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## BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES: A STUDY OF FAMILY STRENGTH AND FAMILY RESOURCES

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### Interim Report 1: Preliminary Findings of Qualitative Interviews

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CATHOLIC FAMILY LIFE LIMITED

## Introduction

### Background

Families are regarded as the foundation of society in Singapore, a message that has been emphasized to its citizens. Over the last decade, the Singaporean government has implemented policies to promote a strong nuclear family unit. The government has encouraged the formation of closely-knit three-generation familial units and childbirth. Furthermore, the government has introduced more grants that reduce the cost of caregiving. (Huang, 2015). Despite the government's efforts to promote strong family ties, the median duration of marriages that ended in divorce in 2021 was 10.7 years with a 13.4% increase in divorces and annulments from 2020 (SingStat, 2021).

Such sentiments are reflected on the ground. Catholic Family Life (CFL) is a social service agency that aims to empower, form, and restore individuals, couples, and families at every stage of life. In 2020, CFL has reported an average of 15 therapy cases per month. Out of these cases, 10% involved family problems, while 48% were related to marital issues within the first decade of marriage. Beyond working with families in distress, CFL also offers a wide variety of programmes (i.e., parenting programmes to raise emotionally resilient children, positive and flourishing relationships for couples etc.) catered to the promotion of strong families. Yet, despite the emphasis on promotive and restorative family work, the constitution of strong families in the Singaporean context remains unknown.

This research paper therefore adopts a Family-Strengths Perspective, which argues that instead of ignoring family problems, families should aim to “(restore) them to their proper place in life: as vehicles for testing our capacities as families and reaffirming our vital human connections with each other” (Defrain et al., 2007). In doing so, this paper seeks to

delve deeper into the perspectives of family and marital strength from Singaporeans and uncover what strengthens and threatens the function of strong families.

The family unit has become more diverse than before with the emergence of other household structures, though the nuclear family is still dominant, and the value of family endures. Over the past three decades, researchers uncovered a set of qualities that describes the characteristics of strong families. These qualities are showing appreciation and affection, commitment, positive communication, enjoyable times together, spiritual well-being, and the ability to manage stress and crisis effectively (Defrain et al., 2007). Strong Families are also related to strong and long-term marriages (Defrain et al., 2007; Nimtz, 2011). In a qualitative study by Nimtz (2011) on marital satisfaction and longevity, a “Sense of Security”, “Togetherness” and “Children/Grandchildren” emerged from descriptions of marital satisfaction; and a “Sense of Security”, “Attitude of Commitment, Respect and Humour” and “Act of Communication, Compromise and Support” contributed to marital longevity.

Importantly, viewing families from a strengths-based perspective emphasises that families should be viewed for its internal family functioning to promote positive relationships and support healthy child development (Defrain et al., 2007). Family strength is therefore likened to the concept of family resilience, which is described by Walsh (1998) as the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful (Lietz, 2006). This process can be viewed as “a balance between the use of internal and external family resources for coping and adapting to life events and planning for the future” (Trivette et al., 1990) to maintain a balance across all life stages (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1993). Therefore, family strength is defined as the set of relationships and processes that support and protect family members, specifically during times of change, that represent core communicative processes and

relationships which serves as coping mechanisms and resources during adversity (Schrodt, 2009).

Despite recommendations for family strength research to investigate family functioning, the literature on strong families and marriages in Singapore is limited only to cross-sectional descriptive data on the attitudes of Singaporeans. Matthews et al., (2015) presented the following attitudes on strong families amongst Singaporeans:

- 1) Satisfaction with marriage and family
- 2) Close family ties
- 3) Intergenerational contact
- 4) Ability to mobilise family for social support
- 5) Strong family values

### **The Present Study**

This paper is part of a broader study that aims to bridge the gap in understanding the key factors that contribute to strong family functioning, particularly in terms of relationships and communicative processes across different life stages. This aspect of family strength research is currently understudied in Singapore, and the findings from this study will provide valuable insights into how families can enhance their relationships to promote stronger and more resilient family units. By identifying the factors that contribute to family strength, this study will also help to inform interventions and programs aimed at promoting healthy family dynamics.

The study utilises a mixed methods approach that takes place in across three phases. Firstly, it uses an exploratory design to qualitatively explore the concept of strong families

and marriages amongst Singaporeans. This then builds onto a secondary quantitative phase connected to the initial qualitative results (Clark et al., 2008). Taken together, the third and final phase of this study will comprise of an in-depth qualitative exploration with family service practitioners on whether the findings can be translated to practice and to uncover new resources that social service agencies like CFL can adopt in supporting the building of strong families and marriages.

Pertinent to the Phase 1 of the study, this paper aims to understand perceptions of Singaporeans on the factors that strengthens or threatens strong families and marriages, and how do families navigate challenges through their relationships and communicative processes, while using their internal and external family resources. This paper seeks to answer four research questions:

- 1) How do Singaporeans define strong families and marital relationships?
- 2) How do long-term married couples in Singapore build and ensure a strong relationship and positive communication patterns?
- 3) How do Singaporeans view family and marital commitment through difficult times?
- 4) What are the common stressors faced by families and how do families overcome these challenges?

Interviews were conducted to identify important insights to family strength, marriages, current resources, and help-seeking orientations. Findings from this study will allow a deeper understanding to what Singaporeans view as important for strong families and marriages, and inform key constructs measured in the second phase of this study.

## Method

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board, Agency for Integrated Care - IRB Reference No: 2021-010.

### Participants

Participants were recruited to represent individuals across different life stages (age groups, marital status, and length of marriage), education background, and faith to provide a holistic understanding of how different families navigate through everyday family life. Participants were recruited through social service agencies, CFL Affiliates and Associates, social media channels, and through personal contacts. Descriptive statistics of all the interviewed participant's demographics are shown in Table 1. All participants interviewed were above 21 years old and are Singaporean or Permanent Resident, and within the sample there were 7 interviewed couples staying in the same household.

Participants ( $N = 47$ ) were recruited in two phases, the first phase (May-Sep 2022) was through convenience sampling ( $n = 38$ ), and the second phase (Apr-May 2023) was through purposeful sampling ( $n = 9$ ) of under-represented participant demographics (i.e., non-Catholic, and not Chinese participants) to allow for a more balanced view of families, their strengths, and their challenges.

**Table 1: Participant Demographics**

		Total Interviewed ( $N = 47$ )		Total Coded ( $N = 34$ )	
		$N$	%	$N$	%
Life Stage	Pre-Marriage	9	19.1	6	17.6
	Married 0 - 5 years	8	17.0	7	20.5
	Married 6 - 10 years	4	8.5	4	11.7
	Married 11 - 20 years	8	17.0	3	9.1
	Married > 21 years	13	27.6	8	23.5

	Single Again	5	10.8	6	17.6
Religion	Buddhist/ Taoist	3	6.5	2	5.2
	Catholic	20	42.4	13	33.8
	Christian	4	8.5	4	11.7
	Hindu	10	21.2	3	9.1
	Islam	5	10.7	8	23.5
	Freethinker	5	10.7	4	11.7
Race	Chinese	23	48.9	19	36.2
	Malay	12	25.5	10	26.0
	Indian	9	19.1	4	11.7
	Others	3	6.5	1	2.6
Highest Education	No Degree	11	23.4	8	23.5
	Degree and above	36	76.6	26	76.5
Gender	Male	19	40.4	14	41.2
	Female	28	59.6	20	58.8

## Procedure

Before conducting the interviews, all participants were administered the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A) to indicate their consent in taking part in the interviews and/or have their interview recorded. Prior to the interviews, all consented participants were briefed by the Principal Investigator (PI) on the purposes of the study, and that participants can exit the study and/or skip any questions throughout the interview without any penalty. All interviews took on average 45 minutes to complete.

## Interview

The method for data collection in this study was in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 47 participants who were interviewed as individuals or with their partners. The interviews were done in two parts: a) Participants ( $n = 38$ ) were interviewed using a list of interview questions (Appendix B) that sought to understand broadly what the participants thought of strong families and/or marriages and how they overcame challenges within their family and/or marriage; b) Participants ( $n = 9$ ) were interviewed using another

set of similar interview questions that delved deeper into family resilience given its relation to the concept of strong families (Appendix C).

## **Analysis**

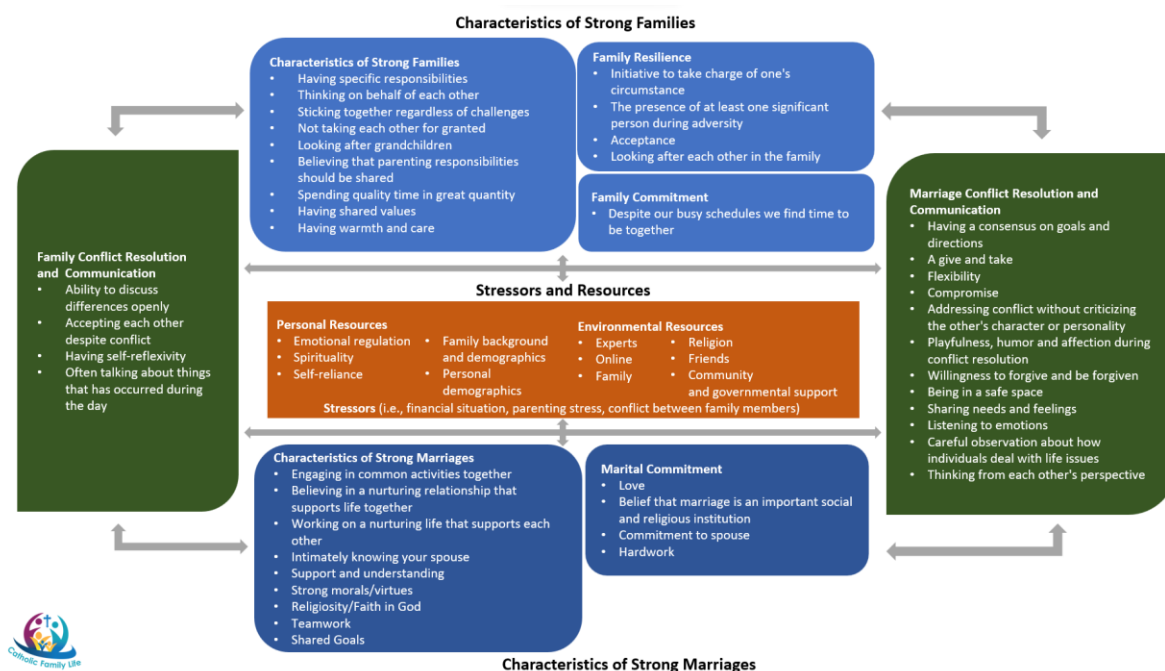
Interviews that had participants' consent ( $n = 43$ ) for recording were transcribed and thematic analysis was adopted. The transcripts were coded into themes (i.e., inductive analysis) and then compared with the existing literature on building strong marriages and families (Chih-Pei & Chang, 2017; Thomas, 2003). All transcribed interviews were coded until a point of data saturation ( $n = 34$ ). Major themes that were mentioned spontaneously in more than 20% of the coded interviews were then identified. Amongst these major themes, themes which were mentioned across almost all interviews were further elaborated on in subsequent sections. The selection of themes was based on their frequency across all coded interviews, in line with the research objective of understanding perspectives from Singaporeans. To note that the findings should be interpreted in which the absence of interview sentiments does not necessarily indicate its absence in the organic relationship of the participants.

## **Results**

The following sections describe the various findings according to 1) Characteristics of Strong Families and marriages, 2) Family and Marital Communication Patterns and Conflict Resolution, 3) Family and Marital Commitment, and 4) Stressors, Family Resilience and Help-Seeking Orientation in Families. See Figure 1 for a summary of the major themes mentioned across interviews pertinent to this paper.

### **Figure 1: Major Themes Based on Strong Families and Marriages**





*Note:* The arrows denote potential interactions between the person, marital and family relationships within their environmental contexts.

## 1) Characteristics of Strong Families and Marriages

In this section, participants were asked to explain what comes to mind when they think about strong families and marriages. Major themes that emerged across the interviews are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Characteristics of Strong Families and Marriages**

1) How do Singaporeans define strong families and marital relationships?		
	Families	Marriage
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have specific responsibilities</li> <li>- We think on behalf of each other</li> <li>- No matter how difficult things get, our family sticks together</li> <li>- In our family, we try not to take one another for granted</li> <li>- Looking after their grandchildren (more than 1 source of social support)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engage in common interests/activities outside together</li> <li>- Believing in nurturing a relationship that supports life together</li> <li>- Intimately knowing your spouse</li> <li>- Working on a nurturing life that supports each other</li> </ul>

- Believing that parenting responsibilities should be shared
  - Spending quality time in great quantity
  - Having shared ethical values
  - Have warmth and care
  - Support and understanding
  - Strong moral values/virtues
  - Faith in God/ Religiousness
  - Teamwork
  - Shared goals
- 

### Characteristics of Strong Families

In descriptions of strong families, many of their views reflect the themes of “intergenerational contact”, “close family ties” and having “strong family values” which concurs with the attitudes of Singaporeans in Mathews et al., (2015).

Intergenerational Contact is described by participants when grandparents or in-laws look after their grandchildren. This form of support was described to enable families to have more capacity to take care of their children, build intergenerational connectedness, allow other members of the family to work, and enjoy a better quality of life. For example, interview 13 described how inter-generational support in caregiving allowed the married couple to have more time for dates:

*“Okay, we are, we are very fortunate that we have very strong family support. So my parents have always been there for us, my mother in law, my late mother in law have always been there for us so, right from day one of marriage, we always had couple of night one, date night so my, my parents, so kids, not only date night ah, we every year, we go on holiday as a couple together, without the kids, so parents will all come out and look after, come by and make sure they have enough to eat and all that...”*

For some families, intergenerational support in caregiving allowed other family members to work and further their education for better job opportunities. Grandparents were described

to have “helped” their grandchildren and “took care of their needs” such as by “fetching them to school”, “cooking” etc. As illustrated in interview 5:

*“The support that I had I would say is in the earliest my grandmother, stepping in to help me look after my children really helped me to focus on my work and earning money, so that I could afford to help my husband be educated in university and then, so after he started work, after we got our flat, we had a helper, and a few years later I felt I needed to spend more time with the kids and by that time, he was earning enough for me to stop work, that's when I took the time off to be with the children.”*

As such, these caregiving arrangements allowed families to become more connected, which is facilitated by a compromise (i.e., “let go and be okay”) between parents and grandparents in caregiving. As shared in interview 18:

*“So I have my both my parents around to help. So we stay together. So obviously, they are they do from a very close-knit bond with my daughter and myself. Yeah. Yeah. Correct. So they do they do get into the idea of what I'm doing. Although I think they're still trying to change because it was a different generation. They're still learning the ropes of how I handle my daughter, that sort of thing. So yeah.”*

Spending quality time in great quantity is actively described in having close family ties. This is mainly described by the key words: “every/over the weekend”, “have meals/dinner together”, “make time for my family/ try to be there”, “do things together”. This theme reflects Defrain et al.'s (2007) description that strong families tend to spend quality time together. For instance, interview 15 described:

*"Then the second platform is in person when we come together... most of the time between 630 to about 830 when we are all around this hall area. And then our dining hall is just nearby, our TV is here. So generally, after 830 we will go our own work or go and sleep. Right. So that two hours is critical for us. Yeah, and we try to then talk as much as possible. Anything, we just bring up so some people will be at the dining table talking one to one or two to one. So normally my wife will just call up the girls and say, I want to ask you something and then she has some private discussion there, sometimes gossip."*

Spending lots of quality time together is part of daily routines in certain families. For some, it can look like having daily meals together, whereas others will have family time on the weekends. Importantly, this theme alludes to committing protected time to spend with the family. As described in interview 19:

*"Okay, so since young right, it is always a practice that over dinner, okay we always have our dinner together, it is a must, so the only time that we don't have dinner together is over the weekend, so Monday to Friday, by hook or by crook we have to come back for, for dinner together. So over the dinner table, we will talk about what happened in school, if we are still in school back then, what happened in school, then Mom will share about the type of students she has, dad will be complaining about the colleagues he has, so it is time for us to actually just vent out our emotions and our, what happened in at work, or in school, so I think that kind of exposure has allowed us to be very upfront with what is happening within ourself, or within our environment la yeah"*

Strong family values in the form of ethical and/or religious values is described as the bedrock to strong families. Participants often talked about “teaching values” to their “children”. The importance of shared values was highlighted when in the absence of it, “it would be very hard for us to stay together”. For example, in interview 7 the participant described being hurt when her child did not act out common values taught in the family:

*“Well, the things that I teach him is to be to be honest, a person of integrity, you know, to, to keep his promise. Yeah, this is one thing that he struggles with also. Yeah, I told him that whatever you say, you want to do, you've got to follow through. Otherwise, after a while people will, will think that you are not reliable, or they think that you're lying because you say that you do it and you don't do it. Yeah so, so this is one thing that I, I teach him on, and I emphasize quite a lot, because he, many times doesn't keep his promise on what he says that he will do and then initially it also bothers me and upsets me a lot.”*

Values are also described as an endearing quality of a strong family that stays constant against negative experiences in life. As shared in interview 9:

*“I think I want to be like a cool mom? No, what I mean is like just open, to have that openness and to instil good values. Yeah. I'm somebody that I mean, I may shut down my parents a lot, but they influenced me in the sense that they also instil good values to me as well. Yeah.”*

### **Characteristics of Strong Marriages**

In descriptions of strong marriages, participants' views heavily support the literature on marital longevity and satisfaction (Nimtz, 2011; see Table 2) – in particular, the idea of

“intimately knowing your spouse” was mentioned by most participants. In addition, participants also described how “sharing a common goal” and “working on a nurturing life that supports each other” played a key contributor to their relationship satisfaction and longevity.

Intimately knowing your spouse is described by participants as the ability to “discover/find more things about the person” which leads to a “deeper understanding” of how their partners react to situations, their “likes and dislikes” and “what is important to them”. Knowing their partner well have allowed couples to “live with each other” and reduced their conflict. As encapsulated in interview 1:

*“I sort of really know what's her personality like, what she liked, what she disliked you know, how is she as a person and, I think from there, I already sort of know how she is like, as a, as a person... because I already sort of slowly get to know her through secondary school, bits and pieces every year and then, I think for us, we also, it became to a point where I felt very comfortable talking to her and interacting with her and knowing, oh, when do I, when can I joke with her? When should I not say anything? Or when should I maybe let her speak or when should I, you know, be respectful la so, I think that is part of the attributes of the strong foundation that we have for each other”*

Partners also made time for each other to engage with their spouse’s interests to know each other better. As described in interview 25:

*“Personally, if you ask me, following her for all the painting lessons, you know sit down there and look at the sea and she do her drawing. I can't even sit down there for 10 minutes but I love her very much, so I said okay, come, I will draw something. Although*

*she said this is not even effort, I say this is the, my best drawing I can draw. yeah, I said but I'm trying to understand why you love painting, you know why you love drawing on that..."*

Sharing a common goal is another key aspect of strong marriages. Pertinent to the Singaporean context, majority participants shared a common aspiration of "having a house/BTO together" in addition to the topics of finances and having children. Such goal setting is deemed as important in any "serious relationship". In interview 12, the participant described his shared goals with his partner for almost a decade:

*"Yes, very broadly, very broadly, we have shared goals, like, for example, we want to live a certain type of lifestyle. Basically, we don't want to have a car. We don't think it's worth having a car, or it's not worth the cost having a car. We, when it comes to children, we are not sure. And we are both okay with not being sure. And if one day we change our minds, or one person changes their mind, then we can discuss about it and then see where things go. We both agree that when it comes to having a child, it's more about lifestyle. Yeah, you know, are... we do we want to live a single life? Or do we want to have different kinds of life experiences by having a child. Some other goals would be what, how retirement might look like. For us, we both agree that we want to be very, very financially stable when we retire. But once we retire, we will also want to pursue hobbies and try to monetize the hobbies a little bit here and there just to get cash here and there. And we also prioritize having stable accommodation. So, we we actually applied for five room BTO which we are getting this year. We don't plan on selling that house until we retire at least. Yeah, because that's something I prioritize... having a stable home."*

Participants married for more than 10 years described that having shared goals have allowed couples to achieve “alignment” in their relationship in “the early stages” and have built the relationship up for the “long term/long run” by “keeping the relationship going”. In interview 15:

*“Well, I told my wife that she should retire ... she is around 61.. 62 and she’s in a teaching course. I said this You have enough money. I think she should just quit and then let’s go traveling... If she’s not working then I am not working... I will just say okay, we have enough money in life la. Yeah. So I think moving forward, I find that when all the 3 girls get married and go off, and its just me and my wife, and then we really have to find something that keeps us going, that’s what... I also dont know what to do. You know, so maybe adopt another child and start the cycle again, or grandchild coming, and you start the cycle again.”*

Working on a nurturing life that supports each other is tied to action – in which, descriptions of positive changes in relationships over time (i.e., “our communication has improved a lot over the years”) was mentioned as part of a strong marriage. This is associated with key words like “growing together”, “learn along the way”, “things changed”. For example, the couple in interview 21 reflected on the improvements in their relationship:

*“Yes yes, 10 years ago. Yes, yes, 10 years ago, I remember (wife cuts in – what did you do 10 years ago that-) I have no idea cause those things I forget, I don’t remember, forget, so I guess the thing is, we have to learn along the way la, you know, and I think that’s important, you know, to, to be able to speak your mind. (short pause) I think that’s important. Because if we don’t really say, we don’t really know la, you don’t know what you don’t know right... So, to answer your question, yes, I think that we, uh,*



*the things that I've identified, right, respect and openness and always talking it out, it is sort of what we do in our marriage. It's not always successful uhm, but yeah, but you know, with every year, it's always and with time, it's always refining that right. And so I think there is always work in progress uhm, yeah..."*

## **2) Family and Marital Communication Patterns and Conflict Resolution**

In this section, participants were asked to describe the quality and quantity of conversations that take place at home and/or in their relationships. Major themes on communication and conflict resolution that emerged across the interviews are presented in Table 3. Note that under conflict resolution strategies, "give and take" (e.g., "it's a give and take la, so sometimes you know, I mean, women have their way of thinking and so I have my own way of thinking, so for my wife, we, it's a give and take la, you know, it's not like I'm always right or she's always right. So, for me, if she thinks she's right, then okay la, I will always say, my concept is always agree to disagree la, that's the thing, just to avoid conflicts la"); "compromise" (e.g., "Yeah, of course, for disagreements then, ya the resolution part has to come lor, so a lot of times it's compromise, try to see each other's point of view, sometimes agree to disagree"); and "flexibility" (e.g., "We will give like what's plan A and what's plan B. If plan A doesn't work then plan B") reflect psychological flexibility that is shown to predict relationship well-being (Twiselton et al., 2020).

**Table 3: Family and Marital Communication Patterns and Conflict Resolution**

2) How do long-term married couples in Singapore build and ensure a strong relationship and positive communication patterns?		
	Families	Marriage
Communication Patterns and Conflict Resolution	Conflict Resolution Strategies - We can discuss our differences openly	Conflict Resolution Strategies - Having a consensus on goals and directions - A give and take

- We accept each other despite conflict

#### Emotional Intelligence in Conflict Resolution

- Emotional regulation strategies (couple/family)
- Having reflexivity

#### Positive Communication Strategies

- We often talk about things we have done during the day.

- Flexibility
- Compromise
- Addressing conflict without criticizing the other's character or personality

#### Emotional Intelligence in Conflict Resolution

- Playfulness, enthusiasm, humor, and affection during conflict resolution
- The willingness to forgive and to be forgiven
- Emotional regulation strategies (individual)

#### Positive Communication Strategies

- Being in a safe space
- Sharing needs and feelings
- Listening to emotions
- Careful observation about how individuals deal with life issues
- Thinking from each other's perspective

### Family and Marital Conflict Resolution Strategies

Emotional regulation strategies in promoting conflict resolution in families and marriages is a key factor brought up across majority interviews. Emotional regulation strategies such as “giving each other space” is consistently employed within the family/relationship to “help each other” “cool down/manage their emotions”. For example, interview 23 described a sense of emotional support between the married couple, and that their conflicts are tempered by the presence of their children.

*“Okay. So, I think couples yeah, usually we have disagreements, but most of the time when, if one of us get angry and have concern towards the other, so, yeah, I mean we have that, that heated exchange, but at the same time, we will try as much as*

*possible avoid to have that exchange in front of our children. If sometimes it happened, then we, we will somehow change the mood to, if that, if that does happen if when one of the time (pause), that my, I think, one of my children ask why am I shouting at my wife so, then both of us realize and we start to make the atmosphere more of like funny things, so that they won't be affected. And then also sometimes it helps, so it cooldowns such a, such, such coming in from the children also cools down our exchanges, so we couldn't get too emotional. So yeah, but it does happen when we have heated exchange, and then when we do have sometimes, we will need some time to mellow down and start to interact and start to make up with each other... But yeah, I am more of a support for her, providing support, I think providing the advice and guidance to, to for her to maintain sanity especially."*

Similarly, beyond inter-personal relationships, individual emotional regulation is also imperative for conflict de-escalation. This is reflected in descriptions of being able to ask for personal space to "calm down/have a breathing space" especially when they are "angry". While calling for a "time-out" is the most common strategy employed to "avoid saying things I don't mean", participants also recognise that they will "come back to it again when [they] are feeling better" or when "[they] are ready". Interview 20 reflects the awareness that emotional regulation is important to avoid unintended conflict:

*"So that it's very obvious that we don't intentionally want to, to me la, it's very obvious that we don't intentionally want to, you know, step on each other's toes but, if it comes to that point and it happens, then, we will uh, usually, I will be the one who will want to say it out first, in our, in our own, own zone la, when we are just by ourselves."*

Addressing conflict without criticising each other is also a pertinent theme throughout family and marital conflict resolution. This theme is encompassed by having “respect” for each other, avoiding blame and “not saying things we don’t mean” in times of conflict. This is well expressed in interview 17:

*“Ok now got some misunderstanding so we tried to solve it immediately. We will all sit together and we will talk. Then we will we will bring up the point without bring in the person. So that so the person that is misunderstanding don't feel bad. So the others will also know "Okay. This thing is not to be done... not to be not to be done this way". So we will let everybody know that okay we don't like this thing, we don't like A, do B. I don't say... but my house is small, so we don't go outside and talk because you will know okay, this person got problem. We don't try to embarrass. Unless it's a really serious matter we will bring that person out of the house and we have a talk. So far no la, everything we can stop we will stop and when we talk we just try to talk peacefully.”*

Being able to accept each other despite conflict is a similar theme that transpired across majority interviews. This theme is often reflected in interviews that also raised the point of addressing conflict without criticising each other. In interview 5:

*“We had a huge fight. It dawned on me that I cannot change my in-laws. My mother in-law is my mother in-law. And just as my I cannot change my parents, I have to love my parents even with their difficulty, can I choose to love my mother in-law as she is?”*

Being able to be “flexible” and “compromise” to “forgive and be forgiven” emerged as common strategies for marital conflict resolution (see also, Gottman et al., 2006). For example, in interview 1 – flexibility is expressed when Participant 1 is able to source for

different platforms for communication (i.e., being able to source different ways to solve problems); compromise is expressed in Participant 2's adjustment to his partner's preferred mode of communication despite having a personal preference for face-to-face communication; and both have the intention of forgiveness in conflict resolution. In

Interview 1:

*"[Participant1] I'll just tell him that I'm not happy, usually it's through a text because for me, I'm better I express myself better through writing. So yeah, like, that's how we solve that resolve things.*

*[Participant 2] WhatsApp, or whatever, I will say at the beginning, it took me a while to adjust because I was just thinking, eh why she don't want to tell me directly, you know face to face and you know, has to send me through a long of text... I think it's what happens after that is more important, the resolving, the talking and, and, you know, like not having any sort of bitterness la, between each other."*

### **Family and Marital Communication Patterns**

Commonly mentioned throughout the interviews is how communication is part of family and/or marital strength. Positive communication is described as "being open" and "saying what you want to say", with the other party "being able to listen well" to hold "vulnerable" conversations.

The ability to "listen to emotions" and "think from each other's perspective" are described as important skills in maintaining a healthy communicative environment in marriages. These sentiments reflect the definition of a validating marriage as described by Gottman (1994) – which describes couples who are open to compromise and calmly work

toward conflict resolution as virtuosos of communication, having developed a keen ability to listen to and understand the other's point of view.

Having conversations about their daily life is shared across most participants in describing a desirable and/or positive family environment. In addition, the mode of such conversations differs across families – in which some families mainly have them over “dinner time” and others on “WhatsApp”. Participant 17 further explained that these conversations are a way to support family members with their stress:

*“When they come back then we will tell the story. What happened... something at school like my number second, this year ITE first year. So when he come back, we will be okay... whatever feedback or whatever he will expressed to us the storytelling after they come back from school should be story telling. Even now especially the big one also if they have a bad day, I will tell them to express themselves. I tell them if you have bad days or bad days from work or with someone it's okay to come home and release on us. Express to us the burden because I don't want them to be stressed yeah...”*

### **3) Family and Relationship Commitment**

The topic of commitment comes to mind when thinking about family or marital strength – which is described amongst participants as being able to “stay together throughout no matter the ups and downs”. This idea of commitment is tied to action. In families, the ability to find time to be together despite busy schedules is a hallmark of family commitment. In marriages, the idea of hard work reflects commitment to overcome troubled times. This is concurred by Nimtz (2011) in which “Action,” referring to the work and effort participants

invested in the marriage relationship is a major theme in marital longevity. Refer to Table 4 for themes on commitment.

**Table 4: Family and Marital Commitment**

3) How do Singaporeans view family and marital commitment through difficult times?			
	Families		Marriage
Characteristics and/or Factors for Commitment	-	Despite our busy schedules, we find time to be together	- Love - Belief that marriage is an important social and religious institution - Commitment to the spouse - Hard work

### Family Commitment

Being able to find time together despite busy schedules is a theme that is central to the participants' views on family commitment. The following from interview 28 best describes this:

*"[Participant 1] Yeah, going through a hard time to get there not giving up. Okay. So basically like like, okay, like when our parents, right, like, when you're talking about families, right, like, when we see our parents like, last those days, like, they used to go to work and everything, and then they spend a lot of time at work, but then they still like, they're committed to whatever it is, which is at home. And it's I don't know how to say it, like, there is no, I think, words cant to express their commitment. Yeah, it's just the actions that you will see their actions and the time that they put in, right is like, way beyond.*

*[Participant 2] I think for me, commitment is about setting aside time for each other. Yeah. So setting aside time, whether it's for dinner, so whether to have family gatherings together. Yeah. So be willing to still meet each other."*

## Marital Commitment

Investing hard work to overcome challenges is an indicator of relationship commitment. This theme is commonly described with the keywords: “effort/work”, “give it your all in your relationship”, “no matter what happens”, “it is a work in progress”. The idea of commitment is also tied to an individual responsibility to uphold their wedding vows as mentioned in interview 13:

*“Because we have, we have known of people who are on their second marriages and all, that marriage is because we make a commitment in church, we have to work at it. You can't assume and let it be because we start a journey together. So we are talking about this, a few, a few friends where they start their marriage together and ultimately, the journey split and they go separate way...Yeah I mean if the relationship is important to you right, then, then there is the question you ask yourself is, what can you do to maintain it right?”*

## 4) Stressors, Family Resilience and Help-Seeking Orientation in Families

More than half of the participants described finances, parenting difficulties, and conflictual family relationships (i.e., such as in-law tensions) as key reasons for conflict in their family life.

To overcome these challenges, participants related to the idea of family resilience and shared their preferences for help-seeking during troubled times. Their sentiments reflect the literature on the key factors promoting family resilience, which includes the ability to access internal and external support, find meaning in the struggles faced (appraisal), as well as relying on spirituality (Schrodt, 2009; see Table 5).



**Table 5: Stressors, Family Resilience and Help-Seeking Orientation in Families (Personal/ Environmental Resources)**

4) What are the common stressors faced by families and how do families overcome these challenges?	
Stressors or Sources of Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial situation</li> <li>- Parenting</li> <li>- Family Relationships (in laws)</li> </ul>
Family Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Initiative to take charge of one's circumstances</li> <li>- The presence of at least one significant support person during adversity</li> <li>- Acceptance</li> <li>- Looking after each other in the family</li> </ul>
Help-Seeking Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-reliance</li> <li>- Experts (including workshops)</li> <li>- Online</li> <li>- Family</li> <li>- Religiosity – knowing that things will be ok during times of difficulty</li> <li>- Friends</li> <li>- Community Support</li> </ul>

### Family Resilience

Having initiative to take charge of their circumstance is demonstrated as a key factor to family resilience. For instance, families were self-reliant in being flexible to adapt to their circumstances. In interview 5, the participant described adjusting her family's spending habits and finances to overcome troubled times, and as a result she feels content and grateful for the things that her family is now able to have:

*"I got pregnant at 19. If not, I don't think we might have thought of getting married, because at the time, I was quite an ambitious person, you know, to me career should be more important than anything but then we got married when I was 22 and he was 24... because we were very young parents, and then when my son was about five, I decided to be a stay-home mom, I would say that financially, we were living on one*

*day at a time, my husband wasn't earning much, so we really had to cut down a lot so we couldn't afford like piano class for the kids, you know, ballet, all of this we couldn't afford. We could just afford Chinese tuition, and that was it. We couldn't afford to eat out at restaurants, you know, no holidays, so we lived very frugally. So, in that sense, we can say we didn't really give our children the best that money can buy, you know, but then I would say that, that also made us appreciate everything, and now that we are a lot more financially stable, every single thing is something that we are grateful for, whether it's a holiday, you know, or a nice meal out so while we couldn't give the best to our children, now, I feel that as a family, we appreciate these things that maybe we wouldn't have appreciated if we had them easily. Yeah."*

The presence of at least one significant support person during adversity was also described as a protective factor in overcoming challenges. As reflected in characteristics of family strength, having intergenerational support in caregiving is often cited as a common support for families. Beyond grandparents, the presence of "god parents", "relatives", "a trusted friend" and having a "domestic helper" were described to support families through times of adversity. These support networks were said to help in caregiving and provide encouragement to families.

### **Help-Seeking Orientation**

Religiosity is another aspect of help-seeking amongst majority participants. Being able to "know that things will be okay during times of difficulty" gave meaning to the participants' lived experiences. Families also "prayed" together during adversity. In interview 10, religiosity was highlighted as internal resource for the participant to cope with having her husband being away during Covid-19:

*“But then when COVID hit, and he has to go back, the whole idea here was to really just one step after the next, to trust in the Lord, to just to just keep on moving. Yeah. And that I mean, then it's like uhm, a lot of prayers, a lot of trust, and a lot of faith to hope that one day when things die down, he will come back la. And which, which he did. It's just that COVID was way too long. Yeah, but a lot of, a lot, a lot of, this is where I'm gonna say a lot of trust in the divine, rather than trust in the human. So, spouse wise, not much he can do. Honestly, if my daughter's sick now, have to go to have to go to a hospital, he cannot do anything. Yeah, but I can trust in the Lord and lots of prayer. It was a time of deep talks with God.”*

Such sentiments are also concurred across different faiths. As shared in interview 11, the participant had to rely on their family members to seek spiritual support:

*“Okay, I am not like a temple going... regular temple going kind of person or anything like that. But in my heart, yes, I believe in religion. I do pray internally. Yeah. But like I said, I do not seek any kind of counsel from the temple or anything like that, because it's a language issue as well. I speak English fluently, but my mother tongue is terrible. So whoever's gonna counsel me is not going to have an easy time and vice versa. So that's why I rely a lot on my family members, especially my brother. He's a spiritual kind of man. And have you heard of this? Guru called Sai Baba? No, no. Okay. Sai Baba is actually supposed to be a Hindu guru. And his teachings are like, well, they resonate a lot. And you know, basically, it's to tell you just be calm and believe, leave difficult situations in the hands of Baba. Right?”*

Finally, more than half of the participants turn to experts; workshops (i.e., such as attending marriage preparation workshops held by religious institutions); seek

encouragement and advice from friends, family, and community; and use the internet for help-seeking.

## **Discussion**

Pertinent to Phase 1 of the study, this paper aims to understand perceptions of Singaporeans on the factors that strengthens or threatens strong families and marriages, and how do families navigate challenges through their relationships and communicative processes, while using their internal and external family resources. In general, the findings from this study support the definition of family strength defined by the set of relationships and processes that support and protect family members, specifically during times of change, that represent core communicative processes and relationships (Schrodt, 2009).

Having interviewed 47 participants, there has been strong support for the literature in three aspects: a) what constitutes marriage satisfaction and longevity (Nimtz, 2011), b) the characteristics of strong families universally (Defrain et al., 2007; Schrodt, 2009) and locally (Matthew et al., 2015) and c) family function in terms of their communicative patterns (Defrain et al., 2007; Schrodt, 2009), and family resilience (Lietz, 2006).

The findings present new culturally specific themes (i.e., intergenerational contact, shared goals) that contribute to strong families and marriages. Specific to the Singaporean context, characteristics of a strong family and/or marriage (i.e., intergenerational contact, shared goals) appear to reflect societal norms around family and the responsibility of caring for family members a collectivist culture. Such ideals are likely to be reflected in government policies that promote the formation of three-generational family units and prioritize building a nuclear family. For example, the Housing and Development Board offers priority schemes in attaining a Build-To-Order flat. Such schemes are targeted at married couples

with children, three-generational families, and families with more than two children. These beliefs appear to be consistent across time (i.e., see more at Matthew et al., (2015). It also likely indicates that while the characteristics of strong families are universal (i.e., spending lots of quality time together, being able to manage stress and crises, having a sense of spiritual well-being; Defrain et al., 2007; Schrodt, 2009), such characteristics can be culturally influenced and present differently across countries.

In filling the gap in the literature to investigate family functioning especially in the Singaporean context, this paper presents an overview of the strategies (i.e., emotional regulation, addressing conflict without criticising each other) that were adopted and acknowledged as useful to promote positive communication and conflict resolution within the family system. Similarly, this paper also describes how family resilience is being portrayed (i.e., having at least one social support, taking charge of their circumstance); and outlines the internal (i.e., religiosity, self-reliance) and external resources (i.e., using the internet, relying on experts) that families orientate to when overcoming challenges.

Finally, this paper also emphasise that family strength also encompass a set of actions (e.g., actions that indicate commitment) present in their daily functioning. As such, the outcomes of strong families are indicated by the growth of relationships within families, knowing each other more intimately and being able to communicate more effectively through crises. It is also interesting to acknowledge that characteristics of strong families (i.e., having intergenerational support) might be related to processes in communication (i.e., accepting each other despite conflict) and family resilience (i.e., the presence of at least one significant support person during adversity).

## **Conclusion**

This paper delved into the notion of strong marriages and families among people in Singapore through qualitative means. To ascertain the frequency of these ideas, their variation across participant characteristics, and their link with family outcomes, a quantitative survey is essential in Phase 2 of the study. By integrating the concepts into a supplementary quantitative phase connected to the primary qualitative findings, the overall research can achieve this objective (Clark et al., 2008). To gauge the impact of the themes identified in this paper, they are mapped onto the quantitative Phase 2 questionnaire by inspiring key constructs and measures of family/marital strength that are most closely associated with the themes. The second phase of the study therefore seeks to further investigate what strengthens or threatens strong families and marriages, uncover how do families navigate challenges through their relationships and communicative processes, while using their internal and external family resources.

While this study presents a Singaporean perspective on what strengthens and threatens strong families and/or marriages, this paper is met with limitations in the coding of interview transcripts. Given the presence of only one Principal Investigator, there might be a lack of inter-rater reliability in interpreting interview sentiments and coding it consistently into themes. To overcome such limitations in validating the codes, the formation of a code book was consistently referenced to the definitions of key constructs (i.e., communication, commitment) in the literature. The Principal Investigator also consulted with CFL Family and Marital Practitioners in having an alignment to certain interpretations and wording of major themes throughout the study (i.e., stakeholder checks; Thomas, 2003). As such, it is recommended for future research to employ more rigorous coding of thematic analyses in similar studies.

Reviews from Strong Families research have suggested areas of application to real life (Defrain et al., 2007). This paper points to the possibility that Social Service Organisations can develop programmes that addresses parenting and improving familial relationships (i.e., such as tensions with in-laws). Such programmes can be delivered through different mediums such as publishing resources on the internet and conducting programmes in person to build community support between families that are experiencing similar difficulties.

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## Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet



## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

## PHASE 1 – EXPLORATORY QUALITATIVE STUDY

1. **Title:** *Building Strong Families in Singapore: A Study of Family Strength and Resources (Building Strong Families)* **AIC IRB Reference No.:** 2021-010

2. **Principal Investigator and co-investigator(s), if any, with the contact number and organisation:**

<b>Miss Karen Lee</b> <b>Principal Investigator</b> Research, Catholic Family Life 6488 0278 karen@familylife.sg	<b>Ms Lynette Lai</b> <b>Co-investigator</b> Management, Catholic Family Life 6488 0278 (ext. 111) lynette@familylife.sg	<b>Mr Daniel Ng</b> <b>Co-investigator</b> Counselling, Catholic Family Life 6488 0278 (ext. 148) daniel@familylife.sg	<b>Ms Shirley Lee</b> <b>Collaborator</b> Management, Catholic Family Life 6488 0278 (ext. 110) shirley@familylife.sg
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3. **What is the purpose of this research?** *(Explain research briefly in layman's terms)*

*(Please start with this opening paragraph)* You are invited to participate in a research study. This information sheet provides you with information about the research study. It is important that you first take time to read through and understand the information provided in this sheet.

The Principal Investigator (the person in-charge of this research) or his/her representative will also explain this research to you and answer all of your questions. Read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to take part.

This study is carried out to understand how strong and resilient families would look like in Singapore, regardless of family life stage and family types. The core belief is that all families have strengths and the capability to face challenges and grow from it. Catholic Family Life is seeking to understand what makes a family strong, how families survive adversities, family communication patterns, the values that Singaporean families hold close, and the aspects or characteristics of strong families in Singapore, in hope that we can be able to equip families with the necessary support and resources to flourish. Catholic Family Life is aiming to survey responses that is not bias towards or against any religion. Participants from all religions are welcome to participate in this study.

Your responses will greatly inform the work we do here at Catholic Family Life, and every response will provide valuable input for us to better understand, serve, and support individuals, married couples, and families.

4. **Who can participate in the research? What is the expected duration of my participation? What is the duration of this research?**

*(Please state inclusion and exclusion criteria e.g. age, gender, health status etc.)*

Any individual aged 21 years old and above can participate in the interview phase of our research study on Strong Families. There are no exclusion criteria for our research study. Consent will be obtained from all participants prior to all interview sessions. Personal Data will be secured and protected in accordance with Catholic Family Life Limited Personal Data Policy.

The expected duration of your participation is as follow:

- One interview session between March 2022 and March 2023
- No more than 90 minutes per session

This research study will commence in March 2022 and will wrap up by July – August 2023. Research analysis will wrap up by December 2023.

**5. What is the approximate number of research participants involved?**

*(This study will involve (insert number of participants))*

The interview phase of this research study will involve individuals or couples from approximately 20 – 40 family units in Singapore.

**6. What will be done if I take part in this research study?**

*(Please describe the research procedures to be followed by the participant)*

If you take part in this research study, you will be asked to partake in one interview session, and to share your views regarding family strength, family communication patterns, family values, challenges and resources, and any other viewpoints and concerns related to the aspects of strong families.

Participants will also be asked to share about their own family, the influences of their views, the challenges they face and how these are solved, and any other aspects of their family life in relation to family strength.

**7. How will my privacy and confidentiality of my research records be protected?**

*(Please **describe the extent** to which information identifying the research subject will be kept confidential.)*

Participation in this research study may involve the collection of individually identifiable personal data and will be kept at a minimal. Only the Principal Investigator has your personal data (e.g., names and contact information) and this will not be released to any other person, including members of the research team, during the course of the study.

Any voluntary decision to leave contact information will solely be used as an invitation to join our interview session and for scheduling purposes. Personal data will never be used in any publication or presentation. All identifiable personal data will be coded (i.e., only identified with a code number) at the earliest possible stage of the research.

All responses provided in any of our phases will be kept private and confidential and in accordance with our Personal Data Protection Policy. Catholic Family Life may distribute aggregated statistical information to the Board of Directors and our grant funding organisations for reporting purposes. All data will be anonymised, and no individual will be identified in any reports.

All data collected will be stored securely in a local database accessible only by the Research staff at Catholic Family Life. Any downloaded data for analysis purposes will be password protected, with added security measures, such as anti-virus software, taken by the organisation to prevent data leakages. Catholic Family Life may retain the responses and the individual's personal data for as long as it is necessary to fulfil the research and analysis purposes, up to ten years.

**8. What are the possible discomforts and risk for participants?**

*(Please provide other details, where relevant)*

Possible discomforts are at a minimum in this research. If any, some possible discomforts for participants may include topics that the participants may find difficult to share (for example, sharing about your family-of-origin where there were cases of childhood trauma).

There are no perceived risks for participants in this research study.

**9. What is the compensation for any injury?**

*(Please state the compensation and/or treatment available to the research participant in the event of research-related injury. If no injury and/or compensation are expected, it should be explicitly stated)*

No injury and/or compensation are expected from the participation in this research study.

**10. What are incidental findings that may arise from this research?**

"Incidental findings" are findings that have potential health or reproductive importance to research participants like you/your child and are discovered in the course of conducting the study, but are unrelated to the purposes, objectives, or variables of the study. There will not be any incidental findings arising in this research.

**11. What is the cost involved for participating in this research?**

*(Please provide details if there are anticipated expenses the participant is likely to incur as a consequence of participating in this research)*

One anticipated expense that participants are likely to incur as a consequence of participating in this research includes travel expenses to interview location. There are no other anticipated expenses for the participants.

**12. Will there be reimbursement for participation?**

You will not receive any reimbursement for your participation in this study.

**13. What are the possible benefits to me and to others?**

There is no direct benefit to you by participating in this research study. The knowledge gained may benefit the public in the future via our programmes, services, and resources for yourself, other individuals, married couples, and families. Other benefits from this study may include educational videos and family resource packs that will be made available at the end of the study. All findings will be made general to all families and resource contents will not come from any religious perspectives.

**14. Can I refuse to participate in this research?**

Yes, you can. Your decision to participate in this research study is voluntary and completely up to you. You can also withdraw from the research at any time without giving any reasons and without any consequence whatsoever, by informing the Principal Investigator. Any research data obtained before the consent is withdrawn may be retained and used for research.

In the event of any new information becoming available that may be relevant to your willingness to continue in this study, you (or your legally acceptable representative, if relevant) will be informed in a timely manner by the Principal Investigator or his/her representative. There will be no other circumstances under which the participants or his/her legally acceptable representative will be contacted for further consent.

**15. Whom should I call if I have any questions or problems?**

Please contact the Principal Investigator, **Karen Lee** at **6488 0278** and **research@familylife.sg** for all research-related matters in the event of research-related injuries.

For an independent opinion regarding the research the rights of research participants, you may contact a staff member of the Agency for Integrated Care Pte Ltd Institutional Review Board (Attn: AIC IRB Secretariat at 66321197 / 66036926 or email [IRB@aic.sg](mailto:IRB@aic.sg)).

## CONSENT FORM



**Title:** *Building Strong Families in Singapore: A Study of Family Strength and Resources (Building Strong Families)*

**Principal Investigator with the contact number and organisation:**

**Miss Karen Lee**  
**Principal Investigator**  
Research, Catholic Family Life  
6488 0278, [research@familylife.sg](mailto:research@familylife.sg)

I hereby acknowledge that:

1. I voluntarily consent to take part in this research study.
2. I have fully discussed and understood the purpose and procedures of this study.
3. I have been given enough time to ask any questions that I have about the study, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. *I have been informed that participation in this research study involves the collection of my individually-identifiable research data.*
5. I may be contacted for further consent, including but not limited to changes in the proposed research.
6. I can withdraw from the research at any point of time by informing the Principal Investigator and all my research data obtained prior the consent withdrawal may be retained and used for research.
7. I will not have any financial benefits that result from the commercial development of this research.
8. I **consent / do not consent\*** to have the coded data made available for future research studies. This will be subject to an Institutional Review Board's approval.
9. By participating in this research study, I confirm that I have read, understood and consent to **Catholic Family Life Limited's** Personal Data Protection Notification.
10. I **agree / do not agree\*** to the audio-recording / video-recording of my participation in the research. I understand that although my name will be not associated with the photographs / video-recordings used in publication/presentation, I may still be identified.

*\*please delete as appropriate*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name and Signature (Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name and Signature (Consent Taker)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B: Interview Questions A

Pre-marriage	Married 0 - 5 years	Married 21 years	Single-again
<p>Could you share with us a little about your relationship?</p> <p>- When did you begin dating?</p> <p>- How were things at the beginning? Any challenges?</p> <p>- How have things changed since then?</p>	<p>Could you share with us a little about your relationship?</p> <p>- How long have you been married for?</p> <p>- When did you begin dating?</p> <p>- How were things at the beginning? Any challenges?</p> <p>- How have things changed since then?</p>	<p>Could you share with us a little about your relationship?</p> <p>- How long have you been married for?</p> <p>- When did you begin dating?</p> <p>- How were things at the beginning? Any challenges?</p> <p>- How have things changed since then?</p>	<p>Could you share with us a little about yourself and your family?</p> <p>- How would you describe the dynamics at home?</p> <p>* How would you describe relationships at home?</p> <p>* Any interesting anecdote to share that illustrates these relations?</p> <p>- What are some family values that you uphold at home?</p> <p>* Where were these values learnt from or mirrored off?</p> <p>* How are these values "enforced" in the home?</p> <p>- How does your family plan family time or bonding time together?</p> <p>* Is it made as part of the routine?</p> <p>* What do your family usually do together?</p>
	<p>- Did you attend any pre-marriage course? What did that unveil for you and your spouse?</p> <p>- How has the process strengthened the relationship or surfaced points of discussions? How did</p>	<p>- Did you attend any pre-marriage course? What did that unveil for you and your spouse?</p> <p>- How has the process strengthened the relationship or surfaced points of discussions? How did</p>	

	<p>you navigate those points of discussions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How has marriage preparation helped your relationship?</li> <li>- What are some key takeaways that you still apply to your relationship?</li> </ul>	<p>you navigate those points of discussions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How has marriage preparation helped your relationship?</li> <li>- What are some key takeaways that you still apply to your relationship?</li> </ul>	
<p>How would you describe your relationship now?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is it a big part of your individual lives? How so?</li> <li>- How would you describe the dynamic/interactions between you two?</li> </ul>	<p>How would you describe your relationship now?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How would you describe the dynamic/interactions between you two?</li> <li>- How has the relationship changed/evolved from when you were dating?</li> <li>- Role of faith – if any</li> </ul>	<p>How would you describe your relationship now?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How would you describe the dynamic/interactions between you two?</li> <li>- How has the relationship changed/evolved from when you were dating?</li> <li>* How has it changed through the various stages and situations over the years?</li> <li>* What was the biggest challenge in maintaining the relationship?</li> <li>* What has supported you throughout this relationship? – people, resources, talks/workshops etc.</li> <li>- Role of faith – if any</li> </ul>	
<p>Would you describe your relationship as “strong”?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any specific areas? What do you think has</li> </ul>	<p>Would you describe your relationship as “strong”?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any specific areas? What do you think has</li> </ul>	<p>Would you describe your relationship as “strong”?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any specific areas? What do you think has</li> </ul>	<p>Would you describe your relationship with your family as “strong”?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any specific areas? What do you think has</li> </ul>



<p>helped you make these areas “strong”?</p> <p>- Are there some areas in your relationship that are not as “strong”? Why do you feel these areas are not as strong?</p> <p>What does a strong marriage/family look like to you? Why do you define it this way?</p> <p>- How has your own families influenced the way you view marriages/family?</p> <p>What are some things that have helped you as a couple as you progress in this relationship?</p> <p>- Learning from parents, values, courses/learning (from where?)? Any support groups or community that helped you along as well?</p> <p>- As you continue to progress, do you have any fears about marriage &amp; family?</p> <p>- What support do you feel will be most helpful to those also in a similar phase of relationship to you?</p> <p>How would you describe the way you communicate?</p>	<p>helped you make these areas “strong”?</p> <p>- Are there some areas in your relationship that are not as “strong”? Why do you feel these areas are not as strong?</p> <p>What does a strong marriage/family look like to you? Why do you define it this way?</p> <p>- How has your own families influenced the way you view marriages/family?</p> <p>What are some things that have helped you as a couple as you progress in this relationship?</p> <p>- Learning from parents, values, courses/learning (from where?)? Any support groups or community that helped you along as well?</p> <p>- As you continue to progress, do you have any fears about marriage &amp; family?</p> <p>- What support do you feel will be most helpful to those also in a similar phase of relationship to you?</p> <p>What are some family values that you and your spouse hold onto?</p> <p>How would you describe the way you communicate?</p>	<p>helped you make these areas “strong”?</p> <p>- Are there some areas in your relationship that are not as “strong”? Why do you feel these areas are not as strong?</p> <p>What does a strong marriage/family look like to you? Why do you define it this way?</p> <p>- How has your own families influenced the way you view marriages/family?</p> <p>What are some things that have helped you as a couple as you progress in this relationship?</p> <p>- Learning from parents, values, courses/learning (from where?)? Any support groups or community that helped you along as well?</p> <p>- As you continue to progress, do you have any fears about marriage &amp; family?</p> <p>- What support do you feel will be most helpful to those also in a similar phase of relationship to you?</p> <p>What are some family values that you and your spouse hold onto?</p> <p>How would you describe the way you communicate?</p>	<p>helped you make these areas “strong”?</p> <p>- Are there some areas in your relationship that are not as “strong”? Why do you feel these areas are not as strong?</p> <p>- Has the idea of relationship strength changed over time from your perspective? How did it change?</p> <p>What does a strong marriage/family look like to you? Why do you define it this way?</p> <p>- How has your own families influenced the way you view marriages/family?</p> <p>What are some things that have helped you during your family journey?</p> <p>- Learning from parents, values, courses/learning (from where?)? Any support groups or community that helped you along as well?</p> <p>- What support do you feel will be most helpful to those also in a similar phase of relationship to you?</p> <p>How would you describe the way you communicate at home?</p>
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<p>- Do yall speak to each other a lot? About what topics?</p> <p>How do you make a decision in your relationship?</p> <p>- How would you both respond when encountering a disagreement/conflict?</p> <p>- Were you aware of these potential conflicts before beginning a relationship?</p> <p>- How have you or do you manage such conflicts? Where did you learn how to do so?</p> <p>What are some challenges you face as a couple today?</p> <p>- How do these challenges affect your relationship/family/social networks?</p> <p>- Has work &amp; other commitments had an impact on your relationship?</p> <p>Does your family play a role in how you view such challenges/negotiate conflict?</p>	<p>- Do yall speak to each other a lot? About what topics?</p> <p>How do you make a decision in your relationship?</p> <p>- How would you both respond when encountering a disagreement/conflict?</p> <p>- Were you aware of these potential conflicts before beginning a relationship?</p> <p>- How have you or do you manage such conflicts? Where did you learn how to do so?</p> <p>What are some challenges you face as a couple today?</p> <p>- How do these challenges affect your relationship/family/social networks?</p> <p>- Has work &amp; other commitments had an impact on your relationship?</p> <p>Does your family play a role in how you view such challenges/negotiate conflict?</p>	<p>- Do yall speak to each other a lot? About what topics?</p> <p>How do you make a decision in your relationship?</p> <p>- How would you both respond when encountering a disagreement/conflict?</p> <p>- Were you aware of these potential conflicts before beginning a relationship?</p> <p>- How have you or do you manage such conflicts? Where did you learn how to do so?</p> <p>What are some challenges you face as a couple today?</p> <p>- How do these challenges affect your relationship/family/social networks?</p> <p>- Has work &amp; other commitments had an impact on your relationship?</p> <p>Does your family play a role in how you view such challenges/negotiate conflict?</p>	<p>- Do yall speak to each other a lot? About what topics?</p> <p>- How does conversation differ between different family members?</p> <p>- Who usually initiates the conversations at home?</p> <p>- What topics are difficult to talk about for you?</p> <p>How do you make a decision in your relationship and at home?</p> <p>- How would you respond when encountering a disagreement/conflict?</p> <p>- Were you aware of these potential conflicts before beginning a relationship?</p> <p>- How have you or do you manage such conflicts? Where did you learn how to do so?</p> <p>What are some challenges you face today?</p> <p>- How do these challenges affect your relationship/family/social networks?</p> <p>- Has work &amp; other commitments had an</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does your family affect the way you look at these challenges/navigate conflict?</li> <li>- Is your family helpful in helping you negotiate these challenges/conflicts?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does your family affect the way you look at these challenges/navigate conflict?</li> <li>- Is your family helpful in helping you negotiate these challenges/conflicts?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does your family affect the way you look at these challenges/navigate conflict?</li> <li>- Is your family helpful in helping you negotiate these challenges/conflicts?</li> </ul>	<p>impact on your relationship?</p> <p>Does your family play a role in how you view such challenges/negotiate conflict?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does your family affect the way you look at these challenges/navigate conflict?</li> <li>- Is your family helpful in helping you negotiate these challenges/conflicts?</li> </ul>
<p>Have yall spoken about the topic of parenting?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- About what specifically?</li> <li>- Where did you learn about parenting from? Modelled after your own families?</li> <li>- What are some of your fears/anxiousness about parenthood?</li> <li>- What support do you feel will be most helpful to those also in a similar phase of relationship to you, with regards to parenting?</li> </ul>	<p>If they have no children yet:</p> <p>Have you and your spouse spoke about the topic of parenting?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What aspect of parenting?</li> <li>- In what ways do you think your own upbringing will affect the way you parent your child in the future? – Give example of how your parents parented you</li> <li>- What do you think you would mirror and what would you forgo?</li> </ul> <p>If they have children:</p> <p>How would you describe your parenting style and parenting motto?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In what ways do you think you own</li> </ul>	<p>If they have no children yet:</p> <p>Have you and your spouse spoke about the topic of parenting?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What aspect of parenting?</li> <li>- In what ways do you think your own upbringing will affect the way you parent your child in the future? – Give example of how your parents parented you</li> <li>- What do you think you would mirror and what would you forgo?</li> </ul> <p>If they have children:</p> <p>How would you describe your parenting style and parenting motto?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In what ways do you think you own</li> </ul>	<p>If they have children:</p> <p>How would you describe your parenting style and parenting motto?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In what ways do you think you own upbringing affected the way you parent?</li> <li>- What are other influences on your parenting style aside from family?</li> <li>- What were some of your fears/anxiousness when stepping into parenthood?</li> <li>- What support do you feel will be most helpful to those also in a similar phase of</li> </ul>

	<p>upbringing affected the way you parent?</p> <p>- What are other influences on your parenting style aside from family?</p> <p>- What were some of your fears/anxiousness when stepping into parenthood? What had helped guide you during that period?</p> <p>- What support do you feel will be most helpful to those also in a similar phase of relationship to you, with regards to parenting?</p>	<p>upbringing affected the way you parent?</p> <p>- What are other influences on your parenting style aside from family?</p> <p>- What were some of your fears/anxiousness when stepping into parenthood? What had helped guide you during that period?</p> <p>- What support do you feel will be most helpful to those also in a similar phase of relationship to you, with regards to parenting?</p>	<p>relationship to you, with regards to parenting?</p> <p>- How is parenting for you different now?</p>
			<p>How did the transition affect the family – looking at family relations, communication etc.?</p> <p>- As much as you are comfortable sharing, how did the transition affect the family?</p> <p>- Changes in relationships? Changes in dynamics?</p> <p>How was the coping and healing process for you?</p> <p>- What helped you through this period?</p> <p>- What were the resources available for you?</p>

			<p>- What would you have appreciated that would have helped you?</p> <p>What were some support factors that helped you during the transition?</p> <p>- Support systems that were present</p> <p>(From a divorce) What did the past relationship surface for you?</p> <p>- What has it made you aware of, whether it's about yourself or a general view of relationships?</p> <p>- If you are okay with sharing, why did it not work out?</p> <p>- On hindsight, what do you think would have strengthened the relationship?</p>
	<p>In terms of resources for dating couples/newly weds (married &lt;5 years), what do you think would be beneficial for you and people in similar life stage?</p> <p>What would you like to see in terms of resources?</p>	<p>In terms of resources for dating couples/newly weds (married &lt;5 years), what do you think would be beneficial for you and people in similar life stage?</p> <p>What would you like to see in terms of resources?</p>	<p>In terms of resources, what do you think would be beneficial for you and people in similar life stage?</p> <p>What would you like to see in terms of resources?</p>

If there's something that you can tell younger couples looking to enter into a relationship/ eventually pursue marriage, what would it be?	If there's something that you can tell younger couples looking to enter into a relationship/ eventually pursue marriage, what would it be?	If there's something that you can tell younger couples looking to enter into a relationship/ eventually pursue marriage, what would it be?	If there's something that you can tell younger couples looking to enter into a relationship/ eventually pursue marriage, what would it be?
What help do you feel is most relevant and helpful for them?	What help do you feel is most relevant and helpful for them?	What help do you feel is most relevant and helpful for them?	- What are some tips you will give to help others build a stronger relationship at home? What help do you feel is most relevant and helpful for them?

### Appendix C: Interview Questions B

Pre-marriage	Married 0 - 5 years	Married 21 years	Single-again
Could you share with us a little about your relationship?	Could you share with us a little about your relationship and your family?  - How long have you been married for?  - Do you have children? Or hope to have any?	Could you share with us a little about your relationship and your family?  - How long have you been married for?  - Do you have children? Or hope to have any?	Could you share with us a little about yourself and your family?  - How long were you married for?  - Do you have children? Or hope to have any?
<b>How do Singaporeans define strong families and marital relationships?</b>			
<p>Let's begin with hearing some thoughts and perspectives from you – What comes to mind when you think about a strong relationship with your partner/spouse/previous or late spouse?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How does it look like to you?</li> <li>- Thinking about yourself, how would you rate your present/past relationship on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 representing the strongest relationship you can aspire to have?</li> <li>- What keeps it at this number, and what would you wished you could do/would have done to push this value up the scale of relationship strength?</li> <li>- Could you give a few examples?</li> </ul> <p>Extra:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How often do you spend time together? What do you usually do?</li> </ul>			
<p>What comes to mind when you think about a strong family? You can think of how your family is like growing up/ or the family you currently have as a parent/aspiring parent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How does it look like to you?</li> <li>- Thinking about yourself, how would you rate your family strength on a scale of 1 to 10?</li> <li>- What keeps it at this number, and what would you wished you can do/would have done to push this value up the scale of relationship strength?</li> <li>- Could you give a few examples?</li> </ul> <p>Extra:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How does your family plan family time or bonding time together? What are some common activities for you?</li> </ul>			
<b>How do long-term married couples in Singapore build and ensure a strong relationship and positive communication patterns?</b>			
<p>One of the things that comes to mind when I think of strong relationships is how couples communicate on a day-to-day basis and navigate through conflicts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you have any stresses about marriage &amp; family? What are some common topics of conflict within your relationships/with family?</li> </ul>			

- Thinking about your day-to-day interactions with your partner/spouse/late spouse, how would you describe your communication with each other?
- What are some areas that work well for you in terms of communication? Give some examples.
- How do you navigate out of conflict? Could you give some examples?
- What do you wish that you could do differently to better navigate better communication?
- Where did you learn these (things that work) from?

Similar with your family,

- How would you describe your communication with each other?
- What are some areas that work well for your family in terms of communication? Give some examples.
- How does your family navigate out of conflict? Could you give some examples?
- What do you wish that you could do differently to better navigate through conflicts?
- Where did you learn these (things that work) from?

### **How do families navigate through everyday family life, including conflicts?**

When I think about strong families, the concept of commitment comes to mind.

Commitment is viewed as a “willingness and determination to work through troubled times.”.

- What does relationship commitment look like to you?
- What does family commitment look like to you?
- Were there times when you actively chose commitment when times were difficult? What were your challenges during that time?

#### **For Single Again:**

- As much as you are comfortable sharing, how did the transition affect the family?
- Changes in relationships? Changes in dynamics?

How was the coping and healing process for you?

- What helped you through this period?
- What were the resources available for you?
- What would you have appreciated that would have helped you?

(From a divorce) What did the past relationship surface for you?

- What has it made you aware of, whether it's about yourself or a general view of relationships?
- On hindsight, what do you think would have strengthened the relationship?

### **How can we, as an organization, support and strengthen the family unit in Singapore?**

Finally, family strength is often associated with resilience that is “the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful”.

- Could you relate to that when thinking about your experiences with family? Give some examples.



- What do you think helped with the ability to bounce back stronger from those challenges?

Often, having support and being resourceful helps with resilience.

- When you encounter difficulties, where do you usually turn to for help?
- Do you think having the same faith helps strengthen relationships?
- What has supported you throughout this relationship? – people, resources, talks/workshops etc.
- Do you plan on/ Did you attend any pre-marriage course?
- What do you hope to learn/ How did it help your relationship?
- If there's something that you can tell younger couples looking to enter into a relationship/ eventually pursue marriage, what would it be?
- What are some tips you will give to help others build a stronger relationship at home?