

Why more older couples split up

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After years focused on parenting, some couples lose the romance in their marriage. When their children leave home, they struggle to relate to each other and split up.

Sociologists and experts whom The Straits Times spoke to said this is one key reason why people aged 45 and above accounted for a larger share of marital break-ups last year - despite an overall decline in the number of divorces.

But the statistics also revealed that more people aged 60 and above are getting hitched, and this may be down to people remarrying, said experts.

Figures from the Department of Statistics, released on Wednesday, showed that the number of divorces and annulments fell by 4.8 per cent to 7,241 last year, the first drop in seven years.

But 38.8 per cent of divorced men last year were aged 45 and above, up from 26.3 per cent in 2002. The figure was 25.3 per cent last year for females in the same age group, compared to 17.3 per cent 10 years before.

National University of Singapore sociologist Paulin Straughan said older couples may split up after their kids leave home, as they did not spend enough time building their relationship as a couple. Instead, they invested the time in their careers and children.

"Much of the marriage is tied to the couple's roles as parents, rather than their roles as husband and wife. So when the children leave, the parents don't know what to do with each other," she said.

Mr Jonathan Siew, centre manager at Care Corner Counselling Centre, said: "The wife may initially choose not to divorce when her children are still young.

"But when the children have grown up and can support themselves, if the marital situation hasn't improved, the wife may choose to opt for divorce."

For marriages to work, Institute of Policy Studies sociologist Mathew Mathews suggested that couples work on developing their relationship from the start. "People should be more open to marriage preparation and marriage enrichment programmes.

When you know that you've been through good times previously, there's something that you can look back to, and you'd feel more committed when going through crises."

The statistics also suggested that more people are rediscovering love later in life.

Some 420 men and 77 women aged 60 and above got married last year, compared to 145 men and 19 women in 2002.

Remarriages also made up 25.1 per cent of total marriages last year. A decade ago, the figure was 18.9 per cent. Mr Siew drew a link between the two sets of figures, explaining that those getting hitched older may be tying the knot for the second time.

Harry Elias Partnership family lawyer Koh Tien Hua said people, even after a divorce or a spouse's death, are not afraid of recommitting themselves because "marriage is still something that's greatly valued".