

IPS Perception of Policies in Singapore
(POPS) Survey 6:
Perceptions of Singles on Marriage and
Having Children

Report

June 2013

Acknowledgement

IPS is grateful to Tote Board and Singapore Pools for their support of this study.



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IPS Perception of Policies in Singapore (POPS) Survey 6: Perceptions of Singles on Marriage and Having Children

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1. Executive Summary

The Perception of Policies in Singapore (POPS) Survey 6 (hereafter POPS(6)) was commissioned by the Institute of Policy Studies to understand the attitudes and perceptions of single Singaporean residents towards marriage, family and parenthood, including their perspectives on pre-marital co-habitation and having children out-of-wedlock. A total of 2,000 Singapore citizens and permanent residents who have never married, aged 21–39 years, were interviewed.

The POPS(6) results show that singles by and large still desired marriage and parenthood, expressing pro-marriage and pro-family views. Overall, both men and women expected to marry nearly a year later than the age they thought ideal for their gender (30.4 and 28.7 years, respectively). The main reasons cited for this difference were the delayed acquisition of the markers of adulthood (education, career, work, a home of their own) and not having a suitable partner. The POPS(6) survey results are consistent with previous studies on singles' attitudes towards marriage and parenthood, but provide additional evidence of the clash of materialistic and individualistic values amongst singles with more traditional family-oriented societal norms.

A gender gap in attitudes towards marriage, parenthood and married life

Male respondents in the POPS(6) survey were more desirous of marriage, less specific in their preferences with regard to a marriage partner and expressed egalitarian expectations of their responsibilities once married. Female respondents however appeared to be less keen on marriage, more specific in their preferences in a marriage partner and were more likely to profess a desire for independence. POPS(6) survey results suggest that whilst single male attitudes may be pro-marriage and pro-parenthood, females are either (1) not as willing to relinquish their independence and freedom as the males and/or (2) not convinced by their prospective spouses' egalitarian views on their roles in the family.

Attitudes towards co-habitation

Almost two-thirds (66%) of respondents considered co-habitation to be acceptable in concept. However, less than half (49%) indicated they would co-habit before marriage when the question was personalised ("Would *you* live with your partner before marriage?"). Our findings also indicate that the pre-dominant concept of co-habitation amongst singles is that of a pre-marital living arrangement with their intended spouse.

Attitudes towards having children out-of-wedlock

POPS(6) respondents had a conservative attitude towards out-of-wedlock births, both when expressed conceptually as well as when it was personalised. Between both sexes, 36% found unmarried couples having children to be acceptable, while 38% found it to be unacceptable, with the remainder expressing no opinion or not having a strong view. Only 7% of respondents would themselves have a birth out-of-wedlock. POPS(6) survey results show the prevalence of traditional views towards pre-marital sexual relations and out-of-

wedlock births, which indicate that it would be difficult to expect out-of-wedlock births to form a meaningful factor in any hoped-for rebound from currently ultra-low fertility levels.

Recommendations

Policy prescriptions that may facilitate a recovery from currently ultra-low fertility levels could be based on two mutually compatible strategies: (1) facilitating the more rapid achievement of the markers of adulthood at an earlier age and (2) engineering a shift away from materialistic attitudes. The first strategy may involve measures such as accelerating the access by young unmarried couples to affordable housing, and reducing the uncertainties around the financial and opportunity costs of child-rearing and childcare — some of which have already been recently announced in the 2013 Marriage and Parenthood Package. Taking the POPS(6) survey findings that the dominant notion of co-habitation in Singapore is that of a pre-marital living arrangement with an intended spouse, we propose unmarried couples who have bid for Housing & Development Board build-to-order flats (but are as yet unsuccessful) be given access to rental flats to allow them to acquire one of the important markers of adulthood more quickly.

It is not clear what government can or should do on the second strategy. Efforts to steer society from considering child-bearing and rearing from a purely economic calculus would help, as would a nation-wide shift away from a productivist value system. More research is required on issues such as changing gender roles and responsibilities for housework and child-rearing, and the constraints or barriers to achieving the markers of adulthood.

2. Background

Over a six-week period from mid-August to early October 2012, the Institute of Policy Studies polled single Singapore residents on a range of issues regarding marriage and having children, including pre-marital cohabitation and having children out-of-wedlock. This study is the sixth in the IPS Perception of Policies in Singapore series.

3. Methodology

The sample comprised Singapore citizens and permanent residents who have never married, aged 21–39 years, i.e., those born between 1973 and 1993. A total of 2,000 interviews were successfully completed.

Interviews were conducted via telephone using the Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) system. Landline and mobile phone numbers were randomly generated by SPSS. Those who were interviewed via mobile phones comprised 80% of the respondents, while the remainder were interviewed via landlines.

The response rates of the fieldwork are detailed in the tables below.

Table 1. Response rate

	Completed		Refused		Ineligible		No answer		Sub total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Landline	394	10%	882	23%	2,110	54%	504	13%	3,890	100%
Mobile	1,606	8%	3,809	19%	13,432	67%	1,203	6%	20,050	100%
Total	2,000	8%	4,691	20%	15,542	65%	1,707	7%	23,940	100%

Table 2. Contact and co-operation rates

	Contact rate (percentage of calls in which an eligible subject single was reached)	Co-operation rate (percentage of calls to eligible subject singles that yielded an interview)
Landline	32.8%	30.9%
Mobile	27.0%	29.7%
Total	27.9%	29.9%

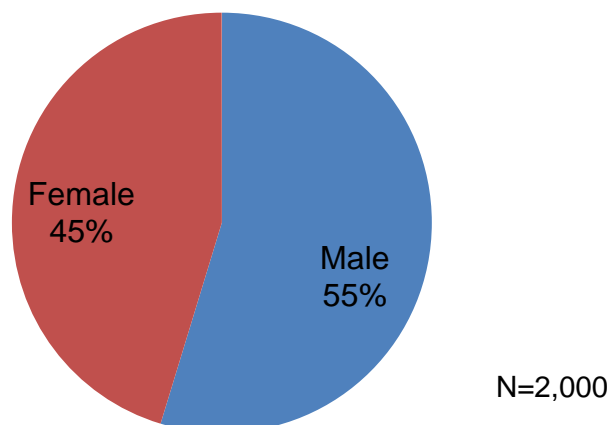
Fieldwork was conducted by interviewers from ML Research Consultants over the period 15 August–3 October 2012.

In the data analysis stage, weights were used in a three-way interlocking matrix (Age*Gender*Ethnicity) so that the resultant distribution in terms of these three variables reflected the distribution of persons who never married amongst the total resident population. Only the weighted results are presented in this report.

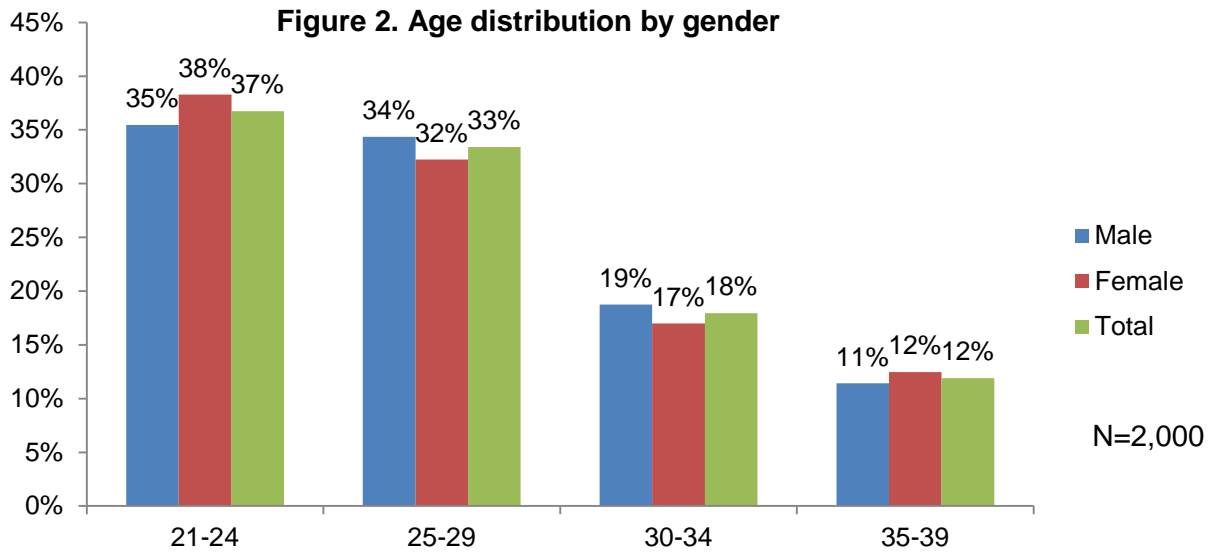
4. Respondents' characteristics

The data in this section relates to the profile of the group under study.

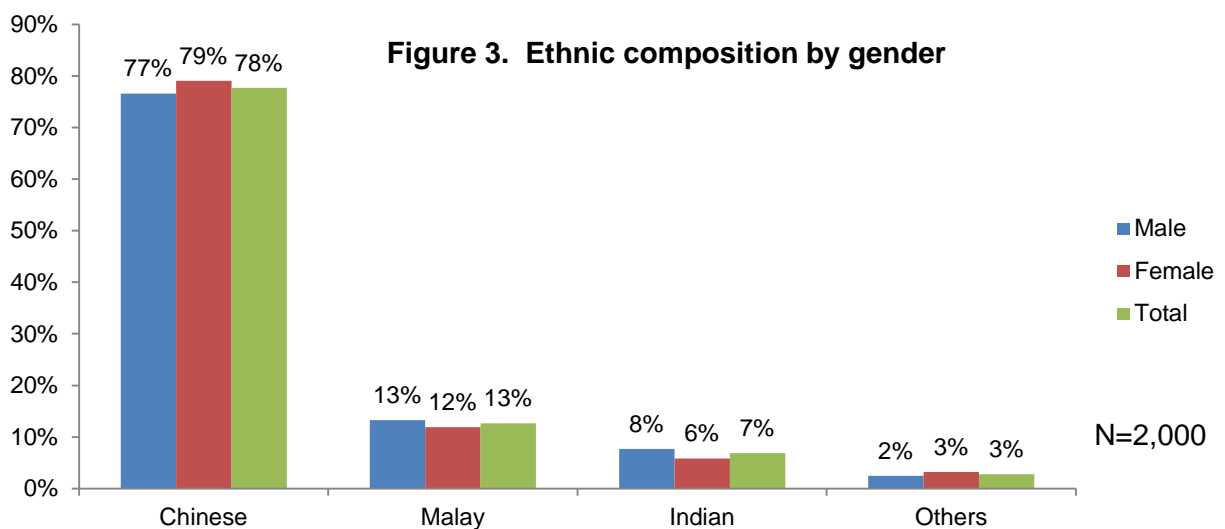
Male respondents made up 55% of the survey, while 45% were female (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Gender distribution

Given the survey focus on respondents who never married, there was a greater proportion of POPS(6) respondents in the younger age groups (Figure 2). The largest age group was 21–24 (37%), followed by the 25–29 age group (33%), whilst only 12% of the respondents were aged 35 to 39. The median age was 26 for the male respondents and 25 for female respondents.

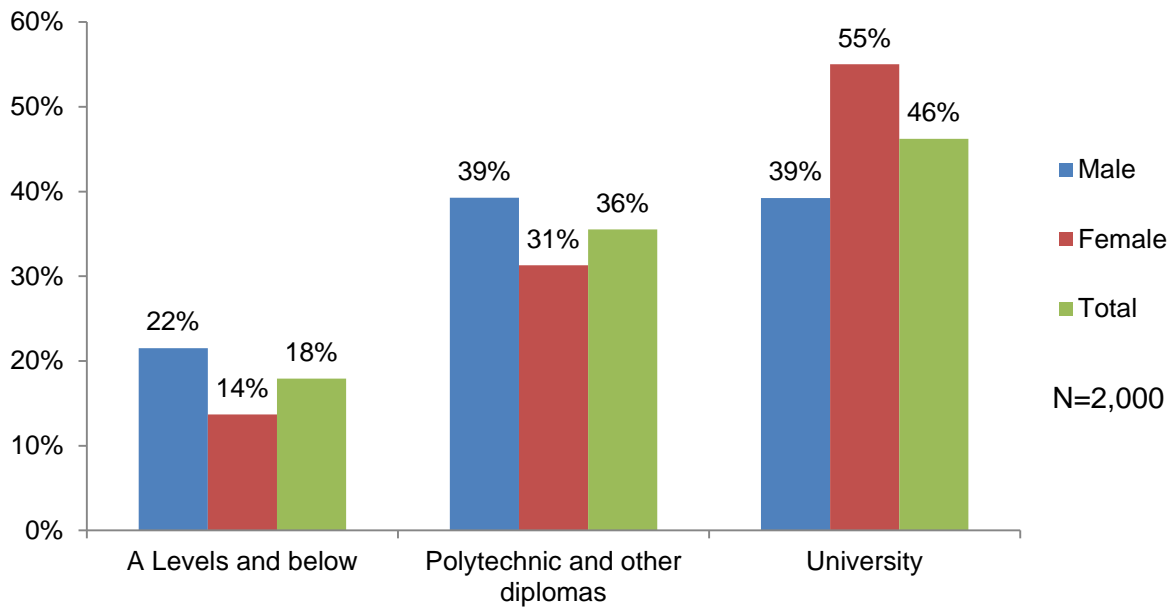


In terms of ethnicity, slightly more than three-quarters (78%) were Chinese, 13% Malay, 7% Indian, with those of other ethnic backgrounds making up the remaining 3% (Figure 3).



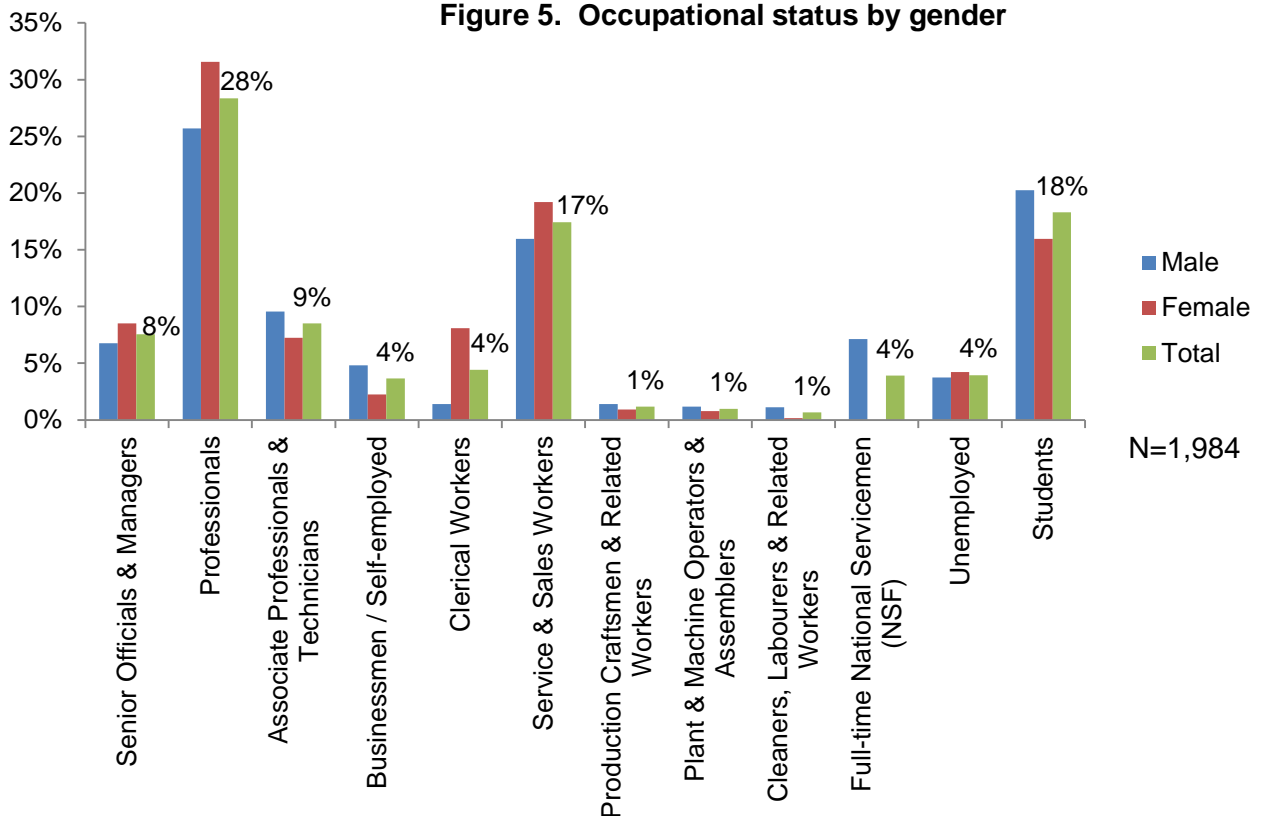
Over four-fifths (82%) of the group under study had tertiary educational qualifications (Figure 4). Females in the sample had higher educational attainment on average as compared with males, with 86% of females having tertiary level educational qualifications, whilst 78% of males had tertiary educational qualifications.

Figure 4. Educational attainment by gender



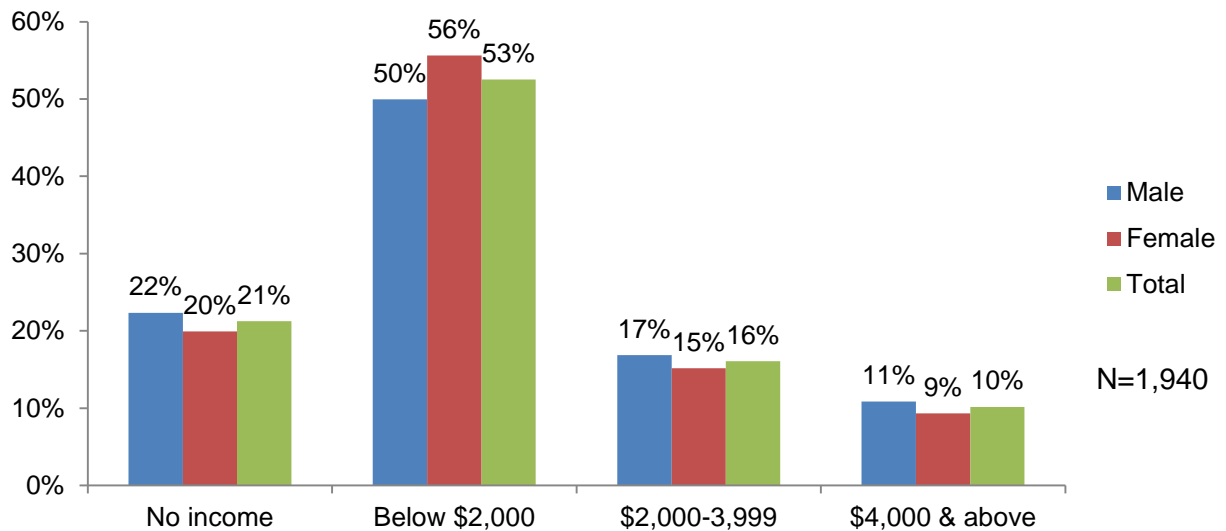
The POPS(6) study was conducted against a backdrop of full employment. According to the Ministry of Manpower’s report on in the third quarter of 2012, the unemployment rate in September 2012 was 2.8% for Singapore residents. As such, only 4% of economically active respondents (excluding students and full-time NSmen) classified themselves as unemployed (Figure 5). The largest categories of occupations for the group under study were professionals (28%), sales and service workers (17%) and students (18%).

Figure 5. Occupational status by gender



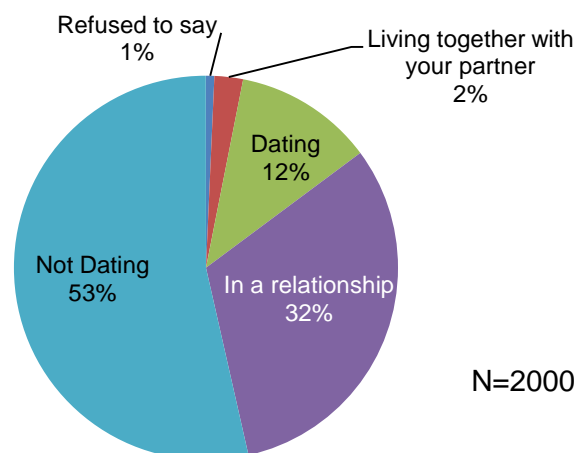
The modal category for the personal monthly incomes of the group under study was below \$2,000, accounting for about 53% of those who provided a response to this question (Figure 6). Another 21% indicated they had no income, consistent with the proportions of the unemployed, students and full-time NSmen.

Figure 6. Personal monthly income by gender



POPS(6) respondents were asked about their relationship status, if they were dating, in a relationship or living with a partner. The majority (53%) indicated they were not dating at the time of the study, and 43.3% said they were either in a relationship or were dating (Figure 7). The remaining 2.4% of the respondents indicated they were living with their partners.

Figure 7. Current relationship status



Source: Q26. Are you currently?

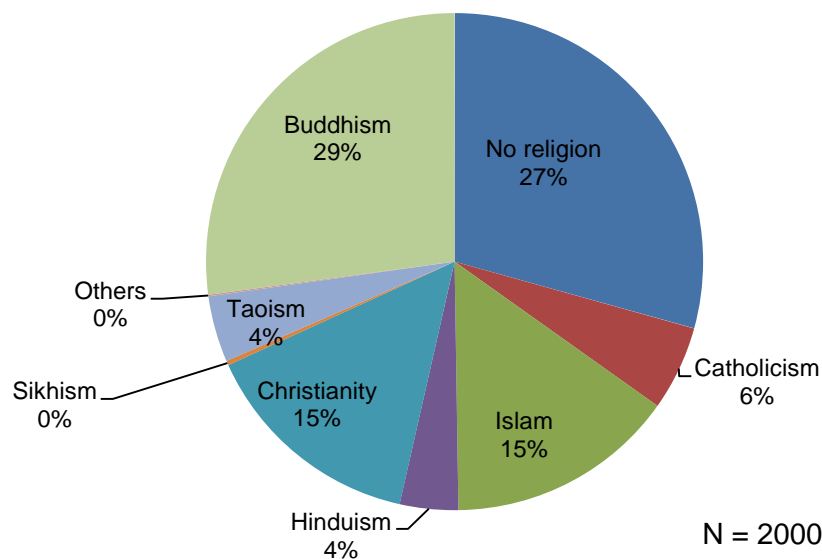
A considerably larger percentage of 25–29 year-olds indicated that they were “in a relationship” than in the other age groups (Table 3). As might be expected, proportionately more respondents in the 35–39 age group answered that they were living together with their partners than in the younger age groups. There were no other significant differences in the relationship status by the age group of the POPS(6) respondents.

Table 3. Relationship status by age group

		Q26. Are you currently _____?					Total
		1. Not dating	2. Dating	3. In a relationship	4. Living together with your partner	5. Refused to answer	
Q2. What was your age on your last birthday?	21–24 years	57.8%	11.7%	29.4%	0.8%	0.3%	735
	25–29 years	45.7%	13.2%	37.6%	2.8%	0.7%	668
	30–34 years	56.1%	13.1%	27.3%	2.3%	1.2%	359
	35–39 years	58.6%	5.7%	27.9%	6.6%	1.2%	238
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of cases (N)		1,071	235	632	49	14	2,000

Respondents were also asked about their religious affiliation and a question on their religiosity. Among them, 29% were Buddhists, 15% were Muslims, 15% were non-Catholic Christians and 6% were Catholics (Figure 8). Hindus and Taoists made up 4% each. Those professing having no religion represented 27% of the group under study.

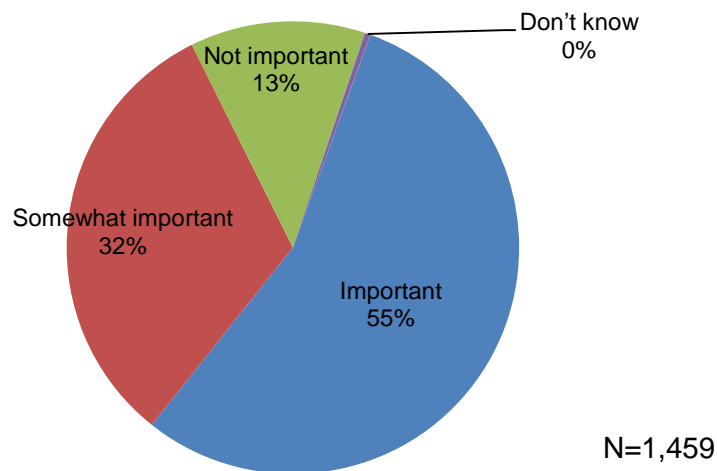
Figure 8. Religious affiliation



Source: Q21. What is your religion?

Respondents with religious affiliations were asked how important their religions were to them. Of these respondents, 87% replied that religion was either important or somewhat important, whilst 13% said their religion was not important (Figure 9). Amongst all respondents, 36% had either no religion or indicated that their religion was not important to them.

Figure 9. Religiosity



Source: Q22. How important is your religion to you?

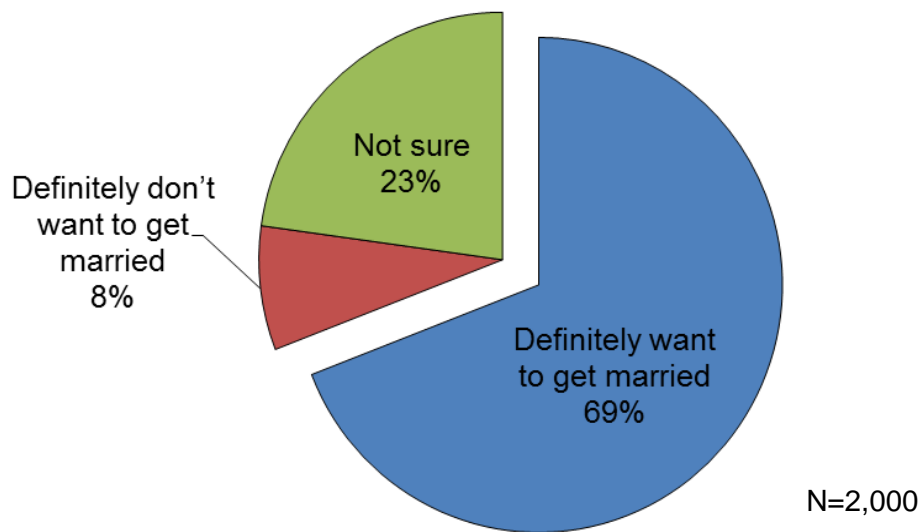
5. Detailed findings

5.1 Desirability of marriage and finding a marriage partner

5.1.1 Desirability of marriage

Of the respondents, 69% said they definitely wanted to get married while 8% said they definitely did not (Figure 10). A large proportion, 23%, was not sure.

Figure 10. Desirability of marriage



Source: Q5. How desirable is marriage to you?

There were noticeable gender, age, ethnic and relationship status differences in responses to the question regarding the desirability of marriage. Significantly more males (72.3%) indicated that they definitely wanted to get married as compared with females (65.1%) (Table 4).

Table 4. Desirability of marriage by gender

		Q1.1 Gender		Total
		1. Male	2. Female	
Q5. How desirable is marriage to you?	1. Definitely want to get married	72.3%	65.1%	69.1%
	2. Definitely don't want to get married	7.3%	9.1%	8.1%
	3. Not sure	20.4%	25.8%	22.8%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0
N		1,095	906	2,001

The results show a strong inverse correlation with the ages of the respondents, i.e., the younger the respondent, the greater the likelihood of saying they wanted to get married. As much as 79.3% of the respondents aged 21–24 years indicated they definitely wanted to get married, whilst only 38.7% of the respondents aged 35–39 answered this way (Table 5). Of the latter, 21% said they definitely did not want to get married, whilst 40.3% were not sure.

Table 5. Desirability of marriage by age group

		Q2 What was your age on your last birthday?				Total
		21–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	
Q5. How desirable is marriage to you?	1. Definitely want to get married	79.3%	76.9%	53.8%	38.7%	69.1%
	2. Definitely don't want to get married	4.6%	5.4%	11.7%	21.0%	8.1%
	3. Not sure	16.1%	17.7%	34.5%	40.3%	22.8%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N		735	668	359	238	2,000

Malay respondents were definitely desirous of marriage — 82.2% of Malay respondents said they definitely wanted to get married whilst only 65.7% of Chinese respondents answered in this way (Table 6).

Table 6. Desirability of marriage by ethnic group

		Q20. What is your ethnic group?				Total
		1. Chinese	2. Malay	3. Indian	4. Others	
Q5. How desirable is marriage to you?	1. Definitely want to get married	65.7%	82.2%	78.8%	80.0%	69.1%
	2. Definitely don't want to get married	8.8%	5.1%	6.6%	3.6%	8.1%
	3. Not sure	25.5%	12.6%	14.6%	16.4%	22.9%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N		1,555	253	137	55	2,000

Of the respondents who were not currently dating, a relatively large proportion (30.3%) said they were not sure how desirable marriage was for them (Table 7). In contrast, 83.9% of the respondents currently in a relationship indicated they definitely want to get married.

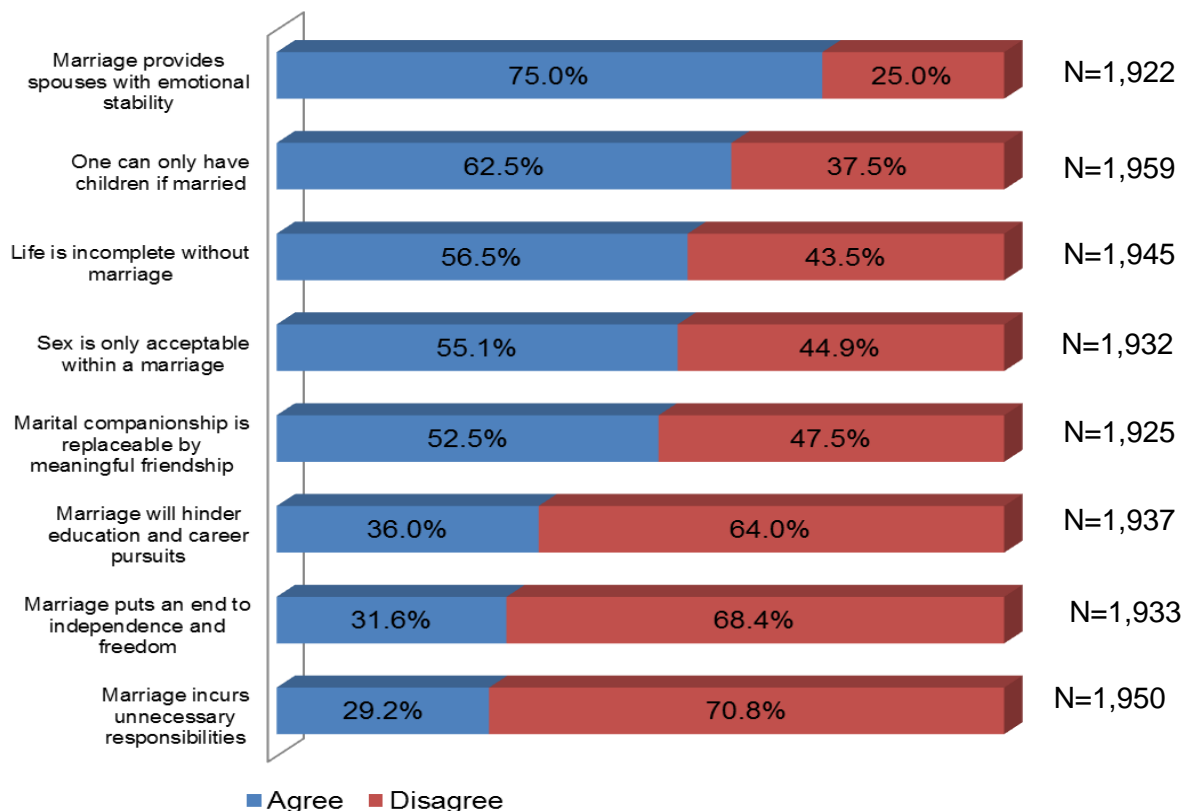
Table 7. Desirability of marriage by relationship status

		Q26. Are you currently _____?					Total
		1. Not dating	2. Dating	3. In a relationship	4. Living together with your partner	5. Refused to answer	
Q5. How desirable is marriage to you?	1. Definitely want to get married	59.3%	73.6%	83.9%	75.5%	42.9%	69.0%
	2. Definitely don't want to get married	10.5%	8.9%	3.5%	8.2%	21.4%	8.1%
	3. Not sure	30.3%	17.4%	12.7%	16.3%	35.7%	22.9%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N		1,071	235	632	49	14	2,001

Overall, POPS(6) respondents were pro-marriage, where 75% agreed with the statement “Marriage provides spouses with emotional stability” and 56.5% agreed with the statement “Life is incomplete without marriage” (Figure 11).

The majority also disagreed with the negatively worded statements “Marriage incurs unnecessary responsibilities”; “Marriage puts an end to independence and freedom”; and “Marriage will hinder education and career pursuits”. However, about half also agreed with the statement “Marital companionship is replaceable by meaningful friendship”.

Figure 11. Views towards marriage



Source: Q8. I will now read to you some statements on people’s views on marriage. Please say whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

Distinct gender differences were identified in the responses to some of the questions on attitudes towards marriage. For example, males were more likely to agree to the statement “Life is incomplete without marriage” (62.3%) than females (46.1%, see Table 8), whilst females were more likely to agree to the statement “Marital companionship is replaceable by meaningful friendship” (53.6% of females as compared with 48.1% of males, see Table 9).

Table 8. Agreement with Statement “Life is incomplete without marriage” by gender

		Q1.1 Gender		Total
		1. Male	2. Female	
Q8a. Life is incomplete without marriage	Agree	62.3%	46.1%	55.0%
	Disagree	34.8%	51.3%	42.3%
	Don't know	2.9%	2.6%	2.8%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0
N		1,094	906	2,000

Table 9. Agreement with Statement “Marital companionship is replaceable by meaningful friendship” by gender

		Q1.1 Gender		Total
		1. Male	2. Female	
Q8b. Marital companionship is replaceable by meaningful friendship	Agree	48.1%	53.6%	50.6%
	Disagree	48.0%	42.9%	45.7%
	Don't know	4.0%	3.5%	3.8%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0
N		1,094	906	2,000

Older respondents were found to have a less sanguine perspective towards marriage than younger respondents. The proportions of those agreeing with the statement “Life is incomplete without marriage” declined with age, with 59.9% of those aged 21–24 agreeing with this statement, whilst only 42.2% of those in the 35–39 age group agreed (Figure 12). The proportions of those agreeing with the statement “Marital companionship is replaceable by meaningful relationship” were highest in the 30–34 age group (Figure 13).

Figure 12. Agreement with Statement “Life is incomplete without marriage” by age group

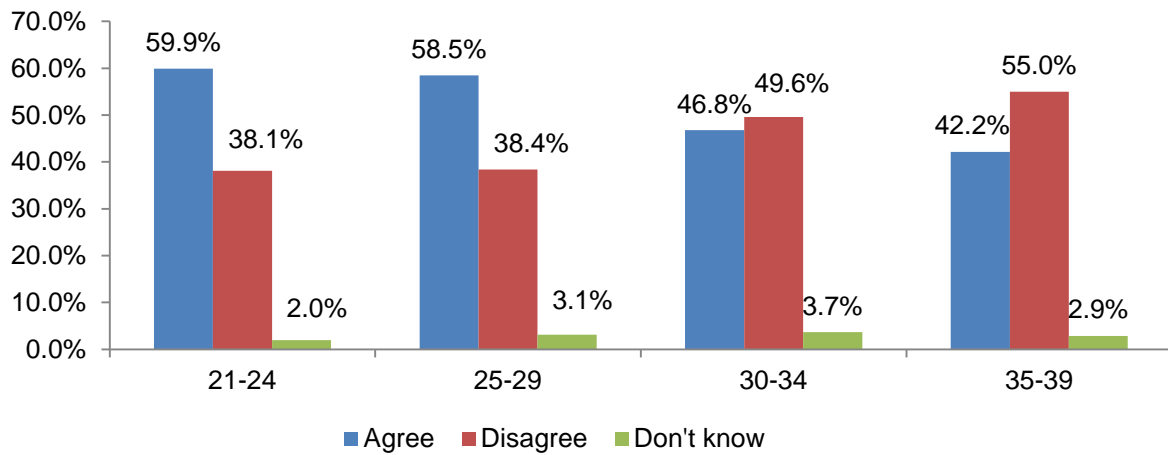
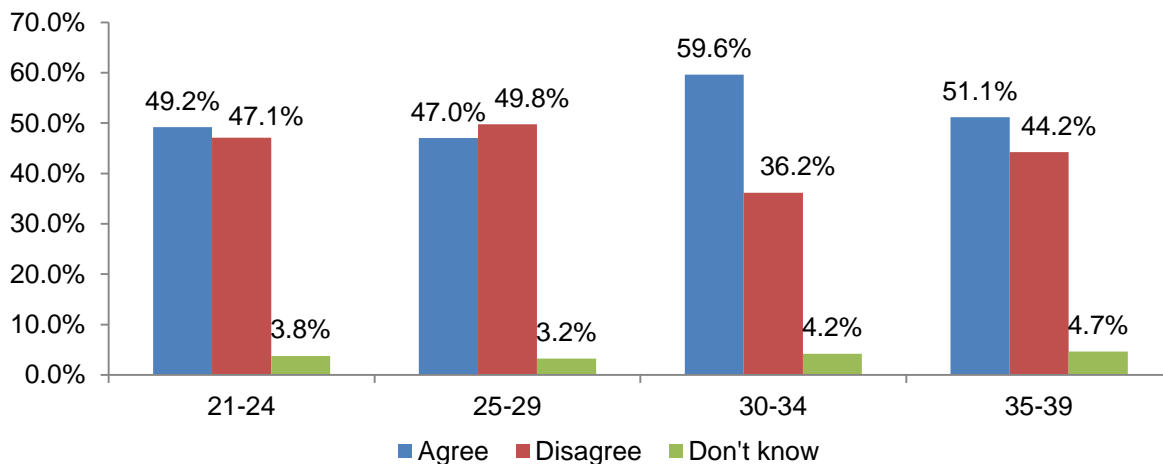


Figure 13. Agreement with Statement “Marital companionship is replaceable by meaningful friendship” by age group



5.1.2 Ideal and expected age at marriage

POPS(6) respondents' ideal ages for marriage were 29.5 years for men and 27.8 years for women (Table 10). However both men and women expected to marry nearly one year later — at 30.4 and 28.7 years, respectively — than the age they thought ideal for their gender (Table 11).

Table 10. Ideal age of marriage for males and females

	Males on male ideal age	Females on female ideal age
N	1,016	836
Mean	29.5	27.8
Median	30.0	27.0
Mode	30.0	28.0
Minimum	18.0	18.0
Maximum	40.0	40.0

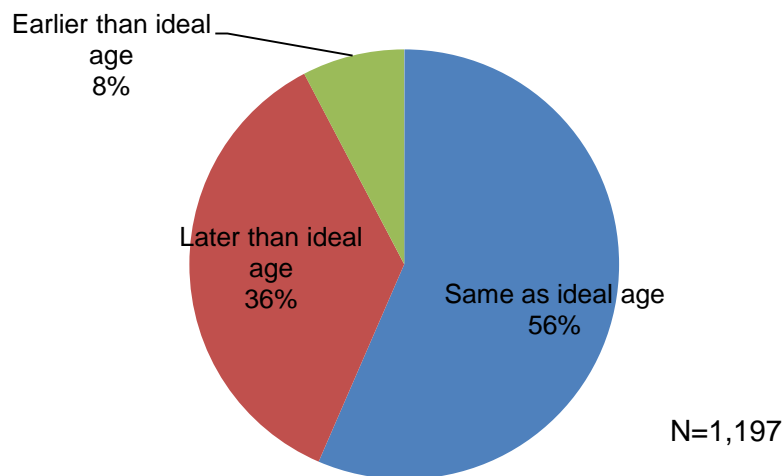
Source: Q4a What do you think is the ideal age for marriage for a male
Q4b What do you think is the ideal age for marriage for a female

Table 11. Actual expected age of marriage for males and females

Males		Females	
N	713	N	528
Mean	30.4	Mean	28.7
Median	30	Median	28
Mode	30	Mode	28
Minimum	22	Minimum	22
Maximum	41	Maximum	40

Source: Q5.1 At what age do you think you will get married?
Q6.1 Why do you think you will get married later than your ideal age?
Q6.2 Why do you think you will get married earlier than your ideal age?

Around 36% of the respondents who definitely wanted to get married (N=428) felt they would get married later than their ideal age of marriage (Figure 14). The top five reasons cited for their expectations of marrying at a later than the ideal age were: (1) wanting to be financially stable before marriage (33.3%); (2) pursuit of career and work commitments (21.0%); (3) have yet to meet a suitable partner (20.0%); (4) pursuit of education and further studies; and (5) availability/affordability of housing (7.3%).

Figure 14. Ideal age vs. actual expected age of marriage

Sources: Q5.1 At what age do you think you will get married?

Q6.1 Why do you think you will get married later than your ideal age?

Q6.2 Why do you think you will get married earlier than your ideal age?

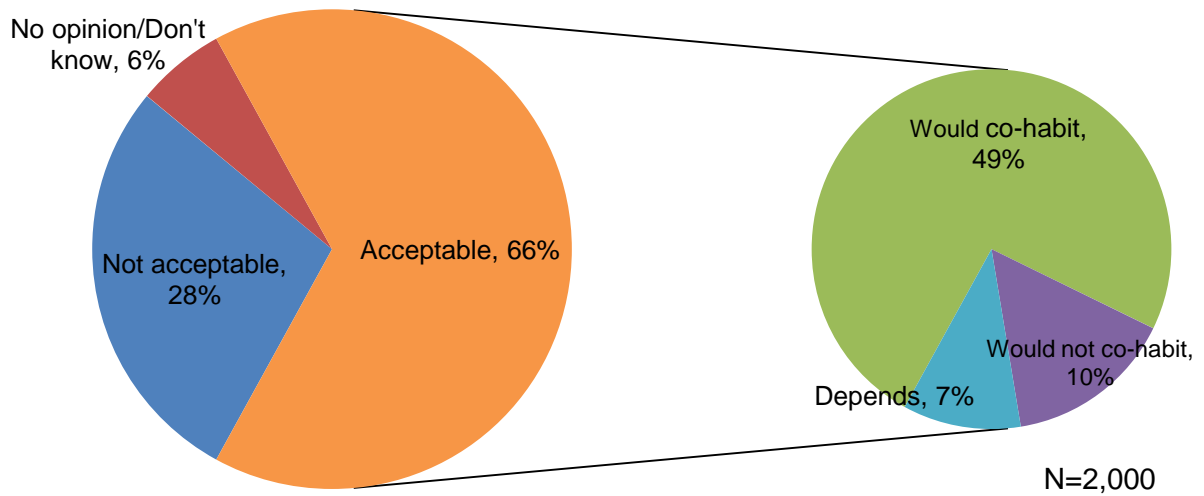
5.1.3 Attitudes towards co-habitation

A total of 1,314, or 66%, of the respondents felt that it was acceptable for a man and a woman to live together before registering for marriage (Figure 15).

When asked if they would themselves live with their partners before marriage, however, a smaller number, 976, or 49% of all respondents indicated they would do so (Figure 15). Another 131 or 7% of the total said it was acceptable depending on the situation.

As mentioned earlier, only 2.4% of the respondents indicated that they were living with their partner at the time of the study.

Figure 15. Views on co-habitation



Sources: Q9. If a man and a woman want to live together before registering for marriage, Do you feel this is ... ?

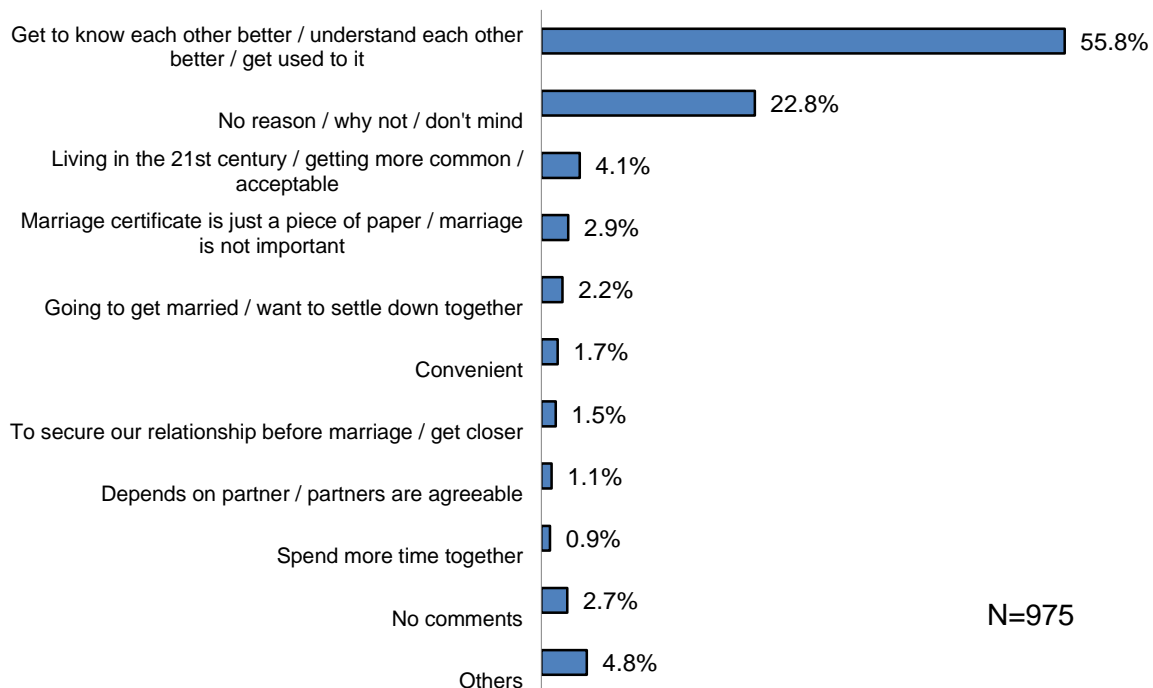
Q10. Would YOU live with your partner before marriage?

There was a strong correlation with religiosity in the respondents' answers to the concept of co-habitation, with 46% of those who said religion was important to them finding co-habitation with their partners before marriage unacceptable, as compared to only 15.8% of those whose religion was not important to them, and 14.0% of those with no religion (Table 12).

Table 12. Acceptability of pre-marital co-habitation by religiosity

		Q22. How important is your religion to you?				Total
		1. Important	2. Somewhat important	3. Not important	4. Refused to answer	
Q9. If a man and woman want to live together before marriage, do you feel this is:	1. Acceptable	47.8%	74.2%	78.7%	50.0%	60.1%
	2. Unacceptable	46.0%	18.9%	15.8%	0.0%	33.4%
	3. No opinion / did not know/	6.2%	6.9%	5.5%	50.0%	6.5%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N		804	466	183	6	1,459

The majority of those who found co-habitation acceptable and would themselves live with their partners before marriage gave reasons that suggested that they considered co-habitation a prelude to marriage (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Reasons for willingness to co-habit before marriage

Source: Q10.1. Would you live with your partner before marriage? Yes, why?

Males were more likely than females to indicate that they would live with their partners before marriage (Table 13).

Table 13. Willingness to co-habit by gender

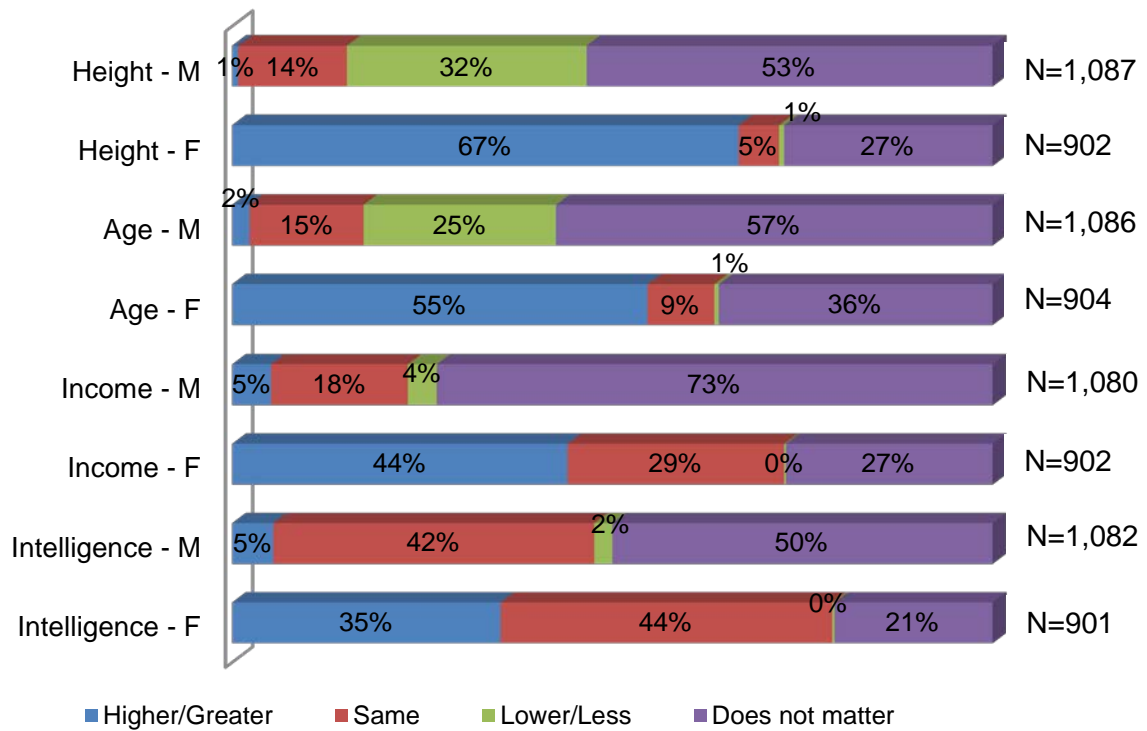
		Q1.1 Gender		Total
		1. Male	2. Female	
Q10. Would you live with your partner before marriage?	1. Yes	80.0%	66.5%	74.3%
	2. No	11.2%	22.0%	15.8%
	3. Depends	8.8%	11.5%	10.0%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0
N		759	555	1,314

5.2 Desired attributes of a marriage partner

Female respondents generally preferred their marriage partners to be older, taller, more intelligent, have a higher occupational status and earn more than them. Family social status differences were not a significant factor when comparing gender differences in the responses.

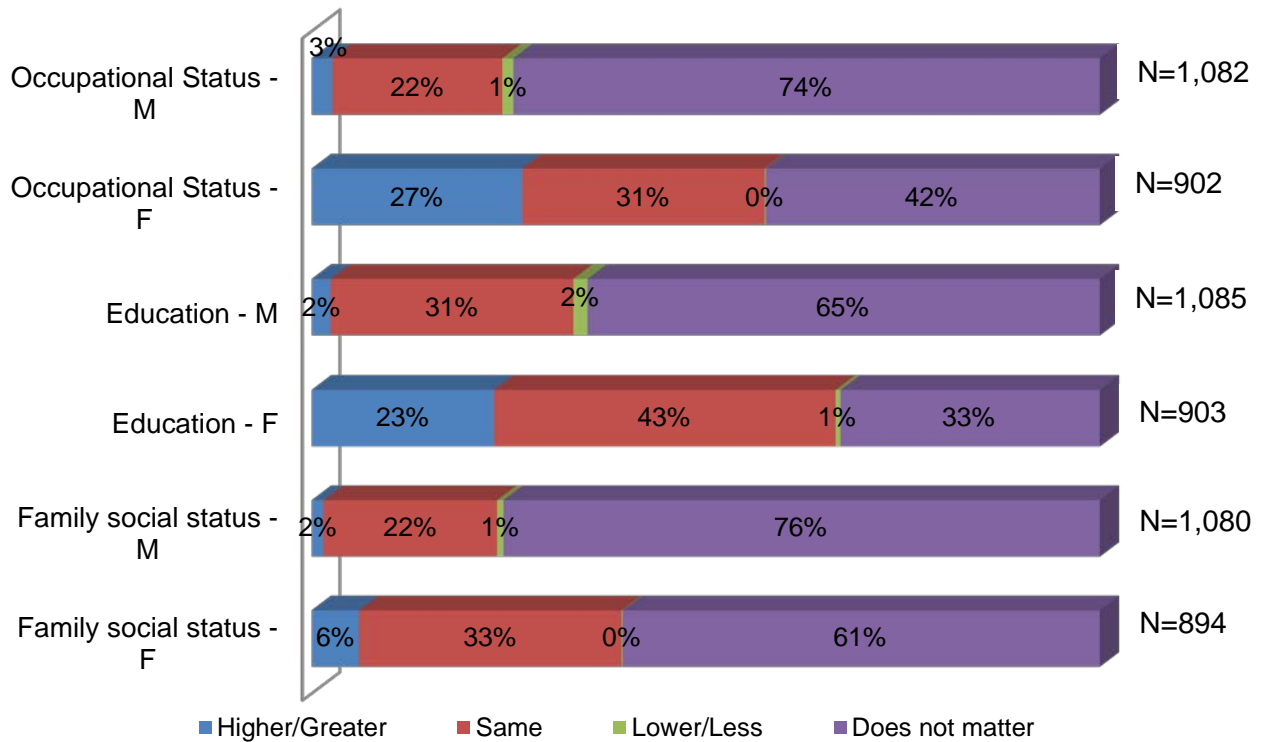
Male respondents were in general less particular than female respondents about their desired characteristics of a marriage partner. In all of the characteristics polled, a higher proportion of males than females responded that characteristics such as age, income, height, intelligence, family social status, educational attainment or occupation do not matter in their selection of a marriage partner (Figures 17 and 18).

Figure 17. Attributes of a desired marriage partner



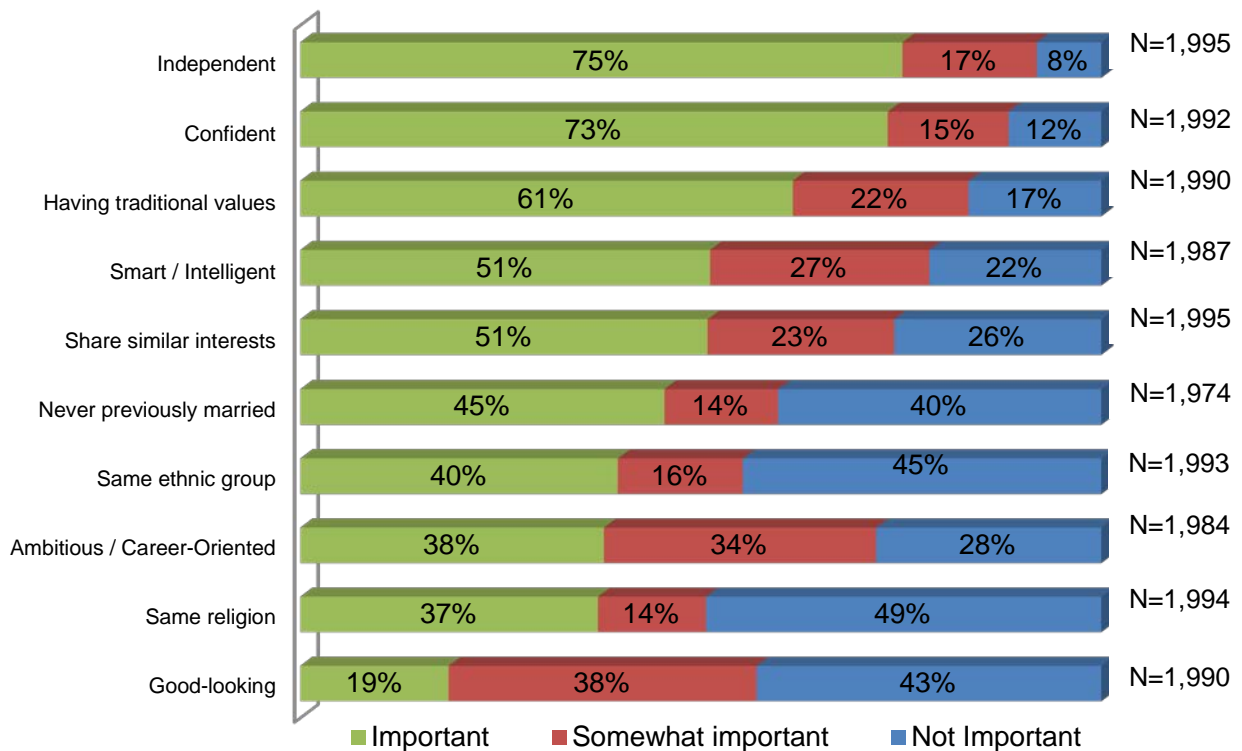
Source: Q11. When selecting a marriage partner, what would be your preferences regarding the following characteristics? Please indicate your preference in terms of a comparison with yourself.

Figure 18. Attributes of desired marriage partner (contd.)



Aspirational personal characteristics such as being independent, confident and intelligent ranked highly amongst the most important attributes of a potential marriage partner (Figure 19). Fundamental characteristics such as being from the same ethnic group and having the same religion were considered less important than some of those aspirational attributes by respondents, although religious and ethnic similarity ranked as more important than looks. There were no significant differences in gender responses towards the aspirational personal characteristics of a potential marriage partner.

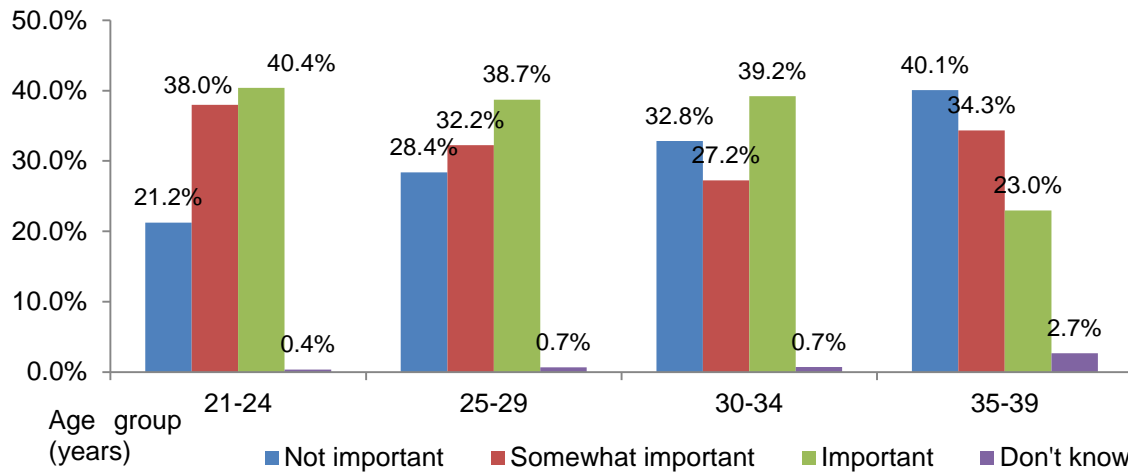
Figure 19. Desirable attributes a marriage partner



Source: Q12. How important are the following attributes to you in finding a potential marriage partner?

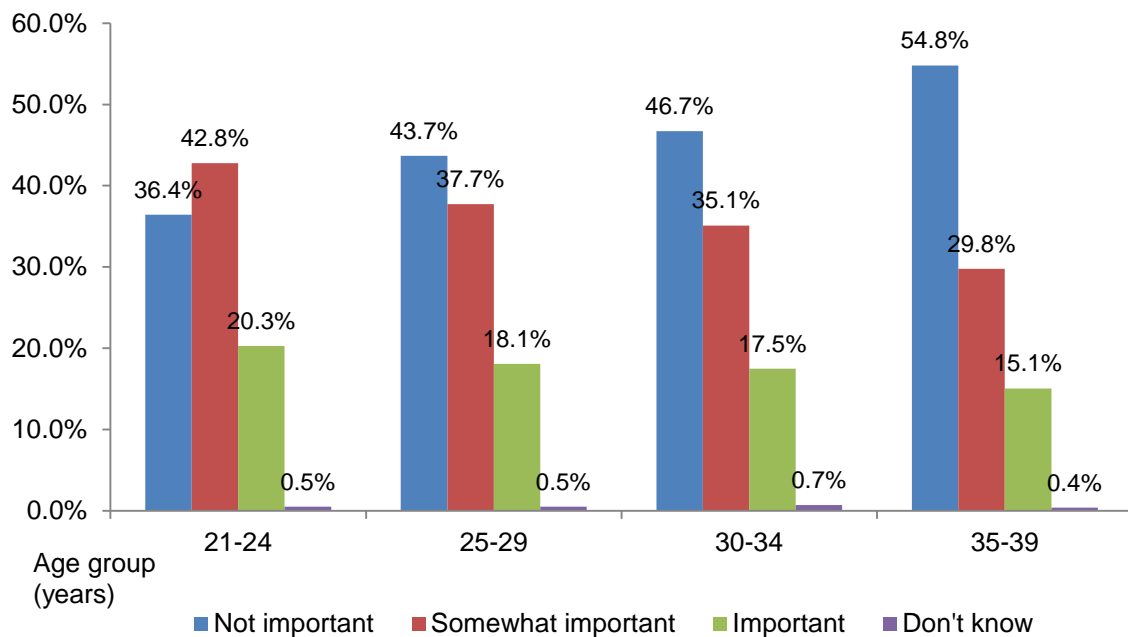
The more aspirational attributes of a potential marriage partner were less important to older respondents (Figures 20 and 21). Being ambitious and career-oriented was important as an attribute of a potential marriage partner for only 23% of the respondents aged 35–39 years, whereas 40.4% of the 21–24 year-olds said that this attribute was important to them. Likewise, the physical appearance of the potential partner was less important with age.

Figure 20. Importance of partner attribute: ambitious/career-oriented



Source: Q12a. How important are the following attributes to you in finding a potential marriage partner: Ambitious/Career-oriented?

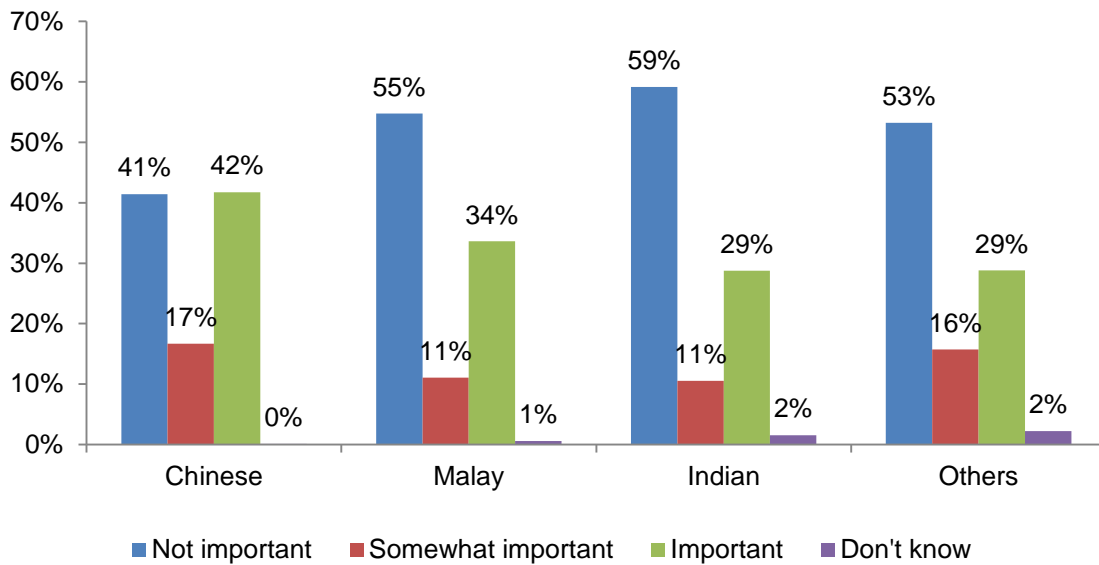
Figure 21. Importance of partner attribute: good looking



Source: Q12i. How important are the following attributes to you in finding a potential marriage partner: Good looking

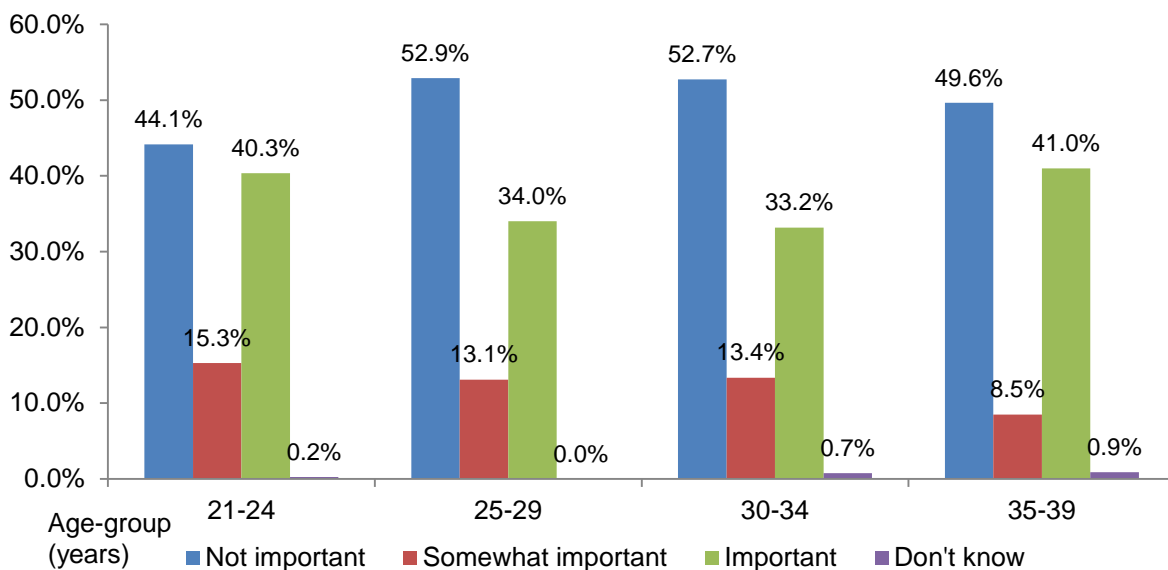
We did not find a significant relationship between age and ranking of importance of the fundamental attributes of a potential marriage partner such as similarity of religion and ethnic group (Figures 22 and 23). This would suggest a reduced willingness to compromise on these fundamental attributes by singles even as they age as compared with the more aspirational attributes such as ambition, independence and confidence.

Figure 22. Importance of partner attribute: Same ethnic group



Source: Q12d. How important are the following attributes to you in finding a potential marriage partner: Same ethnic group.

Figure 23. Importance of partner attribute: Same religion



Source: Q12e. How important are the following attributes to you in finding a potential marriage partner: Same religion

Ethnic and religious endogamy was not found to be particularly high — only 56% and 51% of respondents answered that their marriage partner’s ethnic and religious background, respectively, was either important or somewhat important. The religiosity of the respondents did not make any difference to their answers in this respect. However, higher percentages of Muslim (64%) and Christian (60%) respondents indicated that religion was important as an attribute of a potential marriage partner (Table 14). Chinese respondents were more likely to emphasise ethnic similarities as an attribute in a marriage partner.

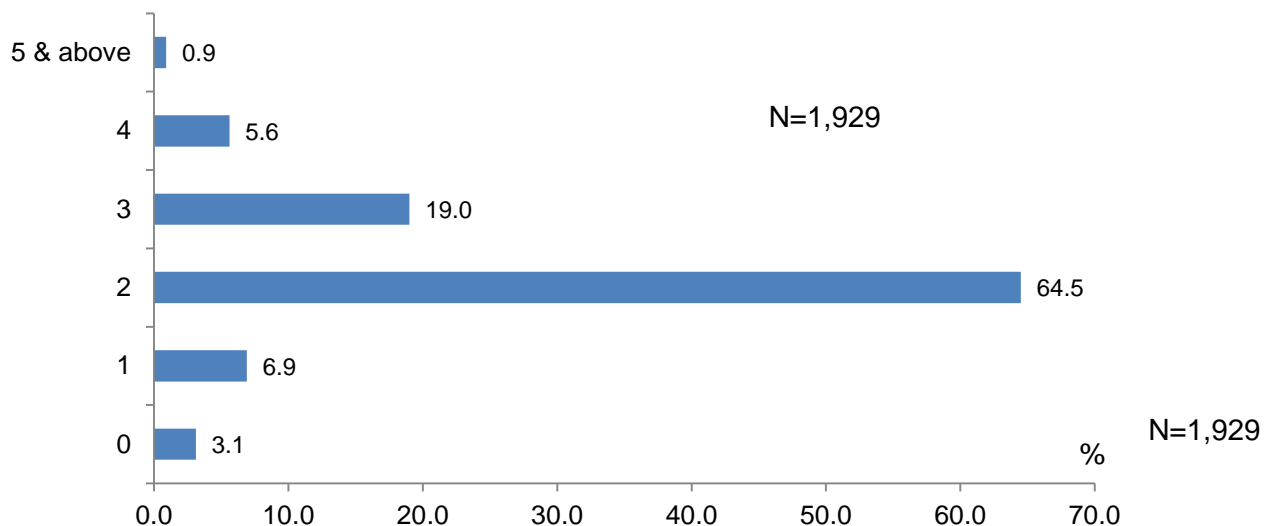
Table 14. Religious endogamy by religion

Q12e. How important ... same religion?	Q21. What is your religion?									Total
	Buddhism	Catholicism	Christianity	Hinduism	Islam	Sikhism	Taoism	Others	No religion	
Not important	50.2%	50.9%	27.3%	60.0%	28.5%	42.9%	59.3%	100.0%	68.3%	49.4%
Somewhat important	15.9%	17.3%	12.8%	10.7%	7.9%	14.3%	14.0%	0.0%	13.5%	13.4%
Important	33.9%	31.8%	59.9%	29.3%	63.6%	42.9%	26.7%	0.0%	18.1%	37.2%
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	584	110	297	75	291	7	86	3	540	1,993

5.3 Having children

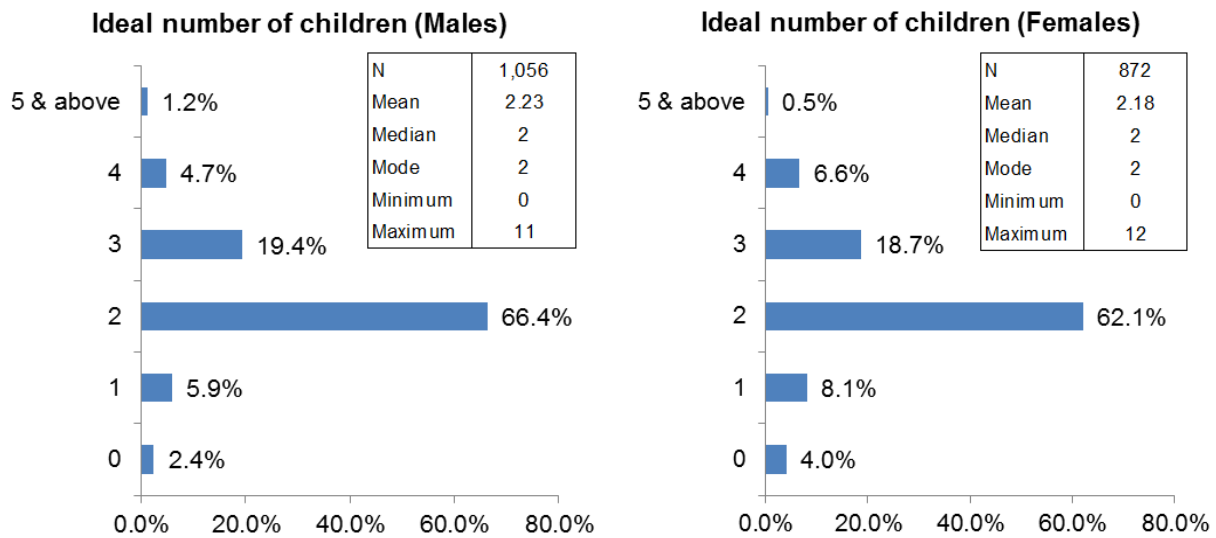
POPS(6) respondents' attitudes to having children were found to be similar to previous surveys, such as the Marriage & Parenthood Survey 2012 and the Singapore Family Values Survey 2010, with the mean ideal number of children being 2.21 (Figure 24). There was no significant difference in the desired number of children between male and female respondents (Figure 25).

Figure 24. Ideal number of children



Source: Q13. If you were to have a family, what is your ideal number of children?

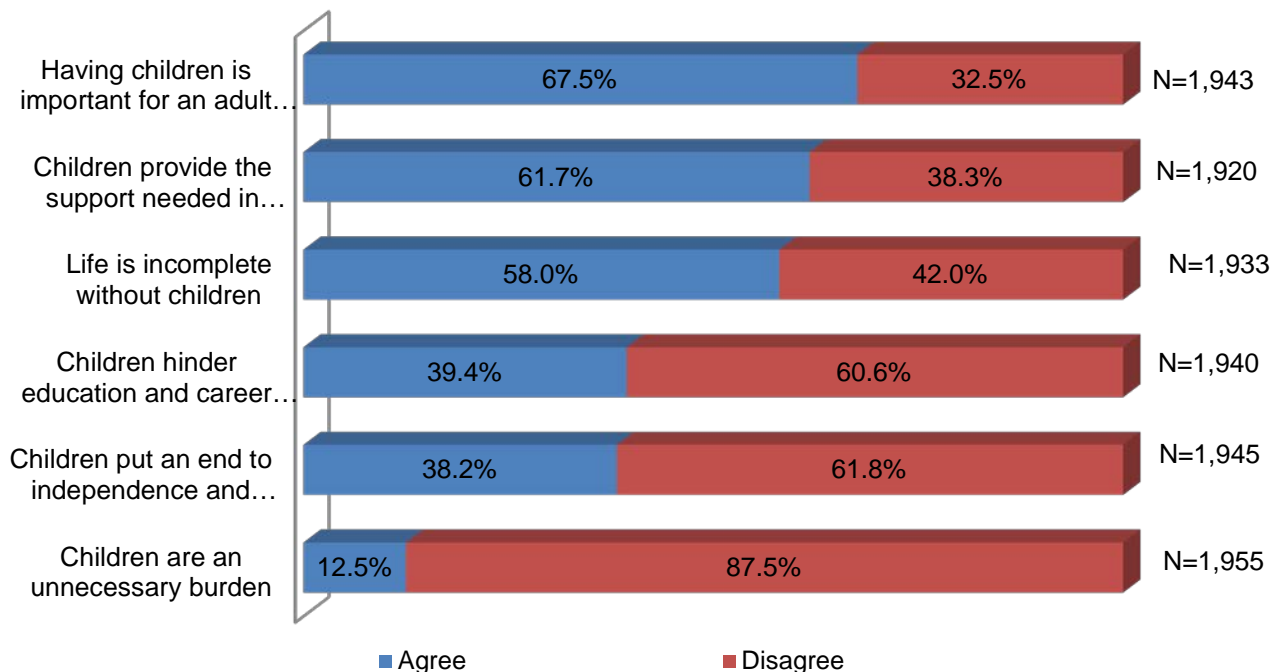
Figure 25. Ideal number of children by gender



Source: Q13. If you were to have a family, what is your ideal number of children?

The responses to questions about attitudes towards having children were in general pro-family. The majority agreed with statements that depict a positive perspective to having children, and disagreed with statements presenting an ambivalent or negative view of parenthood (Figure 26).

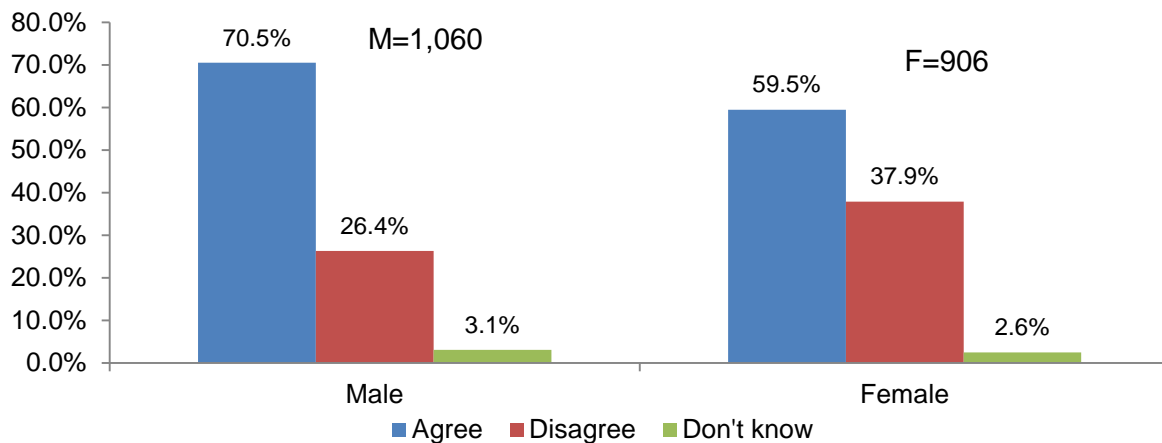
Figure 26. Views on having children



Source: Q14. Which of the following statements describe your attitude towards having children. Please say whether you agree or disagree with each:

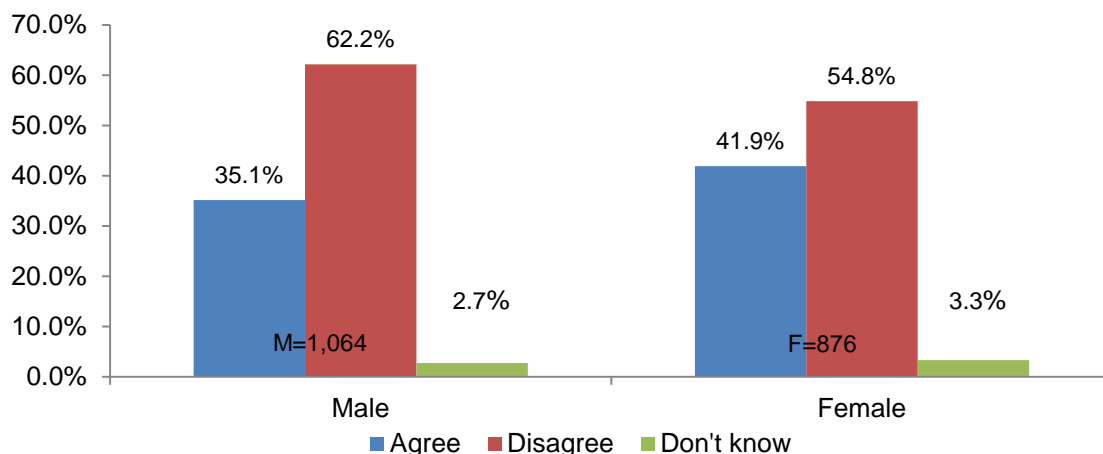
There appears to be a gender gap in the POPS(6) respondents' attitudes towards parenthood (Figures 27 and 28). Males were more likely to agree with statements that had a positive view towards parenthood (e.g., "Having children is important for an adult to live a fulfilled life") than females, and female respondents were more likely to agree with statements that presented parenthood in a negative sense (e.g., "Children hinder education and career pursuits" or "Children put an end to independence and freedom").

Figure 27. Agreement with statement: Having children is important for an adult to live a fulfilled life.



Source: Q14a. Which of the following statements describe your attitude towards having children. Please say whether you agree or disagree: Having children is important for an adult to live a fulfilled life.

Figure 28. Agreement with statement: Children hinder education and career pursuits.



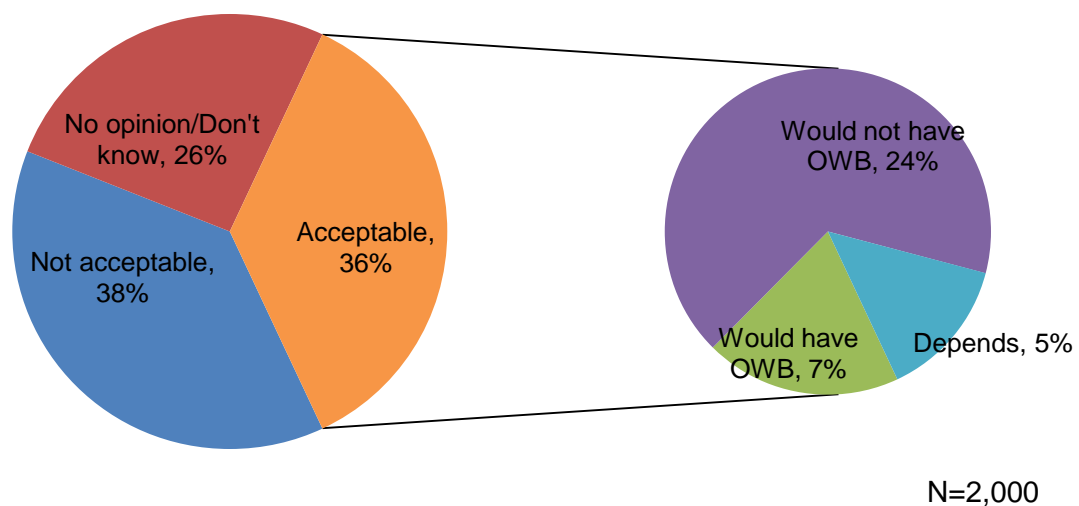
Source: Q14d. Which of the following statements describe your attitude towards having children. Please say whether you agree or disagree: Children hinder education and career pursuits.

5.3.1 Having children out of wedlock

Overall, 36% found unmarried couples having children to be acceptable while 38% found it to be unacceptable (Figure 29). A large proportion, 26%, had no opinion or professed not to have a strong view.

Respondents appeared more traditional and conservative on the matter of out-of-wedlock births than they were towards co-habitation. Only 7% would themselves have a birth out-of-wedlock (as compared to 49% who would themselves co-habit). Another 5% said “it depends”.

Figure 29. Views on out-of-wedlock births (OWB)



Sources: Q15. How about an unmarried couple having children? Do you think this is ...?
Q16. Would YOU have children before marriage?

The religious affiliation and religiosity of the respondents affected their answers to these questions on having children out of wedlock (Tables 15 and 16). Christians, Muslims and those who indicated that their religion was important to them were more likely to find the concept of an unmarried couple having children unacceptable. Those with no religious affiliation, and those whose religion was either not important or only somewhat important were more likely to find the concept of having children out of wedlock acceptable. An above average percentage (48.2%) of Catholic respondents in the POPS(6) survey were accepting of the concept of unmarried couples having children out of wedlock, but they were also more likely to reject the idea of having children out of wedlock when the question was directed at them (at 84.1%, as compared with the survey average of 83.4%).

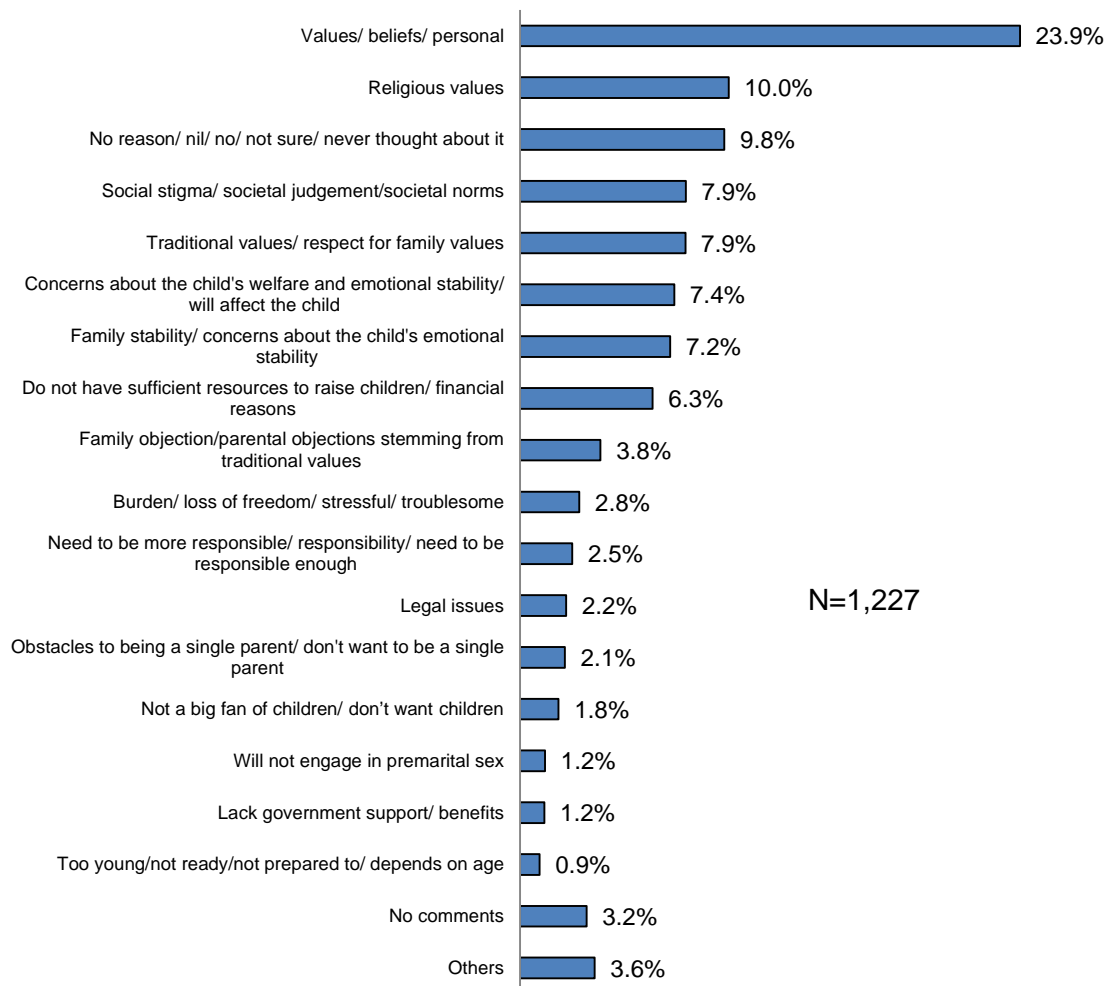
Table 15. Acceptability of having children out of wedlock by religion

		Q21. What is your religion?									Total
		Buddhism	Catholicism	Christianity	Hinduism	Islam	Sikhism	Taoism	Others	No religion	
Q15. How about unmarried couple having children? Do you think this is:	1. Acceptable	36.6%	48.2%	25.3%	36.8%	27.1%	28.6%	42.5%	66.7%	42.1%	36.0%
	2. Unacceptable	35.1%	27.3%	49.8%	39.5%	47.8%	28.6%	29.9%	33.3%	31.4%	37.6%
	3. No opinion/ Don't know	28.3%	24.5%	24.9%	23.7%	25.1%	42.9%	27.6%	0.0%	26.4%	26.4%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N		587	110	297	76	291	7	87	3	541	1,999

Table 16. Acceptability of having children out-of-wedlock by religiosity

		Q22. How important is your religion to you?				Total
		1. Important	2. Somewhat important	3. Not important	4. Refused to answer	
Q15. How about unmarried couple having children? Do you think this is:	1. Acceptable	26.6%	42.5%	41.5%	66.7%	33.7%
	2. Unacceptable	48.9%	27.7%	32.8%	0.0%	39.9%
	3. Don't know/ no opinion	24.5%	29.8%	25.7%	33.3%	26.4%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N		804	466	183	6	1,459

The connection between greater religiosity and finding having out-of-wedlock children unacceptable — both conceptually and personally — is corroborated with respondents' answers as to why they would not have children before marriage. The top two reasons for not having children before marriage was attributed to personal or religious values and beliefs, which came up to a combined 33.9%, with 23.9% citing personal values and beliefs and 10.0% religious values (Figure 30).

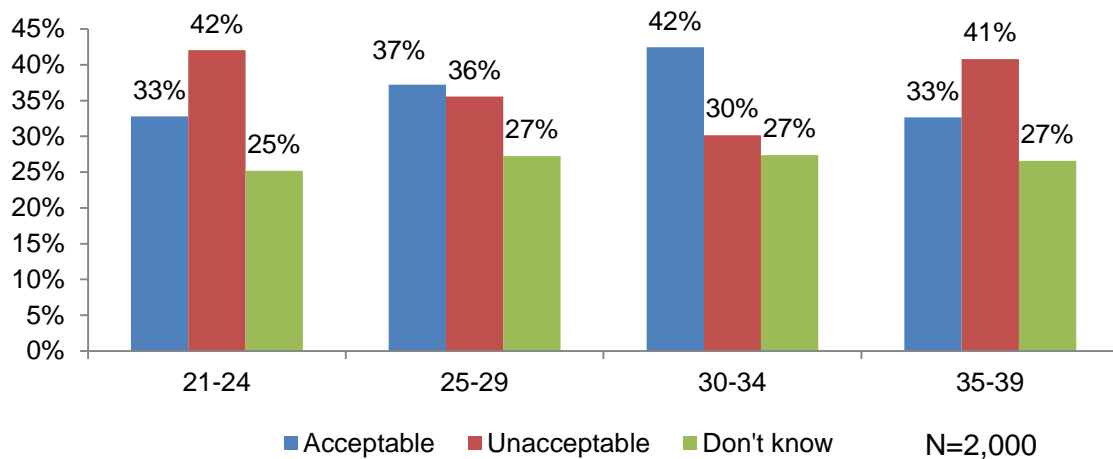
Figure 30. Reasons for not having OWB

Source: Q16b. Would you have children before marriage? No, why?

The age-related findings above are consistent with the view that younger singles have a more idealistic and individualised perspective of marriage as reported by Straughan (2011), whilst older singles were more likely to have a more practical, realistic attitude towards cohabitation and having children out of wedlock. Indeed, although only 2% of the surveyed group reported themselves as living with their partners, these respondents were more likely to be older, at an average age of 29, as compared to the total group average of 26 (Figures 31 and 32).

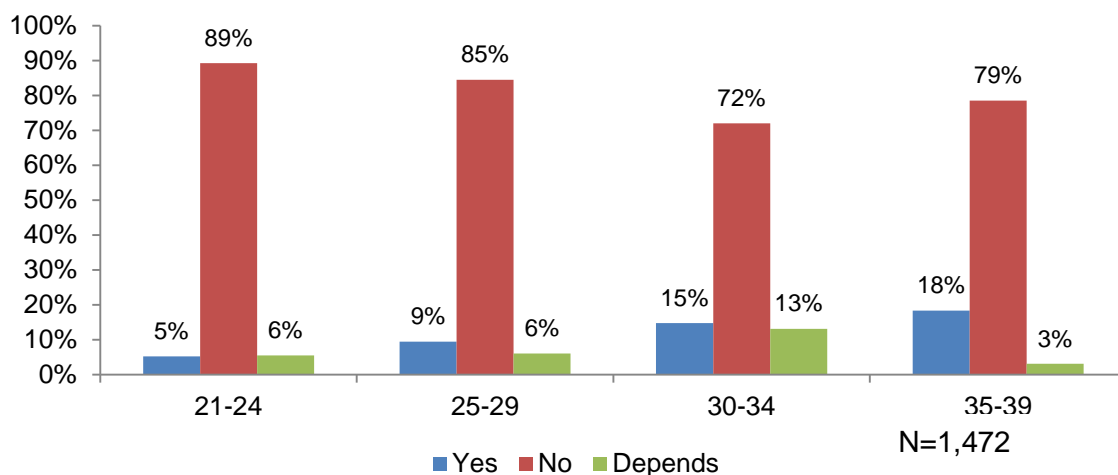
Figure 31. Acceptability of out-of-wedlock births by age

Q. How about an unmarried couple having children? Do you think this is:



Source: Q15. How about an unmarried couple having children? Do you think this is:

Figure 32. Willingness to have out-of-wedlock birth by age



Source: Q16. Would you have children before marriage?

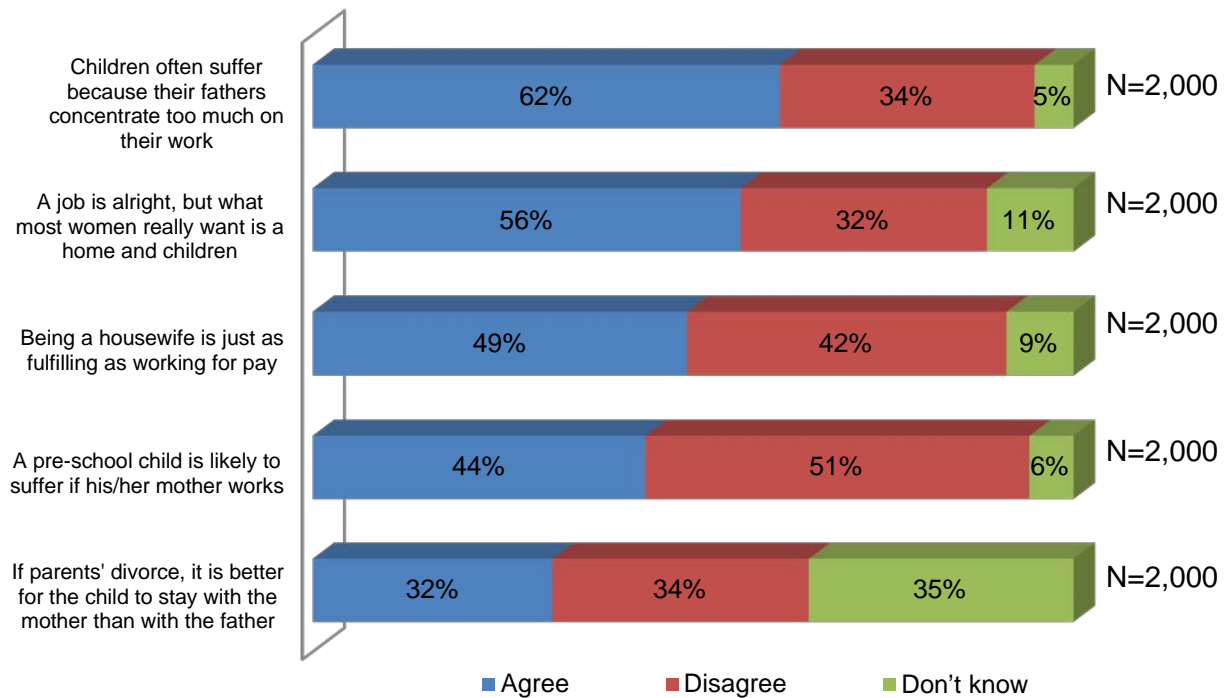
5.4 Expectations of married and family life

Responses to POPS(6) survey questions on expectations of married and family life were less definitive than for the other sets of questions and issues, perhaps reflecting the nuanced nature of these questions. The results may also indicate a balance amongst singles between traditional gender roles and expectations with more modern concepts of family life.

On questions pertaining to women's satisfaction from housework and paid work and which parent a child should live with in a divorce, respondents were generally ambivalent, with broadly equal proportions agreeing or disagreeing with the statements. A clear majority of respondents (62%) agreed with the statement that children often suffer because their fathers concentrate too much on their work, whereas only 44% agreed to the statement that a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works (Figure 33). This suggests that

POPS(6) respondents believe that mothers are better able to combine child-rearing with employment than fathers, although many respondents believe fathers have a role to play in the upbringing of their children (as the latter would suffer if fathers concentrated too much on their work).

Figure 33. Attitudes towards married/family life



Source: Q17. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

There appears to be a gender gap in the responses to statements referring to women's fulfilment from housework and from employment. More females than males disagreed with the statements that "Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay" and "A job is alright, but what most women really want is a home and children" (Tables 17 and 18). These statements could be construed as conforming to more traditional gender roles for women, and unsurprisingly there is a significant difference in the responses to these statements by educational attainment, especially amongst female respondents (Table 19). Respondents with university education were more likely to disagree with the statements that espoused a more traditional role of women in the home and in child-rearing.

Table 17. Agreement with statement: Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay by gender

		Q1.1 Gender		Total
		1. Male	2. Female	
Q17a. Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay	1. Agree	50.8%	47.2%	49.2%
	2. Disagree	36.9%	48.1%	42.0%
	3. Don't know	12.2%	4.7%	8.8%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0
N		1,094	907	2,001

Table 18. Agreement with statement: A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children by gender

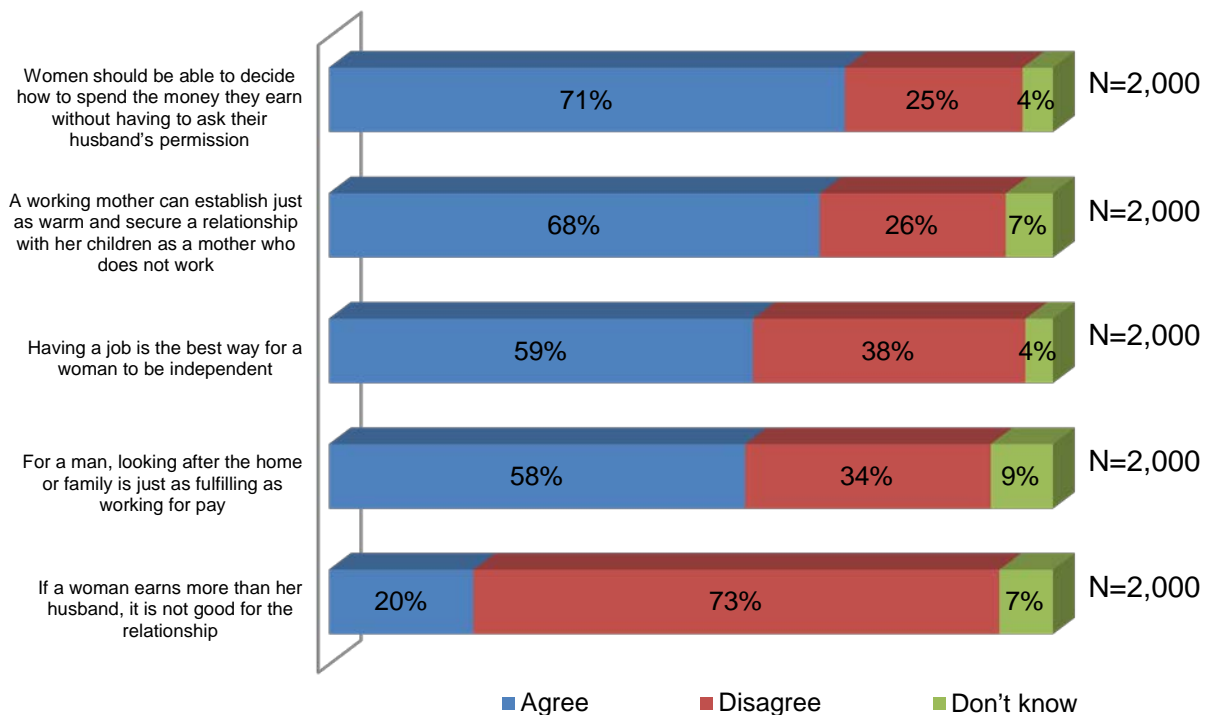
		Q1.1 Gender		Total
		1. Male	2. Female	
Q17c. A job is alright, but what most women really want is a home and children	1. Agree	57.8%	54.4%	56.3%
	2. Disagree	27.8%	38.0%	32.4%
	3. Don't know	14.4%	7.6%	11.4%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0
N		1,094	906	2,000

Table 19. Agreement with statement: A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children by educational attainment

		Q23. What is your highest educational attainment?						Total
		1. PSLE and below	2. N, O Levels	3. A Levels	4. Polytechnic and other diplomas	5. University	6. Unknown	
Q17c. A job is alright, but what most women really want is a home and children	Agree	72.2%	67.0%	56.4%	63.1%	48.5%	66.7%	56.2%
	Disagree	5.6%	24.6%	27.0%	25.6%	40.6%	33.3%	32.4%
	Don't know	22.2%	8.4%	16.6%	11.4%	10.9%	0.0%	11.4%
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N		18	179	163	712	924	6	2,002

A significant majority of POPS(6) respondents agreed with statements on gender roles that could be classified as having a modern perspective as opposed to those with a traditional gender role orientation. For example, 71% of respondents agreed with the statement that women should be able to decide how to spend the money they earn without having to ask their husband's permission, and 73% disagreed with the statement that it is not good for the marital relationship if the woman earns more than her husband (Figure 34).

Figure 34. Attitudes towards gender roles

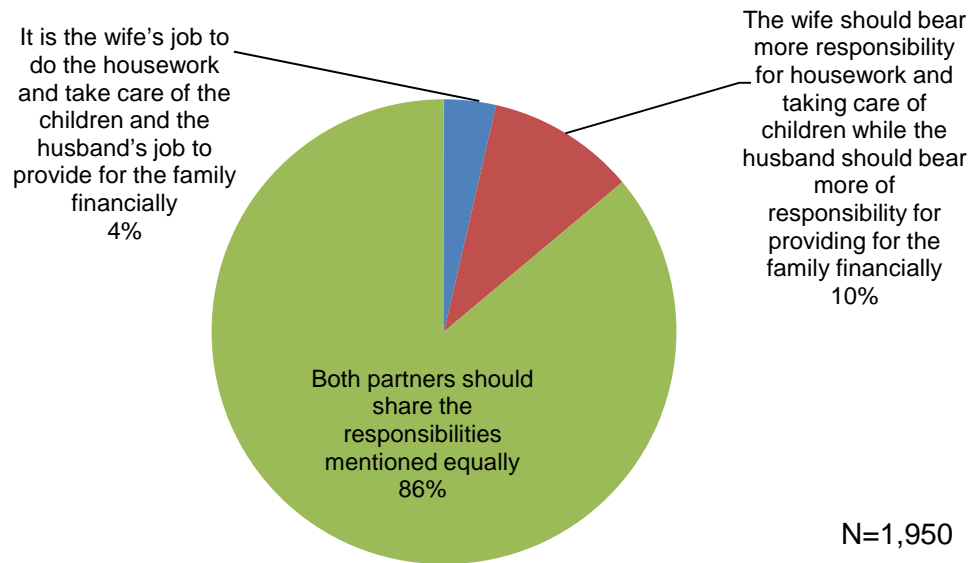


Source: Q17. People talk about the changing roles of men and women today. Can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

We found no significant gender differences in the responses to these gender role statements, with the exception of the statement that "Having a job is the best way for a woman to be independent". In this case, females (69.4%) were more likely to agree with the statement, whilst males were more likely to disagree (46.4%)

A substantial majority of the respondents (86%) believed that husbands and wives should share household responsibilities equally, such as financial contributions, housework and child-rearing (Figure 35). A further 10% believed that the wife should take more of the burden of housework and child-rearing whilst the husband should bear more of the responsibility of providing for the family financially. Only 4% of respondents held a very traditional view of gender roles in the family, believing that it is the wife's job to do the housework and child-rearing, and that of the husband to provide for the family financially.

Figure 35. Division of labour in the household



Source: Q19. What are your views on the responsibilities in the household? For example, financial contributions, housework, and taking care of children.

6. Dissonance

Analysis of the POPS(6) survey results shows certain areas of normative dissonance in respondents' answers on a range of issues such as co-habitation, having children out of wedlock, sexual relations outside of marriage, and in the division of household responsibilities by a couple.

For example, of those respondents who said they would live with their partners before marriage, a surprisingly large number, 390, or 41%, also agreed to the statement "Sex is only acceptable within a marriage". Two probable explanations exist for this apparent inconsistency: either these respondents believe in chaste co-habitation arrangements or that their concept of co-habitation is in reality that of a pre-marital living arrangement with their intended spouse.

In another example of normative dissonance, we found a surprisingly large number of respondents who said that having traditional values such as being filial and family-oriented was an important attribute in a marriage partner, had also expressed liberal as opposed to traditional and pro-family views, such as being prepared to live with their partner before marriage or agreeing with the statement that "Children put an end to independence and freedom" (Tables 20 and 21). For example, 29.3% of the surveyed group answered that having traditional values is an important attribute in a potential marriage partner and that they would live with their partner before marriage. More than a third of the respondents who said having traditional values is an important attribute in a potential marriage partner (or 21.7% of the total respondents), also agreed with the statement that children put an end to independence and freedom.

Table 20. Willingness to cohabit by importance of traditional values in a potential marriage partner

Q9/10. Would you live with your partner before marriage?	Q12j. How important is having traditional values in a potential marriage partner?				
	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Don't know	Total
Yes	9.6%	9.8%	29.3%	0.1%	48.8%
Depends	0.6%	1.7%	4.2%	0.1%	6.6%
No, or living with partner before marriage is unacceptable	6.4%	10.4%	27.6%	0.3%	44.7%
Total	16.5%	21.9%	61.1%	0.5%	100.0%

Table 21. Agreement with “Children put an end to independence and freedom” by importance of traditional values in a potential marriage partner

Q14f. Children put an end to independence and freedom. Do you:	Q12j. How important is having traditional values in a potential marriage partner?				
	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Don't know	Total
Agree	6.8%	8.4%	21.7%	0.2%	37.1%
Disagree	9.2%	12.7%	38.0%	0.2%	60.1%
Don't know	0.5%	0.8%	1.3%	0.1%	2.8%
Total	16.5%	21.9%	61.1%	0.5%	100.0%

Whilst a sizeable proportion of POPS(6) respondents were accepting of the concepts of co-habitation and out-of-wedlock births when asked about the issue in general, considerably fewer respondents would themselves consider co-habiting or having children out of wedlock when the questions were personalised (“Would you have children before marriage?”).

These survey results, which show such apparently conflicting perspectives of marriage and parenthood, are suggestive of a situation in which traditional family-oriented values are meshing uneasily with liberal attitudes and modern aspirations. As documented by Kotkin et al (2012), interviews with young Singaporean singles indicate materialistic views on their life goals, pointing to the need to “keep score: in school, in jobs, in income” as well as having “a cost and benefit analysis about family”. Singles in Singapore however remain strongly influenced by societal norms in which deep-seated traditional family values are commonly espoused by parents, religious leaders and the government.

7. Observations and concluding remarks

In previous studies, the reasons given by Singaporeans for not marrying and not having more children have typically been pragmatic considerations such as the opportunity costs to their careers or their personal independence, or the financial costs involved with marriage and parenthood, including housing, parenting and childcare costs.¹ The POPS(6) survey results do not contradict these earlier findings, but provide additional evidence of the clash of materialistic and individualistic values amongst singles with more traditional family-oriented societal norms.

1. See Yap (2001), Chan (2001), Jones (2012) and Quah (2009).

In tandem with the rebound in fertility in a number of southern European countries, namely, Portugal, Spain and Italy, Billari (2008) identified a significant rise in out-of-wedlock births from the late 1990s. He noted the correlation coefficient between the share of out-of-wedlock births and the rise in total fertility rate (TFR) in Italy from 1997 to 2006 was 0.96, whilst a similar coefficient was found for Spain from 1996 to 2005. These findings have led to a view that a rebound from lowest-low fertility (a TFR below 1.5) may only be achievable with a rise in out-of-wedlock births, especially in countries experiencing a second demographic transition.

Billari found that the recovery of fertility in southern European correlated with a delayed second demographic transition, which incorporates several social trends including the postponement of child-bearing; an increased emphasis on individual autonomy; the rejection of institutional control; the rise of values associated with the satisfaction of an individual's "higher order needs"; and the growth in gender equality. Many of these social trends are in evidence in the Singapore context.

However, the POPS(6) survey results showing the prevalence of traditional views towards co-habitation, extra-marital sexual relations and out-of-wedlock births (on a personal level) suggests that it will be difficult for Singapore to expect out-of-wedlock births to form a meaningful factor in a rebound from currently ultra-low fertility levels. Nevertheless, Kojima (2011) did find that pre-marital co-habitation tends to have hastening effects on the timing of marriage and child-bearing amongst Singaporean women, suggesting that increased incidence of pre-marital co-habitation could reduce the age at first marriage and at first birth.

Pro-marriage and pro-natalist policy measures introduced by the Singapore government to date have been intended to reduce the obstacles to marriage and child-bearing. Successive rounds of Marriage and Parenthood packages in 2001, 2004, 2008 and 2013 have provided for more grants and subsidies to parents to defray some of the financial and opportunity costs of child-bearing and child-rearing. Notwithstanding these measures, the TFR has remained at ultra-low levels.

Delayed transition to adulthood has been cited by Billari (2008) and Suzuki (2005 and 2011) as being associated with ultra-low fertility in southern European and in East Asian countries. Quah (2009) notes that whilst marriage may be a crucial life goal for young men and women — as borne out by the POPS(6) findings — the pursuit of diplomas and degrees, securing a good job or obtaining the first career-track promotion have become important pre-marriage rites of passage into adulthood.

The consequences are evidenced in the following: the steady rise in the average age at first marriage amongst both sexes; the POPS(6) survey findings on expected age of marriage being later than the ideal age of marriage; and the reasons why respondents are not contemplating marriage in the next one to two years. The survey results, which show degree holders as more likely to hold pro-marriage views, also support the assertion that once some of the markers of adulthood have been obtained, attitudes towards marriage and perhaps parenthood turn positive.

The gender gap in attitudes towards marriage and married life provided by the survey is instructive. Male respondents in the POPS(6) survey were more desirous of marriage, were less specific in their preferences in a marriage partner than females, and expressed egalitarian expectations of their marital responsibilities. Female respondents however appeared to be more specific in their preferences in a marriage partner and were more likely to profess their desire for independence. There is thus some evidence that whilst single males' attitudes in Singapore may be pro-marriage and pro-parenthood, females are either not as willing to relinquish their independence and freedom as the males or do not believe

the male attitudes have shifted sufficiently in reality when the intentions are actually put to the test.

The policy prescriptions to facilitate a recovery from currently ultra-low fertility levels may thus have to lie in two strategies: (1) facilitate the more rapid achievement of the markers of adulthood at an earlier age or (2) engineer a shift away from materialistic attitudes. The first strategy may involve measures such as accelerating the access by young unmarried couples or married couples with young families to affordable housing, and reducing the uncertainties around the financial and opportunity costs of child-rearing and childcare, some of which have been recently announced in the Marriage and Parenthood Package 2013 (including the Housing & Development Board's Parenthood Priority Schemes, and subsidies for centre-based infant care and childcare). Taking the POPS(6) survey findings on the concept of co-habitation as a pre-marital living arrangement with an intended spouse, we also propose that unmarried couples who have bid for Housing & Development Board build-to-order flats be given access to rental flats to allow them to acquire one of the important markers of adulthood more quickly.

Should the government be involved in the second strategy? The POPS(6) survey findings do not provide any definitive answers, but the limited success of previous pro-marriage and pro-natalist measures suggest a need to cater for the effects of Singapore's passage through the second demographic transition. We note there is an on-going re-examination, through the Our Singapore Conversation process, of the ways in which society and the government can foster a shift in attitudes and priorities. More empirical research is also required on issues such as changing gender roles and responsibilities for housework and child-rearing, and the constraints or barriers to achieving the markers of adulthood.

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