

ARTICLE 5

SEX ROLE STEREOTYPING AND PREJUDICE

State Parties shall take all appropriate measures:

- (a) *To modify the social and cultural patterns of the conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices, customs and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotypical roles for men and women;*
- (b) *To ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases.*

Singapore has made good progress on the road to equality in both the education and work fields. Today, more females graduate from university than males¹ and women represent 43.6 percent of the workforce². However, this progress has not been matched by equality in the home. The view of the man as head of the household³ still prevails despite the strong face of women in the workforce. Women with careers are often faced with the difficulties of finding a work-life balance with inadequate support from their male partners. At the same time, women are continually bombarded by gender-stereotypical messages in the media that reinforce stereotypical roles or idealized images to which they are expected to aspire. The process of doing away with stereotypes and ensuring that there is no discrimination is limited by the reservations on Articles 2, 11 and 16. These reservations are relevant in this discussion and impact on the local practices, much of which are governed by illustrations of best practices and guidelines, thus limiting the kind of protection that can be offered.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Common Responsibility of Men and Women in the Upbringing of Children

- 5.1 Singapore sees the family as an important institution which contributes to “social stability and national cohesiveness”⁴. As a result of this view, the State has initiated many pro-

¹ MCYS gender statistics for 2009 show 51.4% females compared to 48.6% males. <http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/ResearchStatistics/GraduatesfromUniversitiesbyGender.aspx> ...accessed 1 April 2011.

² Extrapolated from the employment data set out by MOM in Table 29 of its ‘Report on Labour Force in Singapore 2010’ http://www.mom.gov.sg/Publications/mrsd_singapore_workforce_2010.pdf ...accessed 23 January 2011.

³ See also discussion under Article 11 para 11.24.

⁴ See MCYS website <http://app1.mcys.gov.sg/IssuesTopics/StrongandStableFamilies.aspx>

family policies and programmes which aim to encourage the formation of families and the strengthening of family ties. Part VI of the Women's Charter - entitled "Rights and Duties of Husband and Wife" - declares that once married, "the husband and wife shall be mutually bound to cooperate with each other in safeguarding the interests of the union and in caring and providing for the children"⁵. It seems clear that both men and women are expected to share the care for their children. However in terms of running the matrimonial home, the Charter talks only of "equal rights", not of the expected corresponding "equal responsibilities".

- 5.2 In spite of such legislation, the traditional view of the male as head of the family remains prevalent. In the words of a member of the National Family Council, "the father is not only the head of the household but, from my observations, the key to sound family life"⁶. This is a damning statement from a national body as surely both fathers and mothers are essential to a sound family life. In this "traditional society", women are expected to, and do perform the lion's share of care giving to children and elderly parents, as well as household chores. A survey⁷ by the Ministry for Community Development, Youth and Sport (MCYS) in 2009 found that while 99 percent of fathers felt that responsibility for bringing up children should be shared equally between men and women, the reality was that far fewer men were involved in their children's lives. Indeed, many respondents were stuck in the limited, traditional view of fatherhood, seeing the father's primary role as the "breadwinner" (46%), with a mere 11 percent of respondents listing their role as "looking after the child's day-to-day needs". Fathers spend barely half the amount of time alone with a child during a weekend as mothers who spend an average of 4.6 hours alone with their child. When asked to list the challenges fathers face in not being able to spend more time with their children, the majority cited work responsibilities (63%), but a worrying 39 percent cited society's views on how men should behave.
- 5.3 AWARE welcomes the work of the State in attempting to involve more men in the upbringing of the children and congratulates it on initiatives such as the Dads for Life website⁸ and Fathers@School programme⁹ which aim to encourage father-child bonding and involve all fathers more in the lives of their children. Such actions can only have benefits for men, children and women. However, the revealing results of the MCYS

... accessed 1 April 2010.

⁵ See Appendix 5.1. Women's Charter. See also PM's CNY Year Speech 2008.

⁶ See Appendix 5.2. National Family Council. MCYS press release October 2008.

⁷ MCYS Singapore Fatherhood Public Perception Survey 2009 – survey of 2,200 men. http://www.dadsforlife.sg/images/stories/dfi/SINGAPORE_FATHERHOOD_PUBLIC_PERCEPTION_SURVEY_2009.pdf... accessed 23 January 2011.

⁸ <http://www.dadsforlife.sg/> ... accessed 13 January 2011.

⁹ http://dadsforlife.sg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=94... accessed 23 January 2011.

survey and recent discussions in online forums point to the need to address this issue with more fundamental changes.

5.4 One of the main areas of concern cited by both men and women as a challenge to family life is the problem of work-life balance. The 2009 International Labour Office (ILO) Global Wage Report shows that Singapore has the longest working hours in the world¹⁰. While the State has introduced schemes to encourage employers to introduce work-life measures at the workplace¹¹, according to the Ministry of Manpower most employers are still slow on the uptake (see Article 11 para 11.56). This discrepancy presents a worrying picture. It is not enough to introduce schemes if employers are not family-friendly. As the Prime Minister noted in his announcement of the new Marriage and Procreation Package¹², employers need to change their attitudes and not present a “sour face” or make employees feel that there will be a “little black mark recorded in your annual confidential report” whenever they ask for flexible leave arrangements. Without family-friendly employers, both men and women will feel disinclined to take parental leave, fearing that such requests will adversely affect their careers. Recent discussions on paternity leave in online forums reveal just how real these fears are to male employees:

- “I think government must take lead in this area, 2 days childcare leave and 4 days enhanced childcare leave, where got enough? Want to apply also have to think carefully, what will my boss think of me?”;
- “Wasting her time in trying to convince the companies we work in to actually be more understanding and family oriented. I doubt they’ll sacrifice corporate dollars for the sake of staff welfare”;
- “Child sick you bring him/her see doctor you get so called ‘listed’ in the list that your boss gonna target you first”;
- “Simply put, there’s a reason why there hasn’t been paternity leaves implemented until now... = Our boss is just gonna come out with another method to dodge arrows. Everyone welcome suggestions, but not something that will cost them a job”¹³.

5.5 A key problem remains the lack of mandatory paternity leave. This is again a reinforcement of the pre-determined roles for fathers and mothers at State level. While AWARE welcomes the increase of maternity leave from 12 to 16 weeks, it deplores the

¹⁰ International Labour Office ‘Global Wage Report 2009’, pp.6 chart 4. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_116500.pdf ...accessed 4 April 2011.

¹¹ See the Ministry of Manpower’s WOW Fund. <http://www.mom.gov.sg/employment-practices/work-life-harmony/wow-fund/Pages/wow-fund.aspx> ...accessed 13 January 2011.

¹² http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesinterviews/primeminister/2008/August/transcript_of_primeministerleehsienloongnationaldayrally2008spe.html ...accessed 24 January 2011.

¹³ [http://sg.yfittopostblog.com/2010/05/21/aware-responds-not-blaming-men-on-low-fertility-rates/...](http://sg.yfittopostblog.com/2010/05/21/aware-responds-not-blaming-men-on-low-fertility-rates/) accessed 24 January 2011.

lack of paid paternity leave. At present, either parent can take up to six days of paid parental leave for a child under the age of seven, but paid maternity leave remains the right of a woman only. As such, AWARE questions what message this gives to both men and women as to the common responsibility of both parents to bring up their children. A study on parental leave policies in 21 countries¹⁴ by the Centre for Economic Policy and Research states that “parental leave policies can have an important impact on gender equality, both in the workplace and with respect to sharing child care responsibilities”. The study stresses that poorly designed parental leave schemes such as those where there is maternity leave in place but no mandatory paternity leave benefit neither women nor men. Such policies are more likely to increase the mother’s childcare responsibilities and at the same time reduce her long-term earnings relative to the father. At the same time, men are deprived of the opportunity for more active involvement in bringing up their children. The net result is the reinforcement of gender inequality and the maintenance of gender stereotyped roles which continue to portray the husband as “head of the household”. Without the core provision of protection against discrimination in CEDAW’s Article 2 that can lead to Constitutional changes to recognise both sexes as equal citizens, prevailing ideologies such as “men being heads of households”.

- 5.6 One group of women particularly vulnerable to such gender stereotyping is foreign wives of Singapore men. While marriage rates overall have been dropping¹⁵, the number of marriages between Singapore citizens and foreigners has been rising. In fact, in 2008, marriages involving two Singaporean citizens accounted for only 59.2 percent of all marriages¹⁶. This trend is particularly marked in terms of older (over 40) male citizens marrying female non-citizens, many of them from rural communities in Vietnam or China. Interviewed in newspapers, the Singaporean men claim that they have been unable to find a suitable wife in Singapore. Their idea of a wife is of a “traditional” bride, subservient to the needs of the husband, who stays at home to perform duties such as household chores, care for elderly parents and children: “Singapore girls are very demanding. They want the 5 Cs and some of them are haughty”¹⁷. In the words of one matchmaking agency, Singapore “men seek Vietnamese brides because they are homely”. And if it doesn’t work out, they can always just send them home again¹⁸. Foreign women from developing countries run the risk of being commoditized through these processes.

¹⁴ ‘Parental Leave Policies in 21 Countries: Assessing Generosity and Gender Equality’, June 2009, http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/parental_2008_09.pdf ...accessed 24 January 2011.

¹⁵ https://www.nptd.gov.sg/content/NPTD/news/_jcr_content/par_content/download_2/file.res/Population%20in%20Brief%202010.pdf... accessed 24 January 2011.

¹⁶ https://www.nptd.gov.sg/content/NPTD/news/_jcr_content/par_content/download_2/file.res/Population%20in%20Brief%202010.pdf ...accessed 24 January 2011.

¹⁷ ‘Clerk loses allowance after Viet bride backs out’, *The New Paper*, 26 May 2009. The 5 Cs refers to cash, credit card, condo, club and car.

¹⁸ ‘The groom with white hair’, *The Sunday Times*, 21 June 2009; ‘Dumped, he felt duped’, *The Electric New Paper*, 25 May 2009; professional matchmaker Jansen Ong in the Al Jazeera documentary ‘Vietnamese Brides for Sale’ posted on YouTube.

- 5.7 While such attitudes will take time to change, AWARE is concerned that the State does not do enough to assist these women and to secure their status here. Indeed, while the State is proactively promoting families and procreation, not every “wife” is viewed equally. Non-citizen wives have no automatic right to work which would give them independence and the means to support themselves financially. Their immigration status remains tied to the husband who must sponsor them in their application for permanent residence or citizenship. (See Article 6 para 6.27 for further discussion of this issue).

Giving Maternity Leave its Rightful Place

- 5.8 As in other countries in both Asia and the West, there is mounting concern over the dwindling fertility rate in Singapore. For some years now, the State has encouraged married couples to have children with a range of incentives including a cash baby bonus and tax breaks. So far, such policies have failed to reverse the decline in fertility rates which today stand at 1.16¹⁹. Clearly there is no single reason for this decline, but many of the influences can be linked back to the workplace and struggles on affordability and care for the child(ren). In addition, AWARE believes that the State’s policies on maternity reinforce gender stereotyping and leave women feeling pressured to have children and to care for them in a long juggling act of home and work. It is not surprising then that many are opting not to have children at all.
- 5.9 In Singapore, women earn less than men. In 2009, women earned on average 27 percent less than men with SGD 3,247 per month, as opposed to SGD 4,436 for men²⁰. Women continue to lose out in both their careers and their social life because of their time outside the labour force giving birth and caring for young children. Men who take time out from the workforce to serve their two years of compulsory national service are rewarded with higher earnings or credits for time served²¹. While the legislation concerning national service is gender neutral, at present only male Singaporeans are required to complete it and females are excluded from this opportunity to serve. AWARE is disappointed that the State continues to exclude women from national service. There is a perception that the State is employing double standards – on the one hand, women are being given incentives to have children, yet at the same time, they do not benefit from a level playing field in terms of salary on their return to the work force, while men’s absence for national service is rewarded with higher salary levels on their return (see Article 11 para 11.35 for further discussion).
- 5.10 A further issue is the problem of dismissal of pregnant women. This is discussed in detail under Article 11, and is a further sign of the lack of a proper understanding of maternity as a social function, in this case due to companies’ unwillingness to pay maternity benefits. AWARE notes here that there is reservation on Article 11(1) which embodies

¹⁹ ‘Singapore fertility rate falls to record low’, *Channelnewsasia*, 17 January 2011.

²⁰ Singapore Yearbook of Manpower Statistics, 2010. http://www.mom.gov.sg/Documents/statistics-publications/yearbook10/mrsd_2010Yearbook.pdf. ...accessed 24 January 2011.

²¹ Annual survey by five Singapore polytechnics into graduate employment by Singapore’s polytechnics, 2008. http://www.tp.edu.sg/CCD_pressrelease.htm?id=43167&year=2008... accessed 24 January 2011.

core anti-discriminatory measures at the workplace. Stereotypes, discriminatory practices abound at the workplace, evident of the lack of adequate protective measures.

The Role of the Media

- 5.11 The media play an important role in reinforcing or indeed breaking traditional stereotypical views of the roles of both men and women in Singapore. The State survey discussed in para 5.2 underlines this. Of the 2,200 male respondents, 63 percent of them stated that TV and films are an important influence or source of help for them on parenting, and gave a similar figure of 62 percent for books and magazines. This compares to the 40 percent of respondents who see associations of fathers as helpful and would suggest that associations such as Dads for Life are likely to be less successful than strong media messages in changing this stereotype of the equal role of men and women in parenting.
- 5.12 While AWARE welcomes the various TV programmes and media articles that celebrate women who have done well in business, politics or the entertainment world, it laments the lack of celebration of women in less prominent positions whose “voice” could be more influential for both women and men in similar situations in life. AWARE remains deeply disappointed with the constant stereotyping of men and women in locally produced soaps, game shows and DJs.

Foreign Women

- 5.13 There are some 190,000 foreign domestic workers (FDWs) in Singapore, which equates to one worker for every six households. Such workers play an important role in supporting the Singapore family through caring for elderly parents and children and taking care of household chores. In spite of the key support role they play, FDWs continue to be portrayed as mere products with unique selling points such as “No Day Off”. AWARE is concerned that the wider message to society in both advertisements and media reports on FDWs is that household work and caring for the elderly and children is a women’s role only, with little value attached.
- 5.14 AWARE notes the global debate on recognising household work for homemakers and deplors that even in these cases when women cross the seas to work in foreign lands, their work is not recognized and domestic workers are seen as “maids” with no mandated Day Off, to recuperate. The stereotypical view of seeing household work and care giving as “not real work” is extended, ironically, to people who apply for the job, advertised as work in the homes of people in Singapore. (See also discussion in Articles 6 and 11).
- 5.15 In line with the increase in marriages between Singapore men and foreign women discussed in para 5.6 and 5.7 is the number of matchmaking agencies targeting brides from Vietnam and other countries. A review of the online advertising by such agencies presents a worrying picture of the stereotyped roles such foreign brides are expected to play. Some of these descriptions include the following:

- “ever-growing number of bride-to-be Vietnamese village girls daily”
- “a gentle, affectionate, beautiful, family-minded wife range from 18 years old onward”
- “personal grooming, personal hygiene, train to do housework, cook Chinese dishes, to respect elderly”
- “delivery of bride to your doorstep”
- “after service and support”

These examples show how these women are mere products to be bought and sold²². In a more shocking example of women being treated as products, customers for “mail order brides” through Vietnam Brides International²³ were offered a SGD 167 per month instalment payment plan through credit card company Diners Club as well as a sliding scale of price according to where the brides were from²⁴.

Negative Self-image

- 5.16 AWARE continues to note the increasingly held perceptions of a negative body image amongst women in Singapore seen through greater numbers of aesthetic and cosmetic surgery procedures, as well as more women suffering from eating disorders. (See also Article 12 para 12.32-12.33 on aesthetic procedures).
- 5.17 A recent newspaper article²⁵ reported that the average Singapore woman spends about SGD 200 a month on beauty products and services, from haircuts to visits to aesthetics doctors. This makes her the biggest spender in the region. In comparison, women in Hong Kong spend SGD 189 a month while mainland Chinese women spend SGD 151.

Eating Disorders

- 5.18 The slimming industry in Singapore is booming. Indeed adverts for slimming “solutions” are everywhere, from TV to newspapers, magazines and on the side of buses. It’s impossible to escape them. Academics have reported that popular Singaporean magazines aimed at women contain approximately eight slimming ads per issue²⁶. AWARE’s own survey of three newspapers in just one week in January 2011 found a total of 23 advertisements²⁷. The pervasiveness of such advertisements, together with the use of only

²² See Appendix 5.3. Adverts from the J&N Matchmaking agency and Life Partner Matchmaker.

²³ This is a matchmaking agency based in Singapore and specializing in finding brides from Vietnam.

²⁴ ‘Pay \$167 a month for credit card brides’, *Electronic New Paper*, 1 June 2009.

²⁵ ‘How vain can you get?’, *The Straits Times*, 6 May 2011.

²⁶ *The Fat Studies Reader* by Esther Rothblum, Sondra Solovay, Marilyn Wann, page 128.

²⁷ See Appendix 5.4 for survey of *The Straits Times*, *Today* and *My Paper* from 10-16 January 2011. See also *Slim chance, fat hope: society’s obsession with thinness* by Catherine Swee Kian Tay.

thin models²⁸ all reinforce the view that the “perception of beauty in Singapore is still very conventional, slim is beautiful”²⁹.

- 5.19 A 2007 study by the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) found that Singapore ranked fifth globally in per capita consumption of diet drugs or anorectics³⁰. “Anorectics are being used indiscriminately to feed the slimming obsession that affects some societies”, INCB President Philip Emafo said in a statement. “Effective intervention by local competent authorities is a must”. What used to be regarded as a “Western” problem has now become a problem for Singaporeans too. (See Article 12 para 12.26 for the clinical harm done to the body).
- 5.20 In 2009, the Singapore General Hospital³¹ reported seeing an average of 127 new cases a year of eating disorders, but only 10 to 20 sufferers are believed to seek treatment. This compares to just 34 cases in 2003. As in the West, the typical Singaporean sufferer is a female teenager between the ages of 15-24.
- 5.21 While AWARE welcomes the various academic studies into eating disorders including a 2010 study that attempts to analyse the efficacy of treatments for eating disorders in Singaporean young women³², it remains concerned about how the State is tackling the root causes of this problem. Indeed, the State’s Trim and Fit (TAF) programme, started in 1992 to tackle the problem of overweight youngsters in schools is an example of how issues of body image need to be handled more sensitively. The programme involved separating overweight children from their classmates for compulsory exercise up to five times a week. While the State credited the programme with reducing the number of overweight school children, some parents expressed concerns about the psychological impact on children who were separated from their classmates in this way and the impact of such division on the child’s self-esteem. Though the programme has been withdrawn, the impact of that programme can only be judged through study of the first group of children who are now in their late teens. There does not seem to be any programme in place to reach out to those who were affected. According to one past member of the programme “the problem with being specifically identified and categorised as a fat person at such a young age was that it generated a deep sense of embarrassment about the whole affair which almost always leads to a self-consciousness that one cannot shake off”³³. Unfortunately, the reinforcement of negative body image continues into the

²⁸ ‘No demand for plus-size models here’, *The New Paper*, 14 June 2010.

²⁹ Jacky Lee, casting director of Shiny Happy People agency quoted in *The New Paper*.

³⁰ <http://www.incb.org/pdf/e/press/2007/annual-report-press-kit-2006-en-5.pdf>. ...accessed 1 April 2011

³¹ ‘More seeking help for eating disorders here’, by Melissa Pang, *The Straits Times*, 1 January 2011.

³² ‘Eating disorders mental health literacy in Singapore’ by Anna Chen, Jonathan Mond and Rajeev Kumar. *Early Intervention in Psychiatry* 2010 4, 39-46.

³³ Quote taken from ‘Not Just Surface Damage’, a compilation of testimonials from eating disorder survivors and supporters written by Chang Pei Ying, a s part of her final year presentation at Temasek Polytechnic. <http://issuu.com/finte/docs/notjustsurfacedamage> ...accessed 24 January 2011.

workplace. At two local hospitals, the chief executive has told staff that they will not be promoted if they are obese or very skinny³⁴. MP Halimah Yacob, co-chairperson for the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP) expressed concern about such overt discrimination. AWARE too is concerned that this is further discrimination against women who form the largest group of healthcare workers³⁵.

Aesthetic Procedures

- 5.22 The beauty industry is booming in Singapore and is estimated to be worth some SGD 200 million a year³⁶. There are now double the numbers of plastic surgeons in Singapore than in 2007, with about 40 full-time aesthetic clinics run by general practitioners, dermatologist or plastic surgeons³⁷. As with the slimming industry, the pervasiveness of advertising for products and services to improve body image and conform to societal expectations of beauty is dramatic, in both print, TV and mobile media. A sample survey of the main national newspapers revealed seven display advertisements for aesthetic procedures in just one week in *The Straits Times*³⁸. Two of the ads were for bust enhancement.
- 5.23 The popularity of the industry can be shown through not only the number of beauty clinics and spas but also through the number of doctors who now offer aesthetic medicine services. It is estimated that out of 35 registered plastic surgeons and more than 1,400 general practitioners in Singapore, some 1,000 practise aesthetic medicine³⁹. Popular aesthetic procedures for women include breast enlargements, surgery to create double eyelids and Botox injections to lessen the appearance of wrinkles. AWARE is concerned that the advertising of aesthetic procedures through general practitioners is akin to telling women that such procedures are “good” for their health, indeed it is how they should look to be “normal”.
- 5.24 With so many outlets offering aesthetic procedures, many general practitioners and spas are offering cut-price rates, particularly in comparison to rates offered by cosmetic

³⁴ ‘Keeping fit for healthcare staff at Alexandra, Khoo Teck Puat Hospitals’, by Alicia Wong, *Channelnewsasia*, 19 June 2010.

³⁵ See Appendix 5.5. MOM’s Report on Labour Force in Singapore 2010. Number of male and female health professionals and associates.

³⁶ *Health Policy Monitor* ‘Regulation of Aesthetic Medicine’ by Lim Meng Kin, survey no. 11, 2008. http://hpm.org/en/Surveys/University_of_Singapore_-_Singapore/11/Regulation_of_aesthetic_medicine.html ... accessed 24 January 2011.

³⁷ ‘How vain can you get?’, *The Straits Times*, 6 May 2011.

³⁸ From 1-7 January 2011.

³⁹ See Appendix 5.6. *Health Policy Monitor* ‘Regulation of Aesthetic Medicine’ by Lim Meng Kin, survey no. 11, 2008. http://hpm.org/en/Surveys/University_of_Singapore_-_Singapore/11/Regulation_of_aesthetic_medicine.html ... accessed 24 January 2011.

surgeons⁴⁰. The affordability of such procedures means that aesthetic procedures are no longer only for rich celebrities. Today, they are within reach of most women and more worryingly, teenagers too. Waffles Wu, a renowned plastic surgeon, has seen a big increase in interest from the younger generation of women. “I see a big increase in the 16 to 25 age group... about a 30 to 50 percent increase,” he said in an interview⁴¹. *The Straits Times* confirmed this figure in a check with nine plastic surgeons and aesthetic doctors who said they have seen a 30 percent increase in clients below the age of 21 over the last five years⁴². In one case, an 11-year old was brought in by her parents to the Singapore Aesthetics Centre for laser hair removal. The doctor in charge explained that “because she was going into Secondary School and she had lots of hair on her legs... her parents decided that in order for her to blend in and to have less social stigma, they wanted her to have her hair permanently removed”⁴³.

5.25 Worryingly, there have been a number of reported cases of general practitioners pretending to be more qualified in this field than they in fact are⁴⁴. In response to such cases, the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) introduced guidelines governing doctors practising aesthetic medicine⁴⁵. However the guidelines do not apply to non-medical practitioners which means that spas and beauty clinics are not covered. AWARE is concerned that this exposes women undertaking such treatments to increased risks to their health as beauticians are likely to have little if any medical training and are not subject to the same code of ethics as medical practitioners.

5.26 In 2010 alone, the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE) received some 3,111 complaints about the beauty industry, up 51 percent on the 2009 figures. In fact, the beauty industry was the second largest source of disputes⁴⁶. The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore received 34 complaints against the beauty and slimming industry

⁴⁰ Survey by *The Straits Times* found that GPs charge between \$80 and \$120 for a chemical peel and \$250 for treatment to permanently remove hair or improve skin conditions.

⁴¹ ‘Singapore girls pay the price for plastic surgery’, by Melanie Lee, *AFP* 25 April 2006.

⁴² ‘More teens go under the knife in Singapore’, by Fiona Low and Melissa Lin, *The Straits Times*, 30 January 2011.

⁴³ ‘More young people turning to aesthetic procedures’, by Claire Huang and Joanna Chan, *Channelnewsasia*, 1 January 2010.

⁴⁴ In one recent example in November 2009, Dr. Zubin Firdos Medora was censured by the Singapore Medical Council and fined \$10,000 for misrepresentation to a patient in claiming to be an accredited plastic surgeon.

⁴⁵ Goh CL et al. Report of Aesthetic Medicine Workgroup – Recommendations on the Regulation and Training of Aesthetic Medicine in Singapore, 2007 (updated October 2008).

⁴⁶ Consumers Association of Singapore case statistics for 2010 <http://www.case.org.sg/news.html>... accessed 11 February 2011.

in the first eight months of 2010 and suspended seven advertisements for being misleading⁴⁷.

- 5.27 Another area of concern is over advertising standards for aesthetic procedures. Under the 2008 Singapore Code of Advertising Practice for example, advertisers are not allowed to claim that any non-surgical procedure can enlarge busts without the following disclaimer “There is no scientific proof that any non-surgical treatment currently available can enlarge breasts”⁴⁸. However, advertisers frequently ignore this. In a recent magazine advert for example, “scarless breast enhancement” was offered “with 1 injection, achieve a 1 cup-size enhancement in just 1 hour”. There was no disclaimer included in the advert. Instead the advertisement’s tag line to “Achieve the body you desire” was followed by “ISO 9001:2008 certified, Clinically-proven results”⁴⁹. It also says that its body tightening with VelaShape is US FDA-approved for body tightening and cellulite reduction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Removing Reservations

- 5.28 AWARE urges the government to remove reservations to Article 11 and to consider limiting reservations, if need be, on Articles 2 and 16 (see discussions on Articles 2, 11, 16). This is crucial as stereotyping women, limiting their roles within the family or at the workplace by national ideologies on role of men run counter to the core principles of CEDAW, Singapore’s Constitution as well as the National Pledge.

Flexible Work Arrangements

- 5.29 To allow both men and women to share responsibility for the upbringing of their children, AWARE calls on the State to find new ways to promote the introduction of flexible working arrangements. These ways should embrace both men and women as being equally responsible for bringing up a family and caring for the elderly. The low number of employees to date on flexible working schemes suggests that current incentives to employers are not enough to change mindsets. AWARE recommends public education and media campaigns to sensitize both employers and employees of the benefits of such an approach. In addition, the Singapore Human Resources Institute and the Singapore National Employers Federation should provide training for all member firms about how to provide such flexible arrangements. Any new company setting up business should be required to demonstrate arrangements for flexi-work before being licensed. Finally, a very public celebration and financial reward for the best family-friendly firms will send a clear message to all on how employers should behave.

⁴⁷ ‘Misleading beauty ads come under scrutiny’, by Gwendolyne Ng, *My Paper*, 28 September 2010.

⁴⁸ See Appendix 5.7. 2008 Singapore Code of Advertising Practice.

⁴⁹ See Appendix 5.8 Advert for the Singapore Lipo, Body & Face Centre.

Shared Parental Leave

5.30 Research has shown that it is important for men and women to have the option to share parental leave to care for their children (see para 5.5). Not only will this have immediate benefits for the children, it will also help break down gender stereotypes about who should work in the home and how this work should be valued. For this reason, AWARE calls upon the State to provide mandatory paternity leave alongside existing maternity leave. Fathers should be required to take a minimum of two weeks off to be with their children, with the fourth month of statutory paid maternity leave converted into “parental leave” for either parent to take. This would give the couple flexibility to divide the remaining leave according to their individual needs and desires.

Equal Remuneration

5.31 There is no reason for women to be paid less than men in like-for-like work. AWARE calls upon the State to send a clear message on this by prosecuting any employers who discriminate against women in this way. At the same time, the State should allow women to perform National Service – within a new definition that includes choices for community service⁵⁰ - in the same way that other countries do, so that women too can be seen to serve Singapore and can benefit from a level playing field in terms of wages following service.

Foreign Wives

5.32 The increasing numbers of foreign brides marrying older Singaporean men requires immediate attention. While AWARE welcomes the State’s stricter guidelines in matchmaking advertisements, it calls on the State to enforce the guidelines with regard to the way the websites of the agencies market the women. Where necessary the State should prosecute the recalcitrant agencies.

5.33 AWARE is also concerned about the limited support offered to foreign women before they marry as well as once they are legally tied. AWARE recommends the setting up of mandatory information and counselling services. Such services would require mandatory attendance by all foreign spouses before a marriage could be registered. Information would include details of their rights together with addresses and information about where to seek support should they require it.

5.34 Once married, these foreign brides should be given an automatic right to work and should not be subject to the requirement of obtaining a work permit. This is the case in many developed countries and has also been introduced in Malaysia⁵¹. Such a right goes a long

⁵⁰ See AWARE’s CEDAW Shadow Report 2007, pp.73 para 11.13 for AWARE’s argument about extending national service to women.

⁵¹ In November 2008 for foreign wives on long-term social visit passes. <http://www.fragomen.com/newsresources/xprNewsDetailFrag.aspx?xpST=GlobalAlerts&news=3...> accessed 24 January 2011.

way to helping the new wife integrate into Singaporean society and to gain the financial means to support herself, one of the key requirements by the State for anyone seeking to settle in Singapore long term.

- 5.35 AWARE further calls on the State to introduce transparency in the process and a clear path to residency and citizenship for these wives. They should not be left for years on a long-term social visit pass, with no automatic right to work and therefore no financial means to support themselves and completely dependent on their husbands. The process must clearly include safeguards to prevent marriages of convenience, but once a suitable period of marriage and residence has been passed, the path to permanent residence and later citizenship should be clear. See further AWARE's position paper on foreign wives⁵² (see also Article 4 para 4.9)

Eating Disorders

- 5.36 AWARE calls on the State to put in place more programmes to introduce self-esteem programmes in schools and have clinicians speak on the ill effects of anorexia and bulimia (see also Article 12 para 12.42).
- 5.37 AWARE also calls for more severe penalties against private clinics that promote their business by playing with the psyche of young minds.

Aesthetic Medicine

- 5.38 Clearly there is no single solution to improve the negative body image suffered by so many women and young girls in Singapore today. To correct such an ingrained problem will require a multilateral and long-term approach by both State and non-State actors. To begin with, the State should target the young. AWARE calls on the State to provide comprehensive training for all teachers, at primary and secondary levels, in reinforcing positive self-esteem and body image. The training could be modelled on AWARE's Beauty Redefined Workshop which aims to help teenagers "expand their definition of beauty; reveal how media contributes to our unhealthy body image; increase understanding of and consequences of having a negative body image; and teach students how to lead a healthy lifestyle, both physically through nutrition and exercise and mentally through loving oneself"⁵³.
- 5.39 This programme should be equally rolled out in the media, alongside greater prominence for campaigns such as the 2006 Dove Campaign for Real Beauty by consumer product giant Unilever, The Love Yourself Campaign 2009 by a Singapore Poly student and Project Skin Deep 2009 stories by AWARE, which all aim to explode common misperceptions of beauty.

⁵² Foreign Wives in Singapore, submitted by AWARE to the Prime Minister's office by Braema Mathiaparanam, Poonam Mirchandani and Sarah Chalmers, 1 October 2009.

⁵³ See AWARE website <http://www.aware.org.sg/ati/body-image-self-esteem/>

- 5.40 AWARE recommends that anyone practising aesthetic and cosmetic medicine should be required to join the Singapore Society of Aesthetic Medicine. At present, membership is voluntary and the Society has no power to punish practitioners for unprofessional or unethical behaviour except through loss of membership. AWARE would like to see membership extended to all practitioners, medical and non-medical, with the Society taking on a wider role in terms of training and sanctioning for unprofessionalism.
- 5.41 AWARE calls upon the State to impose stricter regulations with regard to safety and to extend these guidelines to non-medical practitioners such as beauty salons and spas. By leaving such practitioners unregulated, patients are being placed at increased risk. According to MP Halimah Yacob, chairperson of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Health “it does not make sense that only doctors be subject to these guideline while beauty salons are free to operate without any rules even for invasive procedures”⁵⁴. To ensure compliance with the State’s safety guidelines, there should be regular checks by suitably qualified and Ministry of Health-approved inspectors.
- 5.42 AWARE also calls for tighter regulation of advertisements of aesthetic procedures and proper enforcement of these guidelines. Leaving lucrative industries such as the aesthetic beauty industry to self regulate is clearly ineffective. Equally, in the interests of the physical and psychological health of women in Singapore, the State should ensure that information on the scientific value of aesthetic products and procedures is made available to the public through advertising and the media.

⁵⁴ ‘Doctors face tighter rules on aesthetic treatments’, *The Straits Times*, 25 July 2008.