

Employees' Attitudes Towards Family Friendly Policies

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ABSTRACT

As employees increasingly face challenges in balancing work with family commitments, the workplace could provide support and practical solutions to their stressful lives. Thus family friendly policies could play an important role in attracting and retaining workers. Family friendly policies are considered as any benefit or working condition that employees enjoy in order to achieve some balance in their family and working life. This study was conducted to determine the extent to which family friendly policies are practised in organizations in the Klang Valley, as well as the perceptions of employees towards such policies. A questionnaire was designed for the study. Based on the data collected from a sample of 113 workers, the findings revealed that a gap existed between what employees actually wanted and what organizations were offering in terms of these policies. Respondents favoured these policies, whether male or female, as well as with or without dependents. The findings have implications for employers, as a greater emphasis on these policies could affect the productivity and morale of workers.

ABSTRAK

Pekerja pada masa kini kian menghadapi cabaran dalam usaha menyeimbangkan tugas di tempat kerja dengan komitmen keluarga. Oleh itu, organisasi boleh menyediakan kemudahan dan penyelesaian praktikal untuk membantu menghadapi tekanan ini. Polisi berorientasi keluarga adalah penting untuk menarik dan menyimpan pekerja. Polisi berorientasi keluarga merupakan sesuatu faedah atau keadaan bekerja yang dinikmati oleh kakitangan supaya kehidupan dari segi keluarga dan kerja dapat diseimbangkan. Kajian ini adalah dijalankan untuk menentukan sejauhmanakah dasar berorientasi keluarga dipraktikkan di organisasi di Lembah Kelang, dan juga untuk mengetahui persepsi responden terhadap polisi itu. Satu soal selidik telah direkabentuk untuk kajian ini. Berdasarkan data yang dikumpul daripada sampel seramai 113 pekerja, keputusan telah menunjukkan bahawa jurang terdapat di antara kehendak pekerja dan polisi yang ditawarkan oleh majikan mereka. Responden berharap

menikmati faedah ini, tanpa mengira jantina dan sama ada mempunyai penanggung atau tidak. Keputusan kajian ini mempunyai implikasi bagi majikan kerana ia mempengaruhi produktiviti dan semangat pekerja.

INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian workforce has undergone tremendous changes in terms of demographic and sociological trends. The workforce participation rate of women, estimated at 39.4% in 2006, would continue to rise. In fact, the number of female workers, particularly professionals, is expected to increase steadily with greater employment opportunities and improvements in educational attainment for women. Therefore, women workers are now able to climb the corporate ladder alongside their male counterparts and boast of a working career. These changes pose challenges for dual-career families, as well as the organisations that employ them.

In view of such a trend, the age-old “work-family dichotomy” based on rigid and demanding workplace requirements with no allowances for family demands would not hold anymore. Hence, responding to workers’ needs with family responsibilities is becoming increasingly important to adapt to this dynamic, ever changing workforce environment. In order to attract or retain productive employees, management would need to look into implementing human resource policy changes, especially family friendly ones or risk losing their precious human capital to more “understanding” organizations.

Work and families are clearly linked - each can affect the other in both positive and negative ways (Perry-Jenkins et al. 2000). For example, a flexible workplace, where the workday can be arranged according to the family commitments and needs of workers, would allow them some control over their working time. These include flexible starting and ending hours of work, or a day of paid leave to care for a sick child, recuperate from their own illness or meet other personal needs (Boushey 2005). Flexibility is an essential factor for workers in the current age. This has been facilitated by technology, which has made work more portable and ubiquitous. Indeed a Hewitt Associates (1996) study of 1,050 major U.S. employers reported that 68 percent of all U.S. firms offered flexitime.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how workers in the Klang Valley perceive their organizations’ family friendly policies. Specifically, the extent to which family friendly policies are implemented, the perceptions of employees towards these policies as well as differences in the perceptions, if any, among the various demographic groups, will be examined.

FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES

Family friendly policies, sometimes referred to as employee friendly policies or work-family practices, are defined as benefits or working conditions installed by organizations to assist their employees in balancing the domains of family and work (Bardoel et al. 1998). These policies essentially allow workers to meet their family commitments, along with their work responsibilities.

A "family-friendly workplace," refers to organizations that establish (1) various policies, such as flexible scheduling, that can promote family well-being and minimize the work-life conflicts, (2) programs and services, such as information and referrals for dependent care for employees, (3) workplace cultures that recognize the importance of the non-work dimensions of employees' lives, (4) supervisor-subordinate relationships that respect employees' work-family responsibilities, and (5) work processes and procedures outcomes that take into account employees and their families (Pitt-Catsoupes 2002; Galinsky et al. 1990).

Family friendly policies could cover flexible working arrangements, e.g. flexible starting and ending work times, schedule control, the option of leaving the office for a few hours to attend to family matters like taking unwell elders to the doctor, or a family emergency. The time taken off could in turn be later replaced by working at non-standard times or part-time. These policies may also include the various forms of leave, e.g. extensions to statutory maternity leave, paternity leave, leave for caring of sick family members, and the ability to change from full to part-time hours or to work from home or at home for at least part of the normal working hours. Another major area of family friendliness in the workplace involves a work culture that supports work-family balance. Supervisory support occurs when supervisors (1) feel that handling family issues is a legitimate part of their role (2) have knowledge about company policies that apply to family issues, (3) apply flexibility when family problems arise, and (4) handle subordinates' family problems fairly (Boushey 2005)

Table 1 shows Dex and Scheibl (2001)'s case study of flexible practices in 14 organisations across a wide range of industrial sectors in the United Kingdom.

According to Glass and Estes (1997), the types of family needs addressed through workplace initiatives fall into three broad categories:

1. policies and benefits that reduce work hours to provide time for family care-giving through the provision of leave for vacation, illness, childbearing, and emergency child care or through reductions in average hours worked per week,

TABLE 1. Range of flexible provisions by industrial sector in the UK

Industrial Sector	Range of flexible provisions
Pharmaceutical Products	Statutory maternity leave; paternity leave; informal flexibility with provision for working from home and flexi-hours
Production (of medical instruments)	Statutory maternity leave; paternity leave; informal flexibility with provision for reduced hours, working from home, term-time working and changing full-time to part-time
Manufacturing	Statutory maternity leave; adoption leave; paternity leave; emergency leave; informal flexibility with provision for reduced hours, term-time working and changing full-time to part-time hours; formal provision for working from home and flexi-hours
Estate Agents	Statutory and extended maternity leave; paternity leave; emergency leave; informal career break for key staff; informal flexibility with provision for reduced hours, working from home, flexi-hours; formal provision for changing full-time to part-time hours
Publishing	Information service for child care; statutory maternity leave; paternity leave; elder care; emergency leave; informal flexibility with provision for reduced hours, term-time working and changing full-time to part-time hours; formal provision for flexi-hours
Media	Information service for child care; extra statutory maternity leave; elder care; emergency leave: employees encouraged to use emergency leave to cover paternity requests; informal provision of flexibility, including reduced hours working, working from home and changing full-time to part-time hours
Education	Subsidized child care; extra statutory maternity leave; adoption leave; emergency leave; focused flexible working opportunities; paternity leave limited to non-lecturing staff; HRM to consider limited form of paternity leave for lecturing staff in future developments; informal provision of flexibility including compressed hours, working from home, flexi-hours and changing full-time to part-time hours

continue

TABLE 1 (continue)

Arts	Subsidized child care; extra statutory maternity leave; adoption leave; paternity leave; emergency leave; informal provision of flexible working, including reduced hours, working from home, flexi-hours and changing full-time to part-time hours
Publishing	Maternity leave; plans to make formal provision of extended maternity leave; adoption leave; informal provision to change full-time to part-time hours for women returning from maternity leave; emergency leave; employees can stagger hours of arrival between 8.30-10am but must be same time each day; formal provision for paternity leave; informal provision for working at home
High tech	Extended maternity leave; career break; annualized hours; term-time working; changing full-time to part-time hours; emergency leave; informal flexi-hours; leave to take care for elderly relative; paternity leave; reduced hours working; working from home
Public Sector	Subsidized child care; career break; extra statutory maternity leave; adoption leave; paternity leave; emergency leave; informal provision of flexibility including annualized hours and compressed working week for key nursing staff; also informal provision for working at home and changing full-time to part-time hours; formal provision for reduced hours working and flexi-hours
Retail	Subsidized child care; career break; extra statutory maternity leave; adoption leave; paternity leave; emergency leave; informal provision of flexibility under heading of annualized hours, reduced hours
Finance	Subsidized child care; career break; extra statutory maternity leave; adoption leave; paternity leave; emergency leave; formal provision for reduced hours working, working from home, flexi-hours and changing full-time to part-time hours
Communications	Subsidized child care; extra statutory maternity leave; adoption leave; paternity leave; emergency leave; formal provision of flexibility under heading of annualized hours, compressed working week, reduced hours, working from home, flexi-hours and changing full-time to part-time hours

Source: Flexible and Family-Friendly Working Arrangements in UK-Based SMEs: Business Cases (Dex, S. and Scheibl, F. 2001)

2. policies designed to give workers greater flexibility in the scheduling of work hours and the location of work while maintaining the core-hour requirement, and
3. policies that provide social support for parents, including various forms of child-care assistance so that they can work without being distracted by the concern for dependents in their absence.

Organisations which are responsive to their members' demands of work and family through the implementation of family-friendly policies; that is, policies that recognise and support them as employees as well as family caretakers, will benefit. The benefits of the support provided, whether formal or informal, for work-family balance, include improved work-related behaviours such as enhanced performance, productivity, psychological well-being, organizational loyalty, commitment and job satisfaction, as well as reduced turnover rates (Saltzstein et al. 2001; Haddock et al. 2001; Bowen 1998).

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire comprising of three sections was designed for the purpose of collecting the relevant data. Section A consists of items related to family friendly policies being offered in the organization of the respondent. These items were based on the policies developed by Bardoel et al. (1998) and Pitt-Catsouphes et al. (1995). However, for the purpose of this study, only 21 out of the 23 items were selected to ensure suitability within the context of Malaysian organizations. The items can be classified into five categories as follows : flexibility (five items), leave (six items), child care (four items), career path alternatives (three items) and employee support programs (three items). Table 2 shows the items in each category. Respondents were asked to estimate the extent to which their organization provided each benefit on four-point Likert scales ranging from 1 for "not available" to 4 for being "offered formally".

Section B comprises statements that aim to measure respondents' attitudes towards family friendly policies. Respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of various statements regarding family friendly policies on six-point Likert scales ranging from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 6 for "strongly agree." Section C comprises questions relating to the background of respondents.

Based on purposive convenience sampling, a total of 150 sets of questionnaires were distributed personally by hand as well as via e-mail to working adults who are pursuing their postgraduate studies in a major public university located in the Klang Valley. Efforts were made to ensure that the sample included respondents from varied backgrounds in terms of gender, marital status, and organization. Out of the 125 questionnaires returned, a total of 113 were usable for data processing and analysis.

TABLE 2. Categories of family friendly policies

Policy/Benefit	Items
Flexibility	Compressed work week Flexitime Job sharing Telecommuting or work from home programs Part-time work
Leave	Bereavement/Compassionate Leave Emergency leave Paid maternity leave Extended maternity leave Paternity leave Paid leave to care for sick family members
Child care and dependent care	On-site/near-site company child-care centre Child care programs during school holidays Company referral system for child care Program for care of ill dependents
emergency	
Career path alternatives	Re-entry scheme Phased retirement Sabbatical leave
Employee support programs	Professional counselling Relocation assistance Supervisory support

RESULTS

The demographic profile of respondents in Table 3 shows that the gender ratio between female (51.3%) and male (48.7%) respondents is quite balanced. The majority of them are aged 40 years and below. Among those who are single, only a negligible proportion has dependents, whereas a large proportion of those married have dependants. As the respondents were drawn based on convenience sampling, their ethnic distribution does not reflect that of the actual composition of Malaysia. The majority of the respondents hold a university or a professional degree (76.1%). Consistent with their educational level, a large proportion of the respondents are skilled professionals or management level employees. Most of them work in the private sector (84.1%), while only 15.9 are in the government sector. Their income levels generally correspond to their educational level and type of jobs held, as most of the respondents earned a monthly income of more than RM2,000.

THE EXTENT OF FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES BEING OFFERED BY ORGANISATIONS

The results in Table 4 show that the majority of the organizations (between 65.5% and 78.8%) that respondents work in do not offer flexible policies. Nevertheless, it can be seen that some of these organisations are open to such policies. For example, flexitime is being considered (11.5%) or even

TABLE 3. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

	No.	%		No.	%
Gender			Education Level		
Male	55	48.7	Degree / Professional	86	76.1
Female	58	51.3	Postgraduate	27	23.9
Total	113	100	Total	113	100
Marital Status			Monthly Income		
Single	58	51.3	<RM2,000	8	7.1
Single with dependents	6	5.3	RM2,000-3,000	32	28.3
Married	14	12.4	RM3,001-4,000	35	31.0
Married with dependents	35	31.0	RM4,001-5,000	13	11.5
			>RM5,000	25	22.1
Total	113	100	Total	113	100
Age			Ethnic Group		
20-29	49	43.4	Chinese	48	42.5
30-39	55	48.7	Malay	43	38.1
40-49	7	6.2	Indian/Others	22	19.4
> 49	2	1.7			
Total	113	100	Total	113	100
Type of Organization Occupation					
Sole Proprietor	5	4.4	Top Management	5	4.4
Partnership	4	3.5	Other Management	74	65.5
Private Limited	34	30.1	Non-Management	6	5.3
Public Limited	35	31.0	Skilled Professional	19	16.8
MNC	17	15.0	Technical Employee	1	0.9
Government	18	16.0	Own Business	3	2.7
			Others	5	4.4
Total	113	100	Total	113	100

being offered informally (16.8%) as a family friendly policy. That some employers recognise the importance of flexibility in the schedule of their workers is reflected by the availability of options, albeit informally, of a compressed workweek (10.6%), job sharing (10.6%), telecommuting or work at home programs (11.5%), as well as part time work (9.7%). These findings indicate a good start for the installation of flexible policies in more organisations in Malaysia in the future.

The most readily available facilities or policies are those related to various types of leave, such as maternity, paternity, bereavement and emergency leave. The fact that most organizations (84.1%) formally offer paid maternity leave is expected, as according to the Employment Act 1955,

TABLE 4. The extent of family friendly policies offered by organizations

	Not available (%)	Being considered (%)	Offered informally (%)	Offered formally (%)	Total (%)
Flexibility					
Compressed work week	72.6	8.8	10.6	8.0	100
Flexitime	65.5	11.5	16.8	6.2	100
Job sharing	78.8	6.2	10.6	4.4	100
Telecommuting or work at home programs	77.9	7.9	11.5	2.7	100
Part-time work	76.1	8.9	9.7	5.3	100
Leave					
Bereavement/Compassionate leave	6.2	8.0	10.6	75.2	100
Emergency leave	2.7	2.7	18.6	76.0	100
Paid maternity leave	6.2	0.9	8.8	84.1	100
Extended maternity leave	54.0	8.8	22.1	15.1	100
Paternity leave	17.7	3.5	19.5	59.3	100
Paid leave to care for sick family members	56.6	9.7	21.2	12.5	100
Child care & dependent care					
On-site/near site child care centre	70.8	0.9	8.0	20.3	100
Child care programs during school holidays	77.9	5.3	5.3	11.5	100
Company referral system for child care	84.1	7.1	8.0	0.8	100
Program for emergency care of ill dependents	68.1	11.5	11.5	8.9	100
Career path alternatives					
Re-entry scheme	47.8	20.4	23.9	7.9	100
Phased retirement	49.6	16.8	20.4	13.2	100
Sabbatical leave	45.1	15.9	17.7	21.3	100
Employee support programs					
Professional counseling on family related problems	65.5	12.4	13.3	8.8	100
Relocation assistance	43.4	12.4	19.5	24.7	100
Supervisory support	38.9	13.3	28.3	19.5	100

it is mandatory for Malaysian employers to provide maternity leave to their female employees. This is necessary as women need to be confined to their homes for complete rest and recuperation after childbirth. It is surprising that 6.2% of organizations do not offer maternity leave. However, the large

proportion (59.3%) of employers offering paternity leave indicates that they do realize the important role of fathers in the upbringing of their children. The role of men in the family should be recognized and benefits for fathers in terms of paternity leave should be made widely available.

Child care and dependent care policies are clearly lacking in many of the organizations of the respondents interviewed. The low percentages of organizations - ranging between 0.9% and 20.4% - offering such policies show that Malaysian employers are playing only a passive role in helping their employees achieve a healthy balance in terms of family and work life. Similar trends can also be observed in terms of policies on career path alternatives and employee support programs. The low percentages (between 8% and 24.8%) of organizations offering such policies suggest that many organizations are have very limited provisions for these policies. Thus they still have a long way to go before they can be regarded as "family friendly". Individual workers have different skills, interests, abilities, values and needs, which may change over time. Thus organisations should provide opportunities for workers to prepare themselves for any career changes they may desire to make in the future.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES

The survey also measured the respondents' attitudes towards the various family friendly policies based on the 21 items. To gauge effectively how receptive they are towards these policies, the responses are categorised as unfavourable, favourable, and highly favourable.

The results in Table 5 show that respondents tend to favour flexitime and compressed working weeks. In fact, almost a third (29.2%) or more (38.9%) highly favour these two items, respectively, as part of their work schedules. This is not surprising as a flexitime policy means, for e.g., employees are permitted to start their workday at different times, or to vary the number of hours worked each day, without affecting the total weekly requirements. Thus they get to enjoy more flexibility in scheduling their family activities. With a greater control over their time, they can then be more efficient in balancing their work and family activities. Similarly, a compressed work week arrangement allows employees to fulfil the required hours in less than the usual number of work days. For example, if the company enforces a five-day working week, then its staff could compress their work into four days. This gives staff flexibility in their schedule but they would have to endure longer workdays. However, the advantage is that staff has more time outside of work to handle their personal responsibilities.

When respondents' preferences (Table 5) are compared with what their employers are currently offering (Table 4) in terms of flexitime and compressed work weeks, it is clear that a wide gap exists as the majority do not implement these two policies. For example, an overwhelming majority

TABLE 5. Employees' perceptions of family friendly policies

	Unfavourable (%)	Favourable (%)	Highly favourable (%)	Total (%)
Flexibility				
Compressed work week	11.5	59.3	29.2	100
Flexitime	4.5	56.6	38.9	100
Job sharing	61.1	32.7	6.2	100
Telecommuting or work at home programs	51.3	40.7	8.0	100
Part-time work	55.7	36.3	8.0	100
Leave				
Bereavement/Compassionate leave	19.5	70.8	9.7	100
Emergency leave	36.2	54.0	9.8	100
Paid maternity leave	17.7	51.3	31.0	100
Extended maternity leave	15.9	60.2	23.9	100
Paternity leave	15.1	53.0	31.9	100
Paid leave to care for sick family members	15.1	59.2	25.7	100
Child care & dependent care				
On-site/near site child care centre	27.4	50.4	22.2	100
Child care programs during school holidays	13.3	65.5	21.2	100
Company referral system for child care	13.2	70.8	16.0	100
Program for emergency care of ill dependents	12.4	69.9	17.7	100
Career path alternatives				
Re-entry scheme	8.9	59.2	31.9	100
Phased retirement	4.4	71.7	23.9	100
Sabbatical leave	10.7	67.2	22.1	100
Employee support programs				
Professional counseling on family related problems	9.8	65.4	24.8	100
Relocation assistance	6.2	56.6	37.2	100
Supervisory support	4.4	56.8	38.8	100

of 94.5% of respondents are in favour of flexitime, whereas only 23.0% of their employers provide it. Similarly, while 88.5% favour a compressed workweek, it can be found in only 18.6% of the companies. In view of the great need for these, the small number of organizations that offer these two benefits informally should formalize them. At the same time, those yet to

offer or are still considering the option to offer it, should start taking note of their employees' wants.

With the exception of emergency leave, most of the respondents undoubtedly are favourable towards policies regarding leave. In fact, almost a third feels strongly positive about maternity as well as paternity leave (for fathers). They also emphasise leave for taking care of sick family members (84.9%). However, this particular need is not fully matched by employers (33.7%). Where extended maternity leave is concerned, up to now, women civil servants in Malaysia enjoy an option of 90 days of unpaid leave beyond their permitted maternity leave of 60 days. However, they have now been granted a new option of extending it to a maximum of five years. The purpose is to allow mothers to give full attention to the children.

Facilities for child and dependent care, though regarded important by the majority of the respondents, are also found to be lacking. These include on- or near-site child care centres, child care programs during school holidays, referral systems for child care, as well as programs for emergency care of sick dependents. These facilities, if made more readily available than is the current situation, would definitely mean less disruption, and could help working mothers to be more focused on the tasks at hand.

With respect to career path alternatives and employee support programs, an overwhelming majority of respondents (between 89.3% and 95.6%) are in favour of them. These policies are still absent in many companies (52.2%-77.9%). For example, phased retirement, where older workers are given the option of moving from full-time to partial or full retirement by having their work hours being gradually reduced, is emphasised by 95.6% of the respondents, but it is found in only 33.6% of the organisations. Another benefit, sabbatical leave, of at least several weeks or even months of paid time off, enabling individuals to engage in activities that provide intellectual and physical development, thus rejuvenating them and preventing burnout, is preferred by 89.3% of employees, but provided by only 39.0% of employers.

Similarly, when respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of relocation assistance, which is usually provided when they are moved from one job to another in a different location, a large proportion of 93.8% would like to enjoy this, whereas only 44.2% actually receive it. Individuals may encounter job transfers for reasons including promotions, personal enrichment, and better location. The need for relocation assistance arises as it would help minimise problems of adjustment of workers and their families in the new community. It covers a wide range of services such as arranging for moving transport, temporary housing, and education consultation in the form of getting the children into suitable schools. In terms of supervisory support, as much as 95.6% of those interviewed would like to have it but only 47.8% encounter such support. Supervisory support, which can be

provided in various ways, e.g. reviewing subordinates' work, meeting regularly with them to discuss their progress, listening to how well they deal with customers, discussing work problems with them, finding out their career interests, or even mapping out their future career plans and developmental needs, would help improve their performance as well as boost their morale.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES

The perceptions between male and female respondents towards family friendly policies were examined to see whether there were any significant differences. The results in Table 6 show that except for job sharing, emergency leave and supervisory support, no significant differences towards these policies are found with regard to the gender of respondents. Both men and women are equally favourable towards family friendly policies. This indicates that such policies, if made available, need not be beneficial only to women. Thus it could be said that the common misconception that men tend to de-emphasise workplace facilities that take into account family needs, e.g. time for family, maternity leave, child care, care of sick dependents, may not always hold in reality.

However, men workers (mean value of 2.69) are less willing than their women counterparts (mean = 3.34) to share their jobs as this may affect their pay. This could be accounted by the general observation that most Malaysian men usually regard themselves as the breadwinner of the family. Similarly, when emergency leave is involved, male employees (mean = 3.53) are also slightly less keen as their female colleagues (mean = 4.31). This probably because women tend to see themselves as more susceptible to taking emergency leave for attending to family matters. Women (mean = 5.33) are also more likely to deem supervisory support as more important than men (mean = 4.96) because they feel more strongly about having their supervisors' support for their career.

DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES BETWEEN RESPONDENTS WITH DEPENDENTS AND THOSE WITHOUT DEPENDENTS

It would also be meaningful to see whether any differences exist between the perceptions of employees with dependents and those without towards family friendly policies. Table 7 shows that there are no significant differences in the attitudes towards family friendly policies between these two groups of employees. This suggests that all employees, regardless of whether they have dependents or not, are generally favourable towards family friendly policies. This suggests that family friendly policies are well accepted by all employees regardless of whether they need these at the time of the survey. This could be attributed to the common extended family

TABLE 6. Gender differences in perceptions of family friendly policies

	Male (Mean)	Female (Mean)	F value	p value (? = 0.05)
Flexibility				
Compressed work week	4.62	4.93	2.119	0.148
Flexitime	5.07	5.17	0.311	0.578
Job sharing	2.69	3.34	5.959	*0.016
Telecommuting or work at home programs	3.45	3.47	0.002	0.464
Part-time work	3.27	3.47	0.541	0.966
Leave				
Bereavement/Compassionate leave	4.38	4.41	0.024	0.877
Emergency leave	3.53	4.31	9.797	*0.002
Paid maternity leave	4.71	4.64	0.088	0.768
Extended maternity leave	4.78	4.45	2.210	0.140
Paternity leave	4.89	4.53	2.239	0.137
Paid leave to care for sick family members	4.67	4.76	0.188	0.665
Child care & dependent care				
On-site/near site child care centre	4.13	4.41	0.981	0.324
Child care programs during school holidays	4.58	4.62	0.037	0.848
Company referral system for child care	4.45	4.52	0.108	0.743
Program for emergency care of ill dependents	4.62	4.59	0.030	0.863
Career path alternatives				
Re-entry scheme	4.80	5.02	1.256	0.265
Phased retirement	4.93	5.00	0.231	0.632
Sabbatical leave	4.67	4.90	1.517	0.221
Employee support programs				
Professional counseling on family related problems	4.69	4.78	0.202	0.654
Relocation assistance	4.93	5.17	1.883	0.173
Supervisory support	4.96	5.33	5.556	*0.020

* significant at $p < 0.05$

arrangements (where at least one elderly parent resides with an adult child under one roof) which are still prevalent in Malaysia. Although nuclear families - comprising of both parents and at least one unmarried child - remain predominant, there is a frequent need for the elderly to supervise or even help out with the tasks and responsibilities of taking care of young children, or conversely, for the adult children to take care of their aged or sick relatives.

TABLE 7. Differences in perceptions between respondents with dependents and those without dependents

	Without dependents (Mean)	With dependents (Mean)	F value	p value (? = 0.05)
Flexibility				
Compressed work week	4.85	4.66	0.705	0.403
Flexitime	5.11	5.15	0.036	0.850
Job sharing	2.97	3.12	0.275	0.601
Telecommuting or work at home programs	3.57	3.27	1.254	0.973
Part-time work	3.38	3.37	0.001	0.265
Leave				
Bereavement / Compassionate leave	4.36	4.46	0.229	0.634
Emergency leave	3.93	3.93	0.000	0.989
Paid maternity leave	4.64	4.73	0.138	0.711
Extended maternity leave	4.75	4.37	2.725	0.102
Paternity leave	4.68	4.76	0.091	0.763
Paid leave to care for sick family members	4.71	4.73	0.013	0.910
Child care & dependent care				
On-site/near site child care centre	4.22	4.37	0.227	0.635
Child care programs during school holidays	4.56	4.68	0.366	0.547
Company referral system for child care	4.54	4.39	0.585	0.446
Program for emergency care of ill dependents	4.65	4.51	0.538	0.465
Career path alternatives				
Re-entry scheme	4.88	4.98	0.247	0.620
Phased retirement	5.00	4.90	0.385	0.536
Sabbatical leave	4.81	4.76	0.068	0.795
Employee support programs				
Professional counselling on family related problems	4.75	4.71	0.047	0.828
Relocation assistance	5.08	5.00	0.198	0.657
Supervisory support	5.11	5.22	0.436	0.510

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that family friendly policies are still very much in their infancy stage in terms of formal implementation in the Malaysian organizations surveyed. In fact the gap between what is required and what is being offered is still quite substantial. Except for the various

types of leave, most of the benefits covering flexibility, child care services, career path alternatives and supervisory support are still lacking as part of the human resource practices currently found. In contrast, the employees are favourable towards such policies, indicating that these policies have a role in the workplace.

The gap that exists between what employees want and what organizations are offering should serve as a wake-up call for organizations. Employers who seek to create a satisfying working environment for their employees would benefit if they were to take note of their wants in terms of their work-family balance. Thus by responding to workers' needs in terms of family friendlier policies, employers could likely benefit in the long-term in the form of better productivity and morale as well as lower turnover rates. The sooner organizations realize the positive effects of providing family friendly policies to their employees, the more quickly they get to enjoy the benefits of having employees who are more satisfied with their working conditions, thus increasing their productivity levels and, in turn, profits.

Management should review their human resource policies with a view to incorporate more family friendly ones to cater to their employees' needs. These policies could gradually introduced informally to the employees who particularly need them, then progressing to formal stages later on. The government could also play a part by assisting organizations that are willing to implement such policies in areas such as providing guidance or counseling, tax relief and other monetary incentives.

In view of increasing challenges in balancing work and family commitments, workers will continue to seek organisations that are supportive of their need for a healthy work-life balance. Companies that provide support and practical solutions to their stressful lives by promoting family friendly workplaces would have an edge when it comes to recruitment and retention of skilled and competent workers. The challenge for organizations is to provide a better workplace for employees; by recognising and reducing unnecessary burdens on employees' family life. Family friendly policies are a way to support and recognise the changing needs of employees at different points in their careers and lives. Once implemented, management need to regularly evaluate these policies to ensure they continue to meet employee needs. Otherwise, workers may leave for other organizations that are willing to offer them a balanced of work-cum-family life.

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