

people
matters



A VIEW OF CHILDCARE FACILITIES BY EMPLOYERS IN INDIA

A People Matters and KLAY Prep Schools and DayCare
Research Study

A View of Childcare Facilities by Employers in India

A People Matters and KLAY Prep Schools and DayCare Research Study

© 2018 People Matters Media Pvt. Ltd

**people
matters**

People Matters Media Pvt. Ltd.
503-505, 5th Floor,
Millennium Plaza, Tower A,
Sector 27, Gurgaon - 122009
www.peplematters.in



KLAY Prep Schools and DayCare
Founding Years Learning Solutions Pvt. Ltd.
31/1 Seetharamapalya, 3rd Floor
Mahadevapura, Bangalore -560048

Disclaimer: The information contained herein has been obtained from sources believed to be reliable. People Matters and KLAY Prep Schools and DayCare disclaim all warranties as to the accuracy, completeness or adequacy of such information. People Matters and KLAY Prep Schools and DayCare will bear no liability for errors, omissions or inadequacies in the information contained herein or for interpretations thereof.

The material in this publication is copyrighted. No part of this can be reproduced either on paper or electronic media without permission in writing from People Matters. Request for permission to reproduce any part of the report may be sent to People Matters Media Pvt. Ltd.



A VIEW OF CHILDCARE FACILITIES BY EMPLOYERS IN INDIA

A People Matters and KLAY Prep Schools and DayCare
Research Study



Contents

Foreword - Ester Martinez & Priya Krishnan	5
Introduction	6
Key Findings	7
Duration of Paid Maternity & Paternity Leaves	8
Current State of Crèche Facilities	9
Existing Employer Communication Practices	10
Impact of the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017)	11
Gaps in the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017)	12
Remedies to Improve the Maternity Benefit Act	14
Conclusion	15
Appendix	15
EXPERT VIEWS	
• Archana Bhaskar, CHRO, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories	16
• Jevitha Sathyanarayanan, Manager HR, Zoho Corp.	17
• Rohit Chennamaneni, Co-Founder, Darwinbox	18
• Ruhie Pande, CHRO, Godrej Properties Ltd.	19
• Swathi Madan, Head HR - KTN circle, Airtel	20
• Vinay Shende, Diversity & Inclusion Lead, Johnson & Johnson India	21
PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE	
• V. Malati, Scientist, R&D unit, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories	22
• Saranya Ganesan, Product Manager, Zoho Corp	23



Foreword



Ester Martinez
CEO & Editor-in-Chief,
People Matters



Priya Krishnan
Founder & CEO,
Klay Prep Schools and
DayCare, under the aegis of
Founding Years Learning
Solutions Pvt Ltd

For many years, women employees quitting jobs post maternity has been a critical concern for corporates in India. With McKinsey Global Institute¹ predicting that India could add more than 18 percent to its GDP by 2025, simply by giving equal opportunities to women, increasing the female workforce participation becomes a key focus area for not only the organizations but the entire nation.

Keeping the importance of women's contribution to the country's GDP in mind, the government of India made amendments to the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 and extended the paid maternity leave of 12 weeks to 26 weeks for women working in the organized sector. The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017) that came into force on 1st April 2017 also brought into force adoption and surrogacy leaves and introduced the option of work from home to the bill as well. Further, to cater to the needs of working mothers post maternity and to ensure that they resume work, the 2017 Bill also made it mandatory for each establishment with 50 or more employees to have a crèche facility.

Although the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017) was introduced with a positive intent to steer gender diversity in organizations, it came with its own challenges. While some organizations struggle to find a replacement for the working mother going on leave, some struggle to bear the administrative burden of managing the additional facilities and employee records. In fact, "finding the right partner for crèche facilities" is one of the top three challenges identified in the survey.

According to the results of the survey, the top three solutions to improve the Maternity Benefit Act further include "Provide tax exemption for childcare facilities", "Expand the scope of benefits to working fathers", and "Define policies and regulations for childcare facilities". The study also highlights that while about 67 percent of the surveyed organizations have completely understood the amendments, about 30 percent still don't have a formal structure around childcare facilities in their organizations.

With strengthening gender diversity being a key focus area for 74 percent of the organizations, it is important that organizations not only comply with the amendments to the act, but also understand and empathize with the needs of the working mothers. Providing childcare facilities, work from home option, flexible working hours and paid leaves is only one part of the solution. Going beyond complying with the acts and policies, organizations have to build a diverse and inclusive culture to empower their women workforce. From having conversations related to career growth to sensitizing the male workforce about the needs of the women employees, organizations can make the workplace better for the female workforce. And to pave their way towards gender parity, not discriminating between a working father and a working mother will also be crucial. Organizations have to cater to the needs of working parents, irrespective of their gender, to ensure a diverse and inclusive work environment.

Continuing with our endeavor to provide actionable research to our community, People Matters in partnership with KLAY Prep Schools and Daycare studied the business impact of the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017). This involved understanding how companies are complying with the amendment and what challenges are they facing in the process. The report also features expert perspectives by talent leaders and working parents from leading organizations across various sectors. We are grateful to all the participants who took the survey along with the individuals and organizations who contributed their time and expertise in assisting us in carrying out this study.

We hope that our readers will enjoy reading the findings of this report and will get back to us with their comments and perspectives. We look forward to hearing from them.

Happy reading the report! ●

1. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/07/india-could-boost-its-gdp-by-770-billion-by-just-treating-women-better>

Introduction

The People Matters and KLAY Prep Schools and DayCare study is designed and conducted with the objective of understanding how leading companies in India are complying with the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017), the challenges they are facing in the process and the solutions they are looking for. The survey saw the participation of more than 90 unique companies across industries and sectors.

The study focused on three key areas:

A The current state of maternity benefits post-amendment (2017)

The understanding and awareness of employers with regards to the amendments made in 2017.

- The duration of the paid leaves different organizations provide to working parents in respective cases like natural childbirth, adoption and childbirth through surrogacy.
- The different ways in which employers are providing crèche facility to working parents.
- The different ways in which employers are engaging with their employees to increase awareness about child-care facilities.

B Impact of the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017)

- Insights from the study indicate that majority of the employers have experienced a positive impact on business with the latest amendments to the Maternity Benefit Act. For about 60 percent of the organizations, the amendments have made a positive impact both on retention and work culture.

However, only 29 percent of employers witnessed a positive impact on talent acquisition.

- The survey further highlighted the challenges employers face in providing for childcare facilities as required by the amended Maternity Benefit Act 2017. Cost of replacing a talent for 26 weeks instead of 12 weeks (48 percent), finding the right partner for crèche facilities (41 percent) and the increase in the cost burden of employers (38 percent) are the top challenges the employers are facing.

C Improvements needed in the Maternity Benefit Act

61 percent of the employers want that there should be a tax exemption for providing childcare facilities and 57 percent of them wish that the scope of benefits of the Act should be extended to the working fathers as well. As companies struggle to cope up with the cost burden due to business loss and additional cost due to childcare facilities, they would appreciate if the cost was borne by the government either partially or fully (37 percent). More than half of the employers seek further clarity and more defined rules and guidelines from the Maternity Benefit Act.

Apart from showcasing the results from the survey, the study includes perspectives from HR leaders from organizations across sectors, discussing the impact of the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017) in their respective organizations. HR leaders have also talked about their strategies and some best practices to enhance gender diversity. The study also includes perspectives of working parents on their expectations from employers and the Maternity Benefit Act itself. ●



Key Findings

The current state of maternity benefits post-amendment (2017)

While less participation of women in the economy and the gender pay gap continue to be two of the major challenges, India is slowly moving towards achieving the goal of gender equality and inclusion with large and small organizations across industries working towards bridging the gender gap.

The study showed that 94 percent of the organizations are complying with the Maternity Benefit Act amendment made in 2017. However, out of these, strengthening gender diversity is a key focus area for just 74 percent of the employers, thus indicating that some organizations (about 20 percent) are providing maternity benefit only for the sake of compliance.

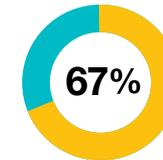
While 94 percent of the surveyed employers are completely or somewhat complying with the amendments, only about 67 percent of them have completely understood them. Further, 30 percent of the organizations have somewhat understood the amendments and 3 percent have not understood the amendments at all. ●



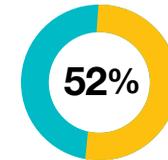
Strengthening gender diversity is a key focus area for 74% of the organizations



Respondents are aware of the latest amendments made to the Maternity Benefit Act

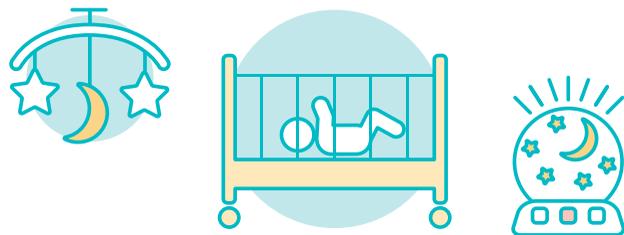


Respondents have completely understood about the amendments made to the Maternity Benefit Act



Respondents are completely complying with the amendments

Better education of employers across industries on the rationale of the amended provisions is required



Duration of paid maternity & paternity leaves

Scenario 1: Natural Childbirth

While 72 percent of the respondents are providing 6 months to 9 months of paid maternity leaves as stated by the law, 25 percent are still providing less than 6 months but more than 3 months of paid leaves.

With more and more organizations realizing that equal parental leave enables both men and women to succeed at home and work, many employers have also introduced paternity leaves in their organizations. Although they are shorter in the term, however, it is a step towards building a gender-equal culture.

The survey reveals that 77 percent of employers are providing paid paternity leaves to the working fathers; however, 23 percent of them have still not walked this path.

Scenario 2: Adoption & childbirth through surrogacy

While research¹ shows that surrogacy is becoming a million dollar business, according to the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA), 3,276 children were adopted in 2017-18 in India.

As many working professionals become parents through modes other than natural birth as well, it was important for both the government and the employers to extend the scope of parental benefits to cases other than natural birth as well.

While majority of the employers who participated in the survey provide maternity leaves for cases like adoption (86 percent) and childbirth through surrogacy (76 percent), the percentage is relatively low in the case of paternity leaves. About 65 percent employers provide paternity leaves in the case of adoption and 58 percent in case of surrogacy. ●

1. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/is-science-to-blame-for-indias-falling-adoption-numbers/article-show/58086785.cms>

Duration of paid maternity leave

Case 1: Natural childbirth	%	Case 2: Adoption	%	Case 3: Child birth through surrogacy	%
Do not give paid maternity leave in this scenario	1%	Do not give paid maternity leave in this scenario	13%	Do not give paid maternity leave in this scenario	24%
Less than 3 months	1%	Less than 3 months	20%	Less than 3 months	19%
3 months to less than 6 months	25%	3 months to less than 6 months	42%	3 months to less than 6 months	31%
6 months to 9 months	72%	6 months to 9 months	24%	6 months to 9 months	26%
More than 9 months	1%	More than 9 months	1%	More than 9 months	0%

Duration of paid paternity leave

Case 1: Natural childbirth	%	Case 2: Adoption	%	Case 3: Child birth through surrogacy	%
Do not give paid paternity leave in this scenario	23%	Do not give paid paternity leave in this scenario	35%	Do not give paid paternity leave in this scenario	42%
Up to 2 weeks	70%	Up to 2 weeks	58%	Up to 2 weeks	51%
More than 2 weeks and up to 2 months	3%	More than 2 weeks and up to 2 months	4%	More than 2 weeks and up to 2 months	4%
More than 2 months	4%	More than 2 months	3%	More than 2 months	3%

Current State of crèche facilities

On 27th March, the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2017, passed by both Houses of Parliament received presidential assent. The amendments made it mandatory for each establishment with 50 or more employees to have a crèche facility. While statutes such as the Factories Act, 1948, and the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 already contained provisions around crèche facilities, the new mandate in the Act increased the scope of the childcare facilities and impacted regional and country offices of larger organizations and some SMEs and startups as well.

For companies who already had such facilities, the amendments didn't have much impact but for the others, this was a new challenge. From redistributing budgets to looking for the best ways to provide childcare facilities to their employees, HR and leaders had a new mandate to fulfill.

It has been more than a year now that these amendments were made, however, about 31 percent of the respondents still don't have a formal structure or policies around childcare facilities in place yet. Some employers either don't have facilities in all the offices/locations or are still looking into it and exploring ways to serve these facilities to working parents.

As per the survey, about 60 percent of the employers either have in-house crèche facilities in the office or have outsourced the service to different third parties or provide a combination of different services with respect to childcare. The rest 8 percent of the employers either reimburse the crèche expenses for working mothers or provide crèche allowances in advance.

Partnering with an external childcare facility was a preferred choice by a majority of the employers (36 percent) as compared to having an in-house facility. Organizations seem to prefer collaborating with a third party vendor for a multitude of reasons including lack of space in the office and lack of knowledge and skills of the subject matter in the internal teams. ●



Existing Employer Communication Practices

Organizations may have crèche facilities or policies for childcare facilities in place but in the absence of an effective communication of these initiatives with current and potential employees, they would fail to create the intended impact.

For centuries, facilities like childcare were not available in workplaces, hence, the option of leaving the child at home with grandparents or maid seemed more viable. It is probably because of this habit that still many working parents prefer to leave their child/children at home rather than getting them to work and availing the given childcare facility. The culture of childcare being fairly new in India, it is imperative that organizations encourage the working parents to avail these facilities through regular communication. As per the survey, about 25 percent of the employers communicate with their employees about childcare facilities, annually. 22 percent of them have conversations around this topic quarterly with their employees and about 12 percent communicate daily. The most common channels of communication are Intranet/Internal Social Media Platform (48 percent), Personalized mailers (40 percent) and One-to-one meetings (28 percent). On the other hand, about 25 percent of the organizations prefer newspapers and 23 percent utilize all-hands meeting to have these conversations.

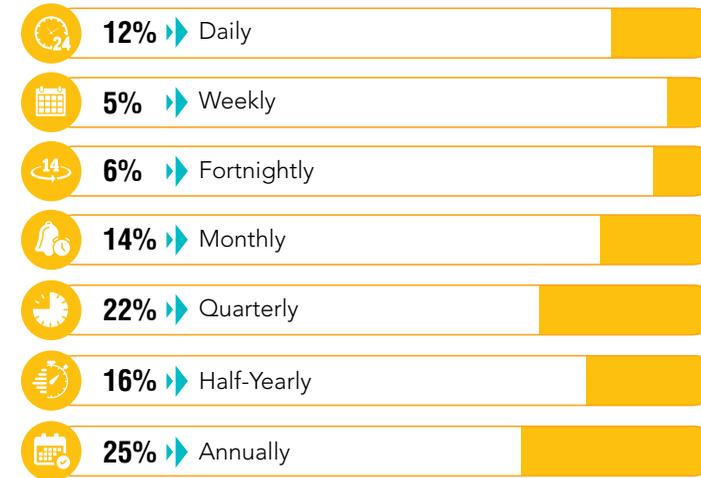
For 80 percent of the companies, the target audience for having conversations on childcare is working mothers. Many employers have further increased the scope and also address the working fathers (46 percent) and in some cases, the families of working parents (12 percent) as well.

The agenda of making the workplace more and more women friendly doesn't just stop at complying with the laws. To strengthen gender diversity and empower the women employees, organizations have to go beyond and provide the mental and emotional support that they require in different phases of their lives. Pre-maternity being one of the most sensitive times in any woman's life, requires empathy and care on the part of the employer and manager. The other crucial phase in a working mother's life is post maternity. Going through maternity is a gigantic emotional roller-coaster which throws any working mother's best-laid plans off-balance. Over 48 percent¹ of working women under the age of 30 take a break in career citing maternity as the top reason and companies see a surging spike in attrition of women who return from maternity, making counselling of women a key priority for most organizations.

While having a structured counselling plan for working mothers is imperative, the survey reveals that more than 75 percent of the organizations don't have an in-house counselor for working mothers. However, on the other hand, 17 percent of them have an in-house counselor not only for working mothers but even for working fathers. ●

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/education/careers/Can-%E2%80%98maternity-coaching%E2%80%99-check-attrition-rate/article17102877.ece>

Frequency of communication (pertaining to childcare)



The common channels of communication



Do you have in-house counselors for: working mothers



Do you have in-house counselors for: working fathers



Impact of the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017)

While research says that employers struggle to fill talent gaps created in the event of 'maternity continuum' of women employees, the maternity benefits such as maternity leaves also have a positive impact on the business.

The top two areas where businesses have gained through these benefits include retention and workplace culture. As per the survey, 60 percent of the employers experienced an increase in retention and a positive impact on workplace culture post-Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017).

However, when it comes to talent acquisition, employers feel that benefits like these are less likely to have a huge impact. Only 29 percent of the respondents said that the act has positively impacted talent acquisition, while 13 percent said that it has actually negatively impacted talent acquisition.

1. <https://www.peoplesmatters.in/news/diversity/maternity-continuum-impacts-business-continuity-report-18262>

The business impact of the Maternity Benefit Act 2017



The curious case of impact on talent acquisition



Gaps in the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017)

While the rationale of the amendments made to the Act, last year, was strong, the financial burden these changes came with has made its implementation a challenging task.

About 48 percent of employers struggle with the cost of replacing a talent for 26 weeks and 30 percent are facing trouble with the administrative burden of managing the additional facilities and employee records. Having childcare facilities as one of the key amendments of the act, one of the major challenges for the employers have been finding the right partner for crèche facilities (41 percent). The lack of clarity in the rules under the amendment and integrating working mother back into work post-maternity were also highlighted as some other challenges by the respondents.

Many startups and SMEs in fact, resist from hiring women employees due to these challenges, hence diluting the entire gender diversity and equality agenda. 1 out of 5 organizations with employee strength less than 1,000 feel that the amendments have negatively impacted talent acquisition. Further, about 55 percent of these organizations are struggling with the added cost burden and 30 percent struggle with the loss of business continuity due to the absence of a team member.

The question is, are these benefits actually strengthening or weakening gender diversity?

While in India the financial burden is supposed to be borne by the employer fully, in most of the other countries, the cost of maternity leave is shared by the government, employer, insurance agency and other social security programs. In Singapore¹, for example, the employer bears the cost for 8 weeks and public funds for 8 weeks. In Australia and Canada, public funds bear the full cost. A social insurance scheme bears the cost in France. In Brazil, it's shared by the employer, employee and the government.

There are some solutions and strategies which can ease the challenge and smoothen the implementation process of these amendments. For instance, the government could share the cost of maternity leave with employers or can amplify tax rebates for maternity wages or set up an insurance scheme to pay maternity wages, sharing the premium with the employer. The survey, therefore, further deep dives into the remedies to overcome the challenges with the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017). ●

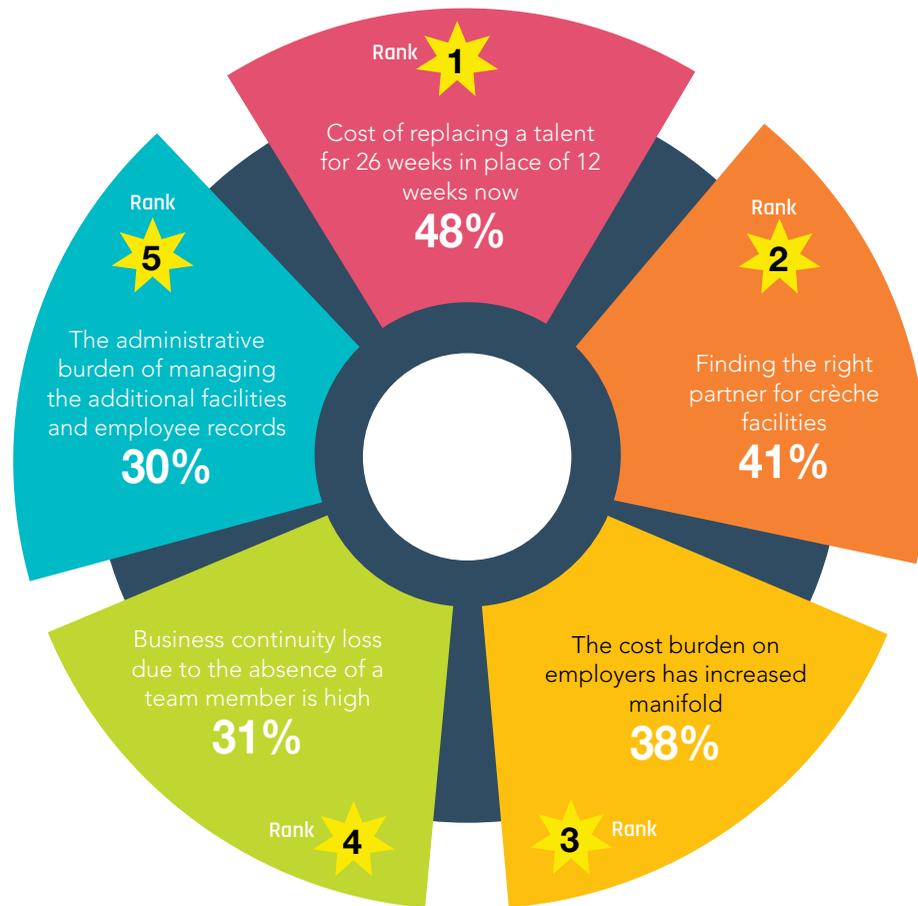


When policy changes applicable to 'for profit' entities entail increased costs for these organisations, there are bound to be unintended consequences which dampens the potential positive impact these changes are intended to have. With regards to the changes brought-in through the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act (2017), many of the corporates, whether or not they eventually complied with the act, were left financially and structurally unprepared. Something that gets reflected in the fact that 31% of the employers who participated in the survey do not have a formal policy around childcare facilities for employees."

- Priya Krishnan

1. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/maternity-benefit-act-the-new-amendments-might-cause-some-pangs-in-the-short-run/articleshow/64809703.cms>

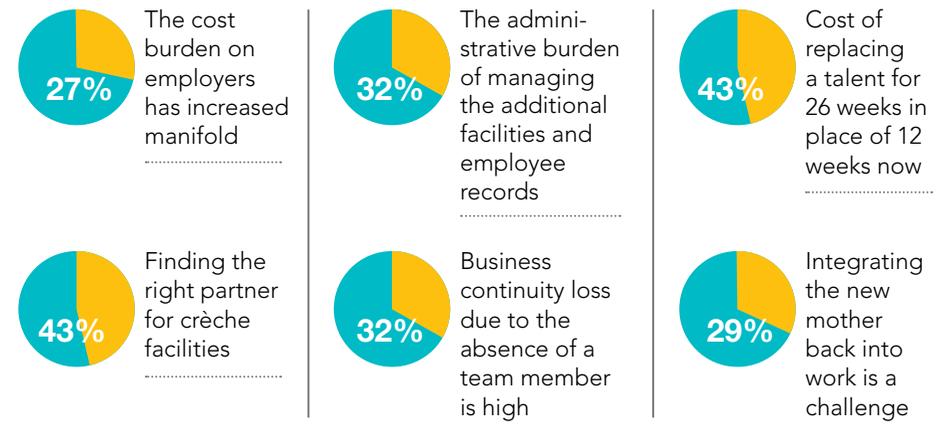
Top 5 challenges post-Maternity Benefit Act 2017



Challenges for companies with employee strength <1,000



Challenges for companies with employee strength >1,000



Remedies to improve the Maternity Benefit Act

Provide tax exemption for childcare facilities (62 percent), define policies and regulations for childcare facilities (57 percent) and expand the scope of benefits to working fathers (50 percent) are the top three ways in which employers wish to see the Maternity Benefit Act improve further.

While many companies took the lead and implemented longer maternity leaves and childcare facilities even before the Act came into effect, the reality is that employers are bearing this additional cost by themselves. Hence, 35 percent of them wish that a portion of the cost or total cost of providing childcare facility should be borne by the government. This could specifically be beneficial in the cases of SMEs and startups who already run on small budgets.

Further, about 23 percent of employers want the government to also share the cost of either a portion of leaves or total maternity leaves. This is a common practice in many countries. For instance, in Singapore¹, out of 16 weeks of paid leave, 8 are funded through public funds and in Australia and Canada, the respective maternity leaves of (18) and (17) weeks are paid by public funds. In India, however, except for the fraction of employees covered under the Employee State Insurance Act (ESI Act) (i.e. employees earning not more than INR 21,000 per month), maternity benefits have to be financed by the employer.

The other key area of improvement is defining policies and regulations for childcare facilities. The amendment in 2017 mandated crèche facility for every establishment with more than 50 employees but it didn't explain it any further. Thus, resulting in ambiguities. Some of the areas where more clarity is required include:

- What is the age limit for children who are accommodated at the crèche for which the company will bear the expenses?
- What is the maximum distance at which a crèche can be located from the office?
- What are the guidelines defining the quality standards to be maintained by a DayCare space?

Further, in the report we find that organizations seek more guidance by the Central Board of Direct Taxation CBDT on the taxability of crèche facilities and determination of taxable value for employees availing the facility to settle the ambiguity and avoid litigation. ●

1. https://www.peoplesmatters.in/article/womenofchange/maternity-bill-2017-has-it-helped-in-increasing-employment-for-women-17677?utm_source=peoplesmatters&utm_medium=interstitial&utm_campaign=learnings-of-the-day



“In the absence of guidelines around infrastructure, adult-child ratios, and other safety norms, there is a risk of proliferation of substandard facilities and service providers. To further maintain the standard and quality of childcare facilities, compliance regulations for service providers are also required. These regulations are critical from a labor, insurance and safety standpoint as many unorganized players are entering the space. The fact that kids are the recipients of this service makes regulation all the more critical as any small or major lapses can have dire consequences.”

- Priya Krishnan

How could the Maternity Benefit Act be improved further?



Conclusion

Leaving the centuries old gender biases behind, businesses in India are spearheading towards having a gender inclusive workplace. However, there are still many more obstacles that they need to cross in this journey. Besides struggling with financial constraints like bearing the additional costs and loss of business hours in the process of supporting working parents, organizations have to also deal with the biases that the society holds. While large MNCs like Accenture, HUL, Infosys and IBM have had strong policies around making a gender inclusive culture for some years, even other companies are now catching up and introducing initiatives to build a gender inclusive culture. 75 percent employers choosing strengthening gender diversity as their key agenda, further, reiterates the statement.

Although with the abolition of Sec 377, organizations would now have to redefine their policies and expand the scope of their initiatives, they still have a lot to achieve in the context of empowering the women workforce.

More support from the government can make the efforts of the organizations stronger. Besides strict mandates around maternity leaves and childcare facilities, businesses are looking for aid in terms of sharing cost burden and amplifying tax rebates for maternity wages. With 62 percent employers choosing 'provide tax exemption for childcare facilities' as the key remedy, authorities need to relook at the current law and redefine the Maternity Benefit Act. Based on the experience of employers after more than one year of the amendments to the Act, defining policies and regulations for childcare facilities (57 percent) is one of the critical areas that needs attention. ●



Appendix

How will you characterize your organization's understanding of the Maternity Benefit Act amendments in 2017?

We have completely understood the amendments	67%
We have somewhat understood the amendments	30%
We have not understood the amendments	3%

How will you characterize your organization's compliance with the Maternity Benefits Act amendments in 2017?



What has been the business impact of the latest amendments to the Maternity Benefit Act?





ARCHANA BHASKAR
CHRO, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories

Increasing diversity and retention with childcare support at the workplace

Before the amendment to the Act came in, we had already implemented the 6 month maternity leave policy and policies such as work from home, flexi timings, etc. I believe that helped in increasing the diversity percentage.

Working parents irrespective of their gender expect three key things from their employers: A safe and healthy environment for their children as they are busy at work, flexibility without diluting deliverables and empathy from manager & co-workers.

Even before the amendments were made to the Act in 2017, Dr Reddy's Laboratories had already rolled out an extended maternity leave policy, work from home & flexible work options for the working mothers in 2016. However, this is not applicable in manufacturing locations.

Nearly 70 percent of our organization is covered under the Factories Act, hence childcare facilities were already in place at most locations. And in the last 3-4 years, we have further extended these facilities to all our offices & non-plant locations as well. The leadership from the Chairman, CEO, CHRO to the Diversity Leader, everyone works together to make the organization gender sensitive and to implement, employee friendly policies.

While businesses complain about the negative implications of the extended leaves, the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2017 has benefited us in many ways:

- **Increased thought diversity** - Our gender diversity percentage increased from 9.3 percent in 2016 to 12.4 percent in 2018.
- **Increased talent retention** - Women no longer need to take career breaks due to a lack of help or support post childbirth.
- **Greater productivity** - Working mothers take fewer days off citing child care.

Currently, our childcare facilities are available to women employees, primarily. But we are now looking to extend these facilities to the entire workforce, irrespective of gender and we have already taken a few steps towards that direction. ●





JEVITHA SATHYANARAYANAN
Manager HR, Zoho Corp.

Adopting positive changes for the welfare of employees

In Zoho's experience, the employees who do not have any family members to take care of their children at home, love and appreciate the childcare facility.

As per a report by International Financial Corporation, benefits such as paid maternity leaves and childcare facilities resulted in an increase in retention for 90 percent of the employers.

Realizing the importance of these benefits, Zoho already had an in-house crèche facility before the amendments were made last year. However, we have had a slightly different approach in terms of providing childcare facility to our employees.

With an intent to be a family friendly workplace, Zoho has a dedicated space in the office which is equipped with all the childcare facilities. Also, the caretakers (baby sitters) who accompany the working parents are provided with free lunch and are extended the same benefits provided to the employees. To make the kids feel at home, there is also a dedicated area with playground equipment. In addition to the in-house facility, Zoho also has a tie-up with a child care agency. And to further support the needs of working parents, the mothers joining after their maternity break are also given flexible work timings.

While we already had a childcare facility in place, the only difference that we made in the last one year was increasing the paid maternity leaves from 3 months to 6 months. And instead of causing us troubles, the added benefit led to a positive impact on business.

In Zoho's experience, the employees who do not have any family members to take care of their children at home, love and appreciate the childcare facility. As parents can visit their children whenever they want and keep a check on them, they are more focused at work, hence increasing their productivity.

Now, as the team at Zoho will grow, the focus will be on expanding the childcare facilities.

A company has to understand and reciprocate to the needs and expectations of its employees to achieve more. Employees learn and grow with the company, and so does their family. As the needs of the working parents (male or female) differ, organizations should be flexible in adopting positive changes. ●





ROHIT CHENNAMANENI
Co-Founder, Darwinbox

Addressing the needs of working parents with a few resources

As a small sized organization, our challenges of catering to the needs of the working parents are different, while their expectations remain the same.

As a small organization and a fast-growing startup, there is a significant amount of stretch in terms of agility and ownership. However, the needs of the working parents remain the same. They look for more flexibility in terms of non-rigid timelines where there is a chance to prioritize their personal needs when necessary while they are able to give their best. Hence, we do not straightjacket 'work hours' into specific times and rituals; instead, we make it more outcome-oriented irrespective of the specific hours/days spent on getting things done.

With the intent to support working parents, we had the extended maternity and paternity policy even before the law was enforced. Policies like these are essential for employee well-being and their ability to give back their best to the organization. However, the effort from the management side sometimes is higher due to this, as the predictability of some mothers returning to work is low in some cases and planning for buffers in those scenarios is not easy.

In the initial days, the involvement of the father is very important both, as an emotional support for the nursing mother (who is going through a change) and also taking care of basic logistics at early stages of the baby like doctor visits and managing sleepless nights. Considering the importance of a father's role in the early stages of a child's life, we kept our paternity policy much higher than the market standard.

While we have many benefits in place to support working parents, we do not have a childcare facility at this stage. Currently, a majority of the workforce is young and only a small percentage of employees have kids. But going forward, we would want to move from an independent workspace to a larger corporate complex which has these facilities or provide subscriptions to nearby ones for employees. Having a childcare facility in place as one of our key agendas, this will be a basic requirement when we are looking for real estate to move our office.

Beyond the policies and benefits, Darwinbox also engages with the family of the employees through family picnics and get-togethers. Through these interactions, we take care of the employee well-being and also use this as an opportunity to bring all the employees to know and understand each other better. We make sure that all the employees (especially the younger ones) are sensitized to the requirements of working parents.

As we go forward, we want to make sure we have a better orientation towards working parents with counselling sessions, more family events and work-from-home opportunities. ●



**RUHIE PANDE**

CHRO, Godrej Properties Ltd.

The long-term benefits of maternity benefits at short-term costs

If a company loses a high potential working woman because it could not allow her some flexibility, it is a loss of a productive resource.

A recent BCG study shows that increasing the diversity of leadership teams leads to more and better innovation and improved financial performance. In the study, companies that reported above-average diversity in their management teams also reported innovation revenue that was 19 percentage points higher than that of companies with below-average leadership diversity—45 percent of total revenue as compared to only about 26 percent. This correlation between gender diversity and innovation makes a strong business case for policies and facilities to support the needs of working parents.

Realizing the importance of gender diversity, at Godrej, the HR team, business teams and a dedicated diversity and inclusion team at the group level together drive the agenda of building a family-friendly workplace. With a focus on the needs of a working mother, a woman professional, during the three phases in the event of a pregnancy—pre-maternity, during maternity and post maternity, here are some ways in which Godrej Properties Ltd. is helping the working mothers:

Pre-maternity

Before maternity, women go through certain health challenges and expect their supervisors and colleagues to be a bit more accommodating. Therefore, at Godrej we sensitize a person's manager to the situations and requirements of the expecting mother. We have tied up with a third party to drive conversations regarding women's health, both mental and physical. We provide all our expecting mothers with maternity counselling to help them through any anxiety if there is, considering it is an extremely sensitive phase of any woman's life.

During maternity

Even before the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2017, Godrej had a 26-week paid maternity leave. And when a female employee has to leave for maternity, we hire temporary employees to fill in

the position or move in people within the organization. We work along with the recruitment team to find replacements to ensure that the work doesn't get impacted. The scope of maternity leaves is also extended to the cases of adoption but instead of 6, working mothers get 3 months of paid adoption leaves.

Post maternity

When a woman employee joins back after a maternity break, she wants to feel as productive as she was before. Hence, we ensure that they are given challenging assignments and the position equal or in some cases superior to before.

Godrej Properties also has a program called Careers 2.0, under which we consider women who are looking for opportunities after a career break. This program is open to any woman who has opted to take a career break and is keen to get back to work.

Similar to maternity leaves, Godrej also had in-house childcare facilities before the law mandated it. Although the facility is built in the office, it is administered by a third-party expert. While we do have the facilities for some of the offices, we are revamping the strategy and exploring some more options to cater to the employees in the best way.

Lastly, we also have a caregiver policy, as per which the women employees who have to travel for meetings can carry their child along with them and also take a caregiver/ helper with them and the company bears the entire cost.

To ensure business continuity, the organizations have to look at the issues and challenges from employees' perspective. They have to look at the long-term gains like increased gender diversity, happy and productive employees and better retention. If a company loses a high potential working woman because it could not allow her some flexibility, it is a loss of a productive resource. ●





SWATHI MADAN
Head HR - KTN circle, Airtel

Going beyond the 26 weeks paid maternity leaves

For an organization that had already reaped the benefits of providing 26 weeks paid maternity leaves in the organization and a childcare facility long before the amendments were made, we have to put in a lot more efforts and go beyond these policies to support women.

The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2017 that mandated crèche facility for every establishment employing 50 or more employees is a positive move towards enhancing employee experience. However, it comes with operational challenges because of ambiguity in the stated amendments.

For instance, for an organization like Airtel, that is operational in various states of the country with employees spread across states, what does the term 'establishment' mean for us. Does it mean 50 employees in each hub/zone or 50 employees in the location? Airtel and other telecom companies have a lot of workforce on the field. Therefore, should we include them or not? It is not clear.

Due to ambiguities like these, we faced some challenges in implementing the policy and in complying with the Act. But now, we have childcare facilities in almost every location. As the top leadership has a strong sentiment around gender diversity, building a business case for childcare facilities was not a challenge. The only business decision we had to make was whether we should build an in-house crèche or tie up with a third party.

While the head office in Gurgaon had a childcare facility, which currently caters to 200 children, the offices in locations like Chennai have crèche facilities within 800m radius of the offices, as it made sense from the perspective of both the size of the location and the size of the workforce.

The admin, the facilities team along with the HR worked in putting these facilities together. HR then publicized these

facilities to our employees through emails, messages, standees, posters, discussions, etc. The HR Head and the CEO were largely involved in the decision making.

But having the childcare facilities and extending the maternity leaves is not sufficient to drive gender diversity. For an organization that had already reaped the benefits of providing 26 weeks paid maternity leaves in the organization and a childcare facility long before the amendments were made, we have to put in a lot more efforts and go beyond these policies to support women. Hence, we started mentoring programs for women employees and brought in mentors and leaders from different walks of life and industries to have inspiring conversations. We have dedicated talks around career with our women workforce and ensure that they get the best guidance. Going beyond complying with the acts and the policies what truly strengthens gender diversity is a strong sentiment and intent to truly make a difference in the lives of our employees. From offering multi-functional opportunities to our employees to launching a forum called We Achieve, Airtel is providing the women employees space to grow and learn from each other.

At the end of the day, what the employees expect from the organization is support and empathy. While a lot of our employees have chosen not to avail the childcare facility, they look forward to initiatives like the mentoring program and the platform 'We Achieve'. ●

(The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in this article belongs solely to the author, and not necessarily to Airtel.)



**VINAY SHENDE**

Diversity & Inclusion Lead,
Johnson & Johnson India

Empathize, Improvize and Personalize for business impact

The secret of the success of policies like maternity and paternity leaves is the level of enthusiasm and participation shown by the leadership.

When it comes to building childcare facilities, the challenges are not related to “why” but “how to do it”? With lack of space and capacity in the offices, along with the majority of the workforce working remotely, building a formal structure around it can be difficult. While most of our factories, head office and some offices have crèche, there are many other offices where we are looking to tie up with third parties, because, firstly, they are the specialists in the area and secondly, the challenges like lack of space are taken care of.

Having a crèche facility in place since the 1970s, the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2017 didn't make much difference to us and the other organizations who already had basic facilities like the ones mentioned in the law. We have to, therefore, improvise and personalize the mandates for more impact.

All employees of the organization, irrespective of their gender, have a primary expectation from their employer, to create a safe environment for them and their family. All they wish for is that the organizations are empathetic to their needs. Therefore, when we think about taking care of our employees, we should think about both the working mothers and the fathers. Hence, we encourage paternity leaves at our workplace and also ask our male employees to avail the crèche facility and support their wives at home. The secret of the success of poli-

cies like this is the enthusiasm and the participation by the leadership. When the leaders themselves drive this thought, making a diverse and inclusive culture becomes a cakewalk.

Leaders at Johnson & Johnson India are champions of promoting things like flexible working hours, work from home, paternity leaves and utilizing childcare facilities.

To further enhance the maternity benefits implied by the law, Johnson & Johnson India also introduced a sabbatical policy for raising a child. We also provide paid leaves in the case of adoption and cases where there is some complication or termination of pregnancy.

In providing such facilities, when we talk about business impact, there are some challenges when it comes to giving work from home to shop floor employees or the staff in the labs. But there are other solutions like flexi hours that work better there.

Therefore, it is safe to say that there is no one foolproof solution for every situation. Laws like the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2017 are basic guidelines or principles for the organizations, which they have to choose, mould and improvize to their company's needs and situations. What might work for one company, might turn out to be hazardous for the other! ●



**V. MALATI**

Scientist, R&D unit, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories

What happens after the child starts going to school?

While for three years I had a better focus on work, felt more engaged and was also able to give my child a safe environment to be in, now as my daughter has joined school, there are new challenges.

When a mother joins office post maternity, while she is keen on getting back to work, she is also worried about the child she is leaving at home. Even though there are options like leaving your child with the in-laws or having a maid to care of him/her, a mother would love to have her child near and accessible and in a safe environment. Also, many female employees either can't afford maids or don't have anyone else to take care of their child at home. Having a childcare facility in-house or nearby the office, hence, proves to be a good option for working mothers.

When in 2015, I went through the maternity phase, the childcare facility provided by Dr. Reddy's Laboratories made my life much easier. I had a better focus on work, felt more engaged and was also able to give my child a safe environment to be in. Facilities like these enable the working mothers to make most of their careers without compromising their personal lives and vice versa.

While for three years my life was simpler, with childcare facility two buildings away, now as my daughter has joined a school, there are new challenges. After the child starts going to the school, the working mother has an entirely new scenario to deal with. If a working parent can bring their child along with them to the office, working extra hours or on weekends becomes easier. And sometimes the work demands those extra hours of work. But with the child reaching home early, the school or the DayCare closing early, working parents have to rush home or work with regrets in their heart.

Organizations have to become more empathetic to the needs and come out with new strategies for situations like these. Maybe what we need is that companies extend the childcare facilities for children above the age of six years as well, basically for the children who start going to school. ●





SARANYA GANESAN
Product Manager, Zoho Corp

A flexible ecosystem brings women back to work post-maternity

The fact that I can go to my manager and ask for a leave without the fear of being questioned is what makes me stick.

Flexible working hours, a childcare facility and a family friendly workplace is what professionals are looking for today. When working mothers have to choose to work for an employer, they look for a bundle of benefits like these and often let go off of the opportunity in the case of absence of these benefits.

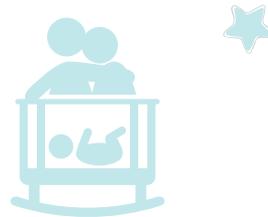
As a working mother, the biggest challenge a woman faces is the inability to be at two places at a time. While she wants to attend to the needs of her child and family, she also doesn't want to compromise her work. Hence, women professionals seek some level of understanding and empathy from their employers. The benefits Zoho provides enables me to concentrate on my work, eases my burden and makes my life much simpler.

When I was expecting, my managers and peers were supportive and sensitive to my needs and requirements at that crucial phase in life. They understood the health challenges I was experiencing, making it easier for me to ask for leaves or for flexi

working hours. I was given the freedom to take one month's advance leave pre maternity and also additional leaves post maternity. The care that I was given built a stronger trust and bond with my organization, making it easier for me to resume work here.

Further, the presence of an in-house childcare facility made it even more easier to come back to work, as I didn't have to worry about who will take care of my child after I leave for office.

If there exists a supportive ecosystem in the organization, it is visible in the daily conversations and situations. Not only the laws and the policies, but emotional and mental support given by peers and seniors is what builds this system. The fact that I can go to my manager and ask for a leave without the fear of being questioned is what makes me stick. Hence, a flexible and open organizational culture that allows working parents to strike a balance between work and life is what attracts and retains them. ●





**people
matters**

People Matters Media Pvt. Ltd.
503-505, 5th Floor,
Millennium Plaza, Tower A,
Sector 27, Gurgaon - 122009
www.peoplesmatters.in



Founding Years Learning Solutions Pvt. Ltd.
31/1 Seetharamapalya,
3rd Floor, Mahadevapura,
Bangalore -560048