

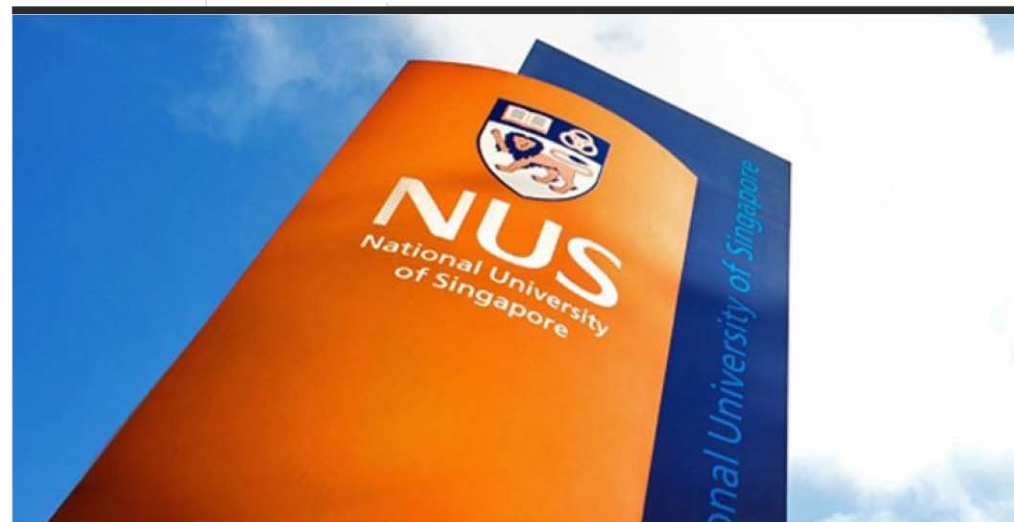
SINGAPORE

NUS launches new centre for Family and Population Research

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Tonight
POSTED: 28 Apr 2015 11:45
UPDATED: 29 Apr 2015 00:01

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PHOTOS | VIDEOS



Logo of the National University of Singapore (NUS).

CAPTION

SINGAPORE: A new Centre for Family and Population Research, launched by the National University of Singapore (NUS) on Tuesday (Apr 28), will be dedicated to research and training on family and population studies in Singapore and beyond.

Fertility and marriage, ageing and health, changing family living arrangements and family values, migration and integration are just some of the key themes it will be focusing on.

At a fertility rate of 1.2 and without any immigration, Singapore's citizen population will start to shrink from 2025. By 2060, more than one-third of citizens would be aged 65 and older. These figures were provided at the launch of the Centre for Family and Population Research.

Given that last year's total fertility rate was 1.25, supporting parenthood aspirations is a national priority. Reasons for a falling total fertility rate include delaying marriage and having children due to career demands. While these may be sensible decisions at a personal level, they have a major impact on population growth and economic sustainability.

The centre will adopt a multi-disciplinary and international comparative approach to bridge the gap between academic research with public policies that affect the well-being of the family.

Established with S\$1.5 million funding from NUS, the centre will focus on three key areas: Research, training and mentorship.

In the next few years, researchers plan to carry out comparative studies across different Asian countries on understanding and managing family stress in different life stages, retirement plans and long-term care for older adults, and healthcare needs in ageing Asia.

This is said to be timely, with Singapore facing changing demographic challenges which demand new policy attention. These include the rise in age at marriage and singlehood rates, rapid decline of fertility, the ageing population and integration of new migrants.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Grace Fu, said: "Family support, childcare options and flexible work arrangements become critical in the decision to have children. Women also expect their spouses to take up a greater share of childcare and housework.

"Research into these shifting social attitudes and needs as well as the policies that could address these changes are of significant practical value. These findings will inform policy-making to support citizens in their marriage and parenthood journeys in the most relevant and impactful way."

While the Government has been increasing its efforts to boost Singapore's fertility rate, one expert has suggested that some initiatives can go further.

Professor Jean Yeung, director of the Centre for Family and Population Research, said: "The financial incentive of this one-time Baby Bonus is not going to do it. It is going to have to be a much longer term commitment - financial support for the family. If you really want to provide more financial incentive, it has got to go deeper."

She added: "The other part that we need to do more is to promote more gender equality both at home and at work in particular. Overall, our work environment still makes it very difficult for women to leave because they are having a baby or getting married. And when they come back, they are afraid that no one is going to employ them.

"Even at the entry point, people look at them as a woman and they are thinking twice about what is going to happen if I hire this woman. This whole social environment and attitude needs to be changed."

Ageing is another issue that will be looked into. Studies in active ageing, the social and emotional well-being of the elderly and inter-generational support between the young and old will also be done.

- CNA/eg/xk