

## **Influx of women tilts Singapore's sex ratio**

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SINGAPORE has more women than men and the gap has widened in the last 10 years, a change some experts say can be partly attributed to immigration.

The tilt in favour of women is notable in two age bands: the prime working years between 25 and 44 years, and among older folk aged 65 and above.

As a result, there are now 974 men for every 1,000 women, a decline from a decade ago when it was 998 against 1,000.

These comparative figures are derived from the advance release of the 2010 Census this week and the 2000 Census, which was the first population census to report this lopsidedness.

What is striking about the growing gap is that it defies the fact that more newborns in Singapore are boys, not girls.

This situation remains unchanged even for the age band 25 to 44 years when the comparison is among Singapore-born residents, which refers to both citizens and permanent residents (PRs) born here.

There are 417,410 men against 394,187 women: a difference of 23,223.

But when the number of foreign-born residents in that age band is added, the situation is reversed: 617,131 women against 583,660 men. The difference is 33,471 more women.

Demographers, sociologists and economists speculate that most of the foreign-born women are foreign brides or immigrants working in traditionally 'female' jobs such as in the service industry, health care or education.

The women are from the region, mainly Malaysia, China and Indonesia.

Singapore Management University economics professor Davin Chor said that cultural norms lead to more women than men going abroad to find work.

'Job opportunities for women might be harder to come by in their home countries, possibly because their labour markets might still be biased towards hiring men,' he said.

As for foreign brides, official figures show eight out of 10 marriages last year between a citizen and foreigner involved a local man. In all, around 7,000 local men married foreign brides, most of whom were from Asian countries.

Business development executive Wang Yao, 24, may be joining their ranks soon.

The Chinese national plans to become a PR when her boyfriend, Singaporean Kenneth Tan, 25, applies for a HDB flat. They met as students in Sweden.

MP Halimah Yacob said more local men are now approaching her for help to get PR status for their wives.

The possibility of having to do national service may also have led to more foreign-born women opting to be Singapore citizens or PRs than men, noted demographer Yap Mui Teng of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

'Some of the sons of immigrant families might not have opted for PR because of NS liability, whereas it is not an issue for the girls,' she said.

The other factor responsible for the gender imbalance is the result of biology. Women tend to outlive men.

For Singapore-born residents aged 65 and older, there are 117,457 women and 97,321 men - 20,136 more women.

But the gender gap has not reached worrying levels, noted Dr Gavin Jones, a population and development specialist at Asia Research Institute.

He said: 'There are some countries which have 800 men per 1,000 women.'

One concern noted by sociologist and Nominated MP Paulin Straughan was that some local women might have difficulty finding partners and end up remaining unmarried.

'Or, we may lose women when they marry foreign spouses and join their husbands overseas,' she said.