

Adoptions in Singapore fall by half over last decade **Stringent checks, tighter supply, more turning to IVF among the reasons**

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THE number of adoptions here is at a 10-year low, having fallen by half in the last decade.

The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) processed 325 adoption applications last year, down from 556 in 2005 and 703 in 2001.

The sharp drop in the number of adoptions comes despite more than 91 per cent of the public viewing adoption as a perfectly viable way of starting a family, a study funded by the National University of Singapore (NUS) found last year.

Adoption agencies and voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) cite various reasons for the fall:

* Stringent suitability checks: Prospective parents are being put off by the five to seven months it takes to process an application - though this is still short compared to the one to two years it takes in the United States and Hong Kong.

In that time, potential parents have to be assessed as suitable through a series of interviews and home visits.

Home-study reports, which safeguard the child's welfare, must be put up.

And after the report is done, the prospective parents still need to go through the Family Court to apply to adopt the child. Only after this does the ministry conduct the checks and prepare the affidavit and social-investigation report.

Ms Alice Kavaree of Lotus Child Adoption Agency said: 'Many people have come to me to complain about the long waiting process.'

Mrs Elyse Wong, the manager at Fei Yue Adoption Services, said the home-study report alone takes five to seven weeks to compile - and this is if the case is straightforward.

Foreigners seeking to adopt a child here must obtain a letter of support from their embassy. This ensures that adopted children will not be left stateless should they be denied entry or citizenship by their adopting parents' country when they decide to return home, said an MCYS spokesman.

Madam Y. C. Lim of King International Adoptions said expatriate adopters are fewer now because the letter of support is hard to get; her clients are now mostly locals.

She added that the administrative hassle may have also shrunk the pool of available babies. Many parents overseas who wish to give up their child for adoption would rather do it in Malaysia or Indonesia, where the adoption process is less troublesome.

Here, the parties involved have to declare a lot of information and some people find this inconvenient, she added.

* Tightening of rules on the supply side: VWOs say that countries like Vietnam and Cambodia have imposed restrictions on foreigners adopting unwanted babies from there. India now has rules favouring the placing of orphans with its citizens, said Ms Teo Seok Bee, a senior manager at Touch Adoption Services.

Touch has noted a fall in the number of children in China put up for adoption in the last few years.

* More going for assisted reproduction: Fewer people are looking to adopt children also because they are trying for children through methods such as in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies Yap Mui Teng said.

And more people are going for assisted reproduction because the procedures are now more affordable, with the Government co-funding the treatment costs. Couples can also use their Medisave to pay for these procedures.

* Better birth control practices: The number of adoptions is down also simply because there are fewer unwanted babies in the first place, as a result of more effective birth control, said Associate Professor Paulin Straughan of NUS' department of sociology.

* Child-rearing is commitment-intensive: Bringing up a child requires heavy investment in time, energy and money nowadays, and since this is so, a bigger premium is placed on biological children than adoptive ones, Prof Straughan said.

The experts say, however, that the seemingly drastic drop in adoption numbers is not a cause for concern. The solution lies not in worrying about the adoption rate, but in getting Singaporeans to marry and start a family earlier, she said, adding: 'We must also stop paying lip service to achieving work-life balance.'

The MCYS spokesman noted that people who want to adopt children are from all walks of life and are usually aged between 35 and 45; there is a marked preference for infants and toddlers as adoptive parents want the child to start his or her life early with them.

Service Centre for Malay-Muslims

MALAY-Muslims now have a service centre accredited by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) to turn to if they wish to adopt a child.

The Apkim Centre for Social Service (Acos) joins the five other MCYS-accredited agencies cleared to compile home-study reports required in the adoption process, which assess the suitability of the prospective parents before the adoption is granted.

Acos was launched at the end of last month.

The manager of the Acos centre for adoption services Roslinda Mohamed Solihin said: 'This centre is long overdue. It was established to fill a service gap in the adoption services within the Malay-Muslim community.'

The centre also does home-study reports for non-Malay would-be parents. Four in 10 couples who have their reports done by Acos are non-Malay.

Besides compiling the report, the centre also offers before- and after-adoption counselling and adoptive matching.

Since it was accredited last year, the centre has registered 100 couples, and placed them on the waiting list for the home-study report.

The AcoSS centre works closely with Moral Family Service Centre, which refers to it Malay-Muslims looking to adopt children.

AcoSS noted that 83 per cent of the babies successfully matched by Moral Family Service Centre with Malay-Muslim families this year were Malay babies.