

Demographic Profile of Seniors in Singapore

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Introduction

Released in June 2021, the results of the Census of Population 2020 offered good insights into specific aspects of the Singapore population, including their education profile, and difficulties in performing particular activities, etc. This article provides insights on the changing demographic characteristics of senior residents¹ aged 65 years and over ("seniors") in Singapore over the past ten years.

Age Group

The number of seniors grew from 338,000 in 2010 to 614,000 in 2020. The increase over the past decade is due mainly to the ageing of residents within the age groups of 55-64 years in 2010 who aged to 65-74 years in 2020 (Chart 1).

As of 2020, seniors formed 15.2 per cent of the resident population, an increase from 9.0 per cent in 2010.

Sex Ratio

Females generally outlive males. The sex ratio of seniors declined with age, from 964 males per thousand females for residents aged 65-69 years to 433 for those aged 90 years and over in 2020 (Chart 2).

Nonetheless, life expectancy for male seniors continued to improve. The sex ratio for seniors increased from 792 males per thousand females in 2010 to 848 in 2020.

Marital Status

The proportion of widowed female seniors shrank from 50.3 per cent in 2010 to 36.2 per cent in 2020 (Chart 3), in line with the increasing life expectancy of males. The proportion of married male seniors remained high over the decade at over 80 per cent.

CHART 1

AGE PYRAMID OF THE RESIDENT POPULATION

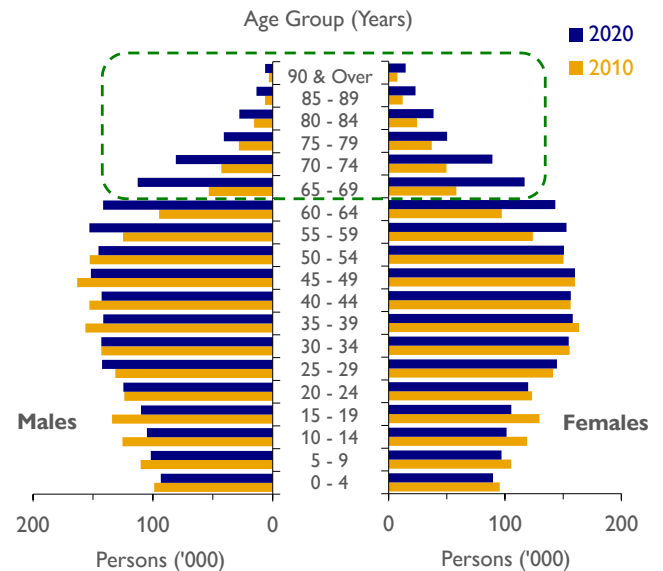


CHART 2

SEX RATIO OF THE RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER

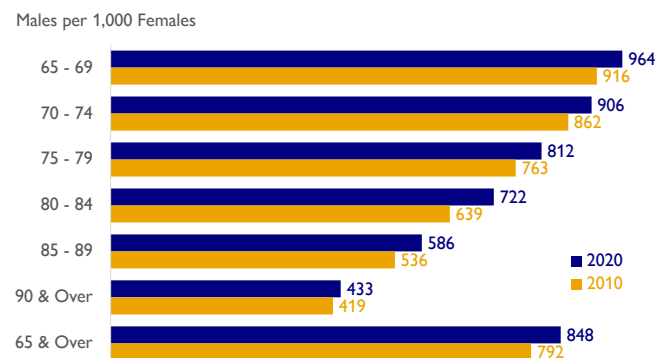
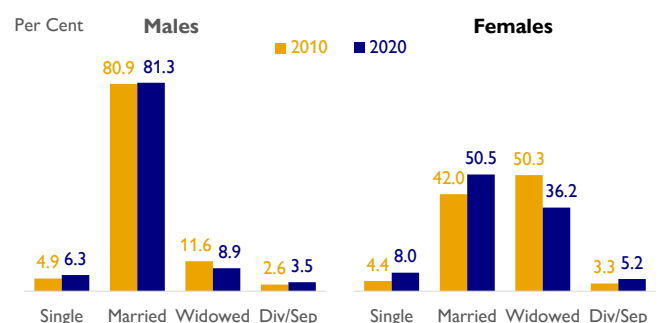


CHART 3

RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER BY MARITAL STATUS



¹ Residents comprise Singapore citizens and permanent residents.

Type of Dwelling

Majority of seniors lived in HDB flats, with 4-room flats being the most common type of dwelling. The proportion of seniors living in HDB 4-room flats increased from 29.5 per cent in 2010 to 30.6 per cent in 2020 (Chart 4).

In 2020, one in five seniors lived in HDB 3-room flats, a decrease from one in four a decade ago. Concomitantly, the number of seniors living in HDB 5-room flats increased from 19.9 per cent in 2010 to 22.1 per cent in 2020.

Highest Qualification Attained

The educational profile of seniors improved between 2010 and 2020. The proportion of seniors with

qualifications that were below Secondary decreased significantly from 79.6 per cent in 2010 to 61.7 per cent in 2020 (Chart 5).

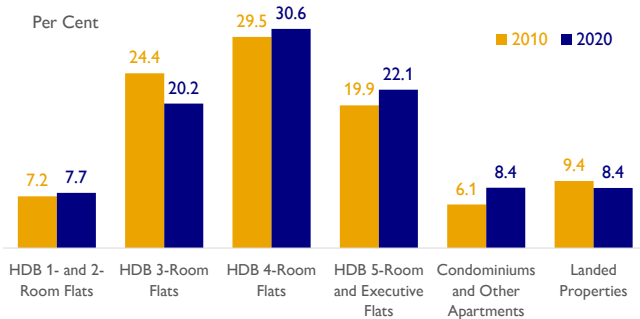
Correspondingly, the proportions of seniors with Secondary or higher qualifications increased.

Religious Affiliation

Most seniors had religious affiliations, though the proportion with no religious affiliation had increased to 15.1 per cent in 2020, from 12.1 per cent in 2010. Over the same period, the share of Buddhists or Taoists among seniors decreased, from 36.9 per cent in 2010 to 35.2 per cent in 2020 for Buddhists and 19.0 per cent to 15.7 per cent for Taoists (Chart 6). In contrast, the proportion who identified themselves as Muslims, Hindus and Christians increased.

CHART 4

RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER BY TYPE OF DWELLING



Note: Other types of dwelling not shown in chart.

CHART 5

RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER BY HIGHEST QUALIFICATION ATTAINED

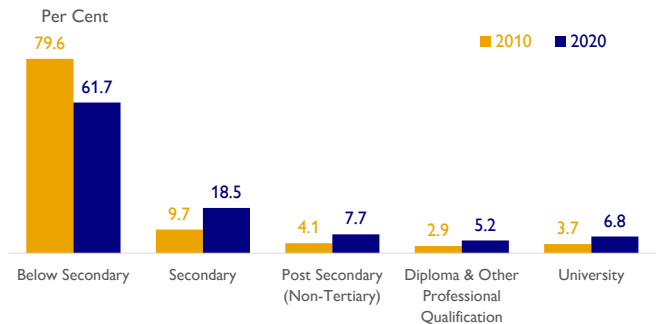


CHART 6

RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER BY RELIGION

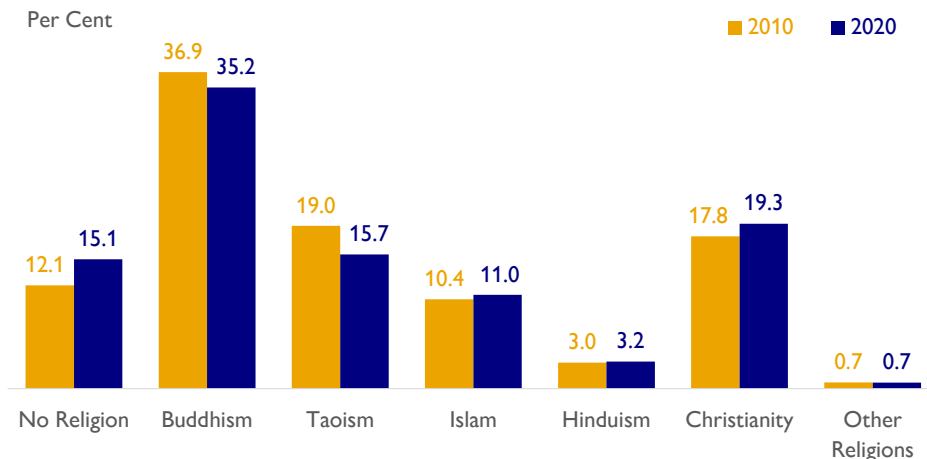
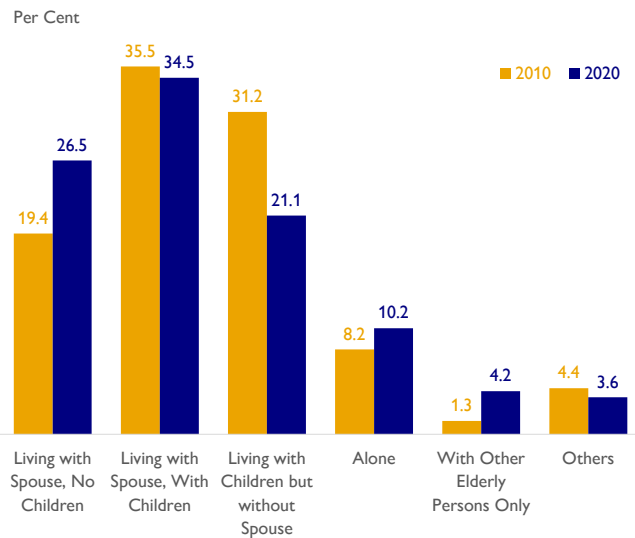
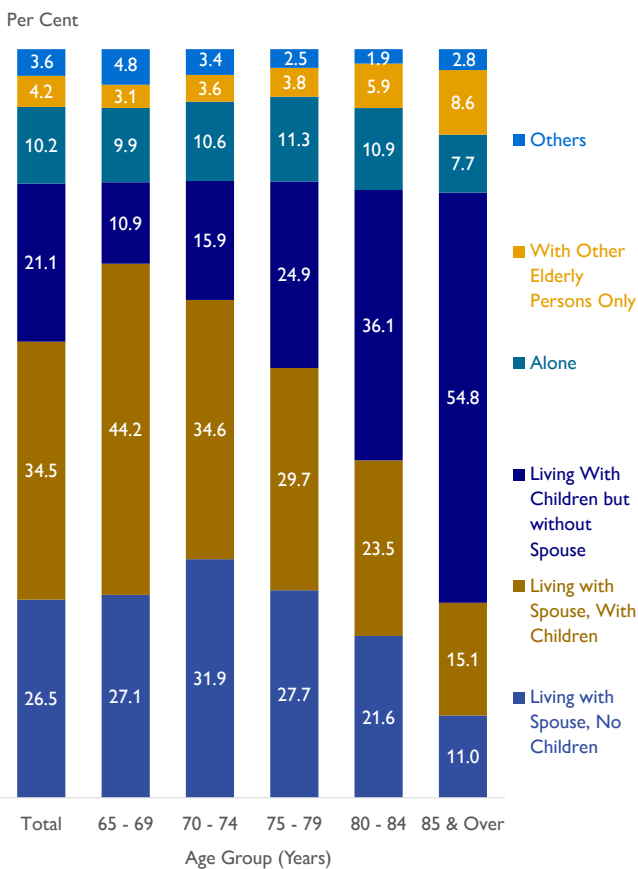


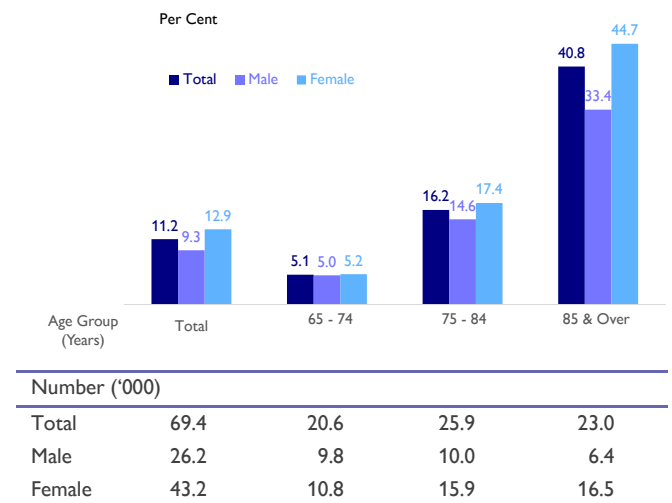
CHART 7**RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER IN RESIDENT HOUSEHOLDS BY LIVING ARRANGEMENT****CHART 8****RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER IN RESIDENT HOUSEHOLDS BY LIVING ARRANGEMENT AND AGE GROUP, 2020****Living Arrangements²**

Most seniors lived with their spouses and children, although the proportion decreased slightly from 35.5 per cent in 2010 to 34.5 per cent in 2020 (Chart 7). Those living with their spouses and without children increased from 19.4 per cent a decade ago to 26.5 per cent in 2020, forming the second most common living arrangement. Seniors living alone accounted for 10.2 per cent in 2020, an increase from 8.2 per cent in 2010.

In 2020, seniors who were living with their spouses and children made up the largest proportion among the age groups of 65-79 years (Chart 8). At the older ages, seniors were most commonly living with children but without spouse.

Difficulty Performing Basic Activities by Age Group and Sex

In 2020, some 69,400 or 11.2 per cent of residents aged 65 years and over who stayed in residential dwellings were unable to perform or had a lot of difficulty performing at least one basic activity³ (Chart 9).

CHART 9**PROPORTION OF RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER UNABLE TO PERFORM/ WITH A LOT OF DIFFICULTY IN AT LEAST ONE BASIC ACTIVITY BY AGE GROUP AND SEX, 2020**

2 Living arrangements of seniors are classified according to their co-residence with their spouse or children within the same household. For example, "Living with Spouse, No Children" may refer to seniors who were childless or have children who were not residing with them.

3 Basic Activities refer to seeing, hearing, mobility (walking or climbing steps), remembering or concentrating, self-care (such as washing all over or dressing), and communicating (for example understanding or being understood).

CHART 10

RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER UNABLE TO PERFORM / WITH A LOT OF DIFFICULTY IN BASIC ACTIVITY BY DOMAIN OF DIFFICULTY, 2020

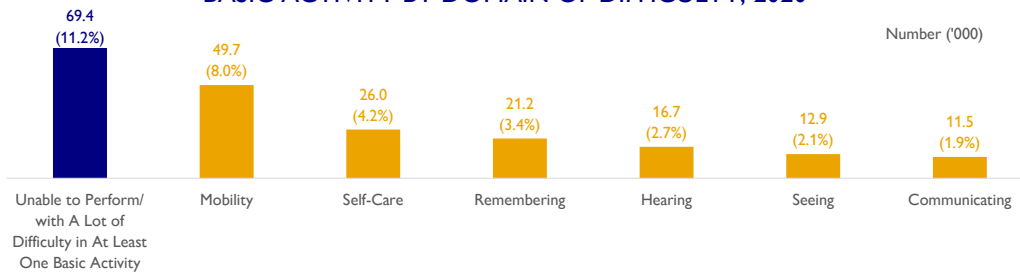
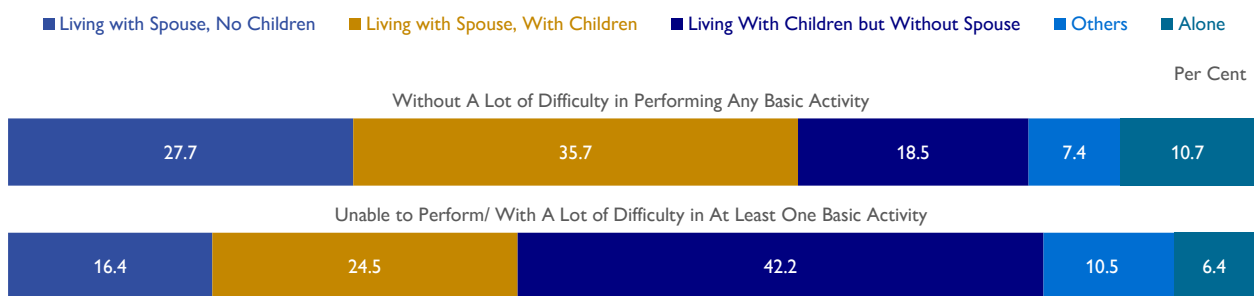


CHART 11

RESIDENT POPULATION AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER IN RESIDENT HOUSEHOLDS BY DIFFICULTY IN PERFORMING BASIC ACTIVITIES AND LIVING ARRANGEMENT, 2020



The proportion of those who were unable to perform or had a lot of difficulty performing at least one basic activity increased with age. A higher proportion of females (12.9 per cent) than males (9.3 per cent) were unable to perform or had a lot of difficulty performing at least one basic activity, due partly to the longer life expectancy of females.

Among those aged 65 - 74 years, the proportions with difficulty performing basic activities were similar for males and females.

Difficulty by Domain

In 2020, seniors who were unable to perform or had a lot of difficulty performing at least one basic activity faced the most difficulty with basic activities related to mobility. Some 49,700 (or 8.0 per cent of) residents aged 65 years and over were unable to perform or had a lot of difficulty performing activities relating to mobility (Chart 10)⁴. Seniors who had difficulty performing self-care activities formed the next largest group (about 26,000 seniors, or 4.2 per cent).

Difficulty Performing Basic Activities by Living Arrangement

In 2020, 93.6 per cent of seniors in resident households who were unable to perform or had a lot of difficulty performing at least one basic activity were living with other people. Most (83.1 per cent) were living with their spouses and/ or children. In comparison, a higher proportion of seniors who did not have a lot of difficulty performing basic activities (10.7 per cent) lived alone (Chart 11).

Conclusion

With advancements in medical science among several other factors, seniors living in Singapore enjoy longer life expectancies today. In 2020, seniors can expect to live for another 21.5 years on average, compared to the 19.8 additional years for seniors in 2010. In addition, baby boomers and post-baby boomers have entered the elderly age groups. In 2010, about one in eleven residents were seniors. This ratio increased to one in seven in 2020. By 2030, about one in five residents is expected to be a senior. This makes it important to understand the changing profiles of our seniors, so that their evolving needs may be better met.

⁴ For Chart 10, the number of residents unable to perform or with a lot of difficulty in specific basic activities do not add up to the overall figure, as there are residents who were unable to perform or had a lot of difficulty performing multiple basic activities.