

Education helps couples stay married

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Better educated couples are more likely to stay together.

Among Muslim marriages, only 18.4 per cent of males and 12.9 per cent of females with university education divorced before their 15th anniversary.

This is compared to 34.7 per cent of males and 36.5 per cent of females with less than secondary school education.

"With more education, families are able to have better tools to cope with problems," suggested Dr Mathew Mathews, senior research fellow with the Institute of Policy Studies, at a seminar organised by the Ministry of Social and Family Development yesterday at Furama City Centre.

Now in its fourth year, the Engaging Hearts and Minds Seminar is a platform for discussion for professionals working with Malay/Muslim families, including representatives from various voluntary welfare organisations and government agencies.

Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Yaacob Ibrahim, the guest of honour, said in his opening speech that Muslim marriages were getting "stronger and more resilient", with only 11.4 per cent of couples married in 2008 divorced before their fifth anniversary, compared to 14 per cent for couples married in 2003. He attributed this to greater engagement by the various agencies working together to prepare couples for marriage.

One of the ways to strengthen marriages was to have men share in household responsibilities, said Madam Azita Abdul Aziz, director of social services at the Singapore Muslim Women's Association.

Dr Nazirudin Mohamed Nasir suggested that this could be achieved by a campaign highlighting Muslim men who are more involved with their families as role models. "I suspect that many men do not see it as a problem," said Dr Nazirudin, a deputy director in the Office of the Mufti at the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore.

Greater awareness of the need for marriage support is needed to further strengthen marriages in the Muslim community, said Dr Yaacob.

"We need to remove the shame of going to a counsellor," he said.