

Publication: SCMP Online

Date: 3 March 2024

Headline: Across Asia, a new class of childless-by-choice couples emerges: meet the DINKs

Across Asia, a new class of childless-by-choice couples emerges: meet the DINKs

- From India to Singapore and Malaysia to Dubai, more couples across Asia are making the choice to be 'Double Income, No Kids'
- Their reasons vary – and it's not always because of finances. But societal stigma persists, even in a world that's increasingly overpopulated



Seema was 14 when she first decided she did not want to have children. At the time, her mother laughed it off as a childish fancy, telling Seema she would one day change her mind.

But nearly 20 years later, the 34-year-old financial analyst in New Delhi has not wavered on her stance – deeply straining her relationship with her parents.

“They have not spoken to me in almost three years,” Seema said, asking to use only her first name to protect her identity. “I don’t know if they will ever come around to my decision.”

Publication: SCMP Online

Date: 3 March 2024

Headline: Across Asia, a new class of childless-by-choice couples emerges: meet the DINKs

Seema and her husband refer to themselves as a DINK couple – an acronym for “double income, no kids”.

Although the term dates back decades, the DINK lifestyle choice has only gained popularity in Asia recently. And it’s seen in many quarters as highly controversial – given much of the region’s conservative, family-centric cultural values – with couples who choose to remain childless often accused of being selfish at a time when countries across the region from China to Japan and South Korea to Singapore are battling rock-bottom birth rates.

Seema met her husband Rajiv while they were both studying at university. The couple were surprised to find that they shared similar views on not wanting to have children. They’ve now been married for six years.

“I was shocked to find someone who felt the same way as me about no kids,” Seema said. “Especially because in our culture, the norm is nuclear families – a mother, a father and children ... and anything that deviates from that is looked down upon.”

Despite the challenges they face, Asia’s DINK couples have become increasingly comfortable opening up about their decision – due in large part to social media, where TikTok videos showing couples sharing their experiences with the “#DINKLife” hashtag have been going viral.

Singapore couple Corinne Chow, a communications professional, and Ryan Tan, who works in commodities, shared one such video on TikTok, in which they walked viewers through what their lives looked like as a 36-year-old DINK couple.

“There’s one camp that says this is why you should have kids, and another that says this is why you shouldn’t,” she said. “For us, it is about not getting blindsided by societal constructs. If you want to have kids, that’s great. If you don’t want to have kids, that’s equally wonderful.”

Their decision to remain childless was not made due to financial pressures, Tan explained, but as a DINK couple, they do feel they have more agency over how they want to “allocate their resources”.

Publication: SCMP Online

Date: 3 March 2024

Headline: Across Asia, a new class of childless-by-choice couples emerges: meet the DINKs



Publication: SCMP Online

Date: 3 March 2024

Headline: Across Asia, a new class of childless-by-choice couples emerges: meet the DINKs

In 2021, the couple decided to launch two scholarships, awarding S\$12,000 (US\$8,900) towards tuition fees, to support disadvantaged undergraduates at Tan's alma mater, the Singapore Management University.

"To be honest, if Corinne and I had a kid two years ago, that would have made the decision to do something like this [the scholarships] very difficult ... we would want to put the money towards the upbringing of our child," Tan said.

"But at this stage of our lives, [I feel] this is a way I can give back to an institution that helped me in my life, and to benefit students who might have their own financial challenges."

Lingering stigma

Although there is a growing acceptance, especially among younger generations, of couples in Asia choosing to remain childless, observers say a lingering stigma against such a lifestyle persists at the societal level.

Delhi couple Seema and Rajiv, for instance, say they are often accused of being self-serving and individualistic.

"It's as if not having a child means I am not a productive member of my society," Seema said.

It's not that all couples who choose not to have children do so because they want to live a life free of 'responsibility'. Their motivations can be varied

Parul Bhandari, University of Cambridge sociologist

Parul Bhandari, a sociologist at the University of Cambridge, said DINK couples were often viewed as "anti-family and selfish, and seen as problems of modernity".

"The reality, however, is a bit more nuanced. It's not that all couples who choose not to have children do so because they want to live a life free of 'responsibility'," she said. "Their motivations can be varied, including for spiritual reasons, or not wanting to bring more humans onto an overpopulated planet, or for health concerns."

According to a 2024 report by independent marketing firm Gitnux, the number of DINK couples in India has been growing at a rate of 30 per cent every year.

And the phenomenon is far from limited to urban couples. Nearly 42 per cent of rural couples were childless in 2011, the last time a pan-India census was conducted, compared to 22 per cent of urban ones.

Medha Verma and her partner Aditya Jha, originally from India, have been together for five years and currently live in Dubai, where they share their home with a pet dog.

Publication: SCMP Online

Date: 3 March 2024

Headline: Across Asia, a new class of childless-by-choice couples emerges: meet the DINKs

“There was no specific reason for us to not want a kid, we just felt like parenthood wasn’t something we wanted or needed,” Verma said. “Instead, we get to focus on our interests, like travelling.

“It was not an easy decision, especially since we come from a conservative culture in India where having children is the norm, but luckily, our families have accepted our decision.”

Ultimately though, Verma attributes the lack of pressure, and awkward questions the couple have faced over their choice to their Middle Eastern move.

According to sociologist Bhandari, Indian society is “witnessing critical changes in its perspectives towards non-traditional style of families and households”.

Family structures that are widely considered non-conventional – including single-parent households and unmarried couples – are being more openly acknowledged and gaining legal recognition, she said.

Dwindling birth rates

In parts of East Asia, the stigma against childless couples may also be connected to concerns about a looming demographic crisis that’s exacerbated by falling birth rates.

In China last year, slightly over 9 million babies were born – the lowest level since records began in 1949 – and the birth rate hit a record low of 6.39 births per 1,000 people, according to the country’s National Bureau of Statistics.

Despite government incentives and handouts aimed at encouraging couples to have children, experts say many younger people are dismissive of such measures – particularly as the Chinese economy struggles to rebound from three years of economically damaging zero-Covid restrictions that had a lasting impact on people’s livelihoods and mental health.

In South Korea, which holds the unenviable record of world’s lowest birth rate, a December survey of married couples by Statistics Korea found more than a quarter of those surveyed – nearly 29 per cent of 815,357 respondents – were living the DINK lifestyle within the first five years of marriage. This marked a substantial rise from an earlier survey in 2015, which found that fewer than 19 per cent of those asked were DINK couples.

Statistics Korea attributed the shift to a number of factors, ranging from the increased participation of women in the workforce, a greater societal acceptance of childless couples, and people increasingly choosing to have their first child at a later age.

For some couples elsewhere in Asia, their choice is very much motivated by monetary factors, according to Fong Woon Bing, a financial planner based in

Publication: SCMP Online

Date: 3 March 2024

Headline: Across Asia, a new class of childless-by-choice couples emerges: meet the DINKs

Malaysia, who has noted an increase in DINK clients approaching him for advice in recent years.

“With the rising cost of living, in Malaysia and also other parts of the world, it has left a lot of couples wondering whether they want to have children,” he said.

Social media can give the impression that most DINK couples are wealthy and spend their money on travelling and material luxuries, but Fong said this was a glamorised perspective and not the reality for many.

For Kuala Lumpur-based secondary school teacher Evelyn, 42, the decision not to have children was made gradually.

“We thought about having a kid when we first got married, but honestly, [my husband] and I never felt like we were financially stable for the first few years of our marriage,” she said, requesting only her first name be used.

“We changed our minds, and now it feels like the right decision. We are more concerned [with] taking care of each other as we grow older.”