

Growing number of singles in Singapore

The latest Population Trends report also show that those who do marry are doing so at a much later age.

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SINGAPORE: Singlehood rates are among the highest for lower-educated Singaporean men in their 30s and 40s, and higher educated women in Singapore, according to the country's latest Population report released on Thursday (Sep 25). The statistics show a growing number of singles in this country, and when they do marry, it's at a much later age.

35 per cent of men between the ages of 35 and 39 who had secondary education or less were single in 2013. Comparatively, only 23 per cent of those with university education were single.

As the men get older, about 28 per cent who had secondary education or less remained single. Comparatively, only 14 per cent of men between the ages of 40 and 44 who had degrees remained single.

ALL THE SINGLE LADIES

In contrast, 26 per cent women between the ages of 35 and 39 who have had university education were single last year. As they hit their early 40s, about 20 per cent remained single.

Observers say these figures are worrying against the backdrop of a shrinking and greying population. "When they get older and they are home alone, so to speak, it could be a problem because they have no one to take care of them, psychologically and financially," said Dr Chung Wai-Keung, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Singapore Management University.

For less-educated men with lower incomes, this means their CPF savings will also be lower, and this could be a problem if they remain single as they get older, he said. For the women with higher levels of education, "it is less of a problem but it's still something the Government needs to take care of".

"In 10 years time, they need to re-evaluate the situation, in response to this increasing rate of singlehood. Definitely they should provide a better public health system. In terms of housing, there maybe housing for single persons," said Dr Chung.

He also suggested building a community dominated by single persons and add to it other public service facilities, much like what Hong Kong is doing.

FOREIGN BRIDES AND FOREIGN GROOMS

Many of the less-educated men tend to turn to foreign brides from developing countries. There were more than 5,000 marriages between Singaporean men and foreign women last year. Counsellor Willie Chien said such marriages bring their own set of social problems: "We have spouses coming from Thailand, Batam, China and also from Vietnam, Many of these people struggle to find acceptance and support locally. So if that particular person, for whatever reason, is separated from her husband, then she is left all alone to fend for herself."

The number of women marrying foreign spouses is also going up. There were more than 1,500 marriages involving Singaporean brides and foreign grooms last year, nearly double the figure compared to 10 years ago.

However, a match-maker Channel NewsAsia spoke to said that marrying someone seen to be less qualified may soon become the norm for women, as attitudes towards finding a life partner changes.

Said Ms Anisa Hassan, Managing Director for the matchmaking service It's Just Lunch: "It's natural for women to be looking for an academic equal or somebody who earns in similar income bracket as them. But their priorities change as they get into their late 30s or 40s. So there is going to be a big reversal in trend, I foresee."

CHANGING MINDSETS

In most Asian societies, the man is often seen as the breadwinner of the family and the one in charge, and this is compounded by the view that education, income and prestige are closely intertwined.

Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies Dr Yap Mui Teng believes such perceptions are likely to change when there are more pathways to success.

"I guess this phenomenon will only go away when education and income and prestige are not so closely tied together, so that males who do not do well academically but are skilled in other ways may be equally well-regarded in society and make equally good incomes," she said. "This will probably take time. With the rising educational levels in the country, hopefully this will ameliorate the situation somewhat."