

Press Release

16 August 2024

**Most Singaporeans feel maternity and paternity leave too short,
but work commitments prevent taking them in full**

16 August, 2024 - Cultivate SG, a non-profit organisation that researches and dialogues on family issues in Singapore, recently commissioned a survey on Parenthood and Work with 1000 Singaporeans, including 600 parents.

Summary:

- 68% of Singaporeans say that paternity leave is too short, while the figure is at 55% for maternity leave. However, taking them in full is still a challenge, because of work commitments and circumstances.
- 3 in 5 (61%) Singaporeans agree that paternity leave makes it easier for people to have children.
- Married non-parents at child-bearing age are still largely interested in or open to having children.
- Employees prefer a temporary hire to provide cover for colleagues on parental leave than having to cover the work themselves.
- Parents are more satisfied with their decisions regarding career and having children, compared to those married without children.
- Material and financial provision continues to be the most common perceived role for fathers, while care-oriented roles dominate perceptions of mothers' roles.

Views concerning Parental Leave Matters

Currently, eligible working fathers are given 4 weeks of paternity leave and mothers are given 16 weeks of maternity leave (inclusive of 4 weeks of shareable parental leave). 68% of Singaporeans say that paternity leave is too short, while 55% of Singaporeans say the same for maternity leave. Most Singaporeans report different ideal durations of maternity and paternity leave. The median

ideal maternity leave duration (20 weeks) is more than double the median ideal paternity leave duration (8 weeks). This suggests that respondents see a difference between the respective needs of fathers and mothers.

However, taking paternity or maternity leave in full is still a challenge.

At least 1 in 5 respondents expressed that their companies have been reluctant to let employees go on their respective parental leave (21% for maternity leave; 27% for paternity leave). Fathers are more likely to point this out, and companies are reportedly more reluctant to let them go on paternity leave (among fathers, the figures are 26% for maternity leave; 38% for paternity leave).

When parents were asked what might cause or prevent them from taking paternity or maternity leave in full, almost 1 in 2 (46%) indicated work commitments and work circumstances as such possible barriers.

Paternity leave is believed to make it easier for people to have children

Most respondents (61%) agree that paternity leave would make it easier for people to have children. Parents are more likely to agree (64%) as compared to non-parents (56%).

This could be linked to another finding, where most respondents believe that paternity leave allows fathers to be more involved in their newborn's life (83%). Similarly, parents are more likely to agree (87%) as compared to their non-parent counterparts (77%).

Married non-parents at typical child-bearing age are still largely interested in or open to having children

78% of married respondents who are of typical child-bearing age (22-44) and who are without children expressed interest in having children. A majority said that they want to have children (54%), and another 24% responded 'not now' to having children. The remainder (22%) said 'no' to having children.

Overall, about 1 in 5 Singaporeans wished they had children earlier (18%). This sentiment is most pronounced among those aged 35-44 (30%). It is also higher among those who are married without children (24%).

Parents are more satisfied with their decisions regarding career and having children, compared to those married without children

55% of parents reported being satisfied with their decisions regarding career and having children. By contrast, only 30% of respondents who are married without children share this sentiment.

Less than 1 in 10 respondents (8.9%) felt that career has held them back from having children.

Temporary hires are preferred as work covers for employees on parental leave by their colleagues

The experience of covering a colleague on parental leave was overwhelmingly described as negative (86% of all points raised in collected responses). Only 4% of the points raised by respondents are positive.

By contrast, experiences with having a temporary hire cover a colleague on parental leave seemed relatively more desirable, with about 29% of the points raised as positive, and only 49% raised as negative.

Material and financial provision continues to be the most commonly perceived role for fathers, while care-oriented roles dominate perceptions of a mother

Material and financial provision stands as the top-mentioned perceived role of a father (44.6%), far above other roles such as giving moral guidance (14.0%), caregiving (14.0%) and education (13.3%).

There are, however, some differences between how a mother perceives a father's role, as compared to how a father perceives his own role. While more fathers hold "Material and financial provision" (47.7%) as a role for themselves, only 39.7% of the mothers felt that way about a father's roles. Instead, mothers regard "Caregiving" as a role for fathers (18.3%) more commonly than fathers do (11.0%).

Care-oriented roles dominate as the 3 most commonly perceived roles of a mother. Material and financial provision is hardly mentioned (6.4%) as a role for mothers.

Comments and Recommendations

Our findings suggest that Singaporeans are not averse to the idea of having children, even as many are not having as many children as they ideally want. While work commitments and circumstances affect parents and their usage of parental leave, there seem to be other reasons that are holding Singaporeans back from childbearing.

Following these findings, we have three sets of recommendations:

1. **More flexibility in work, and growing temporary hire industry.** We suggest a relook at the current work structure to consider more flexible arrangements, as well as fostering a more structured and regulated temporary work force to provide cover for those on paternity or maternity leave. This might better alleviate the pressures which frustrate parental leave policies.
2. **More feedback from parents and youths with aspirations to become parents to inform policymaking regarding marriage and parenthood.** Our findings show that only a small proportion of Singaporeans feel that their careers held them back from childbearing. In light of Singapore's fertility challenges, the Government could make more efforts in reaching out to:
 - a. **Youths, to hear their concerns and hopes for marriage and family life.**
 - b. **Young parents.** As this group may not have the time to participate in the usual feedback exercises, their views could be sought more intentionally, with feedback channels and opportunities that suit their availabilities.
3. **Explore and expand different caregiving arrangements that may better support mothers who are currently the main caregivers.** Options may include normalising greater involvement of fathers in caregiving, expanding childcare options, and involving extended family members such as grandparents. For grandparents who are providing care for grandchildren, there is room to explore ways to better recognise and support them in their caregiving functions.

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About the Survey

Cultivate SG commissioned Milieu Insight to conduct a self-administered online survey (in English only) between 20 June and 3 July 2024. 1,000 respondents participated in this survey, including 300 fathers, 300 mothers and 400 non-parents.

Due to the nature of online surveys (via a phone application), respondents tend to be from the demography that is more “connected” and technologically savvy. It may therefore not have reached respondents who are more offline and beyond the typical ready-reach for online market research panels.

For more details on the demography of our respondents, refer to Annex A in our full report. Link to full report: <https://cultivate.sg/research-recommend/parenthood-and-work-survey-2024/>

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About Cultivate SG

We are an organisation that wants to see families and society thrive for generations. We call this social sustainability. This looks like individual rights and responsibilities, stable marriages, strong families, children’s interests, a cultural climate that supports personal and family growth, and social harmony. We are committed to research, education, and dialogue on these issues to build up other people, families, and communities who share our heart. This is how we grow the good, one conversation at a time.