



**BEYOND
BABIES:
NATIONAL DUTY OR
PERSONAL CHOICE?**

aware 

BEYOND BABIES: NATIONAL DUTY OR PERSONAL CHOICE?

An AWARE Position Paper
July 2004



Block 5 Dover Crescent #01-22 Singapore 130005
Telephone: 6779-7137
Fax: 6777-0318
Helpline: 1800-774 5935
e-mail: aware@pacific.net.sg

© AWARE 2004

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of AWARE.

Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Foreword	iii
Executive Summary	v
Introduction	1
1. Population Policy and the Primacy of Economic Development	4
1.1. Contesting the Women's Body	6
1.2. Differential Impact of Population Policy	10
1.3. Valorising the Child	14
1.4. Housing Policies	16
1.5. Alternatives and (the lack of) State Support	17
2. International Experiences and Perspectives	19
2.1. Focus on Quality of Life	22
2.2. Recognition of Diversity and Respect for the Individual	23
2.3. Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Rights	25
2.4. Work/Life Balance	28
3. Singapore Today	32
3.1. The State	34
3.2. The Market	35
3.3. The Society	38
4. Recommendations: Towards 'Quality of Life' Policies	42
4.1. Recommendations for the State: Responsive Regulation	47
4.2. Recommendations for the Private Sector: Rethinking Corporate Social Responsibility	51
4.3. Recommendations for the Society: Active Citizenship	52
4.4. Is 'TFR' the Issue? Areas for further research	54
Conclusion	55
Bibliography	56
Endnotes	60
Appendices	
A. Country Studies	61
B. Work/Life Balance Case Studies	66
C. Summary of Survey Findings	72
D. Notes on the Process	89
E. Notes from Focus Group Discussions	90

Acknowledgements:

Singapore and Population Work Group Chairperson: Tan Joo Hymn

Researchers/Writers: Pamela Cheong, Jacob Anthony Chew Boon Teik, Chew I-Jin, Chng Nai Rui, Harmin Kaur Gill, Koh Tsin Yen, Michelle Lam, Joycelyn Lee, Lee Sze Yong, Sue Low, Siti Mariam, Constance Singam, Teo You Yenn, Priya Venkat

Facilitators/Volunteers: Alexis Aw Ee Khem, Olivia Chey I-Shing, Sara Dean, Gan Joo Ee, Koh Joo Kim, Dana Lam, Cindy Lim Lee Yen, Sharon Lim, Braema Mathi (President), Leon Pereira, Puvaneswari P.M., Mohana Sunthari, Sharon Wong

Foreword by AWARE President, Ms Braema Mathi

Singapore's low Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has been the news for more than a year now. This is a grave issue at the national level that affects both women and men in a very personal and intimate manner.

But discussing TFR as “babies”, “stork options”, maternity/paternity rights etc is only one often told story. A more critical approach will be to use TFR as a performance indicator to measure the state's and citizens' efforts in engaging one another as stakeholders, working towards a common destiny. This means mainstreaming the TFR discussion to include policies on housing, citizenship rights, educational objectives, value streams, definitions on family models etc. What has always been noticeable in discussions related to procreation is how, inadvertently, the weight of having children or not having any is borne more by the women than the men.

Citizens may or may not have babies for many reasons: based on a traditional respect for progeny; to share a comfortable living, from a deeper sense of spirituality to procreate; seeing children as an investment to secure a future for old age; wanting to maintain independent lifestyles. The state, on the other hand, wants its citizens to have or not have more babies to maintain all its resources at optimum levels of production. But without a holistic approach that encompasses all citizens (including singles and singles again) and potential citizens the discussion around TFR will be localised within the institution of marriage. This is self-limiting.

Therefore to look beyond and deeper into TFR, The Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) which has always offered women's perspectives on national issues, formed a sub-committee in April to examine Singapore's baby crisis.

The volunteer-group of academics, students, career-oriented women, mothers, mothers-to-be, fathers and young men, ably led by Ms Tan Joo Hymn, worked through forum discussions, studied trends and policies of other countries, dived into the past history of our own decision-making processes and collated views of Singaporeans in a survey, to put together this report.

It is with some pride that I present the “Beyond Babies: National Duty or Personal Choice?” Report. I hope this report will bring about more discussions and a more definite paradigm shift to introduce gender equity policies and to review family definitions.

AWARE turns 20 next year. Some of the many suggestions offered in this position paper are similar to suggestions made 20 years ago by Aware. In both instances these suggestions arise from the premise of gender equity. It is my hope that we do not use up another 20 years to make right what we can do now.

Thank you

Executive Summary

AWARE submitted its first Position Paper on Population in 1988 and has been looking into this issue for nearly two decades. In the first Position Paper, we questioned the validity of population projections as well as the size of an optimum population for Singapore. Some of the recommendations were to increase population through immigration policies, to undertake research to explore economic opportunities to meet the needs of the elderly, to encourage fathers to share equitably in their parenting responsibility, and to provide better child care facilities.

Sixteen years on, the issue has become even more poignant as the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) drops to unprecedented low levels.

We applaud the government's efforts in addressing this problem, in particular, the formation of an inter-ministerial committee headed by Mr Lim Hng Kiang to look into this issue, promising a holistic approach and to "leave no stone unturned".

We, at AWARE, are responding to the calls for feedback from Mr Lim's committee. In April this year, we embarked on this project. First, we set out to understand the issues, to examine the contributing factors, and to look for workable solutions. We also elicited feedback from the public through a seminar and focus group discussions on 29th May 2004, and through an online survey on our website at www.aware.org.sg.

This summary sets out our key findings and recommendations.

- The state, the market and the individual all play important roles in fertility decisions and impact on one another, and the outcome depends on the cumulative effects of their interaction.
- There is a direct correlation between TFR and the level of gender equity. This is well documented in several research articles, and from case studies of countries which have reversed the trend of downward spiralling TFRs.

- Adequate support structures for families and availability of flexi-work arrangements are key factors in countries which have seen positive fertility trends.
- Quality of life issues feature prominently in fertility decisions. The concern is not only for the immediate impact on the quality of life for the couple but also for the quality of life their future child is likely to have, given current societal conditions.
- Countries which have relatively high fertility rates recognise the importance of quality of life issues and their policies effectively address this concern. These countries also tend to emphasise respect for the individual.
- Singapore's population policies tended to swing to extremes, with either draconian punitive measures, or intensely pro-natalist incentives. Given the policy u-turns and changes in mindsets in a relatively short space of time, people may be wary of government initiatives to push fertility rates in any direction.
- Many are uncomfortable with the notion of valorising the child, where children are assigned specific monetary value depending on, inter alia, their birth orders, and the ages and educational qualifications of their mothers.
- The government appears to have targeted selected categories of the population to support and reward. Those falling outside these narrowly delineated segments are nevertheless able to contribute, but their efforts are either unrecognised, or worse, thwarted, by unfavourable and discriminatory policies.

The following are findings from survey results and from feedback during the focus group sessions:

- Most people see work flexibility as the most important factor in increasing fertility rates.

- Most of the respondents who do not have children are single; most of those who are married are either planning for children in the future or are already trying to have children.
- Many see fertility decisions as a private matter between couples and would prefer the government not to intervene directly, but rather remove the obstacles to having [more] children.

Our key recommendations include roles for the state, the market (in encouraging corporate social responsibility) and the individual (in encouraging active citizenry):

- Increase support services eg. good quality child care and infant care centres, child-education classes and peer support groups;
- Ensure that female employees are not discriminated against by having robust legislations backed by policies;
- Introduce mandatory paternity leave of more than a token 2-3 days to emphasise the importance of fathers in parenting; and family leave to ease the burdens of employees juggling multiple roles;
- Introduce compulsory life skills classes including family and communication skills and sexuality education in schools for both boys and girls;
- Reduce emphasis on academic excellence in schools and adopt a more holistic education environment;
- Increase labour market flexibility, by recognising contributions of more elderly employees and employees who have temporarily left the work force to care for their families; and by promoting non-discriminatory flexi-work arrangements for all employees;

- Implement policies to cover all who may need support, including mothers not in the labour force or who are working part-time, parents from lower income families, single parents, couples who wish to adopt etc.;
- Rethink the definitions of corporate success to include employee satisfaction;
- Recognise the importance of flexi-work arrangements and that they do not have to impact negatively on productivity;
- Rethink our individual values and set our own definitions of success;
- Recognise our own responsibility and capacity to determine our own destinies, and take action.

Our study brings to the surface many areas that require further research and investigation. In particular, there appears to be a largely overlooked area where current concerns can be adequately addressed without the TFR debate. These include the elderly, singles (and single parents), adoptees, and non-Singaporeans. We suggest that the government continues to investigate and invite feedback on this matter beyond the presentation of the report to Parliament. This is a complex and emotive issue requiring holistic and sensitive solutions that are considerate of all stakeholders.

We urge the state to exhibit political courage and imagination, the private sector to play a responsible role, and most of all, Singaporeans to take ownership of their own lives right now. The lives of future generations will be affected by the decisions we make today. Let us act wisely, for our own happiness, and theirs, and everything will naturally fall into place.

Introduction

At least two heads of state had special messages to their citizens as parents earlier this year. In his traditional New Year's Day address on television, Norwegian Prime Minister Mr Kjell Magne Bondevik congratulated Norwegians in general, and mothers in particular, in giving birth to a high number of children in the previous year. According to Prime Minister Bondevik, high fertility in Norway is: "an expression of people's optimistic views on the future and the "quality" of ... society" (Rønsen, 2004). The message that Singaporean Prime Minister-to be and current Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Mr Lee Hsien Loong had for Singaporeans was a contrasting one: "Our children embody our hopes for the future. Singapore's birth rate is way below replacement level and falling. This is a serious problem. A declining birth rate will sap the vitality and resilience of our country" (Ministry of Finance, Singapore, 2004).

What are Singaporeans to make of the Norwegian Prime Minister's statements? Is the "quality" of society he talked about the reason behind Singapore's population woes? Although social issues like family, child-rearing, and fertility intertwine in complex and dynamic ways, we agree that the concerns of the state, as expressed by DPM Lee are very valid ones. We also feel, as implied by his Norwegian counterpart, the quality of life is the single most important reason why Singaporeans are not having more children. While "quality of life" is a highly subjective idea, AWARE believes that a good quality of life for *Singaporeans* must mean a healthy balance between work, family, and community life that is underpinned by institutions, mores, and norms that fundamentally recognise the diversity of Singaporean society and respect each individual – every Singaporean *must really* matter.

It was thus heartening to hear from DPM Lee that an inter-ministerial committee headed by Mr Lim Hng Kiang will explore what is a very complicated set of issues in detail and will "leave no stones unturned." We at AWARE have put together our findings for fellow Singaporeans and Mr Lim's committee to consider. This report aims to understand the implications and causes of declining population growth in Singapore in such a way that will not prejudice its policy prescriptions. For example, we are most concerned at how women are seen to be "culprits" who upset the status quo.

Recognising that low Total Fertility Rate (TFR) may be a problem in itself, we propose comprehensive approaches to the issue of “reproducing” Singapore. There is a tendency to propose myopic and narrow solutions to an issue that is both complicated and controversial. A holistic approach is thus needed. This implies a reconsideration of the position of women, the elderly, the family, our perceptions of children, in short, “a cultural change in the hearts and minds of Singaporeans” as noted by DPM Lee (Plate, 2004). The lack of gender equity coupled with advancement of women’s socio-economic position has meant that women now have the power to elect not to procreate (more), given that it is still the women who ultimately make fertility decisions. Women’s liberation has been marked but uneven, while the erosion of patriarchal institutions has not been replaced by new forms that support gender equity and allow all genders to take up new roles in society. We urge the state, the private sector, and society at large to recognise and adapt to the inevitable changes in socio-cultural beliefs about women and the family; to improve the socio-economic position of women in society; and make the work place friendlier for women, men and children.

In the end, we also want to interrogate the “TFR problem” and challenge its perceived assumptions and implications. At the heart of this brief discussion is the demonstration that Singapore’s declining total fertility rate (TFR), while worrying, is not inevitable for developed nations. Rather, other developed nations have used balanced policies of procreation *and* immigration to sustain their populations.

Chapter 1 considers the “population” issue of Singapore in broad historical perspective. Salient themes will be picked up showing both the general and particular impact of Singapore’s population policy on Singaporeans and Singaporean women respectively. This is followed by chapter 2 which provides a brief comparative study of similar issues as experienced by other countries. In drawing comparisons between Korea, Japan, Denmark, Norway, and some brief mentions of the United States and United Kingdom, we can identify certain elements of population and fertility policy pertinent to our own experiences. Such lessons shall be elaborated in greater detail in chapter 4, after a critique of the current situation in Singapore from a less statist perspective in chapter 3. This paper concludes by calling for political courage and

imagination from the government to tackle the “population” issue, and also invites the corporate sector and fellow citizens to take a proactive stand on an issue that challenges us all as Singaporeans.

1. Population Policy in Historical Context:

The Primacy of Economic Development

How can you not? You have half the population uneducated and their potential wasted. Economically and intellectually, it is just unthinkable. It would be a totally different kind of society.

(DPM Lee Hsien Loong, quoted in Plate, 2004)

The single most important task of the government in its founding years was to achieve economic growth, so much so that the very character and nature of the Singaporean state was shaped for this purpose. All aspects of public and social policy were geared to spur economic development and population policies were no exceptions. Indeed, “Population control was viewed then as critical in balancing the available economic resources with the demands of an increasing population” (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2002). Even while conceding that the government had, to an extent, created its own problem, DPM Lee recently reasoned that it was unavoidable (Plate, 2004).

This chapter presents the historical background of population trends in Singapore (summarised in Table 1, Appendix A). The extensive reach of the state in the governance of Singapore meant that the government’s population policies have stood out in terms of their impact and visibility. This is in spite of the fact that, “[F]ertility decisions are located in the triangle between the state, the market and the family...” (Knudsen, 1999:2). The spotlight thus falls primarily on legislative actions and policies adopted by the Singapore state. The running theme that emerges is one of functionalism, where economic development has been the paramount rationale for policy-making, including issues pertaining to population.

The Singapore Family Planning and Population Board (SFPPB) was established in 1966 because overpopulation in the 1960s was seen as a potential obstacle to economic growth. SFPPB had the long-term objective of controlling population growth and improving standards of living. It aimed to promote and disseminate information about family planning in Singapore and persuade its citizens to change their attitudes about family size ideals so as to reduce the annual population growth (four per cent from 1947 to 1957) and to maintain Singapore’s rapid economic

growth. Because Singapore lacked natural resources, population control was necessary to reduce the proportion of dependents, alleviating the burden shouldered by the employed in supporting the dependents.

SFPPB directed and administered the Five Year Family Planning Plan to reduce the country's rate of births. In its early phase, government midwives and nurses disseminated contraceptives and family planning advice during their home visits (Jose & Doran 1997). A widespread public campaign was later launched in September 1966 to emphasise a large family's negative features and a small family's advantages such as higher standards of living, better quality of health and education. Using the media, exhibitions, pamphlets, and marriage guidance talks, the campaign was aimed at the lower socio-economic groups. The aggressive publicity campaign later transpired to one that used the simple "Boy or Girl, Two is Enough" slogan (Jose & Doran 1997:479). The publicity campaigns of the 1960s encouraged Singaporeans to identify with community interest and not self-interest when it came to matters of fertility.

The government campaign in curbing rapid population growth was a successful one although overall socio-economic development of Singapore also played a part. As evidenced in other developed nations, population growth declined as families in advanced economies have largely reduced in size, with people delaying marriages and opting to have fewer children than their parents. Key government population control measures in Singapore include those that introduced direct disincentives for large families – the steep rise of maternity costs for each additional child; the low school enrolment priorities for third and higher-order children; the withdrawal of paid two-month maternity leave for "civil service union women" after the second child; low public housing priority for large families; and no income tax allowance for those with more than three children. Positive incentives – special payments such as accouchement fees, income tax rebates, and preferential allocation of public housing – rewarding those who met the policy objectives also played a part in changing the public's mindset. Early population policies however did more than change peoples' mindsets towards procreation. It also reinforced existing prejudices against the role and position of women in society, at work, and in the home.

1.1 Contesting the Women's Body

Sorry, the factory is closed.

(overheard)

I've done my national service.

(overheard)

The passing of the Abortion Act and Voluntary Sterilisation Act in 1969, which provided the National Family Planning Program with two alternatives to population control and family limitation, was also important in shaping family size. From these two acts one may discern the more obvious expressions of the state in “using” the woman’s body – in the area of reproductive health. These Acts legalised male and female surgical sterilisation and abortion on socio-economic and medical grounds with the objective of creating a modern Singapore. But they also modified personal attitudes and behaviour patterns.

The 1969 Abortion Act in fact failed because in requiring women to go through the Board for approval of terminations of pregnancy, it did not provide for many women who might have abortions outside the system. The 1970 and 1971 figures for Kandang Kerbau, Thomson Road and Alexandra Hospitals verified that a good number of illegal abortions were still being performed despite legalisation on socio-economic grounds. This piece of legislation deprived the basic right of women to control their own fertility. It transferred responsibility over her own body from the women to her parents and the Board. Hence, the Abortion Act failed to produce its desired effect as women chose illegal abortions over legal means.

The Termination of Pregnancy Act was thus passed in 1974 and offered women the chance to terminate their pregnancies without societal ostracism and reduced unhygienic means of terminating pregnancies. The Voluntary Sterilisation Act of 1974 ensured that all persons are eligible for sterilisation without consent from a third party unless they are below 21 years old and unmarried or are of unsound mind (Section 2). Because of the assurance of confidentiality, sexual sterilisation in Singapore became effortless.

In the quest to attain general and specific national objectives, the government had used executive and legislative power over women and the family and to shape women's reproductive choices. Gendered policy measures and the policy shifts were targeted at women rather than women and men inclusively and were intended to limit, rather than to expand, women's reproductive choices. Attempts to control the women's body by the state were not limited to claiming its reproductive functions. The women's productive capability as (workers in the labour force) in the economy was also demanded of but never granted equal status with their male counterparts. Paradoxically the reproductive role of the women's body was undervalued.

For example, although the government extended equal pay to its female employees in the civil service, it did not give them equal access to medical benefits, on the grounds that women were not the main financial supporters of households (Wee, cited in Doran, 1996:156). The Employment Act, which came into operation on 15 August 1968 is the primary legislation governing the terms and conditions of employment in Singapore. Under the Employment Act, a series of provisions catering specifically towards the welfare of female employees have been made. A pregnant female workman cannot be required to work at night without her consent and a letter certifying her fit by a doctor. "Night" in this context means the period between 11pm and 6am the following day (Regulations 2 and 3 (1) of the Employment (Female Workmen) Regulations 1988).

With regard to maternity benefits, a female employee is entitled to paid maternity leave of 8 weeks which is usually taken 4 weeks before and 4 weeks after confinement (Section 95 (1)). This maternity benefit will only be granted if the female employee, at the time of her confinement, does not have 2 or more surviving children and has worked for the employer for a continuous 180 days. The employee must also give notice of confinement approximately one week before going on maternity leave and as soon as practicable after confinement (Section 76 (4) and 80). Failure to do so would only render the employee entitled to half the amount payable for the period of her maternity leave unless she provides sufficient cause to explain her failure to do so. It is an offence for an employer to knowingly make a female work during the 4 weeks following her confinement. The employer is not allowed to terminate the services of a

female employee during the period that she is on maternity leave. If the employer terminates the services of a female employee without sufficient cause 3 months before her confinement, he is still required to pay her the maternity benefits that she is entitled to.

The maternity benefits provided to the female employee under the Employment Act fail to reflect the current family structure prevalent in modern Singapore society. It continues to acknowledge the patriarchal family structure dominant in the 1960s, assigning the responsibility of childbearing as well as childrearing to women, neglecting the importance of the emotional support that men can possibly give to their partners especially in the first few months after the birth of a child. Nowhere in the Act are men provided with the privilege (and responsibility) of taking paternity leave to support their spouses as well as bond with their new-born, reducing the role of the men in providing material and emotional support to their wives and children, leaving the women with the sole responsibility of taking care of the child. The Employment Act dismisses men's role as fathers, thus contributing to the choices made by Singaporeans today. Hence, the Employment Act creates an undesirable environment for childbearing right from the time of birth.

The government had hoped that its policies and legislation would safeguard the genetic quality of future generations. But, seemingly, the results were more than what it had set out to achieve. When the first Five Year Family Planning Program ended in 1970, the number of live births in that year was 45,779 – a dramatic decline from 54,680 in 1966. By 1975 the TFR had slipped to a replacement level of 2.1 from 1965's high figure of 4.7 children per woman (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2002); by 1985 the TFR was down to about 1.62 for all ethnic groups (Soin, 2001); and by 1988, the average number of children being born to women dropped to 1.4 (Jose & Doran).

Abortion, intended as a family planning measure, unintentionally gave women some control over their bodies and sexuality (Soin, 2001). The family planning programme inadvertently raised the status of the girl child and had unintended positive consequences for women's advancement even if it infringed upon the women (notably in the contestation over their reproductive and productive roles). This was

before the advent of ultrasound technology to diagnose the sex of the unborn child. Parents, limited to having only two children, invested in the education of both to maximise their potential. Another surprise for the policy makers was that highly educated mothers began to have fewer children than the less educated. Falling below replacement fertility in 1977, the next 25 years saw Singapore's fertility rate continue to decline albeit for a brief increase in 1988-89.

Alarmed at these trends and that the TFR in the 1980s fell below that needed for population replacement, the government changed track, proposed a selectively pro-natalist population policy, and used a catchy tagline that encouraged couples to "Have Three, Or More If You Can Afford It" (Doran, 1996:158). The government was also concerned that too many better educated women were cutting back on births while too few of the poorer, less educated women were not. It is here that some of the bias of Singaporean population policy towards some of its citizens is revealed.

1.2 Differential Impact of National Policy

Having established that not all Singaporeans were affected equally by national population policy as women bore the brunt of the nation's reproductive and productive burdens, it should also be noted that not all Singaporean women were equally affected. Some measures continued to be linked to the mothers' or parents' educational level. For instance, selective incentives were instituted to encourage "elite" women to increase their level of reproduction (Yap, 1992:132). Restrictions affecting the school enrolment of their third child were removed. Medical benefits were made available for having a third child and housing options for those with three or more children were improved (Hill & Lian, 1995:153). Additionally, the Income Tax Act passed in 1987 expanded child deductions for women who have attained a certain level of education (Fifth Schedule to the Act – proviso (A) to section 39 (2) (e) and paragraph 6). In March 1989 the government announced a S\$20,000 tax rebate for fourth children born after January 1, 1988. Where a married woman ... "has passed at one sitting the examination for the General Certificate of Education with at least three subjects at Ordinary Level or has equivalent or higher educational qualification, the ... deductions shall be allowable to her." The child deductions vary from five per cent for the 1st eligible child to 15 per cent or 25 per cent for the fourth child depending on the child's age at the time of assessment subject to a maximum of \$15,000. The Act could be criticised because of its bias towards women who have attained a certain level of education.

The now-famous 1983 National Day Address by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew highlights bias in the state's approach to the problem very well. Senior Minister (SM) Lee Kuan Yew implied that less-educated Indian and Malay women who had more children than educated women (presumably Chinese) in Singapore were being irresponsible. He also attributed the falling national birth rate to the opportunities, both educational and economic, which had opened up for women since independence (Jose & Doran 1997). Much has been said about how certain remarks in the speech were based on a eugenicist belief that intelligence is inherited. Scholars have criticised the speech for pointing out how the less-educated women's actions (of giving birth to more children) would decrease the nation's intellectual ability and undermine Singapore's international competitiveness and how it was made to rectify

the balance between the various ethnic groups¹ because the Chinese (the majority) was contracting at about seven percent per generation (Jose & Doran 1997: 481-3).

What is noteworthy is that following Lee's speech the government implemented several new policies based on the belief that graduates produce "better" babies. One tried to make sterilisation attractive for some women: a \$10,000 cash incentive was given to women under 30 years of age from a less or an under-educated background and who volunteered to be sterilised after giving birth to the second child (Jose & Doran 1997: 484). Another was the Graduate Mothers' Priority Scheme: priority for school admission was given to the third and subsequent children of graduate mothers (Jose & Doran 1997: 481). The latter, received very negatively, was rescinded in 1985 (Jose & Doran 1997: 481). Although such policies attracted its fair share of accusations that they were an "interference in the private lives of citizens," Lee, according to a report in the national paper (*The Straits Times*, 15 August 1983), maintained that without such "interference" on his government's part, Singaporeans would not have been able to enjoy their current level of economic prosperity.

Come the 1990s the government's rhetoric remained the same: the government's rationale for the new schemes was similar to that of the cash incentives offered in 1984 to discourage large families from proliferating among Singapore's lesser educated and supposedly less intellectually endowed. The Small Families Improvement Scheme announced in 1993 by PM Goh (*The Straits Times*, 16 August 1993, cited in Jose & Doran, 1997) meant that mothers from low income families educated below a certain level of attainment and under 35 would be given a housing grant of \$800 each year for 20 years; their children would also be given financial assistance for education. The catch: the parents must only have two children or cease to be eligible for assistance (Jose & Doran 1997). Apart from the fact this scheme reinforced patriarchal family structures and manipulated the poor's reproductive replacement levels, the motivation behind it – Chinese families were reproducing below the rate of population replacement, while Malay and Indian families were reproducing at or above replacement levels – has also been criticised (Jose & Doran 1997).²

Furthermore, the Employment Act does not provide women with the ability to take maternity leave if they have 2 or more children at confinement. Women employees are only entitled to take maternity leave only at the births of their first two children. Such provisions provide the image that women's rightful place is in the home, depriving them of the equal opportunity of pursuing their career alongside their male counterparts by disadvantaging those women who bear more children. Women who are interested in advancing their careers are thus deterred from having more than one child since there is no legal support that would encourage them to bear more children. However, there is a more serious issue than this. That this provision in the Act has not changed at a time when the government is "leaving no stone unturned" is a curious situation. It is likely to be the case that only *certain* kinds of women are disadvantaged by this Act. Figures from 2000 in fact shows that non-Chinese mothers are disproportionately affected by this provision. Mothers with below secondary education are disproportionately affected.

Table 1: Percentage of ever-married Chinese females aged 15 and over with children

	TOTAL number of ever-married females aged >15	TOTAL number of ever-married CHINESE females aged >15
with at least 1 child	152,568	121,751 (79.8%)
with 3 children	186,065	140,966 (75.7%)
with 4 children	76,725	54,882 (71.5%)
with 5 children	37,786	27,955 (73.9%)
with 6-7 children	42,386	32,223 (76.0%)
with 8 or more children	29,346	20,666 (70.4%)

Source: Singapore Department of Statistics, Census of Population (2000)

Table 2: Percentage of ever-married female non-students aged 15 and over with children with below secondary education

	TOTAL number of ever-married female non-students aged >15	TOTAL number of ever-married female non-students aged >15 with BELOW SECONDARY EDUCATION
with at least 1 child	152,317	54,021 (35.5%)
with 3 children	186,041	126,503 (68.0%)
with 4 children	76,721	60,970 (79.5%)
with 5 children	37,786	34,400 (91.0%)
with 6-7 children	42,386	40,681 (95.0%)
with 8 or more children	29,346	28,916 (98.5%)

Source: Singapore Department of Statistics, Census of Population (2000)

On ethnic and educational levels, this policy seems to imply that the mothers, and hence their babies, are deemed less worthy of support from a state that claims to have a meritocracy in place.

1.3 Valorising the Child

There, that child, no bonus lah.

(overheard)

To encourage Singaporeans to have more children, the government assumed that its citizens would respond to monetary incentives and its administrative allocations of medical, educational, and housing services. The child thus acquired very direct and immediate monetary value. The Children Development Co-Savings Act and the Baby Bonus Scheme implemented in 2001 appear laudable because now the government is not targeting only educated women as it had in the past. The Co-Savings scheme assisted families financially to encourage married women to have two or more children; the government will make contributions to an eligible child's bank account equal to the contributions made by the parent dollar for dollar, up to S\$1,000 for the second child and up to \$2,000 for the third child. With the Baby Bonus Scheme, a second child is entitled to a deposit of S\$500 at birth and a third child is entitled to a deposit of \$1000 and, every year for the next five years, an equal amount will be deposited for each child up to a total of S\$3000 for the second child and up to S\$6000 for the third child (Sherraden, 2001). While such policy developments could perhaps be the most substantial Children's Development Account worldwide (Sherraden, 2001), they are deeply flawed.

The eligibility criteria display the government's objectives to promote births within intact families: the mother must be *lawfully married* to the child's father at the time of the child's birth or conception; the child must be a Singapore Citizen at the time of his/her birth (children born overseas but eligible for Singapore citizenship will be given the Baby Bonus when they become Singapore Citizens); and the child must be the second or third child born alive to his mother (stepchildren or adopted children are not considered in counting birth order). Further, the policy do not affirm the value of every child. It is flawed by the treatment of children based on birth order. Perhaps, some young Singaporeans appear to be more worthy of the nation's wealth than others. As Sherraden (2001) had pointed out, could the government be saying explicitly that the second child is more valuable than the first? Even as children were now proclaimed to be valuable, *some* children were more valuable than *others*. The

1987 population publicity campaign, “Have Three, Or More If You Can Afford It”, probably expresses the valorisation of children most clearly in recent Singapore history.

1.4 Housing Policies

Possibly unique to Singapore, housing policies under the Housing Development Board (HDB) also has a role in determining population and fertility issues in a very direct way. The social mission of HDB's housing policies was in fact recently reinforced in parliament by the Minister for National Development, Mr Mah Bow Tan: "our public housing policy is designed to be pro-family in orientation. Single citizens are considered as part of a family unit. They are encouraged to live with their parents for mutual care and support." (Singapore Parliament Reports, 2004). As noted by some commentators, existing incentives to woo Singaporeans to procreate have tended to focus on those already married, ignoring the growing numbers of young single Singaporeans who are delaying marriages and starting families. Existing public housing policies, in a highly moralistic judgement, conflate finding a life partner and establishing a home. Hence singles are not eligible to purchase public housing individually until they are 35. Even single parents with their children are *not* automatically considered as a family unit and are ineligible for HDB housing, except on a "case by case" basis. It is unclear on what terms and basis does the HDB consider such cases.

The alternative is for single Singaporeans to stay with their parents which does little for the personal development of the person in terms of her sense of place and privacy (Gee, 2004). The alternatives facing Singaporeans are therefore extreme ones. Marriage and property comes in at the same time or none at all. With little space in between to negotiate their private lives, the prospect of marriage and childbearing is a daunting one both materially and emotionally. In the light of recent revelations of Singaporeans' attitudes towards families and children, and TFR figures, it remains to be seen how HDB policy are helping matters and keeping up with the times. The role of the state should be one of encouragement but should not be dogmatic. Housing policies should be less moralistic.

1.5 Alternatives and (the lack of) State Support

To maximise exploitation of women's reproductive and productive roles, a large number of foreign domestic workers (FDWs) have also been allowed into the country since 1978 under the Foreign Maid Scheme. At present, one in seven Singaporeans households employs a FDW (Abdul Rahman *et al*, forthcoming). A survey on dual career couples found that the availability of FDWs has enabled more married women to continue with their careers after child-bearing (Department of Statistics, 1994). These “second class” women take over the caregiving responsibilities of Singaporean women, allowing them to engage in full time employment outside the home despite having young children or elderly at home. The results of these policies are twofold. First, caregiving remains solely the domain of women and there is no threat to the patriarchal status quo, despite the illusion of greater gender equality where both husband and wife worked. Second, an issue of public importance has remained very much a private matter – child care and elder care, which are great social concerns, are being handled by individual families in the private domain, away from public notice.

As a result, until very recently, there has been little public discussion over the various issues related to the increasing numbers of foreign domestic works in Singapore households. In framing child and elderly care as private matters, the govt need not think about providing state support services in these important areas, and although lately it seems to have realised that alternatives are necessary, it consistently depends on the “people sector” like Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Volunteer Welfare Organisations (VWOs) to fill in the gaps. Options provided by the market by way of professional services for example have been few and far between, and of varying standards.

In FDWs, the state has found a cheap and expedient way of achieving their objectives. However, this is at the expense of FDWs, and true gender equity. The availability of FDWs has also meant that alternative institutional facilities which can cost more are deemed less attractive. Used to the convenience and flexibility of home-based help that FDWs offer, Singaporeans do not consider non-home-based help as a real alternative. This has resulted in a market situation where professional and commercial care and cleaning services has been hindered (TWC2, 2003). The pressure to provide more flexible working arrangements for working couples has also

been absorbed by the availability of FDWs. As we rely more and more on FDWs in our homes, foreigners on short two-year contracts are becoming the de facto surrogate parents of our children.

In summary, Singapore experienced both high population and economic growth in its early founding years. The state saw the high TFR as a threat to sustained economic development and hence implemented policies to arrest its increase. With regards to the nation's women, the state implemented policies to tap into their reproductive (as mothers) and productive (as workers) roles. These were often contradictory. While it could be argued that the measures seemed to pay off as fertility was substantially reduced and economic growth averaged double-digits between 1965 and 1980, a new set of problems have emerged. The government, alarmed by the TFR that dipped below replacement level in 1975, attempted to reverse population control policies and encouraged procreation beginning in the mid-1980s.

If it was economics before that dictated its attitudes towards population growth, it is economics once again that has spurred the state to act against a rapidly declining TFR. But, by then, factors that contributed to the rapid decline in fertility – higher ages at marriage and childbearing, rising number of women remaining single, and the increased use of contraception and abortion – had surfaced. If state population policy was successful in curbing population growth, it is having less success in increasing it. This has serious implications not only on policy-making but also on how the issue of population decline is to be understood. The next chapter will consider these issues from the experiences of other countries.

2. International Experiences and Perspectives

Although the situation of each country is unique, there are valuable lessons to be learned from their experiences which are relevant to the salient themes identified in the previous chapter. We examine the cases of Denmark and Norway, two Nordic countries which have been said to have “gotten it right” in stemming fertility decline. Japan and Korea are two countries from our own region in Asia who have been less successful. The roles played by private sectors in issues of population and fertility will also be looked at examined through the cases of the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Like Singapore, declining fertility trends have generated much anxiety—especially on the part of the state—around marriage and childbearing trends in Japan (Amaha, 1998; Retherford, Ogawa & Matsukura, 2001). Unlike other industrialised countries with similar trends however, Japan’s fertility decline is the largest and the first to occur in the post World War Two period (Ogawa, 2003). With a population of 122.7 million in 2000, Japan’s population is expected to peak at 127 million in 2006, and then projected to decline beginning in 2007 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2003). The post-war baby boom in Japan lasted only from 1947 to 1949. The TFR dropped steadily in the 1950s to replacement level (2.1) in 1958. In the 1960s and 1970s, the TFR remained relatively stable around the replacement level. It dropped to 1.57 in 1989, and then to a record low of 1.32 in 2002 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2003).

The Japanese government fears that the ageing population will lead to dire consequences for the social security system and severely undermine the Japanese economy (Donald, 2004). It was only in 1990 after TFR reached 1.57 that the government took the “first step” towards declining fertility in Japan (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2003). The drop in fertility is attributed largely to the delay in marriage and the increased incidence of non-marriage. Unlike other developed countries in Europe, the incidence of non-marital births is very low in Japan (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2003). Table 2 (appendix a) summarises key landmarks in Japanese population policies.

South Korea's population structure has changed dramatically since World War Two. In the 1950s, its population structure formed a classic pyramid where each successively younger age cohort represented a larger portion of total population. Baby boomers fuelled a slight TFR increase over this period. In 1962, the government established a national family planning policy to reduce population growth. The two-child family became the norm, and total fertility fell from 6.0 children per woman in 1960 to 1.6 children per woman in 1990 (Family Health International, 2003). From the 1980s-90s, fertility rates decreased rapidly. Replacement level was reached in 1984 and continued to decline. By 2000, Korea's birth rate fell to 1.5 as life expectancy increased by 26 years for females and 30 for male. With a rapidly ageing population, the estimated average age of South Koreans by 2030 will be 43 years old. Korea's pension cost is expected to rise from 2.1 per cent of GDP to over 10 per cent. In 2002 Korea's TFR was 1.17, among the lowest in the world. Korea will need to figure out how to support a growing inactive population with fewer workers. Between 2000-2030, the ratio of workers to retirees is expected to fall from 7.1 to 2.7. The current population agenda is to boost the nation's low birth rate and prepare for an elderly population. Reasons for South Korea's low TFR include a higher marriage age, growth in unmarried population, burden of childcare, insufficient childcare support infrastructure, high cost of living, change in societal values, and sociopolitical barriers for women to balance work and family life.

The main objective of Korea's 1966 new population policy interestingly enough, was to maintain below replacement fertility as it realised that high fertility was not economically desirable. It aimed to improve morbidity and mortality levels as part of the process of achieving sustainable socioeconomic development. Family health and welfare were to be enhanced, as were the balancing of sex ratios at birth and the reduction of the incidence of induced abortions. A plan was conceived to tackle the sex-related problems of the youth and adolescents. Women were to be empowered with support from the state by expanding employment opportunities and welfare services (more will be said on this later). Last but not least to improve work opportunities and provide adequate health care and welfare services for the elderly (Kim, 2000:4-5).

With a TFR of 1.73, Denmark represents one of the few countries to have

successfully stemmed the fertility decline that has struck most industrialised nations. The birth rate in Denmark began to fall before the turn of the last century starting from 4,139 per 1,000 women in 1901 to its lowest point in the century at 1,377 per 1,000 population in 1983 but it has since seen an increase to 1,730 per 1,000 population in 2003. Within Europe, Denmark's fertility rate is only surpassed by that of France (1.85), and Norway (1.83). The country's success in achieving an improved fertility rate can be attributed to social policies and legislation that support child-rearing and the family within the framework of changing family, social and labour market structures.

Norway, another Nordic country that seems to have dealt "successfully" with declining fertility experienced a "baby boom" like many countries after the Second World War. This boom lasted longer than in most other countries. At the beginning of the 1970s the TFR in Norway was still as high as 2.5. Fertility fell rapidly thereafter. In 1985, Norway was predicting an absolute decline in its population by the year 2011, as well as a doubling of its 500,000 pensioners (in a population of just over 4 million people). In 1986, the Nordic Council identified a low fertility rate consistent with other Nordic countries, which would eventually mean a decrease in the overall population. Active pro-natalist policies were then implemented by Norway resulting in the TFR stabilizing at around 1.8 since 1999. See Table 5 for a summary of some of these policies. From the quick overview above, a few common themes emerge.

2.1 Focus on Quality of Life

While Japan and Korea are countries where much progress can still be made where family policies are concerned, both have embedded within them the potential for more holistic solutions. Korea realised this as early as 1966 (Kim, 2000:4-5). As noted earlier, the main objective of Korea's 1966 new population policy was to maintain below replacement fertility as it realised that high fertility was not economically desirable. Japan too has realised that its social environment is not supportive enough for people who desired children. The Japanese population policy thus, "defines policy toward declining fertility not as a pro-natalist policy but as part of a welfare policy that aims to improve environment more supportive for families with children" (Atoh & Akachi, cited in National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2003:13)

Denmark and Norway recognised that improving the quality of life was important to increasing population growth, and resisted the temptation to only tackle 'obvious' policy areas (e.g., marital fertility and childcare support). Efforts were made to improve the overall quality of life to have families. Denmark has recognised that external factors – heavily influenced by state and market conditions – that affect the quality of life are important in influencing the decisions of families to have children. In the past decades, a comprehensive package of policies has been implemented to raise the quality of life in Denmark so as to create an enabling environment for child rearing (Knudsen, 1999:8). Aggressive measures to increase female participation and reduce working hours were introduced to allow families and citizens more time to themselves. Similar motivations can be found behind Norwegian population policies that target the family. They are premised upon the recognition of the importance of gender equity and concern for the general well being of children and their families rather than motivated primarily by pro-natalist objectives. The main emphasis for these countries – Korea, Japan, Denmark and Norway – is the general well being and quality of life of its citizens. The later two Nordic countries however differ on one crucial point. While targeted at families, Nordic social welfare regulations and laws remain premised upon the rights and duties of the individual person. These have important implications for its citizens, especially women, and the success of its policies.

2.2 Recognition of Diversity and Respect for the Individual

It is interesting to note that Danish initiatives, social policies and legislation to support child-rearing and the family have been implemented that keep up with changing family, social and labour market structures. In this, especially with regard to reproductive policies, both Danish citizens and policy makers observe a pragmatic rather than moralistic approach to issues of sexuality, contraception and pregnancy (Knudsen, 1999:8). In Denmark, “most laws, rights and benefits and obligations are directed at the individual, not at the family” (Knudsen, 1999:12). It is this fundamental respect for the individual and recognition of the diversity of Danish society that has allowed it to consider many other parts of society when considering issues related to children, and the elderly.

Norwegian policies to increase fertility share this theme in that, “policies have not primarily been motivated by pro-natalistic concerns, but rather by gender equality ideologies and the general well-being of children and their families” (Rønsen, 2001:146). While seemingly going against the structure of the family, policies targeting the individual have not led to the ‘destruction’ of the family unit nor to the permanent decline in population growth (population decline has in fact now stabilised). Rather, government policies that recognise the different and changing needs of its citizens vis-à-vis how they relate to and associate with one another in society, have made it easier for individuals to make better informed and prepared choices about marriage and childbearing. This has also allowed government policies to make a more meaningful impact.

In countries like Japan however, there remains an attempt to appeal towards an idealised family structure that is having less of a bearing on reality. While not having explicitly pro-natalist policies just to halt fertility decline, it continues to view the family as the main recipient of its population policies. Hence, “government intervention is justified based on an argument that social environment is not supportive enough for women, men and couples to have children even though they wish to have some. Consequently, the government defines policy towards declining fertility not as a pro-natalist policy but as part of a welfare policy that aims to improve environment more supportive for families with children” (Atoh & Akachi, cited in National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2003:13). These have

been much criticised for being self-contradictory. For example, even though the main source of fertility decline in Japan has been identified in the increasing numbers of Japanese choosing to remain single, fertility policies and programmes have been specifically designed to increase marital fertility. Little has been done to deal with the problematic issue of changing nuptial trends for example (Ogawa, 2003). In the Nordic recognition of their society's diversity and respect for its individual citizens, their women have benefited the most (Knudsen, 1999:12), with significant and positive effects on their population landscape.

2.3 Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Rights

Denmark is one of the Nordic social democratic welfare states, with relations between the State, Market and Family that differ remarkably from what is seen in the rest of Europe and in the United States. Most laws, rights, benefits and obligations are directed at the individual, not at the family, which was previously the dominant form. Recognising this individual orientation has had a great influence on the women's position in the family and in relation to the labour market (Borchorst, cited in Knudsen, 1999:12). Women are the key actors in making fertility decisions and in so doing have to seek active adjustments between their various roles and expectations that the state, market and family place on them. The family has been and is still strongly affected by changes in the women's position in the other parts of society. For example, the age at birth of the first child and the number of children in a family are strongly related to the woman's education and position in the labour market - and in quite another way than to that of the male partner (Knudsen, 1999:13).

Danish women's participation in the labour force increased most strongly throughout the 1960s from less than half of all 15-69 year old women in 1950 (47 per cent) and 1960 (42,5 per cent) to 54 per cent, 65 per cent and 71 per cent in 1970, 1980 and 1994, respectively (Knudsen, 1999:13). Denmark has the highest rate of working mothers with young children in Europe (Family Policy Studies Centre, 1998). Very few women are housewives. A survey in 1989 among mothers (20-49) years old showed that a proportion as low as four per cent were housewives. Fertility remained higher among women outside the labour market, but this has been decreasing since (Knudsen, 1999:14). In Danish families with children, about 89 per cent of mothers work and 97 per cent of fathers. Everyday life has changed fundamentally in the last 15-20 years. Most mothers work outside the home, often full-time, and many children attend full-time day care institutions. The socialisation of children takes place not only at home but also in the public context. The consequence of this new way of life has yet to be fully understood.

In Norway until the 1970s, women in developed countries who went to work tended to have fewer kids. But now the reverse is true: the higher the rate of female participation in the workforce, the higher the fertility rate (Steketee, 2001). This is the consequence of, "a long tradition of equality between men and women [in

Scandinavia], and it's considered important for both of them to have a job" (Christiane Pfeiffer, head of psycho-social research at the EU's Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and the Family, quoted in Bitá, 2003).

Norway leads the pack in several areas, such as female participation in the labour force (about 80 per cent, which is comparable to male participation); political life (about 40 per cent of politicians); higher education (about 60 per cent of students are female). Jobs tend to be segregated by sex, however; almost half the women in the workforce are in the public sector, of which they comprise about 2/3 of the sector, which suggests that the public sector has more family-friendly policies than the private sector. In 1978, Norway adopted the Gender Equality Act in 1978, which prohibits discrimination on ground of gender, applicable to all areas of society. A Gender Equality Ombud was set up to enforce the Act. A gender mainstreaming strategy introduced in 1986, where it is the responsibility of the relevant public authority to ensure gender equality, e.g., in working life, in education, in the health sector etc. Gender quotas in politics were first adopted within the Socialist Left Party and the Liberal Party, as far back as the 1970s.

Although female participation in the South-Korean workforce is high, there remains an employment system for Korean women which asks for their commitment to work while societal expectations continue to define women as primary caregivers for children. Men's attitudes toward sex roles are more traditional than women's. The dual burdens of work outside and inside the home have created stress for women who have no choice but to merge their roles. "[N]o one has escaped without personal sacrifice or struggle or inner conflict" (Family Health International, 2003). This has translated into a two-tiered labour market, "centring around highly educated men in the white collar sectors and low educated women in light industries" (Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, 1996). So while women's roles in Korea have changed in the past three decades – access to family planning is almost universal, families are small, and women have greater opportunities to participate in the labour market, cultural mores and norms still demand an unrealistic caregiving role from Korean women. Furthermore, sex discrimination remains a big social problem in Korean society and in the workplace (Kim, 2000). Policies are still needed to make it easier for women to work outside the home (e.g., availability of child care) and for

men to have the time to participate in the home. Curiously, the impact of population policy in Japan is still not well understood as it is an area that has not been extensively researched on empirically (Ogawa, 2003). What is generally recognised is that for all the numerous policies, little has actually been done to alleviate the pressures of Japanese mothers, especially those holding down a job in the workforce (Ogawa, 2003). Unsurprisingly, fertility in Japan, just like in Korea, continue to drop in the absence of holistic approaches to population and fertility, as working women in these two countries put off marriage and childrearing.

2.4 Work/Life Balance

In the context of population and fertility issues, work/life balance for AWARE does not mean an equal balance of hours spent on work and outside work. We believe that work/life balance means different things to different people and may vary over time for the same person. Hence, there is no such thing as a single, perfect one-size-fits-all arrangement. AWARE believes that all workers should have the freedom to pursue personal and family activities and responsibilities outside the workplace. A paradigm shift away from the “24/7” working culture must take place. This means that work must be arranged more efficiently, and organised more intelligently to reflect the changing working and social environment of Singaporeans. This in the long-term can contribute to the quality of life and result in fertility decisions that can satisfy the individual citizen at the personal level, and the policy-maker at the national level. Everyone has a role to play in work/life balance arrangements: the family, the state and the market.

In Japan, the state is encouraging companies to introduce flexible work schedules for working parents with young children, the impact is limited because they are encouragements rather than regulations (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2003). Companies do not pay wages to employees on parental leave; instead, there is a social security insurance payout.

In the US and UK however, work/life balance policies are largely a corporate initiative rather than the governments'. The current legislature in both countries focuses on “work-family” integration rather than “work-life” integration. Increasingly, organisations in both countries are coming up with policies to include all employees, regardless of whether they fall into the typical definitions of ‘family’. Lessons have been learnt from policies which focus only on the needs of married couples with children.

In the US, The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), provides (at a national level) covered employees with the right to an unpaid leave of absence for up to 12 weeks within a 12 months period, in order to address family and medical responsibilities. The FMLA is, however, much less comprehensive than leave or family policies of other industrialised countries. The U.S. is the only industrialised

country in the world without some sort of mandated *paid* leave for mothers or for both parents. (Pyle & Pelletier, 2003). There are many initiatives on the state level to extend and enhance family and medical leave. 27 states have introduced paid leave bills (in addition to California which passed their paid leave bill). However these are very recent initiatives; most having been passed around 2002-2003. Also, the state bills allow six weeks of leave at reduced pay for all employees. This is far less than what some companies offer their employees. Organisations in the US are going further and offering more than what is mandated by the law. (e.g., paternity leave). Before the state bills were passed, many of the larger enterprises had, in fact, begun to voluntarily provide some leave as it became more evident that having family-friendly policies could alleviate some of the disruptions to work as employees try to juggle work and family demands (Bernstein, 2001; Marks, 1997). Hence, work/life balance initiatives in the US can be seen mostly as a corporate initiative.

In the UK, women whose babies are due on or after 6 April 2003 are entitled to 26 weeks' ordinary maternity leave, regardless of how long they have worked for their employer. Ordinary maternity leave is normally paid leave. Additional maternity leave starts immediately after ordinary maternity leave and continues for a further 26 weeks. Additional maternity leave is usually unpaid. According to the UK Department Of Trade and Industry (2003), from 6 April 2003 eligible employees who are parents of children aged under six, or of disabled children aged under 18, will have the right to apply to work flexibly. Their employers will have a duty to consider such requests seriously. Eligible employees can take up to two weeks' paid leave to care for their new baby and support the mother. The right is available to employees whose children are expected to be born, or are born, on or after 6 April 2003. The right is available to individuals who adopt, or one partner of a couple where the couple adopt jointly. Rights to parental leave and time off for dependants for employees – both mothers and fathers – who have completed one year's service with their employers are entitled to 13 weeks' (unpaid) parental leave to care for their child. Parents of disabled children are entitled to 18 weeks' parental leave (previously 13 weeks) up to the child's 18th birthday, providing they have the qualifying length of service (Department Of Trade and Industry, UK, 2003).

These new changes to the law in the UK were very recent, implemented in April 2003. Previously, there was only a provision for maternity leave. (18 weeks ordinary maternity leave and entitlement to wages during maternity leave was a matter of negotiation. Usually it was 90 per cent of employee's salary for the first 6 weeks). Again, there were companies which initiated policies voluntarily before the implementation of these policies and which have policies that go beyond the present legislative provisions. (See case study on Pricewaterhouse, UK, appendix B). At this point it is important to note that the policies implemented legislatively by the UK and US are more of Work/family balance policies and not really work/life balance policies. Corporations in the US and the UK have begun to offer more work/life friendly policies, going beyond just offering work/family friendly policies. (See case studies of companies in the US, appendix B)

In the mid 1990s' there was a growing discontent among single and childless employees with Corporate America's preoccupation with family-friendly programmes (Flynn, 1996). They felt left out by their companies' work/family programmes and felt that their needs were not receiving as much attention from management as those of employees with spouses and children. Also many felt that they were carrying more burden than their married-with-children counterparts. Employers thus began reviewing their policies and ensuring that they were fair to both married and single employees. Examples of more inclusive benefits are flexible-work arrangements (for all employees) and dependent-care offerings. See appendix B for companies which began to look at more inclusive policies (1990s)

Policies, whether implemented by the government at a national level or by a company at an organisational level, must not cause employees who are single or unmarried to feel discriminated against. We have seen examples of companies which have developed family-friendly types of policies and programmes without totally alienating employees who do not have any advantage in that.

In looking to the experiences and perspectives of other nations with similar issues, a caveat needs to be added. While some nations may have been successful in some policies, tackling population issues is a novel challenge by and large. Every country has tried different methods and there is no fixed way. As Siddique suggested,

“all developed societies are experimenting with solutions, and none has yet found any magic formula. Singapore has no choice but to sail into uncharted waters with everyone else” (Siddique, 2004). Nonetheless, some salient themes are consistent which we must bear in mind.

Firstly, countries that have stemmed fertility decline like Norway has done so through pro-natalist policies that were designed to improve the quality of life for its citizens, rather than to specifically target fertility figures. This was premised upon a high sensitivity to gender roles and relationships in the society. Secondly, countries that have pro-natalist policies targeting increased fertility like Japan and Korea have so far failed to halt declining fertility rates. Thirdly, improving the position of women must not end at the workplace. There must be institutions and mores and norms in society and at home to support changing gender roles of men and women in all areas of their lives, as evidenced by the Scandinavian countries. Fourthly, examples of corporate behaviour in the US and UK has shown that the private sector can do much in this aspect, even setting examples for the state. Ultimately however, the state must still intervene in terms of legislations and policies. Last but not least, fertility decisions are taken at an individual level and are influenced by a complicated combination of state, family and market forces.

3. Singapore Today

In the first chapter, we saw that economic imperatives were the main drivers for population control policies in the early years. These together with changing attitudes and institutions as a consequence of Singapore's socio-economic development led to a decrease of TFR. Since the 1980s, fertility continued to fall and remained below the replacement level. During this time, Singapore's economic development has proceeded rapidly. Significant improvements were made in housing conditions, public health, transportation, educational and employment opportunities. GDP growth averaged seven per cent. Concurrently, social changes were occurring at a fast pace with rising female labour force participation and education attainment, and a trend towards nuclearisation of the family.

Figures and analyses released by the Singapore Department of Statistics pointed the finger heavily towards women. One reason for the fall in fertility was due to the decision to postpone marriages by Singaporeans. The average age at first marriage increased by two years over the past two decades, from 28 years in 1984 to 30 years in 2000 for grooms and from 25 to 27 for brides. The delay in marriage occurred at all levels of education (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2002:3). The delay in the timing of marriage is manifested in the rise in singlehood rates as well.

The rise in singlehood rates were seen to reflect the delay in the timing of marriages. Among the younger age groups, proportionately more persons remained single during the last two decades. At the prime childbearing age of 30–34, one-fifth of females were unmarried in 2001 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2002:3). It was felt that the increased financial independence of Singapore women who have a high rate of economic participation reduced their need to seek financial support within a marriage. In a fast-paced, urban environment like Singapore, there is also a notable lack of opportunities for potential marriage partners to meet and interact. In addition, for educated women, career considerations have increased their propensity to stay unmarried. In year 2001, more than one-fifth of female graduates remained unmarried at the critical age of 35–39 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2002:3).

It was shown too that, “delayed marriage among Singapore women has resulted in a corresponding delay in the onset of childbearing”. On average, Singapore

mothers who gave birth to their first child in 2000 were 28 years old, three years older than first-time mothers in 1980. With the postponement of marriage and delay in child-bearing, the share of higher parity births has declined. In 2001, fourth and higher order births made up just 6.6 per cent of the total resident births, a sharp drop from 33 per cent in 1970. As a result, the completed family size has become smaller. In 2001, women aged 40–44 had an average of 2.1 children compared with 4.0 in 1980 and 2.5 in 1990 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2002:4). As mentioned earlier, fertility decisions are still chiefly decided by the female, and these are determined through a complicated negotiation between state, market and family forces of influence.

3.1 The State

Much has already been said about the role of the state with regards to population issues in the first chapter. It shall suffice to note once again that economic imperatives have driven the state to take action on arresting the falling TFR. In addition to the forming of a high-powered interministerial committee to investigate the issue, significant changes have already been made, most notably the constitutional amendment earlier this year. Babies born abroad to Singaporean women married to foreigners will have the right to citizenship under a constitutional amendment passed in April that takes effect on 15 May 2004. Under the new constitutional amendment, future generations of Singaporeans living abroad can pass on Singaporean citizenship as long as mothers or fathers meet new residency rules, including spending at least five years in the country before having a baby.

This is a dramatic and positive step forward by itself for this has been an issue that has long been debated in the parliament and public. Not only are Singaporeans no longer excluded by a patriarchal definition of laws but the position of Singaporean women are potentially advanced. It is hoped that such changes are signs of more structural revisions to come. On its own, however, it is in danger of going down in history as yet another example of how Singaporean women are valued only for their reproductive and productive roles, rather than as equal members of the country on the same footing with their male counterparts.

3.2 The Market

In a country where the state pervades all areas of life, the private sector has tended to take its lead from the government, unlike its more laissez faire counterparts in North America and Western Europe. There has been a need for employers to have more faith in their workers and be more open to the idea of flexi-work. The Scandinavian countries have proven that flexi-work does not affect productivity, but they have a very different employment system which ought to be studied. Unions play a big part and serve as consultants, customizing solutions for both the company and the employee. Many in the Scandinavian countries cite family as their top priority and women do not see the issue of raising a family as jeopardizing their employment prospects. These countries have a high female labour participation and well developed networks of subsidies and childcare services.

Demographics of corporations have changed yet the culture and expectations have not evolved alongside. The Acting Minister of Manpower, Dr. Ng Eng Hen concedes that the government can do more to make the workplace family-friendly. In hope of having the private sector follow suit as well (Tee, 2004b). More women are in the work force now yet corporate culture is still patriarchal and has neither changed nor adapted itself to meet the needs of these women. The corporate culture remains male-oriented (no paternity leave). In Singapore, not enough innovative programmes have been established within many businesses to address the dual responsibilities of women. Women's needs are recognised to an extent with maternity leave. Providing childcare needs seems to be an area where few initiatives have been taken. In the recent Family Friendly Firm Awards (2002) organised by the Work/life Unit of MCDS, only five (20 per cent) of the 23 winners offered childcare services/ subsidies (and all were govt linked organisations). And take note that this is the percentage of the winners. And although women have entered the workforce in large numbers and consequently doubled her responsibilities, men have not reciprocated by taking on their share of household and childcare responsibilities. And corporations have not made it possible for men to do so. Whilst paternity leave is offered by many organisations, this is a “token number”. Out of the 23 winners, none had paternity leave that was longer than two days.

In Singapore, there needs to be a change in mindset that productive work can only happen in the workplace. Many private firms are not family-friendly due to several reasons (Tee, 2004b):

1. CEOs think it makes no business sense.
2. Managers and Human resource personnel have no capability or support to tailor family-friendly practices to suit employees' needs.
3. There is a prevailing culture of "face time" productivity, measured by the number of hours put in at the office rather than results yielded.

In a letter addressed to the ST forum, a senior personnel in Qian Hu Corporation voiced his opposition towards granting longer maternity leave, arguing that it is detrimental towards business productivity and efficiency, and would result in increasing costs of doing business in Singapore. He sees the falling birthrates as no cause for alarm, as foreign talent can always be imported to fill up positions. He suggests that no more than three months of maternity leave should be granted, and that the government should subsidise one month out of the three, so as to minimise the impact on firms (Kenny Yap Kim Lee, 'Extend maternity leave to no more than 3 months', *The Straits Times*, 9 March 2004).

Private companies rarely offer paid leave to tend to sick family members, but most bosses would grant this if staff asked. Several companies have their own "baby bonus" schemes, giving out cash and gift vouchers to staff who just had a newborn baby. American Express hands out \$1,000 to staff who are new parents (Tee, 2004a). Paid family and child sick leave are viable options for business. Some exceptional examples- IBM offers male and female members 5 days of family care leave, M1 and Shell give women workers 5 days of family care leave too (Tee, 2004a). The general lack of family care leave among 22 companies surveyed is a marked contrast to the public sector, which offers 5 days of paid leave to look after sick children under 12. Less than 10 per cent of the private sector offered paid family care leave. About half of private companies offer paternity leave, 3/4 marriage leave, 90 per cent compassionate leave, 1/3 give paid exam leave. But only 15 per cent give unpaid leave lasting for more than three months, claimed to attend to family matters (Tee, 2004b). Flexi-work arrangement is less common, as are child care centres and time

off to care for sick relatives. Only four per cent of private sector employees are slated for such work arrangements. In the year 2003, 30 per cent of private companies provided housing benefits, but only 1.5 per cent gave out childcare benefits (Tee, 2004b). Such figures appear to paint a rosy picture of a benevolent corporate culture towards families. More systematic studies need to be conducted to show how substantial these allowances are and their impacts on workers.

3.3 Society

In a recent public survey done by AWARE (see Appendix C), respondents feel that the government's monetary incentives have not addressed the 'root' issues that potential parents and parents are concerned with regarding procreation, they also recognise that there is little the government can do if Singaporeans themselves do not want babies in what is essentially regarded as a personal decision, not an aspect of national duty. While the government sees procreation as an essentially socio-economic issue, the "baby producers" essentially see it as a personal decision or situation; 67% of the 79 respondents who do not have children are childless because they are single, not because they are already married and choose not to have children (only 40% of the 64 married respondents are childless, and even so a handful are either planning for one or already expecting one).

While this may suggest that the bigger obstacle to procreation is singlehood, and not that married people are choosing not to have children, further research, at least using larger sample sizes, are required to substantiate cause-effect hypotheses. In contrast with earlier generations that seemed to equate a large family with a higher quality of life, the reverse seems to be the case in present day Singapore. Many are weighing the time, energy and effort to bring up a child against other factors (e.g. how conducive they think Singapore is for growing a family) and coming to the conclusion that parenthood is either inconvenient or undesirable in current-day Singapore.

While respondents acknowledge that Singaporeans respond well to economic and monetary incentives on other issues, most feel that they are not the most appropriate for addressing the declining-birthrate issue because money is not the key consideration when one decides to have a child. Respondents suggest that policies addressing a range of lifestyle concerns with major impact on themselves and their children would be more appropriate. Factors that surfaced as most important during this survey were increase in work flexibility and changes in the school/education system, followed by a second band of concerns regarding the cost of living and the availability of good childcare facilities.

As earning power has become increasingly balanced with the change from a typically single-income family to present-day dual-income families, respondents feel

that parental involvement should also become more balanced between fathers and mothers. A father is no longer viewed as just a breadwinner; he is also emotionally involved and spends time with his wife and children. As such there is strong approval for paid paternity leave to allow more family bonding when a child is born, and in recognition of the ideal present-day role of fathers. However, respondents are divided over the issue of longer maternity leave. In the Singapore context, while many applaud the chance for the mother to bond with the child for a longer time, especially if breastfeeding, they also feel employers should not be expected to hold a work position for an absent employee for such a long time.

The key changes that respondents hope to see are more flexible work arrangements so that both fathers and mothers can get more involved in their children's lives, cultural acceptance for not working long, late hours, more opportunities for fulfilling and positively-viewed part-time work so that mothers may better balance their work/life roles, and generally more family-friendly and baby friendly facilities in society, for example in shopping malls and offices. All items on this wish-list are essentially pro-family which is good news as far as the fertility issue is concerned. It suggests that it is not because people do not want to have babies, but that circumstances prevent them from doing so.

Extending the pro-family wish list, respondents paint a preference for the opportunity and strong support structure to look after their children themselves with help from grandparents, maids, and childcare facilities in various degrees. A variety of views were expressed on the role of the single person in a pro-fertility society; on one hand some feel singles have no responsibilities in this area and should be left alone to choose their own lifestyles, on the other some feel singles should get married and have children of their own. It is suggested that singles can help in a pro-fertility culture by becoming part of their colleagues and married siblings' social support structure, both in terms of helping to look after aged parents and babysitting, as well as safeguarding their own fertility by being educated and exercising responsibility on the issues of smoking, excessive drinking and a promiscuous lifestyle. Letting responsible singles adopt children is another suggestion, as is recognising that singles contribute to the economy and pay the taxes that can help fund maternity and paternity leave.

Many respondents feel enabling more immigration and adoption, and having policies that encourage more foreigners to settle down in Singapore, are key for increasing the population without focusing on existing Singaporeans to have more children. Others don't think our population even needs to be increased because it is already crowded as it is. Essentially, respondents' message to the government: "Be sincere when you say you will leave no stone unturned!"

Therefore, instead of attributing the current phenomenon of a low fertility rate to women's reluctance to give birth, AWARE, for example, has examined the declining and stagnant fertility rate within the larger social climate. The demands of modern life and from the knowledge-based economy have created more stress and pressure on people. The emphasis on economic imperative and drive has created a strain between full time employment and childcare, which are seen and experienced as nearly mutually exclusive. An increasing number of Singaporeans are now preoccupied with career advancement and material gain, the yardstick of success in society, and as a result, parenting has been sidelined. The lack of a family-oriented work culture exacerbates the problem, as people are forced to choose between one or the other, as juggling both at the same time is simply not a viable option. There is a need to improve the quality of life, from employment policies to a radical overhaul of the education system that has been highlighted as detrimental and damaging, imposing excessive demands on school children. In order to boost the fertility rate, the government must go beyond offering monetary incentives, but must look into making parenting a viable option and strengthening the family by addressing other areas such as employment conditions.

As noted earlier, Singapore relies heavily on foreign domestic workers in the running of households and childcare. This has several implications. First, this reinforces child-rearing as a woman's issue that is done by the FDW who becomes the wife's "wife". The work of a mother is relegated to paid help, instead of being distributed evenly between husband and wife in the household. Thus, men are unable to acquaint themselves with household labour, a stumbling block to achieving gender equity. In understanding the current fertility trends, social perceptions around employment and housework also need to be considered. The "housewife" is perceived

as an inferior second class citizen, with no ability to earn income. Working mothers are perceived as contributing more to society, but face tremendous strains in the process. Men who don't take paternity leave are seen as efficient workers, as their contribution at workplace is more valuable than raising children. These attitudes need to be changed so that parenting is not seen as merely a woman's domain. The high cost of mothering is a core reason for the low fertility rate.

The low fertility rate might well be a consequence of the anti-natal policies adopted before 1983, which led to a generation growing up and feeling resentful over the discriminatory acts that their parents experienced. The government's vacillating population policies are almost schizophrenic, making people confused and this might well be one of the explanations behind the low fertility rate. The economic recession could also be a reason behind the low fertility rate, where the costs of parenting are too high. The low fertility rate could also be a long time consequence when studied in historical perspective, where Singapore's initial problem was that of overpopulation which resulted in a slate of extreme anti-natal policies and the availability of contraceptives and easy access to abortion. At the same time, this coincided with women's entry into the workforce.

This chapter has therefore presented the picture of a government that is eager to promote fertility and a nation of people who are open to its motherhood messages. Rather than demand specific "hand-outs" however, Singaporeans are asking for an enabling environment for them to make considered decisions on fertility. The market has a vital role to play in this although its potential remained largely untapped. The next chapter makes three sets of propositions for the state, market and society/families to consider.

4. Recommendations: Towards ‘Quality of Life’ Policies

From this survey, AWARE feels that the quality of life is the single most important reason why Singaporeans are not having more children. This is certainly not a new idea. Yet “quality of life” is subjective. AWARE proposes that in the context of population and fertility, quality of life means a healthy balance between working, family and community life that is underpinned by institutions, and mores and norms, that fundamentally recognise the diversity of Singaporean society and respect each individual. Families, the private sector and the state must take pro-active measures in this. Respect of the individual and recognition of diversity is paramount. No groups in society should be discriminated. This is especially in terms of gender (male and female), ethnicity (of all groups), age (of all ages, young and old), marital status (married and single), socio-economic class, and last but not least “body” (as in “able-bodiedness” and those with different forms of disabilities).

AWARE proposes that the government can no longer wait in creating a society that is gender equitable if it wants to boost the fertility rate. There is a mismatch between levels of gender equity in different social institutions, where women do have equal opportunities in education and in the job market but equity is lacking in employment conditions. Government policies cannot be tilted towards women alone, but must benefit fathers as well, as the majority of households are dual income ones where childcare and paternity leave are issues that affect men equally. Politicians in Singapore are now becoming aware of.³ The preceding chapters of this report have shown how countries managed to improve the fertility rate due to its belief in gender equity reflected in social policies, as compared to countries like Japan that failed to do so due to its conservative stance on women.

Castles’ (2003) study of 21 OECD countries finds that downward fertility trends have been reversed in those countries where women have had greatest access to educational and occupational opportunities. Moreover, those countries where there is adequate support for childcare and flexi-work hours are also those that have seen positive fertility trends. Castles argues that these findings point to two important lessons for governments. First, “the only aspects of family-friendly public policy associated with fertility outcomes are formal child-care provision and the proportion of women reporting that they work flexi-time, both of them variables measuring

aspects of the policy environment cutting across the public/private divide What appears to matter is not the sources of the remedies but their substance: that women are able to access the child-care places they need and can arrange their lives in ways that accommodate the often conflicting demands of work and maternity” (Castles, 2003:225). This implies that regardless of one’s ideological position on the role of states versus markets, one can find a solution that depends on some combination of action through the two.

The second lesson, “relates to the scope of potential policy intervention to modify fertility behaviour, for ... it seems to imply that this scope goes far beyond what is conventionally dignified as family-friendly public policy fertility outcomes are a function not only of policies directly aimed at permitting women to combine work and maternity, but also of education and labour market policies that enhance the probability of women finding employment and staying in employment irrespective of their fertility behaviour” (Castles, 2003:226). Therefore governments have an even wider pool of instruments at their disposal to improve fertility. In addition to family-specific policies, the state can also embark on general efforts to improve women’s position in education and the work place.

The implications of this for government policy are thus very clear. “[T]he policy environment is defined not by what governments do or do not do, but by what they could do if they were so minded. A strong implication in much of the literature is that governments are far more likely to be so minded in cultures where traditional values are no longer dominant” (Castles, 2003:220). Peter McDonald puts it another way. He suggests that low levels of fertility in advanced countries today can be explained in terms of a mismatch between the levels of gender equity applying in different social institutions. For instance if women have equal opportunities in education and in the job market while they lack equity in terms and conditions of employment, services and in the family itself, fertility will be low. This situation – the combination of a patriarchal family structure with relative gender equity in education and employment – also explains the lack of enthusiasm for marriage (McDonald, 2000). The implication for Singapore is clear, as expressed by senior writer of *The Straits Times*, Janadas Devan (2004), “[W]hat is needed is a social ideology that not only approves of women having careers, but also encourages

equality both at work and at home”. This must be supported by, “practical programmes to help them have babies and continue to work”.

What kind of social ideology can this be? One that expresses the kind of Asian values that Singaporeans (not the Singaporean *Government*) share. In a fascinating study by Teo You Yenn, she finds that, “even as people saw childbirth and the ageing population as major public issues, they did not think of their own situations as needing social solutions. Instead, they turned towards pooling individual family resources and piecing together private resolutions” (Teo, 2004:7). On the surface, this appears to be the ‘Asian values’ that the government speaks of. Closer inspection reveals this to be more complex. While, “the government may stand on a soapbox with the call to “Asian values,” but ultimately, people are the ones with the real authority to define what makes for their family values. Rather than demanding for public solutions, then, people find that dealing with their own problems helps them *maintain certain independence and autonomy from the state*” (italics my own) (Teo, 2004:10). Solutions to the “problem of fertility” must not only be comprehensive and holistic, it must be guided by a ideology that does not take reference to artificial values which Singaporeans do not share. It must be an ideology that changes people’s sense of responsibility *for their own parents and children only* to all *Singaporean dependents*. It is only then that a sense of collective responsibility may allow public policy to deal effectively with an issue that is perceived as a national problem (Teo, 2004).

The most basic lessons The Working Committee on Marriage and Procreation would or should have learnt during their research to improve fertility rates are: one, that social policies should also benefit fathers if they are to have a positive long term impact on procreation; two, that fertility is higher in liberal societies than in traditional societies: that is, whether family is characterised by male supremacy or by gender equity. Denmark and Norway can teach us about the ups and downs of fertility rates. There are also lessons to be learnt from the experiences of Spain, Italy, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Taiwan, to name a few. The first two countries have managed to increase their fertility rates while all the other countries like Singapore have very low fertility rates.

The difference between the countries on either side of the divide lies in their attitudes towards women and the family. The countries with lower fertility rates are also countries with more conservative values in regard to the role of women, especially mothers. All of these countries also have policies which make it difficult for the employment of mothers in the work force. Undoubtedly many factors, economic, social and private, are involved in a couple's decision to have children. Economic considerations are important. In Norway a stagnation in the economy had a negative impact on childbearing which also correlates with the situation here. We had a fertility crisis in the mid-1980s and now we have one again. Both occurred during times of economic recession.

Another factor is the cost of children. A welfare state-like approach, such as the provision of tax rebates, subsidised children's services, paid parental leave, have been proven to achieve positive results. For instance, fertility in Sweden did respond to positive welfare state initiatives in the late 1980s and responded in the opposite direction in the 1990s when these provisions were rolled back. Here policy intervention strengthened or weakened the situation. Studies also reveal that brighter economic prospects, generous family and social policies which support parents to balance work and family reversed the trend towards lower fertility. In which case some of the measures announced recently should help. But will it? We will have to wait and see.

Further a positive relationship between female labour force participation and fertility, in the countries under study, debunks the myth about increased level of workforce participation and low fertility. In Norway and Sweden both went up in the 1980s and decreased in the 1990s. The assumption that women's lower fertility rate has to do with their increased work participation is fuelled by the fact that historically, falling birthrate was not the problem. The problem was overpopulation. That situation coincided with the time of low participation rate of women in the workforce. Women's entry into the formal workforce force had also coincided with the availability of contraceptives, strong anti-natal public policies and women's new experiences in work-life balance. However recent surveys show that women do want to marry and have families. So what is stopping them?

The reality is that the social and economic world of young Singaporeans have changed as they have in all developed countries. Young women do not see their future in terms of a male breadwinner/head of family. Similarly young men do not wish to be the sole bread -winner with dependant wives. Societies and economies demand a double-income couple or a one-income single. Where social and economic models have adapted fast to these changing conditions they have been able to prevent fertility dropping to very low levels. Singapore needs to follow those examples and work towards a gender equity model of the family to emerge. In this model of the family there would be income earning work, household maintenance work and care and nurturing work which are not determined by gender. It is now time for fathers to fight discrimination against policies that limit their role in the home. The principles upon which this model are based, to quote from McDonald's paper, "are equal respect for men and women, equality of resources and capabilities, parity of participation in socially valued activities, and an end to male-centred measures of social value" (Fraser, cited in McDonald, 2000:3).

AWARE has been consistent in arguing that the issues of marriage and childbirth are societal ones that are not just "women's issues." It is fundamental to recognise this because it is precisely the unfair burden – both symbolic and practical – placed on women as wives and mothers that makes childbearing a difficult path for people to take. It is rather astounding to see that both the general plea for gender equity and the specific pushes for fair policies (medical benefits; paternity leave) remain relevant today. Women civil servants are still not entitled to the same benefits as their male colleagues, and men still get a paltry three-day paternity leave versus eight weeks of maternity leave (moreover, while maternity leave is mandated by the law, paternity leave is merely a recommendation). The state, in its various efforts to encourage procreation, still tends to focus on women as "the problem."

4.1 Recommendations for the State: Working with the private sector and civil society

Position can be a factor in getting pregnant, though if you have a major reproductive problem, then position may not be relevant anymore. But assuming you're both "averagely" fertile, but you just want to give conception a little boost-which way to have sex? Your aim is to deposit sperm as close to the cervix as possible...

MCDS booklet title: "Planning for babies: how babies make your life complete" An excerpt from the section: making babies

Every time I have sex, I recall that the Gahmen wants me to have sex, and frankly, thinking of the Gahmen when having sex totally kills my mood.

www.talkingcock.com, "Top 20 Reasons Why Singaporeans Aren't Having Sex or Children"

While it may be the state's prerogative to be concerned about declining national TFR figures, fertility decisions remain the domain of the individual. The government should be less invasive in its approach to population and fertility issues. The state must still lay down ground rules and provide a coherent and comprehensive enabling environment for Singaporeans to make informed decisions about fertility. Its regulatory role is therefore more behind-the-scenes work as a "meta-regulator" like a gatekeeper rather than as an enforcer on the ground like a normal regulator. This may be done by providing guidelines for a positive value system which then can be translated to ground rules. Such values must recognise the irreducible diversity of Singaporean society and respect the rights of individuals. The State cannot do all. It can lead by example (via the civil service) and lay down the rules and guidelines (law and policy making). It must also partner itself with the market and civil society and delegate regulatory responsibilities. The following are propositions compiled from all walks of Singaporean life, with a few suggestions from AWARE itself:

- Paternity leave must be introduced. This must be longer than the existing 2-3 days and be made mandatory. To only introduce maternity leave will reinforce the idea that parenting is synonymous with mothering. In addition it will have an undesirable impact on women, as it will reduce their competitiveness when they return to the workforce and will also result in an employer's reluctance to hire a pregnant woman. To have both paternity and maternity leave will lessen the impact on women and will drive home the point that family management and parenting ought to be collective.
- Extend government-supported maternity leave benefits to third and subsequent children.
- To raise the cut off age of sick child leave to 12 years from current 6 years. Extend sick child leave, part-time employment and no-pay leave after childbirth to working fathers. Implement 5 day work week.
- Support services like peer support groups and child-education classes are needed to replace the role of an extended family now that it is disappearing from society.
- Compulsory family skills education for both boys & girls, together with pre-marital training programmes at an early age.
- Include a life skills course in the education curriculum to impart the right family values.
- Situating before- and after-school centres within schools. Grant bigger subsidies to parents who place their children in these centres. Lower enrolment age of kids at childcare centres from 18 months to 2 months and grant bigger subsidies.
- A more holistic and favourable educational environment would improve the quality of life, and have an impact on people's decisions on whether or not they would want to raise a child in this country. To improve the education system, there should be a re-examination of the teacher-student ratio, accreditation for pre school professionals, more dialogue between the Ministry of Education, parents and educators, and students could be assessed according to his/her respective strengths and subject areas.
- Harmonising policies on medical benefits for women in the civil service.
- Encourage more private sector firms to implement family friendly practices such as flexible working arrangements like flexi-time, part-time or job-sharing

systems, child care subsidies, on-site child-care centres or services that help employees conveniently locate one. Facilitate re-entry of employees into workforce after childbirth.

- Maintaining labour market flexibility – Reversing the trend towards early retirement. Decreasing fertility rates and increasing longevity will ensure the continued “greying” of the population. It is something of a paradox that despite increased life expectancy and improved overall health of older persons that statutory retirement ages have not been adjusted to reflect this reality in full.
- CPF contributions be made to parents who stay home to look after their children and job security when they do return to workplace
- AWARE notes that most of the recent government proposals are aimed at working women who pay a substantial amount of taxes. Women who are part-time workers are overlooked, as well as those from lower income families. AWARE proposes that the government reexamine where financial assistance and tax rebates go, so as to have a fair distribution of resources, as it seems that families who need financial help most will be excluded.
- Tax perks should be extended to husbands so that wives are not compelled to return to work just to get them.
- Remove vestiges of fiscal incentives for better-educated to have children (eg Income Tax amendments of 1987, HOPE scheme requirement for low-income families to have a maximum of two children), as these measures are socially divisive.
- Review Children Development Co-savings Act to address inequities based on birth order, citizenship and children born outside wedlock.
- Recognise and support the important contribution that women make to families and communities through caregiving (Provide income support).
- Caregivers may be financially disadvantaged – Recognise and address gender differences in the burden of caregiving and make a special effort to support caregivers, most of whom are women who care for children, parents. Caregivers often have to reduce their working time or give up gainful employment. Allow people to enter or leave the labour market in order to assume caregiving roles at different times over the life course (ensure job security when they return to the workplace).

- Set up an inter-ministerial committee on family development. Future measures to manage elderly care. Review HDB's fiancé/fiancée scheme so unmarried couples won't plunge blindly into marriage.
- A robust but discerning replacement migration policy. Immigration rules should be re-examined and greater allowances, as well as transparency in decision-making, given for Singaporeans marrying work permit holders for example. This should include a review criteria for Singaporeans who have married domestic workers & their offspring.
- Convince Permanent Residents to become citizens. Simplify conversion process & lower threshold for citizenship.

4.2 Recommendations for the Private Sector: Towards a CSR for Singapore

Much has been said about how corporate culture needs to change to become more pro-family, which in turns becomes pro-community. This in fact should really be what Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is about. Joyner and Payne define CSR as “categories or levels of economic, legal, ethical and discretionary activities of a business entity as adapted to the values and expectations of society” (Joyner and Payne, 2002), or in other words, ‘the ethical behaviour of a company towards society.’ (WBCSD 1999:3). This is to be achieved by, ‘contributing to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the community and society at large’ (Ibid.). This is a definition of CSR that Singapore endorses. In a speech on CSR earlier this year, Minister of State for Trade and Industry and National Development Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan emphasised the importance on work/life balance practices in Singapore (Balakrishnan, 2004). CSR can therefore perform a proactive role in guiding corporate behaviour and culture to support work/life balance arrangements and organisations so as to allow space and time for Singaporean workers’ personal and family pursuits. These may include:

- Rethinking definitions of corporate success to include corporate responsibility and employee satisfaction
- Recognising the importance of flexi-work arrangements for all employees and finding innovative ways of implementing same that results in win-win scenarios for all
- Providing quality, on site, accessible child care.
- Allowing parental leave (several days paid leave per year up to 4 years of unpaid leave)

4.3 Recommendations for Society: Active Citizenship

“Active Citizenship”, like CSR, has also come to mean many things, and in the context of a paper recommending ideas on population and fertility may seem irrelevant.

However, as noted throughout this paper, decisions made at socio-political and familial levels have a great bearing on national mores and norms, and overtures from the state and private sector will be in vain if recipients are passive and reactive to how they want to improve their own quality of life.

Chief among this passivity is an over-dependence on the state for leadership, and a political apathy perhaps conditioned by a fear of major retribution or maintained by the ability to live a comfortable, complacent life with one’s main survival needs largely met. Active citizenship in this context calls for the initiative of the individual to take action, voice opinions, challenge the status quo, and thus provide the force to influence policy decisions from the grassroots level, and play an active role in shaping our collective future.

As Singaporeans, we have to reflect on ourselves, our values, our motivations; how we define success and love, how we love, how we live our lives, what values guide our choices in life. We need to stop complaining: stop blaming the government; start taking personal responsibility for the state of our lives and thus restore personal control over where our lives are heading. We need to awaken our own capacity for determining our own destinies: we are not as helpless as we think we are.

We cannot keep blaming the system, the state, the corporate world, for all the problems we face in relation to organizing our lives. Whether we like it or not, however blind we are to the positive aspects of our system, and however little we acknowledge and accept the historical involvement of our lot, we are part of that system, of that state, of that corporation. We should, and can, organize these extensions of our social self to support the well-being of our personal and family lives.

The cabinet minister, the CEO of a company, the principal of a school, the manager of a department – we are all fathers/mothers, husbands/wives, sons and daughters. What

we do in one capacity has an impact on the other. We fool ourselves and can fractionalise our own lives to our own detriment if we compartmentalise our various roles too strictly. At the end of the day, it is our relationships that contribute to our joy, our happiness. Active citizenship can be a major force to increase the holistic alignment of all aspects of our lives.

In this light, some suggestions for an active citizenry to think about may include:

- Rethink husband/wife, father/mother relationships.
- Rethink how we view and value children.
- Rethink our need to be involved in socio-political matters.

4.4 Is 'TFR' the Issue? Areas for further research

So far, this paper has largely assumed the validity of the problem of a declining TFR as presented by the state. AWARE can agree with some of this argument. However, there is a need to recognise that Singapore's position is hardly unique. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) notes that increasing fertility to "grow" the workforce is not an answer. No national attempt to raise fertility has ever succeeded against a downward demographic trend. Women will not take kindly to calls to become more fertile in the public interest. Beyond appeals to patriotism, conventional tax incentives and grants for childbearing, it is hard to imagine pro-natalist policies which would not infringe on the basic human right to choose the size and spacing of the family (UNFPA, 1998). Korea for example has been satisfied with maintaining below-replacement fertility and aims to supplement population growth with immigration in the long-run (Kim, 2000).

We need to rethink our obsession with figures and reconsider what is a realistic TFR and target population figure for Singapore. As UNFPA warned, economic imperatives in this context are short-term and will fail. We need to be more imaginative and daring with how we utilise our most important resource – Singaporeans. There remains a large pool of unrecognised resources which have been defined out of relevance and/or undervalued (e.g., elderly, disabled, adoptees, singles). While the "foreign-talent" debate remains controversial, we must be ready as a nation to embrace our heritage as a nation of migrants and accept "not-yet-Singaporeans" who may be sincere to "down-root" in our country.

5. Conclusion: Change Requires Political Will and Imagination

Population policy in Singapore is uncharacteristically ideological, given the nation that prides itself internationally and internally as pragmatic. The determination to enforce patriarchalism does not make economic sense and the improvement of women's socio-economic position over the past decades is indicative of this reality. Whither the political will to make the changes needed? This government has always lauded itself as a pragmatic and unemotive one. Why then does it deal with the issue of procreation, fertility, family and gender so dogmatically? By insisting on traditional, patriarchal values upon a nation whose values and cultures have shifted is not only myopic and self-defeatist.

Procreation, fertility and population are complicated issues. More research needs to be done to anticipate expected impacts of current trends, as well as to substitute existing (patriarchal) views which may not be realistic nor desirable for the long-term reproduction of Singapore as a nation-state. From our research and engagement with Singaporeans, AWARE has repeatedly come across "quality of life" as a main reason behind fertility decisions. The quality of life may be a highly subjective one but it is the responsibility of the state to provide an enabling environment for Singaporeans to pursue their own quality of life without impinging on the other, and in a way that is conducive for Singaporeans to entrench deeper roots by way of procreation. Current indicators show that there is much potential for this scenario to develop. We urge the state to exhibit political courage and imagination, the private sector to play a responsible role and most of all, Singaporeans to take ownership of their own lives now. The lives of future generations will then naturally fall into place.

Bibliography

- Abdul Rahman, Noorashikin, Yeoh, Brenda S. A. & Huang, Shirlena (2004) 'Dignity Over Due: Transnational Domestic Workers in Singapore', in Huang, Shirlena and Yeoh, Brenda S. A. (eds.) *Contemporary Perspectives on Asian Transmigrant Domestic Workers*, forthcoming.
- Amaha, Eriko (1998) "Baby blues" *Far Eastern Economic Review*. Pp13
- Anon. (2003) "Fertility decline in Asia: trends, implications and futures – Editorial", *Journal of Population Research*. May issue, http://articles.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PCG/is_1_20/ai_105659428, accessed 7 June 2004.
- Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) (1988), 'Population: An Issue of Current Concern', AWARE Position Paper No. 1, 1988.
- Balakrishnan, V. (2004) "Keynote Address by Minister of State for Trade and Industry and National Development Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan" at the *Singapore/UK: Developing Corporate Social Responsibility Seminar*. 23 February, [online] <http://app.sprinter.gov.sg/data/pr/2004022304.htm>, accessed 13 July 2004.
- Bitá, Natasha (2003) "Wanted: Baby Boom for the 21st Century – Scandinavia: Focus on Population – Europe: A Worldwide Special Report", *The Australian*. 13 October
- Castles, Francis G. (2003) "The world turned upside down: below replacement fertility, changing preferences and family-friendly public policy in 21 OECD countries." *Journal of European Social Policy*. 13(3) pp209-227.
- Cho, Namhoon (2000) "Policy Response to Population Ageing and Population Decline in Korea", paper presented at 'Expert Group Meeting on Policy Responses to Population ageing and Population Decline', Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, New York, 16-18 October
- Chua, Beng-Huat (1995). *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*. London: Routledge
- Department of Trade and Industry, UK (2003) "Employment Legislation" <http://www2.dti.gov.uk/er/matleafr.htm>
- Devan, Janadas (2004) "What S'pore needs to boost birth rate", *The Straits Times*, 27 February
- Donald, Colin (2004) "Japan's birth dearth." *The Straits Times*. February 16. Singapore.

- Doran, Christine (1996) "Global Integration and Local Identities: Engendering the Singaporean Chinese." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*. 37(2) pp153-64.
- Family Health International (n.d.) "Korea: A New Look at the Fertility Transition and Its Impact on Women", online, accessed 25 June 2004.
- Flynn, Gillian (1996) "Backlash: why single employees are angry." *Personnel Journal*. Sept v75 n9 pp58(8).
- Gee, John (2004) "More babies? Then let singles buy an HDB flat sooner" *Business Times*, March 13
- Hill, M. and Lian Kwen Fee (1995). The Politics of Nation Building and Citizenship in Singapore. London: Routledge.
- Jose, Jim and Doran, Christine (1997) "Marriage and Marginalisation in Singaporean Politics." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. 27(4) pp475-488.
- Joyner, Brenda E., and Payne, Dinah (2002) "Evolution and Implementation: A Study of Values, Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility" *Journal of Business Ethics*. 41(4) pp297-311.
- Kakuchi, Suvendrini (2003) "Health: Japan slow to heed warning signs on abortions." *Global Information Network*.
- (2004) "Labor-Japan: Women Part-Timers Gain Amid Workplace Changes." *Global Information Network*, pp1
- Kezai Koho Center (2002) "Working hours per week--Manufacturing." *Japan Institute for Social and Economic Affairs*
- Knudsen, L. B. (1999) "Recent Fertility Trends in Denmark - A Discussion of the Impact of Family Policy in a Period with Increasing Fertility" *Danish Center for Demographic Research*. Research Report 11
- Lyons, Lenore (2000) "A State of Ambivalence: Feminism in a Singaporean Women's Organisation" *Asian Studies Review* 24(1) pp1-23.
- Ministry of Finance, Singapore (2004) "Budget Speech" [online]
http://www.mof.gov.sg/budget/budget_2004/budget_speech/section19.html,
 accessed 8 June 2004
- Mutsumi, Ota (1999) "Dad takes child-care leave." *Japan Quarterly*. Pp83-90
- National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (2000) "The Second National Survey on Family in Japan Report (Summary)" *Japan: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research*.
- (2003) "Child Related Policies in Japan." *Japan: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research*. Pp1-61.

- Ogawa, Naohiro (2003) "Japan's changing fertility mechanisms and its policy responses" *Journal of Population Research*, May 2003, online, http://articles.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PCG/is_1_20/ai_105659434, accessed 8 June 2004.
- Plate, T. (2004) "Singapore's most pressing concern – babies", *The Straits Times*, June 16.
- Pyle, Jean and Pelletier, Marianne S (2003). "Family And Medical Leave Act: Unresolved Issue" presented at 'From 9-to-5 to 24/7: How Workplace Changes Impact Families, Work, and Communities' program at the Women's studies Research Centre at Brandies University. March issue
- Retherford, Robert D., Ogawa, Naohiro and Matsukura, Rikiya (2001) "Late Marriage and Less Marriage in Japan." *Population and Development Review*. 27(1) pp65-102.
- Rønsen, Marit (2001) "Fertility and family policy in Norway: Is there a connection? ", paper presented at *International Perspectives on Low Fertility: Trends, Theories and Policies* conference, organised by the IUSSP Working Group on Low Fertility in collaboration with the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (Japan), Tokyo, Japan, 21-23 March.
- (2004) "Fertility and public policies - Evidence from Norway and Finland" *Demographic Research*. Vol. 7, Article 6, 7 May, www.demographic-research.org, accessed 8 June 2004.
- Singapore Department of Statistics (1994) "Dual-Career Couples in Singapore" [online] <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/papers/op/op-s2.pdf>, accessed 13 July 2004.
- (2000) "Census of Population 2000" [online] accessed 21 May 2004.
- (2002) "Twenty-Five Years of Below Replacement Fertility: Implications for Singapore" [online] accessed 21 May 2004.
- (2003) "Historical Data: Per Capita GDP at Current Market Prices." [online] accessed 28 May 2004.
- Steketee, Mike (2001) "The Birth Strike – Work and Family: The Crunch" *The Weekend Australian*, 1 September
- Saw, Swee-Hock (1990) *Changes in the Fertility Policy of Singapore*. Singapore: Times Academic Press
- Sherraden, Michael (2001) "Singapore Announces 'Baby Bonus' and Children's Development Accounts." *Center for Social Development*

- Siddique, S. (2004) 'Baby blues and greying hair? There's no magic formula', *The Straits Times*, 20 April.
- Singam, Constance (2003). Interview. The Singapore Internet Community. Online. 27 May
- Sixel, L, M, (2003) "Paid paternity leave more popular than expected". *Houston Chronicle*
- Soin, K. (2002) "Challenges for Women and Men in a Changing Environment", *A Gender Agenda: Asia-Europe Dialogue*
- The Straits Times*, various.
- Tee, H. C. (2004a) 'Having a baby? Here's a bonus from the bosses', *The Straits Times*, 29 March.
- Tee, H. C. (2004b) 'Why firms here aren't pro-family', *The Straits Times*, 20 March.
- Teo, You Yenn (2004) "Public Problems, Private Solutions: Negotiating Care-Giving Dilemmas in Singapore." Paper presented at The Changing Asian Family: A Support System with Holes, Asia Research Institute & Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore. Singapore.
- The Employers for Work/life Balance, part of "The Work Foundation" (UK), [online] http://www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk/case_studies/pwc.htm, accessed 16 July 2004.
- The United Nations Population Fund (1998) 'Shift to Smaller Families Can Bring Economic Benefits', *The State of World Population 1998*, [online] <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/1998/newsfeature1.htm#top>, accessed 16 July 2004.
- TWC2 (2003) *Alternatives to Foreign Domestic Workers*, unpublished paper.
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2000) "The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics." *UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs*.
- Weiss, Meredith (1999) "Democracy at the Margins: NGOs and Women's Unofficial Participation in Singapore." *Democratization and Women's Grassroots Movements*. Ed. Jill Bystydzienski and Joti Sekhon. Bloomington: Indiana UP, pp67-92.
- Wong, Aline K (1994) "Feminism and Women's Studies." *Changing Lives: Life Stories of Asian Pioneers in Women's Studies*. Ed. Yasuko Muramatsu et. al. New York: The Feminist P, pp22-30.
- and Leong, Wai Kum, eds (1993). *Singapore Women: Three Decades of Change*. Singapore: Times Academic Press

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (1999) “Meeting Changing Expectations” WBCSD’s First Report on Corporate Social Responsibility. Geneva: WBCSD.

Yeoh, Brenda S.A. and Willis, Katie (1999) “‘Heart’ and ‘Wing’, Nation and Diaspora: Gendered Discourses in Singapore’s Regionalisation Process.” *Gender, Place and Culture*. 6(4) pp355–372

Notes

¹ The Singaporean society is made up by more than 70 percent Chinese with a Malay and Indian minority. Its current population is made up of 76.7% Chinese, 13.9% Malays, 7.9% Indians, and 1.5% who are of other races (“Singapore Facts and Pictures 2002” qtd. in Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts: Singapore website).

² This has since become the HOPE (Home Ownership Plus Education) scheme. It has similar objectives and eligibility criteria and is now administered by Community Development Councils.

³ In the Parliamentary Budget Debates this year, a few MPs spoke out on the need to involve and recognise role of men in procreation.

Appendix A: Country Studies

Table 1: Singapore Population Policy Landmarks

Year	TFR	Major Steps Taken	Description/Objectives
1965	4.7	Singapore Family Planning & Population Board Act (1965)	To establish the SFPPB. To promote family planning to persuade Singaporeans to change their attitudes about family size ideals so as to reduce the annual population growth.
1966		Creation of the Singapore Family Planning and Population Board (SFPPB)	To reduce population growth and improve standard of living.
1969		Abortion Act (1969); Voluntary Sterilisation Act (1969); National Campaign "Two is enough"; incentives/disincentives	Direct disincentives for large families include steeply rising maternity costs for each additional child; low school enrolment priorities for 3 rd & higher-order children; withdrawal of paid 2-month maternity leave for civil service and union women after the 2 nd child. Positive incentives include special payments such as accouchement fees; income tax rebates; & preferential allocation of public housing. By legalising male and female surgical sterilisation as well as abortion on socio-economic and medical grounds, the government hoped to manipulate the populace to achieve its objectives of creating a modern nation
1974		Termination of Pregnancy Act (1974); Voluntary Sterilisation Act (1974)	Termination of Pregnancy Act provides all women with the opportunity of terminating their pregnancies without fear of societal ostracism in a government approved institution. Under the Voluntary Sterilisation Act, all persons are eligible for sterilisation without needing to seek consent from a third party unless they are below 21 years old and unmarried or are of unsound mind.
1975	2.1		
1986	1.43		
1987		Income Tax Act (1987)	To allow expanded child deductions for women who have attained a certain level of education
1989		4 th Child Tax Rebate	
1993		Small Families Improvement Scheme	Mothers from low income families educated below a certain level of attainment and under thirty-five would be given a housing grant of S\$800 each year for 20 years; their children also would be given financial assistance for education. Size of families must however be limited to two children per family.
2001	1.42	Children Development Co-Savings Act (2001)	To assist families to encourage married women to have two or more children; and provide financial assistance for the development of the children of these families via a co-savings scheme where the government will make contributions to an eligible child's bank account equal to the contributions made by the parent.
		Baby Bonus Scheme	Where a second child is entitled to a deposit of S\$500 at birth and a third child is entitled to a deposit of S\$1,000 if the births occur before the mother turns 30. Additionally, every year for the next five years, an equal amount will be deposited for each child up to a total of S\$3,000 for the second child and up to S\$6,000 for the third child
2003	1.26		
2004		Constitutional amendment	Babies born abroad to Singaporean women married to foreigners will have the right to citizenship

Source: Singapore Department of Statistics, 2002; Jose & Doran, 1997; Doran, 1996

Table 2: Japan Population Policy Landmarks

Year	TFR	Major Steps Taken	Description/Objectives
1990	1.54	Inter-ministry committee: "Creating a Sound Environment for Bearing and Rearing Children"	State thus adopted stance to cope with new phenomenon by promoting social environment to support individuals hoping to marry and have children
1991	1.53	Childcare Leave Act enacted	Allows workers (in regardless of sex) to take childcare leave until the child turns one year old
1994	1.50	The Angel Plan or the "Basic Direction for Future Child Rearing Support Measures"	Supportive measures included, inter alia: (1) reconciling work & family responsibilities; (2) strengthening child raising function of a family; (3) providing affordable quality housing for families with children; and (4) easing economic burden associated with raising children
1995	1.42	Childcare and Family Care Leave Act enacted; "Five-Year (1995-99) Emergency Measures for Childcare Services" planned	Previously the Childcare Leave Act (1991), this was amended to allow employees to take leave to care for other family members as well. Workers who are not employed regularly are not eligible, including many women who are part-time or contract workers
1999	1.34	New Angel Plan (2000-2004) formulated	Measures included, inter alia: (1) making daycare centres & childcare services more accessible; (2) making employment environment more adjustable for workers with children; (3) changing traditional gender-role values and work-first atmosphere in work environment; (4) improving educational environment for children; and (5) more support for families with children through housing and public facilities
2000	1.36	Child Abuse Prevention Law enacted	Japanese women's wages in manufacturing as a percentage of men's wages in 2000 is 59%
2002	1.32	The "Measures to Cope with a Fewer Number of Children Plus One" reported to the Prime Minister	Manufacturing workers worked 43 hours a week The Plus One is based on 2 previous Angel Plans but goes by recognizing the declining marital fertility rate, as well as the need to transform working patterns including that of men. The Plus One included 4 specific objectives: (1) change prevalent work patterns including those of men; (2) strengthen community-based support for families with children; (3) increase the awareness among children and youths to be responsible for next-generation, as well as to extend medical assistance to couples who are unable to have children; and (4) promote independence and social skills of children
2003	n.a.	The Law for Measures to Support the Development of the Next-Generation; the amendment to the Child Welfare Law; and the Law for Basic Measures to Cope with Declining Fertility Society enacted	Amendments to the Child Welfare Law to consider the even the welfare of children not lacking care providers

Source: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (2003)

Table 3: Korea Population Policy Landmarks

Year	TFR	Major Steps Taken	Description/Objectives
1960	6.0		
1962		National family planning programme	
1966		New population policy	Shifted emphasis from a policy of modifying fertility levels to focusing on the quality of life and welfare for the Korean population - maintain below replacement level, improved morbidity and mortality level; enhance family health n welfare; prevent imbalance of sex ratio at birth ; reduce induced abortion; sex education for youth; expand employment opportunities and welfare services for women and elderly, health care services for elderly -recently the government decided to impose user fees for family planning services to eliminate the incentive schemes for the one child family and instead to support a two child policy
1973		the Maternal and Child Health Law (1973)	Established exemptions from Criminal Code of 1953 which strictly prohibits abortions on any grounds. Abortion was thus legalized nation wide. Physicians may perform an abortion if the pregnant women or her spouse suffer from eugenic or hereditary mental physical disease specified by presidential decree; if pregnancy results from rape or incest or if continuation of pregnancy is likely to jeopardize the mother's health.
1974	3.6		
1987	1.6		
1991		The Maternity Leave Law (1991)	Provides for 90 days of paid maternity leave (45 days more allocated for after pregnancy) funded by the employer for first 2 months and the rest by employment insurance. No overtime work and transfer to light work of requested by employee. A female worker who has an infant less than twelve months shall be allowed to take more than 30 minutes of each nursing period twice a day.
1998	1.48		
2002	1.17		

Source: National Statistical Office cited in Cho (2000)

Table 4: Denmark Population Policy Landmarks

Period	Main demographic characteristics	Major steps taken	
		Reproductive policy & legislation	Other legislation & characteristics
1901-1933	Fertility decline over 20 years: TFR halved; late onset of childbearing; more than 1/2 of young mothers unmarried	1930 – Penal code revised (including pregnancy interruption, which was part of the penal code since 1866)	1922 – Married women got equal rights in parental custody matters 1925 – The partners in a marriage got mutual maintenance obligations
1933-1963	Diversity in fertility rates: Increasing TFR; decreasing fertility rates from the age of 30 years and increasing fertility rates below 30; early onset of childbearing; most young mothers married	1939 – First act on interruption of pregnancy; Act on help to mothers, especially unmarried and poor mothers, came into force; The National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child established 1945 – First act on pregnancy care 1960s – Family planning services & contraceptive counselling became incorporated in National Health Insurance Scheme	1933 – Maternity leave of 2 weeks 1950 – Female labour force participation: 47% 1958 – No. of working hours per week changed from 48 to 45, and annual vacation prolonged to 3 weeks 1960 – Female labour force participation: 42,5%; Maternal leave of 14 weeks for certain groups of women; Continued economic improvement
1963 - 1983	Fertility decline in all ages: Declining TFR; Postponing of 1 st birth; New family forms emerged; Increasing proportion of unmarried mothers, due to consensual unions, also among older women	1967 – Oral contraceptives released; a government committee appointed to analyse level of knowledge and behaviour of population regarding sexual issues and contraception 1970 – Act on compulsory sexual education including contraception in schools 1981 – maternal leave extended to include 4 weeks before birth	1964 – Preschool classes established 1967 – Day care in private homes with public supervision 1970 – Female labour force participation: 54%; Joint taxation between married couples substituted by individual taxation; Benefit in case of unemployment equal for women and men 1974 – Number of hours per week decreased to 40 1979 – length of vacation increased to 5 weeks per year
1983-	Increase above 25: Increasing TFR; continued decline below 25; consensual unions prevalent; 50% born by unwed mothers; age at first marriage higher than age at first child	1983 – a group of citizens established a new Mother's Aid	1984 – Maternal leave after birth extended to 20 weeks; Fathers entitled to take the 2 1 st weeks after birth together with mother and some weeks after week 14 instead of mother 1985 – Maternal leave after birth: 24 weeks 1990 – number of hours per week decreased to 37; Female labour force participation: 71% 1998 – right to 'care days' in some occupations (2 days per year per child under 14)

Source: adapted with amendments, from Knudsen, L. B. (1999)

Table 5: Norway Population Policy Landmarks

Year	TFR	Major Steps Taken	Description/Objectives
1956		Paid childcare introduced Universal right to paid leave in connection with birth dates granted	Parents can enrol children in publicly-funded childcare centres (about 40% of children under 3 years old are in publicly-funded childcare centres). Parents who choose to look after their children at home receive a grant from the government equivalent to the childcare centre subsidy.
1973	2.2		5 percent of Norwegian pre-school children had a place in public day-care
1977	1.75	Extension to paternity leave granted right to leave with job security until the child was one year old enforced	Benefit period was prolonged to 18 weeks & fathers became entitled to share the leave, except for the first six weeks which were still reserved for the mother
1978		Further extension to paternity leave granted	Benefits were raised substantially to cover 100 percent of former income for most working mothers and were made taxable and subject to pension payments
1983	1.65		Since 1983, Norwegian fathers have to take at least 1 out of 12 months' paid parental leave, or have that one month's payment forfeited. Half the total amount of paternity leave can be taken by the father. About 80% of Norwegian fathers do take their paternity leave entitlement. Maternity benefits are granted for a period of 42 weeks with full pay or 52 weeks with 80 percent compensation
1992	1.85		40 percent of Norwegian pre-school children had a place in public day-care
1993		Extension to paternity leave	The leave period has been prolonged several times, resulting in a maximum leave of 52 weeks with 80 per cent wage compensation or 42 weeks with full pay. Fathers may share all of the leave except for three weeks before and six weeks after birth that are reserved for the mother. In addition, fathers are entitled to two weeks of unpaid paternity leave immediately after birth Amendment reserved four weeks of the extended leave for the father - the so called "daddy quota". These weeks are generally not transferable to the mother, and are lost if the father does not make use of them.
1998	1.8	A cash benefit to parents who do not use publicly subsidised childcare was introduced	A monthly, tax-free flat rate payment that is roughly equivalent to the state subsidy for a place in a day-care centre (NOK 3000 or approx. USD 340). To be eligible for the full benefit, the child must not attend a publicly funded day-care centre on a full-time basis (more than 32 hours per week). Parents of children that attend part time may receive a reduced benefit

Source: Rønson (2001; 2004)

Appendix B: Work/Life Balance Case Studies

Source: Personnel Journal, 1996

Washington, D.C.-based Marriott International (1992):

- Carried out surveys, and focus group discussions within company.
- Found that many single and childless employees were self-selecting out of work/family initiatives.
- Began a makeover by changing its policy name to "work/life" from "work/family" to be more inclusive.
- The new department also began rolling out educational pieces to assist all types of employees, not just those with kids: personal-finance management, elder care and housing and tenant rights.
- Introduced a resource line. Employees dial a toll-free number and reach a team of social workers for counselling on such subjects as elder care and child care, as well as alcohol and substance abuse, housing issues, debt management, depression, home remodelling, living successfully with relatives, purchasing a car etc.
- 85 per cent of the calls were made by the hourly workforce, and this workforce was largely single, so Marriott knew it was hitting its mark.
- These third-party counselors from the resource line track the topics of inquiry and report back. That way the work/life program could identify less obvious issues of the workforce – it is how the company knew employees wanted an education piece on housing and tenant rights.

Consolidated Group, US:

- Wanted to see what employees thought of their benefits, the HR department designed a survey asking employees for feedback: what they wanted; what they liked and didn't like.
- The company's 201 single employees had very different needs than the 332 married employees. In general, individuals with dependents thought the company should increase its medical contribution for insurance. The single employees thought they should receive the same flat contribution paid for employees with children, so the singles would have their benefits paid equally.

- The offerings were evened out. Consolidated Group paid about as much for tuition reimbursement as it did for day-care reimbursement annually. About 75 per cent of people going back to school were single; 75 per cent of those using childcare were married or had children.
- The company believed that benefits would be perceived as more fair if they weren't structured specifically with singles or married or childless employees in mind. The question "What really constitutes a family?" was asked. The company felt that staying in the typical definitions of single or married, childless or with children did not work anymore.

Consolidated Group considered a shift towards flexible benefits. By providing a flat dollar amount, employees have the power to allocate their benefits to the areas in which they will most benefit. We can learn a few lessons from companies who balance their policies well. We need to move away from the traditional 'work/family' approach to prevent a backlash from those who do not fit into the typical definitions of family.

The following are examples of organisations in the US, which go beyond the federal policies (Source: Houston Chronicle, 2003):

KPMG, US:

- Adopted a paternity leave program that gives new fathers two weeks of paid leave.
- 228 fathers have taken advantage of the paternity leave program KPMG began offering 17 months ago. About a year earlier, the firm had given new mothers an additional two weeks of maternity leave to stay competitive, and several fathers asked for something similar.
- 30 percent of the fathers at KPMG took advantage of the program, which also covers adoption and foster care. The high usage rate is credited to the firm's corporate culture, and the fact that the leave is paid, which makes it resemble work.
- Brochures touting the program were sent to the homes so spouses would see it.

J.P. Morgan Chase & Co.:

- Launched a parental leave program that provides up to 12 weeks of paid leave to the primary caregiver after the birth, adoption or guardianship of a child.
- The designated nonprimary caregiver is also eligible for one week of paid leave.
- The bank designed the program so it could accommodate the needs of a variety of parents, such as single fathers and same-sex partners. For example, if a single father adopts a child, he'd receive up to 12 weeks of paid leave. It is flexible. Under the provisions of the program, if a mother -- who was to be the primary caregiver -- gets sick, the father can step in as the primary caregiver and receive 12 weeks of paid leave.

Offering paternity benefits at KPMG strengthens recruiting and retention. The company estimates the impact in the 10 to 25 percent range.

Recent good examples of organizations completing the evolution from work/family to work/life: Case study (detailed) (this case study has been taken in its entirety from the web-site of 'The Employers for Work/life Balance', part of 'The Work Foundation', UK) (2004)

PricewaterhouseCoopers

Background Information

- The world's largest professional services organisation providing assurance, advisory, tax and HR consulting services to a range of clients
- Number of employees: 13,500 (in UK)

The challenge/s

- Professional services firms, as highly client-centric organisations, tend to be characterised by a long hours, macho culture. Profitable growth depends on providing good work/life policies to attract top talent; our employees are highly self-motivated and set themselves extremely high standards. For such individuals, it can be exceptionally hard to discipline oneself into achieving a better work/life balance. PricewaterhouseCoopers has therefore been leading

the drive to flex and adapt corporate structures to respond to the increasing demand – from the business and from our people - for flexibility and work/life integration.

Principles – walking the talk:

- Employees are all different: the meaning of work/life balance varies throughout an individual's life.
- Individuals must take responsibility for their own work/life balance and be considerate of others' needs.
- PwC seeks to achieve the optimum balance between business and individual's needs.
- Owing to habitual long hours' working, managers need support in helping their teams to work flexibly.
- Quality of output is more important than the number of hours worked.

Policies all employees can apply for:

- Flexible benefits
- Flexible working patterns: all staff have the right to request a flexible work arrangement, not just parents.
- Career breaks
- Flexible leave arrangements
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Compassionate and emergency leave
- Lifestyle management support and training
- Discounts/concierge services

Policies for parents:

- Enhanced maternity leave
- Fully paid paternity leave
- Adoption leave
- Parental leave
- Time off for dependants
- Childcare vouchers

PwC LifeStyle:

- This intranet site was launched in 2001 and provides practical advice, support and tools to help staff juggle commitments in and out of work.
- It was developed with specialists in the fields of work/life balance.
- It includes information on pregnancy, childbirth, parenting, eldercare, relationship management, stress, time management, nutrition and health.

Business benefits:

- Improved staff satisfaction:
 - 60% of employees said they were satisfied with their work/life balance, compared to 40% in 1999;
- Improved staff retention:
 - Increase in return rate from maternity leave from c40% in 1998 to c80% in 2003;
- Changing attitudes:
 - Increasing acceptance of flexible working in its broadest sense, for example, homeworking, flexitime etc, which promotes a greater sense of trust between managers and staff and a greater sense of personal control among individuals.

Issues

Despite this improvement, the fact remains that 40% of our people are not satisfied with their work/life balance and this figure is unacceptable. Our efforts therefore continue to improve the working lives of our people and, in order to measure the success or otherwise of our efforts, we survey our people every quarter using our “You Matter” staff survey.

The future

At PwC we certainly don't see this as an issue that's going away; quite the opposite. Doing business in the 21st century means doing business against a backdrop of phenomenal change, be it demographic shifts, globalisation, technological advances etc. All of these pose a challenge to the traditional models of employment and work. There is thus enormous pressure to adopt new ways of working. By promoting flexibility and work/life balance we will have a competitive advantage over others, for

the corollary is a business which is flexible and adaptable to anticipate change and one which stays ahead of the game (Updated February 2004).

Appendix C: Summary of Survey Findings

- I Sample Characteristics
 - A Overview
 - B Sample Details
 - 1. Summary
 - 2. Table 1: Profile of Gross Family Income
 - 3. Table 2: Profile of Occupations
- II Responses to Questions
 - A Responses to Duo-Option Questions
 - B Responses to Three-Option Questions
 - C Responses to Multiple-Response Questions
 - 1 Factors Government should address to encourage more baby-making
 - 2 Reasons why respondents themselves do not have kids
 - 3 Reasons why Singaporeans have kids, in respondents' opinion
 - D Responses to Open-Ended Questions

I SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

1.A Overview

Respondents (n=123) are mostly female Singapore Citizens in their 20s and 30s, half are married and most of the remaining are single. Two-thirds of all respondents work 32-80 hours a week (presumably full time). All income brackets are represented in an approximate bell-curve; working hours and income do not seem to correlate (i.e. those who work more hours do not necessarily have higher gross family incomes), although respondents with gross family incomes of \$10,000 and above all worked 40 or more hours a week.

I.B Sample Details

I.B.1 Summary

Of the full sample size of 123 respondents,

- 90 per cent are female (111 females, 12 males); within the female subgroup, 51 per cent, or 57, are married and 43 per cent, or 48, are single¹
- Of the 123 respondents, 52 per cent, or 64, are married, 40 per cent, or 53, are single²
- The age range is from 12 to 62 years, with most respondents in their 20s (53, or 40 per cent), and 30s (59, or 44 per cent)
- 82 per cent, or 101, are Singapore Citizens, 10 per cent, or 12, are Singapore PRs, and the rest are either foreigners or did not state their nationality
- All income groups are represented, in an approximate bell curve³ (See Table 1)
- Most respondents (86 persons) work, presumably full time, between 32 and 80 hours a week in various occupations; some work between 5 and 30 hours a week (14 persons), presumably part-time; the rest either did not work or did not indicate their occupations (4 are students and 2 are housewives). Details in Table 2
- 36 per cent, or 44, are parents; 23 have one child, 19 have two children, 2 respondents have more than two kids
- 20 per cent, or 25, are married and have no kids

¹ The remaining respondents were either divorced, widowed, or put 'others' under marital status

² Likewise, the remaining respondents were either divorced, widowed, or put 'others' under marital status

³ However, it is possible some respondents indicated their 'personal income' rather than the 'gross family income' requested (e.g. two students put 'Under \$1,000' in this field)

I.B.2 Table 1: Profile of Gross Family Incomes (n=123)

Gross Family Income	Number of Respondents (N)	Percentage (%)
Under \$1,000	2	2
\$1,000-\$2,500	12	10
\$2,500-\$4,000	18	15
\$4,000-\$6,000	24	19
\$6,000-\$8,000	17	14
\$8,000-\$10,000	14	11
\$10,000-\$15,000	15	12
Above \$15,000	6	5
Not indicated	15	12
Total	123	100

I.B.3 Table 2: Profile of Occupations (n=123, 111 females)

Work hours per week	Male	Female	Male & Female
0-10	1	6	7
11-20	0	6	6
21-30	0	5	5
31-40	3	11	14
41-50	4	44	48
51-60	2	15	17
61-70	0	5	5
71-80	0	1	1
81 and above	0	2	2
Not indicated	1	16	17
Total	12	111	123

II RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

II.A Responses to Duo-Option Questions⁴

Question	Yes (%)	No (%)
Are you aware of the policies the Government has implemented and the suggestions made in the recent Budget to increase the birth rates in Singapore?	83	15

⁴ Please refer to the sample questionnaire at the end of this appendix for full list of questions

Are you satisfied with how the Government has been handling the issue of declining birth rates in Singapore?***	15	80
In your view, are economic and monetary incentives the most appropriate means of getting Singaporeans to have more babies?***	28	67
Do you feel the government has sufficiently discussed the role of men/fathers in the home and at the workplace when addressing Singapore's declining birth rates?***	10	88
Do you support paid paternity leave?***	91	7
Do you support six months' maternity leave for mums?***	63	36
Do you think Singaporeans are concerned about "quality of life" and values when deciding to have children?	85	12
Does it worry you that with the declining birth rates, Singaporeans will not "replace" themselves?***	37	59

Notes:

1. All questions elicited a small percentage of null or non-committal responses (between 1% and 5%)
2. A 'Why' question follows each 2-option response question marked '***'.

II.B Responses to Three-Option Questions

Out of 123 respondents,

- 64 per cent, or 79 respondents, believe that 'quality of life' and 'values' are very important factors to consider when they are deciding whether to have kids of their own
- 25 per cent, or 31 respondents, feel these two factors are somewhat important;
- 5 per cent, or 6 respondents, feel they are not important.

II.C Responses to Multiple-Response Questions

II.C.1 Factors Government Should Address to Encourage Procreation

Apart from economic and monetary incentives, what are the other areas the government should address when encouraging Singaporeans to have more babies?

Multiple-Response Options	Count	Ranking
Cost of living	76	3 rd
School/Education system	90	2 nd
Lifestyle choices	65	
Career demands	64	
Childcare facilities	72	4 th
Work flexibility	104	1 st
Gender Equality	54	
Others	See below	

Respondents collectively feel that these are the top factors that should be addressed by the government if they want to encourage Singaporeans to have more babies: the most important factor is ‘Work flexibility; followed by ‘School/Education system’ and ‘Cost of living’, with ‘Childcare facilities’ coming in a close fourth. ‘Gender inequality’ was deemed the least important of the seven optional factors given, followed by ‘Lifestyle choices’ and ‘Career demands’.

Other factors respondents feel the government should address range from

- Socially engineering our *kiasu* ‘culture’ and ‘value system’ *not* to emphasise on being ‘Number 1’ and value only a person’s economic worth, and to champion pro-family values, child bearing, and close family ties
- Policy changes like mandatory paternity leave and longer mandatory maternity leave, policies to provide flexibility to males and females, to protect women from discriminatory employment practices, and to help old folks with low-income children who are themselves parents by giving a retirement allowance
- Educating people on how to good parents, how to interact with and bring up kids
- Changing the character of young people who have gone too ‘soft’ and dependent to want to become parents
- Invoking people’s sense of meaning in life, spirituality and religious beliefs

II.C.2 Reasons why respondents themselves do not have kids

Multiple Response Options	Count	Ranking
Not married	39	1 st
I'm gay	2	
Too expensive	8	4 th
Trying to adopt	0	
Trying for IVF	1	
Enjoying current lifestyle	9	3 rd
Singapore is not a conducive place to bring up children	13	2 nd
Don't like children	4	
Others	3	

Most respondents don't have kids because they were not married. The other reasons given are that Singapore is not a conducive place to bring up children, respondents were enjoying their current lifestyle, and think it is too expensive to bring up children in Singapore. Three respondents did not currently have kids because they were pregnant and had not delivered, or were still planning to have one.

II.C.3 Reasons why Singaporeans have kids, in respondents' opinion

Multiple Response Options	Count	Ranking
To get tax incentives	3	
Fulfil their parents' expectations and demands	17	3 rd
So there's someone to look after them in their old age	14	4 th
Fulfil their national duty	1	
For the love and joy of a child	52	1 st
It's just the normal thing to do after you get married	42	2 nd
Other reasons	6	

Respondents think the two main reasons Singaporeans have kids is for the love and joy of a child, and because it is a normal thing to do after one gets married. Some respondents think that Singaporeans have kids to fulfil their parents'

expectations and demands, and to function as caregivers when their parents become old. A negligible number of respondents believe Singaporeans have kids to fulfil their national duty or to get tax incentives.

As for other reasons, respondents also believed Singaporeans had kids for mundane reasons like getting pregnant by accident because contraceptives that did not work; for inspiring reasons like bringing life or their married to a new stage of fulfilment, for the baby to have a chance at experiencing what it is to be alive, and for pre-emptive reasons like fearing loneliness in one's old age.

II.D Responses to Open-Ended Questions

General feel of respondents' views:

Collectively, while respondents feel that the government's monetary incentives have not addressed the 'root' issues that potential parents and parents are concerned with regarding procreation, they also recognise that there is little the government can do if Singaporeans themselves do not want babies in what is essentially regarded as a personal decision, not an aspect of national duty.

While the government sees procreation as an essentially socio-economic issue, the "babyproducers" essentially see it as a personal lifestyle decision or situation; 67 per cent of the 79 respondents who do not have children are childless because they are single, not because they are already married and choose not to have children (only 40 per cent of the 64 married respondents are childless, and even so a handful are either planning for one or already expecting one).

While this may suggest that the bigger obstacle to babymaking is singlehood, and not that married people are choosing not to have children, further research, at least using larger sample sizes, and preferably over a longer time frame, are required to substantiate correlational and cause-effect hypotheses.

In contrast with earlier generations that seemed to equate a large family with a higher quality of life, the reverse seems to be the case in present day Singapore. Many are

weighing the time, energy and effort to bring up a child against other factors (e.g. how conducive they think Singapore is for growing a family) and coming to the conclusion that parenthood is either inconvenient or undesirable in current-day Singapore, and at this time in their personal lives when they are enjoying a particular lifestyle that does not include children.

Are economic and monetary incentives the best?

While respondents acknowledge that Singaporeans have been seen to respond well to such incentives on other issues, most feel that they are not the most appropriate for addressing the declining-birthrate issue because money is not the key consideration when one decides to have a child.

Respondents suggest that policies addressing a range of lifestyle concerns with major impact on themselves and their children would be more appropriate. Factors that surfaced as most important during this survey were increase in work flexibility and changes in the school/education system, followed by a second band of concerns regarding the cost of living and the availability of good childcare facilities.

The role of men and fathers

As earning power has become increasingly balanced with the change from a typically single-income family to present-day dual-income families, respondents feel that parental involvement should also become more balanced between fathers and mothers. A father is no longer viewed as just a breadwinner, he is also emotionally involved and spends time with his wife and children. As such there is strong approval for paid paternity leave to allow more family bonding when a child is born, and in recognition of the ideal present-day role of fathers.

6 months' maternity leave

However, respondents are divided over the issue of longer maternity leave. In the Singapore context, while many applaud the chance for the mother to bond with the

child for a longer time, especially if breastfeeding, they also feel employers should not be expected to hold a work position for an absent employee for such a long time.

Changes in the workplace and Singapore society

The key changes that respondents hope to see are more flexible work arrangements so that both fathers and mothers can get more involved in their children's lives, cultural acceptance for not working long, late hours, more opportunities for fulfilling and positively-viewed part-time work so that mothers may better balance their work/life roles, and generally more family-friendly and baby friendly facilities in society e.g. in shopping malls and offices.

All items on this wish-list are essentially pro-family. This is good news as far as the babymaking issue is concerned, because it suggests that people are not having babies not because they don't want to, but that circumstances prevent them from doing so.

Ideal family structure

Extending the pro-family wish list, respondents conveyed a preference to look after their children themselves with help from grandparents, maids, and childcare facilities in various degrees as part of a strong social support system.

Role of the single person in a pro-fertility society

A variety of views were expressed here; on one hand some feel singles have no responsibilities in this area and should be left alone to choose their own lifestyles, on the other some feel singles should get married and have children of their own. It is suggested that singles can help in a pro-fertility culture by becoming part of their colleagues and married siblings' social support structure, both in terms of helping to look after aged parents and babysitting, as well as safeguarding their own fertility by being educated and exercising responsibility on the issues of smoking, excessive drinking and a promiscuous lifestyle. Letting responsible singles adopt children is another suggestion, as is letting singles continue to contribute to the economy and pay the taxes that can help fund maternity and paternity leave.

Other ways to increase our population

Many respondents feel enabling more immigration and adoption, and having policies that encourage more foreigners to settle down in Singapore, are key suggestions for increasing the population without focusing on Singaporeans to have more children, while others don't even think our population needs to be increased because it is already crowded as it is.

Any other thoughts?

Most of the views highlighted above reflect the collective voice as it emerges from consolidated feedback.

However there are also individual views that stand out for their uniqueness, eloquence, or insight, captured in the 'qualitative' open-ended questions that are no less important. Even if some views may be marginal in the context of this particular survey, they are legitimate perspectives in our non-homogeneous society with cosmopolitan "world-class" ideals. These views may also be used as spin-off points for valuable additional research.

For example, in response to the question why she did not have children, one female aged under 30 remarked that she did not know if her body could take baby-making and that she has not convinced her husband to "stay home or agree on work flexibility", and reflected that she "grew up with (a) stay-home mother and a financially adequate but emotionally absent father, and (her husband) grew up with grandma taking care of him while parents worked".

If one's personal growing up experience results in one feeling repelled to what one's family stood for by the way they lived their lives (i.e. the "I don't want to become my father/mother" mentality), and makes it hard for new couples to come to an agreement on how to go forward as a new family, this could suggest that a rapidly changing Singapore society has made it difficult for young adults to vicariously learn from and embrace their caregivers as positive family-role models. It could also imply that those

experiencing less than positive family life while growing up are less likely to be pro-family.

Therefore, for the government to be effective in making pro-family changes, it must facilitate the creation of a positive and nurturing family experience--what two respondents (a single female in her 30s and a married male in his 40s, both without children) interpret as more important than social family structure.

When asked what they would deem the ideal family structure for bringing up children, the respondents replied that the ideal would be a “communicative and close-knitted” family where “people love and care for each another in a positive style” whether they lived “under the same roof or not”. Another respondent observed that the family eating together, as a time for conversation, is not common in Singapore. Other respondents candidly noted “no point having housewives staying home just the surf (the) Internet or play mahjong!”, and that they support paternity leave “only if fathers use paternity leave to help look after kids! Not to go to Batam to see/start/have a ‘second’ family”.

Beyond Batam, one respondent’s worry about Singaporeans not replacing themselves is related less to TFR and more to the “brain-drain” from emigration and the ensuing “waste of (a) nation’s investment” in its people. Another respondent concurs that quality is more important than quantity, thus there is no need to increase our population.

The quality of our population is as important as the quality of life of our people. A working female respondent in her 60s with two children remarked that

“Parents and children are now so stressed by the demands of work and school that they have forgotten how to enjoy family life. If family life is/can be enjoyable, maybe having another baby can be considered.”

Singapore –both the government and the people—need to be transformed. Education is the key, and the government has already set up a commendable infrastructure for

enabling many forms of education, but open-mindedness and the courage to change are essential for effective uptake.

This could even entail the need to accept non-traditional family structures, as one female gay respondent in her 20s suggested; as well as not penalising those who are not pro-family because, as one married male in his 40s without kids noted, “there are many ways you can contribute to society without having kids.”

As one respondent articulated, people may feel cold and distant from the government and not respect it because it asserts authority in a coercive, not charismatic manner, e.g. through economic incentives for baby-making. Essentially, by taking the effort to air their views, respondents are saying ‘here’s our feedback’, and urging the government to “be sincere when you say you will leave no stone unturned!”

At the end of the day, one respondent is confident that “society will find an equilibrium”. Another penned these philosophical words of hope:

“When “feelings” are good ... possibilities exist ... when possibilities exist ... all things happen.”

Notes on Survey Methodology

The Beyond Babies: National Service or Personal Choice Survey was circulated by AWARE between May and July 2004: at a seminar and focus group sessions of the same name, emailed to contacts, as well as posted on AWARE’s website www.aware.org.sg.

Most responses were submitted online through the AWARE website; 20 were submitted via email or fax. The assigned research assistant compiled the quantitative data used in this paper on 12 July 2004 based on 123 useable forms that were emailed, faxed, and submitted online.

Qualitative findings are based on data from these 123 responses as well as 18 additional handwritten responses from seminar/focus group participants made

available after 12 July. This anomaly was allowed as survey respondents are not pre-selected; this makes every useable response a valid one (un-useable responses are those that were largely incomplete); quantitative data from the second batch of responses will be assimilated in due course; preliminary examination suggest no large skew from the picture collectively painted by the first 123 responses.

Beyond Babies – the survey

Thank you for taking the time to answer this survey. It will help Aware's efforts to present a position paper on this issue of decreasing total fertility rates to the relevant ministry.

For profiling purposes, may we have the following information:

Name (optional):

Age:

Gender:

Marital Status:

Number of children you have and their ages:

Occupation:

Average working hours per week:

Gross monthly, family income: under \$1,000 \$1,000 to \$2,500
 \$2,500 to \$4,000 \$4,000 to \$6,000
 \$6,000 to \$8,000 \$8,000 to \$10,000
 \$10,000 to \$15,000 above \$15,000

Nationality: Singaporean / Singapore PR / Foreign national on employment visa or work permit / Foreign national married to Singaporean or Singapore PR / other

1. Are you aware of the policies the Government has implemented and the suggestions made in the recent Budget to increase the birth rates in Singapore?
 Yes
 No

2. Are you satisfied with how the Government has been handling the issue of declining birth rates in Singapore?
 Yes
 No

Why?

3. In your view, are economic and monetary incentives the most appropriate means of getting Singaporeans to have more babies?
 Yes
 No

Why?

4. Apart from economic and monetary incentives, what are the other areas the government should address when encouraging Singaporeans to have more babies? (can tick more than one)
- Cost of living
 - School / Education system
 - Lifestyle choices
 - Career demands
 - Child care facilities
 - Work flexibility
 - Gender equality
 - Others (please state)
-

5. Why do you think the government has been unsuccessful in increasing the total fertility rate in Singapore despite various economic incentives?
-
-

6. If you do not have children, why not?
- Not married
 - I'm gay
 - Too expensive
 - Trying to adopt
 - Trying for IVF
 - Enjoying current lifestyle
 - Singapore is not a conducive place to bring up children
 - Don't like children
 - Others (please state)
-

7. Do you feel the government has sufficiently discussed the role of men/fathers in the home and at the workplace when addressing Singapore's declining birth rates?
- Yes
 - No

8. If you answered "no" to question 7, how else do you think men and fathers should be included in this issue?
-
-
-

9. Do you support paid paternity leave?
- Yes
 - No

Why?

10. Do you support six months' maternity leave for mums?

Yes

No

Why?

11. What changes would you like to see in our society and in the workplace?

12. Briefly describe what your ideal situation is for bringing up children where the family structure is concerned.

(eg: grandparents live in same house; one full-time, stay-at-home parent; live-in foreign domestic worker to help with child-minding)

13. How important were "quality of life" and values when you were deciding to have children? (or how important are they when you do decide to have children?)

Not at all

Somewhat

Very

14. Do you think Singaporeans are concerned about "quality of life" and values when deciding to have children?

Yes

No

15. What do you think is the primary reason Singaporeans have children?

To get the tax incentives

Fulfill their parents' expectations & demands

So there's someone to look after them in their old age

Fulfill their national duty

For the love and joy of a child

It's just the normal thing to do after you get married

16. What is the role of singles in our society where the goal of increasing fertility rates is concerned?

17. Do you think there are other ways to increase our population besides persuading people to have more children?

18. Does it worry you that with the declining birth rates, Singaporeans will not “replace” themselves?

Yes

No

Why?

Please share with us any other views or thoughts you have about the issue of declining birth rates in Singapore, and how the government is addressing this situation, and what more can be done to reverse the trend.

Thank you for your time and help with our survey!

Appendix D – Notes on the Process

After the announcement that an inter-ministerial committee would be formed, headed by Mr Lim Hng Kiang, which would obtain feedback from the public, the AWARE Executive Committee decided to submit a report to the committee.

Work began in April. An appeal for volunteers was sent out to various mailing lists and garnered a good response. The volunteers, male and female, ranged in age from twenties to sixties. They worked in diverse fields and some were students or unemployed. The volunteers each chose their own niches, from researching and writing to organising the seminar. A list of volunteers and their roles appear in the acknowledgments section of this paper.

The seminar and focus group sessions were held on Saturday 29th May 2004. Over sixty participants attended the seminar and slightly fewer the focus groups. Facilitators fluent in English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil were at hand to conduct the focus group sessions. All the participants were conversant in English and two focus group sessions were held. Notes of their discussions are in Appendix E.

Concurrently, a survey was on the AWARE website at www.aware.org.sg and hard copies were distributed at the seminar. 123 responses were received. Most were received online and several were received by fax. A summary of the findings is in Appendix C.

After the seminar, many volunteers continued to contribute to the research and writing of this report.

Appendix E – Notes from Focus Group Discussions

Notes from focus group 1's discussion

General comments from participants:

- Shift in values and paradigms observed. Immigrant forefathers expressed “love” by providing basic care for their families (ala Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory). Now love is valued in itself but we don’t know how to deal with it (*i.e there is a conflict between old and new values*)
- singles are feeling disconnected (*as a result of a debate that excludes their needs and their lives.*)
- Biggest problem is conditioning – the higher the economic growth, the more money is available and the more spending that occurs. Success in Singapore is defined by economics. To break away from this constitutes a personal struggle, based on individual awareness. Requires lots of discipline.
- Asked whether we really need more people. Not enough land as it is- we will have to build 40-storey housing/buildings, people will be taxed more. As it is, there are too many cars on the road. How will we cater for 6 million people? Roads and infrastructure will have to be increased everywhere along with taxes etc. Cost of living will go up.
- Quality vs quantity – haven’t we achieved sufficient quantity? It’s time to step back. Children bring pleasure and should be enjoyed. What’s the purpose of having more if everyone is stressed out? Let’s look for quality people, quality families, quality relationships. Recognize other models of families.
- Singaporeans talk about moving elsewhere where life is better, Time to reclaim right to better life here collectively.

- If we connect differently and not focus on the 4 “C”s quality of life we will be better off.
- Thinks that it is insulting that government gives financial incentives to encourage Singaporeans to have kids. Government should just try to make life easier so that people are not in a constant state of stress.
- Costs are realities. How you balance it is up to the individual. What is enough? Life can be simpler if you have less. One can be happy with less.

Key recommendations were:

1. Repositioning of our unique identity -

- a) Take time to let different cultures to melt together to form a “Singapore Culture”

2. Policies to encourage “family-hood” and govt to not be “invasive” -

- a) Increase international co-operation in pro-family & labour-friendly policies.
- b) Reward and foster friendly-family corporate policies To increase population, look into adoption policies (more can be done by way of i) subsidies – it now costs \$15k ii) adoption leave per maternity leave
- c) Recognise sexual liberation – education, censorship
- d) “Is the parenting like Singapore government did good for the long term development?” / Maybe can give Singaporean’s more freedom.
- e) Before we talk about having babies, we should help men and women to have confidence in getting married

3. Recommendations for government to reach out

- a) Government to establish closer links with diverse organizations of all walks of life.
- b) Private organizations to constantly have relevant programmes to (cater for) different races, religions, groups or other grassroot levels

- c) Government to encourage and not create fear in private organizations to submit their views. Ideas, through more friendly messages
- d) Government to open up public debates on quality of life and basic needs.

4. Improving women's status in society –

- a) Father's should share in the responsibilities of the child-raising process.
- b) Valuing women's work in the home.

5. Government and corporate initiatives to improve work/life balance

- a) Money will always be a problem not just in baby-related issues. Short-term solutions like monetary incentives and cheaper delivery package are NOT going to help. A change in the work structure (long-term) may be a start. A change in mindset will follow.
- b) Government should provided adequate support for mums to be able to step back in to the workforce
- c) In terms of achieving work-life balance, companies must be willing to provide family-oriented benefits for employees. In addition to that the employers must encourage the employees to voice out their opinions in how to make the organization more family-friendly.
- d) Some of the partner's CPF could pass into the stay-home spouse.
- e) Work hours regulated.

6. Policies to broaden quality of life definition/concepts so as to be more inclusive

- a) Government to give more incentives to private organizations who walk the talk in terms of improving quality of life for Singaporeans.

7. Self: what individuals can do / cultural change

- b) Personal – take a step back, sacrifice economic benefits for happiness, each find one's own balance point.
- c) Solution – Cultural evolution: break the old to replace with the new. Fertility must be an individual's choice... institutionalizing it can be a “turn-off”, equally a softer approach can be a “turn-on”.
- d) Solution - Focus on improving quality of life so that children can be raised in a

caring environment.

- e) Problem – Fear vs inspiration: this seems to be the root of our cultural attitudes, affects work groups, fertility, innovation, change. Fear can be facilitator or immobilizer... inspiration may help go further, by unleashing “intrinsic” strength.
- f) Eliminate programmes such as SDU which makes couple-hood too cosmetic/manipulated/contrived.

8. Things government should facilitate:

- indirect governance,
- empowering “alternatives to encourage diversity to more wholesome clarity” (right to talk about it)
- NGOs, volunteerism
- a) Better quality child/infant/elder care services
- b) Government to support financially – for groups and societies to enable such groups to hold more forums, advertise, etc.
- c) 5-day week
- d) School hours should coincide with working hours so that parents and children are “engaged” at the same time.

9. State policy (practical ideas for policy makers)

- a) Pro-family incentives should NOT be given as tax rebates –
The lower income group who need it don’t get it
Those who are in the higher income group don’t need it.
- b) More space, less policies, reduce sphere of influence.
- c) Have a government body to look into and improve social issues.
- d) Reduce housing cost
- e) More family-friendly HDB housing
- f) Government should STOP speaking of children as an economic asset.

10. Civil society -

- a) Break the mould and empower individuals to challenge – “govern” themselves.

Notes from Focus Group 2's discussion

The discussion started with two questions – (1) should public policy put the economy first or the people first? and (2) What can companies do to help women achieve a better work-life balance?

Economy first or people first?

The consensus was that people should come first – that the quality of life of our citizens should be at the front and centre of public policy, rather than economic development per se. We questioned if Singaporeans really needed to work quite so hard, if Singapore needed to grow quite so fast, if it were possible for Singaporeans to take a step back and reassess their values and their priorities.

Having children is an individual decision to make – the individual has to ask herself, what are my limitations? What are my reasons for having children? What demands do I have to cope with? Basic demands include job security, time to develop her career and to spend with her family, money; competing pressures on an individual mean that it is getting harder to juggle having a career and being a good parent.

What can companies do?

Suggestions included:

- Getting the government to put pressure on companies to adopt policies on work-life balance, and offer incentives to companies that do so.
- Family-friendly policies need not be expensive; one American company, for example, set aside one day a year for employees to bring their children (or children of their friends or relatives) to work, to show the children what they did at work.
- Longer maternity leave (i.e. 6 months) might not be the solution – a mother who could not juggle her work and family commitments in 2 months is unlikely to be able to do so in 6 months. What is needed are more flexible working schemes, e.g. flexi-hour schemes, working from home, daily or

monthly-rated contracts or part-time work, to cater to individual needs. This might even increase productivity in the long run as employees are better able to balance their work and family commitments.

- Think of innovative solutions to cover the work of employees on maternity/paternity leave, e.g. hire interns during the time, after which the best-performing interns could be hired permanently.
- Better infant care and childcare is needed, perhaps through state-run childcare centres (as in the Nordic countries), larger childcare subsidies or help in finding well-trained domestic help.

Problems encountered in everyday life and suggested solutions

Our value system

The problem here is that we live in an overly competitive and materialistic society, which in turn encourages materialistic values. What is needed is a change in mindset and a reassessment of our value system – rather than focusing on excellence in our studies or work (i.e. being kiasu), we should be also consider our quality of life.

Specific suggestions included:

- Business leaders could help by thinking of ways to maintain profit levels *without* sacrificing the quality of life of their employees.
- Do away with the ranking system for schools, to lessen competitive pressure in our education system.
- Broaden the public definition of a family to include (i) single moms/dads, (ii) singles, (iii) same sex marriages, (iv) cohabiting couples.
- Use housing policy to encourage extended families to stay together, with luck making “kampong living” a reality.

Support services

The problem was that there is inadequate support for (1) working and non-working mothers; and (2) young children, and especially children with illnesses and disabilities.

Specific suggestions included:

- Organise workshops for companies to help them realise how pro-family policies can benefit them.
- Make available high-quality infant care and childcare for all children, e.g. by lowering the cost of childcare or building more childcare centres.
- Provide more help to families with children who are born with illnesses or disabilities.
- Revamp the education system to make it less stressful.

Cost of living

The high cost of living, especially in terms of accommodation, transport, utilities and medical costs, was cited as a major problem faced when having and bringing up children.

Specific suggestions included:

- Conduct studies on the cost of living and measures to lower it (and implementing those measures).
- Provide more relief for families with children, especially families facing financial difficulties.
- Reinstate pension plans, to provide a safety net for old age.

Lack of time

Long working hours were cited as a major problem to achieving a healthy work-life balance, as many women felt that they did not have enough time to spend with the family or for themselves. Furthermore, some companies do not encourage flexible working hours and even frown upon part-time employees. It was pointed out, however, that how we spend our time is ultimately a personal decision, and depends on our individual priorities.

Specific suggestions included:

- Have more flexible working hours or allow employees to work from home, allow employment on part-time or daily/monthly-rated basis.
- Have tax incentives for companies with family-friendly policies.
- Guarantee 4 months' paid maternity leave and 18 months' flexi-time or part-time work.
- Allow choice of longer maternity/paternity leave or subsidy.

What WE can do

Finally, we discussed what we as individuals could do to make things better, and came up with four points:

- Learn to accept “failure”, or not being No. 1, in return for a better quality of life.
- Change our mindset/values (not limited to individuals, but should include the government and companies as well).
- Learn useful life skills, e.g. time management, stress management.
- Reconsider our priorities in life.