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More divorces among couples who tied the knot in recent years

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A bigger percentage of married couples are going their separate ways compared to decades ago, among those who tied the knot in recent years, according to new data in a report by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF).

The report, which tracked 29 cohorts of couples who wed between 1987 and 2015, also found that more couples have tied the knot and were more recently break up earlier compared with those who were married for a longer time.

The data was presented to support the idea of the proverbial seven-year itch, the highest proportion of couples ending their marriage between the fifth and sixth year.

In 2015, the MSF first released data on the dissolution of marriages – which includes the grounds or annulments – of resident couples by cohorts of years from 1987 to 2012.

It tracked the percentage of Singaporeans and permanent residents ending their marriage, for a "better insight on marriage stability".

In the latest report, it released data for the more recent cohorts, which showed that a higher percentage of recent marriages are ending, compared with those who wed much earlier.

For example, among those who wed in 2000, a little more than a quarter their 10-year wedding anniversary – and nearly doubled that of the 8.2 per cent in the 1987 marriage cohort, which tied the knot 10 years earlier.

Of the 1987 cohort, 18.9 per cent went their separate ways before their anniversary in 2016. Yet, for those who married between 1990 and 2000, the percentage was about two-fold less time, more than 18.9 per cent ended up in the 2016 data.

Social workers who work with dissolving couples attributed the trend to factors such as an increase in family stress factors, less quality time and more dual-income couples, focus on their careers, shifting perceptions and less stigma towards divorce, and poor conflict management skills, among others.

Care Corner Singapore chief services officer Agnes Chia said that in the 1980s, unlike today, people may have been more apprehensive about getting a divorce, with many worrying about life post-divorce and the financial burden.

National University of Singapore sociologist Tan Ai Leen said younger couples could be less inclined to marry because of the idea that marriage is a lifetime commitment, and would make them more likely to want to get out of a marriage that does not explain the higher rates of divorces among those who married more recently.

Association Professor Tan added that with dual-income couples now the norm, time spent apart or the relationship after getting married could be affected by other pressing needs. Such couples are more likely to succumb to issues or conflicts in key areas such as finance or caregiving matters.

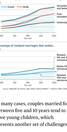
The MSF report also found that the proportion of total marriages that dissolved between the fifth and 10th wedding anniversary was the highest among the cohorts studied.

For example, of those who wed in 2003, 6.4 per cent ended their marriage in under five years, compared with 9.6 per cent who did so between the fifth and 10th year mark, and 5.1 per cent who did so between the 10th and 15th year mark.

When marriages break up

Percentage of marriages that dissolved after one year of marriage

Percentage of marriages that ended within five years of marriage, ten years of marriage, and fifteen years of marriage



Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development

In many cases, couples married for between five and 10 years tend to have young children, which presents another set of challenges.

The couple will need to juggle the stress of building their careers and raising a family, said Mr Arthur Ong, director executive director at Care Corner.

When asked if the data helps to shed light on the rise of the seven-year itch, Mr Chia said the duration does not provide any more insight into stress factors.

She said: "We need to strengthen the life stages of adulting, coupling and parenting. If we, if we allow the different stresses to come in and exacerbate the situation, the risk of marriages ending up splitting is higher."

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