

New benchmark: Tata Sons rolling out woman-centric policies including paid maternity leave of seven months

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NEW DELHI: India Inc has got a new benchmark in policies for women . Tata Sons is rolling out a set of woman-centric policies that include paid maternity leave of seven months, 18 months of half pay-half working day post-maternity support, flexibility to choose work hours, secure performance ratings during the maternity leave and flexible work duration. Once you complete five years at work, you could avail of a one-year leave at half pay if you are a care-giver at home.

For now, the policy has been unveiled only at Tata Sons, the holding company of the group with businesses ranging from salt to software. Others in the group are likely to adopt it in the near future — policies at the Tata Group companies are traditionally shaped by the initiatives at Tata Sons.

On offer are work-life policies for women that could set a new benchmark in India, and match some of the best policies across the world . Tata Sons has tailored interventions at various life stages of women — child birth, early childhood care, flexible working, care for elderly and child, as part of Tata LEAD - under the Group Diversity and Inclusion initiative that was launched by chairman Cyrus P Mistry in March 2014. "Our intent is to show that we care through a deep organisational commitment towards our woman employees. Maternity, for example, has been a key focus area. By offering seven months leave followed by postmaternity support of 18 months, we are providing a viable option to mothers to be at home during the critical early childhood," said NS Rajan, the group chief human resources officer at Tata Sons who spearheads the Group Diversity Council.

Starting this month, woman employees at Tata Sons can avail of the seven-month maternity leave with full pay. The leave can be taken from two months prior to child birth. For early childhood care after completing the maternity leave, women can work from home with reduced hours for 18 months. During this period, they will get half pay for half working day. Those who want to work full time during this period can shift to a flexi-work arrangement. Beyond maternity and early childhood care as well, women have the option to flexi-work — they can work from home for up to two days a week, and opt for flexible work hours.

"Women's careers are most vulnerable in the period soon after maternity — almost 48% of women drop out at this stage," said Saundarya Rajesh, founder president of AVTAR Career Creators. "If a company were to manage the retention and performance of women in this career stage, almost 50% of the battle is won. Add to this a good measure of skill-building to ensure that attitudinal growth also happens — you have a perfect recipe for a gender balanced organisation."

On completion of five years in service, women are now entitled to a unique privilege — they can take up to one year of leave during the total course of their employment for child care or elder care. This has been done to support life events that need women to take time off. This one-year leave can be taken in instalments — maximum six times for a minimum of two months.

Compensation during this period will be 50% of the last drawn CTC. That's not all. One of the biggest concerns for women during maternity leave, and then early child care, is career progression. The company in its policy ensures that performance rating during maternity leave and flexible work will

be based on the average of the previous two years' ratings or ratings for the ongoing year, whichever is higher. Maternity leave, flexible work, work from home — time spent on all will be considered as continuous service, and promotions will not be impacted.

"Working women today perform multiple roles much beyond their work at office. Looking after home, attending to children and elders is a cherished role. Our approach, be it special leave and flexible alternatives, are aimed at recognising these important roles women play in their families and stand by our woman employees wherever needed," Rajan said.

The company has also introduced a six-month adoption leave, sixmonth surrogacy leave, and 15 days of paternity leave.

Companies in India typically offer three months of paid maternity leave, but now more and more companies have started offering sixmonth leaves. While companies, especially across the services sector, do have flexi-work options or even early childhood policies, it is for the first time that a company has put together a holistic policy with conscious interventions at different life stages for women.

Under Tata LEAD, two years ago the Tata Group had announced increasing the number of female employees to 230,000 in 2020 from 115,000 in 2014. Currently, the number of women in the group is more than 145,000 that constitutes 24% of total employees.