

Call to make eldercare leave compulsory

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Madam Halimah Yacob shares her views on work and family life balance with about 200 members of the public at the 7th Children's Society Lecture on Oct 5, 2013. The Speaker of Parliament has urged the Government to legislate for family or elder care leave. -- ST PHOTO: HOE PEISHAN

Speaker of Parliament Halimah Yacob has urged the Government to legislate for family or elder care leave.

This, she said, will send a strong signal to employers of the growing need to support workers who have to take care of sick and frail family members.

Giving the keynote address on work-life balance at the 7th Singapore Children's Society Lecture on Saturday morning at the Singapore Management University, Madam Halimah shared her views with an audience of about 200 members of the public.

A mother of five, she said balancing work and family life has become one of the most daunting challenges that many in Singapore face today.

She urged for a more comprehensive set of public policy and community measures to support families in view of a growing number of dual income homes where both parents are under pressure to juggle work and family.

Employers could help, for instance, by allowing flexible work hours wherein employee assessment is not about "measuring face time" in the office.

Referring to her time under the National Trades Union Congress, she said she valued the flexibility given and how "you're not assessed based on what time you clock in, what time you clock out, but rather, based on your outcomes, the output."

Society, too, could chip in by promoting shared parenting instead of perpetuating stereotypes of women shouldering most of the family caretaking.

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But Madam Halimah also cautioned against relying too much on legislation and external forces to bring about work-life balance.

"We cannot absolve our individual decision and responsibility and how that contributes to our family well-being," she said. "We cannot say [this is] what the Government will do, what the workplace will do, we have to also ask ourselves, what can we do."