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Household Living Arrangement in Singapore, 1990 - 2010

By

Koh Wee Ling and Lee Zhi Ying

Income, Expenditure and Population Statistics Division
Singapore Department of Statistics

Introduction

With the ageing of the population, delay in life events such as marriage and child-bearing, as well as the reduction in family sizes, the characteristics and composition of households¹ in Singapore have changed over the years.

As household members go through the different stages of the life cycle, households may transit from one living arrangement to another.

For example, a new household is formed when a couple marries and moves away from their parental homes to live together in a new home. This would often be followed by the couple entering the parenthood phase.

On the other hand, the parental home may be characterised by a declining number of children, and the passing away of the older parents.

This article highlights the changing profile of resident households in Singapore in terms of household living arrangement between 1990 and 2010 based on data from the Singapore Censuses of Population (for 1990, 2000 and 2010) and General Household Surveys (for 1995 and 2005) conducted by the Singapore Department of Statistics.

For statistical purposes, households are broadly classified into the following household living arrangement categories shown in Table 1.

¹ A household refers to a group of two or more persons living together in the same house and sharing common food or other arrangements for essential living. It also includes a person living alone or a person living with others but having his own food arrangements. Although persons may be living in the same house, they may not be members of the same household. A resident household refers to a household headed by a resident (i.e. Singapore citizen or permanent resident).

TABLE 1: HOUSEHOLD LIVING ARRANGEMENT CATEGORIES

| Category | Definition |
|---|--|
| Couple-based | Refers to households with a married head and spouse. This category is further split into those living with children and without children. |
| Lone Parent | Refers to households whose head is never-married/widowed/divorced/separated and living with children aged below 16 years or never-married children. |
| Living Alone | Refers to one-person households. This includes ever-married persons who are living alone as their children have grown up and moved out from the parental home. |
| Other Households with Family Nucleus ² | Refers to other types of households with a family nucleus, for example, a divorced household head living with elderly parents only, or a widowed household head living with the son and daughter-in-law. |
| Other Households without Family Nucleus | Refers to other types of households without a family nucleus, for example, a never-married household head living with never-married siblings, or a household head living with unrelated persons only. |

Age Profile of Resident Household Heads

The effect of the ageing population can be observed from the shift in the age structure of resident household heads.

Households headed by younger persons aged below 35 years declined from 23 per cent in 1990 to 11 per cent in 2010 (Chart 1).

In contrast, the share of older heads aged 50 years and over increased from 35 per cent in 1990 to 50 per cent in 2010.

Household Living Arrangement

Household living arrangements have evolved in tandem with changes in the age

structure as well as marriage and family formation preferences of the population.

While couple-based households with children remained the most common living arrangement, the proportion of such households declined from 66 per cent in 1990 to 56 per cent in 2010 (Chart 2).

In contrast, there were increases in the proportions of couple-based households without children (from 8.4 per cent in 1990 to 14 per cent in 2010) and those living alone (from 5.2 per cent in 1990 to 12 per cent in 2010).

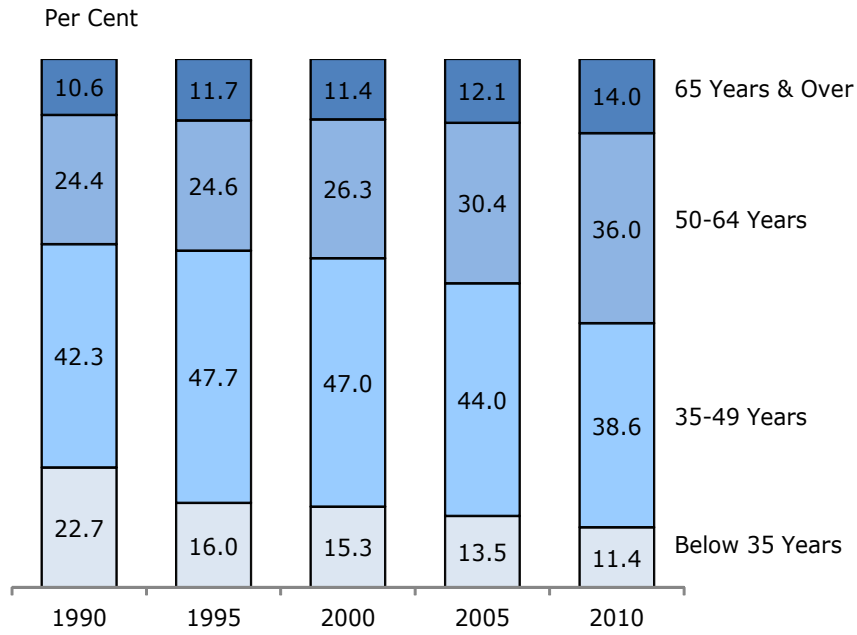
The share of lone parent households remained relatively stable at about 7 to 9 per cent over the same period.

² For statistical purposes, a family nucleus in a household can be formed by:

- (a) a married couple without children;
- (b) a married couple with never-married child(ren); or
- (c) one parent with never-married child(ren).

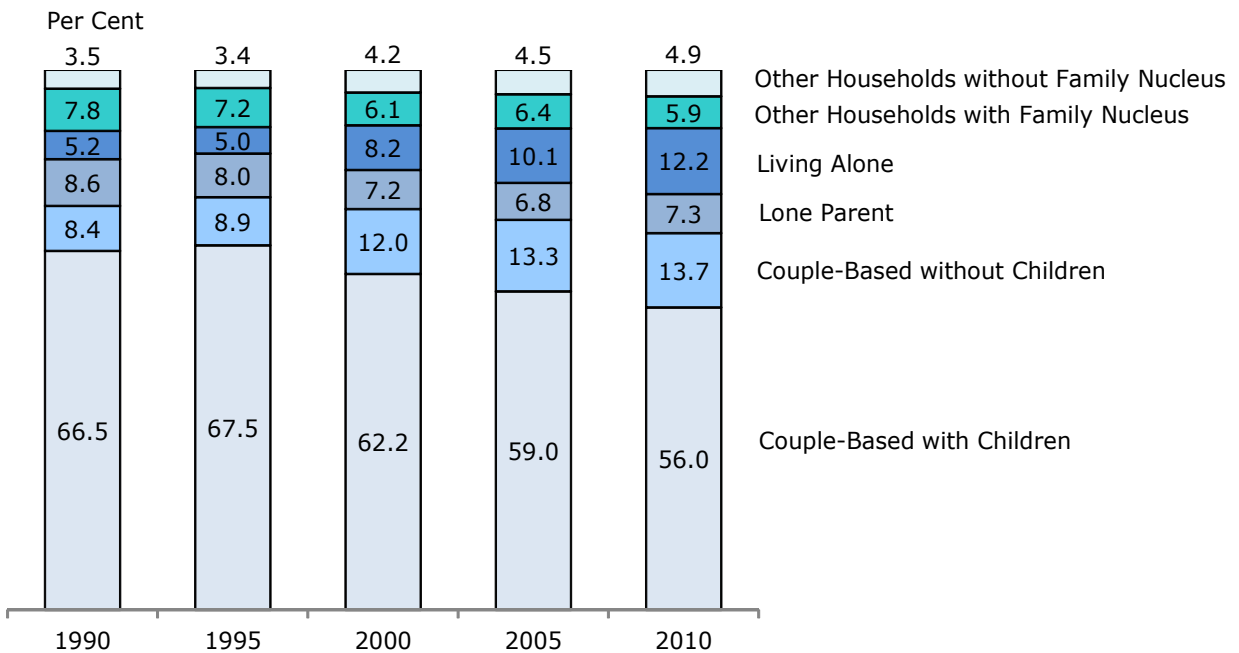
A household can have one family nucleus, multiple family nuclei or none. Each nucleus comprises one or more generations.

CHART 1 RESIDENT HOUSEHOLDS BY AGE GROUP OF HOUSEHOLD HEADS, 1990-2010



Note: The figures may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

CHART 2 RESIDENT HOUSEHOLDS BY HOUSEHOLD LIVING ARRANGEMENT, 1990-2010



Note: The figures may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Households Headed by Persons Aged Below 35 Years

Among households headed by persons aged below 35 years, the proportion of couple-based households decreased from 76 per cent in 1990 to 63 per cent in 2010 (Chart 3).

Conversely, the proportion of those living alone more than doubled from 7.2 per cent in 1990 to 19 per cent in 2010. This reflects the delay in marriage and family formation among the younger population.

Households Headed by Persons Aged 35-49 Years

Among households headed by persons aged 35-49 years, the proportion of couple-based households with children decreased from 77 per cent in 1990 to 65 per cent in 2010 (Chart 4).

Correspondingly, the shares of couple-based households without children and those living alone increased, with each constituting around 10 per cent in 2010, up from about 4 or 5 per cent two decades earlier.

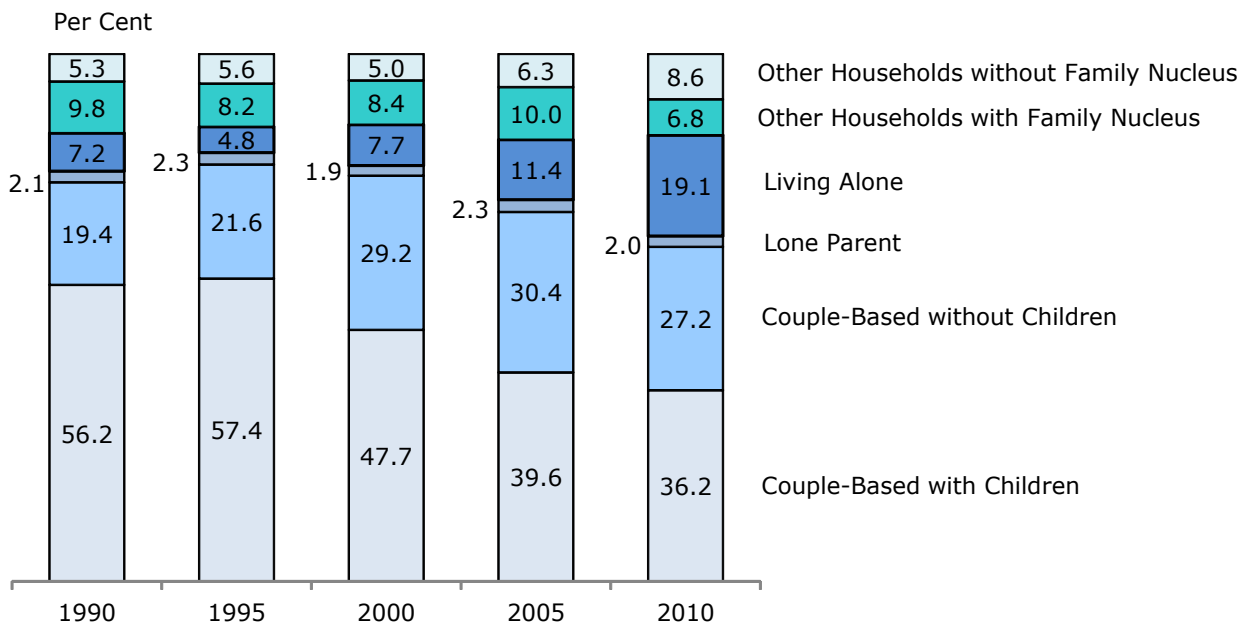
Households Headed by Persons Aged 50-64 Years

Similarly, among households headed by persons aged 50-64 years, the proportion of couple-based households with children decreased, albeit by fewer percentage points, from 67 per cent in 1990 to 62 per cent in 2010 (Chart 5).

In comparison, the shares of couple-based households without children and those living alone grew over the same period.

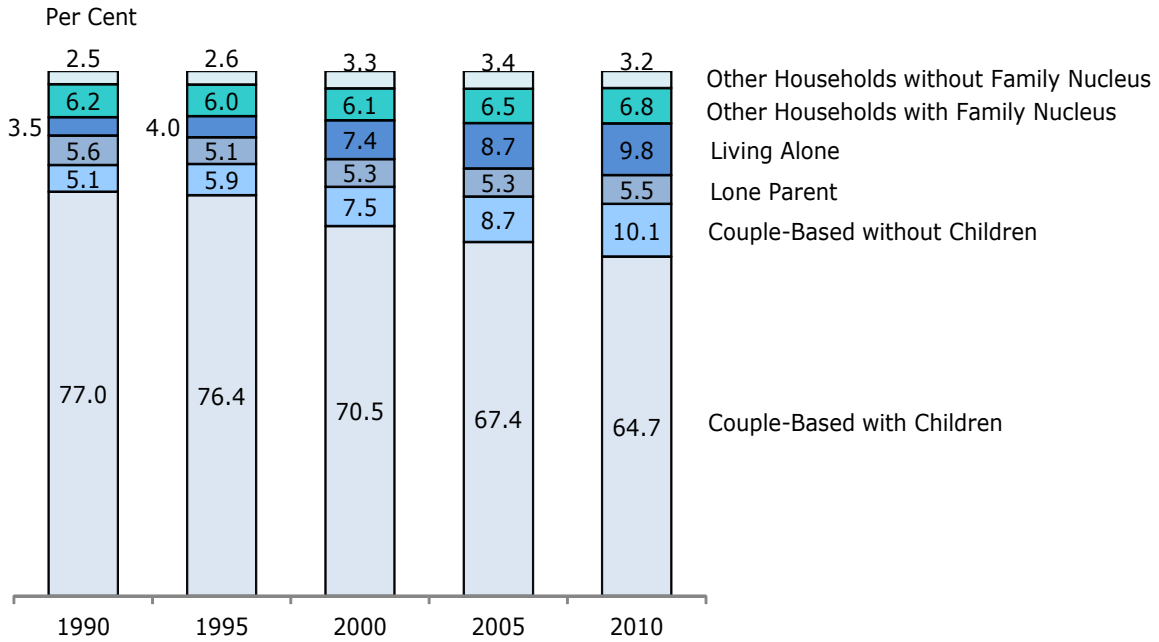
In contrast, the proportion of lone parent households fell from 15 per cent in 1990 to 8.3 per cent in 2010.

CHART 3 HOUSEHOLD LIVING ARRANGEMENT OF RESIDENT HOUSEHOLDS WITH HEADS AGED BELOW 35 YEARS, 1990-2010



Note: The figures may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

CHART 4 HOUSEHOLD LIVING ARRANGEMENT OF RESIDENT HOUSEHOLDS WITH HEADS AGED 35-49 YEARS, 1990-2010



Note: The figures may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

CHART 5 HOUSEHOLD LIVING ARRANGEMENT OF RESIDENT HOUSEHOLDS WITH HEADS AGED 50-64 YEARS, 1990-2010



Note: The figures may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Households Headed by Persons Aged 65 Years and Over

Among households headed by elderly persons (i.e. those aged 65 years and over), the proportion of couple-based households with children declined gradually from 44 per cent in 1990 to 33 per cent in 2010 (Chart 6).

A drop was also observed in the share of lone parent households, whose proportion decreased from 20 per cent to 14 per cent across the same period.

In contrast, the proportion of couple-based households without children almost tripled from 8.4 per cent to 23 per cent.

The share of elderly heads living alone also nearly doubled from 9.4 per cent to 17 per cent over the same period. This trend corresponds to the life cycle stage where grown-up children had left their parental homes.

It is also the result of one spouse passing away, leaving the other behind.

The majority of the elderly who lived alone were females (54 per cent in 1990 and 66 per cent in 2010), reflecting the higher life expectancy of women compared to men.

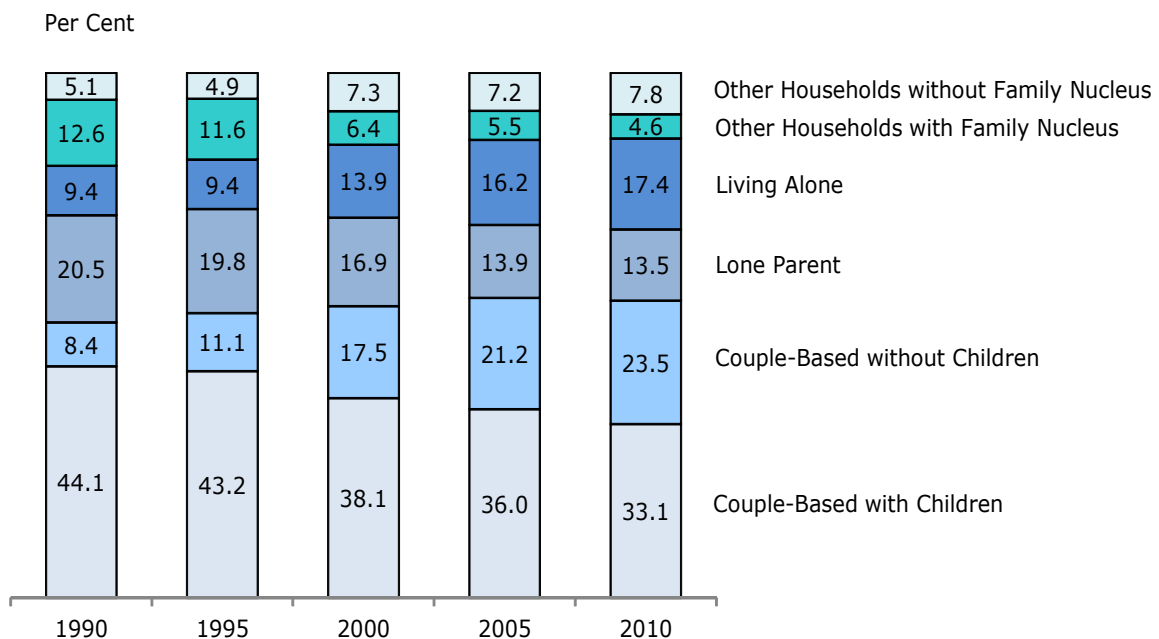
Concluding Remarks

While couple-based households with children remained the most common living arrangement between 1990 and 2010, the proportion of such households was on the decline. In contrast, the shares of couple-based households without children as well as one-person households were growing.

Taken together, the shares of these two groups increased steadily from 14 per cent in 1990 to 26 per cent in 2010.

These trends may be seen as a reflection of the ageing population, the delay in family formation and reduction in family sizes.

CHART 6 HOUSEHOLD LIVING ARRANGEMENT OF RESIDENT HOUSEHOLDS WITH HEADS AGED 65 AND OVER, 1990-2010



Note: The figures may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.