



Social Service Research Centre
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences



In-Work Poverty and the Challenges of Getting By Among the Young Symposium 2025

15 Oct 2025 (Wed) 2:00 p.m. - 5:15 p.m.

NUS LT11

Tea break (halal-certified) provided



Programme Details & Abstracts

Programme	
Time	Details
1:30 p.m.	Registration begins
2:00 p.m.	<p>Opening Presentation: In-Work Poverty and the Challenges of Getting by Among the Young - Highlights from Recent Reports</p> <p><i>By Prof Irene Y.H. Ng, Professor, NUS Department of Social Work, and Mr Tan Zhi Han, Research Associate, NUS Social Service Research Centre</i></p> <p>Q&A Session <i>Moderator: Dr Gerard Chung, Assistant Professor, NUS Department of Social Work</i></p>
2:35 p.m.	<p>Panel 1: Origins, Family, Work</p> <p>Understanding Precarious Work Through Labour Regimes and Risks <i>By Mr Asher Goh, Research Associate, NUS Social Service Research Centre</i></p> <p>How Husbands' Shifts, Gigs, and Office Work Affect Domestic Division of Labour <i>By Dr Mathew Mathews, Head of IPS Social Lab and Principal Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, NUS Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy</i></p> <p>Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Well-being of Young Workers: Exploring the Longitudinal Impact on Health and Work-Related Functioning <i>By Dr Gerard Chung, Assistant Professor, NUS Department of Social Work</i></p>

	<p>Panel Discussion and Q&A</p> <p><i>Moderator: A/P Vincent Chua, Associate Professor, NUS Department of Sociology and Anthropology</i></p>
3:35 p.m.	Tea Break
4:00 p.m.	<p>Panel 2: Social and Human Capital</p> <p>Ties that Pay: The Effects of Ethnic Social Capital on Wages</p> <p><i>By Ms Amalia Ariffin, Student, NUS Department of Social Work and Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy</i></p> <p>Sources of Inter-ethnic Social Mixing in Singapore</p> <p><i>By A/P Vincent Chua, Associate Professor, NUS Department of Sociology and Anthropology</i></p> <p>Skills Training: Prevalence and Effects</p> <p><i>By Prof Irene Y.H. Ng, Professor, NUS Department of Social Work, and Mr Tan Zhi Han, Research Associate, NUS Social Service Research Centre</i></p> <p>Panel Discussion and Q&A</p> <p><i>By Dr Mathew Mathews, Head of IPS Social Lab and Principal Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, NUS Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy</i></p>
5:00p.m.	<p>Closing</p> <p><i>By Prof Irene Y.H. Ng, Professor, NUS Department of Social Work</i></p>
5:15p.m.	Symposium Ends

About the Symposium

This Symposium will present new findings from the research study on “In-Work Poverty and the Challenges of Getting By Among the Young” (IWP). Funded by the MOE Social Science Research Thematic Grant, the IWP research study has been ongoing since 2019 to gain new insights on the kinds of “in-work” poverty and challenges faced by low-income lower-educated young workers in Singapore (aged between 21 and 44).

Abstracts

Opening Presentation

In-Work Poverty and the Challenges of Getting by Among the Young - Highlights from Recent Reports

By Prof Irene Y.H. Ng, Professor, NUS Department of Social Work, and Mr Tan Zhi Han, Research Associate, NUS Social Service Research Centre

We highlight 14 key findings from our recent reports. The findings show that while there are improvements in many conditions since 2021, there are also reversals and emerging trends. Most significantly, a college premium persists, not only in terms of wages, but also other conditions such as differential work-family-interface, psychological well-being and cost-of-living concerns. This persistently wide college premium suggests the importance of layering onto universal policies such as SkillsFuture progressive designs to target more vulnerable workers.

Panel 1: Origins, Family, Work

Understanding Precarious Work Through Labour Regimes and Risks

By Mr Asher Goh, Research Associate, NUS Social Service Research Centre

Drawing on findings from my Masters’ thesis, study dives into the experiences of young low wage workers in Singapore. Using the concepts of labour regimes and risks, the study highlights how low wage workers’ experience of precarity in their work is mediated by their interactions with state policies, companies and other co-workers. The presentation examines the nature of precarious work, motivations for entering precarious work, and the effects of precarious work on individuals.

How Husbands' Shifts, Gigs, and Office Work Affect Domestic Division of Labour

By Dr Mathew Mathews, Head of IPS Social Lab and Principal Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, NUS Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

This presentation examines how husbands’ work conditions shape wives’ satisfaction with their involvement in caregiving and domestic duties. Based on paired in-depth interviews with 15 couples where husbands are engaged in platform economy work, shift work, or managerial/technical roles, contrasts are made between different kinds of work and their impact on the division of domestic

labour and caregiving responsibilities. The qualitative enquiry demonstrates that while traditional norms of domestic work still persist, job design, supervisor support, income security, and husbands' family-oriented dispositions can drive more equitable divisions and greater partner satisfaction and well-being.

Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Well-being of Young Workers: Exploring the Longitudinal Impact on Health and Work-Related Functioning

By Dr Gerard Chung, Assistant Professor, NUS Department of Social Work

This Singapore study examined how Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) affect young workers' health and job outcomes. Among participants, 59% reported at least one ACE, with higher rates among females, younger workers, those with lower education, and low-wage earners. ACEs negatively impacted both physical and mental health. Poor physical health reduced self-efficacy, while poor mental health decreased optimism and job security. The research demonstrates ACEs' lasting effects on workplace functioning and suggests employers should implement trauma-informed care and stress management programs to support affected workers and promote healthier work environments.

Panel 2: Social and Human Capital

Ties that Pay: The Effects of Ethnic Social Capital on Wages

By Ms Amalia Ariffin, Student, NUS Department of Social Work and Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

This study examines the relationship between social capital and wages in Singapore, with ethnicity as a moderator. Grounded in Lin's Model of Social Capital and Bonilla-Silva's theory of racialised social structures, survey data from 1,620 working adults aged 21–38 were analysed using multivariate regression and moderation analysis. Findings reveal that the wage returns from weak ties were weaker for Malays (–\$502) and Indians (–\$473) compared to Chinese workers, while returns from strong ties were also weaker for Indians (–\$504). These results underscore how racialised structures constrain returns from social capital and highlight the need for targeted, strategic interventions to expand minorities' access to resource-rich networks.

Sources of Inter-ethnic Social Mixing in Singapore

By A/P Vincent Chua, Associate Professor, NUS Department of Sociology and Anthropology

This study examines how institutional logics—the organising principles that guide action within institutions—shape the formation of inter-ethnic ties in Singapore. We compare three key sites of social life: schools, workplaces, and voluntary associations. While all offer opportunities for inter-ethnic contact, the nature and quality of these ties depend on the dominant logic at play. Schools and workplaces operate primarily under professionalising, classificatory, and market-oriented logics, which often reproduce ethnic stratification despite surface-level diversity. In

contrast, voluntary associations are driven by mission-oriented and communitarian logics that foreground shared goals and solidarities, enabling deeper forms of cross-ethnic engagement. This juxtaposition reveals a structural paradox: institutions most central to social mobility, such as schools and workplaces, also entrench ethnic boundaries, while those on the civic periphery are more conducive to bridging them. By theorising how different institutional logics condition the possibilities for inter-ethnic relations, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of the infrastructures of cohesion in plural societies.

Skills Training: Prevalence and Effects

*By Prof Irene Y.H. Ng, Professor, NUS Department of Social Work,
and Mr Tan Zhi Han, Research Associate, NUS Social Service Research Centre*

Skills training is a core component of Singapore's approach to uplift wages and maintain employability in the labour market. Drawing data from three panel survey waves of young workers, this presentation addresses the following questions: 1) Who are more likely to complete training? 2) Who benefitted more from training in terms of wage growth? 3) What were the types of training completed? Our findings suggest that access to skills training—and the wage benefits it confers—are unequal. They depend on the support and recognition of employers, who play an integral role in promoting workers' career progression.