

Key Insights

PARENTHOOD STATUS AND FAIR HIRING IN SINGAPORE





Women in Singapore are concerned about career disadvantages when they become parents. Internationally, extensive academic research has examined the “motherhood penalty”, where mothers earn less than child-free women and are less likely to be hired. Conversely, fathers experience a “fatherhood premium”, and experience more favourable work outcomes than men without children.

This study therefore aimed to examine parenthood penalties in the Singapore workplace, and how they may shape (i) employment decisions such as hiring, and (ii) the granting of flexible work arrangement (FWA) requests. This will enable the government and unions to develop policies and interventions to promote fair and progressive workplace practices.

Methodology



PHASE 1

Eight exploratory qualitative interviews with HR professionals and hiring managers



PHASE 2

Online experimental survey with balanced sample of n=2,273 working professionals (HR professionals and hiring managers versus general employees)



Discrete choice experiment (DCE)

Simulated hiring scenario where participants reviewed fictitious CVs as a hiring decision-maker for a project manager position



Randomised controlled trial (RCT)

Each participant acted as FWA request approvers with two tested factors: gender (implied via name of employee) and reason for FWA request (parenting-related or general)



Attitudinal questions

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups (motherhood or fatherhood) and were asked five attitudinal questions on perceptions of working parents and FWAs

1

Hiring decision-makers penalised parents in hiring, while general employees (co-workers) did not.

In the discrete choice experiment, regardless of the candidate's gender, HR professionals and hiring managers were less likely to hire parents than non-parents. This pattern was consistent with the views expressed by hiring decision-makers. Hiring decision-makers were more likely than general employees to believe that parenthood, regardless of gender, can constrain employees' careers.



2

Hiring decision-makers and employees within larger companies were most likely to penalise parents in hiring.

One possible explanation is that individuals in larger companies have greater experience in making hiring decisions, which could result in them relying more heavily on mental shortcuts when evaluating candidates.



3

Mothers were seen as less available for work while fathers were seen as more career-oriented.

Participants were more likely to perceive mothers as less available for last-minute or overtime requests than fathers and that mothers' work quality was negatively affected by their parenting responsibilities. On the other hand, participants were more likely to perceive that fathers had increased career motivation and drive compared to mothers.

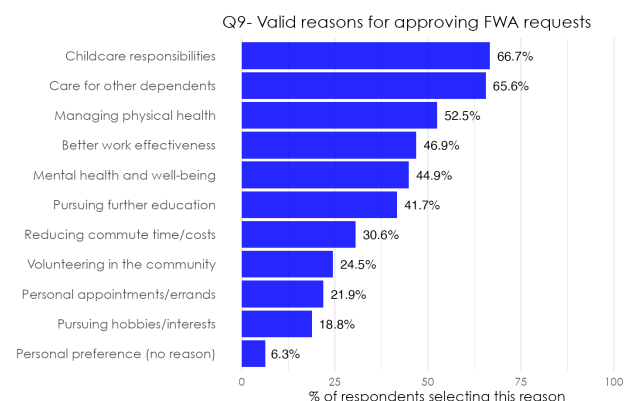
These findings are aligned with extensive literature documenting the motherhood penalty and fatherhood premium in the labour market.

4

Caregiving was perceived as the most legitimate reason for FWA requests.

An employee's gender, or whether their request was parenthood-related, did not affect the likelihood of being granted an FWA in a hypothetical scenario.

Requesting FWAs was perceived as more acceptable for socially recognised obligations, such as caring for children and other dependents, rather than as an employee benefit in its own right.



Key Recommendations

How unions can help, together with tripartite partners:

1

Promote broader acceptability of FWAs through stronger implementation support and transparency

2

Foster inclusive workplace cultures and caregiving support for all genders and life stages to mitigate bias



**Every
Worker
Matters**

