

Core and Stable Scheduling

A partnership between Daughters Of Tomorrow and the Business Community to Enable Social Mobility for Working Mothers from Lower-Income Communities



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Introduction

Singapore's national childcare policy follows the strategy of providing quality and accessible care for children under the age of seven in formal care institutions. The policy also involves promoting the work-life balance of employed parents by limiting childcare operation hours to office hours. This approach, however, poses a barrier to employment for a lower-income group of Singaporeans. Parents who can't find employment opportunities within childcare operation hours struggle to secure sustainable income for themselves and their families.

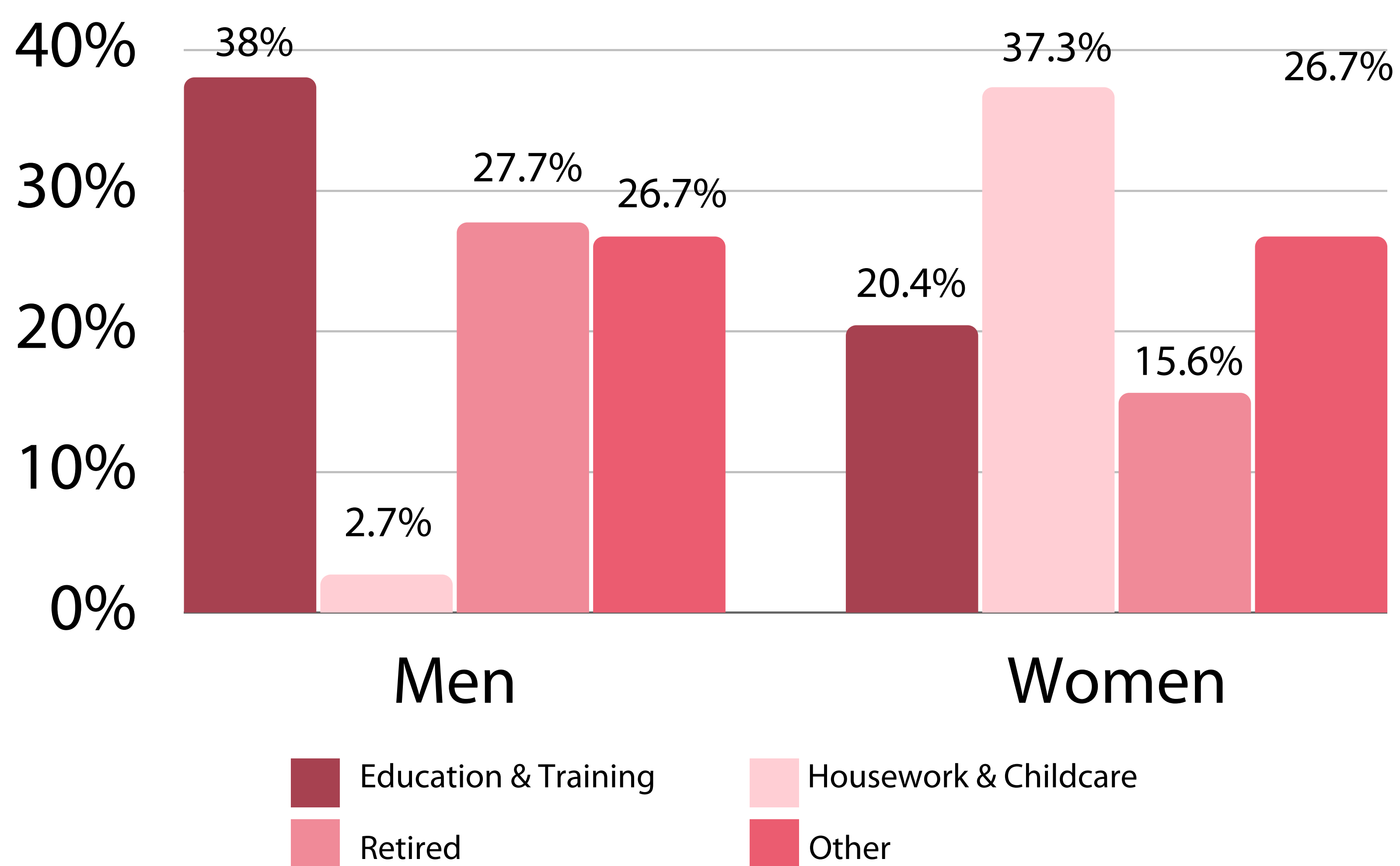
To provide an insight into this conundrum faced by many lower-income mothers in Singapore, Daughters Of Tomorrow (DOT) examines the issue at hand, as well as providing a detailed look into its initiative that helps counter this challenge with the partnership of the business community of Singapore.

Why are mothers from lower-income communities struggling with stable employment?

Across the globe, women juggle the dual responsibility of having to work and take care of children due to gender roles, which limits their ability to earn a decent income for themselves and their families. Generally being the sole providers of care to the family, women struggle to balance their traditional care duties and access to employment, and Singapore is no exception.

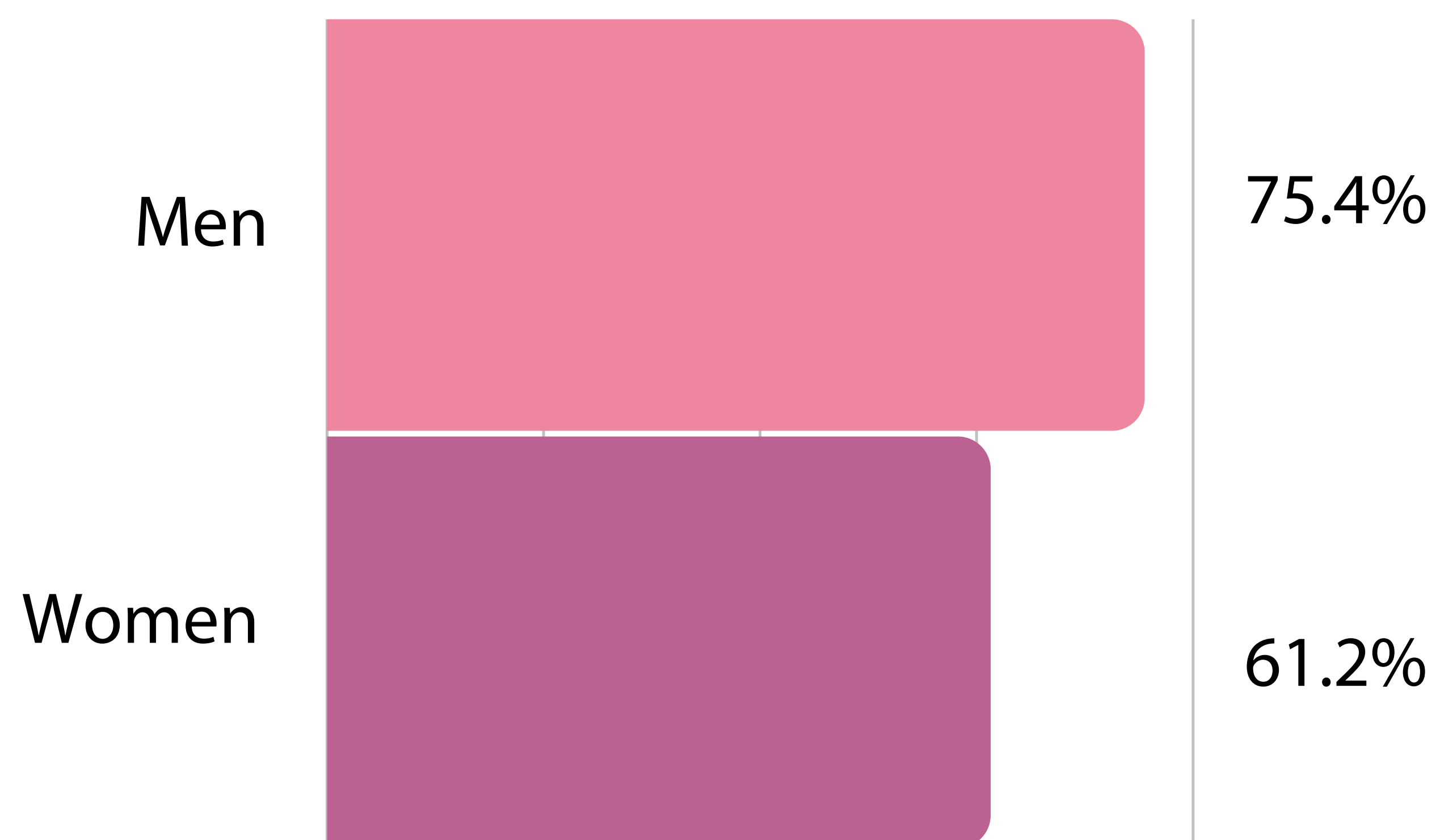
According to the Ministry of Manpower's recent report on the labour force, in 2020, 37.3% of women outside of the labour force cited housework and childcare as the main reason they were not working or looking for work. Based on the same report, men left the workforce to get better education and training but women stayed out due to domestic responsibilities, including taking care of children. Child-rearing and care work is commonly gendered, and disproportionately reduces women's ability to participate in the workforce. The statistics on the next page point to an alarming phenomenon of the worsening financial situation of women, also known as the feminization of poverty.

Why working-age Singaporeans are out of the workforce 2020



Sources: Department of Statistics Singapore, Labour Market Report 2020

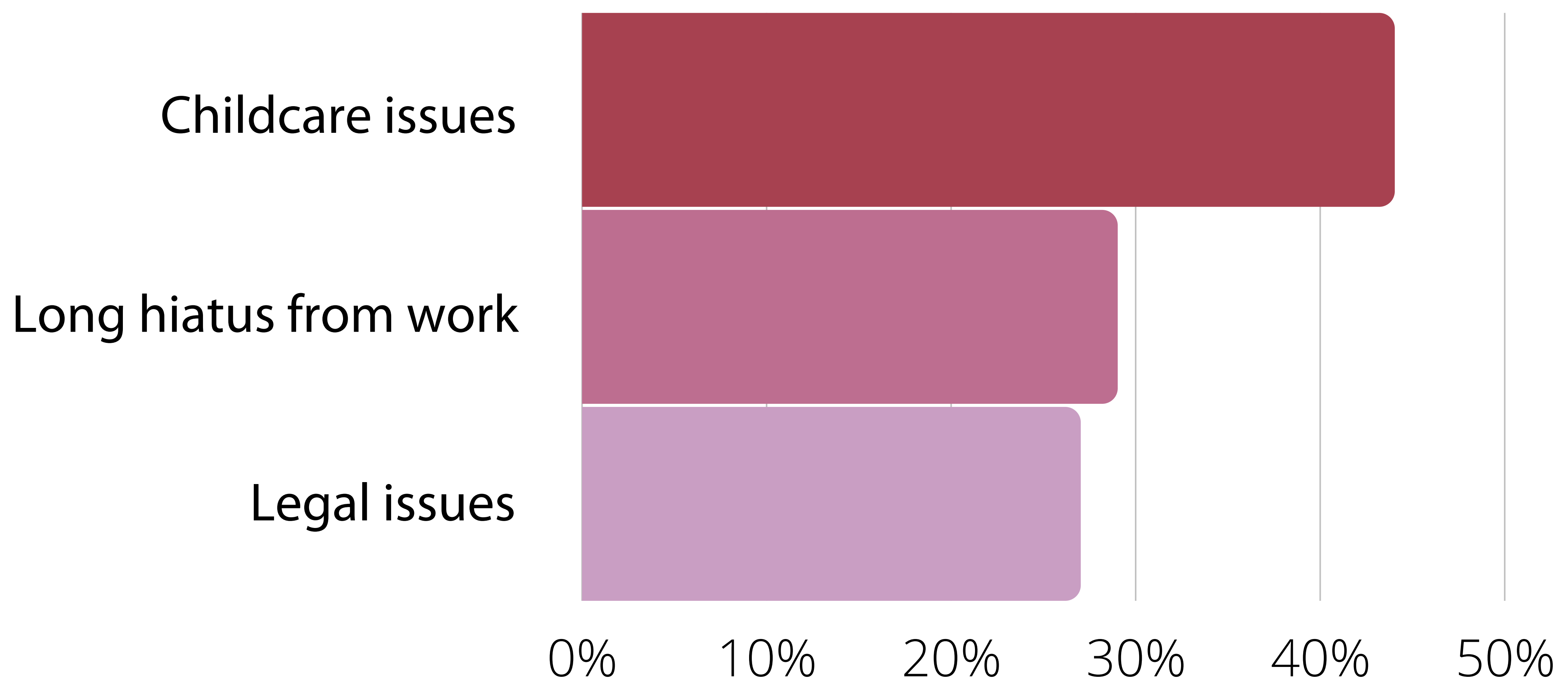
2020 Labour force participation rate in Singapore



Sources: Department of Statistics Singapore, Labour Market Report 2020

In Singapore, many lower-income mothers are often unable to work and earn an income due to childcare responsibilities. According to a survey with more than 300 DOT beneficiaries, almost half of respondents cited issues with finding childcare as the main factor preventing them from finding employment.

Top 3 barriers to employment faced by DOT beneficiaries



Source: Needs Assessment Collated Highlights 2020, Daughters Of Tomorrow

Analysing why these mothers struggle with finding stable income opportunities points to a complex phenomenon. In Singapore, many working parents benefit greatly from infant and childcare centres across the island. By offering quality care for children at reasonable fees, which are further made affordable thanks to subsidies implemented by the government, these centres allow parents to attend work and earn an income. The main problem for women from lower-income communities arises when it comes to the operating hours of these centres.

As part of the national policy, childcare and student care centres by and large operate on weekdays and during office hours. With a highest education level lower than the national average and mostly lacking skills that are required to secure and keep an office job, many mothers from lower-income communities instead are forced to find shift work in industries such as the retail, hospitality, and F&B sectors.

CHALLENGE



Shift work traditionally operates in a way that provides flexibility only to the business itself. Employees are assigned rotating shifts by scheduling managers without much input from the workers, in a best-case scenario, allowing employees to swap shifts between themselves. This system directly disadvantages mothers who have no childcare options other than the childcare centres when their shifts do not coincide with the centres' operating hours. Indeed, while childcare centers are open between 7am and 7pm, working under a rotating shift model, or in industries like retail and F&B, that operate largely between 10am and 10pm, destabilise mothers, often resulting in job termination.

A further problem arises when it comes to picking up children after work, as almost all centres impose "late pick-up fees." While these fees can be an inconvenience for middle-class parents, for mothers with lower incomes they amount to exuberant sums, possibly costing them more than what they pay for an entire month's childcare fees. Lastly, as lower-income earners, these mothers often have almost no savings, leaving them with no alternative childcare arrangements outside of the childcare centres. When all of these elements come together, mothers doing shift work face constant instability that risk their jobs when they can secure one. This instability increases exponentially for mothers who are the sole caregivers for their families and can't depend on other family members, especially if they have more than one child who are placed in different childcare centres.

DOT's Core and Stable Scheduling:

A solution that benefits both mothers and employers

When Amanda, a single mother struggling financially, was referred to Daughters Of Tomorrow by her social worker, she was having trouble finding a job that could accommodate her responsibilities as a mother, as well as provide an income for her small family. Unable to source reliable care for her young son before and after childcare operation hours, the young mother was struggling to keep a full-time job since she had to skip shifts to care for him.

Amanda found that workplaces were not understanding of her timing needs. She did not have any reliable family members who could care for her young son, leading her to begrudgingly accept that her best option was to care for her son by herself, trying to survive on financial assistance from the government, and forgoing employment opportunities, which she would not be able to sustain.



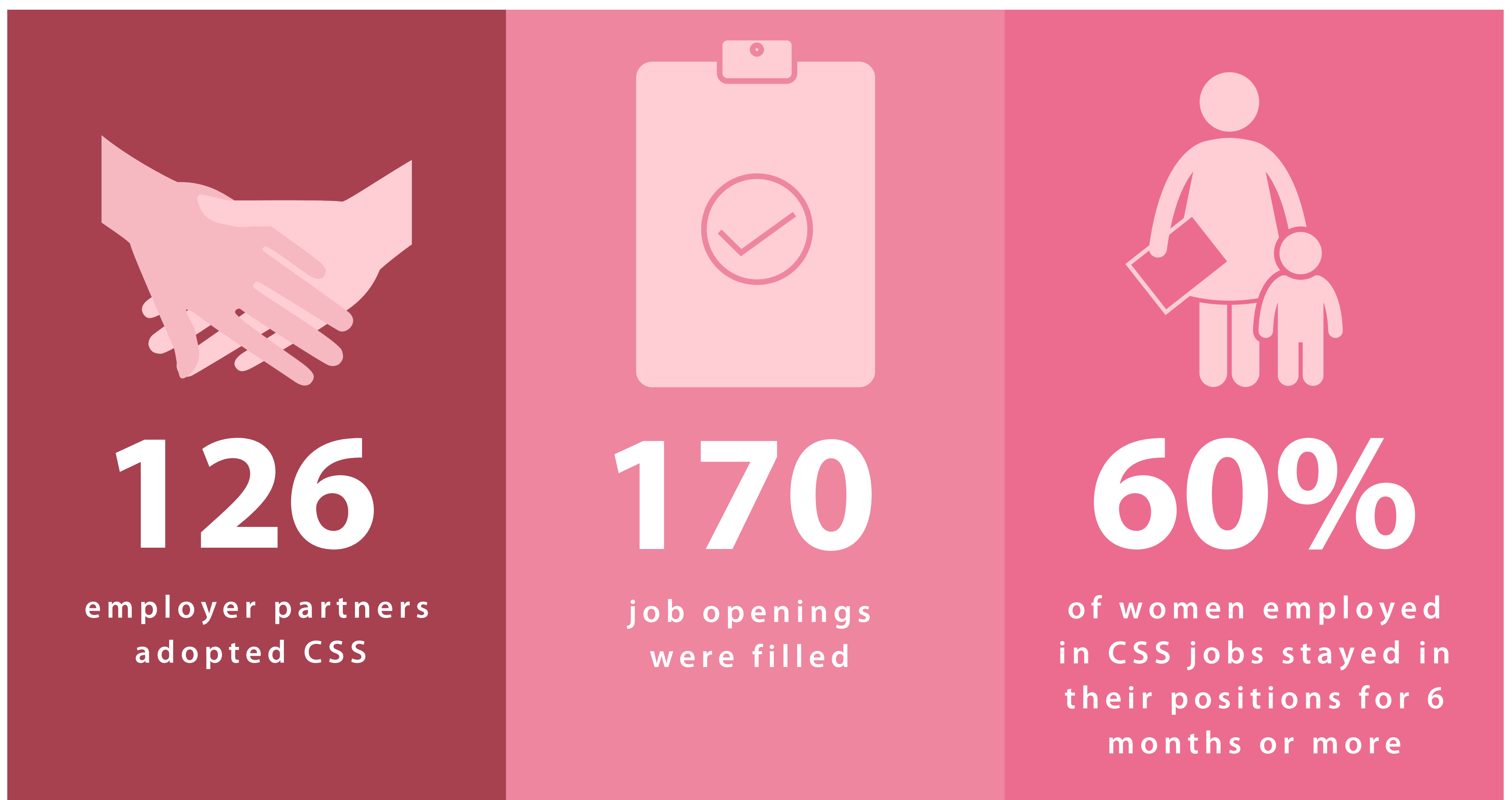
DOT's solution for mothers in situations like Amanda's is Core and Stable Scheduling (CSS). Based on innovative practices first trialled overseas, CSS is a zero-cost model that provides fixed-shift work during office hours to mothers with family responsibilities, allowing them to access services by childcare centres and avoid late pick-up fees. Traditionally in industries that rely on rotating-shift models, workers are put on different schedules week-to-week or even day to day. CSS helps mitigate this problem for mothers and can be implemented by employers.



Many of DOT's employer partners have implemented CSS by attracting the right employee to the right shift permanently from the beginning of the recruiting process. Instead of following a rotating shift structure, these partners recruit their workers for specific shifts throughout their employment. This method sets clear expectations for the employees, allowing mothers stability in attending work and managing their care responsibilities. Employer partners who have switched to this model report increased employee punctuality decreased short-notice absences, and better working relationships between employees and managers.

Since its inception in 2018, DOT's CSS model has enabled employer partners to decrease their risk of employee turnover, grow their appeal to local workers, and increase the productivity of their scheduling managers. These employer partners in return have changed the financial reality for dozens of mothers and their children, enabling each person to earn a stable income while partaking in the labour force.

DOT's impact in since 2018



Source: Internal data, Daughters Of Tomorrow

Proven to be beneficial both for employer partners in need of reliable staff, as well as mothers who are struggling financially, DOT invites members of the business community to further contribute to our society by implementing Core and Stable Scheduling to enable lower-income women back to the workforce. Through adopting CSS, employers will find a way of giving back while potentially increasing profits and operational effectiveness, thanks to lower turnover rates and reduced costs on re-hiring and re-training. This effort in itself helps improve our society as a whole by creating sustainable and equitable income opportunities for marginalised members of our community.

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