

# Move to boost rates of marriages, parenthood

**More S'poreans opt to stay single, marry late, delay births, have fewer babies**

By MALMINDERJIT SINGH

THE government will be engaging all stakeholders, including roping in employers, to explore new measures to improve the rates of marriages and parenthood in Singapore.

This comes as the latest statistics show that more Singaporeans are opting to remain single, marrying at a later age, giving birth at a later age and consequently having fewer babies even though the government had proposed a handsome marriage and parenthood package.

As a result, the government is reviewing its policies and measures to help

more Singaporeans to get married and have children, and will also look at what other countries have done effectively to tackle these issues.

Yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean said that the government will work with stakeholders to "address the fundamental problems behind these dwindling numbers", as he highlighted demographics as a key issue that will shape Asia in the coming decades, in a speech at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Global Asia Institute Signature Conference 2012.

He also called for suggestions on "how we can enhance the pro-family environment in Singapore".

An Occasional Paper on marriage and parenthood trends in Singapore, released yesterday by the

National Population and Talent Division, showed that the proportion of singles has increased across all age groups between 2000 and 2011. Among citizens aged 30-34 years, for instance, singlehood rates rose from 33 per cent to 44 per cent for males and from 22 per cent to 31 per cent for females.

The data also revealed that those Singaporeans that are in fact getting married are indeed doing so at a later age than before. From 2000 to 2011, the median age of Singaporean men getting married for the first time has risen from 28.5 years to 30.1 years while women are also saying "I do" later in life at 27.8 years compared to 26.1 previously.

With the delay in family formation, Singaporeans are also having fewer chil-

dren, the paper stated. For example, based on a sample of women born between 1965 and 1970, those who married at the age of 25 had 1.95 children by the age of 40, whereas those who wedded at 28 had 1.67 children and women in this group who tied the knot at age 35 only had 0.83 children.

The proportion of married women having one child or none has also gone up but generally, the statistics revealed, the decline in birth rates is a trend across all ethnic groups in Singapore and could therefore be less of a cultural trend owing to a particular race group.

The trend of declining marriage and parenthood rates has occurred despite the government's efforts over the years to give them a boost through a slew of

## Marriage and parenthood benefits

Breakdown of what a middle income household can enjoy\*

MEASURE	BASIS	BENEFITS UP TO AGE 7	TAX SAVINGS BEYOND AGE 7
• Baby Bonus Cash Gift	First child: \$4,000 Second child: \$4,000	\$8,000	
• Baby Bonus Child Development Account (CDA) Co-Savings	First child: \$6,000 Second child: \$6,000	\$12,000	
• Parenthood Tax Rebate	First child: \$5,000 Second child: \$10,000	\$4,500	\$10,500
<b>Total savings from reliefs, of which:</b>		<b>\$5,500</b>	<b>\$7,200</b>
<i>Working Mother's Child Relief</i>	15% for 1 child, 35% for 2 children	\$2,500	\$3,300
<i>Grandparent Caregiver Relief</i>	\$3,000 per year	\$800	\$1,100
<i>Qualifying Child Relief</i>	\$4,000 per year per child	\$2,200	\$2,800
• Foreign Domestic Worker Levy Concession	9 yrs x 12 mths x \$95	\$10,300	
• Subsidy for full-day centre-based infant care	17 mths x \$600 each child	\$32,400	
• Subsidy for full-day centre-based child care	54 mths x \$300 each child	\$20,400	
• 16 weeks of maternity leave per child	16 wks x \$3,400/mth	\$27,200	
• 6 days of child care leave per parent per year	9 yrs x (6 days x \$3,400/mth + 6 days x \$5,100/mth)	\$21,200	
<b>Total benefits</b>		<b>\$141,500</b>	<b>\$17,700</b>

\*Equivalent for 2 children, until both children turn 7 (assume children are spaced 2 years apart). Assumption of \$8,500 household income, split 60:40 between husband and wife.

Source: National Population and Talent Division

measures. The country's fertility rate stands at 1.2 despite such measures, which include the baby bonus cash and co-savings, infant-care and child-care subsidies, tax savings and paid maternity and child-care leave for the parent.

For instance, for a middle-income household with two children, this could amount to as much as \$141,500 until each child is seven years old. Beyond the age of seven, the

family will also stand to gain from tax savings of as much as \$17,700 for both children.

Since its implementation in 2001, the families of some 350,000 children have benefited from the measures under the Marriage and Parenthood Package, which was last enhanced to \$1.6 billion a year in 2008.

The paper explained that Singapore was not alone in this predicament as most developed societies

had total fertility rates (TFR) below replacement levels and Singapore's experience of declining TFR was similar to that of other East Asian developed societies such as Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Like Singapore, these societies were also experiencing later marriages and rising singlehood due to factors such as rising levels of educational attainment and better employment opportunities.

In understanding and

addressing the impact of more demanding and better careers on declining marriage and fertility rates, the government is expected to consult employers among other stakeholders, and is actively soliciting feedback from the public on this pertinent issue.

Members of the public who are interested in giving feedback on marriage and parenthood trends in Singapore may do so at the REACH portal.