

Family norms at a crossroads

Although women still do more household chores, men are more enlightened about role at home

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DUAL-INCOME households are becoming the norm, but the sharing of responsibilities between husband and wife at home is far from equal, according to findings from a 2005 study announced yesterday.

The study, done after the Government's 2004 Marriage and Parenthood Package, also found that 24 per cent of the 1,512 married respondents were unaware of the pro-family policies — a sign that such incentives will not move those who are unprepared, said sociologist Paulin Straughan of the National University of Singapore, who led the study.

The study found that women take on more duties like grocery shopping, cooking and supervising the children's schoolwork, although some of these duties are shared between couples, said Associate Professor Straughan.

While the men work marginally more than women on an average day (18 minutes), the women spend half an hour more than men on domestic duties on weekdays, and about an hour more on weekends.

The division of domestic responsibilities reveals that women do about one household chore and two childcare duties more than their husbands. The survey listed 11 household chores and 10 childcare duties, and the respondents — consisting of 701 men and 811 women — identified which ones were done by themselves, their spouses, or were shared.

But "we are at the crossroads of changing norms", said Prof Straughan at the inaugural Family Research Network forum yesterday.

For example, more energy is channelled into bringing up children than before, with parents sending their children to enrichment classes. And men are becoming more enlightened about their roles in raising children: While most men feel that women are the best caregivers, they also feel that both parents are equally important in this role.

When asked how effective the Government's pro-family policies have been, Prof Straughan said that while the birth rates could signal the "crude take-up rate" of such incentives, one could also study their intrinsic effects, such as how the policies have raised the status of family in the social order. "Now, it's become socially and politically correct," she said.

The policies could also explain why Singapore's fertility rate — at the current 1.29 — has not fallen beyond 2004's low of 1.26. And if the rate

holds up amid the ongoing economic uncertainty, it would be “precisely” because of recent enhanced parenthood incentives, said Prof Straughan.