

## Work eating into S'poreans family time

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Families here may be happier and enjoy closer ties, but more are also struggling to find time with their loved ones as work encroaches on their private lives, even though companies are trying to provide greater support for family needs.

These are among the findings of the 2013 Survey on Social Attitudes of Singaporeans, in which more than half the respondents (55 per cent) agreed that work demands had interfered with family time, up from 47 per cent in 2009.

In particular, the proportion of divorced, separated or widowed respondents who agreed that their jobs took time away from family more than doubled to 57 per cent from 25 per cent over the same period.

More men also felt the same way, with 58 per cent agreeing in 2013 up from 44 per cent in 2009, the last time a similar survey was conducted.

Commenting on the figures, Dr Mathew Mathews, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, said: "Men are beginning to be more concerned about family time. Perhaps this is because women are expecting more from their partners...it will take a while more before businesses recognise that work-life issues affect not just women, but also men."

The 2013 survey, commissioned by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), polled 2,000 Singaporeans.

The figures, which were first presented at the MSF's Social Service Conference on Friday by Dr Mathews, showed that families in Singapore were doing well on the whole.

More single and married respondents (90 per cent and 95 per cent respectively) indicated they were satisfied with their family lives in 2013, up from 84 per cent and 89 per cent respectively in 2009.

Only respondents who were divorced, separate or widowed experienced a dip in their satisfaction with family over the same period.

The proportion of respondents who claimed they had close family ties also rose, except for those aged 70 and above. A consistently high percentage of respondents across all age groups supported filial piety towards parents and viewed the family as a source of financial support.

On the other hand, the survey also found that relatively fewer married respondents were satisfied with their marriages. About 92 per cent in 2013 agreed that they were satisfied, down from 96 per cent in 2009.

While issues such as income and the rising cost of living pose increasing challenges to couples, marriage counsellors said couples also need to deal with unrealistic expectations.

Centre manager of Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapura (Vista Sakinah) Fazlinda Faroo said the narrative of modern marriage centres on the individual — a contrast to the older generation, who had a sense of the sacrifices that needed to be made for marriage.

For some couples, their yardstick on whether a marriage is satisfying is based on “me” and not so much on “us”, said Ms Fazlinda, whose centre runs marriage-preparation classes for couples who plan to remarry. Families for Life council member Anita Fam added: “...If more couples went for marriage prep (preparation courses), they would have a more realistic expectation of what goes into a marriage, and they wouldn’t be disappointed.”