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FAMILY- FRIENDLY POLICIES AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT TO OVERCOME WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

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The involvement of women at the workplace has often been related to work-family conflict. Work-family conflict is the amount of conflict an individual experiences whilst trying to adjust her jobs or career and home-life, whereby dual carrier women are faced with time pressures such as rush jobs and deadlines. In general, numerous studies done in the West and East have focused on the negative impacts of work on the family. In Malaysia, the increase of women in the workforce and families with dual work is a common phenomenon. Hence, the focus on developing women capital should be considered as one of the valuable human resource assets towards developing the nation. Based on this premise, the objective of the paper is to look at whether working time and organizational support contribute to work- family conflict. The data in this study was collected through questionnaires and interviews. The findings indicate that working time and work-family culture had a positive relationship with work-family conflict. Finally, the paper discusses various ways in which workplace organization can promote family-friendly policies in order to promote gender equality and enhance women capital in Malaysia.

Keyword: Working women, working time, work-family culture, work-family conflict, Family- Friendly Policies.

INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in the workforce has increased all around the world and unavoidably resulted in remarkable changes in the family (Davidson and Burke, 2004). This scenario has brought apparent changes to the demographic trend that influences the composition of the workforce, rising number of dual-working families, single families and role crises. The variety of roles bring both negative implications such as tension and stress, and benefits. Generally, the traditional family feature of the husband going out to work and the wife staying at home to look after their children is now becoming less common (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006) and statistics demonstrate a greater participation of women in paid work, family structures altering, an aging workforce and the desire for some workers not to be 'married to the job' (Allis and O'Driscoll, 2008). In Malaysia, the increase of women in the workforce is not normal because 53% of women are the major contributors to the workforce and out of these 61% are in managerial and professional group (Public Service Department, 2010). Of this total, about 70% of working women are married or having families of their own and also contribute to the increasing number of families with dual-careers (Jamilah, Rahim, and Aminah, 2006).

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY

Work and family conflict certainly has been under careful scrutiny ever since few interventions have been introduced to help deal with the pressures of work and family roles. Married couples need the wisdom to balance the roles at home and at work to ensure the well-being of the family (Sabitha, 2009). According to popular belief, work is always a burden or a propagator of negative impacts on the family. In general, work and family conflict occurs when there is an overlap of roles which reflect incompatibility between work and family domain (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Therefore, efforts to balance the roles between work and family sometimes cause problems or stress (Kahn et al., 1964).

Role theory has been used to understand the conflict between work and family roles (Kahn et al., 1964). The inter role conflict occurs because it is not possible for the focal person to satisfy all expectations of his or her work and family roles since each role requires time, energy and commitment. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) have divided work-family conflict into three types of conflicts, namely time-based conflict, strain-

based conflict and behaviour-based conflict. Time-based conflict refers to the conflict that arises when the time devoted to one role makes it difficult for the individual to participate in the other role. Strain-based conflict arises when strain symptoms (i.e., tension, anxiety, and depression) experienced within one role intrude into the other role and therefore interfere with participation in that role. Behaviour-based conflict occurs when a specific behaviour required in one role is incompatible with the behaviour expectations within the other role.

Studies on work-family conflict has explored areas in various dimensions, such as demographic characteristics (i.e., age, sex, number of children), the amount of time spent with family along with aspects of the organization (i.e., number of working hours, job categories) which have been identified as the causes of conflict of work and family roles (Bernas and Major, 2000; Greenhaus and Kopelman, 1981; Parasuraman and Simmers, 2001; Voydanoff, 1988). These studies focus on effects of conflicts on physical and psychological well-being, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, commitment and job performance. Family performance and marriage are also explored (Aryee, Fields, and Luk, 1999; Kossek and Ozeki, 1998; Thomas and Ganster,1995).

In Malaysia, six studies conducted by research institutions in Malaysia that cover professional women, including secretaries, nurses, medical doctors, bank clerks and factory workers discover that married women are experiencing work-family conflict at different levels in meeting the needs of work and family (Aminah, 2005). Findings of these studies show that the conflict of work and family and workplace pressure are present among working women and it is consistent with the findings in Western countries by Frone, Russell and Cooper (1992). Apart from having the work-family conflict, employed women, especially those in management positions are at a higher risk of having critical work stress than men (Sabitha and Norma, 2007). The study considers a number of factors as follows:

Working Women and Working Time

Work-family researchers are convinced that the time committed to work contributes to conflict between employees' work and non-work roles (Aminah, 2005; Gutek, Searle, and Klepa, 1991). Long working hours may have negative consequences for families and for workers who struggle to balance the demands of work and family roles. These are supported by other researchers that claim total work hour and the role in the family indicate if more time is devoted to work (family), the less time devoted for another role

(Frone et al.,1997; Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian, 1996.). Research in the West have also proven that the working hours had a positive and strong relationship with the level of work-family conflict (Frone et al., 1997; Judge, Boudreau and Brets, 1994).

The basis for time-based conflict is derived from the scarcity hypothesis which suggests that human energy is limited (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Thus, work time has been identified to be related to the intensity of work-family conflict experiences. Other than that, there is a relationship between working long hours and the difficulty in balancing work and personal life (Moen and Yu, 2000) and frequently associated with stress, exhaustion, insomnia as well as chronic health disorders such as back pains, coronary heart disease and an increase in accidents (Sparks et al., 1997).

Working Time and Organizational Support

Organizational support has been been viewed as a significant factor that can promote effective coping and enhance employee's well-being in the face of work-family conflict. Two major components of organizational support in helping employees balance work and family lives are organizational family-friendly policies and organizational cultural support (Allen, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness, 1999). Work-family policies refer to benefits or programs that enable employees to manage their work and family (Thompson et al., 1999).

Research has shown that the implementation of work-family policies is associated with positive outcomes both for organizations and employees. However, it is argued that the effectiveness of family- friendly policy depends on a supportive organizational culture (Bernas and Major, 2000; Thompson et al., 1999). Organizational culture is often cited as either the key facilitator or barriers to work-life policies, as cultural norms often override formal policy intentions. A supportive culture can improve work performance and motivate people to reduce stress and absentism.

While family-friendly policies may aim to assist employees to manage multiple work and non-work responsibilities, the effectiveness of governmental policies may depend upon the organizational policy at hand. Lacking organizational support, employees may be dissuaded from using the benefits (Allen, 2001; Lu, 2007). Studies done in an oil company in Malaysia, has commented that there were policies to support a friendly work environment but were not being implemented well due to organizational work culture (Maimunah and Mariani, 2008). Studies done in the past,

particularly in the West support the notion that family-friendly policies can reduce work-family conflict and increase satisfaction and commitment towards work; and all these depend upon on supportive environment (Allen, 2001, Kossek and Noe, 1999).

The role of Family-friendly Policies

Family-friendly policies provided by the organization are expected to overcome the problems of working women. This is possible because women tend to use family-friendly policies provided by the organization more than men (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2002; Carli and Eagly, 2001). Child-care centres is one example of the services that is provided by organizations to increase employees' morale and productivity and at the same time reduce absenteeism and accidents at work (Thomas and Thomas, 1990). Besides that, flexible working hours can also reduce family-work conflict, stress and at the same time increase job commitment and satisfaction (Frone and Yardley, 1996).

Studies conducted in the West, found that family-friendly policies influenced the behaviour and attitudes of workers and thus contribute to organizational performance. A study by Grover and Crooker (1995), found that effective family-friendly policies can create positive attitudes, behaviour and performance of at work. A review by Ezra and Deckman (1996) found that effective family-friendly policies do help ease the burden of work and family commitments. The concept of flexibility in family-friendly policies is also believed to have a positive relationship with job satisfaction, reducing family-work conflict and increasing the time spent with family (Christersen and Stains, 1990).

Supportive Work-family Culture at workplace

Managerial support refers to the attitude of a manager or supervisor that is sensitive to his or her employees' family needs in reducing work-family conflict (Allen, 2001, Anderson, Coffey, and Byerly, 2002, Frone et al., 1997, Goff, Mount, and Jamison, 1990; Thompson et al., 1999). In an organization, the behaviour of supervisors is very important in facilitating the implementation of a policy such as disseminating information about the existence of any policy, providing support and guiding their employees on an existing policy. The implementation of family friendly policies is more effective if they are supported by the supervisor, employer or organization. The benefits and effects of good management or supervisory support is

positive increase in job satisfaction, career satisfaction, high commitment and good attitude, less absences from work, less stress and pressure of roles and lack of intention to quit (Allen, 2001; Greenberger et al., 1989, Goff et al., 1990; Thomas and Ganster, 1995, Thompson et al., 1999).

Frone et al., (1997) also added that supervisor support could reduce psychological stress sustained by an employee. Studies show that working women that receive high level of support from their organization manage their work better (Frone et al., 1997). This will reduce work and family related stress, and in the long run increase the satisfaction and well-being of the employees (Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 1997). Thus, the initiative towards the organization that practices a family working culture can be successful if the management and supervisory practice and support the family-friendly policies that have been made (Allen, 2001, Thompson et al., 1999).

METHODOLOGY

A study was conducted to discover the relationship between working time and work-family culture and work-family conflict, and the level of satisfaction dual career women obtain from the implementation of the current family friendly policies.

The study utilized a mixed method approach using explanatory sequential design which is also called a two-phase model (Creswell, 2012). It consists of collecting survey data and then followed by interview to explain the survey results. A list comprise all professional women in the State of Sarawak holding the grade of 41 and above was obtained from the Public Service Department and Sarawak State Government. The first phase of the study was carried out among 255 professional women who met the criteria of the study. The respondents were chosen based on their marital status and must have at least one child. These criteria ensured the samples have relatively comparable work and family roles. The data was collected through questionnaires that were distributed personally to each respondent at their respective workplace to ensure high return rate. Meanwhile, the second phase of the study encompassed twenty respondents randomly selected from the first phase.

Instrument

Work-family conflict used the nine-item work to family conflict developed by Carlson et al. (2000). The Cronbach alpha for this scale was .91. Work-

family culture used instruments developed by Thompson et al. (1999). The scale consists of twenty one items comprising the component of management support, negative career consequences and organizational time demand and Cronbach alpha was .83. Finally, family-friendly policies adopted the family-friendly policies scale developed by Burke (1996). The scale consists of twenty-one items to measure the level of satisfaction towards policies that has been provided by the organization. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was .91.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The study obtained a 91 % returned rate for the questionnaires. The following are the demographic and inferential statistics of the study.

Demography Characteristics

The age range of the respondents was 27 – 54 years with the mean age of 39.5 years old. The majority of the respondents had a bachelors degree (72.5%) followed by a master's degree (21.6%), PhD (1.2%) and other qualifications (4.7%). In terms of the number of children, 49.8% of the respondent had 1–2 children followed by 3–4 children (41.1%) and only small number 5-7 children (9.1%). Among the women in this sample, 70.6 % did not have stay-in maids. The findings are similar with the research done in Peninsular Malaysia that showed more than 70% did not have stay-in maids (Noor, 2006; Sabitha, 2009). The women in this sample worked on an average of 43 hours a week, while the average in Peninsular Malaysia is 44 hours a week.

Work-family conflict and working time

Findings indicated that there is a positive relationship between work-family conflict and working time ($r=0.391$, $p<0.01$). This result suggests that women who spend more time at work are more likely to report higher level of work-family conflict. This findings is similar to the research done in the West that indicates work time is significantly and positively related to work-family conflict (Frone et al., 1997; Grzywacz and Marks, 2000; Judge et al.,1994; Major, Klein and Ehrhart, 2002). Studies done in Malaysia have shown that the longer hours spent at work tend to increase the intensity of work family conflict (Aminah, 2005).

In recent studies in the West, there has been an escalation of overwork which is 50 hours per week among the well-educated in managerial and professional positions (Daly, 2001). In this study, 74.6% of the respondents claimed that they work more than 40 hours a week and 64% bring their work at home. This study had identified a link between job types and conflict levels among the respondents. The employees in managerial and professional positions report higher levels of work family interfaces than those holding non-managerial and non-professional positions (Aminah, 2005).

Based on written comments, work-home segmentation and family support are important strategies for professional women in managing work and family roles. The finding shows that 75% of the respondents placed a borderline between working time and the time spent at home. Theoretically, a person who needs to balance multi tasks or roles, especially the responsibility of work and domestic chores, try to limit the border or the uncertainty of situations or office roles and home. Segmentation is used to represent the degree to which aspects of each domain (i.e., thoughts, concerns, and physical markers) are kept separate from one another – cognitively, physically or behaviourally (Edwards and Rothberd, 1999; Kreiner, 2006). On the other hand, integration represents the merging and blending of various aspects of work and home. Both the concept of segmentation and integration have been conceptualized as two poles on a continuum each representing opposite approaches to work-life balance (Ashhfort, Kreiner, and Fugate, 2000). Statements from our interview support the practice of work and family segmentation.

> **Respondent No. 2:** *To balance work and family commitments, time management needs to be well-planned and to be compromised during adhoc situation. Preferable working hours is dedicated to work and once it's family time, the focus is to family only.*

> **Respondent No. 5:** *I avoid transferring the stress from family into the office, so that can fully utilize my work time in a focused manner. This help to reduce the need to bring office work at home, therefore allow me to participate equally in household activities and responsibilities.*

Apart from the above strategy, support from the family plays an important role in helping these women in managing their multiple roles. A study done

by Noor (2001) has proved that the support received from family members especially husbands is able to enlighten work and family burden and stress. The feedbacks below shows that 70% of the respondents share their experience with regards to the help and support they receive from their spouses, family members as well as live-in maids.

> **Respondent No.1:** *As a working mother, it's not an easy job to balance work, family commitments. If the responsibility equally shared with the spouse, there won't be any conflict between work~~s~~ and family. I'm thankful that my husband shared the responsibility in housekeeping and childcare. His support motivates me to be a competent worker, mother and wife.*
>
> **Respondent No. 7:** *I don't have problems in managing my daily life activities. I focus on my work during office hours. While at home, my parent helps me a lot in managing my children. I still lived together with my parent. My mother helps me in managing the house and my children. My father manages my children's school activities including fetching them from school.*
>
> **Respondent No. 10:** *Having a good maid will help to reduce time to do housework. The time that is normally used to do housework can be used to spend with family.*

Hence, from the individual perspective, it is interesting to note that working hours is still manageable in this context if working women are able to handle the task effectively with appropriate strategies introduced to suit their needs.

Work-family conflict and work-family culture

Results revealed that work-family conflict was positively related to work-family culture ($r=0.468$, $p<0.01$). The findings of most studies in the West show that family-friendly policies will reduce work-family conflict and enhance commitment and job satisfaction (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al., 1999). In this context, the higher the level of support from the organization, the lower work-family conflict faced by working women. Thompson et al (1999) found that when there was a supportive organizational culture,

employees were able to manage work-family conflict more effectively, their loyalty and commitment to the organization and their retention increased.

Supportive work-family culture enhances the psychological resource base for employees by increasing a sense of self-acceptance and flexibility, which supposedly develop positive effects towards work. In the organization's perspective, the behaviour of supervisor is very important in motivating and facilitating the implementation of a policy such as disseminates information about the new and existence policy. This effort will ensure the policy suit with the needs of employees and allow for tolerance in family matters (Thomas and Ganster, 1995). The statements below suggest the importance of management commitment in helping working women in managing their work and family conflict.

> **Respondent No. 1:** *The management shows their tolerance whenever staff had to deal with family matters, such as fetching the children from school during office hours. Our work culture is supportive. Relationship among staff is good and we know each other very well including the family members*
>
> **Respondent No. 19:** *The working environment in this department is satisfactory and the management shows a kind attitude whenever the staff had to deal with family matters. As a staff, we should always inform our immediate supervisor whenever if we have to attend personal matter during office hours.*

Perception towards organizational support

In this study, family friendly policies consist of leave policies, flexible work arrangements and employer-supported dependent care. With regards to family friendly policy, the results indicated that respondents were very satisfied with the leave policy. The most common policies utilized were sick leave (96.6%), maternity leave (91.6%), personal days-off (80%), family (personal) illness days (71.6%), leave for miscarriage (66.7%), paternity leave (65%), parental leave (63.3%) and leave for maternal physical assessment for pregnancy (51.7%).

However, 58.3% responded that leaves for breast-feeding was not widely implemented. These findings are in line with other findings that shows leave of absence, personal days-off, paid maternity leave and

maternal physical assessment for pregnancy were the forms of leave most frequently used. Rosin and Korabik (2002) found that the more satisfied the employees were with family-friendly policies the less work-family conflict they experienced. This finding strongly supported the importance of a family-friendly policy in an organization. This statement is also supported by the most successful organizations such as Intel, Motorola, Telekom Malaysia Berhad, and Royal Selangor that have been implementing family friendly policies to suit the needs of employees, especially among female workers (Berita Harian, 2008; Sabitha, 2009). The statement below shows the importance of leave policies from the viewpoints of working women.

> **Respondent No. 6:** *The entitlement of leave policies is sufficient and satisfactory. I used this leave for family matters such as taking care of sick children. I strongly support the 90 days of maternity leave as this duration is important for the mother to breast feed their child and build the strong bonding. Sick leave also helps a lot and the same goes to the facility of car loan with a very low rates.*

> **Respondent No. 16:** *Annual leave is still appropriate and relevant as it is used for vacation with children and most important to visit our families. Normally, I spent at least 1 to 2 weeks for vacation. Meanwhile, other policy is satisfactory and useful in case for family matters.*

On the other hand, the findings on the usage of flexible work arrangement show that only times of arrival at and departure from the place of work are relevant in this context. We found that 68.4 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the item, while other items such as a reduction of one working hour per day for those who have children less than 3 years old, limited working time at night for pregnant female employees, flexible working hours, compressed working week, telecommuting, job sharing, part-time arrangements and flexible workplace were not widely practiced in any of the organizations.

Finally, the findings revealed that the use of employer-supported dependent care such as childcare resources, elder care resources and on-site childcare centre was not given by their organization and majority of the respondent indicate a sign of non-applicable for those item. Therefore, based on the result above, action should be taken to improve and strengthen the

current work-family policies in order to suit the need of working women. In this study, emphasis is towards strengthening flexible work arrangements such as flexible working hour and flexible work place, whereby employer-supported dependent focusing on the provision of child-care.

SUGGESTIONS

This paper outlines some strategies to help working women balance work and family commitment through the maximum utilization of current Friendly Family Policies and supportive work culture. Among them are flexible working time, breast feeding room and childcare centre.

Flexible working time

Although the concept of flexible working time is not much applied by many public organizations, its implementation can be considered to reduce the stress of work and family. Research has shown that 63.2% of women want to have more children if their employer implements flexible working hours (LPPKN, 2004). Nowadays, with the advent and advancement of the digital age, performing tasks in the workplace has become more flexible in terms of time and setting. Mobile technology such as laptops, cell phones and portable devices enable employees to execute their work-related task virtually anywhere and at anytime. Thus, this is the time for the organization to reconsider the implementation of flexible working time as it not only helps working women in balancing work and family but is the current trend of work. Encouragement to provide flexible working hours has long been highlighted in every Women Summit, especially in recent years. In fact, it was also stressed by the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak: to provide flexible working hours for employed women in order to continue their works despite being a wife and reduce their desire to discontinue working (Women Summit, 2007, Women Summit, 2008).

Breast Feeding Room

Research in public sector reveals that many organizations have yet to have a specific baby-feeding room (Sabitha and Surena, 2011). However, there were several private sectors organisations that have initiated baby-feeding rooms within their compounds. IBM Malaysia, DiGi and Exxon-Mobile have led the movement of having specific space for this purpose (IBM Malaysia, DiGi, & Exxon-Mobile, 2011). Therefore, the suggestion of

having baby feeding- room during the early stages of child development should get full support by organizations as an alternative to breast-feeding program and to support the recommendation set by ILO to provide for at least six months of exclusive breast feeding. As has been mentioned, this effort should be taken seriously with the requirement that all the public sector have the facility of breast feeding rooms in their organizations. It is also in line with the Family National Policy in providing supportive work environment and promotes the concept of gender equality.

Childcare centre

Childcare centre is not a new issue at work. It is encouraged by the government to be established in government and private sectors. Previous studies reinforce the need for childcare centre when a woman is working outside the home (Frone and Yardley, 1996; Gutek, Repetti and Silver, 1998 in Hobbler, 2007). A study in the Klang Valley shows that there are only 74 childcare centres in operation, covering 55 units run by the government and 10 by the private sector (Aminah, Khateejah, and Muhammad, 2006). Proposals to provide more childcare centres are critical as the number of working women is increasing, especially those in the managerial and professional groups. Recently, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak pledged a 10% tax deduction to employers who establish childcare facilities at work (Berita Harian, 2009).

Hence the reinforcement of having access to a childcare centre is not only helpful to the dual career couple but is also in line with the National Family Policy that emphasizes the importance of providing adequate facilities for working women with young children. Therefore, there is an urgent need for all public and private organizations to build or allocate a specific space or room in their premises for childcare purposes before any building designs or plans are approved by the authorities. In implementing this policy, the local authorities should be firm with their action plans and ensure that all organizations and individuals follow their instructions.

CONCLUSION

The participation of women in the workforce is unavoidable. In fact, their participation is necessary for the continuous growth of the economy and the success of companies. Though home and workplace conflict is faced by both men and women, the additional burden of family and work responsibilities are socially place on women’s shoulders. This study has verified that

working time and supportive work cultures influenced professional women to balance work and family commitment. Hence, the importance of family friendly policies is another issue that should be revised and improved in facing the current challenges in performing multi-task at work and home. The implementation of flexible working hours should be considered, with the advent and advancement of the digital age, work can be done anywhere and at any time. Breast feeding rooms and childcare centres should be provided in ensuring supportive work culture and to promote the concept of gender equality. All this effort certainly would help in enhancing the women human capital and most importantly to retain them in the workforce.

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