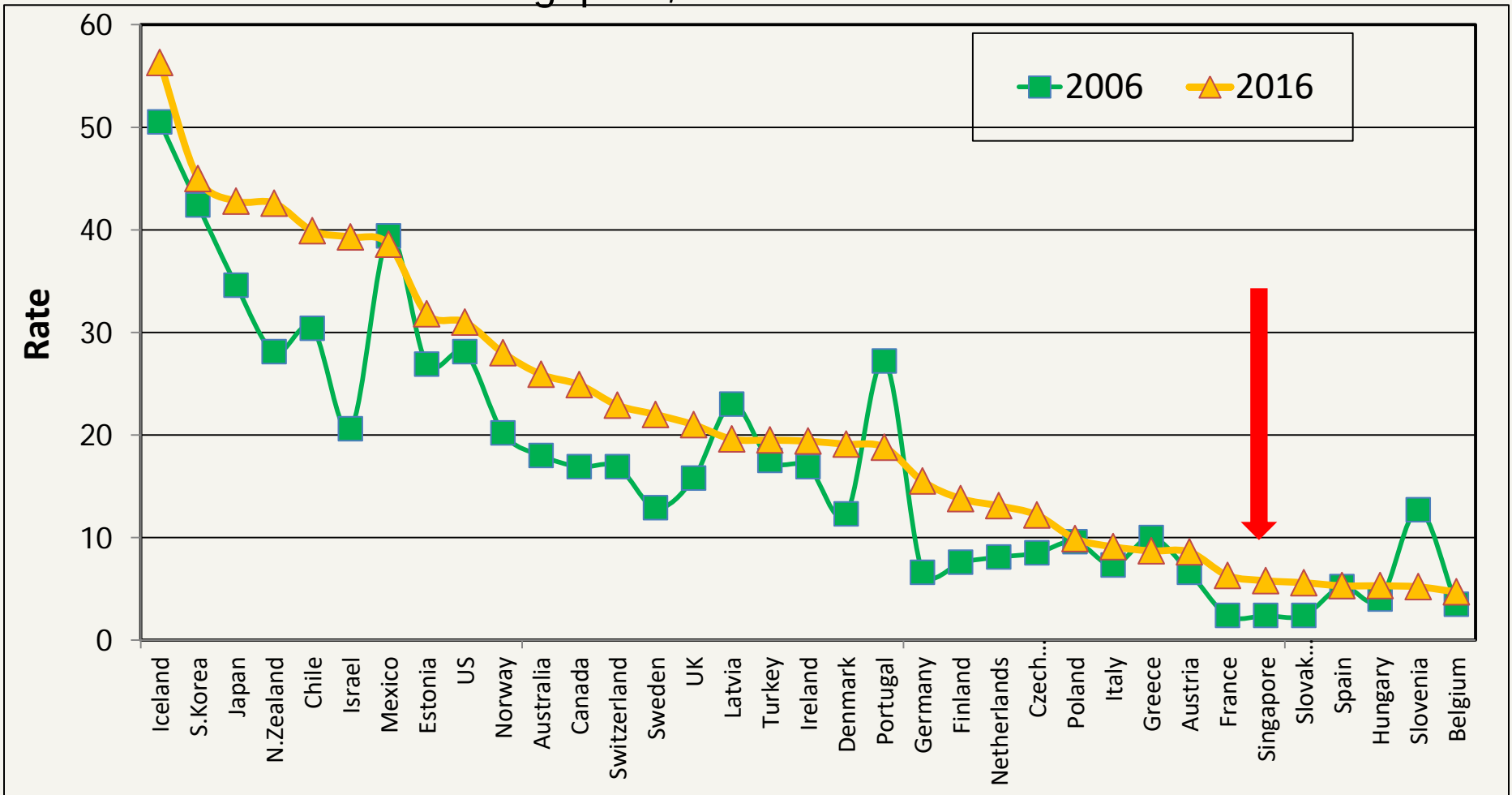


Source: Compiled from DOS (2017) <http://www.singstat.gov.sg>

Yet, despite the presence of
the new dynamic generation
of seniors,
progress has been very slow in
the creation of **social space**
for them in
the labour market.

Singapore lags behind in employment for seniors:

Fig 7. Employment rate (% of age group) of people aged 65-69 in the OECD countries and Singapore, 2006 and 2016



Source: OECD (2017) Better Policies for Better Life. Paris: OECD; and Singapore DOS, 2017.

Notes: Singapore figures refer to Singapore Residents aged 65 and older.

OECD = Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

3. First recommendation:

We need a new way of thinking.

**"A way of seeing is
a way of *not* seeing"**

(Kenneth D. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 1935, p. 70)

- (a) Our perception of **seniors** is outdated:
Seniors are a multi-skilled, dynamic and healthy cohort.

Concern with old age disabilities is justifiable. But, the unintended consequence of seeing only illness is **not seeing** the readiness of healthy seniors to continue their active engagement in society.

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(b) Our perception of **the economy and the labour market** is outdated:

21st century economies are vibrant, flexible and open where people navigate the labour market acquiring new **skills** and competing based on **performance**, not on **age**.

3. Second recommendation:

We need a rational alignment of skills and jobs.

Singapore needs

a rational alignment of skills and jobs

(knowledge and work)

where adults work and learn
at their own pace and time,

regardless of age,

for as long as they wish.

3. Third recommendation:

The rational alignment of skills and jobs enriches human and social capital and **begins with these crucial steps:**

- ❑ Encouraging labour force participation of **all prepared adults, regardless of age**
- ❑ Removing institutional obstacles by examining critically the need for
 - retirement age; and
 - retirement age regulations.

Thank you for your attention.