

Last of the millennials

The 19+: Who they are, what they want



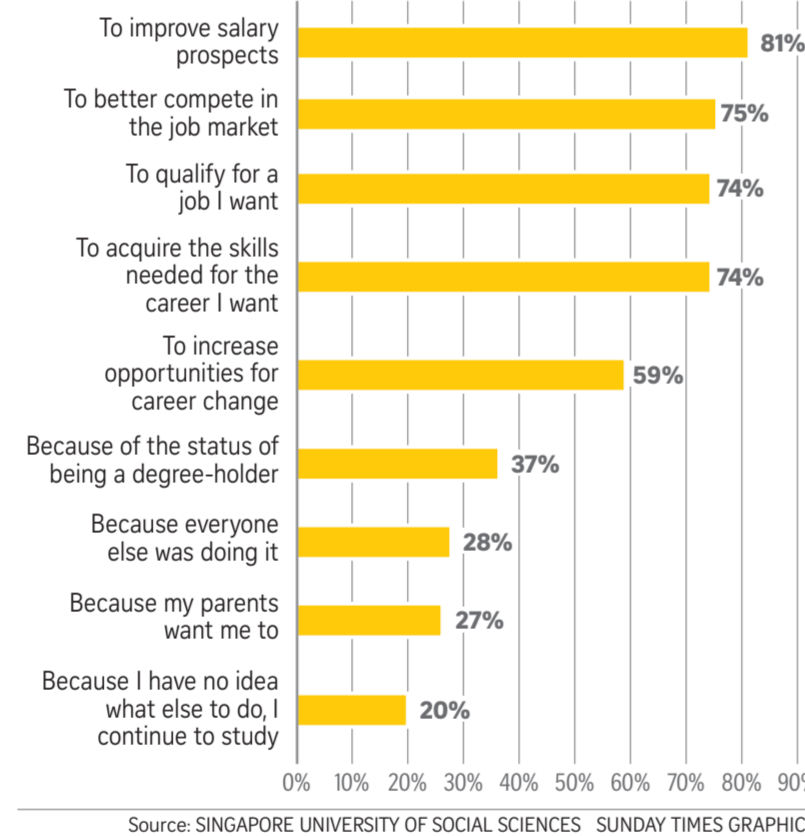
Ms Martina Veloso views a degree as a back-up plan while Mr Nicholas Papayouanou says it means "you are higher up in the food chain". ST PHOTOS: KELVIN CHNG

A degree? Yes, please

91% of ST-SUSS poll respondents see it as way to earn more, get careers they want



Why they want a degree



Further about their higher education plans. All said they hope to eventually head to university. Among this group are national shooter Martina Veloso and School of the Arts graduate Nicholas Papayouanou. Ms Veloso, who won two gold medals at the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane, Australia, last year, wants to be a full-time athlete while Mr Papayouanou, who played

About 15 per cent of their parents' generation went to university. But nine in 10 of 19-year-olds want a degree.

Sandra Davie
Senior Education Correspondent

By one definition, the 19-year-olds born in 1999 are the last cohort of the millennial generation. By another definition, they are already part of Generation Z, aka, iGen – those born between 1996 and 2010 – because the Internet and smartphones have defined many of their experiences thus far.

The generation coming up after Gen Z is already being referred to by some as Generation Alpha. The Straits Times and Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) decided to study 19-year-olds to understand who they are, how they view the world and what they want out of life. While some of this information could have been gleaned from snap polls done by marketeers, we decided to ask this group to characterise themselves and share their thoughts, for a more nuanced and complete picture. We held two focus group discussions to understand the and what their educational and career aspirations were. The survey, carried out between

Women expect to be paid less

Despite years of talk about gender equality, not only is there still a gender pay gap, but young women also expect to be paid less than men.

The results of a survey of over one thousand 19-year-old Singaporeans last year, such as people management and communication. First-year Singapore University of Social Sciences marketing student Victoria Wong said: "Perhaps cultural expectations make men think that it's their responsibility to be the main provider for their family and earn more."

Associate Professor Randolph Tan, noting that there is scant research on salary expectations in Singapore and almost none that he is aware of on salary expectations of those who have not yet joined the labour force, said: "In general, we would expect prior expectations about asking salaries to be directly linked to future asking salaries. Where a gap already exists at the point where expectations are formed, it makes it more likely for the actual gender salary gap to persist."

"The fact that 19-year-olds display such a gender-based gap suggests that difference arises even before actual labour market experience, and are therefore not formed through first-hand experience of workplace discrimination," he said, adding that more research can be done to see if there are other cultural or socio-economic factors at work. Randstad Singapore managing director Jaya Dass said the results were not a surprise, given that on average, men around the world still earn 20 per cent more than women.

She said: "Salary expectations are references to salary benchmarks that are mainly based on historical data which takes into account past traditional values where men were commonly the breadwinners and women were homemakers."

August and November last year, had 1,056 respondents. They were either about to enter first year in university, or were final-year polytechnic or Institute of Technical Education students. Some of the males were serving national service. A small number were working. As the majority were in post-secondary institutions and looking to further their education at the universities, we asked them about the education system they had been through and what their educational and career aspirations were.

The 19-year-olds belong to a generation shaped by the smartphone and the concomitant rise of social media. They were asked about their usage of mobile phones, laptops and various forms of media. The earlier millennial cohorts grew up with the Web as well, but it was not ever-present in their lives, at hand at all times, day and night.

We also sought to understand their views on issues, including political ones – from Section 377A, the law that criminalises gay sex, to whether the race of a prime minister should matter. Their responses give us a window into their views, and

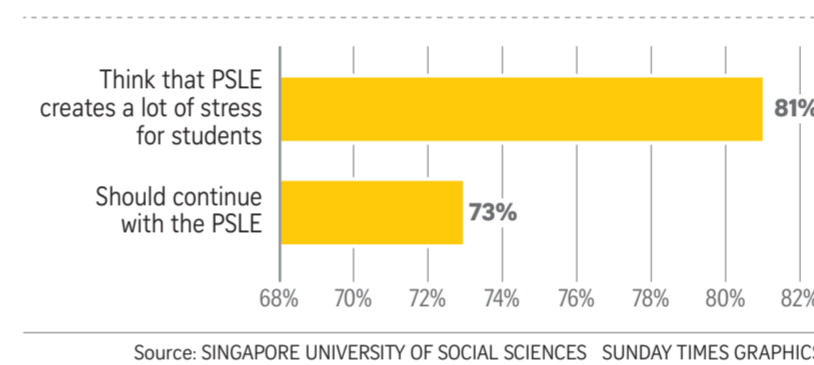
provide some clues about where this generation might be headed. Many of them shared views and values consistent with the generalisations often trotted out about millennials and iGen. That said, some stereotypes were also debunked.

This study examines the characteristics of this age group through the lens of their differences, as well as through aspects which distinguish them from other groups.

Some differences are discernible across gender, education pathways, as well as socioeconomic status. Others are based on formed habits, such

Is streaming appropriate?

On PSLE



Streaming, exams are OK

Education Minister Ong Ye Kung recently announced that the Normal-Express stream divide will be done away with in secondary schools. By 2024, streaming will be replaced with a system that lets students study subjects at different levels.

Many people, including parents and educators, cheered the move. They hope the change will reduce the stigmatisation of students in the slower Normal streams. However, surprisingly, when 19-year-olds were asked about streaming in the ST-SUSS survey, 69 per cent felt it was appropriate for students to be routed into the Special, Express and Normal streams in secondary school.

A closer look at the figures reveals a more complex picture. Those from the junior colleges and Integrated Programme (IP) schools favoured streaming more strongly than those from the polytechnics and Institute of Technical Education.

Similarly, eight in 10 of the respondents complained that the Primary School Leaving Examination creates a lot of stress for students, but at the same time, 73 per cent said the exam should stay.

When asked about these findings during the focus group discussions with two groups, it emerged that it was their parents who are stressed out over exams and streaming. They, themselves, saw examinations as an appropriate way to stream students.

But again, most of the 19-year-olds say the six-year programme, which allows students to skip the O-levels, should indeed be for the academically strong.

Another interesting insight was that more than half of those from IP schools said they had aimed for this since primary school. And about 60 per cent said they chose the IP so that they could skip the O-levels and get into a top school.

Singapore Polytechnic student Liang Ge Song echoed the sentiments of many of his peers when he said he did not mind being routed into the Normal (Academic) stream. "I realised in secondary school that I learn best by doing – by applying what I learn. So after secondary school, I was happy to go to polytechnic where learning is hands-on and you get to do a lot of projects," said the human resource management student.

National Institute of Education Associate Professor Jason Tan was not surprised at the findings.

"Their views on streaming, exams, and reasons for wanting a degree, all show that they are a very pragmatic lot. I am not surprised that they support streaming and exams – they probably see exams as a fair, objective way to sort students," he said.

"And when you have been through an exam, however stressful, it doesn't seem bad in hindsight. Especially, if you came through it well."

Purpose over pay cheques

Young people want jobs with meaning, and they will even put purpose over pay cheques.

A survey conducted by The Straits Times in partnership with the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) found that the most important factor in choosing a job for them was how meaningful it was.

The study examined the views of more than a thousand 19-year-old Singaporeans. Nearly 42 per cent said the job must hold some meaning for them. This was more than twice as popular as the next highest ranking factor of good salary prospects, which 17 per cent of the respondents agreed with.

They also said other considerations, such as work-life balance, how related the job is to one's field of study and the opportunity to progress in the career, would not affect their job choice.

However, fewer of the respondents from the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) – 32 per cent – felt that a meaningful job was important, in contrast with 42 per cent for those from polytechnics and 45 per cent from junior colleges (JCs).

The survey also showed that ITE students had more practical considerations. More of them said factors such as salary and how related the job is to their discipline of study would influence their decision to take it up.

Those from JCs also had higher salary expectations than their polytechnic and ITE peers. The desired starting pay for young people on the JC route was \$3,905, compared with \$3,312 and \$3,247 for those from polytechnic and ITE.

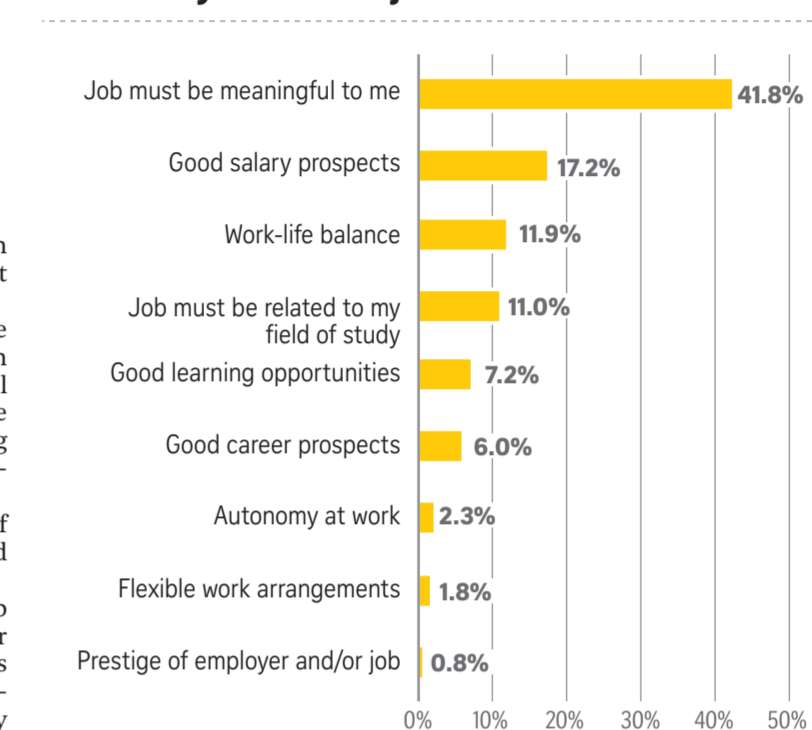
Labour economist Randolph Tan, who led the ST-SUSS study, said: "Young people value their freedom and have greater confidence in their own abilities than the generations before them, and do not believe in serving merely as a cog in the system."

The SUSS associate professor noted that there is a difference in socio-economic status between students from ITE and JC, suggesting that this plays a role in shaping their career outlook.

Temasek Polytechnic student Charmaine Goh, who hopes to take up a job which can benefit others, said: "It goes back to what you want to do in your life and how your career fits in with that, and how it helps you achieve that purpose."

The third-year communications and media management student said there is a "clear shift" in think-

What they want in a job



Old millennials vs young millennials



http://str.sg/oldvsyoung

SEEKING VALUE-ADDED JOBS

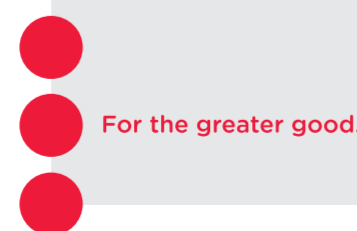
In the past, it was about finding a job that you could stay in for a long time, and work and life were two separate things... Today, the lines are blurred. My friends and I would like jobs that we would personally enjoy, something that can benefit other people.

MS CHARMINE GOH, a third-year student at Temasek Polytechnic.

"This sort of work process will eventually help you to grow as a person, instead of just taking instructions from others."

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*According to Graduate Employment Survey 2018.

Last of the millennials

My phone, my world

National footballer Ikhsan Fandi never turns off his phone, not even before a big game

Jolene Ang

For many young people, the first thing they reach for when they wake up, and the last thing they see before going to bed, is their mobile phone.

In fact, nine in 10 of them do just that, according to a survey recently conducted by The Straits Times in partnership with the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) of a group of 19-year-olds, or those born in 1999.

The survey also found that most of the respondents use their phones for five to six hours a day, with the women spending close to one hour more than men.

National footballer Ikhsan Fandi, who falls in that age group, is just like his peers in that regard – when he is not on the pitch, he is on his phone, he said. He likes being connected to his friends and family, from whom he lives apart.

“Life without my phone would be really hard. I think I could survive without my phone only on the condition that all my friends don’t have their phones too, so I don’t feel disconnected,” he said in a recent interview with ST from Raufoss, Norway, where he is based.

Mr Ikhsan, who turned 20 last month, is the second son of local football legend Fandi Ahmad. He relocated earlier this year after signing a two-year contract with Norwegian football team Raufoss.

He said: “I’m always on my phone – I check for updates on social media every few minutes.”

He does not ever switch off his iPhone XS. Even if it is before a big game, he uses it to listen to music.

And he prefers texting to calling, just like others his age. The survey found the most frequently used phone function was messaging, followed by social media, the alarm clock, phone calls and music.

The footballer often chats with



Mr Ikhsan Fandi, who is based in Norway, says he checks for updates on social media every few minutes and often chats with his siblings on social media, like when they post pictures on Instagram. PHOTO: IKHSAN FANDI/INSTAGRAM

They got their first phones at age 11 and their first laptop at 13, just as they entered secondary school. Females tend to get their phones earlier, while for males it is laptops.

Three out of five follow social media influencers.

his siblings on social media, like when they post pictures on Instagram, for example. The photo-sharing app is his top app, followed by Snapchat and WhatsApp.

Mr Ikhsan has more than 72,000 followers on Instagram, and can be called an influencer, or a personality who has been able to monetise his popularity on social media.

According to the survey, three in

five respondents follow social media influencers.

About 20 per cent of respondents also said they prefer interacting through social media rather than face-to-face, while a third said they would feel lost if they had no access to social media for a day.

SUSS’ School of Humanities and Behavioural Sciences senior lecturer Razwana Begum Abdul Rahim said mobile phones may have become a symbol of social status for the younger generation.

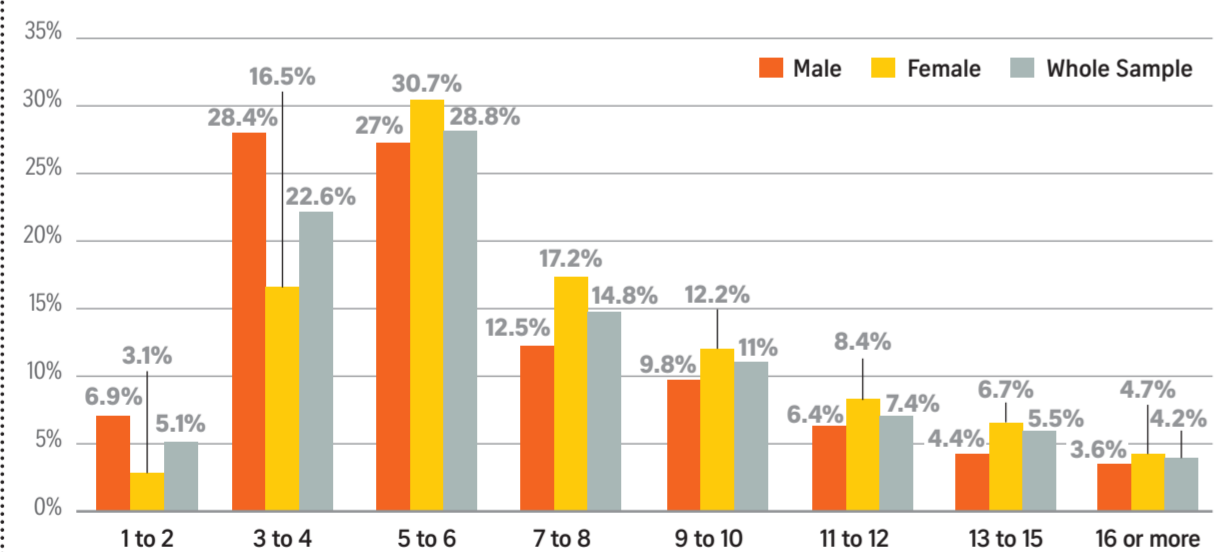
“They view the mobile phone as an investment and a symbolic representation of self... From their perspective, the appearance, accessories and features of the phone increase their social status.”

Phones are no longer just another technology invention, she added, they also serve as a tool to organise and maintain social networks.

But she cautioned against dependency on and overuse of phones, which “intrude into family time and take away intimate moments to bond and connect”.

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Number of hours spent a day on mobile phones



Jolene Ang



Temasek Polytechnic mass communications student Kieran Desker, who plans a career making films, says he reads newspapers online every day. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Young people do read newspapers, and books too

To say that young people do not read newspapers is, quite simply, untrue.

A survey of more than 1,000 19-year-olds showed that more than half of them read newspapers. Nearly one-third of respondents said they read e-newspapers, while a fifth said they read print versions. About 48 per cent said they read

fiction books. And, between them, those who read books and newspapers are more likely to hold stronger opinions on domestic and international issues, the survey by The Straits Times, in partnership with the Singapore University of Social Sciences, found.

Those from the junior college, Integrated Programme and Interna-

More consultative govt, please

much more receptive and accepting of policies if they are consulted and there is consensus-building,” she said. Ms Khanna said she does not expect the Government to consult the people on all policies. “For example, when it comes to economic or financial policies, I expect the Government would know best.”

Participants were also polled on issues such as Section 377A, the law that criminalises gay sex, and whether there was a need for a fake news law.

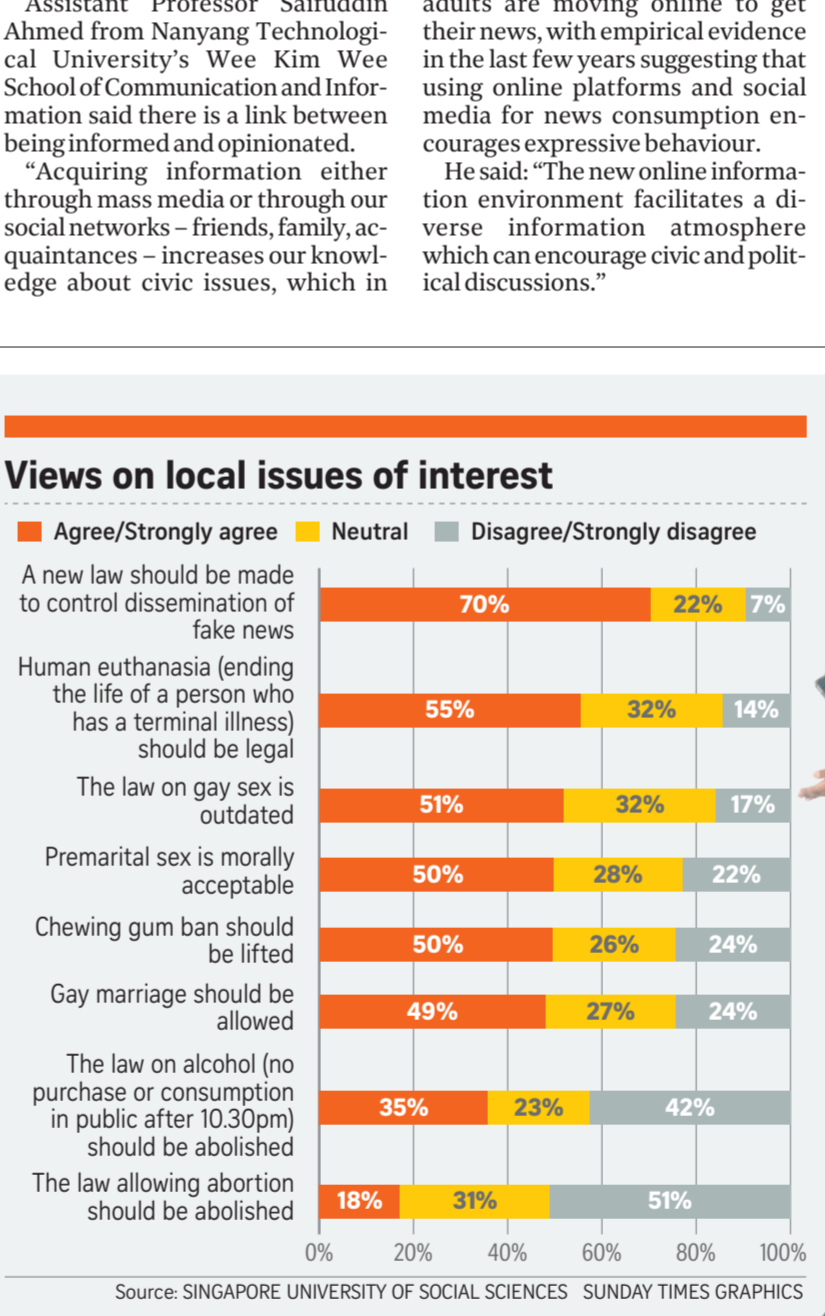
About half of the respondents said the gay sex law was outdated and the same proportion said gay marriage should be allowed.

Seven in 10 said a new law should be made to control the dissemination of fake news.

SUSS lecturer in social work, Dr Grace Chee, said increased exposure to other perspectives through social media has given rise to a youth population that is more open and accepting of diversity. “With globalisation, youth are becoming more aware of perspectives that extend beyond Singapore,” she said.

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Views on local issues of interest



Jolene Ang

Like 51 per cent of the respondents, Ms Aneesh Khanna, who is studying sociology and economics at the Singapore Institute of Management, says the prime minister's race does not matter at all. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Open to tying the knot

Poll shows nearly 90 per cent hoping to get married, 86 per cent wanting to have kids

Amelia Teng
Education Correspondent

The Singapore Government frets about young people delaying marriage and having children but, going by the findings of a recent survey, it may have less to worry about than thought.

Nearly 90 per cent of the respondents hope to get married, and 86 per cent would like to have children, according to the survey and conducted by The Straits Times in partnership with the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS).

The study sought the views of more than one thousand 19-year-old Singaporeans last year and what they thought about various topics, including marriage and family. For many of them, the ideal age to achieve both – find a life partner and start a family – is by the time they turn 30.

In general, women preferred to get married almost a year younger, or 11 months earlier, than men. Females from the junior college (JC) route said 27 years old was the ideal age to marry, while their male peers said 28 years old was the right time.

Females in polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) said 27 and 26 respectively would be their preferred age to get married. Their male counterparts indicated they wanted to settle down a year later.

Similarly, on average, female respondents hoped to have their first child 16 months earlier than males.

But both males and females from JCs preferred to start a family at a later age compared with those from polytechnics and ITE.

The survey also found that most of the respondents, or 65 per cent of them, said their ideal partner should have similar interests and hobbies as them. More than half of them also hoped their partner would have the same race, religious beliefs and education level as them, while about a sixth or less (13 per cent to 16 per cent) said it did not matter.

These findings come even as the Government announced recently that it wants to hear from Singaporeans on what they think about marriage and parenthood, and how young families can be better supported.

Singapore's total fertility rate (TFR) dipped from 1.16 in 2017 to 1.14 last year, as young people take longer to find the right partner and start families later.

More women are also getting married later. According to the Statistics On Marriages And Divorces 2017 report, the median age for first-time brides was 28.4 years in 2017, up from 27.2 years in 2007.

Associate Professor Randolph

Tan, who led the ST-SUSS study, said its results suggest “a very different future trajectory for marriage rates and TFR of this group”.

But he also noted the respondents raised concerns about the costs of bringing up children. “There is a strong possibility that these concerns begin building up as young people approach their ‘ideal’ marriage ages,” he said.

Dr Charles Sim, head of SUSS’ master of counselling programme, said the findings are not surprising, given that the respondents are in their pre-adulthood years, and a sense of identity and belonging is important to them at this stage of their lives.

“Their views may change over the next five to 10 years, after having experienced the demands and challenges of working life, and being involved in intimate relationships,” he said.

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Mathew Mathews said: “While TFR has dropped and people marry later, it doesn’t mean that Singaporeans don’t believe in marriage or parenthood.”

“In fact, surveys show that this is an important aspiration for many young Singaporeans – the only issue is how to achieve this, given the pressures of work and the social expectations people have about what is needed before they marry and have children.”

Temasek Polytechnic student Charmaine Goh said she hopes to get married between the ages of 26 and 28, and have children before 30, so that there is some “buffer time” to enjoy as a couple.

The three-year communications and media management student said getting married earlier would not be possible as she wants to be financially stable first.

“I definitely know I want kids, but it’s when I have more security in terms of finances and career. There are bills to pay and the cost of buying a house, raising a child, education, is high.”

Similarly, Mr Nicholas Papanoanou, who is serving national service, said 27 to 28 would be a good age to marry, and he hopes to be a father by the age of 30.

“Without a stable job and income, I don’t think I’d have that confidence. I must make sure both my partner and I are ready, that we have somewhere to live, that we have enough money, that we’ve thought everything through and we know we can juggle everything,” he said.

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