

STATE OF THE FAMILY IN SINGAPORE



This biennial Report on the State of the Family in Singapore tracks key trends on the family and family life in Singapore. The People-sector led National Family Council, together with my Ministry produced this Report using data and statistics from government agencies, survey findings and published studies.

The family is the cornerstone of society, and the basic social unit that nurtures and moulds each person and his values. Family ties and families in Singapore continue to remain strong. Trends show that Singaporean families remain close-knit, with the family continuing to be a key pillar of emotional support and financial security.

Families, however, are increasingly facing challenges brought about by globalisation and modernisation as individuals try to balance their responsibilities between family and work. Consequently, policy makers, social organisations and the community at large must try even harder to ensure the resilience of families in these trying times.

I would like to thank Mr Lim Soon Hock, Chairperson of the National Family Council, and Council members for promoting and helping to build resilient families in Singapore.



Dr Vivian Balakrishnan

Minister
Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports

The family is the first and most basic institution to which everyone belongs. It forms the basic building block in our society. A keen understanding of how the Singaporean family is doing and the challenges it faces is important to ensure its continued resilience.

This Report shows that Singaporean families are doing well. At the same time, worrying trends have also surfaced. Our social norms and family values are increasingly threatened by the onslaught of liberalisation, brought about by a more interconnected world. The family risks being side-stepped due to the overwhelming demands of work and other pursuits in fast paced, contemporary Singapore.

The family needs to be the number one priority on everyone's agenda. We want more families to have positive shared experiences and to inculcate love and respect for family in our young.

We hope that this Report would serve as a common reference to discuss issues affecting the family. Together, we can make Singapore a great place for families.



Mr Lim Soon Hock

Chairperson
National Family Council



Families in Singapore

The Singapore family unit remains strong. Most people surveyed say that their family is still close-knit despite having to shoulder the increasingly heavier demands of daily life.

Married children continue to stay in touch with their parents – and the relationship between the two parties is healthy. Most teenaged children feel appreciated for who they are and enjoy spending time with family members.

Singaporeans also possess pro-family values and attitudes. They look towards the family as a strong source of emotional and financial support.

However, Singaporeans continue to delay marriage and parenthood. Couples are having fewer or no children. More people are also staying single.

More disturbing is the fact that more Singaporean marriages are ending up on the rocks. The number of divorces hit a high in 2005 with almost 7,000 divorces. This is an increase from 3,634 cases in 1990.

Significantly, the rise was contributed mainly by marriages that ended before their fifth anniversary, and empty nesters, i.e., couples with grown-up children.

Another group facing difficulties are the “sandwiched” families where working couples have to take care of both their elderly parents and their young children.

With these troubling trends, the family unit’s ability to be the first line of care and support for its members may be seriously affected.



Strong family bonds and ties

The General Household Survey 2005 data showed that 8 in 10 households had a family nucleus. A nucleus comprises a married couple, with or without unmarried children, and a parent or grandparent. It can also be taken to mean a family of just one parent with unmarried children.

Household size in Singapore has declined from an average of 4.7 in 1980 to 3.6 in 2005. Large households with six or more members declined from 21 per cent in 1990 to 11 per cent in 2005. Meanwhile, one-person households increased from 5 per cent in 1990 to 10 per cent in 2005.

While not physically living together, Singaporeans continue to feel they belong to close-knit families.

The 2005 Survey on the Social Attitudes of Singaporeans (SAS) showed that a majority (96 per cent) viewed their family as close-knit and were able to relate and turn to family members for help, both financially and emotionally.

Attitudes on Family Issues

Statement	Per cent who agree		
	2001	2003	2005
I have a close-knit family	97	93	96
My family members tell me their personal problems	88	86	91
When I am troubled, I would talk to one or more of my family members	88	85	91
People who are earning their own income should regularly give money (e.g., monthly allowance) to their family	98	99	99
I will give money to my family members if they are in need of financial support	99	98	99

Source: MCYS Survey on Social Attitudes of Singaporeans

Nurturing children

The majority of Singaporeans held positive attitudes towards parenting. The 2005 SAS noted that 99 per cent of respondents agreed that parents should communicate regularly with their young children (e.g., asking them about their day, talking about common activities) even if they were busy.

Similarly, many parents yearned to spend more time with their children. In MCYS' 2004 Study on Marriage and Parenthood, 60 per cent of parents feared not being able to spend time with their children.



Nurturing teenagers

The number of Singaporean teenagers aged 15-19 years has declined steadily. With delayed family formation and dipping birth rates, the teenage population fell from 12 per cent of the total resident population in 1980 to 7 per cent in 2005.

Teenagers in Singapore enjoyed stable and healthy ties with their families. Eighty-nine per cent of teenagers surveyed in the 2005 National Youth Survey felt that they were appreciated by their family members and 85 per cent enjoyed having dinner together.

Quality of Family Relationship

Statement	Per cent who agree	
	National Youth Survey 2002	National Youth Survey 2005
I feel appreciated for who I am	93	89
We enjoy having dinner together and talking	80	85
The only time I'm being noticed is when I have a problem	23	15
We can't get along with each other	10	7

Source: National Youth Survey

Compared to 2002, fewer teenagers felt they were only noticed when they had a problem and could not get along with their family members.



Caring for parents

From the Housing and Development Board Sample Household Survey, around 2 per cent of elderly respondents indicated that they did not receive visits from their married children. Of those who did, 73 per cent received regular visits of at least once a week, up from 68 per cent in 1998. Daily visits also increased from 18 per cent to 22 per cent.

This showed that intergenerational family times remained strong.

Frequency of Visits from Married Children

	Per cent	
	HDB Household Survey 1998	HDB Household Survey 2003
Daily	18	22
At least once a week	50	51
At least once a month	22	17
Less than once a month	9	8
Never	1	2

Source: HDB Sample Household Survey 2003



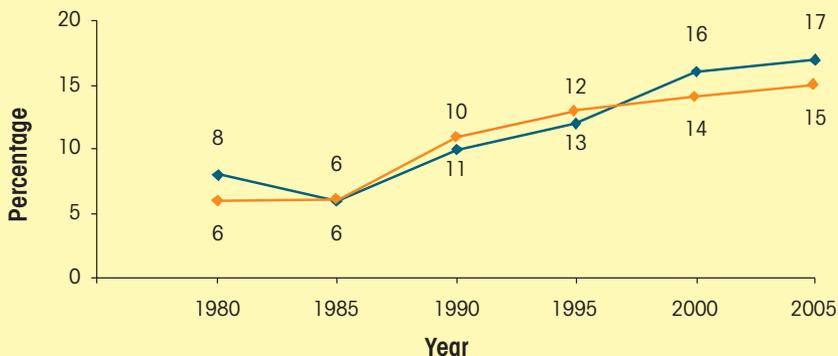
Future Challenges

Delayed marriage and family formation, rising divorce rates and greater tensions faced by sandwiched families may impact on the ability of the family to care for and support its members.

Postponement of marriage and parenthood

More Singaporeans are not getting married. The singlehood rate has increased steadily. In 1980, the percentages of singles for males and females were 8 per cent and 6 per cent respectively. In 2005, they had risen to 17 per cent for males and 15 per cent for females.

Citizen Singlehood Rates for Males and Females Aged 40-44

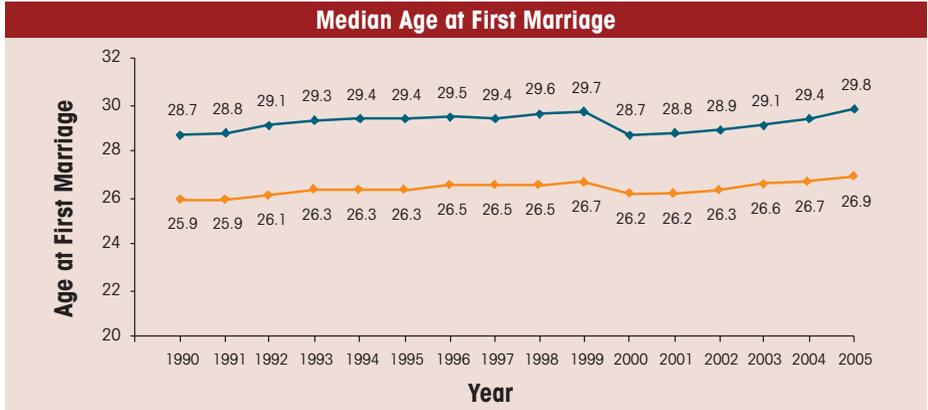


Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

— Male — Female

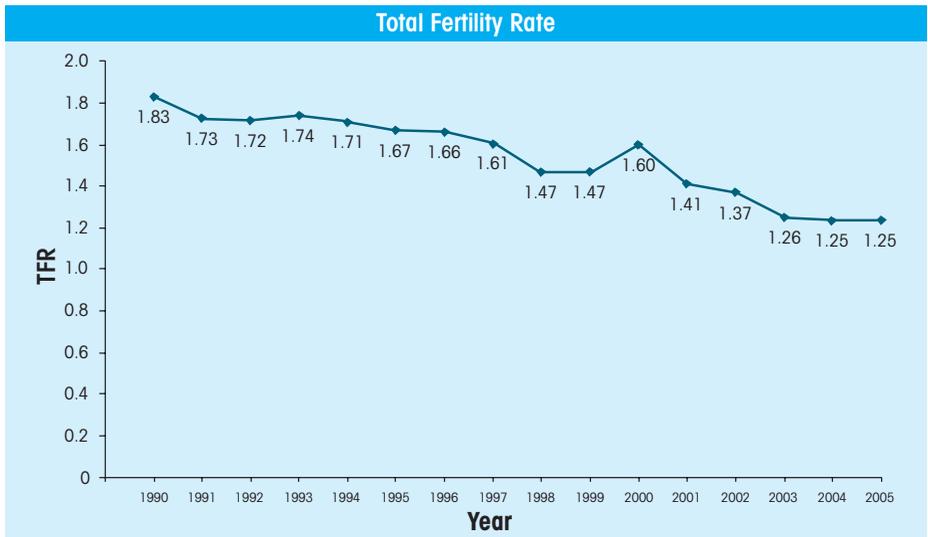
Singaporeans who do marry are doing so later and having fewer children. In 1990, the median ages at first marriage for grooms and brides were 28.7 and 25.9 respectively. These numbers increased to 29.8 and 26.9 respectively in 2005.

Singapore's total fertility rate decreased from 1.83 in 1990 to 1.24 in 2005. This change has been brought about by changing lifestyle choices and values.



Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

— Grooms — Brides



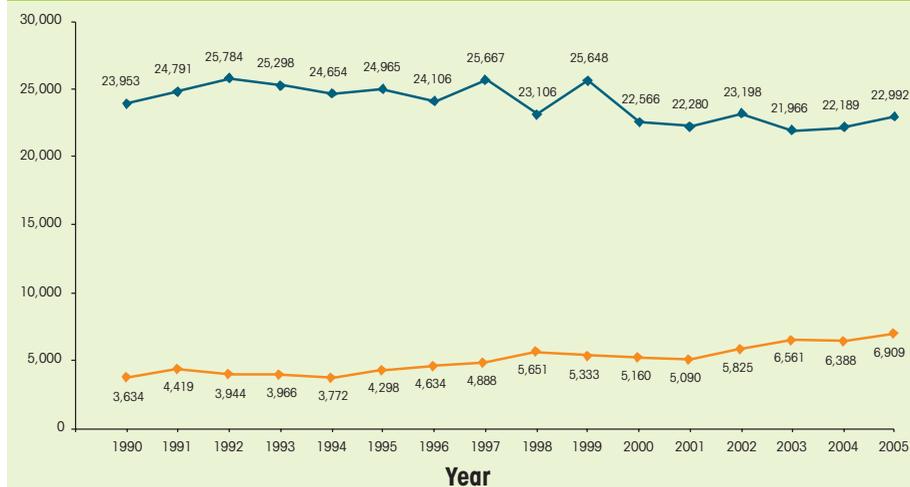
Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

The total fertility rate is the number of children that a woman can expect to have in her lifetime if current fertility rates remained constant.

Divorce rising

The divorce rate in Singapore has been rising steadily over the past two decades. The 2005 Report on Marriage and Divorces, published by the Singapore Department of Statistics, showed that divorce cases have increased from 3,634 in 1990 to 6,909 in 2005.

Number of Marriages and Divorces



Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

—◆— Total Marriages —◆— Total Divorces and Annulments

Increasing early divorces

One in 10 civil marriages registered in 1996 broke up before their tenth wedding anniversary. This is an increase of 3 per cent compared to the 1987 cohort. For Muslim marriages, 18 per cent of the 1996 cohort divorced within their first ten years compared to 11 per cent of the 1987 cohort.

Divorce among empty nesters

Many "older" marriages are breaking up, particularly among the non-Muslims. Most of these people 50 years old and above, do not have dependants below 18 years of age.

It is likely that for many of these late divorcees, it was after the children had grown up that they found there were no other reasons to cling on to the marriage.

Sandwiched families

With rising life expectancy, the sandwiched generation would find themselves having to take care of, not just their children, but their elderly parents as well. With the trend towards dual-income families, breadwinners would be hard-pressed to cope with their own needs and those of their aged parents and growing children.

Shrinking household sizes also meant that these families may not have many family members to turn to in times of need.

Growing number of singles

The SAS surveys showed that most Singaporeans, including singles, have high levels of communication within the family and enjoy close ties.

However, the singlehood rate has risen over the past 20 years. While the SAS surveys have shown that singles (8 out of 10) would talk to their family members about their problems, this was lower than the 9 out of 10 for married people.

Conclusion



Overall, the average Singapore family remains strong. Stable family structures with pro-family values and attitudes are in place for most people.

They also believe that their closely-knit families have been able to provide a valuable source of emotional and financial support.

However, the future of the family as a key supporting pillar is less certain mainly because of the increasing demands and stresses of modern society.

“Can the family continue to be the first line of care and support for its members?” is the key question that stares them in the face.

Indeed, it is a question that must be answered by all Singaporeans and a concerted effort made to ensure that this important institution stays resilient at all times.

About the State of the Family in Singapore Report

The **State of the Family in Singapore** Report presents key national trends on the family and draws data and statistics from government agencies, survey findings and published studies.

Some of the key studies include:

- **General Household Survey** – a series of large scale mid-decade national surveys undertaken by the Singapore Department of Statistics since 1995. It provides key demographic, education, social and labour force statistics. Some 90,000 households were surveyed in 2005.
- **Survey on the Social Attitudes of Singaporeans** – a series of longitudinal biennial studies conducted by MCYS since 2001. It covers the attitudes of Singaporeans towards a wide range of topics including family, ethnic relations and satisfaction with life. More than 2,000 respondents participated in the 2005 Survey.
- **Public Housing in Singapore: Social Aspects and the Elderly** – the 2003 Housing and Development Board Household Survey explored current concerns such as community formation and ageing population of HDB residents and covered some 7,300 households. This survey is done once every five years.
- **National Youth Survey** – a nationwide survey by the National Youth Council. The 2005 Survey covered more than 1,500 young people aged 15-29 years, on the state of youth in Singapore. This survey is done once every three years.
- **Marriage and Parenthood Study** – a biennial study conducted since 2004 to understand and monitor changes in the underlying motivations and perceptions towards marriage and parenthood. This study involved 3,000 married respondents and 3,000 single respondents.



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