

## **Women, what will make you want more babies?**

**Charlene Chua**

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What does Singapore need?

More babies.

Our total fertility rate (TFR) has declined from 1.6 in 2000 to 1.25 in 2014.

The TFR has not been satisfactory since 1977, the last time there was optimal population growth.

What do women want in order to help the country achieve that level again?

This is what we hope to find out.

Yesterday (July 6), the Institute Of Policy Studies (IPS) released the results of a study done on 2,000 Singapore citizens and permanent residents with regards to the effectiveness of the Marriage and Parenthood Package.

And what did these respondents think of the package, which was enhanced with more incentives in 2013?

Less than half of the people surveyed felt that more maternity leave, Baby Bonus, Parenthood Priority Scheme, Medisave grant for newborns, paternity leave and shared parental leave were pull factors for baby-making.

Indeed, the Government had set aside a \$2 billion budget for this package of measures, four times what was offered to married couples in 2001.

IPS researcher Christopher Gee noted that what the study showed was that money wasn't the only consideration when it came to having children.

And that women remained more sceptical about parenthood incentives than men.

He advocates that now is the time to focus on what will encourage women to have kids, especially women in their 30s.

Is it access to better childcare?

Initiatives to provide better work-family time balance?

Perhaps, an option to work from home till the child is one, even?

Elsewhere in the world, Japan has spent millions on matchmaking events and robot babies in hopes that that may inspire couples to want one of their own.

In Denmark, sexy advertisements remind couples of their civic duty in the bedroom.

Finland provides a maternity package for mothers comprising clothes, pajamas and books.

In 2007, Russia announced the country's national Day of Conception and tried to encourage baby-making with chances to win prizes such as cars, refrigerators and cash for women who gave birth.

Mr Gee said that women in Singapore may need to be convinced that it is not an all or nothing situation, where they either work full time or become a stay-at-home mum.

"Women (surveyed) were less likely to say measures were influential, the package was conducive, than men.

"This highlights the gender divide between men and women's attitudes and perceptions about child-bearing.

"They are a little bit more concerned about the whole process of having a child than men."

Singaporeans are now getting married at a later age, researchers also noted.

Mr Gee added: "What we need to do from here is to really think about... the barriers that women face today in terms of having a child.

"Maybe what women want are things like childcare, and also facilitating their re-entry into the workforce."

The silver lining in all of this?

The next decade will see more Singaporean women reaching their 30s.

Now, if we only knew what they wanted — to make more babies that is.