

## Recent Marriages Not Standing the Test of Time

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***The Straits Times***, 7 April 2015

They are breaking up more often than those in the past, study shows

Marriages, it seems, do not last the way they used to. Recent ones appear to be breaking up far more often than those in the past, a wide-ranging government study has found.

And, in cases where a man ties the knot at an especially young age, the marriage becomes even more vulnerable.

The study, conducted by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), with data from the Department of Statistics, looked at the stability of resident marriages for different marriage cohorts from 1987 to 2012.

One key finding was that rates of marriage dissolution - annulments or divorces - among recent marriage cohorts had risen compared with those in the past.

By the 10th year of marriage, 16.1 per cent of those who married in 2003 had their marriages dissolved, double the 8.7 per cent for the 1987 cohort.

By the 15th year of marriage, a fifth of the 1998 cohort had their marriages dissolved, compared with 12.3 per cent of the 1987 cohort.

The study also found divorce rates of recent Muslim marriages had fallen (see story below).

While statistics on marriages and divorces are released annually, these usually track divorces by the year of the break-up, and not by the marriage cohort or the year the divorcing couple wed.

In the report released yesterday, the MSF wrote: "(The general divorce rate) does not track the outcome of marriages by marriage cohorts over time, and thus does not give a complete picture of the number of marriages ending in divorce."

Another key finding is that there are more dissolved marriages among younger grooms - those aged 20 to 24 when they wed.

Annual divorce statistics give a former spouse's age at the time of divorce, not the age when he wed.

The latest study found that divorce rates for younger grooms in non-Muslim marriages are twice that for grooms aged 25 and above, and the rates for younger grooms in Muslim marriages are 1-1/2 times that for older grooms.

Experts said there is now less social stigma attached to divorce.

**Sociologist Tan Ern Ser said: "People are less bound by tradition and more inclined towards freedom of choice."**

As for more marriages involving younger grooms being dissolved, experts said this could be because the husbands were less mature, and the result of problems linked to shotgun marriages.

Ms Cindy Loh, programme head at Care Corner Centre for Co-Parenting, said problems may arise when there is a baby but the young husband does not have a good job or enough money.

Sociologist Paulin Straughan agreed. "People expect men to be the head of the household and provide for the family. It is very difficult for couples not to care about public opinion," she said.