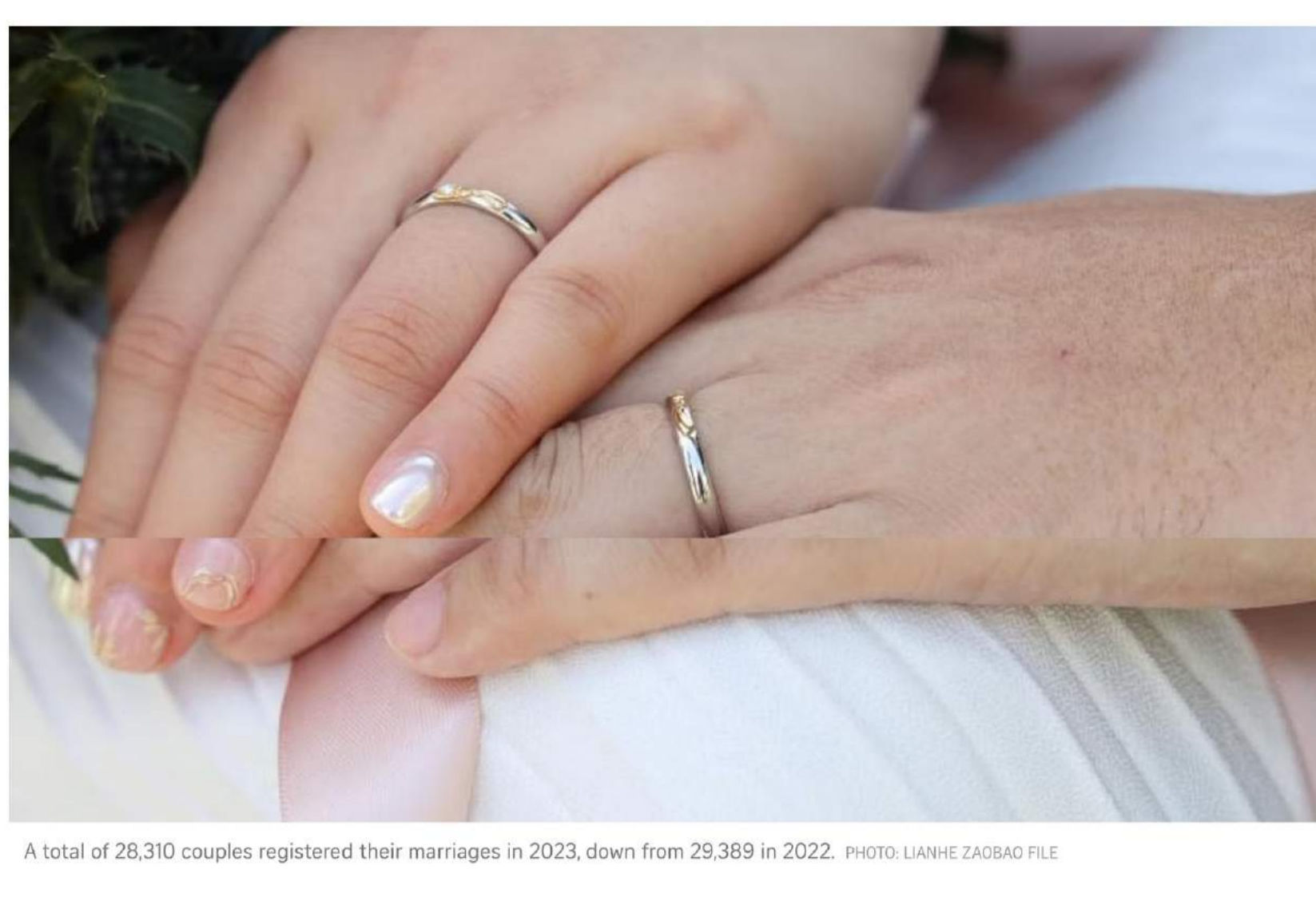


Fewer marriages in 2023 in S'pore after surge in 2022



A total of 28,310 couples registered their marriages in 2023, down from 29,389 in 2022. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO FILE



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SINGAPORE- The post-pandemic wedding rush is over, as fewer couples tied the knot in 2023.

A total of 28,310 couples registered their marriages in 2023, a 3.7 per cent fall from the record high of 29,389 marriages in 2022.

The data was contained in the inaugural Family Trends Report published by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) on July 15.

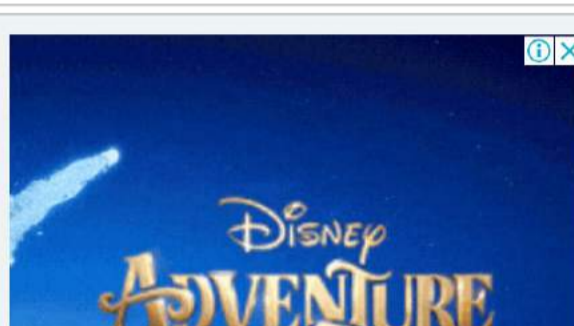


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The 37-page report contains statistics related to every stage of family life, such as marriage, family formation, early childhood and ageing, Minister for Social and Family Development Masagos Zulkifli said.

He was speaking at the National Family Festival appreciation event to thank partners involved in the month-long festival that ended on June 23.

These statistics have, in previous years, been released in separate reports – for instance, in the Population Trends report published by the Department of Statistics.



Mr Masagos said that Singapore remains a good place for families across every life stage.



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"In 2023, there were over 28,000 marriages registered, which is over 2,000 marriages more than a decade ago. Overall, the five-year moving average for marriages has been stable," he said.

Veteran marriage solemniser Joanna Portilla said there was a surge in marriages in 2022, when Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, such as curbs on the maximum number of guests at weddings, were eased or lifted.

Many couples who postponed their weddings due to Covid-19 restrictions earlier in the pandemic held their nuptials in 2022, she said, adding that it is not unexpected that the number of marriages in 2023 fell after 2022's record high.



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The report showed that the proportion of men and women who were ever married, which includes those who are currently married, widowed or divorced, has fallen.

What this means is that there has been a higher proportion of people staying single in the past decade.

The proportion of male residents aged between 25 and 49 who were single increased from 31.2 per cent in 2013 to 35.4 per cent in 2023.

The corresponding figure for women was 25.1 per cent in 2013, and this rose to 28.7 per cent in 2023, an MSF spokeswoman told The Straits Times.

Residents comprise both Singaporeans and permanent residents.

Total number of marriages registered

■ Civil ■ Muslim

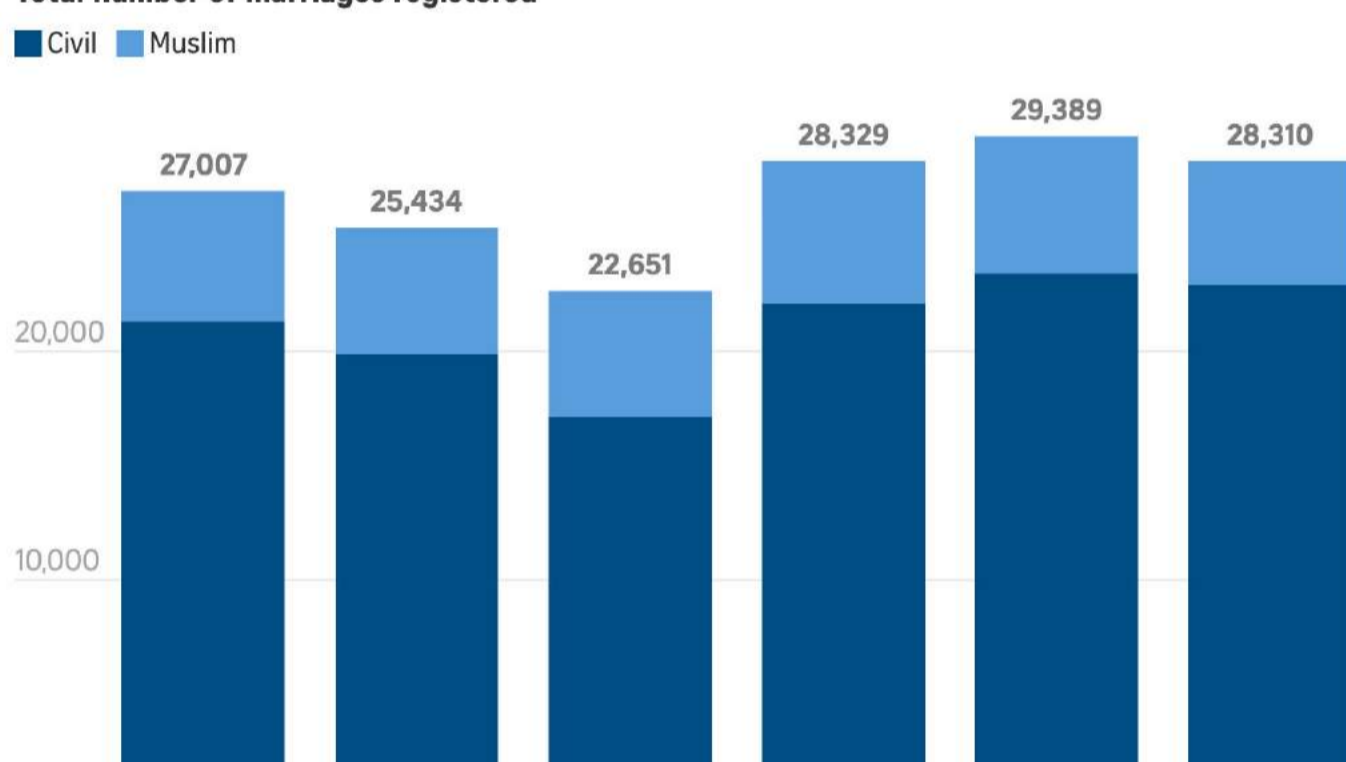


Chart: STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS - Source: MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

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More remaining childless or have one child

Singapore's resident total fertility rate, which refers to the average number of babies each woman would have during her reproductive years, fell to a historic low of 0.97 in 2023.

The report showed that a growing proportion of women are staying childless or having just one child by the end of their reproductive years.

In 2013, 10 per cent of female residents aged between 40 and 49 who were ever married did not have any children, and this rose to 13.9 per cent in 2023.

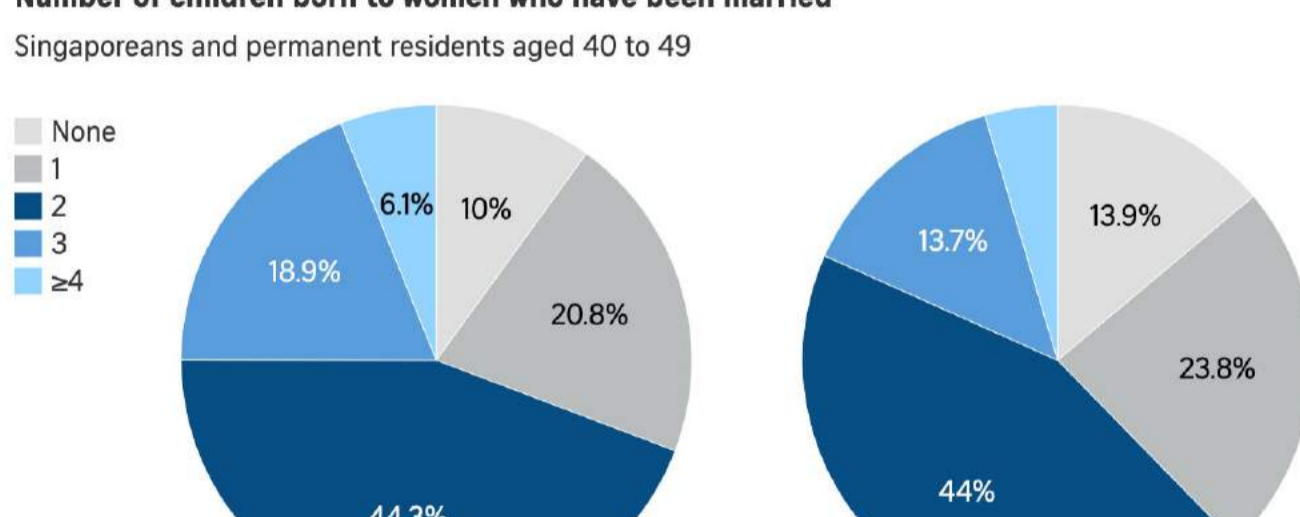
The proportion of such women who have one child also rose, from 20.8 per cent in 2013 to 23.8 per cent in 2023.

Dr Mathew Mathews, principal research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, noted that couples are marrying and having children later.

For example, the median age of first-time mothers rose from 30.3 years in 2013 to 31.6 years in 2023.

Number of children born to women who have been married*

Singaporeans and permanent residents aged 40 to 49



*Those who are married, widowed, divorced or separated.
NOTE: Figures may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.
Chart: STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS - Source: MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

As a woman's fertility declines with age, having babies at an older age may limit the number of children a woman would eventually have, Dr Mathews said, even if the couple wants more children.

He added: "While it is still the norm that couples feel that a child completes their marriage, it no longer is seen as necessary for a married couple to have children. Being childless is no longer stigmatised."

"For some, the thought of having children and how this can disrupt career and other life plans does factor in their decision to remain childless."

Dr Mathews said that, as more Singaporeans stay single if they do not find Mr or Miss Right, and these singles also lead fulfilling lives, the societal push for marriage has slowly been diminishing.

Professor Jean Yeung, the director of social sciences at the Agency for Science, Technology and Research's Institute for Clinical Sciences, said that young adults are more focused on self-development, rather than marriage and babies these days.

This is especially so for women, as the cost of marriage and having children falls disproportionately on wives and mothers, who shoulder most of the caregiving and housework responsibilities at home.

Prof Yeung, who is a professor at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, said: "These responsibilities exert a high opportunity cost for women so that they usually end up forgoing higher wages, free time to pursue career development and self-interests, leisure, and consumption for themselves."

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Greater stability in recent marriages

Meanwhile, a smaller percentage of couples who wed in more recent years have ended their marriages compared with those who wed in earlier years.

This suggests greater marriage stability among couples who wed more recently.

Marriage counsellors attribute this to more couples seeking help to save their marriages, along with more marital programmes for couples at different stages of marriage, like marriage preparation courses.

For example, the cumulative proportion of marriages that ended before their 10th anniversary fell from 17 per cent among couples who wed in 2005 to 15.3 per cent for those who wed in 2012.

The report said that the most significant improvement was seen in the fall in dissolution rates for Muslim marriages.

A marriage can be dissolved through either a divorce or an annulment.

Mr Ahmad Syakir Sariff, a senior counsellor at the AMP Marriage Hub, said there have been more efforts by various Muslim organisations to help couples with their marital issues, which may have led to fewer divorces.

Ms Patricia Lum, a senior counsellor at Care Corner Singapore, said there have been more programmes in recent years to help couples prepare for marriage and strengthen their union so that they stay happily married.

She added that there are also more groups running services for couples facing marital woes, and many of these services run by MSF-funded agencies are offered free of charge.

This makes such services a lot more accessible as counselling offered by private providers may be costly to some, at up to \$240 a session for couples, she said.

"There is also less stigma around seeking help," she added.

"Anecdotally, we have seen that couples are more willing to get support for their relationships and there is less shame in working through marital challenges."

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