

## **Advocate proposes extended paternity leave in Singapore**

***Nurhuda Syed***

***Human Resources Director, 02 Feb 2020***

Longer, non-transferable paternity leave policies could be key to take pressure of working mothers in Singapore, according to a study by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

The study noted that the legislated two weeks of paternity leave is not enough time to contribute significantly to childcare, with one interviewee noting that “it’s just a vacation”.

Measures should also be taken to reduce the cultural stigma and gender norms around parenting, hence supporting fathers in playing more active roles at home.

Besides the two weeks, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) states that working fathers are entitled to additional ‘shared’ parental leave. Employees can thus apply to share up to four weeks of their wife’s 16 weeks of paid maternity leave, subject to agreement.

However, the IPS study did not find this ideal. An extended paternity leave should be offered on its own and be exclusive for working fathers. Increasing shared parental leave would only feed in to the idea that mothers are the “owners” of the leave, based on research in other countries.

The study's author, Yvonne Arivalagan, a research associate at IPS told The Strait Times that workplaces could also introduce a paternity cover policy.

In this policy, a temporary employee is hired for a six-month period while a staff member is on extended paternity leave – like maternity cover practised by companies.

Government policy support and communications could also highlight that being a father and caregiver is not “emasculating”, a sentiment reflected by interviewees who’ve had an average of six years’ experience as a stay-at-home father.

Addressing stigma could be helpful in encouraging use of paternity leave as well. Last year, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) found that about 65% of working fathers did not take paternity leave, and almost all (97%) did not take shared parent leave.