

Now, daddy takes charge at daycare ^[1]

More and more organizations are realizing that fathers are just as interested in creches at work as mothers

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EXCERPTS

A few years ago, when a global consumer goods company set up on-site daycare facilities, it was surprised by the number of applications it received. As an exasperated HR manager double-checked the numbers, it dawned on her that they had accounted for the young mothers but not the fathers.

The men also wanted to bring their tots to the facility.

There was a time when a man's involvement in childcare was virtually unheard of, but, in the last decade, the conversation has moved from young mothers to young parents.

"Raising a child is a collective responsibility and if a facility is available where fathers can work and avail daycare services at the corporate houses, it is certainly beneficial for both parents," says Nitin Arora, associate director, marketing and communication, IndiGo, who regularly uses the on-site daycare facility for his son.

In fact, more fathers are now working from home or using other flexi benefits if the need arises, says Aditya Khurana, head of strategy at Founding Years Learning Solutions, which has set up, and manages, around 45 on-site daycare centres for companies across seven cities.

Almost 55% of the employees who use their facilities are fathers, says Khurana. "Organizations should now consider the total parent count and not just young mothers when they think of childcare benefits. Since childcare is not just the mother's responsibility any more, the parents use the best of what's available to them. If a father's organization provides better facilities, the couple may decide to use that," Khurana says. Higher productivity, engaged workers and lower attrition rates are just some of the benefits that employers reap.

Moreover, creating a facility where work and family can blend seamlessly for young parents is no longer just a "nice" thing to do. The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, passed last year, made it mandatory for establishments employing 50 or more people to provide creche facilities from 1 July 2017.

Gagan Mathewan, who has an interior design business, had twins four years ago. The situation became challenging when it was time for his wife to return to work. He also realized that he wanted to spend more time with his children when he wasn't travelling on work. So, in March, Mathewan set up Monkey Business, a co-working-cum-daycare facility in Gurugram, which he runs in addition to his first business. "I wanted to create a space where parents can have a hybrid of a house and an office. If you leave your child with the nanny, you're worried all the time, and if you work from home, it's not as professional. You end up not being seen as the professional you are, and not being the parent you want to be," says Mathewan, who now takes his children to work every day.

[Info graphic available to view online, "Where fathers matter: The countries which offer the longest parental leave" (OECD)].

Working parents are a large part of the employee workforce. Providing parental support, therefore, isn't just important, it's increasingly gender agnostic. "The reality is that more and more people are living in nuclear families. Hence, it becomes imperative for both spouses to work as a team to help each other have a long, fulfilling career. Stereotypes have been broken and organizations play a crucial role in creating this enabling environment," says Manika Awasthi, associate vice-president, HR, IndiGo.

It takes a village to raise a child, albeit one with strong Wi-Fi.

Asian paradox

South Korea offers its dads the longest parental leave at 53 weeks, slightly ahead of Japan's 52 weeks. Despite that generous allowance, very few fathers in both countries take advantage of it as they fear the career implications. The US is one of nine OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries with no paid parental leave for fathers. Source: Statista.com

4 lessons from Sweden on being child-friendly

Parents are entitled to 480 days (each parent is entitled to 240 days) of paid parental leave when a child is born or adopted. Parental leave can be taken until a child turns 8. Parents can legally reduce their normal working hours by up to 25% until the child turns 8. Parents still get 80% of their pay when they have to stay home with sick children. Source: Sweden.se

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