

Publication :	TODAYonline
Date :	15 June 2006
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Headline:	More speak English as a first language here

## More speak English as a first language here

EVEN as the Ministry of Education looks to improve how English is taught in schools, it has emerged that more Singaporeans are speaking it at home as a first language.

According to the General Household Survey (GHS) 2005, which was released yesterday, the number of residents preferring to use English increased across all the major ethnic groups. Compared to 2000, the proportion increased from 24 per cent to 29 per cent among Chinese, 7.9 per cent to 13 per cent among Malays and 36 per cent to 39 per cent among Indians.

The findings from this latest GHS, which is conducted once every 10 years by the Department of Statistics, also revealed that more people here are putting in longer hours at the workplace.

The average number of work hours each week went up slightly, from 47.9 in 2000 to 48.4 last year. Nearly one in five residents, or 19 per cent, spend at least 60 hours a week at work, up from 17 per cent in 2000.

This finding corroborated two recent polls on employment trends that were published earlier this year.

The first by employment management company Hudson found Singapore's workers were the most overworked and burnt-out in Asia.

The other study by ACNielsen showed that Singaporeans complained more about their working hours than any other Asia-Pacific country, with nearly one in two feeling they spent too much time at work.

Other findings of the GHS survey included the latest figures on Singapore's ageing population, with those who are 65 years and above making up 8.4 per cent of the resident population last year, up from 7.3 per cent five years prior.

Younger Singaporeans are also choosing to delay tying the knot. Those still single among citizens aged 30 to 34 years increased from 33 per cent to 37 per cent for males, and from 22 per cent to 26 per cent for females. — Lee U-Wen