

Press Release

15 November 2024

**Most Singaporeans have positive views towards marriage and family,
but views of younger women are less in favour**

15 November, 2024 – Cultivate SG, a non-profit organisation that researches and dialogues on family issues in Singapore, recently commissioned a survey on Marriage, Family and Social Discourse with 2,000 Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents.

Summary:

- Almost 8 in 10 respondents (78%) believe that marriage is beneficial to society, with more men (84%) than women (73%) saying so. Younger women aged between 18 to 24 are least likely to agree (59%). Similar trends are paralleled in the support for current norms surrounding marriage and family.
- More than half of married respondents with only 1 child said they have not yet met their ideal (52%) or planned (69%) number of children.
- More than 8 in 10 (83%) believe that single parents should receive more support, but only about 1 in 4 respondents (24%) believe that single parenting should be encouraged.
- 8 in 10 (80%) respondents agree that grandparents bring important contributions to caregiving for their grandchildren, but only about 7 in 10 (69%) want their parents to be involved in raising their children.
- Respondents generally believe that friendships across controversial views (67%) and dialogues across opposing views are possible (74%), but almost 6 in 10 respondents (58%) report self-censorship due to the fear of public criticism.

1. Most have positive views towards marriage and family, but views of younger women are less in favour

Almost 8 in 10 respondents (78%) believe that marriage is beneficial to society, with more men (84%) than women (73%) saying so. Younger women aged between 18 to 24 have the least favourable view towards marriage as beneficial to society, with only 59% agreeing with the statement and nearly 1 in 5 (19%) expressing disagreement.

These trends are paralleled in the support for current norms surrounding marriage and family.

Almost 8 in 10 respondents (78%) support the current legal definition of marriage as between a man and a woman, but only 56% of women aged 18-24 agree with the current legal definition.

While nearly 8 in 10 (78%) of all respondents agree that the traditional family unit should be upheld as the ideal in education institutes from Primary to Secondary school, only slightly more than 6 in 10 (61%) women aged 18-24 agree with the statement.

Similar trends can be observed regarding views on whether it is good to keep sex within marriage. More than 8 in 10 (82%) respondents agree that it is good to keep sex within marriage, whereas about 7 in 10 women of ages 18-34 consider it good to keep sex within marriage (73% for women aged both 18-24 and 25-34 respectively).

Younger women between ages 18-24 still exhibit considerable interest in getting married (75%), one that is closely matched with the men of their age group (77% among men aged 18-24). On the other hand, aspirations for marriage seems to decline significantly for women aged 25-34 (55%) as compared to their male counterparts at the same age (76%).

An overwhelming majority (87%) of Singaporeans recognise that men and women bring unique contributions to a marriage. Such sentiments are generally shared across age and sex.

A high level of support for Government benefits to encourage marriage is noted on the overall (79%).

2. Most have positive views on children and parenthood, but there are many unfulfilled parenthood aspirations

About 7 in 10 respondents (69%) believe that Singapore will be better off with more children, with more men (75%) than women (63%) saying so. The difference in views between men and women are the starkest among those aged 18-24. Among women aged 18-24, only 56% agree that Singapore society will be better off with more children, as compared to 75% of their male counterparts who agree with the statement.

While respondents say that “2” is the ideal number of children, about half (51%) of the married respondents currently only have 1 or no children. Almost half of those married and between ages 18-44 have not had the number of children they think would be ideal to have (49%) or planned to have (58%).

Those who are without children are most likely to say that they have not yet achieved their ideal (79%) or planned (83%) aspirations for parenthood. More than half of those with only 1 child similarly said they have not yet met their ideal (52%) or plans (69%).

About half the respondents (51%) regardless of marital or parenthood status agree that they will not marry or would not have married someone who does not want to have children.

More than 8 in 10 (82%) agree that the Government should give benefits to encourage childbearing. While support for Government incentives to encourage childbearing is generally shared across the sexes as well, there seems to be a notable difference between men (85%) and women (78%) in such support. Men and women aged 18-44 are more likely to favour Government benefits (at least 80%) to encourage childbearing, compared to older age groups.

3. Fathers and Mothers deemed important for children

Nearly 9 in 10 (89%) respondents believe that men and women each bring unique contributions to parenting. More than 8 in 10 (84%) of the respondents who are parents (married or once married) agree that they and their respective spouses (or former spouses) each bring unique contributions to parenting as a mother and a father.

Similarly, more than 8 in 10 respondents (83%) believe that a child needs a father and a mother.

About 8 in 10 (79%) respondents agree that as far as possible, children should be raised by their biological parents.

Reflecting these attitudes towards the importance of both parents, only about 1 in 4 respondents (24%) believe that single parenting should be encouraged. Nevertheless, respondents remain compassionate towards single parents, with more than 8 in 10 (83%) agreeing that single parents should receive more support.

However, there are noticeable differences among younger women. Among the younger respondents aged 18-34, women are almost twice more likely to agree (34% among those aged 18-24; 42% among those aged 25-34) that single parenting should be encouraged, than their male counterparts (15% among those aged 18-24; 23% among those aged 25-34).

More than 8 in 10 respondents (83%) agree that parents should be involved in major decisions in their children's lives.

Relatedly, about 9 in 10 (89%) respondents believe that parents should have the primary responsibility to educate their children on moral values, and more than 8 in 10 (83%) respondents believe that parents should have the primary responsibility for their children's sexuality education.

4. Contributions of grandparents in caregiving for grandchildren strongly recognised, but slightly fewer desire actual involvement

About 8 in 10 (80%) respondents agree that grandparents bring important contributions to caregiving for their grandchildren, and this sentiment is shared across the age groups.

Despite such a positive view, fewer respondents believe that grandparents should be involved in a grandchild's upbringing, with only about 6 in 10 (64%) indicating so.

Women are less likely than their male counterparts to want their parents to be involved in raising their children. Among women of all age groups, around 6 in 10 (63%) expressed

such desires, as compared to around 7 in 10 (74%) among men of all age groups. The figure was the smallest among women aged 55-64, where only slightly more than half (54%) want their parents to be involved in raising their children. Similar trends were observed for women aged 35-44, where less than 6 in 10 (59%) want their parents to be involved in raising their children.

About 7 in 10 (71%) respondents feel that the Government should give benefits to encourage grandparenting.

5. Friendship and dialogue across controversial views possible, but significant tendencies towards self-censorship, shaming and 'cancelling' exist

Almost 7 in 10 (67%) respondents say that they do not allow controversial views to stand in the way of them making friends. Most respondents also believe that it is possible for people with strongly opposing views to dialogue with each other. More than 7 in 10 (74%) respondents believe that such dialogues can happen.

However, respondents express lower levels of comfort about discussing differing views, especially online.

Respondents generally feel more comfortable in-person (64%) rather than online (58%), when discussing controversial issues with people who do not share the same views. Almost 1 in 2 women are not comfortable discussing controversial issues, with fewer being comfortable doing so in the online space (56% in-person; 52% online). By contrast, men report higher comfort levels (71% in-person; 64% online).

Almost 6 in 10 respondents (58%) report self-censorship due to the fear of public criticism. The concern is elevated among the younger age groups of 18-24 (61%) and 25-34 (62%) as well as those aged 65 and above (68%).

The heightened sensitivity to criticism could be due to certain ideas and attitudes concerning social discourse. Almost half (48%) of the respondents feel that to accept someone means agreeing with the person. 4 in 10 respondents (40%) say that it is hateful to disagree with someone.

Conversely, a sizeable number of respondents are favourable towards forms of social sanction against people for expressing views they do not share. More than 1 in 3 respondents (36%) say that it is acceptable to shame someone online for expressing views that one does not agree with. More than 1 in 3 (37%) say that it is acceptable to call for someone to be fired by employers for expressing views that one does not agree with.

Comments and Recommendations

Our findings suggest that Singaporeans have a positive view about marriage and children, considering them as positives for society. Married Singaporeans are not averse to the idea of having children, with a majority of those aged 18-44 saying that they have not yet met their ideal or planned number of children.

Overall, the findings also suggest that a sizeable number of younger women aged 18-34 are dissatisfied with existing norms surrounding marriage and family, diverging from their male counterparts.

Singaporeans value the contributions grandparents can bring to the caregiving of their grandchildren. However, a significant number (11%) do not proceed to say they want or would want their parents involved in raising their children.

Following these findings, we highlight three sets of recommendations from our report:

1. **Examine reasons for the divide in views between men and women.** Further study may be necessary to examine the precise reasons for the significant divergence of views between men and women aged 18-34 towards current norms surrounding marriage and family.
2. **Create more opportunities that can suit young parents to collect valuable feedback.** It is strongly recommended that the Government make more effort in reaching out both men and women aged 18-44 to hear their concerns and hopes for marriage and family life. It is also important for more effort to be invested to reach Singaporeans who already are parents but at a relatively young age. These Singaporeans may currently be busy trying to balance work and family lives and

thus have little ability to find time to participate in feedback exercises. The Government can consider pursuing their views more intentionally, creating more opportunities that suit their availabilities in order to collect valuable feedback.

- 3. Explore reasons why some parents do not want their own parents to be involved in raising their children.** We noted in our Cultivate's survey on Parenthood and Work (August 2024) that grandparents are the third most common main caregivers during working hours on weekdays (15%), behind mothers (44%) and institutionalised childcare (21%). This is despite a generally high view of the contributions of grandparents in caregiving we found in this survey. Further study may be necessary to examine the reasons why some parents do not want their own parents (i.e. the children's grandparents) to be involved in raising their children, including any gaps or challenges in intergenerational connections and bonds.

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About the Survey

Cultivate SG commissioned Toluna to conduct a self-administered online survey (in English only) between 21 September to 21 October 2024. 2,000 respondents participated in this survey. Due to the nature of online surveys, respondents tend to be from the demography that is more “connected” and technologically savvy. It may therefore not have reached respondents who are more offline and beyond the typical ready-reach for online market research panels. Survey participation may also be limited by language barriers.

Despite these limitations, this survey provides valuable insights into the viewpoints and attitudes of nationally representative sample. As with any survey, care should be taken when generalising the results to the entire population due to the limitations inherent this survey’s design.

For more details on the demography of our respondents, refer to Annex A in our full report. Link to full report: <http://cultivate.sg/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/20241115-MFSD-Survey-Report.pdf>

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About Cultivate SG

We are an organisation that wants to see families and society thrive for generations. We call this social sustainability. This involves individual rights and responsibilities, stable marriages, strong families, children’s interests, a cultural climate that supports personal and family growth, and social harmony. We are committed to research, education, and dialogue on these issues to build up other people, families, and communities who share our heart. This is how we grow the good, one conversation at a time.