

Singaporeans value family: Survey

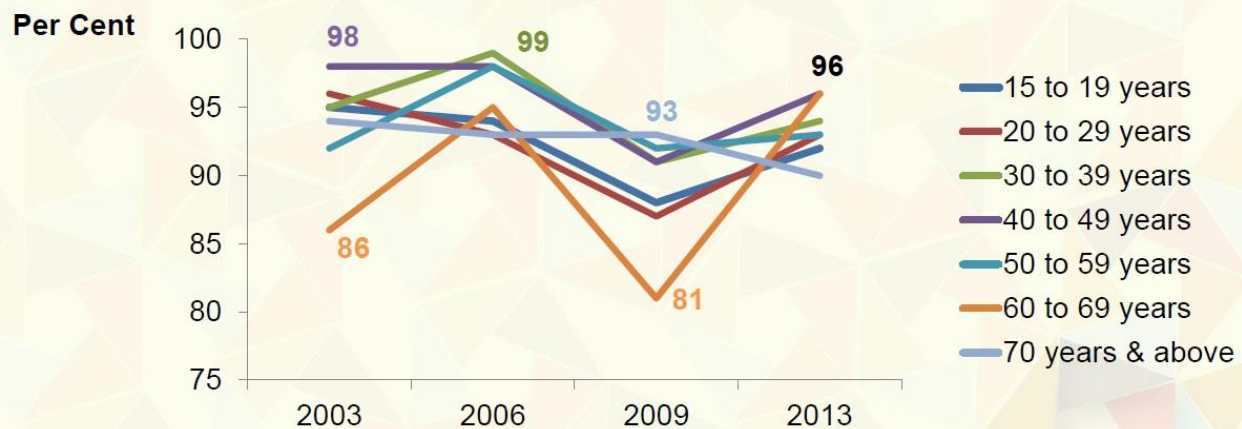
Channel NewsAsia, 26 May 2015

Singaporeans value families - they want to get married, have children and feel a strong sense of filial piety a survey found. However, statistics by the Social and Family Development Ministry (MSF) show a gap between what they desire and their reality.

About nine in 10 respondents, across all age groups in a Survey on Social Attitudes of Singaporeans, said they have a close-knit family.

Close Family Ties

Respondents Agreeing with "I have a close-knit family" by age, 2003 – 2013



Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development (Survey on Social Attitudes of Singaporeans)

The desire for married couples to be close with their parents is also strong. But sometimes the environment does not allow for it.

In the survey conducted by MSF, about 40 per cent of families with young children said they either live in the same flat, in a nearby block, or same estate as their parents. But 55 per cent said they actually preferred to do so.

Professor Yeung Wei-Jun Jean, director of the Centre for Family and Population Research, explained: "They desire to do so perhaps because of the proximity to take care of ... the parents or maybe grandparents to take care of younger children.

"But in reality, maybe some of the married couples or elderly parents already bought housing some time ago and it is not so easy to move to be closer to be in the same neighbourhood and housing. So maybe in terms of public policy, (it would be good) to look at how to make it easier for people who are living further apart but now because of the caring needs, they want to be living closer, and how to make it easier to move."

INTER-GENERATIONAL CONTACT

And perhaps because of the distance, inter-generational contact seems to be affected. In 2003, some 76.4 per cent of married respondents had said they see their elderly parents either daily or at least once a week. In 2013, the proportion dropped to 70.6 per cent.

In fact, 18.8 per cent of respondents said they either never or keep in touch with their elderly parents just a few times a year.

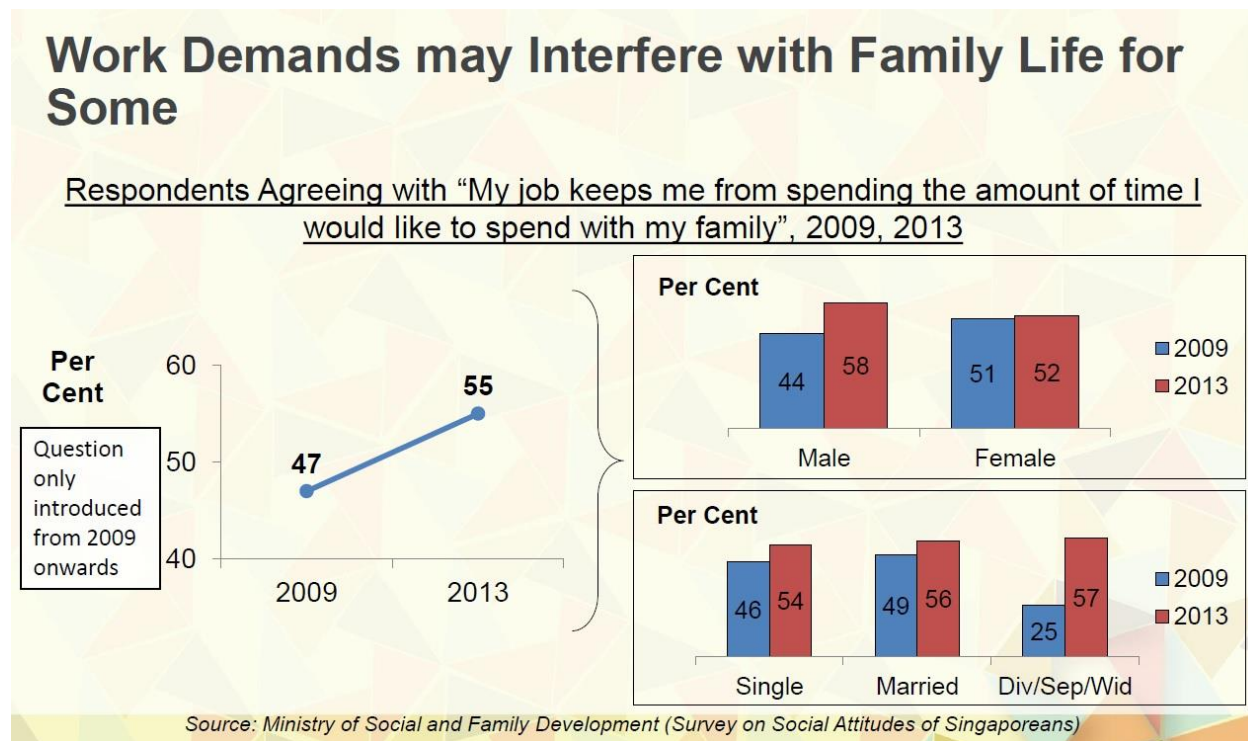
Prof Yeung noted: "People have many demands and young couples are working long hours. We know from statistics that Singapore adults are working very long hours and children's schooling is very demanding."

The inter-generational bonding further weakens as the age gap widens - 71.4 per cent of those aged between 65 and 74 said they do not discuss their personal lives with their grandchildren; the figure goes up to 80 per cent among those aged 75 and above.

Dr Mathew Mathews, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, said: "Values transmission is important, and we notice that less than 30 per cent of grandparents actually discuss their personal life with their grandchildren. That is really a loss because if more are able to do that, grandchildren would be more richer for being able to catch a lot more value, which may be important to their lives, going forward."

HIGHER EXPECTATIONS AND EVOLVING ROLES

And while there is an increasing number of companies offering some form of flexi-work arrangement, 55 per cent of respondents still said their job keeps them from spending the amount of time they would like, with their family.



Dr Mathews said it may be because expectations are higher and roles are evolving.

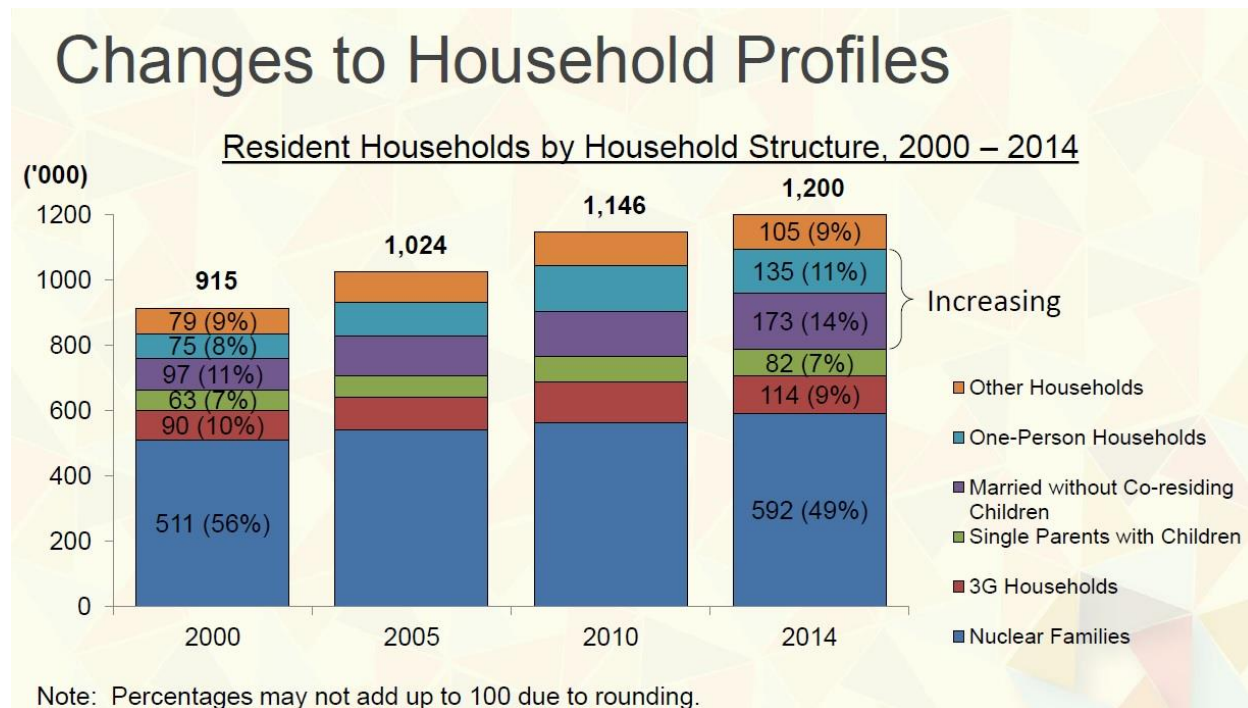
He said: "What we have here now is that more men are expressing the fact that work and family life is in conflict. We notice that in the newer wave of the survey, and I think it speaks to the fact that increasingly, wives also want their men to step up and be involved in caregiving roles which previously more of them shied away from but today the expectation is higher on them."

Researchers also point to the growing number of single households saying that it is important to build on community networks and targeted support, especially for vulnerable groups, such as women who are divorced or widowed.

DROP IN NUCLEAR FAMILIES

Meanwhile, the number of nuclear families was down 7 per cent last year, from 56 per cent of resident households in 2000, according to data released at the Social Service Partners Conference 2015 on Tuesday (May 26).

The fall in the proportion of nuclear families, which are two-generation couple-based households either living with parents or with children, came despite its increase from 511 in 2000 to 592 in 2014. The proportion of 3G - households comprising three or more generations - families also dropped from 10 per cent to 9 per cent.



Conversely, one-person households saw an increase from 8 per cent in 2000 to 11 per cent in 2014. The proportion of married couples without co-residing children in households also rose from 11 per cent to 14 per cent over four years.

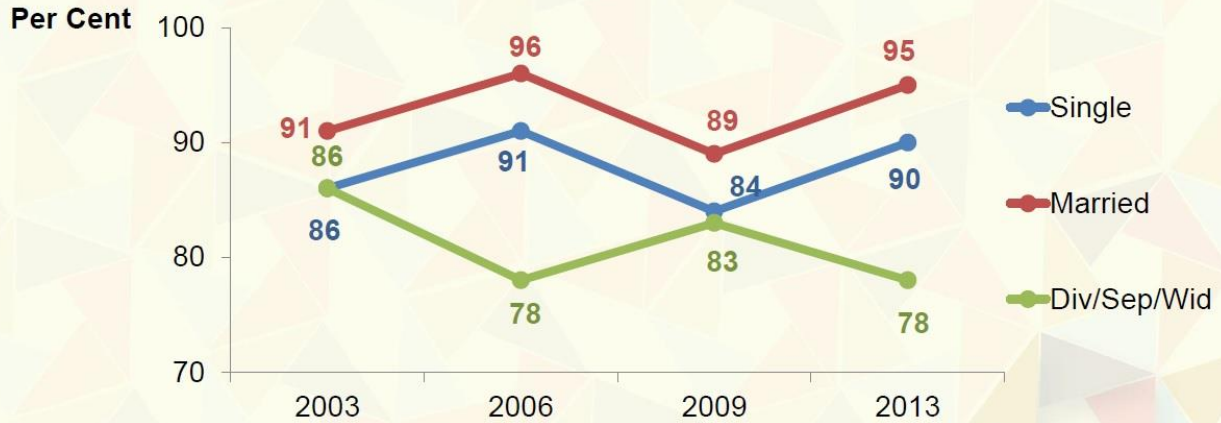
DIVORCED, SEPARATED, WIDOWED LESS SATISFIED WITH FAMILY LIFE

One key finding from the survey was that fewer divorced, separated or widowed respondents said they are satisfied with their family life, unlike the single or married cohorts.

The survey showed a 9.3 per cent drop in the number of divorced, separated or widowed respondents agreeing that their family life is satisfying, compared to the 4.6 per cent for singles.

Satisfaction with Family Life

Respondents Agreeing with “I am satisfied with my family life”, 2003 – 2013



Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development (Survey on Social Attitudes of Singaporeans)

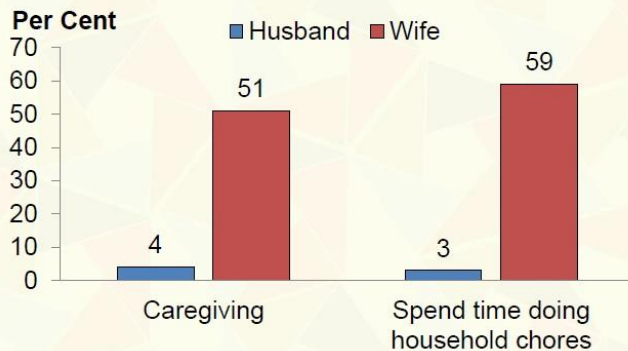
Despite the 4.3 per cent increase in married respondents who are happy with their family life, those who are satisfied with their marriage dropped from 96 per cent in 2009 to 92 per cent in 2013. The survey also showed that 94 per cent of males were satisfied with their marriage, compared to 89 per cent of females.

A stark difference was also observed between the number of wives who said they do more caregiving and household chores than the number of husbands who said they do. For example, 59 per cent of wives indicated themselves as spending more time doing household chores, compared to 3 per cent of husbands.

Gender Equity in the Private Sphere

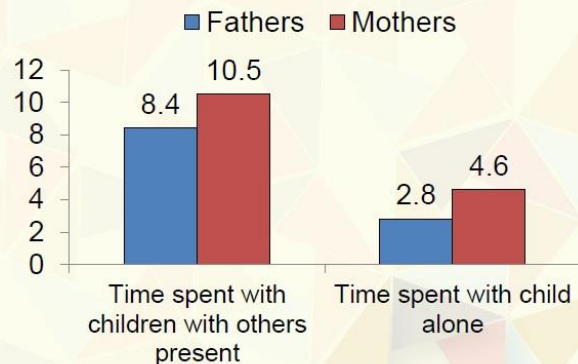
Respondents who indicated ‘Me’ when asked:

“Between your spouse and yourself, who does more of the following....,2013



Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development (Survey on Social Attitudes of Singaporeans)

Average No. of Hours Spent with Child During Weekend, 2009



Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development (Fatherhood Perception Survey 2009)

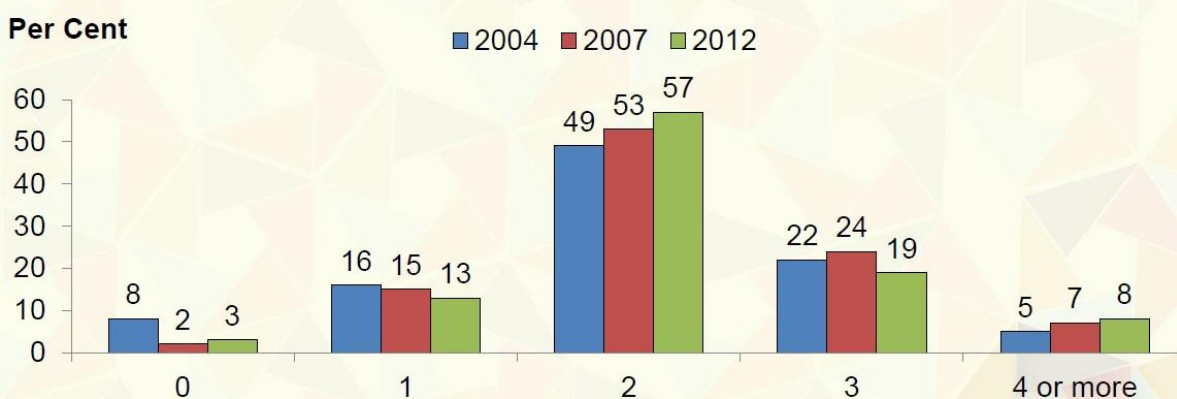
Similarly, mothers were revealed to spend almost double the time alone with their children during the weekend compared to the fathers.

MORE SINGLES DESIRE TO GET MARRIED

In another survey, the number of single respondents who desire to get married increased from 74 per cent in 2004, to 85 per cent in 2012. As for parenthood aspirations, the Marriage and Parenthood Survey 2012 revealed that a 4 per cent increase in married respondents who intend to have two children was observed between 2007 and 2012.

Parenthood Aspirations

Married Respondents' Intended Number of Children, 2004 – 2012



Source: National Population and Talent Division (Marriage and Parenthood Survey 2012)

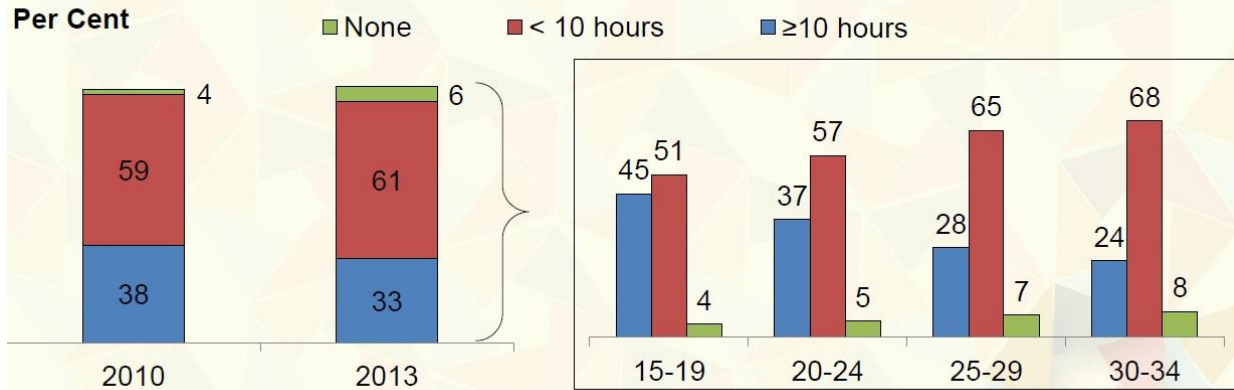
FAMILIES SPENDING LESS TIME TOGETHER

Meanwhile, according to the National Youth Survey 2013 conducted by the National Youth Council, more than half of respondents across all age groups said they spend less than 10 hours with family members in a week.

A total of 55 per cent of respondents between the ages of 15 and 19 said they spend less than 10 hours, while the age-groups 20-24, 25-29 and 30-34 registered 62 per cent, 72 per cent and 74 per cent respectively.

Time Spent with Family or Relatives

Youths' Hours Spent on Activities with Parents or Other Relatives in a Week, 2010, 2013



Source: National Youth Council (National Youth Survey 2013)

Additionally, 63 per cent of youths surveyed by the National Youth Council in 2010 said they spend less than 10 hours with their parents or relatives in a week, out of which 4 per cent indicated no time is spent.

In comparison, 2013's results showed 67 per cent of youths spending less than 10 hours, and 6 per cent spending zero hours with their parents and relatives in a week.