

## Parents choose mixed-race option for kids

### One in five babies of mixed ethnicity get new double-barrelled option

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*The Straits Times*, 14 April 2011

When Mr Mohammed Azhar Yusof and his Chinese Singaporean wife Juliana Kang had their first child four years ago, they made it a point to include her Chinese name - Jiang Ling - on the birth certificate.

'We talked about how we can reflect the fact that she is from mixed parentage,' Mr Azhar said of their daughter, who had her race registered as Malay.

'Previously, the only way to get around it was to have her name reflected in the birth certificate in Chinese characters,' said the National Institute of Education lecturer.

The couple, both 39, were spared the dilemma when registering their second child, thanks to the new double-barrelled race option which took effect on Jan 1.

Their four-month-old son had his race recorded as Malay-Chinese.

About one in five Singaporean newborn babies of mixed parentage chose the new option in the first two months of this year, said the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA).

The new policy allows Singaporeans of mixed parentage the option of reflecting two races on their identity cards, such as Chinese-Malay or Indian-Eurasian.

Releasing the figures for the first time, the ICA said that among newborn babies with mixed parentage, about 17 per cent had the first component of the double-barrelled race follow that of the father. Another 4 per cent had the first component follow that of the mother, the ICA said.

The remaining 79 per cent of the newborn babies of mixed parentage had their race recorded as Eurasian, or followed the mother's or father's race.

A total of 5,809 births were registered with the ICA across all ethnic groups in the first two months of this year. Newborn babies of mixed parentage made up less than 20 per cent.

The new option applies not only to newborn babies, but also to other Singaporeans of mixed parentage. But the ICA said it was unable to provide figures for this group.

The new policy was introduced to reflect evolving societal changes, particularly the growing number of inter-racial couples here. In 2009, about 18.3 per cent out of 26,000 marriages were inter-racial, up from 10.6 per cent out of 25,600 marriages in 1999.

Dr Leong Chan Hoong, a research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, feels the take-up rate is encouraging, given that it is a new scheme. He said that 'we need time for people to become more confident about this system as they see how it is accepted by others'.

But he pointed out that in terms of Singapore's inter-ethnic ratio, it would make the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others categorisation and proportions less predictable.

Some have also expressed concern that the new policy may encourage some to pick a 'race of convenience' for practical reasons - such as to influence the assignment of mother tongue language class or to take advantage of the ethnic quota applied in Housing Board estates.

The first component of the double-barrelled race option will be used for such purposes.

Teacher Gerard Chan, 25, said practical needs would be a key consideration if he ever decides to change his race from Chinese to Indian-Chinese.

Said Mr Chan, whose father is Chinese and mother is Indian: 'If being an Indian can help me get a flat more easily due to the ethnic quota, then I will do it. Otherwise, there is no point in changing it because it is not so relevant for me.'

But experts say the desire to reflect their children's mixed parentage is likely to be the motivating factor for most parents.

National University of Singapore sociologist Tan Ern Ser said most children tend to follow the father's surname and, by logical extension, they would also take on their father's race as the first component.

Singaporean housewife Lee Wye Mun, 41, who married a German, said: 'The flexibility gives more leeway to the parents to make a choice and not force them to follow blindly.' The couple, who have two children, registered their month-old son as 'Caucasian-Chinese'.

Still, couples such as magazine director Norsham Husaini, 36, and his wife Anne Chua, 32, a teacher, say they will let their children decide. The Singaporean couple have a 14-month-old daughter, Aleisha Chua-Norsham, who is registered as Boyanese.

Said Mr Norsham: 'When she is older, she can do whatever she wants.'