

82% of S'poreans aged 21-34 don't think marriage is necessary, most still want to get hitched: IPS poll

The poll explored attitudes towards dating, marriage, and parenthood.

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In a poll conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), a significant majority of younger respondents agreed that it is acceptable to remain single.

The poll was carried out between November to December 2023, ahead of the Singapore Perspectives conference on Jan. 22 and 29, 2024, which centres around the theme of "Youth".

It aimed to gauge the attitudes, values, and opinions of Singaporeans towards issues regarding well-being, work, family, civic engagement, and life transitions, as well as understand whether and how these sentiments may vary across age groups.

IPS polled a total of 2,356 Singapore citizens and permanent residents aged 21 to 64 who were recruited from online panels. The results were weighted for age group, gender, and ethnicity.

Comparisons across age groups were also conducted to check for intergenerational similarities and differences.

The (un)necessity of marriage and kids

A section of the poll was dedicated to finding out how the younger generation viewed the idea of family.

Is singlehood acceptable?

82 per cent of respondents from the youngest age group sampled — aged 21 to 34 — said it is acceptable for people to choose singlehood.

It is worth noting that this percentage is not far off from the overall 78 per cent, which included other respondents up till age 64, who mostly echoed that choosing singlehood was acceptable.

Among those aged 35 to 49, 78 per cent agreed that it was acceptable to remain single.

Among those aged 50 to 64, 75 per cent agreed that it was acceptable to remain single.

Is marriage necessary?

70 per cent of those aged 21 to 34 agreed that it is not necessary to get married.

This is compared to 58 per cent and 50 per cent in the 35 to 49 and 50 to 64 age groups, respectively.

Is it necessary to have children in a marriage?

Within the youngest age group of 21 to 34, 72 per cent were agreeable to the idea that marriage does not need to lead to children.

This is compared to 63 per cent and 49 per cent in the 35 to 49 and 50 to 64 age groups, respectively.

Majority of younger participants still desired marriage and kids

Interestingly, despite their views toward the non-necessity of marriage and having children within a marriage, the majority of younger participants still desired marriage and kids for themselves.

68 per cent of respondents aged 21 to 34 who were unmarried foresee themselves getting married in Singapore in the future.

And 67 per cent of respondents aged 21 to 34 who did not have children said they hope to have children one day.

Furthermore, these figures are higher among those who are in a relationship.

Among the respondents aged 21 to 34 who are dating, 84 per cent foresee themselves getting married in Singapore in the future.

And, among the respondents aged 21 to 34 who are dating or married, 76 per cent hope to have children in the future.

The seemingly contradictory results, though baffling, were said to be broadly consistent with findings in youth research, according to IPS Senior Research Fellow Kalpana Vignehsa.

She explained that there are attitudinal shifts, in that fewer and fewer youth respondents find romantic relationships and parenting to be essential for self fulfilment.

In other words, it seems that perceptions of marriage and parenthood have shifted, more so than actual family aspirations and plans.

What's holding people back from family aspirations?

Why do people not want to have children?

Participants across all age groups pointed to the high cost and high stress levels of raising kids as the main culprits.

Other notable factors include the worry that they are unable to provide enough care and support, as well as the lack of time or energy.

When it comes to dating, younger respondents aged 21 to 34 cite "other priorities" like jobs, studies, and self-discovery, as well as a lack of time or energy as the main reasons for staying single.

As for obstacles to getting married, the younger participants are more prone to being deterred by the cost of getting married in Singapore, while older participants were more inclined to point to a preference for singlehood.

IPS Adjunct Senior Research Fellow Chew Han Ei commented that today's younger people have "checkboxes" to fulfil before setting their eyes on marriage.

These "checkboxes", which Chew described as being "nearly all material in nature", include securing a good job, a home, and a comfortable life.

In contrast, for previous generations, the priorities of getting married and getting a job were more "equally weighted" without a strict order, Chew said.

Other findings on work and civic engagement

IPS's poll also set out to address other areas of concerns in the lives of young Singaporeans, such as their work and civic engagement.

Results revealed that younger respondents are more worried about their work prospects, and find it difficult to attain their preferred form of employment in Singapore.

But not all is bleak for our youths.

More open to and prepared for the future of work, their generation displays a readiness to adapt to changing working landscapes, such as being willing to explore different career paths and tackle technological advances.

Younger respondents are also more civically engaged, both online and offline, as compared to their older counterparts.