

Submission to Sex Discrimination and Fair Work (Respect at Work) Amendment Bill

2021

Introduction

This submission is concerning the *Sex Discrimination and Fair Work (Respect at Work) Amendment Bill 2021*. We want to propose a new policy establishment regarding gender-equitable parental leave to promote gender equality at the workplace.

Information about authors

The submission is written by four social work students from the Australian College of Applied Psychology (ACAP): Candie Ren, Joanna Pieprzycka, Urmina KC and Harjinder Pal.

As social workers, we are dedicated to advocating for social justice and human rights. Gender equality is a topic that concerns us both professionally and personally. Especially nowadays most women are taking responsibilities of both their careers and unpaid family caring roles.

This submission presents what we believe can help reduce sex discrimination at the workplace and, more broadly, Australian society.

Summary

- Challenge the assumption of only females taking the “primary carer” role or even abolish the concept of “primary carer.”
- Provide five months paid and non-transferable parental leave for both parents and additional two months that can be arranged freely by the family
- Encouraging more fathers to take parental leave and to create more inclusive gender norms.

Response

- We believe that the fact that most women taking primary leave contributes to the gender pay gap in our workplace. According to the Government report from 2018, only 5% of Australian fathers took primary parental leave, which is lower than the global standard (Walsh, 2018). The lack of fathers sharing family responsibilities encourages the mindset that it costs more money and effort to hire women and that the female employees are less dedicated to their careers. It leads to fewer opportunities for women to get higher pay and barriers to being promoted to management positions in the workplace (WGEA, n.d.). In recent years, many countries are trying to encourage fathers to share childcare responsibilities by establishing shared parental leave policies. Gender-equitable parental leave is one of the main reasons countries like Sweden and Canada have the smallest gender pay gap (Margolis et al., 2019).
- We understand that employers might assume that this policy increases their cost; however, our strategy indicates that gender-equitable shared parental leave is beneficial for employers. WGEA (2019) report indicated that companies and organizations in which fathers take parental leave show better recruitment, retention, and promotion rate. In addition, parental leave is a critical factor in employment decisions and job performance in both genders.
- Paternity leave will increase fathers' participation in child-caring which will help to facilitate father-child bonding and achieve better work and family balance. Multiple studies indicated that fathers' involvement in the early stage of children's life is strongly associated with the mental health status of the whole family (Lau, 2010; Marrs et al., 2014). Lack of fathers' participation after childbirth and early childhood is a risk factor of maternal postnatal mental illness and children's future development. Children must be provided with appropriate parenting and establish a secure attachment with both parents.

Conclusion

Upbringing and caring for a child is the responsibility of both parents; however, most of the time, women are the only ones who have to neglect their career development opportunities and hold most of the family-related responsibilities after giving birth to a child. The current policy on parental leave in Australia is not gender-equitable and does not promote gender equality in our workplace. We propose that the Government establish new and more advanced policies regarding the issue, which is providing five months paid and non-transferable parental leave for both parents and additional two months that can be arranged freely by the family.

Reference

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