

## **More Singaporeans better educated, own homes: General Household Survey**

***Siau Ming En***

**TODAY**, 5 February 2016

A better educated population with higher rates of home-ownership, more dual-income married couples, fewer children born and more households living with at least one member aged 65 and over.

These were the trends reflected in the General Household Survey 2015 report released by the Singapore Department of Statistics on Wednesday (March 9). It looks at basic demographic characteristics, education, language and religion, among other things.

As of end June last year, Singapore's resident population — which includes Singapore citizens and permanent residents — was 3.9 million. Among the non-student population aged 25 and above, 52 per cent of them possessed post-secondary qualifications in 2015, up from the 46.5 per cent in 2010.

The increment was also observed among all age groups.

Also, more hold university qualifications at 28.2 per cent of the non-student population last year, compared with 23.7 per cent in 2010. Literacy rate also remained high at close to 97 per cent of the resident population, slightly up from the 95.9 per cent in 2010. In particular, multi-language literacy became more prevalent where the proportion of those who can read two or more languages increased from 70.5 per cent in 2010 to 73.2 per cent in 2015.

The number of singles among the younger age groups — 25 to 29 years old — increased, rising from 74.6 per cent to 80.2 per cent for males, and from 54 per cent to 63 per cent for females. Singlehood was more prevalent among men with lower educational qualifications, while the reverse was observed among women. Among ever-married women (those who are married or have been married before), the majority still had two or more children, but the average number of children declined from 2.02 to 1.85.

And among married couples, the proportion of dual-career couples grew to 53.8 per cent last year, up from 47.1 per cent in 2010.

In particular, the figure soared for older couples, with 14.5 per cent of married couples aged 65 and older both working, compared with 7.5 per cent in 2010. And among resident households — now numbering 1.23 million — the proportion with at least one household member aged 65 years and above increased from 24.1 per cent in 2010 to 29.1 per cent last year, reflecting the ageing population.

Similarly, the proportion of households made up of solely residents aged 65 and above also rose from 4.6 per cent to 6.7 per cent within the same five-year period.

The proportion of the elderly living with their children dropped from 66.7 per cent to 61.3 per cent last year. Elderly women were also more likely to live alone or live with their children without their spouse given their longer life expectancy, the survey found.

In terms of housing, four-room flats remained the most common house type, where nearly one in three resident households last year was living in this housing type, even though more were living in condominiums and other apartments at 13.9 per cent last year compared with 11.5 per cent in 2010.

Overall, homeownership among resident households was 90.8 per cent, up from 87.2 per cent in 2010.

Speaking to TODAY, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies Mathew Mathews said there will now be public expectation for amenities in housing estates for the elderly, whether they are for recreation or care facilities and safety features in homes.

NUS sociologist Paulin Straughan said the authorities might want to reconsider their en-bloc policies now that more elderly are living alone in mature estates. Unlike the younger generation, she noted that they may not be financially capable or have the energy to relocate.

But head of the Social Science Core at SIM University Kang Soon-Hock said that a more measured approach needs to be taken when it comes to making housing or welfare policy changes.

“Most of the policies that the Government has been rolling out over the years have been taking stock of the changes in elderly population, they do look quite far ahead ... Many measures that have been taken have been taken at an earlier point in time,” he added.

The sample survey for the General Household Survey was conducted as part of the Comprehensive Household Survey last year, to which 27,804 households responded.