



Gender Equality in Singapore: An Action Plan for Progress

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PANEL II
Home is Where the Work is

SPEAKER

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IPS WOMENS' CONFERENCE

Gender Equality in Singapore: An Action Plan for Progress

Panel II
"Home is where the work is"

Gender and ageing from the Gerontologist Perspective

Kalyani K. Mehta, PhD.

Focus of presentation

- 1. Increase in life expectancy of Singapore residents*
 - feminization of ageing
- 2. Home is where single and married women do major share of caregiving
- 3. Elder women may be caring for spouse and grandchildren
- 4. Housework, caregiving, childminding – unpaid, undervalued work
- 5. My vision for the next decade

*In 2017, life expectancy at birth was 84.8 years according to the Burden of Disease in Singapore 1990-2017 report

Feminisation of aging increases with age

| Age (in years) | Male residents | Female residents | M:F Ratio (approx.) |
|--------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 70 years and above | 169,312 | 215,660 | 4:5 |
| 80 years & above | 47,720 | 76,254 | 2:3 |
| 90 years and above | 6,312 | 14,563 | 1:2 |

Source: www.singstat.gov.sg as of Sept 2020 retrieved on 17 May 2021.

Selected research on Family ties and Caregiving in Singapore

- 2000- 2010

- * Tsao foundation study (stress & caregiver burden)
- * Family Caregiving Project (NUS)
- * Stress of caregivers of persons with dementia (ADA)
- * PHASE -1 survey (MCYS)

- 2011 – 2020

- *The Survey on Informal Caregiving (MCYS)
- * SIGNS – 1 survey
- * Qualitative Study on Informal Caregiving (MCYS)
- *CARE Research Brief 6
- *AWARE- Make Care Count

Women are the
nurturers, homemakers &
emotional pillars

**DOES SOCIETY RECOGNISE FULLY
THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN
IN THE HOME?**

**WHY IS DOMESTIC WORK STILL
NOT CONSIDERED AN 'ECONOMIC
CONTRIBUTION'?**

**WHY ARE WOMEN EXPECTED TO
JUGGLE 2 JOBS – IN THE
WORKPLACE AND AT HOME?**



With permission granted

Grandmothers

WIVES

MOTHERS

SISTERS

DAUGHTERS

ELDER WOMEN: taking a life course perspective

- Current cohort of **elder women (70 years and above)** have **less education, less savings, and suffer more chronic illnesses** than their male counterparts
- NCSS **Quality of Life** study (yet to be published) showed caregivers >65 yrs had lower QOL compared to other caregivers
- Burden of Disease in Singapore 1990-2017 report – Singaporeans (especially women) will spend more years in **POOR HEALTH** despite the gains in life expectancy
- Informal Caregiving Survey highlighted that caregivers were likely to have their savings depleted (especially spousal carers) and negative effects were likely to lead to **depression**

Going forward – how can we create a more egalitarian distribution of housework and caregiving tasks in our homes?

Society also needs a mindset shift

- **WHY ARE CAREGIVING GRANTS MOSTLY TAPPED BY WOMEN EVEN THOUGH THE CRITERIA ARE NOT GENDER BASED?**
Is it because majority of caregivers are females, or is there a stigma for males to apply for them?

- **SOCIALISATION OF SONS & DAUGHTERS**

We need parents to treat sons and daughters in a gender-neutral way and train them to be prepared for life, so that when the situation demands they can be flexible in executing functions like cooking, cleaning etc.

Housework and caregiving should be seen as a way to show love for family, rather than a “lowly” job. Hiring of MDW has reinforced this attitude.

POLICY MAKERS – be future ready by embracing Care economy as infrastructure

- COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of being flexible, and extending care and compassion to those in our midst.
- FUTURE CARE ECONOMY- intrinsically connected with how we deal with this crisis, how the psychosocial impact of crisis is cushioned with human capital rallying together e.g. volunteerism.
- SENIORS are our nation's ASSETS – Growing manpower to be tapped skillfully

My vision for the next decade

- **Annual Paid Eldercare leave** (3 days) to be made **mandatory** for all organisations (currently it is offered only in some agencies)
- Family caregivers, especially **senior female** caregivers and those from **low income groups** to be provided much more affordable support in recognition of their sacrifices.
- For Singapore society to grow post-COVID-19, radical changes are needed in the eradication of ageism and gender biases.

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THANK YOU!