

**INSTITUTE TO BRIDGE RESEARCH AND PUBLIC POLICIES**

# New NUS centre to study family, population issues

**SINGAPORE** – The National University of Singapore (NUS) has launched a new research centre to better understand population and family issues in Singapore and Asia, as well as to bridge academic research with public policies.

Fertility and marriage, ageing and health, migration and integration are just some of the eight themes the Centre for Family and Population Research (CFPR) will focus on.

Established with an initial S\$1.5 million funding from the university, the centre will carry out faculty-initiated projects on comparative studies across different Asian countries over the next three years. Some of the research areas include understanding and managing family stress in different life stages.

Speaking at the launch yesterday, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Grace Fu said: "Norms are changing and an Asian-oriented study into the changes will give useful inputs on policy solutions in an Asian context."

CFPR director Jean Yeung said the centre will develop an interdisciplinary understanding of trends, determinants, and consequences of family and population changes, particularly in Asia, and is aimed at bridging research and policies.

One area of immediate concern that Professor Yeung identified was the persistently low fertility rates and policies to address the problem, such as the Marriage and Parenthood Package.

"The financial incentive of this one-time baby bonus is not going to do it. It's going to have to be a much longer

term commitment ... And the other part that we need to do more is really to promote more gender equality both at home and at work," she said.

Also held yesterday was a conference on Singaporean families and its population dynamics.

In a study conducted by Dr Jason Tan and Dr Lana Khong, both from the Policy and Leadership Studies in the National Institute of Education, it was found that the wealth and preferences of parents are increasingly determining the education pathways for their children. This is despite the fact that Singapore's education system is rooted in meritocracy, which aims to provide equal educational opportunities.

"Not all parents can be parent volunteers ... not all parents have the social networks to help their children get on in life ..." said Dr Tan.

In two studies on vulnerable families, researchers called for the public system to step in with more support and to make changes to public policies.

One of the studies, by Nanyang Technological University sociologist Teo You Yenn, found that the conditions faced by those with low-income meant they were limited in the ways they can "perform the idealised family", such as how they fulfil their parenting roles.

Public policies then need to relook at existing conditions the low-income demographic face and address these inequalities, such as in the areas of housing and wages, to prevent them from feeling insecure, she said.

**LAURA PHILOMIN AND SIAU MING EN**