

*Report on*

**Singaporean Women as Workers, Mothers and Caregivers: Coping with Changes, Challenges and Commitments**

18 January 2003

York Hotel Singapore

Rose Room I & II

co-organised by Family Studies Research Programme

Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis  
Asia Research Institute  
National University of Singapore

By

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This one-day workshop was organised by the Family Studies Research Programme in conjunction with the Asian MetaCentre of the Asia Research Institute. Its aim was to explore the nexus between wage employment and changes in the lives of women -- both married and unmarried. The workshop provided a forum for dialogue among academics of the National University of Singapore from the faculties of Law, Arts and Social Sciences, and the Business School. The 70 participants who attended the workshop also included representatives from the Ministry of Community Development and Sports, local women's organisations, religious groups, and business and corporate organisations.

The opening address was presented by Brenda Yeoh, Principal Investigator of the Asian MetaCentre and Chair of the Family Studies Research Programme who briefly described the aims of the Centre and the Programme. Postdoctoral fellow of the Family Studies Research Programme Theresa W. Devasahayam then described her motivation for organising the workshop, and the significance for discussing issues pertaining to working women.

The papers were organised into four panels examining women's working lives. The first panel dealt with how family law in Singapore recognises and advocates the equal participation and contribution of both men and women in a conjugal relationship. While the first paper by Leong Wai Kum elaborated on how the law supports homemaking and childcaring, the second paper by Debbie Ong showed how a working woman's preoccupation with her career may potentially affect her position in a custody battle.

The second panel, also consisting of two papers, addressed the theme of how women balance work commitments and family life. Suriani Suratman's presentation, concerned with childcare management, argues that factors outside the household may encourage or discourage participation of both men and women in household-related work. Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang's paper, while also examining the gendered dimensions of household management, focused instead on the relationships between women and the foreign domestic workers who come under their charge.

The third panel was on how work factors relate to women's lives, including their families. Theresa W. Devasahayam's presentation sought to explain the need for an eldercare leave scheme among working caregivers, arguing that it paved the way for greater equity in workplace policies for the married and unmarried employees. In her paper, Chung Yuen Kay showed the extent to which gender stereotyping persists in organisational cultures. How work travel commitments mediate job satisfaction and family relationships formed the theme of the last paper presented jointly by Paulin Straughan and Audrey Chia.

The last panel consisted of two papers presented by Gracie Wee and Linda Ang respectively. Both papers described the rationale for creating a work-life friendly Singapore and its challenges, and the reception of organisations to these work-life strategies.

The first three panels were followed by a discussion and a question and answer session, except for the fourth panel, which closed with a question and answer session only. In all panels, participants actively engaged in the discussion.

Aside from the active learning and lively discussion that the workshop provided, the Asian MetaCentre also distributed its recently-printed brochure outlining its mission and objectives. Also for distribution was its publication *Researching Migration and the Family* as well as its working paper series. The Ministry of Community Development and Sports was also actively engaged in publicising its publications. Folders containing the publications *Making Your Organisation Work-life Friendly*, *For Everything, A Season: Inspirations for Your Work and Life*, and *Wow your Employees!* were also distributed to all workshop participants. Also displayed by the Ministry were posters describing work-life strategies, and the family-friendly firm award winners. Distributing agent Taylor and Francis Asia Pacific also had their catalogues and brochures for distribution.