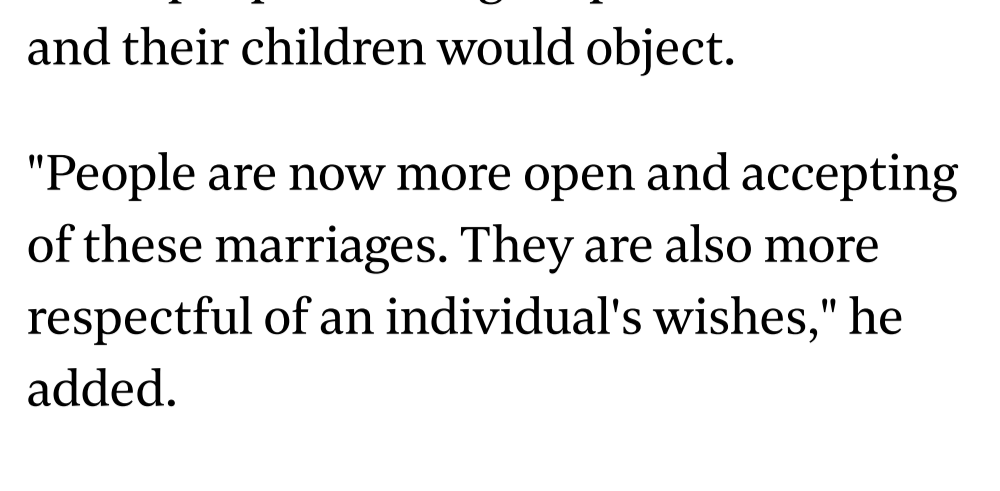




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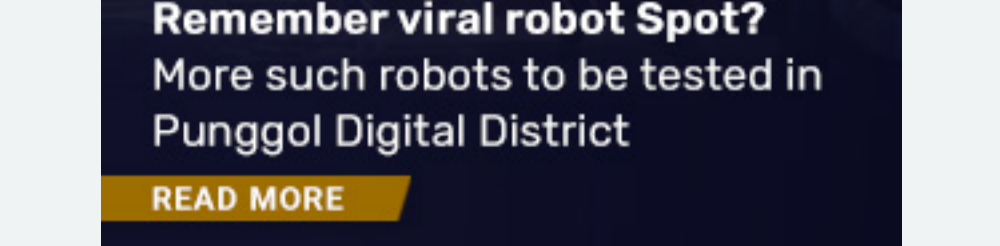
# Never too old or too late for love to blossom

More seniors aged 60 and up saying 'I do' - a sign such unions becoming more accepted



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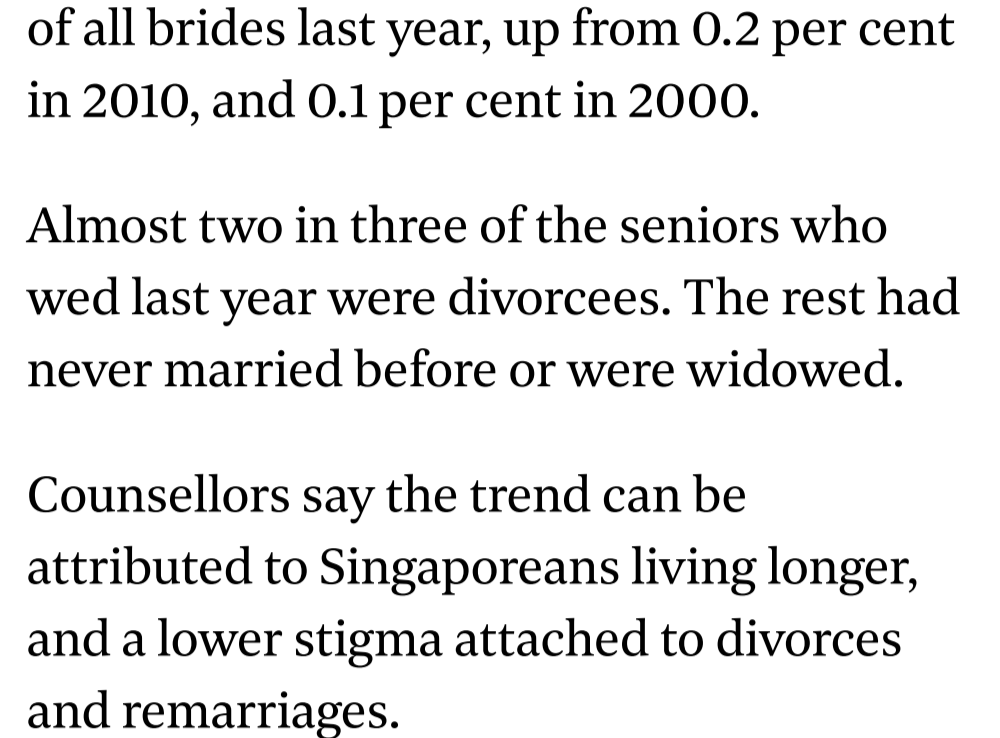
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A growing number of seniors are finding love and getting married in the autumn of their lives, a trend that suggests a greater acceptance of unions later in life and evolving values and norms ascribed to ageing.

Mr Leng Chin Fai, a senior consultant at Fei Yue Community Services who also conducts pre-marriage counselling, said that in the past, seniors may have abstained from remarrying as they were afraid people would gossip about them and their children would object.

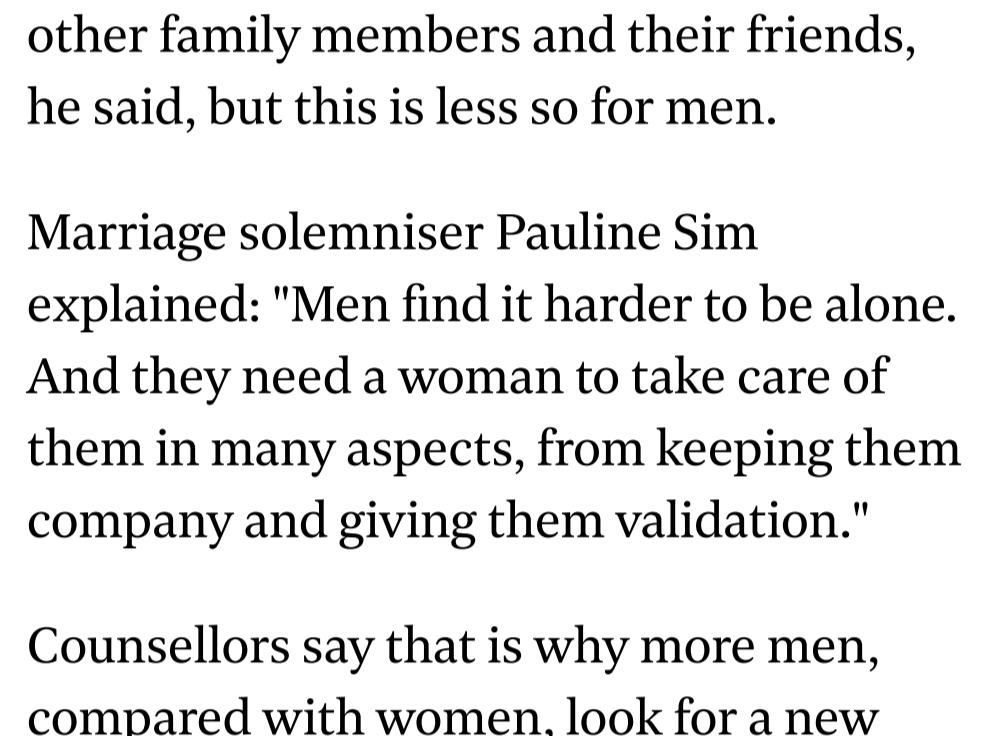
"People are now more open and accepting of these marriages. They are also more respectful of an individual's wishes," he added.



Last year, 334 men aged 60 and older got married, up from 305 in 2010, and 150 in 2000.

The data is in the 2020 Statistics on Marriages and Divorces report published by the Department of Statistics last month.

These men accounted for 1.5 per cent of all grooms last year, up from 1.3 per cent in 2010, and 0.7 per cent in 2000.



Compared with the men, there were fewer women aged 60 and older who tied the knot.

Last year, there were 98 such brides, up from 51 in 2010, and 32 in 2000.

These women accounted for 0.4 per cent of all brides last year, up from 0.2 per cent in 2010, and 0.1 per cent in 2000.

Almost two in three of the seniors who wed last year were divorcees. The rest had never married before or were widowed.

Counsellors say the trend can be attributed to Singaporeans living longer, and a lower stigma attached to divorces and remarriages.

Many of those in their 60s are physically and financially healthy, and yearn for companionship in their golden years after a divorce or the death of a spouse, say counsellors and solemnisers.

Singapore Management University sociology professor Paulin Straughan said: "The notion of falling in love is not age-specific. We do fall in love at different stations and stages of our life course.

"And marriage is not just about procreation and raising children, it is also about nurturing a committed companionship between two mature adults."

Mr Jonathan Siew, principal counsellor at Care Corner Counselling Centre, said some people assume that seniors have less need for intimacy, whether it is emotional, physical or sexual.

He added: "But one's attachment needs do not change with age. My clients still feel the need to be cared for and to be important to someone."

Older women may meet these needs through relationships with their children, other family members and their friends, he said, but this is less so for men.

Marriage solemniser Pauline Sim explained: "Men find it harder to be alone. And they need a woman to take care of them in many aspects, from keeping them company and giving them validation."

Counsellors say that is why more men, compared with women, look for a new partner to fulfil their needs when they become single again. It is also one reason why there are significantly more older men who wed, compared with women.

There are also foreign women - who may be significantly younger than the men - who marry the older Singaporean men, said the solemnisers and counsellors.

Mr Siew said it is also seen as culturally "less permissible" for older women to marry, which could lead some women to hold back on starting a new relationship or marriage.

He added: "It's the whole cultural thing that when you reach a certain age, people feel you shouldn't have certain needs, like sexual needs. It is not seen as appropriate."

Marriage solemniser Joanna Portilla pointed out that a few seniors whose marriages she solemnised decided to marry after having spent decades together as a couple, so that their spouses can inherit their property after their death.

They include a 78-year-old former nurse, who had never married before, whose dying wish was to marry her long-time partner, a journalist two years her junior.

He was a divorcee with a son and the couple were together for over 30 years. She was diagnosed with end-stage cancer and wanted to marry him so that he could inherit her flat after her death, Ms Portilla said.

While some adult children are supportive and would even help to plan for their parent's new marriage, Ms Portilla said others do not feel the same way.

Some object to the new spouse, especially if the woman is much younger than their elderly father or they suspect she may be a gold-digger, said those interviewed.

Ms Sim noted that some seniors may hold back as they are afraid of what their children, family and friends may say.

To that, she said: "Age is just a number and it should not be a barrier to your happiness when you find love and commit to each other. Don't deprive yourself of happiness."

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