

S'pore women tying the knot... at a later age

Huang Lijie

The Straits Times, 15 January 2011

Proportion of single female graduates drops in 35-44 age group

THE proportion of young single females may be on the rise but Singapore women are not saying no to marriage.

Scholars whom The Straits Times interviewed said results from the Census 2010 survey released this week show that women, especially the better-educated ones, are tying the knot, albeit at a later age.

The postponement of marriage among women, however, may cause fertility rates to dip and bring about a fast-ageing population.

The jump in singles is sharpest among women aged between 25 and 29, with the proportion climbing from 45.5 per cent in 2000 to 62 per cent last year.

The proportion of single women between 35 and 44, and with tertiary qualifications, however, fell in the same period.

For women with a university degree, the proportion of singles dropped from 29.1 per cent to 24.8 per cent in the 35-39 age group, and from 26.7 per cent to 23.5 per cent in the 40-44 age group.

National University of Singapore sociologist Paulin Straughan said the data suggests that women are 'not rejecting or demeaning marriage', just delaying it.

'Especially for tertiary-educated women, they may want to see returns on their investment in education in their careers before they get married,' she added.

They may also be putting off marriage until they are financially secure, said Singapore Management University's Assistant Professor of Sociology Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan.

'Most newly weds want to live in their own house, independent from their parents, but with housing costs going up, they will have to work for more years to save up for a home before getting married,' she said.

When the new set of data is compared with figures from 1990, the proportion of tertiary-educated single women is marginally lower than 20 years ago.

The proportion in 1990 was 27.3 per cent in the 35-39 age group and 24 per cent in the 40-44 age group, compared with 24.8 per cent and 23.5 per cent respectively last year.

Dr Mathew Mathews, a research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, said this suggests that the Government's pro-marriage message is hitting home and that women, unlike before, are 'not giving up on their chances of getting married after turning 35'.

Ms Lydia Gan, president of the Association of Dating Agencies and Matchmakers (Singapore), agreed, noting: 'In the past, people used to think that if marriage does not happen by a certain age, then that is it.'

'But now, they are more active about dating and no longer embarrassed to sign up for dating services.'

Women getting hitched later, though, may kiss goodbye to the chances of conceiving.

Dr Yap Mui Teng, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, said: 'The delay means that women are likely to begin child-bearing later in life. Infertility and the risks of pregnancy, however, generally increase with age, especially after 35.'

Associate Professor Straughan said the low fertility rates could also trigger a 'fast-greying population' and associated problems such as a smaller labour force and greater demand for care for the elderly.

Mrs Chang-Goh Song Eng, head of Reach Counselling which specialises in marital and family work, sees a silver lining though.

She said: 'Those who get married at a more mature age usually have more realistic expectations about love and marriage and this translates into a more stable marriage.'