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## **PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS BY ORGANISING CHAIRWOMAN GAN SIOW HUANG AT PAP WOMEN'S WING CONFERENCE 2023 ON 29 JULY 2023**

Thank you for participating in the PAP Women's Wing Conference this year. We are excited to have you here as we will be discussing "Support for SG Families", a topic that is close to the hearts of many Singaporeans, especially women who traditionally carry a heavier load in caregiving duties at home.

As Comrade Sim Ann said, our nation is grappling with two worrying trends – ageing population and declining TFR. The problems we are facing today – rising demand on caregivers, shortage of local workers, shrinking school cohort size; these problems are connected to the issues of ageing population and declining TFR, and will become more acute in the years to come.

Other developed countries in the world are facing similar issues too, and have not found any easy solution. While we can look to good practices elsewhere, we must create our own solutions that suit our local context and culture. How can we better support those who are taking care of young children or elderly family members? What are the family-friendly workplace practices that should be available more widely? What does it take for men and women to be more equal in sharing caregiving responsibilities at home? In a nutshell, how do we, as a society, make Singapore a nation that is truly, Made for Families?

Prior to this conference, the Research Group in the PAP Women's Wing and NTUC's Women and Family Unit did a survey on Flexible Work Arrangements. The objective was to understand the relevance of Flexible Work Arrangements in supporting employees with caregiving needs, and the challenges in adopting Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA) more widely in Singapore. About 2700 people responded to the survey; all were working, and more than half had children.

The survey tells us one of the main benefits of FWAs is that it indeed helps employees better manage their work and caregiving responsibilities.

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Working from home is the most common type of FWA in Singapore, followed by staggered working hours.

Working from home is also more available in larger companies, while staggered working hours and part-time options are more available in some industries than others. For those in companies with more than 100 employees, 6 in 10 could work from home, whereas for those in companies with 25 or fewer employees, only 4 in 10 could do so.

There are some downsides to working from home. 3 in 10 say they are more productive in the office than at home. 4 in 10 need to meet regularly with their colleagues to build strong relationships and teamwork. 3 in 10 feel that working from home makes it difficult for them to separate their work and personal life.

What are the implications of these survey findings?

First, employees like Flexible Work Arrangements, but not everyone can or wants to work from home. For certain companies and employees, flexi-time and flexi-load could be more suitable.

Second, as FWAs are helpful for those who need to manage work and caregiving, FWA provisions can help more caregivers continue or return to work instead of taking a pause in their careers. This is especially pertinent for women who are bearing the heavier load of caregiving in their families. If we want more women to return to work, increasing availability of FWAs is key.

Third, the survey shows that smaller companies (<25 employees) are less able to allow work from home for their workers. Smaller companies perhaps have limited HR and supervisor capability to manage staff on remote or hybrid work. We should help small companies build capabilities to implement FWAs. This will benefit their employees, especially those who are caregivers. It can also help SMEs attract and retain talent. More details of the FWA survey will be released after the conference.

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This afternoon, we will be sharing three real stories with you, or what we call “learning journeys”. One of the learning journeys showcases a local company that hires many women, and offers flexible work arrangements to support employees in managing work and caregiving roles. The learning journeys feature not only women, but also men who are playing an active part in supporting families.

After the learning journeys, we have a panel discussion on the topic of “Support for SG Families”. We have invited interesting speakers from various backgrounds, and who have personal experience as caregivers, or whose work involves supporting families. We look forward to a rich discussion on how employers, the community and society-at-large can empower those among us who are working to better manage work and family commitments.

My heartfelt appreciation to the learning journey presenters and panel speakers for their contributions.

I hope their stories will spark interest in our comrades and friends here today to initiate new partnerships, policies, and practices on the ground. I know that fellow MPs who feel passionately about strengthening support for families will speak up in Parliament and push for changes towards this cause. Most of all, we want to see ideas turn into action, to create positive impact.

I would also like to thank my teammates from the Women’s Wing and PAP HQ for planning and organising today’s conference.

Finally, I hope that all of you will find today’s conference useful – be it in generating ideas to strengthen support for families, or simply, re-connecting with fellow comrades and making new friends. Together, we can improve the lives of women and make Singapore the best place for families.

Enjoy the conference!