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TACKLING CHILDCARE: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare in Myanmar

December 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication was produced by IFC under the overall guidance of Henriette Kolb, Head of IFC's Gender Business Group.

This initiative was led by Ellen Maynes under the leadership of Amy Luinstra, IFC Gender Lead in East Asia and the Pacific, with contributions from Hnin Nwe Nwe Aung, Roshika Singh and Rudaba Nasir. The team would like to thank Ashani Chanuka Alles, IFC Myanmar Acting Country Manager, Khin Thida Maw, IFC Myanmar Country Officer, Camille Annette Funnell, IFC Communications Head for Low Income and Fragile States - Asia and the Pacific and Kaye Mon Lin, Communications Consultant for their help and inputs.

The report was prepared in collaboration with an external consultant team from Factive Consulting led by Dean Laplonge. The team included Thiri San, Moh Moh Aung and Zunzu Zuhan.

IFC would like to thank the businesses that agreed to participate in this research and the employees of these businesses who gave their time to discuss experiences, share ideas and later participate in validation workshops. These businesses are: ACLEDA MFI Myanmar Co. Ltd., Alpha Power Engineering Company, De Heus Myanmar Ltd., Fullerton Myanmar, IGE Power Co. Ltd., KBZ Bank, KEB Hana Microfinance Ltd., Maha Agriculture Microfinance, Parami Energy Group, Shwe Taung Group and World Bank Group.

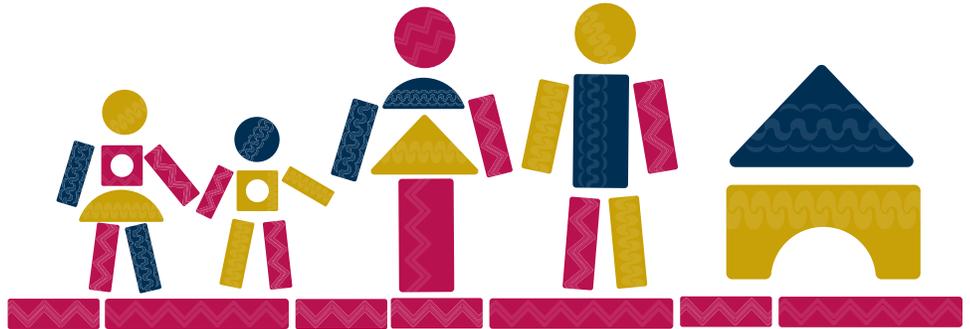
The report also benefited from valuable inputs made by other Myanmar businesses and organizations including: Alive and Thrive, CARE Myanmar, CITTA Consulting, Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Gender Equality Network, How She Did It, Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business, Myanmar Institute of Directors and UNICEF.

We would like to acknowledge the support of the World Bank Group's Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality. The Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality (UFGE) is a multi-donor trust fund administered by the World Bank to advance gender equality and women's empowerment through experimentation and knowledge creation to help governments and the private sector focus policy and programs on scalable solutions with sustainable outcomes. The UFGE is supported with generous contributions from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

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Executive Summary

When companies support their employees to balance their childcare responsibilities with their work obligations, there are many benefits. Working parents are more motivated and less distracted when they know their children are well cared for. Companies can enjoy increased productivity and reduced absenteeism and can attract and retain talented employees. There are many different ways a company can provide childcare support to its employees, ranging from relatively low to high cost. Some examples include paid parental leave, breastfeeding rooms, family-friendly work policies, flexible working arrangements or an on-site childcare center.

This study aimed to understand how childcare responsibilities are impacting employees working in the private sector in Myanmar. The study assessed employees' current childcare arrangements, their satisfaction with these arrangements, and how childcare responsibilities affect the employees' ability to attend work on time, work to their full potential and remain employed. No previous research has been done to explore these impacts or to present solutions to Myanmar's business community and its employees.

The business landscape in Myanmar is rapidly changing. Women's participation in the workforce has increased. Companies are improving business and human resources practices to succeed in a challenging market. Despite this progress, working parents are limited in their options for childcare support. Only 7 percent of parents with preschool-age children who participated in this study use a private childcare center. Many do not consider this option because centers are not available or accessible. Women continue to experience pressure to leave the workforce when they have children and are delaying or foregoing childbirth as a result.

Traditionally, family members are the preferred option for childcare, with 86 percent of parents relying on a relative to provide care while they are at work. However, this option is becoming more challenging for parents. Today's parents have different values and concerns. 22 percent of parents are living separately from their preschool-aged children. Three in every five parents (61 percent) expressed concern about their children's safety,



and over half (56 percent) said they worry about the health of their children. Parents also raised a concern about children's access to new technology and social media.

The study is based on survey responses from nearly 800 employees from 11 Myanmar urban-based businesses across various sectors, as well as focus group discussions with almost 250 employees and interviews with more than two dozen managers. The findings are intended to provide recommendations for Myanmar businesses on how to better support the needs of working parents and to realize the business benefits of employer-supported childcare.

The results indicate that businesses can benefit from efforts to help working mothers and fathers manage their obligations at work alongside their childcare responsibilities. These employees are seeking a variety of childcare alternatives to meet their needs and to enable them to pursue successful careers. Myanmar companies lack awareness of the impact of these childcare responsibilities on business performance. Employees believe that by increasing support for childcare, employers will benefit from improved productivity.

KEY FINDINGS

- Nine in 10 employees with children said their childcare responsibilities impact their work.
- More than half of parents with preschool-age children reported being absent from work for at least one day during the past month because of their childcare responsibilities.
- Childcare responsibilities affect both working fathers and mothers. There is no significant difference between the rate of mothers (89 percent) and the rate of fathers (91 percent) who reported an impact on their work.
 - Fathers are slightly more likely to be late for work or leave work early, whereas mothers are slightly more likely to have to take time off.
 - Men and women are equally likely to have turned down a job offer.
 - Working mothers are twice as likely as working fathers to quit a job.
 - Working mothers are also less likely to be able to take opportunities to attend a training course or accept a promotion as a result of their childcare responsibilities.
- Failure to address the childcare needs of their employees is impacting the performance of Myanmar businesses. For example, lack of employer-supported childcare is affecting employee retention and turnover. Approximately 20 percent of employees said they and/or their partner had left a previous job because of childcare responsibilities.
- 37 percent of parents with preschool children said they do not use a childcare center because there is no such facility near their home.
- A significant proportion of female and male employees in the private sector are delaying having children so that they can continue their career. This demonstrates the loyalty of skilled employees and their commitment to their careers.
- There continues to be pressure on women to exit the workforce after having children. This pressure comes from family members, peers and work colleagues. In Myanmar society, the belief that the primary role of women is to have and look after children is deeply embedded.
- Some Myanmar businesses are beginning to realize the benefits of employer-supported childcare. Some of the businesses that participated in this study are starting to implement innovative and progressive solutions. Much of this support is offered only informally and not according to any documented policy. Most managers had limited knowledge and appreciation of the extent to which childcare responsibilities are affecting their employees and the performance of their businesses.
- A clear and consistent policy for flexible working was the number one benefit employees said would help working parents better manage their childcare responsibilities.

Approximately 20 percent of employees said they and/or their partner had left a previous job because of childcare responsibilities.



1. Introduction

In Myanmar, most parents rely on childcare offered by family members, especially grandparents. In the absence of affordable and easily accessible childcare centers, this is the cheapest and most convenient option. In some cases, this means the parents are living separately from the child. For family members to support each other with childcare is part of the traditional social framework in Myanmar. However, generational differences in attitudes towards nutrition and discipline mean that younger parents are growing concerned about this kind of arrangement. While they continue to trust older family members to care for their children, they also worry about the ability of non-professional caregivers—like grandparents—to ensure their children eat healthy food and stay safe.

Social norms in Myanmar are changing rapidly, especially in urban areas. One impact of these changes is the increased opportunity for skilled women to enter the workforce in more diverse roles. While the labor participation rates in Myanmar continue to differ significantly for men and women (approximately 80 percent compared to 50 percent¹), there has been a greater increase in these rates for women than for men², especially in high-income jobs³. The rates of university enrolment are higher for women than men in Myanmar – approximately 1.4 female students are enrolled for every male student.⁴ For businesses in Myanmar, the skilled female labor market presents a welcome solution to the skills shortage. And yet, there continues to be pressure on women in Myanmar to exit the workforce after having children. This pressure comes from family members, peers, work colleagues and employers.

In Myanmar, employees in the private sector are entitled to maternity leave (14 weeks) and paternity leave (15 days). These entitlements are outlined in the Social Security Law (2012), Leave and Holidays Act (1951) amended in 2014 and Factories Act (1951) amended in 2016. The Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR) are the lead ministries involved in the provision of Early Child Care and Development (ECCD) services. A law for operating childcare centers was passed in 2014 – The Law Relating to the Early

Childhood Care and Development. This law outlines regulations relating to staff qualifications, child-teacher ratios, age of children and required permits.

The topic of support for employees with children is currently not high on the agenda for businesses in Myanmar. Some international agencies and local not-for-profit organizations are making efforts to improve specific issues related to employment and childcare. These include ensuring women can breastfeed during working hours and promoting improved regulation of early childhood education. But most employers are unaware of the extent to which the childcare responsibilities of their employees are affecting productivity and business performance. Equally, most employers are unaware of the many different options they could consider to support their employees who have children, and how this support could improve business performance.

Currently, few employers in Myanmar offer family-friendly policies, practices or benefits for their employees who have children. Two of the businesses that participated in this study manage on-site childcare centers. In many of the other businesses, employees are permitted to arrive later or leave work early if they need to take care of their children. Some employers offer cash payments to employees when their child is born. And in many workplaces, employees offer assistance to colleagues who are struggling to meet deadlines or complete work tasks because their child is sick. The majority of this support is informal and not backed up by formal workplace policies.

IFC recognizes the many benefits that employer-supported childcare can bring to working parents, their children and businesses.

Following research into employer-supported childcare support in Bangladesh, India, Fiji and Sri Lanka⁵, this study on childcare in the private sector in Myanmar is part of a global initiative on employer-supported childcare that grew out of IFC's 2017 report *Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare*. That report demonstrated, through global evidence and case studies from 10 countries, that investing in childcare

¹ International Labor Organisation, 2015, *Myanmar Labour Force, Child Labour and School to Work Transition Survey*, p. 11.

² Asian Development Bank, 2016, *Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Myanmar: A Situational Analysis*, p. 40.

³ See <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/myanmar>.

⁴ See <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/myanmar/education-statistics?page=3>.

⁵ https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/topics_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/gender+at+ifc/priorities/employment/tackling_childcare_the_business_case_for_employer_supported_childcare.

Currently, few employers in Myanmar offer family-friendly policies, practices or benefits for their employees who have children

has multiple benefits for a business – reduced absenteeism, higher productivity and a more motivated and committed workforce. The ability of skilled working parents to remain in the workforce is one of the most important benefits. Furthermore, childcare support from employers can improve the company’s reputation among potential employees, shareholders and investors, clients and customers.

This study provides a foundation on which to build greater awareness about the business case and good practices for childcare needs among employers in the private sector in Myanmar. The results indicate that working mothers and fathers are having difficulty balancing their work and childcare responsibilities. For example, parents might be late for work or need to leave early, worrying about the safety of their children during the day and arranging care for babies when the mother is ready to return to work. Employees believe that by increasing support for childcare, working parents will be better able to manage their work obligations and employers will benefit from improved productivity.

This report provides insights on how employer-supported childcare can help parents as employees – their ability to be productive, their retention, and their career opportunities and aspirations. It presents a strong business case for employers in Myanmar to provide more secure and consistent support to help their employees manage childcare responsibilities.

1.1 Study Methodology

This study aimed to understand how childcare responsibilities are impacting employees working in the private sector in Myanmar. Including to identify good practices and strategies adopted by employers to provide childcare support for their employees; and to understand better the legal framework and existing landscape of childcare in the country. Through an assessment of the existing childcare needs of employees working in large businesses in Myanmar, the study aimed to establish the business case for employer-supported childcare and to identify childcare solutions that would work specifically for Myanmar businesses.

The study explores employees’ current childcare arrangements, their satisfaction with these arrangements, as well as their childcare concerns and needs. To identify the impacts on employers, the study looked at how childcare responsibilities affect the employees’ ability to come to work on time, work to their full potential while in the workplace and remain in employment. The study also considers the impact childcare responsibilities have on employee’s partners⁶. In addition, some consideration was given to how childcare arrangements and impacts might differ based on the age of the child, if the child had a disability or special needs, and if the parents were single parents or same-sex parents.

Research used a similar approach to the study conducted by IFC to explore the business case for childcare in Fiji.⁷ Survey questions were used from that study and adapted to the Myanmar context.

Eleven private sector businesses participated in the study.⁸ These businesses represent four major sectors in Myanmar – finance, agriculture, energy and construction. Collectively, these businesses employed 3,427 workers as of September 2019.⁹ A total of 794 employees completed the study’s survey. An additional 243 employees participated in focus group discussions and 27 senior personnel (mostly line managers and human resources managers) were interviewed.

⁶ “Partner” is an inclusive term used to describe a person with whom one has an intimate relationship. It can include a spouse. It can also include a person to whom one is not married, but who is considered equal to a spouse. This term was used in the research to ensure inclusion of intimate partnerships where the two persons are not legally married.

⁷ IFC, 2019, *The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare in Fiji*.

⁸ Two businesses owned by the same parent company were counted as one.

⁹ Two businesses did not provide a total employee count, so the total number of workers across the 11 participating businesses would, in fact, be higher.

The study employed a mixed method approach, using the following four data sources:

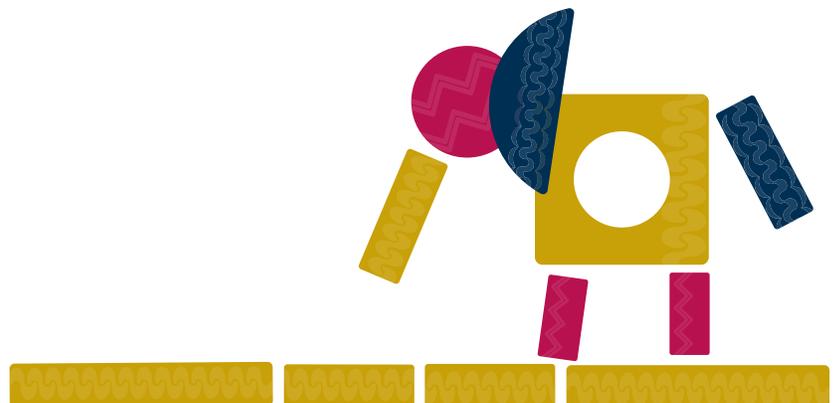
1. Human-resources data on employee demographics, absenteeism, turnover and uptake of parental leave benefits.
2. Employee survey completed during August and September 2019 by 794 employees across the participating businesses. Most of the respondents (92 percent) reported having a university degree.
3. Focus group discussions with employee groups at each of the participating businesses. A total of 45 focus group discussions were held, including 131 female and 112 male participants.
4. A total of 37 key informant interviews were conducted with 10 stakeholders¹⁰, 12 human resources managers and 15 other employees with responsibilities for managing employee work performance or health.

Of the 794 employee survey respondents, 63 percent were female and 37 percent were male (Figure 1). This is a higher ratio of women to men than the average female to male population ratio across the businesses – of the total 3,427 employees, 55 percent are female and 45 percent male. This is also different from Myanmar’s general population, which is approximately 52 percent women and 48 percent men.¹¹ Two employees identified as being of non-binary gender.¹²

Figure 1: Share of female and male respondents



A majority of employees who completed the survey were between 25 to 34 (55 percent) years of age. The percentage of employees between 18 to 24 and between 35 to 44 were both 19 percent.



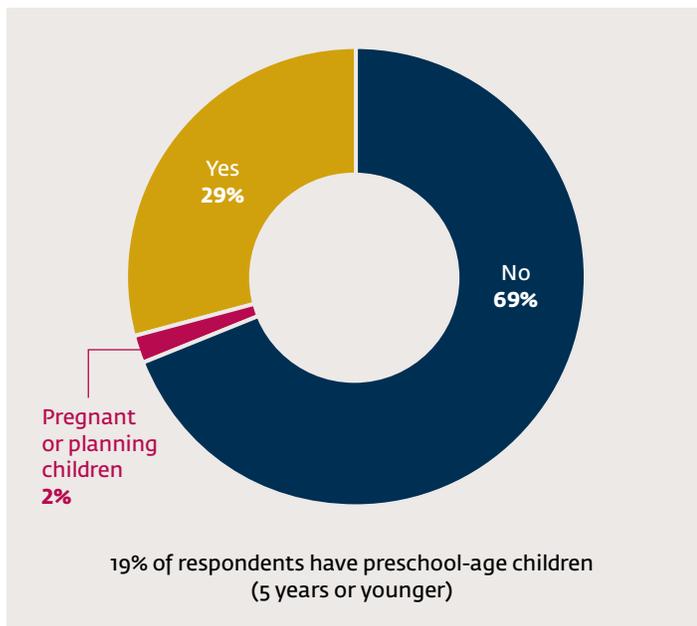
¹⁰ Stakeholders were representatives of international and national non-government agencies and private consultancies working on childcare in Myanmar.

¹¹ Source: <https://data.worldbank.org>

¹² Non-binary gender refers to identifying as neither male nor female.

Fewer than one-third (29 percent) of the survey respondents said they have children under the age of 18 (Figure 2). This is significantly lower than the percentages of women who have ever had a child in the Union of Myanmar (57 percent) and in Yangon specifically (61 percent).¹³ The number of survey respondents who have preschool-age children (aged zero to five) is 147 or 19 percent of the survey respondents.

Figure 2: Share of respondents with children



1.2 Limitations

- The total number of participating businesses is lower than the initial target of 15. Attempts were made to explain why the study was relevant to all employees and all businesses, and to educate employers about the different options for childcare support that employers might consider. There were, however, three key barriers to participation:
 - Concern the study intended to argue the case for establishing costly childcare centers in workplaces.
 - Not seeing the study as relevant because the majority of employees in a business did not have children.

- Not seeing the study as relevant because the business did not currently offer any childcare support to its employees.

These three barriers relate to specific comments made by managers and business owners when they were invited to participate. It is also possible that some managers and business owners did not see the link between childcare and profitability, and therefore viewed childcare research and childcare as irrelevant to their business operations. We can make this assumption because the study shows that employers in Myanmar have relatively low awareness of childcare options or benefits.

- The finance sector was somewhat over-represented in the research data, because of active participation from this sector in the study. In total, six of the 11 participating businesses were from this sector. Employees working in this sector completed almost 70 percent of surveys. The study findings are, therefore, more representative of the finance sector than other sectors.
- Of the 11 participating businesses, a single business accounts for 44 percent of all survey respondents. The four businesses with the highest survey response rate account for 85 percent of all responses. The study findings are, therefore, also more representative of the employee population in these four businesses.
- All the businesses that participated in the study have their head offices in Yangon. Many have sub-branches and operations outside this city, and employers were encouraged to share the survey with all their employees. The overall results may, however, be more reflective of the situation in Yangon.
- The study did not include exploring the childcare practices and needs of employees who work outside an office space. While the survey was available for all employees to complete online, many – women working in rural settings, for example – may not have had the ability to access or read it. This means there is a gap in this report concerning understanding of how childcare responsibilities affect the labor force who work outside an office space.

¹³ Data taken from *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census*.



In Myanmar, working parents are limited in their options for childcare support. Only seven percent of parents with preschool-age children who participated in this study use a private childcare center.



2. Impacts of Childcare Responsibilities on Employees

2.1 Findings

Existing childcare arrangements

Only 7 percent of employees with preschool-age children (“parents”) said they use a childcare center as their primary method of managing childcare arrangements while they are at work. These results include employees who make use of a childcare center provided by their employer at their workplace. Most parents (84 percent) said the service was not provided by their employer. On average, parents who use a childcare center do so for 27 hours per week.

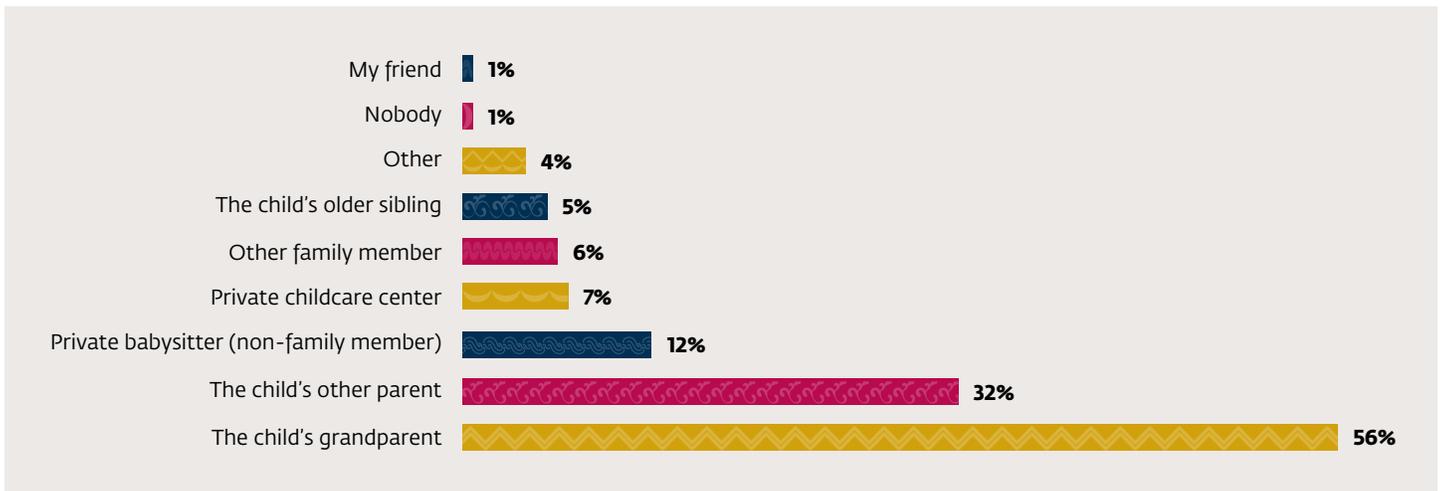
More than three quarters (86 percent) of parents rely on a relative of the child – the other parent, a sibling, grandparents or another family member – to provide care while they are at work. The study found that 22 percent of parents are not living in the same house with their preschool children.

Figure 3 shows the range of caregivers that parents rely on for childcare while they are at work. Among the employees with preschool-age children who responded to this question, 31 percent selected more than one option indicating they have multiple care arrangements.

In the focus group discussions, participants with children were asked to explain the reasons for their choice of childcare arrangements. They emphasized social norms and trust as the main reasons why they rely on grandparents for childcare.

- *Social norms.* One participant noted there is a “trend in that grandparents take care of their grandson and granddaughters.” Another participant said it was “because of the culture” that “family members who are not working take care of the children.”
- *Trust.* Participants spoke about grandparents being “reliable” and how it was considered a safer option for a child to be cared for by a family member instead of by a stranger. In contrast, there was some concern about the lack of formal training and qualifications for private babysitters. A few participants said it was unsafe for children to be left in the care of babysitters, who they also labeled as “strangers,” because they had seen media reports or YouTube videos showing babysitters mistreating children.

Figure 3: Current care arrangements for parents with preschool-age children



Other reasons why parents primarily rely on family members to care for their children while they are at work include the high cost of private childcare, concerns about a lack of attention to the safety of children in childcare centers and discrimination against children by staff working in these centers. For 37 percent of parents, they do not use a childcare center because there is no such facility near their home. If there were, 30 percent said they would make use of it and an additional 50 percent said they would consider doing so.

In some cases, participants expressed heightened fears of having anybody other than a relative look after their children because of isolated stories they had seen in the media about cases of child sexual abuse, trafficking and kidnapping. Several parents expressed a fear of their children being “stolen by a stranger.”

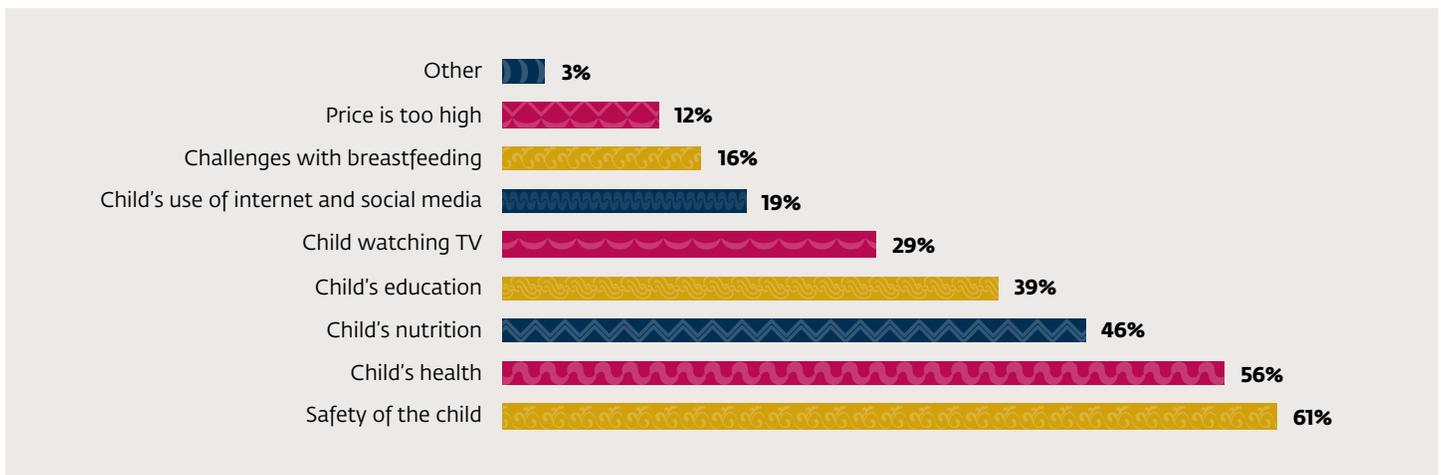
No parents with preschool-age children who have a disability (from a total of 8) said their child was looked after in a childcare center or school. Other employees suggested that a “disabled child’s parents will have few choices of childcare centers,” and those centers that accommodate children with disabilities would be “expensive.” For unmarried working parents, the most common method of childcare is the child’s grandparent (64 percent).

Concerns about existing childcare arrangements

When asked how satisfied they were with their current childcare arrangements, 73 percent of parents said they were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied. Satisfaction is higher when the children are being cared for by the child’s mother or father, who is not at work (83 percent) in comparison to the child’s grandparent (71 percent). Among parents who use a private childcare center that is not provided by their employer, 59 percent are somewhat satisfied and 19 percent are very satisfied. Overall, fewer than one in 10 (9 percent) of the employees said they were somewhat dissatisfied or dissatisfied with their current childcare arrangements.

These results appear somewhat contradictory given the extent to which working parents also said they are concerned about their children while they are at work. Three in every five parents (61 percent) expressed concern about their children’s safety and over half (56 percent) said they worry about the health of their children.

Figure 4: Concerns with current childcare arrangements



Participants expressed concerns about the capacities of grandparents to do a good job caring for children¹⁴. These concerns included:

- *Energy to care for the child.* Participants were concerned that aging grandparents did not have enough energy to look after the children all day. As one participant said, “grandparents usually take a nap in the afternoon.”
- *Level of attention.* Some participants were concerned that grandparents used the television as a babysitter, allowing the children to watch cartoons and movies for hours instead of interacting with them.
- *Approach to nutrition.* One participant said that “grandparents don’t have up-to-date knowledge about adequate nutrition and supplementary food, and they don’t want to accept our suggestions, so we worry about the children’s nutrition.”
- *Methods of discipline.* Grandparents were seen to have different attitudes towards how best to discipline children. One participant shared how they reacted when they discovered their child had been physically punished. “Beating and comparing with other children should not be done. I have to reduce [my] anger. I told the family member not to beat the child very strictly.”

The generational gap between grandparents and parents is the cause of some growing misapprehension among working parents about the quality of childcare that older family members can provide. This may lead to calls for changes in the current social practices of childcare, resulting in an increased demand for safe, quality and affordable private childcare options outside the home.

Children’s access to new technology and social media was commonly raised as a concern by working parents. Some said their children were being allowed by family members to spend too long using their phones. They feared this might affect their “communication practices,” vision and nervous system, or lead to

“addiction” of technology and social media use. They were also worried their children might be accessing “unsuitable” websites, including pornography and age-inappropriate movies.

For younger children, the major concerns of parents are nutrition, slow educational achievements and bullying by other children. Single mothers face social discrimination and are often considered less capable of managing childcare and work. Their children are subjected to regular bullying about “having no father” by other children.

Impacts of childcare on work and career progression

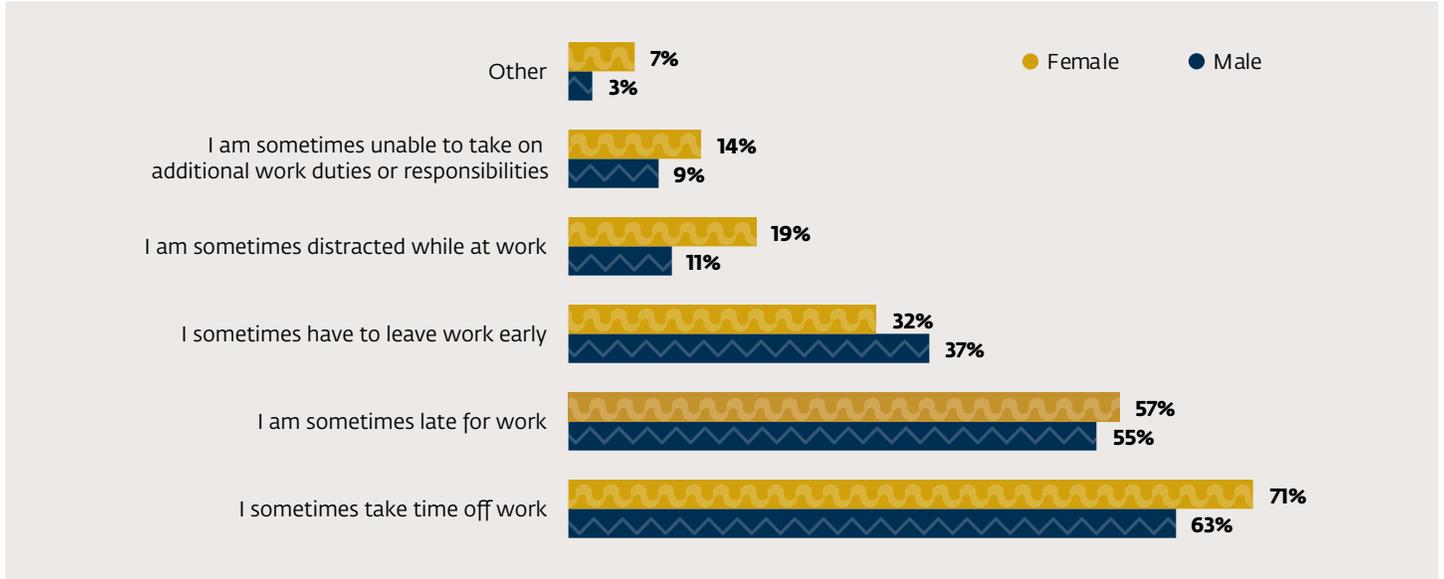
Of the total number of employees with children under the age of 18, 90 percent said their childcare responsibilities impact their work in some way. There is no significant difference between the rate of mothers (89 percent) and the rate of fathers (91 percent) who reported some impact on their work. Among parents of preschool-age children, 91 percent said their childcare responsibilities impact their work. This rate stays the same for parents of children up to 12 years old. However, the rate is slightly reduced for parents of teenagers (84 percent).

The most common ways that childcare responsibilities impacted on parents of preschool-age children include taking time off (67 percent), being late for work (56 percent) and leaving work early (35 percent). Mothers are more likely to take time off work to care for their children than fathers – 71 percent compared to 63 percent. Fathers of preschool-age children are slightly more likely to leave work early due to childcare responsibilities – 37 percent compared to 32 percent.

While approximately three-quarters of parents said they were satisfied with their current childcare arrangements, just under two thirds (64 percent) do not have any backup arrangement if their current childcare arrangement falls through.

¹⁴ The study did not include interviewing grandparents who look after children while the parents at work, to explore how they feel about having this responsibility. It is possible there could be some mutual dissatisfaction with this arrangement, with some grandparents wishing they had more free time to rest or pursue their activities.

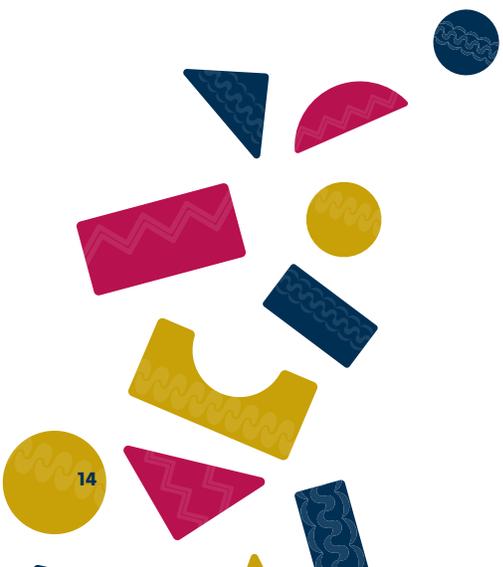
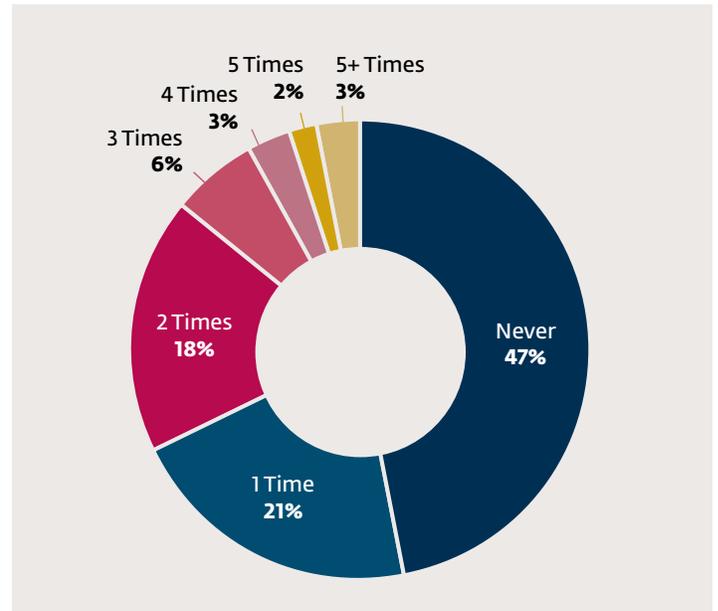
Figure 5: Impacts of childcare responsibilities on work for parents with preschool-age children



ABSENTEEISM

Half of the parents (53 percent) reported being absent from work for at least one day during the past month because of their childcare responsibilities. For 14 percent, the number of days of absenteeism was three or more. Both men and women reported occasionally missing work because of childcare responsibilities, although this was slightly more common for women (57 percent) than for men (49 percent).

Figure 6: Frequency of absence during previous month for parents with preschool-age children because of childcare responsibilities



During the focus group discussions, some employees said they would like to take time off, but feel pressured to stay at work to finish deadlines. Others are concerned that taking time off to manage their childcare responsibilities would mean their colleagues would have more work to do. In both cases, parents identified this situation causes them stress. A line manager confirmed that, when a parent with significant work responsibilities takes time off, other staff do have “difficulties” because they have to take the “burden for completing the additional work.”

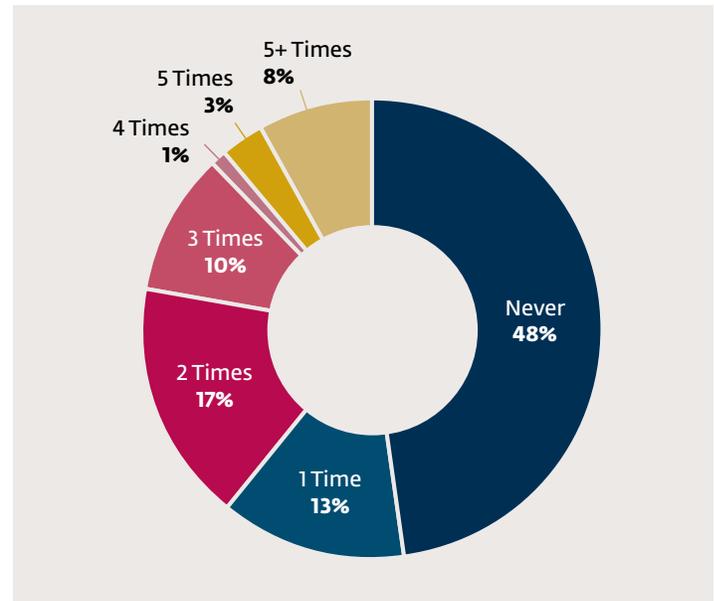
One female participant explained how her husband had to take time off work to care for their sick child because her employer did not allow her to take leave every time. Another mother requested a month of leave to care for a very sick child but was only granted two weeks of leave.

One participant insisted a parent would always prioritize their child’s wellbeing over their job if they were forced to make a choice – “A job can be substituted, but the child cannot. If a parent experiences an emergency case, he or she will leave even from a meeting.” Another explained how parents—especially mothers—are sacrificing their own need to take sick leave so they can save up available days for when their children are sick.

ARRIVING LATE AND LEAVING EARLY

Almost three in every five (59 percent) parents with children under the age of 18 have either arrived late for work or left work early during the previous month because of their need to care for their children. Parents with preschool-age children are more likely to have been impacted this way – 65 percent compared to 55 percent with school-aged children. Fathers were slightly more likely (67 percent) to report arriving late or leaving early than women (64 percent). For parents with preschool-age children, 22 percent have been late for work or left work early three times or more during the past month.

Figure 7: Frequency of lateness in previous four weeks for parents with preschool-age children because of childcare responsibilities



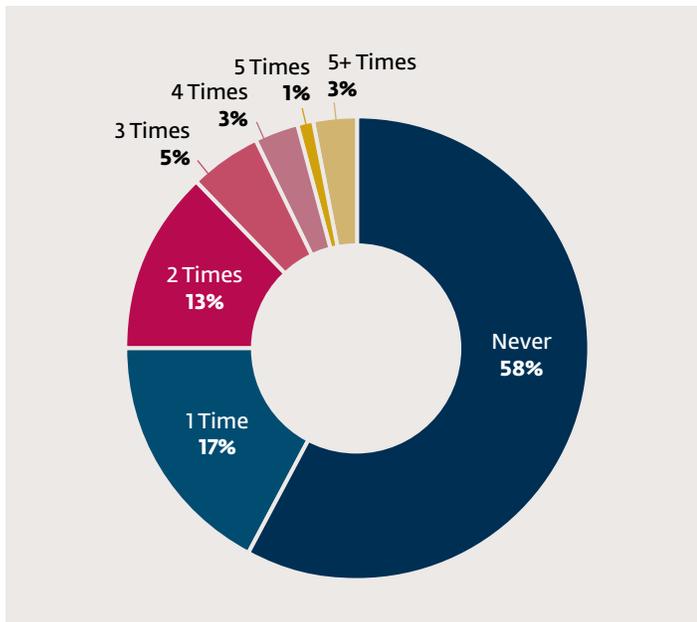
It is normal for parents to prioritize the well-being of their children and to take time off to meet their childcare responsibilities. In many of the focus group discussions, however, participants said there are financial penalties or verbal warnings for being late. In some cases, there is some more flexibility – a parent is allowed to be late a few times before the penalty applies or before a verbal or written warning is issued. However, many employees complained about the lack of understanding their managers have regarding their childcare responsibilities. One employee noted an example of this was when managers expected employees to work overtime, sometimes until as late as seven o’clock in the evening. While this participant recognized this situation is “not okay for mothers,” they also admitted that “we do not say anything about this.”

The results strongly suggest that in all businesses, leaving without first seeking approval from a line manager or the human resources manager is not allowed. Sometimes, employees have to wait for a pass to be issued before they can leave the workplace. In some cases, parents arriving late to work are required to submit a retrospective request for half a day’s leave.

PRESENTEEISM

Qualified and highly skilled parents are frustrated and embarrassed at having to balance their commitment to their employer with their childcare responsibilities. Being distracted at work affects 41 percent of all parents with children under the age of 18. Women in this group are more likely to be distracted by their childcare responsibilities than men – 45 percent of mothers compared to 37 percent of fathers. Parents of preschool-age children are notably more distracted (42 percent) than parents of teenage children (31 percent).

Figure 8: Frequency of being distracted in previous four weeks for parents of preschool children because of childcare responsibilities



Among parents with preschool-age children, 12 percent have felt distracted while at work three times or more during the past month. Participants in the focus group discussions identified that worrying about what the child is eating and if they are safe affects their creativity and concentration at work. They also recognized that parents spent more time making phone calls to check on a child, especially if the child is sick. Another factor that leads

to distraction is a concern by parents they may be punished at work for taking time off or arriving late to fulfill their childcare responsibilities.

While employees generally spoke about trying their best to support each other to manage childcare responsibilities, one line manager noted there were times when parents who are coping with sick children “get easily angry and may shout at other colleagues.” Such behavior would contribute to an unpleasant work environment in which employees might feel upset and therefore, might not be able to concentrate on their work fully.

Line managers saw competing impacts. On the one hand, they identified that employees who are parents sometimes make errors at work and are unable to finish work tasks. On the other hand, some line managers suggested that being a mother incentivized a female employee to work harder to provide the best for her children and to show an example to her children of what it meant to be a successful working mother.

The overall finding of this study indicates that working parents in Myanmar strive to be as productive in their workplaces as their colleagues who have no children. Sometimes – and understandably so – their childcare responsibilities demand their attention. Parents try to find ways to limit the impact this has on their work because, as much as they are committed to looking after their children, they are also committed to being good employees. Some of the employees’ comments suggest that working parents are embarrassed about how their childcare responsibilities affect their performance at work. For one employee, it is clear that childcare responsibilities make working parents tired, but “we try our hardest not to let these responsibilities affect our work.” Improving employer-supported childcare can help working parents achieve this goal.

TURNOVER

Survey results show that 5 percent of employees have quit a job in the past because of their childcare responsibilities. There is very little difference between women and men – the rate is 5 percent for female employees and 6 percent for male employees. In the survey, employees were also asked to identify any potential impacts that childcare responsibilities had on their partners. The percentage of employees who said their partner had left a job because of childcare responsibilities is significantly higher, at 15 percent. This result shows that more women than men have left their jobs because of childcare responsibilities: 22 percent of men reported that their partners had quit their jobs compared to only 7 percent of women.¹⁵ By combining employee data with partner data, we can observe that 26 percent of working mothers are likely to have quit a job, versus 13 percent of fathers, because of childcare responsibilities.

One employee—a participant in a focus group discussion that included only males with no children—claimed that “They [employees with children] already have a plan to leave the job. They have already collected enough money after taking all the leave entitlements. So, it is like an excuse to leave the job.” This position fails to consider how women in Myanmar continue to be placed under significant social pressure to leave their job after giving birth. During the focus group discussions, other employees consistently spoke about women leaving their jobs permanently after having children. And many employees gave specific examples of friends or colleagues who had done just that.

The average rate of turnover during the past 12 months across the businesses is 11 percent.¹⁶ When disaggregated by sex, there is a slightly higher turnover for men (12 percent) than for women (11 percent). The study did not seek to explore in more detail the range of reasons for employee turnover in the businesses. But some human resources managers acknowledged that turnover rates would likely reduce if employers offered more support to help employees manage childcare responsibilities. There are multiple costs to business related to turnover – including recruitment and

selection, training and productivity. Globally, these are estimated to be on average 20 percent of an employee’s salary, but up to 213 percent depending on the job and employee skills.¹⁷ If turnover can be managed and reduced by providing working parents with childcare support, this could result in a reduction of these costs to a business.

CAREER PROGRESSION

For 50 percent of employees, their childcare responsibilities had at some time in their career prevented them from attending a training course or completing their studies. More than twice as many women (68 percent) said they had experienced this situation compared with men (33 percent). One female employee explained this situation by simply saying, “We don’t get enough time to study or learn for career development.” Another employee explained that training courses were often made available after work hours or on weekends. This made it difficult for them to attend because “I have to stay with my child and complete domestic work.” Going on business trips, attending conferences and participating in work social events are activities that working mothers identified as difficult to do.

Among survey respondents with children, 10 percent of women and 8 percent of men said they have been unable to accept a promotion because of their childcare responsibilities. When combining employee data with partner data, the results show significantly more women than men have had to make this decision – 20 percent compared to 11 percent. The survey results show that men are more likely to have turned down an offer of a new job because of their childcare responsibilities – 12 percent of mothers compared to 17 percent of fathers said they had. When we include the number of partners of employees in the results, the rate is the same for men and women – 30 percent. In several focus groups, employees said they had quit a job in the past because of their childcare responsibilities. Many participants also said they knew a colleague who had made this decision or who had turned down a promotion because of childcare responsibilities.

¹⁵ This result assumes that when the employee is talking about their partner, they are referring to a partner of the opposite sex.

¹⁶ This is based on the results from nine of the businesses. Two failed to provide relevant data.

¹⁷ IFC, 2017, *Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare*, p.25.

There is one additional highly significant finding from the quantitative data collected during the focus group discussions. In previous research, results showed that female employees in the financial sector might be delaying having children or might not be having children at all to remain employed.¹⁸ In this study, there is a strong indication that female employees across all sectors are making this choice. 75 percent of men and 100 percent of women in focus group discussions said they were not having kids or had delayed having children to remain employed.

In Myanmar, there continues to be intense pressure on women to quit work when they have children. Many women internalize this pressure and apply it to other women, who may already be coping with pressure from society, their family and husband to comply with this cultural norm.¹⁹ And so, they delay childbirth – which allows them to work for longer but does not challenge dominant social attitudes towards gender roles. The rate of women in this study with children (22 percent) is low compared to the rate in the general population in Myanmar (57 percent). As one employee admitted, “After getting married, I will not consider having a child 80 percent. I am afraid of losing the opportunities for work and career improvement when I have childcare responsibilities.”

Employee preferences for childcare support

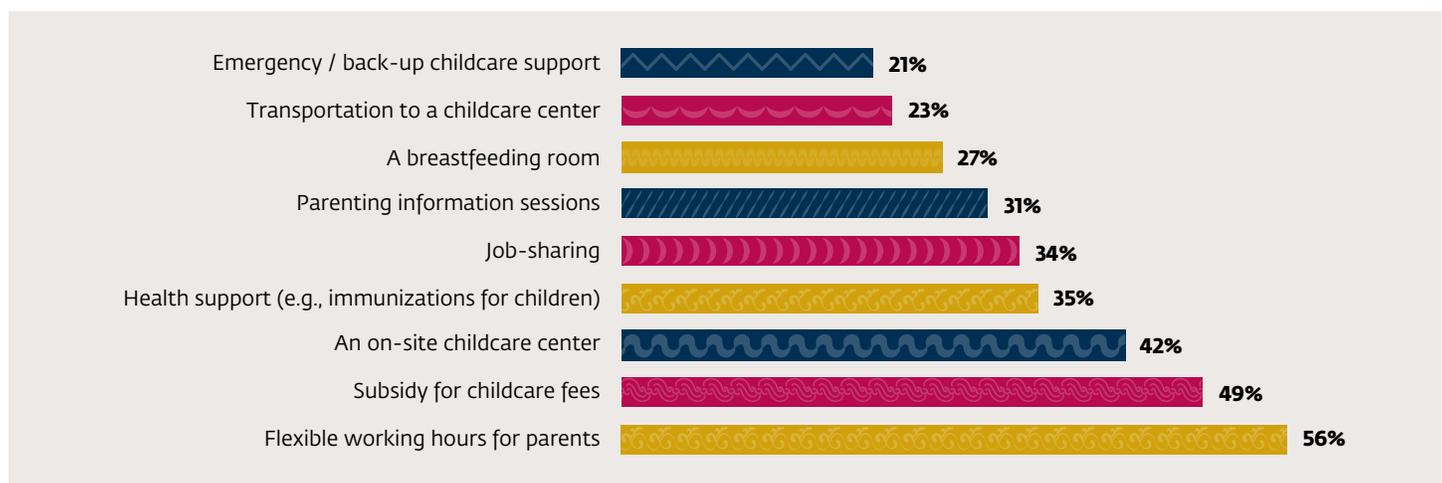
Employees who completed the survey were asked to select from a range of possible childcare support options they thought would benefit them or their colleagues if offered by their employer.

FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

The most commonly selected idea for how employers could support working parents was flexible working hours – 56 percent selected what one employee described as “very comfortable and convenient for parents.” One employee suggested the introduction of this practice might help reduce concerns for parents about having their salary cut or being criticized by colleagues when they are late for work. The overall impact, they suggested, would be that parents might feel less stress. A few other employees shared this view. In Myanmar business culture, however, a high value is placed on face-time – the amount of time an employee is seen by their colleagues and manager to be present in the workplace. While employees might wish they could have flexible working hours, they might be less reluctant to request this arrangement.

Overall, the study found that employees do not have extensive knowledge about the different ways a work role or working

Figure 9: Desired childcare-related benefits as identified by all survey respondents



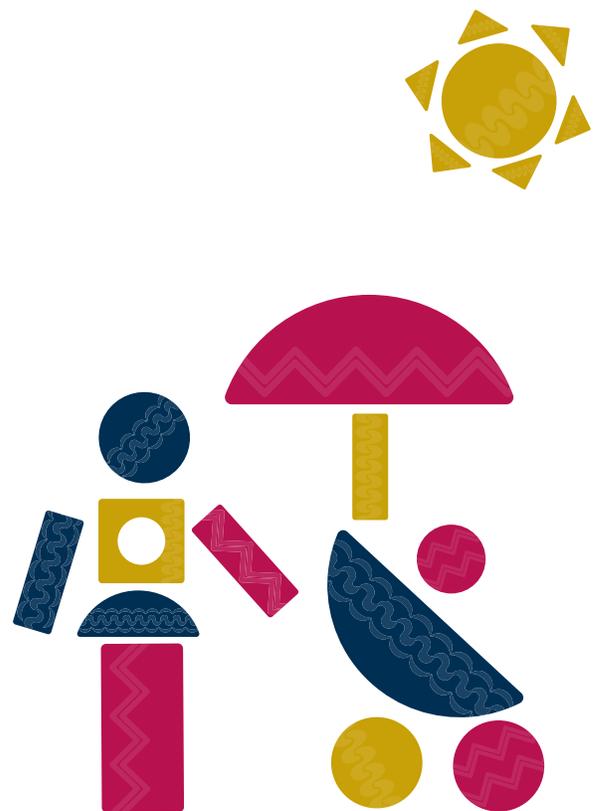
¹⁸ See the report from IFC’s research on sexual harassment and bullying in workplaces in Myanmar, available [here](#). This hypothesis is explored further in Appendix B, where the results of this study are used to test out its validity.

¹⁹ See International Labor Organisation, 2018, *Weaving Gender: Challenges and Opportunities for the Myanmar Garment Sector*.

practices could be changed. In the group discussions, employees did not raise the possibility that somebody could work 10 hours a day in exchange for one day off a week. Nor did they discuss the possibility that somebody could start work earlier than most other employees so they could also leave earlier. There were very few references to how flexible working hours might benefit employees with children. One employee considered that flexible working hours might be especially more convenient for employees who had children with disabilities. This position reflects a general acceptance among employees that these parents face particular difficulties managing their childcare responsibilities and accessing assistance. A strong conclusion of this study, however, is that both employers and employees in Myanmar need to be made aware of the range of options for childcare support.

Globally, flexible working arrangements are being recognized as good practice to help attract and retain a diverse, skilled and productive workforce. They offer working parents more control over their working hours. This approach can be a low-cost option for a business to support employees with children – an approach that has a high impact on improving recruitment and retention, as well as improving employee morale by displaying the value the business places on diversity.²⁰ Introducing a formal approach – driven by policy – to flexible working arrangements in a business in Myanmar could help address concern among working parents that by arriving a little bit late or by taking time off to attend to childcare responsibilities, they are causing problems for their colleagues. It could also help parents make arrangements that allow them to continue to be fully productive employees even if they are not present in the workplace during regular working hours.

Other options for flexible working arrangements include job sharing, a condensed work week and allowing employees to customize their work hours. During the focus group discussions, it became apparent that, when translated into Myanmar language, “job-sharing” is more often understood to mean helping out a colleague with a specific work task. The formal practice of job-sharing is not widely known or practiced in Myanmar workplaces. The survey provided respondents with a definition for this term: “Job-sharing is when two or more people share the same job. For example, two people may work half-time each to make up a fulltime role.” And 34 percent of the respondents selected job-sharing as an initiative they believe would help working parents.



²⁰ See IFC, 2017, *Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare*, pp. 64-66.

CHILDCARE CENTER

Of the 147 employees who have children under the age of six, 32 employees (22 percent) said they use a childcare service. Parents with children under the age of six account for 84 percent of employees who use childcare services, with the need for such services reducing considerably as children reach school age. In total, only 38 employees who completed the survey use a childcare center – 33 use a private childcare service and five use an employer-supported childcare service.

Opening and managing an on-site childcare center is one way employers can provide childcare support to employees. 42 percent of the employees who completed the survey identified an on-site childcare center in their wish list of employer support for parents. In the focus group discussions, employees said this kind of arrangement would ensure mothers could check on their children and breastfeed regularly, while also being able to focus on their work. Others suggested it would make the company more attractive to potential employees and “improve the company’s reputation and good image.” Not every employee is in favor of this option. Some suggested it would create a distraction for mothers, who might constantly be checking in on their children, and that this would, therefore, reduce productivity. Noticeably, employees did not assign the same risks and potential outcomes to fathers.

As Figure 9 shows, an on-site childcare center is not the most commonly selected option for what employers could do to help working parents. During the group discussions, employees made a total of 41 comments that included a suggestion on what employers could do to help support working parents. Only three of these identify an on-site childcare center. The majority of comments were instead concerned with improving the quality of care and education available in Myanmar.

There are significant costs involved in creating and managing a childcare center in a workplace. In the case of one business, the total setup cost was approximately 30 million kyat (equivalent to almost USD 20,000). Annual running costs are approximately 50

percent more. Not every workplace can afford to offer this type of support for employees with children. And not every business is equipped or qualified to manage a childcare center. Even when offered, there can still be barriers for parents to make use of this service. Among survey respondents with children below school age who do not place their children in a childcare center while they are at work, 16 percent said that transportation was a barrier. In those workplaces where there is a childcare center available, 19 percent said it was difficult to travel to the childcare facilities. Parents do not feel safe traveling to work with their children on public transport.

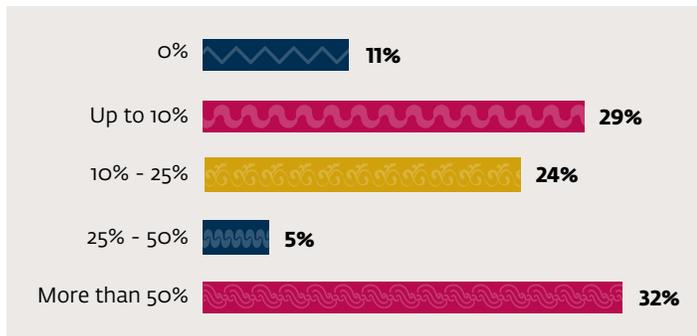
The cost of placing children in childcare centers is also a concern for working parents. Among employees who currently do not place their children in a childcare center, 29 percent say this is because of the cost. For employees who use a childcare center outside their workplace, the average cost is 15,145 kyat (USD\$9.87) per day. For the employees who use an employer-supported childcare center childcare, the daily cost ranges zero to 5,000 kyat (USD\$3.26).

Almost half the employees (49 percent) said they would like their employers to provide subsidies to help cover the costs of placing their children in childcare. This arrangement does not require the employer to take on the responsibility and costs of building and operating a childcare center, but it does help to address employees’ concerns that childcare is too expensive. Employees were asked if they would use a childcare center near their home or near their workplace if one were available. In both cases, almost four in every five employees said yes, or they would at least consider this as an option to help them meet their childcare responsibilities.

Despite concern over the costs of placing children in childcare, 89 percent of working mothers and fathers also said they would be willing to pay more for better quality childcare.²¹

²¹ Figure 10 shows a combined result of 101 percent. This is because of the rounding method used for the individual percentages. To avoid subjective bias in the results by manually altering one of the percentage results, a consistent rounding method is maintained.

Figure 10: How much more parents would be willing to pay for a better quality childcare service



For employees, better quality childcare means ensuring providers address the concerns they have about the current standards of childcare centers. Feedback during the focus group discussions highlighted the improvements that parents want to see in how childcare is offered. These include:

- protecting the child from risk of accident while playing or being exposed to dangerous animals and insects
- ensuring childcare staff pay close attention to interactions between children to prevent discrimination, bullying and fighting
- improving the skills and capacities of teachers, as well as their teaching and communication styles, through proper accreditation of training programs for childcare staff
- making sure children are provided with healthy and nutritious food and limiting their consumption of fast food or sugary drinks
- monitoring children’s use of television and computers
- ensuring childcare staff are more attentive to the specific needs of individual children, such as required medications or learning and social interaction difficulties
- ensuring childcare staff treat all children fairly and equitably, without discrimination

Stakeholders – representatives from international and national non-government organizations that undertake work to improve childcare in Myanmar – share many of these concerns. They are especially interested in seeing more formalized approaches to training and accreditation of childcare center staff and the transparent monitoring of childcare services. Several raised concerns that parents in Myanmar do not fully appreciate the importance of early childhood development. There is increasing recognition of the importance of early education globally. But one stakeholder said that in Myanmar, most parents want the teacher to do everything for the child. They want teachers to “help the children to wash their hands, to write, to eat and to do all the matters. So, the children start to rely on other people too much. For us, we want the child to be independent. But parents are satisfied with those approaches. Most of the childcare centers are struggling to get the parents’ agreement to change.” Another stakeholder emphasized the importance of nutrition and playing as part of early childhood development, but said that many parents “only value the teaching of the English language.”

More than three quarters (86 percent) of parents rely on a relative of the child – the other parent, a sibling, grandparents or other family members – to provide care while they are at work.

Employer responses

Across the businesses that participated in this study, there are already some childcare support practices in place. Employees identified these in the survey.

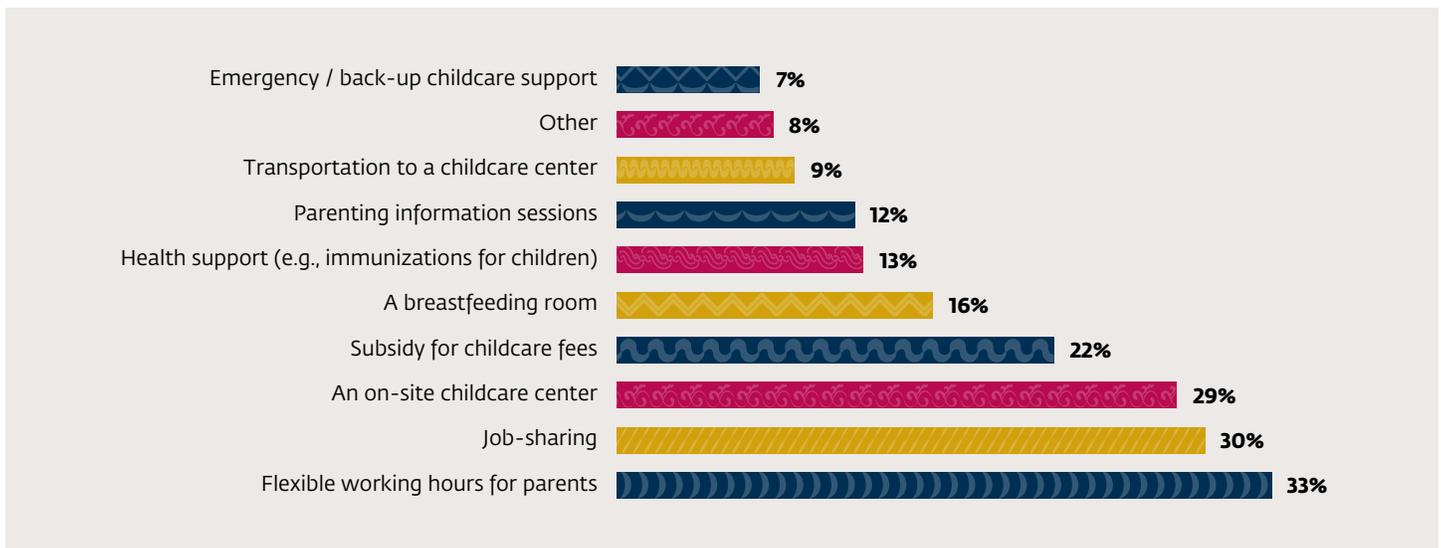
The focus group discussions with employees and the interviews with line managers and human resource managers revealed that most of the participating businesses currently offer some childcare support to their employees. This support includes:

- Maternity leave and paternity leave as per the law
- Flexibility in working hours, especially when a child is sick
- Cash allowances provided at the time of birth with ranges from 100,000 to 430,000 kyat
- Some subsidies to support medical and education expenses of children

- Additional time off to attend formal school events (e.g., graduation)
- Breastfeeding facilities (either a room and/or a refrigerator)
- Information sessions on health and nutrition
- Emergency leave
- Health insurance schemes

In most cases, these are informal practices rather than the outcome of documented policies intended to support working parents with children. This means that childcare support in a particular business risks not being applied universally, consistently or equitably. A lack of formal policies may also indicate that employers have not yet fully considered the needs and benefits of providing childcare support to their employees.

Figure 11: Currently available childcare-related benefits as identified by survey respondents



LIMITATIONS ON ACCESSING CHILDCARE SUPPORT

Where employers offer support for employees with children, it is not available for everyone. This applies in cases where the support is both informed by a policy and informally offered.

Two of the participating businesses operate on-site childcare centers. In one case, this center is not available to fathers; only mothers can place their children in the center. This employer is assuming that childcare is exclusively the responsibility of women. Reflecting a similar perception, a female line manager at another company suggested there was no need for any policy on childcare in their business because either the female employees are not married or “our workers are male.” The results of this study show that working fathers have childcare responsibilities. Male employees with preschool children reported higher frequencies of being late for work or having to leave work early to deal with childcare.

Some employees expressed concerns about the real accessibility of the worksite childcare centers. Here, there are two main concerns. Firstly, the centers are only available for employees working in head offices, but not for employees working in branch offices. Secondly, the practicality of bringing children to work is made difficult because of unsafe and overcrowded public transport. In reality, senior personnel who are provided with a car as part of their job are more likely to use the childcare centers.

There is no evidence from the study to show that employers are systematically applying a policy of flexible working arrangements to support employees who have children. Flexible working hours are practiced in many of the businesses that participated in this study. Some human resource managers referred to their “policy” on this sort of arrangement. However, the majority of the participating businesses did not provide evidence of such a policy. Any flexibility around hours of work appears to be at the discretion of a manager. The situation is more accurately described by one human resources manager, who said, “Although we don’t have a specific policy for this, every employee helps and supports the staff who have children.”



Flexible working hours are not always an option an employer can offer. In certain jobs – assembly line work, shift work or construction – there is a specific order in the way the work must be completed. When an employee is missing or late, this can disrupt the whole production. In the businesses where the study identified some flexibility in working hours, employees expressed concerns that this arrangement was not universally applied. In one case, an employee said that the practice of flexible working hours did not apply to people working outside the head office of their company. Another said the practice was only applicable to employees with children under the age of two, to “allow them to be late for up to one hour in the morning.” In some businesses, being late for work can sometimes result in a verbal warning and/or financial penalty. In one of the businesses, an employee risks losing up to a whole day’s salary if they are more than 30 minutes late to work – and this is written in a policy.

Thirty-three percent of employees said that job-sharing was available in their businesses. When available, it has benefits. As one employee said, “Because of job-sharing, we can better manage our work.” However, it is only offered through what was described several times in different group discussions as “mutual understanding.” As discussed previously in this report, “job-sharing” is not widely understood in Myanmar’s workplaces. This includes among human resources personnel, which mostly described job-sharing as a situation when a person goes on maternity or paternity leave and another employee takes over that person’s job.

Additional limitations on accessing childcare support that is otherwise available include:

- Some subsidies that can be used to pay for childcare fees are only available to employees who earn lower salaries (e.g., 200,000 kyat in one case)
- The refrigerators are not always used exclusively for storing breast milk, but are for general use by all staff for storing lunches, drinks etc.
- Cash allowances on birth require the employee to submit official birth certificates naming the biological parents, a process that can take time and which may exclude single parents, parents of adopted children and same-sex parents from accessing this benefit
- Salary penalties for working “flexible work hours” (i.e., coming to work late or leaving early)

For paternity leave, the legal requirement for a male employee is 15 days, provided he is signed up to the social benefits system. This means that, in some cases, paternity leave might not be available. Within the participating businesses, there is no apparent direct opposition to working fathers taking paternity leave. One human resources manager insisted that “We don’t want fathers to regret the absence or not taking care if something bad happened to his wife and baby.” The implication here is that they actively encourage male employees to take paternity leave. However, both employees in the focus group discussions and other human resources managers acknowledge that in many cases, men do not take their full entitlement and that there can be pressure on men to return to work early.

Among stakeholders, there is a belief that many of these limitations are driven by a lack of awareness on the part of managers about the impacts of childcare and the needs of their employees who are parents. Some are especially concerned about unconscious bias and discrimination against people—especially women—with children during the recruitment process.

In the businesses where the study identified some flexibility on working hours, employees expressed concerns that this arrangement was not universally applied.







Image: IFC /Victoria Milko

3. The Legal Framework for Employers and Childcare in Myanmar



Relevant laws:

Social Security Law (2012)

Leave and Holidays Act (1951) as amended 2014

Factories Act (1951) as amended 2016



Parental leave

	Mother	Father
Paid leave before birth of child	6 weeks	Nil
Paid leave after birth of child	8 weeks	15 days

All leave entitlements are paid at 70 percent of the ordinary wage of the employee (based on a 12 month average).

In the case of the birth of twins, the mother is entitled to an additional 4 weeks of paid leave after the birth of the children.



Maternity expenses

	Mother	Father
One child	50 percent	25 percent
Twin birth	75 percent	37.5 percent
Triplet or more	100 percent	50 percent

Maternity expense entitlements are calculated as a one off payment based on a percentage of the ordinary monthly wage of the employee.



Eligibility requirement

	Minimum duration
Time employed by current employer	12 months
Contributions to the social security board scheme	6 months / past 12 months

In the event the mother is uninsured, an insured father is entitled to claim 50 percent of the maternity expenses that would have been paid to the mother if she had been insured.



Factory specific regulations

Female employees with children aged below 5

Required to establish childcare center	More than 100
Required to provide a suitable childcare room	Less than 100

Factories with more than 250 employees must also provide a nurse room or clinic with one doctor and one nurse in full-time attendance.



Miscarriage and Adoption

In the event of miscarriage, the mother is entitled to 6 weeks of paid maternity leave at the 70 percent rate.

Women who adopt children under the age of one are entitled to claim 8 weeks of paid maternity leave at the 70 percent rate.

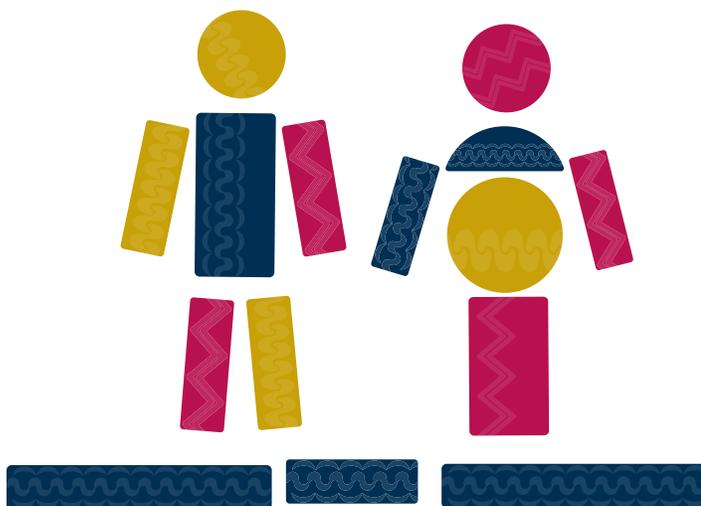
In each of these situations:

- There is no entitlement to maternity expenses.
- The father does not have any entitlement to paternity leave.

In Myanmar, entitlements for employees who have children are covered under three main laws:

- Social Security Law (2012)
- Leave and Holidays Act (1951) as amended 2014
- Factories Act (1951) as amended 2016

Maternity leave and paternity leave are governed by the Social Security Law for employees who make contributions to the Social Security Board's (SSB) benefits scheme; and by the Leave and Holidays Act for employees who do not. Payment for maternity leave is the responsibility of the employer unless the worker contributes to the SSB benefits scheme. There is no requirement for an employer to cover paternity leave if the employee does not contribute to this scheme.



Parental leave rules according to the Social Security Law

Under the rules of the Social Security Law, entitlements apply only if the mother or father has worked a minimum of one year for their current employer before enjoying leave and has paid contributions to the SSB benefit scheme for a minimum of six months within the that year.

All businesses with more than five employees must register with the Social Security Board and pay equal contributions as the employee in the amount of 2 percent (or 2.5 percent if the employer is over 65) of total salary. These contributions cover the employee's entitlements, including maternity and paternity entitlements.

ENTITLEMENTS FOR THE MOTHER

- Leave entitlement is 14 weeks maximum, including six weeks before confinement and a minimum of eight weeks after confinement, with salary payment at 70 percent average wage of a year.²²
- If the mother gives birth to twins, she is entitled to an additional four weeks after giving birth.
- A one-off payment to cover maternity expenses depending on the number of children born in a single delivery:
 - Single child = 50 percent of average wage of a month
 - Twin = 75 percent of average wage of a month
 - Triplet or more = 100 percent of average wage of a month
- In the event of a miscarriage, the right to maternity leave up to a maximum of six weeks with salary payment at 70 percent average wage of a year, provided the miscarriage is considered "not a punishable one," which would include an abortion,
- In the case of adoption, the right to maternity leave not exceeding eight weeks for one adopted child only, but only if that child is under one year of age.

²² In March 2014, the Myanmar government doubled the maternity leave for public servants to six months.

- Maternity benefits may not be paid simultaneously with sickness benefit, disability benefit or unemployment benefit. They can be paid jointly with medical leave.
- Pregnant women are also entitled to seven days of paid leave for antenatal care (one time per day up to a maximum seven times) and the salary is to be paid by the employer.

Table 1: Entitlements for mothers who contribute to the SSB benefits scheme

Category	Single child birth	Twin birth	Triplet or more birth	Miscarriage ²³	Adoption
Before birth	6 weeks at 70 percent average wage of a year	6 weeks at 70 percent average wage of a year	6 weeks at 70 percent average wage of a year	6 weeks at 70 percent average wage of a year	Not applicable
After birth	8 weeks minimum at 70 percent average wage of a year	12 weeks minimum at 70 percent average wage of a year	Not stipulated.		8 weeks maximum at 70 percent average wage of a year (provided the child is under the age of one)
Maternity expenses	50 percent of average wage of a month	75 percent of average wage of a month	100 percent of average wage of a month	No entitlement ²⁴	No entitlement

ENTITLEMENTS FOR THE FATHER

- 15 days leave for infant care on confinement of his insured wife, with salary payment at 70 percent average wage of a year.
- If his wife is uninsured, he can also receive half of the maternity expenses that his insured wife would otherwise be entitled to.

Table 2: Entitlements for fathers who contribute to the SSB benefits scheme

Category	Single child birth	Twin birth	Triplet or more birth	Miscarriage	Adoption
Before birth	No entitlement				
After birth	15 days at 70 percent average wage of a year			No entitlement	
Maternity expenses ²⁵	25 percent of average wage of a month	37.5 percent of average wage of a month	50 percent of average wage of a month	No entitlement	

²³ Does not include abortion which is a criminal offence under Myanmar law.

²⁴ It is not fully clear if the maternity expenses entitlements apply in the case of a miscarriage.

²⁵ Only payable on the condition that his wife is uninsured.

Parental leave rules according to the Leave and Holiday Act

The mother is entitled to 14 weeks of paid maternity leave to be taken six weeks before confinement and eight weeks after confinement. Payment for such leave is the responsibility of the employer unless the employee contributes to the social security board scheme.

An employee is entitled to six days of casual leave per year, with no more than three consecutive days at any one time, but this leave cannot be combined with any other form of leave. Casual leave entitlement expires at the end of each year.

After the first year of employment, an employee is entitled 10 days earned leave with pay. Earned leave must be taken consecutively. In agreement between the employer and employee, earned leave can be accumulated up to three years.

Additional childcare requirements according to the Factories Act

Provision of a nurse room or clinic with one doctor and one nurse in full-time attendance for premises with more than 250 workers.

The original Factories Act (1951) stated that, in the case of there being more than 50 women employed in a factory, there needs to be a dedicated and suitable room for the use of children under the age of six years of these women; and that this room needed to be managed by women trained in the care of children and infants. Changes to the Factories Act in 2016 now require the owners of factories employing more than 100 women with children aged under five to establish day-care centers with the assistance of the Ministry of Relief, Resettlement and Social Welfare. Owners of factories employing fewer than 100 are required to manage a childcare room.

Entitlements in the Public Sector

Since March 2014, mothers who work in the public sector they have been eligible for six months of post-natal maternity leave. This gives them four months longer than mothers who work in the private sector.

Myanmar's Early Child Care and Development (ECCD) Law was enacted in February 2014. This law stipulates that childcare centers can only provide care for children who have reached the age of six months. The legal entitlement to maternity leave includes only eight weeks of post-natal leave. This creates a problem when the child is aged between two and six months. Women, who wish to return to work, can only do so if they are able find an alternative option for childcare support for those four months.

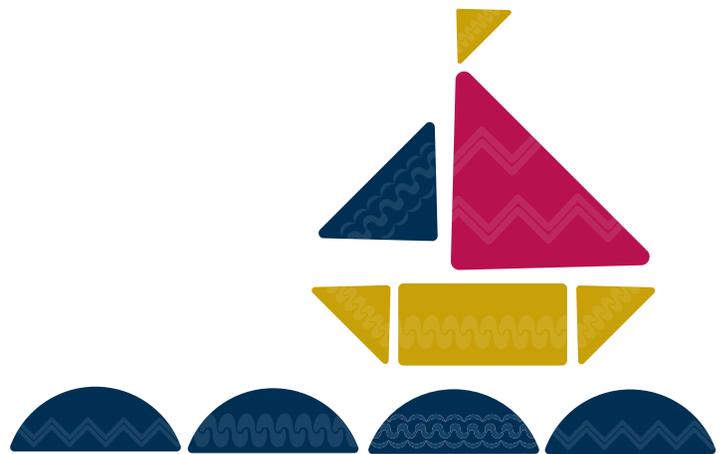




Image: World Bank / Hong Sar.



4. Priorities for Action

4.1 Business Considerations

- **Review the range of childcare support your company currently offers:** What policies, programs and services are currently in place to support the needs of working parents in your business?
- **Develop the business case for offering employer-supported childcare:**
 - **Identify your business challenges.** What challenges are affecting the performance of your business? For example, recruiting human resources; increasing attendance at work and productivity; retaining talented staff; or improving company reputation?
 - **Collect employee data.** Capture or review existing data on workplace absenteeism, staff turnover, employee satisfaction and childcare support costs. This data collection will help you understand the business case for childcare support and inform and convince the company decision-makers of the business benefits.
 - **Align company values with your employer-supported childcare offerings.** Strong family values are at the heart of many Myanmar businesses. Are your employee benefits consistent with your company values?
- **Evaluate additional childcare support services that are available in your community:** Review the services of childcare providers and community organizations operating in your area and their costs. Companies can consider using the services of private childcare centers in the area or may benefit from the expertise and advice of organizations that work on topics such as early childhood development, breastfeeding and nutrition.
- **Understand the childcare needs of working mothers and fathers:** Childcare support should be demand-driven. The needs of employees can be different, for example, based on the age of children, the distance from their home to the workplace and the hours' employees are required to work. Consider conducting a survey or focus group discussions with employees on finding out what childcare support they need and want.

- **Ensure that childcare supports are inclusive:** Do your childcare benefits apply to men and women, to single parents, to same-sex couples, to employees who have a child with a disability and to junior and senior staff?
- **Monitor and evaluate your childcare interventions:** Is your existing childcare support effective? Identify measures to assess whether they are working and establish regular management reporting to track and improve childcare interventions.

4.2 Recommendations for Business

Lower resource-intensive interventions

- **Set up a parent's group within your business:** Peer support networks can allow parents to share their experiences and challenges related to managing their work and childcare responsibilities. Group discussion provides an opportunity for parents to problem solve and to capture issues and ideas they can feedback to management and Human Resources. Companies that have employees located in different parts of Myanmar might consider establishing an online parent group.
- **Create a return to work program:** Develop return-to-work plans for all female employees who are pregnant, to ensure they are supported if they choose to return to work after giving birth. These plans could include ways for the mother to start doing work from home before returning to the workplace. They should take into consideration ways to help the mother continue to use and develop her skills, especially if she decides to take more time off work after giving birth. Online training and remote participation in training sessions are options.

- **Offer flexible work arrangements:** Formalize existing flexible working arrangements, so they are consistent and clearly communicated. This will provide working parents with a greater ability to ensure their working hours and childcare responsibilities are aligned. Flexible working arrangements could include allowing all employees to:
 - arrive an hour later to work in exchange for working an hour later that same day or at another time;
 - work from home;
 - work extended hours over four days in exchange for three days off a week.
- **Review and communicate family-friendly work policies and benefits available to all employees and new recruits:** Clearly communicating the policies improves awareness and employee satisfaction and may help position your company as a family-friendly employer of choice for new recruits.
- **Ensure the company training schedule considers the childcare responsibilities of employees:** Consider allowing employees to bring children to training that is held on weekends or outside normal office hours. If the training session requires travel overnight, offer employees with children additional support, such as a childcare allowance, to attend.
- **Introduce training and support for parents and caregivers:** Provide information sessions to help educate parents and caregivers about issues relevant to childcare. Some examples are children's use of social media, sexual health for adolescents, child safety in the home, effective communication with children, child discipline and infant nutrition.
- **Train managers and Human Resources to understand the company childcare support and maximize its effectiveness:** Important topics include family-friendly company policies, benefits and how they work and how to support employees in their return-to-work.

Higher resource-intensive interventions

- **Reserve places at a local childcare provider or subsidize childcare costs:** Explore options for forming partnerships with existing high-quality childcare providers to offer spaces at a reduced fee to employees. Another option is to subsidize employees' childcare costs with a childcare allowance.
- **Collaborate with other businesses:** Sharing your childcare experience and solutions with other businesses through networks such as the Business Coalition for Gender Equality has various benefits. This information will help encourage other Myanmar businesses to implement employer-supported childcare and offer your company new ideas for effective childcare solutions. Additional inter-business collaboration, such as co-managing a childcare center, will help strengthen the overall childcare support for working parents in Myanmar.
- **Establish on-site childcare services:** Based on employee demand and business priorities, establishing an on-site childcare center may be a good option for your business. However, this option can be costly and might only be feasible if accompanied by a suitable transport solution. *IFC's Tackling Childcare: A guide for employer-supported childcare (2019)*²⁶ provides detailed guidance to help companies to establish a childcare center.

4.3 Recommendations for Others

- **Explore the issues of employer-supported childcare in the public sector:** Consider exploring childcare in the public sector to recommend opportunities for cross-ministry collaboration and policy reform.
- **Address the maternity leave and childcare eligibility gap:** A child can enter childcare from six months and the age of the child at the time when maternity leave entitlements for women in the private sector finishes is only two months. This gap makes it difficult for women to return to work. This could be addressed in the following ways:

²⁶ <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/da7bf72-e4d9-4334-955f-671a104877a7/201911-A-guide-for-employer-supported-childcare.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mVHadh3>

- Extend the eligible length of post-natal maternity leave to six months for employees in the private sector. This will bring their eligibility into line with that of public servants, who have been entitled to six months of maternity leave since March 2014. An extension would require a legal adjustment of entitlements.
 - Change the time limitations currently imposed on both maternity and paternity leave, such as removing the mandatory requirements that pregnant women leave work four weeks before giving birth or that fathers need to take paternity leave immediately after the birth.
 - Lower the age at which childcare centers can accept children to two months.
- **Establish public-private partnerships:** Help to establish partnerships between local government and private sector businesses to work together on finding solutions to the childcare needs of working parents. Outcomes may be private-public childcare centers, but also broader results such as improved safety on key public transportation commuter routes or childcare services in special economic zones.
 - **Training course for childcare staff:** A concern employees have about existing childcare providers is the quality of the training that staff has received. Training organizations could develop a course for childcare staff who have not received any formal qualifications. This approach would be in addition to existing training options, including the Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Development. It should help improve skills and knowledge for caregivers who do not have formal qualifications.
 - **Develop a Myanmar specific guidance note for childcare service providers:** A comprehensive guidance note which outlines the minimum standards for operating a childcare center would be a useful resource for childcare centers. While some of these standards are included in the current law (around caregiver-to-child ratio and childcare center space, for example), others should draw on recognized research into early childcare and
- development. This could be based on global best practice, such as IFC's *Guide for Employer-Supported Childcare (2019)*.²⁶
- **Undertake further research:** Further research is needed to explore issues raised in this report.
 - The childcare needs of men and women working in the private sector and who work in remote locations and/or are involved in manual labor where they are outside all day (in the agribusiness sector, for example).
 - How private sector businesses can respond to social changes that affect how their employees respond to their childcare responsibilities. Some examples of social changes are attitudes towards the care of children by grandparents, women moving into non-traditional roles, women accessing senior positions and social behaviors of adolescents in urban settings.
 - **Provide additional incentives to operators of childcare centers to accommodate children with disabilities or special learning needs:** This may involve supporting the establishment of distinct childcare centers to cater to these specific needs. Existing childcare centers should also be encouraged to make spaces available to children with lower levels of disability and make efforts to ensure these children are integrated fully into activities. These centers will need adequately trained caregivers to respond to the additional needs of these children.
 - **Advocate for change in the legal system to allow for same-sex partners to adopt children and to be recognized as legal parents or guardians:** Current law prevents same-sex partners from being eligible for parental leave and other benefits. Such a change may need to be presented as part of a comprehensive review of the legal situation for gay men and women in Myanmar, where sexual relationships between people of the same sex continues to be illegal because of established colonial law.



5. Conclusion

Despite higher education attainment and better career opportunities for women in Myanmar, women continue to be underrepresented in the workforce. This study found there is a limited supply of quality childcare available in the country. Due to this lack of supply and traditional cultural expectations, women are pressured to leave their work when they have children. Additionally, the research found that skilled women are delaying childbirth due to anticipated challenges in combining family obligations with pursuing their careers. Myanmar companies have low awareness of the implications of failing to support employees with families. Yet the study found 20 percent of employees with children had left a previous job due to childcare responsibilities.

The study demonstrates the need for Myanmar companies to address the childcare needs of their skilled employees to improve recruitment, retention and strengthen reputation. Nine out of 10 employees said that childcare responsibilities are impacting their work. It is important to note that despite the common assumption that childcare is women's business, working fathers are also affected by childcare responsibilities. Care by grandparents was identified as the most common childcare solution in Myanmar. However, this current arrangement is failing to meet the needs of working families. Parents are increasingly getting worried about child safety, health, nutrition and education. As a result Myanmar employees are demanding better solutions and support from their employers.

Addressing the lack of available, accessible and trusted childcare is key to strengthening the ability of parents to continue to be part of Myanmar's workforce. There is an opportunity for businesses to benefit from offering support for childcare. There are a growing and accessible collection of international good practice on employer-supported childcare from which to learn. Several Myanmar companies are introducing innovative childcare solutions, some of which are low cost and others which are higher cost. Ultimately, the cost of failing to address the childcare needs of employees to make work and family compatible is significant for companies and the economy. While the short-term effects relate to staff turnover and productivity, the long-term economic consequences of the already declining birthrate in Myanmar are likely to be felt more broadly.



Annex A: The Childcare Landscape in Myanmar

Early childhood development education

In Myanmar, the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR) are the lead ministries involved in the provision of Early Child Care and Development (ECCD) services. There are a number of non-governmental and private sector organizations actively supporting communities with the provision of ECCD services. Most noticeable among these is UNICEF, which supports the Myanmar Government with the implementation of the ECCD policy.

With the launch of its National Strategic Education Plan 2016-21, the Myanmar Government identified a number of key challenges with respect to Early Child Care and Development (ECCD):

- The need for service providers to improve the quality of their services
- The need for improvements in the quality of preschool teacher training
- The need for the design of a kindergarten curriculum that is “culturally responsive and educationally relevant”

The plan acknowledged that Myanmar lags behind other countries in the region with respect to children’s access to preschool and kindergarten education. It offers a comprehensive and extensive attempt to respond to a number of deficiencies in ECCD that were identified in a situational analysis conducted to inform the writing of the plan. These deficiencies included:

- Extremely low adherence to quality indicators in preschools
- Untrained teachers working in facilities
- Low availability of suitable play materials in facilities
- Low level monitoring and recording of children’s development

In addition, the situational analysis identified there were very few services and institutions offering support for children with disabilities and special learning needs.

Earlier in 2014, the Myanmar Government had launched its policy on ECCD – the result of collaboration between several government ministries and consultations in communities throughout the country. This policy identified the need for a strong organizational system to manage early childhood development and outlined the process for working towards this. As its vision statement, this policy stated:

From birth to eight years of age, all children of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar will receive holistic, high-quality and developmentally-appropriate care from their parents, caregivers and service providers to ensure they will be happy, healthy, well-nourished, socially adept, emotionally balanced and well protected in conditions of freedom, equity and dignity in order to contribute positively to their families, communities and the nation.

As part of its mission statement, the Myanmar Government is committed to providing “universal, affordable and inclusive” preschool services for all children aged three and four, and “free, compulsory and inclusive” school services to children aged five.



Registration of childcare centers

The Law Relating to Early Childhood Care and Development was passed in 2014. This law established a number of new regulations for operating a childcare center²⁷ in Myanmar. These include:

- Minimum numbers for child-teacher ratios, which are:
 - one teacher for every three children for children under the age of two
 - one teacher for every six children for children aged between two to three
 - one teacher for every 15 children for children aged three to five
- The head of a preschool must be a university graduate aged over 25 with a recognized child-care qualification.
- The requirement for private and non-government agencies to apply for the right to operate a childcare center and, if approved, pay an annual registration fee for the relevant permit.

The law also outlined the role of a newly formed Central Supervisory Body, made up of representatives from different government departments and community organizations, to supervise and inspect childcare centers. It allows persons who operate a childcare center without approval to be fined and/or imprisoned.

Childcare service providers

There are an estimated 49 childcare centers operating across 10 different locations in Myanmar. The majority of these are located in Yangon. It is not known how many of these are officially registered.

The study included a survey to explore what childcare service providers are providing, to how many children and in which age groups and the fees charged to parents. The survey was sent out online to all identified childcare centers, provided they had an available email address. Phone calls were made to follow-up on receipt of the survey link, and, at the request of managers in nine centers, visits were made to each center to help complete the survey in person.

Uptake was extremely low. Only six surveys considered valid, and all were only partially completed. Recent media attention on child abuse in a childcare center in Myanmar²⁸ may have affected the willingness of many managers to share information about their center, even as confidentiality and security of the data were assured.

Based on this limited data, the following are some indicative findings about the services offered by childcare providers in Myanmar:

- Most offer spaces to children aged between two and five. Half provide spaces for children aged between six and ten.
- The maximum number of available spaces in a childcare center is 40 and most childcare centers can accommodate this number of children. However, none is at full capacity. The younger the child, the fewer places are taken up.
- The average daily fee for a child between the ages of two and five is 5,179 kyat. There is, however, a considerable range in the fees, from 2,500 kyat at the lower end to 10,000 kyat at the upper end.
- Most preschools are open from nine in the morning until three in the afternoon. Only one has longer opening hours, with one hour extra each side. None are open on weekends.
- Children are generally provided with toys, books, art materials and a play area. Some of the centers offer televisions or computers.

²⁷ In the English text of the law, "Day Care Centre" is the term used; and is defined as a "department, school or program which nurtures the early-children who have attained the age of six months to three years of age to obtain the holistic development including physical, intellectual, moral, social, emotional, nutrition and health aspects of development."

²⁸ See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49660087>.



Image: IFC / Victor P. Smith

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