

New NTU master's in psychology offers specialisation in death and bereavement studies

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NTU provost's chair in psychology Andy Ho and Master of Science in Psychology programme director Rebecca Nichols shared insights on the new master's-level specialisation in thanatology and community mental health.

ST PHOTO: JASEL POH



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Summary ⓘ

- NTU will launch a Master of Science in Psychology programme in August 2026, featuring Asia's first thanatology specialisation focused on death and bereavement.
- The programme addresses Singapore's need for trained professionals in grief support, as current services lack regulation despite 30,000 annual deaths.

- Other specialisations include community health, neuropsychology, and forensic psychology, aiming to enhance mental well-being and community resilience.

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Published Jan 27, 2026, 02:20 PM

Updated Jan 27, 2026, 11:12 PM



SINGAPORE – As part of efforts to strengthen Singapore's mental healthcare capacity, a new programme at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) will be the first in Asia to offer a master's-level specialisation in thanatology – the study of dying, death and bereavement.

The specialisation will allow Master of Science in Psychology students to learn how to provide bereavement support and grief intervention to individuals, families and communities facing mortality and loss.

They will also be trained in providing psychological, social and spiritual care.

The new programme will begin in August, with an expected intake of up to 40 students.

Graduates will be able to work in hospices, hospitals and palliative care settings, as well as in services offering bereavement care or crisis counselling.

Death remains a taboo topic in many Asian societies, even though conversations about the subject have opened up in recent years amid a greater emphasis on end-of-life care planning, said NTU provost's chair in psychology Andy Ho.

With about 30,000 deaths in Singapore each year, thousands of family members and friends are dealing with grief, and many are often uncertain about how to support those who have lost their loved ones, he added.

"The grieving individuals are also feeling quite alone because they may be disenfranchised in terms of their grief and not being fully understood or cared for," Professor Ho said.

While there are people providing grief counselling and therapy in Singapore, a lack of regulation means that those offering such services may not have received sufficient training, he added.

The master's-level thanatology specialisation, which has been offered at universities in North America and Europe, will be available in Asia for the first time, Prof Ho said.

It will help build Singapore's capability in this area, he added.

The Republic is placing greater emphasis on mental healthcare.

In March 2025, the Health Ministry announced that it would [work towards mandatory registration of psychologists](#) to raise professional standards in psychological services and safeguard patient safety.

The other specialisations under the new NTU programme are community health psychology, neuropsychology and forensic psychology.

Under the community health psychology track, students will be trained to develop and implement interventions addressing systemic issues at a community level, positioning them to work in community mental health centres and public health agencies, or to pursue roles in programme development and policy advocacy.

As part of the neuropsychology specialisation, students will study the cognitive and neurological underpinnings of human development and mental health.

One area of study under the track, school neuropsychology, focuses on supporting the neurodevelopmental and cognitive needs of school-aged children, preparing students to work in educational organisations, research institutions and rehabilitation centres.

They will also be able to support neuropsychological assessment and intervention in both public and private care settings.

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Meanwhile, those pursuing the forensic psychology track will study how psychological principles apply in legal and criminal justice settings, as well as in law enforcement and cybersecurity.

Graduates from the specialisation will be able to work in correctional facilities, law enforcement agencies and related settings.

These specialisations were chosen because, beyond just treating people with mental health disorders, there is also a need for training to address psychological interventions at a community level, said Dr Rebecca Nichols, programme director for the Master of Science in Psychology at NTU.

“We’re looking to train individuals who are able to serve in these capacities by the time they graduate,” she said.

Offered by NTU’s School of Social Sciences, the 1½-year programme includes 500 practicum hours.

NTU noted that the new programme complements the Master of Arts (Applied Psychology) programme currently offered by the National Institute of Education, which is targeted at the fields of educational psychology and counselling psychology.

The National University of Singapore and the Singapore University of Social Sciences also currently offer psychology at the master’s level.

“We face a pressing need for professionals to support mental health through society, not just in clinical contexts,” said NTU College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences dean Jon Wilson.

“The new Master of Science in Psychology programme fills this gap by training qualified professionals to support and enhance mental well-being and community resilience,” Professor Wilson added.

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Zhaki Abdullah is a correspondent at The Straits Times. He is on the health beat, in addition to occasionally covering science, environmental, tech and Muslim affairs issues.

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