

Family First

State of the Family Report 2009



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Foreword

In a fast-changing environment, the Family remains as an anchor for individuals and the cornerstone of society. Strong and stable families are crucial to our well-being. They serve as the first line of care and support for an individual, and lay the foundation for the building of communities, and eventually, the nation. The Family is the only institution that creates and nurtures the next generation. It is therefore the cradle of our future. Consequently, we must monitor closely the health of Singapore families.

The biennial Report on the State of the Family tracks key trends on the Family and family life in Singapore. The National Family Council, together with the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, produced this report using data and statistics from government agencies, survey findings and public studies.

Trends show that the Singapore family unit remains strong. The majority of Singaporeans still believe in the institution of marriage and desire to have children. They continue to feel that they belong to close-knit families, and are able to relate and turn to family members for financial and emotional support.

However, families today face ever-increasing pressures and demands. Forces such as globalisation, changing family structure and 24/7 connectivity are changing the landscape in which individuals and families operate. Such developments present us with greater options and opportunities, but they also bring about new challenges and distractions. We are seeing an increase in the number of singles. Singaporeans are getting married and having children later. Couples are having fewer children. Family size is getting smaller. Divorce is increasing. Competing aspirations seem to be affecting marriage and parenthood decisions.

In today's environment, families need more support. The people, private and public sectors must come together to create an overall environment that is conducive for family formation, and which helps families strengthen family bonds. We need to invest in this area to make Singapore a great place for children and families.

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

The family is the lifeline of a society, and the first and most basic institution to which everyone belongs. It is important that we stay attuned to how the Singapore family is doing and the challenges it faces so that we can ensure its continued resilience.

The Report shows that Singaporean families are doing well. However, worrying trends have also surfaced. Families today face the challenge of having to manage many demands. As a result, we find that we have less time with our children and family. More mothers are now in the workforce, juggling both work and family. Fathers are equally busy at work, while the extended family system is increasingly under threat.

I like to liken the balancing of the many roles of an individual to that of juggling balls. We strive to keep the balls up in the air as we seek to perform all our roles harmoniously. At the same time, we need to strengthen each of them so that should one slip and fall, it will have the tenacity and resilience to bounce back and perhaps reach greater heights. We must strive to maintain the social fabric of our society and family ethos as we continue to be exposed to the onslaught of external influences to ensure the continued resilience of families.

To do this, we need to have policies and programmes that support the family and build a strong social ecosystem. We need to create shared experiences for family members to experience love, care, warmth and support. Families need to spend time together, doing things and having fun, so as to strengthen bonds.

We hope that this report will serve as a useful reference to start a dialogue on issues affecting the family. Together, we can make Family the number one priority on everyone's agenda, and build Singapore into a great place for families and children. The family is the single most important key stakeholder in our lives, in both good times and bad. It is therefore prudent for all of us to invest in the family, especially with our time and efforts.

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan
Minister for Community
Development,
Youth and Sports

Mr Lim Soon Hock
Chairman
National Family Council

Families in Singapore

The State of the Family Report presents an overview of the well-being of families in Singapore. It presents key trends in areas such as singlehood and marriage, parenthood, divorce and attitudes towards the family.

Statistics indicate that the family unit in Singapore remains strong. Most Singaporeans surveyed hold pro-family values and attitudes, viewing their family as close-knit and the key pillar of emotional and financial support.

Trends also show that intergenerational ties remain strong, with generally high frequency of visits and contact between parents and their married children.

The majority of Singaporeans hold positive attitudes towards parenting, spending time with their children on homework, play, grooming and listening to their problems. Teenagers in Singapore enjoy stable and healthy ties with their families. Most teenagers surveyed feel that they are appreciated by their family members.

The majority of singles surveyed indicate an intention to get married. This shows that Singaporeans still believe in the institution of marriage and hold such aspiration.

While the state of family in Singapore is generally positive, worrying trends such as rising singlehood and divorce rates, and delay in marriage and family formation, have continued to surface.

These trends may have significant impact on the ability of the family to continue functioning as a strong and resilient unit, and the first line of care and support.

It is important that we stay attuned to the heartbeat of the Singapore family, and do our part in keeping it strong and healthy.



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 a 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 of all households 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.

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

Attitudes Towards Family

The 2006 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.

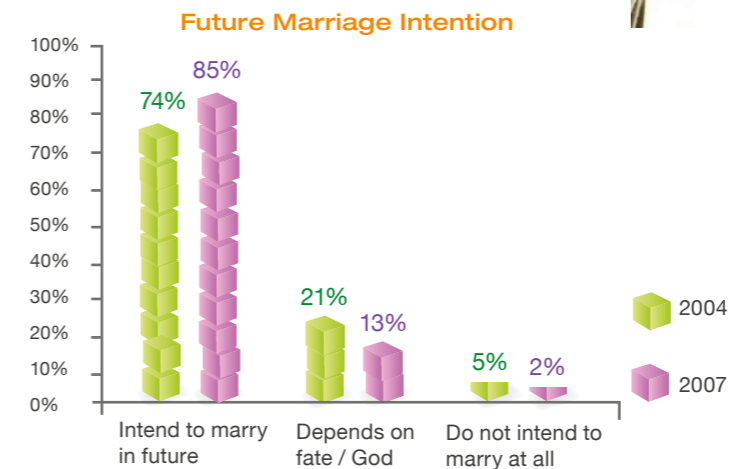
Family Ties Remain Strong

Statement	Per cent who agree		
	2001	2003	2006
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

Marriage and Parenthood Intentions

Singaporeans do intend to marry. From the Study on Marriage and Parenthood 2007, 85 per cent of singles surveyed indicated an intention to get married. This proportion is higher than the response in 2004, when a similar survey was conducted. Singaporeans thus still believe in the institution of marriage and hold such aspiration.



Source: Study on Marriage and Parenthood

In both the 2004 and 2007 Marriage and Parenthood surveys, starting a family was either the most important or the second most important reason for getting married. The 2007 survey also showed that more respondents indicated that they intended to have 2 or 3 children. 53 per cent of respondents indicated they intended to have 2 children, and 24 per cent of respondents indicated they intended to have 3 children in the 2007 survey, compared to 43 per cent and 19 per cent respectively in the 2004 survey. However, in reality, couples have less than their intended number of children.



Desire for Children

No. of Children	Total Married Respondents (Per cent)			
	2004		2007	
	Intended	Actual	Intended	Actual
0	7	22	2	19
1	14	24	15	28
2	43	36	53	37
3	19	13	24	13
4 or more	5	4	7	4
Mean	2.0	1.5	2.2	1.6

Source: Study on Marriage and Parenthood

Nurturing Children

The Study on Marriage and Parenthood 2007 showed that 34 per cent of married women felt that it was ideal to leave the workforce when they had children or when their children were still young, as compared to 29 per cent in the 2004 survey. This could likely indicate that more parents prefer to take care of young children themselves.

The same study in 2007 also showed that males spent an average of 2.4 hours per day while females spent an average of 5.5 hours per day looking after their children. This included time spent with children on homework, listening to their problems, play and grooming.



Nurturing Teenagers

Teenagers in Singapore enjoyed stable and healthy ties with their families. 89 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.

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

Quality of Family Relationships

Statement	Per cent who agree	
	2002	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

Caring for Parents

The 2005 National Survey of Senior Citizens found that 99.3 per cent of elderly respondents aged 55 and above were in contact with their children, with 94.8 per cent of them being in contact with their children at least once a week. 73.7 per cent talked to their children daily, 79.8 per cent spent leisure time with their children, and 69.9 per cent discussed important family matters with their children. This showed that intergenerational family ties are generally strong and healthy.



Future Challenges

The institution of the Family, while still strong, is facing some challenges. Delayed marriage and family formation, as well as rising divorce rates may affect the ability of the family to care for and support its members.



Rising Singlehood and Falling Marriage Rates

Despite aspirations to be married, more Singaporeans are remaining single. The number of resident singles aged 20 to 44 years has been increasing steadily over the years, from about 480,000 in 2000 to almost 530,000 in 2007, with approximately 3 per cent increase in resident singlehood rates over the same period.

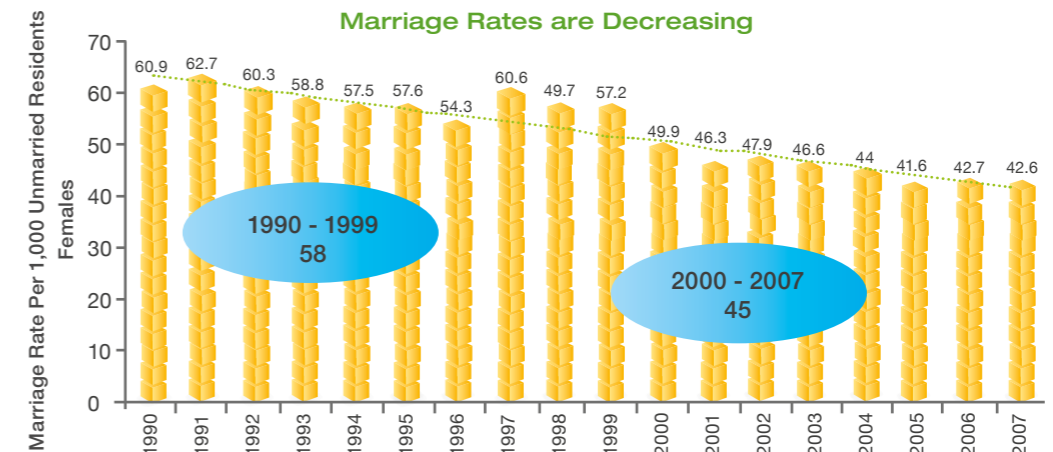


In both the Marriage and Parenthood 2004 and 2007 surveys, the top 2 reasons singles cited for not marrying continue to be not having met a suitable partner (compatible and of good character) as well as choosing to concentrate on their studies or career.



Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

Conversely, the female general marriage rate is decreasing. This 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. In the 1990s, the marriage rate was an average of 58 marriages per 1,000 unmarried resident females. This has declined to an average of 45 marriages per 1,000 unmarried resident females for 2000 - 2007.



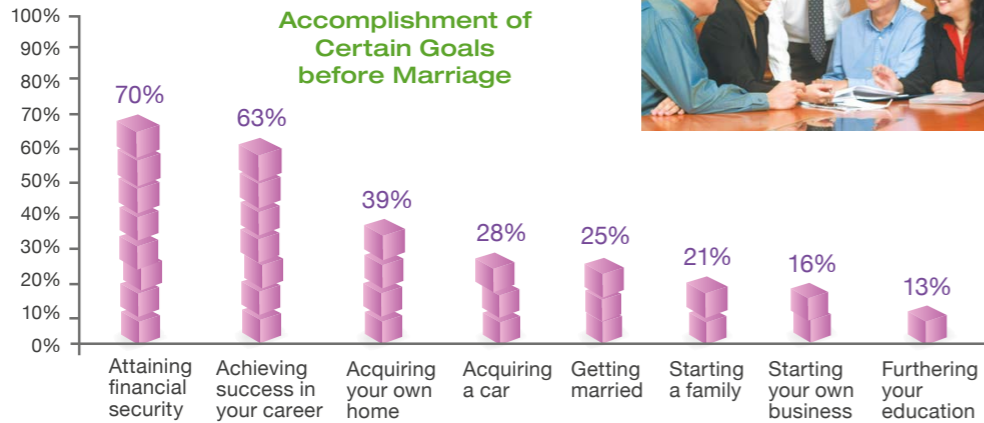
Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

In 2007, there were close to 24,000 marriages, of which 19,853 were contracted under the Women's Charter (civil marriages) and 4,113 were registered under Muslim Law.

Over the past ten years, the number of marriages has hovered between 22,000 and 25,700. The average annual marriages dipped slightly to about 22,900 for the period of 2000 to 2007, compared to an annual average of about 24,900 from 1992 to 1999. Civil marriages made up the bulk of the marriages (82 per cent on average), while Muslim marriages made up an average of 18 per cent of total marriages.

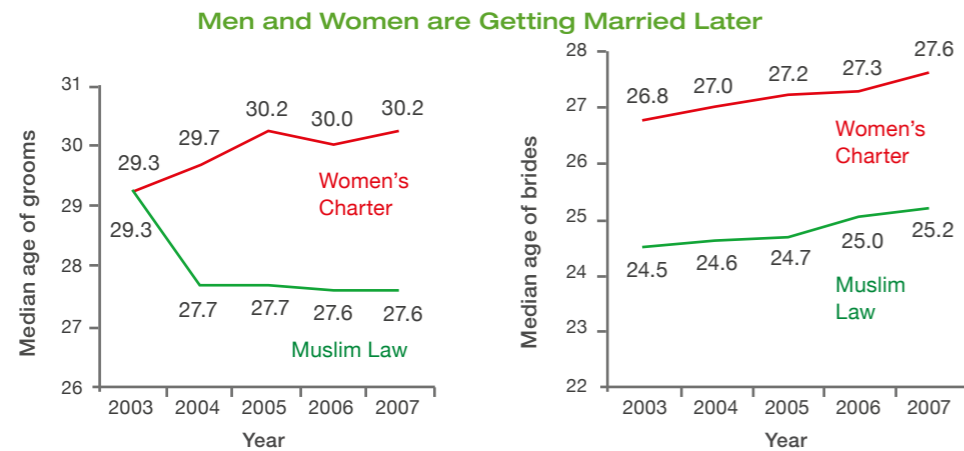
Postponement of Marriage

In the Singles' Attitude Towards Courtship and Marriage Survey 2006, singles had expressed the desire to accomplish other goals, such as attaining financial security and success in career, before marriage.



Source: Singles' Attitude Towards Courtship and Marriage

Related to this, Singaporeans are marrying later. Since 2003, the median age at first marriage for non-Muslim grooms rose by almost a year from 29.3 to 30.2 years, while non-Muslim brides rose from 26.8 to 27.6 years. The median age at first marriage for Muslim grooms have remained relatively stable since 2004 while Muslim brides increased by more than half a year from 24.5 years to 25.2 years.



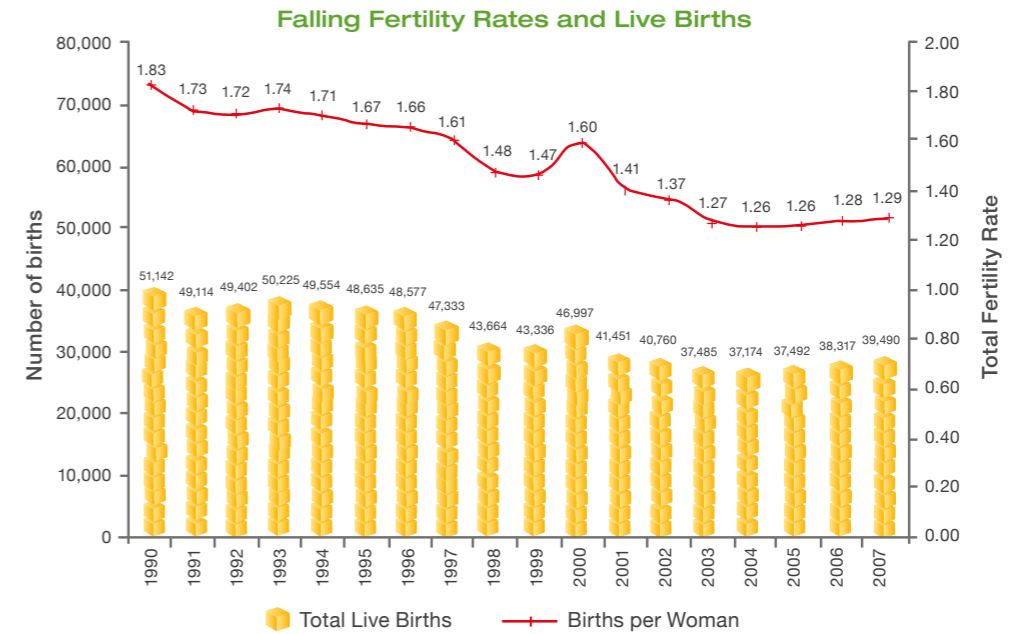
Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

Births and Fertility

In 2007, there were 39,490 live births, compared to 47,333 ten years ago, and over 51,000 in 1990. The last peak was in 2000, which coincided with the dragon year.

The Total Fertility Rate (TFR)¹ has also been on a downward trend since 2000, although it enjoyed a slight increase in 2006 and 2007.

¹ 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.



Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

The fertility rate for age group 25 – 29 registered the sharpest decline, from 123 births per 1,000 women in 1996, to 80 births per 1,000 women, 10 years later.

There was also the tendency towards delay in child bearing, with the peak in fertility moving from the 25 – 29 age group to the 30 – 34 age group. Families were having fewer children. This was so for all age groups. This could be due to later marriages, later births, or lifestyle choice.

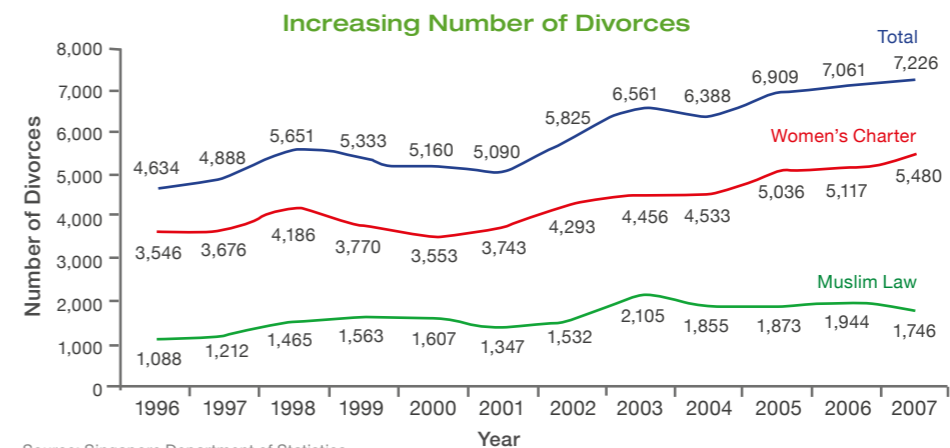
Families are Having Fewer Children

Age group (Years)	Average number of children born to Resident Females		
	1990	2000	2007
Total	2.85	2.53	2.27
15 - 29	0.98	0.81	0.79
30 - 39	1.91	1.77	1.50
40 - 49	2.75	2.21	2.07
50 and over	4.69	3.85	3.03

Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

Rising Number of Divorces

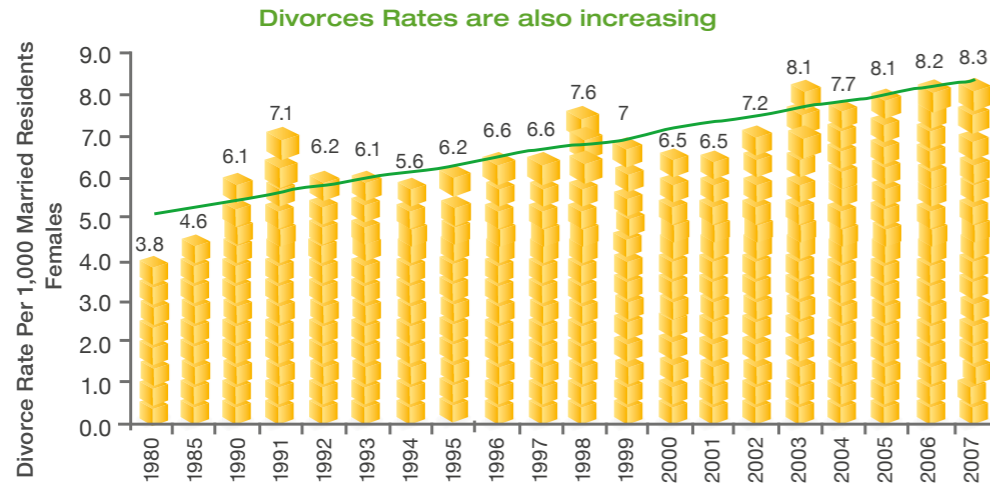
The total number of divorces rose from 4,888 in 1997 to 7,226 in 2007. Divorces for both Civil and Muslim marriages have increased. For Civil marriages, there were 3,676 divorces in 1997, rising to 5,480 in 2007. For Muslim marriages, divorces in 1997 were 1,212, rising to 1,746 in 2007.



Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

Summary

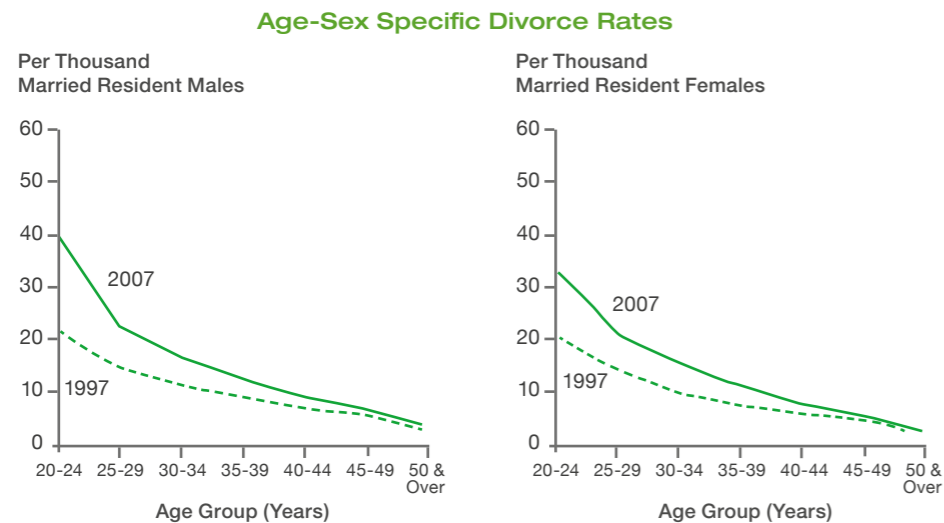
Divorce rate is rising. In 2007, there were 8.3 female divorcees for every 1,000 female married residents, up from 6.6 in 1997.



Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

Age-Specific Divorce Rates²

Younger married persons in the age group of 20 - 24 years registered the highest divorce rate in 2007. The divorce rate in this age group reflected the highest increase over the past decade.



Source: Singapore Department of Statistics

Divorces by Duration of Marriage

In 2007, slightly more than half of the divorces lasted less than 10 years, with about one third of the divorces occurring within 5 - 9 years of marriage. The proportion of divorces within 5 - 9 years of marriage had increased (34.4 per cent), compared to 10 years ago (29.5 per cent).

² Age-Specific Divorce Rate is defined as the number of divorces and annulments granted to a specific age group during the year, out of every thousand married residents in the same age group. These statistics are taken from the Singapore Department of Statistics' "Population Trends 2008" publication.

Overall, the average Singapore family remains strong. The majority of Singaporeans still believe in marriage and want children. They hold pro-family values and attitudes, and enjoy close ties with their family members.

However, with rapid social, economic, and technological changes, as well as increasing pressures and demands brought about by globalisation and modernisation, families in Singapore are facing greater challenges in staying resilient.

Statistics and survey findings show that Singaporeans are getting married and having children later. Couples are also having fewer children. There are rising singlehood and divorce rates.

With competing priorities and aspirations, can the Family continue to be the number one priority for all Singaporeans?

What can we do to ensure that the Family remains as a strong anchor in our ever changing environment?

We hope that this report serves as food for thought, and more importantly, for action by each of us to keep the institution of family strong and resilient. We can contribute in small and big ways, starting now with our own family, and reaching out to champion the Family in Singapore.

About this Report

The State of the Family Report presents key statistics on the family and draws data 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 studies conducted by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (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 2006 Survey.
- 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 periodic study conducted by MCYS since 2004 to understand and monitor changes in the underlying motivations and perceptions towards marriage and parenthood. In 2007, this study involved 3,000 married respondents and 3,000 single respondents.
- Survey on Singles' Attitude Towards Courtship and Marriage**
 A biennial survey conducted by the Social Development Unit - Social Development Service to find out the views of singles towards courtship and marriage and examine if there is a shift in marriage trends and attitudes. It surveyed 1,800 singles aged 21 to 35 in 2006.
- National Survey of Senior Citizens**
 A periodic survey commissioned by MCYS to map the financial, physical and social health of senior citizens in Singapore. In 2005, 4,591 senior citizens aged 55 and above were interviewed.