

Singapore should measure poverty but not only by monetary means: SMU

11 Nov 2013 20:51

A report on measuring poverty by the Singapore Management University (SMU) has called for Singapore to officially define poverty, but not solely in monetary terms.

SINGAPORE: A report on measuring poverty by the Singapore Management University (SMU) has called for Singapore to officially define poverty, but not solely in monetary terms.

The report by The Lien Centre for Social Innovation and SMU School of Social Sciences, called "Measuring Poverty in Singapore: Frameworks for Consideration", said that most Singaporeans are not aware of the country's scale of poverty due to lack of information.

Thus, being able to measure poverty could lead to greater public support to address the needs of the vulnerable.

But the report added that there are limitations to defining poverty by monetary means, such as through household income.

John A. Donaldson, Associate Professor of Political Science at SMU's School of Social Sciences, said: "Money is an indicator of poverty but it's not an actual measure of it. The question is whether this person is capable, (or) has the capabilities to lift (himself or herself) out of poverty.

"What we are calling for is more a qualitative research on different groups of people who have unmet needs, and looking more specifically at how those people experience poverty."

Separately, the government has said it wants to help people across an entire spectrum.

And having a defined poverty line may hinder this.

Social and Family Development Minister Chan Chun Sing said: "That would be very dangerous because there will be other groups of Singaporeans who may also need help but may not get the assistance, so this is something we have to be careful about.

"But on the other hand from a social perspective, we must also be careful not to stigmatise people, just by one dimension of their need, whether it is income or something else.

"We need to be more sophisticated in the way we assess the needs and to make sure that we deliver help consistently to the people."