

## **Paternity leave; A worldwide perspective**

Historically the caring role has predominantly been undertaken by women, be it child-rearing or looking after the vulnerable groups in society (elderly, disabled and sick). Even today this stereotyping still persists and continues to be re-inforced.

However in some parts of the world although women still play a pivotal role in taking care of the new born babies moreover men are becoming more involved. For the developing countries the issue of paternity leave largely remains an unchartered territory. For example there is no paternity leave policy in place in Ghana, Angola or Mauritius. Here in Seychelles under the law women are guaranteed 14 weeks of paid maternity leave. In the event that a father would wish to stay with his new-born baby he has the option of applying for 4 days paid leave for compassionate reasons but again it will be at the discretion of the employer or will have to take days off his annual leave allocation as there is no paternity leave laws in place at this point in time.

In essence parental leave laws can support new parents in two complementary ways; by offering job protected leave and by offering financial support during that leave. Increasing research worldwide has shown that the father figure or male presence is important if not crucial in the overall development of children.

On the other hand, the absence of a father figure in the lives of children increases greatly their risk of falling prey to various anti-social behaviour such as delinquency, deviancy and substance abuse to mention just a few. The Ministry of Social Affairs, Community Development and Sports undertook a study late last year to have an insight in the *situation of the family and its support systems*. What this study found was that the family structure is changing considerably as it is shifting from the nuclear family (father, mother, children) to single-parent families and extended families. The large number of men being reported for non-payment of maintenance at the Family Tribunal is again further proof of the need of fathers to be more responsible.

The promotion of more balanced caring responsibilities between women and men is the *raison d'être* for paternity leave being implemented in various countries which mainly revolves around the idea of promoting greater male involvement in their child's upbringing. Furthermore emotionally, paternity leave can also be very important, establishing a critical bond between father and child. The same ideal is very much relevant for Seychelles, with the need to promote positive masculinities also features strongly in the Social Renaissance programme. The *Social Renaissance* campaign is pushing for a change in attitudes in order to combat various social ills affecting our society. Likewise fathers are being called upon to play a more active role in the lives of their children regardless whether they are living with them or not. The message being driven home is that fatherhood is for life and so to is the responsibilities that come with it. Paternity leave gives men that opportunity to bond with their child and inculcate that sense of responsibility right from the beginning.

In most European Union countries men are given the choice or option to look after their baby. The approach taken in implementing paternity leave varies from country to country to take into context socio-economic circumstances. Moreover, there is considerable variation in the specific

provisions which apply in each country in respect of issues such as transferability between parents, duration of leave, financial arrangements, scope for flexibility in the way leave is taken, and eligibility conditions. This approach recognises the fact that the caring of a baby can be done by either the mother or the father. Now we will have a look on how different countries have implemented parental leave.

In Norway 12 weeks of the 56 weeks paid leave is reserved for the father. If he does not take these 12 weeks, they will be lost as they can not be transferred to the mother. The rest of the leave can be shared between the mother and father. Norwegian parents may take 46 weeks of parental leave at 100 per cent pay or 56 weeks at 80 per cent pay. Three weeks before and six weeks after the birth are reserved for the mother, while 10 weeks of the total parental leave period are reserved for the father (paternal quota).

In Sweden mothers and fathers who have been with their employer for the preceding six months or at least 12 months during the preceding two years are entitled to full leave until the child has reached 18 months (or for 18 months following an adoption). They are also entitled to a reduction in working hours until the child is eight years old or until it has finished its first year at school, with the right to return to full-time work with one month's notice. A parents' allowance is payable for 450 days (plus 180 days for each additional child in multiple births), and may be used at any time up to the child's eighth birthday. Each parent is entitled to half of the 450 days, but they can transfer all but 30 days (the so-called "father's month") to each other

In Italy following an obligatory period of maternity leave, ending three months after confinement, working mothers or fathers may apply for an optional period of leave of six months prior to the child's first birthday, and for leave to look after a sick child until he or she is three. During this leave, the pay level is fixed at 30% of the wage/salary, to be paid by the employer.

On the other hand some private companies or organisation have their own internal paternal leave policies. One case in point is that of the United Nations where male workers are guaranteed 4 weeks full pay paternity leave (or 8 weeks for staff members serving at locations where they are not allowed to live with their family).

As shown above the implementation of the parental leave varies from one country to the other. If Seychelles chooses to go along this path the provisions will have to be tailored to fit our local situation, as it will have both social and economic repercussions.