

# More can be done to fix hidden gender biases, stereotypes: Indranees

As a young lawyer just starting out, Ms Indranees Rajah was told that women should do more corporate and conveyancing law, and that men are more suited for litigation as the field is "tough".

Yet, she went on to become a leading litigation lawyer, and was appointed Senior Counsel in 2003.

"It was not malicious, but it was just a kind of unspoken assumption that women would do corporate and conveyancing work, which is not contentious, and that they wouldn't do litigation," she said yesterday.

"So, when I had the opportunity to be part of the recruitment process, that was something I worked very hard to change," said Ms Indranees, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, who was speaking at the Nanyang Business School International Women's Day Forum 2022 held at Nanyang Technological University.

More needs to be done to address such implicit assumptions, she said. Her comments come a few days after the Government on Monday released a White Paper

with plans to improve the lives of women.

In response to a question on how men can help, Ms Indranees said they can start by relooking hidden biases.

"Give women a chance and try them out. And some of them will really fly, which is great, and some may not. And for those who don't work out, don't take that as evidence that women can't do the job.

"You should take that as evidence that a particular individual is not suited for that particular role, just as there will be guys who are not suited for particular roles."

About 250 participants tuned into yesterday's forum, which was held in a hybrid format.

Nanyang Business School dean Christina Soh hosted the dialogue with Ms Indranees, who covered a range of topics, such as women in leadership and breaking down gender stereotypes.

The recent White Paper aims to tackle some common assumptions, one of which is that women must be the main caregivers for family, said Ms Indranees.



Ms Indranees Rajah, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, speaking at the Nanyang Business School International Women's Day Forum 2022 held at Nanyang Technological University yesterday.  
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looked after family. So, it never ever occurred to me that I couldn't do both. And my mother never, ever said that you can only do certain subjects or only do certain things... She didn't limit me, and that was very important."

Ms Indranees also acknowledged the pressures put on women to "have it all".

"The short answer is no one's perfect, and you can't do anything perfectly all the time," she said, recounting her own past experience of working long hours in the private sector and not being able to spend more time with her mother.

"It may be possible to have it all, but even then, situations change... your boss changes, something happens on the family front.

"Sometimes, something has got to give. So, you may have to take time off. You may have to take leave. Sometimes, you may have to ask your colleagues if they can cover for you for certain things.

"I have a lot; I wouldn't say I have it all, and each person has to choose what works for them."

**Amelia Teng**

"They are often put in a situation where they have to make a binary choice... and when you force them to do that, many of them will

choose family because they see that as a very important thing."

Making a societal shift starts at home, she said, citing the example

of her mother, who worked as a nurse while raising three children.

"I grew up with a role model in mind of a mother who worked and