

Working mothers in a dilemma ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

KATHMANDU: Working mothers in Nepal are torn between taking up a full-time job to support their children or staying home to take care of them.

Although the Labour Act 1991 states that an organisation having more than 50 female workers should establish day care centres for meeting child care needs of working mothers, except for Singha Durbar, there is no such centre in the country.

According to the Act, offices should arrange a healthy room where female workers can breastfeed their children as required, during their working hours.

But the provision differs for thousands of mothers working in the private sector.

Manamaya Bhattarai (35), a section officer at National Vigilance Centre at Singha Durbar, however, considers herself a lucky working mother to have her nine-month-old daughter admitted at the Child Day Care Centre in Singha Durbar where she can frequently breastfeed her daughter.

After her three-month maternity leave Bhattarai resumed work in March. "At the time when I had to leave my daughter at home, I used to worry about her the whole day and could not concentrate on my work," recalled Bhattarai.

According to her, she travelled back and forth from her office at Pulchowk to home during lunch hour to breastfeed her daughter.

"Something as natural as breastfeeding has now become a challenge for modern working women in the country," said Bhattarai

"Even though the government advocates exclusive breastfeeding for six months, we get only 60 days of maternity leave," said the section officer asking policy makers to ensure the right of the mother to breastfeed their children.

Similarly, Deepa Bhattarai, a computer operator at Ministry of Energy also shared the same story. She used to visit her daughter more than twice before she admitted her six-month-old daughter at the centre.

She, however, feels for thousands of other women who are deprived from their fundamental right to breastfeed their children.

Women rights activist Renu Rajbhandari said failure to establish the centre is against Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Convention on the Rights of the Child that the government has committed to fulfil.

Stressing the need to formulate policies to create an environment to breastfeed their children in both formal and non-formal organisations, Rajbhandari urged the government to extend maternity leave to promote exclusive breastfeeding for holistic development of children.

"Workplaces which provide space and time for mothers to continue breast-feeding, profit in terms of increased productivity, reduced parental absence, higher rate of return to work and increased staff loyalty," said Rajbhandari.

Breastfeeding provides optimal nutrition for infants and has proven to reduce health risks for both infant and mother.

Meanwhile, Ministry of Labour and Employment spokesperson Buddhi Bahadur Khadka informed that the ministry was working to amend the current labour act to address the needs of working mothers.

The ministry will work in close coordination with trade unions and the private sector to establish day care centres in the near future, he added.

-reprinted from the Himalayan

Region: Asia ^[2]

Tags: maternity and parental leave ^[3]

mother's labour force participation ^[4]

work/life balance ^[5]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/12/08/working-mothers-dilemma> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/asia> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/maternity-and-parental-leave> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8142> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/5668>