

Marriage & Parenthood Study 2012

The Marriage and Parenthood (M&P) Study 2012 is a survey commissioned by the National Population and Talent Division (NPTD), to understand the attitudes and motivations behind Singapore residents' marriage and parenthood trends. Similar surveys were conducted in 2007 and 2004. A total of 4,646 respondents aged 21 to 45 years old was surveyed for the 2012 study, comprising 2,120 single (never married) and 2,526 married individuals.¹ (Please see [Annex A](#) for profile.)

Key Findings

Most singles desire to get married

Marriage aspirations remained strong. 83% of single respondents indicated that they desired to get married. This is close to the 85% result in the 2007 survey, and higher than the 74% result in 2004. The top three reasons singles cited for not yet marrying were: i) have not met a suitable partner; ii) desire to concentrate on career or studies; and iii) have not enough money. These were similar to the reasons cited in 2007 and 2004. Among singles who were in serious relationships (i.e. with a view towards marriage), the top three reasons cited by those who did not intend to register their marriage within the next two years included: i) saving money for housing, ii) saving money for the wedding, and iii) too young to get married. (Please see [Annex B, Exhibits 1-2.](#))

Singles prefer meeting members of the opposite sex through recreational/social activities and friends

Singles were most comfortable meeting members of the opposite sex through i) recreational, sports and social activities, ii) friends/fellow students, and iii) colleagues and work acquaintances. Singles who were in serious relationships as well as married respondents indicated that they had met their partners/spouses mainly through friends, at school, and at work. (Please see [Annex B, Exhibits 3-4.](#))

Most would like to have 2 or more children

Parenthood aspirations remained strong. 80% of singles who indicated a desired number of children wanted to have 2 or more children. This is comparable to 84% in 2007. Among married respondents, 84% intended to have 2 or more children in 2012, similar to the 84% in 2007 and higher than the 76% in 2004.² Both male and female respondents intended to have an average of 2.2 children. There was little difference in the desired number of children between male and female respondents. (Please see [Annex B, Exhibits 5-6.](#))

The average number of children that married respondents actually have was 1.5. This is comparable to the average of 1.6 in 2007 and 1.5 in 2004. As with past surveys, the average actual family size stabilised at around 2 children for couples towards the end of their child bearing ages (i.e. above 40 years). (Please refer to [Annex B, Exhibit 7.](#))

Respondents who indicated they were unlikely to have any more children cited both practical

concerns (e.g. financial cost and lack of good child care arrangements) and family considerations (e.g. having enough children and spouse's decisions) among the top reasons. (Please see [Annex B, Exhibit 8.](#))

Most respondents viewed having children as taking place within the institution of marriage. 80% of single and 85% of married respondents agreed or strongly agreed that only legally married parents should have children.

Need to improve awareness of fertility issues

More can be done to improve awareness and address misconceptions regarding fertility issues. About 70% of single and 77% of married respondents assumed that couples would have little problem having children even when they were over 35 years old. This indicates that many are unaware that male and female fertility decline with age, and assisted reproduction technology cannot compensate for the age-related decline in fertility.³

Strong support for shared parental responsibility

Respondents voiced strong support for shared parental responsibility. 99% of married respondents agreed that fathers and mothers are equally important as caregivers for children.

Women desire both family and work at the same time

Female respondents desired family and employment at the same time. 80% of single female respondents indicated their preference to be working mothers (comparable to 81% in 2007 and 79% in 2004).

Among married female respondents, 77% indicated their preference to be employed after having a child (up from 62% in 2007 and 2004). Respondents were quite equally split between part-time and full-time employment options, although the percentage preferring part-time employment has increased to 40% in 2012 (compared to 19% in 2007 and 21% in 2004). This suggests that part-time opportunities and more workplace flexibility could encourage women to remain in or return to the workforce. (Please see [Annex B, Exhibit 9.](#))

Some aspects of work-life balance can be improved

The majority felt that they had good work-life balance. Notwithstanding this, respondents highlighted that some areas could be improved.

- a. 79% of single respondents reported they had good work-life balance. However, 65% were exhausted when they came home from work, 42% had insufficient time to date, and 50% had insufficient time to meet new people.
- b. Among married respondents, 82% reported good work-life balance. However, 62% of them were exhausted when they came home from work, and 54% felt their job prevented them from spending as much time with their families as they would like.

These findings suggest that while Singaporeans generally perceive themselves as having good work-life balance, they may have accepted that achieving work-life balance requires trade-offs in other aspects of their lives. (Please see Annex B, Exhibits 10 and 11.)

Care by family members was the most common child care option

Care by parents and grandparents was the most common child care arrangement. 83% of married respondents indicated that they took care of their children during weekdays, followed by 38% who indicated that grandparents played this role. 20% of the respondents indicated that their foreign domestic worker cared for their children during weekdays, while 14% and 5% placed their children in child care centres and kindergartens respectively.⁴ (Please see Annex B, Exhibit 12.)

The top three factors parents took into consideration when deciding on their current child care arrangements were: i) trust in caregiver, ii) financial cost and iii) proximity to home. This is largely similar to the 2007 findings where the top three factors were i) trust in caregiver, ii) financial costs and iii) whether the caregiver was trained to care for and develop the child. (Please see Annex B, Exhibit 13.)

Attitude towards Marriage & Parenthood measures

The Marriage & Parenthood Package was last enhanced in 2008 to strengthen the pro-family environment and support Singaporeans' aspirations to get married and have children. Married respondents indicated that maternity leave and the Baby Bonus cash gift were the top two policies that would most likely persuade them to have children or to have more children. (Please see Annex B, Exhibit 14.)

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¹ While similar studies were done in 2007 and 2004, not all the questions are comparable across studies. In particular, the survey questions were adjusted in the 2012 Study to allow a better understanding of topics such as life goals and work-life balance.

² Figure for the 2004 study was based on married respondents who indicated an intended family size.

³ For more information, please see:

- "Ageing and Infertility: An Overview" by Juan Balasch, published in Gynecological Endocrinology, 2010.http://www.issues4life.org/pdfs/20100608_ageingandinfertility.pdf

- "Delayed Childbearing" published by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, January 2012.<http://www.sogc.org/guidelines/documents/gui271CO1201E.pdf>

4 Figures add up to more than 100% as respondents could select multiple options in response to this question.