

**Work-Family Policy**

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## Work-Family Policy

In this review, I examine the various views of work-family policy. Some research has advocated policy implementation due to the positive effects that benefits have on both the employee and employer. Others are apprehensive about policy adoption because it may be unfair to those employees who do not directly benefit from it. Overall, research has shown that larger organizations were more likely to offer benefits and employee's use of these benefits was dependent on the social context. Still, there is a difference between employer provision and employee utilization of work-family policy. Employees were less likely to utilize policies because they felt it would be detrimental to their careers. Employers were more likely to offer benefits if they wished to enhance their reputation for social responsibility and appear more attractive to potential employees. Future research should focus on further examination of policy utilization over time and within various organizations.

Work-family policies are meant to reduce the conflict produced by the integration of the demands of work and family life. As more women enter the workforce, increasing the number of dual-earner families in our society, there becomes an obvious struggle to make time for both aspects of life. Unlike previous generations, there are no longer distinct “separate spheres” for men and women. As our society moves toward egalitarianism, both men and women are sharing the responsibilities of work and family. Therefore, work-family policies play an important role in many people’s lives. Not only do these policies provide maternity leave, as much of the public perceives, but they also offer more flexible schedules for both men and women who may need to take care of their children or elderly parents.

The purpose of this literature review on work-family policy is to try to understand the various views on policy adoption and implementation. Some researchers are advocates of policy implementation because it has been shown to have a positive effect on employees. Others are apprehensive about policy adoption because it may appear unfair to those employees who do not directly benefit from it. Much research has also gone into studying why organizations choose to provide policies and why employees choose to access the benefits.

Previous studies in the work-family area have shown the results of work-family policies that have been implemented in organizations. Employees working in “family-friendly” environments showed higher organizational commitment, higher job satisfaction, and lower intention to quit (Scandura & Lankau, 1997; Sahibzada et al, 2005; Grover & Crooker, 1995). Such policies had a positive effect on

organizational attachment and on the employees' perceived control of his or her environment, which in turn was associated with higher job satisfaction (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). There have also been studies conducted to examine why people use work-family policies and why companies decide to implement such policies.

Waters and Bardoel (2006) found that specific elements of workplace culture had an impact on whether employees made use of the policies in place. Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) also looked at social context, and specifically the employee's work-group, in relation to the utilization of work-family policies. They examined why employees take advantage of the policies in place and found that the power of an employee's coworkers and supervisors highly affects their likelihood of utilizing policy. There have also been questions proposed to try and understand the differences between the provision and utilization of work-family policies (McDonald, Brown and Bradley, 2005), which may be one of the biggest concerns for future researchers. An employee's utilization of any policy may depend on the perceived consequences to his or her career that might result from using that policy (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; McDonald et al., 2005; Waters & Bardoel, 2006). For example, employees might feel that taking advantage of the benefits policies will hinder the likelihood of them being considered for a promotion, or that the promotion would be more likely to be given to someone without family obligations.

Glass and Fujimoto (1995) studied the characteristics of employers who were likely to provide work-family policies to their employees. By surveying women who

had had utilized work-family policies during their pregnancy, they found that firm size and unionization had the most impact on whether or not a company would offer work-family policy benefits. Davis and Kalleberg (2006) also explored the reasons organizations adopt and implement work-family policy and why they choose some practices over others. Using data collected from various organizations during the 1996 National Organizations Study, they found that work-family policies most often occur in organizations confronted with both economic and institutional pressures though they appear to be more prevalent in companies that experience the latter type of pressure. For this reason, they suggested that only an increase in the legitimacy of policies utilized would enhance widespread adoption. Such legitimacy might have to be encouraged by government mandates such as the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993.

Casper, Weltman, and Kwesiga (2007) found that singles perceived more inequity in the support policies provided by their organizations than did employees with families. One solution they suggested was to allow work-family, or what they termed “work-life” policies such as flexible scheduling to be available for all employees regardless of their outside obligations. Young (1999) wrote about the “work-family backlash” and explained that employees without family obligations may feel that it is unfair to provide benefits that might give those with family obligations an advantage.

## **History**

First, it is important to look at what work-family policy actually is before developing an understanding of its impact on the workplace. Glass and Estes (1997) performed a literature review designed to examine the many different elements and effects of work-family policy. Their review was meant to conceptualize work-family conflict from both the employee and employer perspective. They also reviewed the common policies in place and the organizational determinants of policy adoption and to evaluate whether or not the policy goals were met. They concluded by examining the differences between the policies that are the most beneficial to employees and those that the organization is most likely to implement.

Glass and Estes (1997) began with the assertion held by many policy researchers that there are more people in the work force today who both provide physical care to dependents and have a financial responsibility to their families. There is much less segregation between home and work life, and for this reason, employers must be sensitive to the increasing need for relief from the tension created by these dual roles. US Census Bureau information from 1992 showed that 52 percent of mothers with infants less than one year of age were in the work force as of 1991 and that 85 percent of female workers intended to become pregnant at some point during their career. They also pointed out that the increasing number of mothers in the work force had an effect on fathers who may have experienced more tension between their work obligations and family responsibilities.

Glass and Estes (1997) explored the historical issues that helped instigate work family-policy adoption and implementation in organizations. They discussed the changing demographic of the work force in relation to World War II. Although women who entered the work force during the war did not remain there, many scholars still consider this an important period for social policy research. The benefits that workers received during the postwar expansion included many federally mandated policies such as Social Security. This institutionalized the notion that “employers had at least some obligation to provide for the security of the families of their employees” (p. 291). The belief in institutionalizing benefits through federal mandates suggests that it may be the government’s responsibility to regulate such policies although, traditionally in the U.S., most work-family policy is formulated by individual employers. It was not until 1993 that Congress passed the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allowing an employee to take unpaid leave due to a serious health condition that causes the employee to be unable to perform his or her job, or to care for a sick family member or for a new child (including by birth, adoption, or foster care).

The FMLA was a very influential step toward easing work-family conflict. It allows eligible employees to take off up to 12 work weeks in any 12 month period for the birth or adoption of a child, to care for a family member, or if the employee themselves has serious health condition (<http://www.dol.gov/esa/whd/fmla/>) An “eligible” employee is defined as one who has been employed by their current employer for at least 12 months, which do not have to be consecutive, and worked at

least 1,250 hours during that time. Also, the act only applies to organizations that employ 50 or more employees within 75 miles of the workplace. Employees are entitled to have their benefits maintained, but they must continue to pay their portion during the leave. The employee also has the right to return to the same or equivalent position, pay, and benefits at the conclusion of their leave. The 12 weeks of leave can be taken intermittently but the employee is asked to give 30 days notice for any foreseeable events. The provision of intermittent leave also allows the employee to change to part-time status until the equivalent of 12 weeks is rewarded. The employer is also allowed to ask for verification from the employee's medical provider prior to or when returning from leave. When both a husband and wife work for the same organization, they are only entitled 12 weeks combined leave for the birth or adoption of a child or when caring for a sick relative. Employers are also required to post information about the FMLA at the workplace. As Glass and Estes (1997) pointed out, the fact that this bill passed is somewhat of a double-edged sword. On one hand, the specifics of the signed act are different than the original document. Leave time was shortened and provisions included exemptions for small businesses. On the other hand though, it could be seen as a federal validation of the need for implementation of work-family policy.

For this review, Glass and Estes (1997) organized the policies adopted by organizations into three categories. The first were those that reduced work hours through either leave provision or the reduction of average work week hours. These policies were meant to give parents more time at home. The conflict that arises from

lack of home time has been shown to diminish children's well-being, although research is not definite about the effects that a parent's absence at home has on children. Second were the policies that allowed for flexible scheduling and flexible work location while not decreasing the number of hours worked per week. For both men and women, a lack of workplace flexibility has been linked to various types of physical distress, such as headaches and difficulty sleeping. Most of the stress regarding inflexibility arises from difficulties in child-care arrangements. The final category included policies that provided social support for parents such as child care assistance. All three elements of work-family conflict appear to be interconnected. Decreased work hours and flexibility policies would allow parents to spend more time caring for children. Workplace social support and flexibility policies would aid in the difficulties that surround child-care arrangements.

Glass and Estes (1997) also reported that work-family conflict affects the employee's work life, not just his or her home life. Due to anxiety concerning their children, workers are more likely to be absent, less productive, or to even quit their jobs. Organizations, too, suffer when their employees are absent, less productive, and when they leave the workforce or change jobs. Glass and Estes noted an immense growth in the quantity of policies in the past 15 years (prior to 1997) with most large companies having instituted policies that allow for reduced work hours and schedule flexibility. They were quick to point out, however, that the reported statistics applied mainly to large organizations and that the numbers dropped significantly when smaller companies were added to the calculations. This aided in illustrating the

statement in Glass and Estes' introduction regarding the lack of across the board institutionalization of work-family policy. Institutionalization also depended on the employee's use of policies, not just that the organizations offered work-family policy. They suggested that future research would need to examine the actual work-family policy use within an organization. Although policies may have been put in place, it will most likely take even longer for them to be utilized. Like Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002), they pointed out the necessity for supervisor support and advocacy of policy use.

Next, Glass and Estes (1997) turned to the topic of organizational adoption of work-family policy. They introduced three specific problems encountered when implementing work-family policy. The first was that children at different ages need different types of parental care. This was intensified by the second problem of how to deal with childcare. Some people prefer that policies allow time off for parents to care for their children while others feel that care-giving should be transferred to other institutions such as schools and day care programs giving parents more time to focus on their careers. Finally, there is the problem of the lack of information regarding the most effective policies. Work-family policy research is a relatively young field and the research that has been conducted is sometimes conflicting. Glass and Estes also emphasized that the direct effects of such policies on the lives of children have not been thoroughly examined.

Glass and Estes (1997) identified two specific perspectives as determinants for policy adoption. The rational choice perspective explained the efficiency of work-

family policy, and the institutional theory identified administrative personnel as the main component in policy adoption. Both perspectives suggest that larger organizations and those that employ more women should adopt policies first and more comprehensively. Both perspectives also examine the costs of absenteeism and turnover in not adopting and implementing work-family policies. The rational choice perspective states that it is more efficient to adopt policy than continually lose employees and have to retrain new ones. Institutional theory emphasizes the importance of a committed workforce to company productivity. Glass and Estes also noted that organizations whose mission is more correlated with family responsiveness would be more likely to implement work-family policies.

Glass and Estes (1997) next examined the effects of work-family policies both within the organization and within families. Within organizations, decreased work hours both increased productivity and decreased turnover. A study by Rogers (as cited in Glass & Estes) found that employees who were performing their previously full-time jobs in part-time hours still showed increased productivity. The problem with Glass and Estes' data was that they relied on self-reports, which did not firmly establish a link between reduced work hours and individual productivity, because people are not always honest about their performance. In several studies (Christensen & Staines; Dalton & Mesch as cited in Glass & Estes), schedule flexibility had been shown to decrease tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover. Rogers (as cited in Glass and Estes) ranked flexibility fourth out of sixteen factors affecting employees' decisions to stay with a company. In a subsample of employees who had been rated by their

companies as high performers, flexibility ranked second in importance only to salary. Research also demonstrated a positive association between the implementation of flexibility policy and job satisfaction (Thomas & Ganster; Mueller & Price as cited in Glass & Estes). That correlation coupled with the link between job satisfaction and turnover could lead to the hypothesis that policies which increase job satisfaction will be indirectly and negatively related to turnover. Research surrounding the final category, workplace support, showed that on site child-care policies are mostly useful to employers as a recruitment tool. Since most child-care facilities do not have a provision for sick children, employees must still deal with arrangements when their children are ill (Kossek & Nichol; Youngblood & Chambers-Cook; Goff et al. as cited in Glass & Estes).

Whereas reduced work hours had not been directly linked to increased mental health specifically, Glass and Estes (1997) reported that increased anxiety and depression had been linked to things such as shorter maternity leaves and full-time employment as compared to part-time employed or homemaking mothers. Similarly, Glass and Estes noted that, in a study of nurses, flexible schedule was related to decreased depression and lower blood cholesterol (Thomas & Ganster as cited in Glass & Estes). Flexible policies obviously allow for more time that can be spent with family, which has been shown to reduce work-family conflict and in turn increase mental health. Finally, on-site child-care did not appear to be related to reducing work-family conflict as one might expect. Glass and Estes explained this

with the notion that other policies allowed employees more freedom to care for, not just children, but all family responsibilities on their own time.

Glass and Estes (1997) concluded their review by identifying the challenges faced by organizations and with future research ideas. From the numerous studies examined, they deduced that several problems exist in the empirical research surrounding work-family policy. First, they noted the necessity of an “adequate conceptualization of family responsive policy” (p. 303). This concept must contain both the different types of policies available and an understanding of the organization’s commitment to implementing those policies. Also, when determining which policies are in place, researchers must decide whether to only measure use of formally instituted policies, like those more prevalent in large companies, or to include informal policies, which are more likely to be found in small organizations. When it comes to institutionalizing work-family policies, it is not always clear that the policy benefits will be worth the cost of implementation. Organizations must calculate the economic benefits to the company and compare that to what policy implementation might cost. Also, many employees will only take advantage of such policies for a short period during their time in the workforce. Individuals may be less likely to push for policy adoption within their company if they themselves will not use it. Globalization and the dynamic economy in America are other barriers challenging policy advocates. Organizations are apt to feel pressure from international competitors to increase productivity. One way to do this is by controlling labor costs through demanding longer hours of current employees or using

temporary employees who would not be privileged to any policy benefits. These goals would obviously be at odds with the goals of employees who wish to increase the time spent with their family while maintaining financial stability.

Glass and Estes (1997) suggested future research that further examines employer's and employee's motivations for adopting or utilizing policies. They pointed out that individuals who need policy benefits the most, specifically low-income workers and young or single parents, are the least likely to be in a position where such options are available. To solve this problem, federal intervention might be necessary. They compared this problem to the minimum wage that prevents employers from exploiting workers. Overall, they emphasized the need for more and better research concerning work-family policy. Specifically child well-being and employer cost should be examined. Measurement plays a major role in any study, but for work-family research to progress, Glass and Estes recommended more clearly defined measures of policy type, intensity of commitment to that policy by the organization, and availability of the policy to all employees.

### **Workplace Culture**

Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) studied the effects of individual-level and work group-level differences on work-family policy use. They focused on the social context of the workplace and its effect on individual employees' policy use. In their research, they surveyed the employees of a major financial firm where the workplace culture emphasized high productivity through long hours and a competitive atmosphere. This put the managerial and professional workers in a predicament when

choosing between utilizing a policy to ease the conflict between their work and family life or following their desire to portray high organizational commitment that might help further their careers.

Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) classified individual-level need as one's family responsibility to dependent children or elderly relatives. They surveyed employees' demographic information such as gender, marital status, number of children, and ages of children. They also included the variable of having a homemaker spouse and providing care for someone who is elderly, ill, or disabled. Their hypotheses included the possibilities that women would be more likely to use work-family policies than men, married employees more likely than singles, and employees with young children more likely than others. They also expected that the probability of use would be higher for single parents, for employees without a homemaking spouse, and for those who provide care for an elderly, ill or disabled relative.

For work group-level differences, Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) measured the percentage of women in the work group, percentage of people married or cohabitating, and percentage of the work group with children. To examine the relative power of the work group members and their supervisors, they surveyed the gender, tenure, and salary of employees as well as the average group tenure and salary and average supervisor tenure. Blair-Loy and Wharton expected to see members of work groups with higher concentrations of women, married people, and parents to be more likely to use policies than other employees (net of individual factors). They also believed that employees with female or married supervisors will

be more likely to use policy than employees with male, unmarried supervisors. As reasoning for this set of hypotheses related to work group levels, they stated that members are more likely to take advantage of policy benefits if others around them could do the same. This creates a norm within the work group and helps to encourage the use of work-family policies.

The next set of hypotheses presented by Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) dealt with the ambiguity of work-family policy usage and the notion that employees may fear the career costs of using them. They asserted that people may be less likely to use such policies unless they are surrounded by powerful coworkers or supervisors. The definition of “powerful” employees may vary depending on the specific work environment. For example, an employee who had been with the company longer may have more perceived power than his newly hired superior, or older employees may be more powerful than their younger coworkers. By consulting previous studies Blair-Loy and Wharton illustrated that men generally have more power in the workplace than women. Also, they showed that employees with longer organizational tenure and higher salary often have the most power to support the use of work-family policies or protect the beneficiary from negative consequences associated with utilizing the policy. Therefore, they hypothesized that employees who are surrounded by male coworkers or supervisors who have longer organizational tenure and higher salary are more likely than others to use the work-family policies in place.

Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) also recognized that there are different components of the work-family policies provided and that these components were

utilized by different people with different individual and work group features. In their study, they divided work-family policy into three aspects and each was tested using their previous hypotheses about the impact of individual-level and work group-level factors. The element most often used by employees was policy involving flexibility. Flextime, flexplace, and compressed workweek were elements of this type of policy which twenty-six percent of employees reported using. When utilizing flextime, employees were able to determine the hours they work during each day. In other words, it allowed them to make their own schedule. Flexplace policies permitted the employee to work part of the time in his or her office, and part of the time at home. A compressed workweek allowed the employee to work the same number of hours but in fewer days. None of the elements of flexibility policy cut down on the number of hours worked per week.

According to Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002), the second most utilized was the family-care policy. This policy included child-care and elder-care referral services as well as dependent sick time in which employees would be allowed to use their own sick time to care for a dependent. It also included paid or unpaid leave to care for a dependent longer than two weeks. Twenty-one percent of employees reported using some type of family-care policy at the time of the study or prior to it. Finally, job sharing and transitioning from full-time to part-time to cut back work hours were reportedly used by only two percent of employees. Blair-Loy and Wharton did not use these policies as part of their analysis due to the small number of employees who reported using the policy.

Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) suggested that work-family policies, especially those that may be ambiguous or conflict with organizational norms, are less likely to be used by employees. For this reason, some benefits that are included in standard work-family policies could remain merely symbolic instead of being utilized, also suggested by McDonald et al. (2005). But these results might differ in another setting or vary from workplace to workplace. Also, opinions and behaviors could vary between specific departments in any organization. For this reason, it may be important to look at more than just social context when studying work-family policy. In their results, Blair-Loy and Wharton noted that although certain policies were utilized by a considerable percentage of employees, they also showed that almost two-thirds of the respondents reported a belief that using work-family policies would be detrimental to their career advancement. This is obviously a significant problem in policy implementation.

Concerning flexible policies, Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) reported results counter to their individual-level hypotheses. On the other hand, for family-care policies, their results supported all of the assumptions in the first set of hypotheses regarding greater policy use by women, those with children, and people who provide care for elderly, ill, or disabled. The one exception was that marital status did not have an affect on the probability of using work-family policies. It is also important to note that, after accounting for individual differences, use of family-care policies did not vary significantly across work groups. This showed that use of this type of policy depends mainly on individual-level factors and not work group-level factors. With

regard to the flexible policies though, individual-level factors showed much less importance due to the higher degree of variation across work groups.

The work-group level results supported Blair-Loy and Wharton's (2002) hypotheses regarding coworker and supervisor power but were contrary to those regarding coworker and supervisor social support. They also found that, while women were more likely than men to use family-care policies, employees in work groups with higher percentages of women or with female supervisors were less likely to use them. Their results showed that family-care policy use was higher for employees in work groups with a longer average organizational tenure, but not among members in higher paid work groups or employees whose supervisors had longer organizational tenure. Therefore, although the use of these policies was significantly increased by specific individual needs, being surrounded by powerful coworkers may facilitate utilization. As further support for the effects of social context over individual factors in policy use, they found that women with children in mostly male work groups were more likely to use family-care policies than the average woman with children as well as those with children in mostly female work groups. This showed that the percentage of women in the work group mediates the individual-level need affects. Also, having a male supervisor increases the likelihood of both men and women using family-care policies.

With regard to the other type of work-family policy, flexibility policies, the results were similar to those found concerning family-care policies. Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) found that policy use increased with the work group's average

organizational tenure and in those having male supervisors. Conversely, use decreased in work groups whose supervisors had longer organizational tenure. They explained this with the notion that supervisors with less organizational tenure might be more open to change and innovation and therefore more encouraging of flexibility policy use. Overall, “having a male, unmarried supervisor as compared to a female, married supervisor increases the probability of using flexibility policies by 50 percentage points” (p. 835). Once again, these findings helped to illustrate the important of social context in work-family policy use.

The results of Blair-Loy and Wharton’s (2002) study showed that organizations should not treat different work-family policies as if they were interchangeable. Although the results for family-care and flexibility policies both demonstrated that employees who worked with powerful supervisors or colleagues were more likely to use work-family policies because they felt buffered from the perceived negative effects on their careers, Blair-Loy and Wharton acknowledged that the use of family-care policy was influenced more by individual-level need and only moderately by social context whereas flexibility policy was highly supported by work group factors. The researchers also discussed the importance of clarity in work-family policy. Because family-care policies may be less ambiguous, they are not as easily affected by workplace culture as the flexibility policies. For future research, Blair-Loy and Wharton suggested further consideration of the role supervisor and coworker power plays in work-family policy usage.

### **Provision-Utilization Gap**

As suggested in Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002), although work-family policy may be adopted by an organization, it is not always utilized by employees.

McDonald et al. (2005) intended to develop a construct for future research to find explanations for this provision-utilization gap. They began by citing the increase of women in the workforce and consequent growing need to relief the conflicts that arise from balancing work life and family life. Although more and more organizations are beginning to provide benefits to employees, many workers do not take advantage of policies that are meant to facilitate the blending of what was once considered two separate spheres.

Like Glass and Estes (1997), McDonald et al. (2005) cited many of the effects of work-family policies on the organization. Retention and recruitment, reduced absenteeism, and increased productivity are all mentioned in association with such policies. Also, because turnover and retraining costs may be high for some companies, any perk that might keep skilled employees is seen as cost efficient. Some studies they referred to had even shown that women with more flexibility in scheduling tended to work longer into their pregnancies and returned to work sooner following childbirth. One challenge in researching the effects of work-family policy on an organization had to do with defining the costs and benefits of such policies. For example, cost may be the expense of policy implementation or the indirect cost of losing managerial oversight of employees who may choose to work more from

home. Benefits could include something as concrete as reduction in absenteeism or something more abstract such as increased organizational commitment.

McDonald et al. (2005) also looked at the effect of work-family policies on employees. They found that not only did actual utilization of work-family policies increase variables such as commitment, morale, and satisfaction, but just the perception of control related to these policies had similar results. They did caution, however, that these policies might have certain set backs for employees. First of all, the provision of work-family policies may increase the inequality between work and family life rather than allowing them to blend. The availability of policies may lead employees to believe that benefitting from them at one point means having to work twice as hard later on, which could encourage in high-status employees to work more rather than less (Glass & Fujimoto, 1995). Also, if policies are implemented from a top-down perspective without any communication between employers and employees, they may be useless to those who they are meant to benefit.

This provision-utilization gap was discussed further by McDonald et al. (2005) and divided into five explanations that could impact policy acceptance rates. As Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) found in their research, two of the elements that affect policy utilization are managerial support and coworker support. Managers are obviously in a position of power which allows them to discourage or advocate any aspect of workplace culture. Coworker support has much of the same affect. While each coworker does not have as much power as the supervisor, all of the individuals in a work group aid in shaping the social context. Regarding coworker attitudes,

McDonald et al. raised the issue of policy backlash. Young (1999) wrote in depth about the viewpoint of childless employees who feel that policies which specifically benefit one group over another are unfair. A solution to this could be to allow employees without family responsibilities the same benefits for other obligations outside of work.

McDonald et al. (2002) wrote that next, and closely related to managerial support, was the perception of career consequences. This concept was also touched on in the Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) study. There, employees were willing to utilize work-family policies because they felt that their powerful supervisors could act as a buffer from any career detriments that would result from policy use. For workers who wish to excel and advance in their field, they may fear being perceived as less committed to the organization than those who do not have family responsibilities. Women especially may be anxious about appearing to be on the “mommy track” rather than being dedicated to their careers. Switching from full-time to part-time work seems to be particularly detrimental to an employee’s career. Part-time workers are often paid less, receive less training, and advance more slowly within an organization than their full-time coworkers. Full-time employees also comprise the majority of managers. Part-time employees were also viewed by their coworkers as having less organizational commitment, a criticism that could potentially affect worker moral and mental well-being.

Organizational time expectations are another construct that could influence policy utilization. If the workplace culture emphasizes dedication through long work

hours, employees are much less inclined to use policies that would allow them to spend less time at the office. This is related to the perception of career consequences. While employee outcomes may be the same or even greater for workers who are able to reduce work hours or enjoy schedule flexibility, it is harder to measure an employee's performance without factoring in the time they actually spend at the workplace. Beneficiaries of work-family policies may worry that their time spent away from work will cost them certain career advancements such as promotions or raises.

Finally, the gendered nature of policy utilization may contribute to the low acceptance of work-family policies. Although the policies are adopted and implemented as gender-neutral, women in organizations are the most likely to use them. This not only has effects on the specific organizations and households, but on society as a whole. Women's traditional gender role as financially dependent on men is perpetuated when they continually take part-time rather than full-time jobs to cope with family responsibilities. The notion that both family life and the work environment are moving in an egalitarian direction may be true, but some scholars have argued that work-family policies help to maintain an inequality in both spheres. While policy directed at fathers, such as paternal leave, has been implemented in some organization, the research showed that men are not likely to take advantage of the benefits because they feel financially responsible for their family's well-being and still tend to give work priority over family.

In combination, McDonald et al. (2005) argued that these five elements, managerial support, coworker support, perceptions of career consequences, organizational time expectations, and the gendered nature of policy utilization make up workplace culture. Utilization of work-family policies often depends on the focus of the workplace culture. If the work environment supports use of work-family policies, they are more likely to be utilized. Unlike Blair-Loy and Wharton's (2002) research, this review did not include any individual factors but assumed that the difference in utilization would be seen only among employees who had family responsibilities and would need to benefit from police assistance. McDonald et al. ended with a proposed study using the five dimensions outlined above to explore the gap between provision and utilization of work-family policy. They concluded that developing a better understanding of organizational culture would be an important component of research regarding work-family policy. For human resource professionals within an organization, who are most often involved in policy implementation, this data would allow a more comprehensive examination of policy utilization. Further research in this area could lead to a solution to the challenges that arise from cultural barriers which might prevent employee use of work-family policy benefits which could then lead to a positive outcome for both the employee and the organization.

### **Employee Attitudes Toward Work-Family Policies**

For a closer look at individual employee attitudes toward work-family policies, the study conducted by Waters and Bardoel (2006) is very useful. Using the

five explanations from McDonald et al. (2005), they surveyed university faculty and staff in a focus group setting in an attempt to better understand issues surrounding policy utilization. As suggested in the previous research, there is a problem with under-utilization of policy benefits in many organizations. Waters and Bardoel did not propose any hypotheses in relation to their study, but simply wished to gain more information from faculty and staff members about their experiences with work-family policy implementation.

Like many organizations, universities not only use work-family policies as a means of recruiting and retaining skilled employees, but also as means of “gaining a competitive edge” (p. 69). So it is important that benefits do not remain merely symbolic. Previous research has shown that it takes more than a formal policy in place for employees to profit from work-family policy practices. Although policies may be present in the academic environment, it takes support from the organizational culture to legitimize utilization.

In their study, Waters and Bardoel (2006) used focus groups as a forum for discussion related to work-family policy. They found six themes that emerged from the discussions. Poor communication, high workloads, career repercussions, management attitudes, influence of peers, and administrative processes were identified as factors that would discourage the individual from utilizing the policies provided by the university. With regard to communication, participants reported that their knowledge of policies was limited. Even if employees had previously used a policy, they were still unclear about many of the details. The legalistic language of

the employee handbook was not clear about an individual's entitlements. Many of the employees felt that both formal and informal policies were not encouraged, and if one wished to use them, he or she would have to be proactive and find information themselves rather than it being readily presented, which would take time away from their other priorities and obligations both at work and at home. This problem overlapped with the next reported issue, high workloads. Both faculty members and general staff felt that they were expected to take on more work that would build up if they took time off for family responsibilities. Faculty members reported increased levels of stress due to the demands of both teaching and research while staff members felt pressured to work longer hours.

The career repercussions of utilizing work-family policies were also a concern of many university employees. This notion has been presented in much of the other research regarding policy utilization. Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) specifically noted that employees would only make use of policy benefits if they felt protected by their supervisors from negative perceptions. In this study, employees worried that their utilization would be construed as a lack of commitment and would affect their career advancement. Employees also worried about the resentment and hostility from their peers following access to work-family policies. Not only did their coworker's attitude affect the probability of their using policies, but employees also reported management expectations as a factor in under-utilizing policies. Some participants conveyed feeling like managers expected them to deal with the demands of family life on their own without any aid from the university. Managers were also described

as advocating a workplace culture that rewarded working long hours and demeaned part-time workers as incompetent. Finally, the complications of the administrative process seemed to deter many employees from accessing policy benefits. They felt that the paperwork necessary was too involved and confusing.

Waters and Bardoel (2006) expressed that the themes which emerged from the university employee focus groups were closely related to the five dimensions of workplace culture established by McDonald et al. (2005). These informal barriers often conflict with the formal policies set out by the organization and indeed accounted for lack of policy utilization. This study also strengthened Blair-Loy and Wharton's (2002) argument that social context plays a major role in an individual's policy use. Policy advocacy in organizations was obviously important since communication was the greatest factor reported in the study. Employees were more likely to use policies if they are aware of them. Adequate communication could also help overcome many of the other obstacles presented in the focus groups. Clear communication about the administrative processes necessary for access to policy benefits should increase employee utilization. With manager promotion of policies, employees would not have to worry as much about the attitudes of their coworkers or detriments to their careers because the workplace culture would begin to take a positive outlook on policy use. Communication would not be able to overcome high workloads though. This problem often stems from scarce resources that require workers to do more with less.

Waters and Bardoel (2006) concluded that this study supported the assertion that work-family policies are likely to remain merely symbolic unless the factors that prevent their use are eliminated. Most of those barriers dealt with the social context explored by Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002). Creating a workplace culture that supports policy utilization would be a big step in the direction of closing the “provision-utilization gap” (McDonald et al., 2005). The results of this study also provided useful information to human resource managers who wish to guarantee that the policies in place in their organizations are actually being utilized by employees. For future research, Waters and Bardoel suggested that similar studies be conducted at other universities and organizations to develop a more comprehensive understanding of factors affecting policy utilization. They also recommended adding a quantitative element to the surveys for statistical analysis purposes. With both qualitative and quantitative information from many different industries, more variations can be seen and human resource departments can better determine how and which policies should be implemented to result in the best outcome for their specific organization. This research provided more information about why employees choose to utilize work-family policy benefits, but it is also important to understand why organizations implement policies in the first place.

### **Employer Attitudes Toward Work-Family Policies**

Davis and Kalleberg (2006) examined which organizations were more likely to offer work-family policies and why they might choose to provide some policy elements over others. As mentioned before, the changing workforce has prompted

many organizations to respond with policies that should help ease the tension between work and family life. This research provided many different factors both within and outside of organizations that would prompt them to add policies regarding work-family conflict to their benefit packages. Like Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002), Davis and Kalleberg chose to examine the components of work-family policy separately as opposed to grouping them as a single measure.

Davis and Kalleberg (2006) tested their hypotheses using data from the second National Organizational Survey conducted from 1996 to 1997. During this survey, telephone interviews of informants were conducted by the Center for Survey Research at the University of Minnesota. The informants from each company were generally the human resource manager of an organization or an employee whose job was functionally equivalent. The dependent variables included the four types of work-family policies: paid leave, unpaid leave, flexible scheduling, and dependent care. The independent variables were the three types of pressure established as internal economic, external economic, and external institutional pressure. To control for other factors that might influence policy practices, they reported the type of organization, whether it be profit, nonprofit, private, or governmental. This was also meant to allow for a more comprehensive view of policy adoption and implementation. Other controls included presence of union workers within an organization, because their pressure would increase the likelihood of policy adoption. Finally, they looked at the influence of institutional pressures in addition to internal and external ones as explanatory variables. Whether or not the company operated in

the service industry or if temporary workers were employed would decrease the likelihood of policy adoption and the age of the company with the idea that older companies are less flexible with policy changes.

Davis and Kalleberg (2006) began their exploration with some background information concerning why work-family policies are needed in the first place. First, there was the increase of women, especially mothers, in the workforce in the 1990s. As the cost of living became more expensive, a single income became insufficient means to support a family. Also, over the past quarter century, employees have begun working longer hours, and parents have not wanted to cut back hours because of the financial responsibilities associated with raising a child. Davis and Kalleberg reported that the increase in women, dual-career parents, and single parent households in the workforce has created more necessity for relief from the competing demands of work and family life. They referred to the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 as a message from the government that employers should not penalize their workers for starting or having a family, but instead should aid employees in their search to find balance between work and family life.

As reasoning for why these policies exist within organizations, Davis and Kalleberg (2006) pointed to internal economic pressures, external economic pressures, and external institutional pressures. First, the internal pressures consisted of an organizational desire to enhance employees' commitment and satisfaction and to reduce turnover. Benefit packages of any type have been linked to employee loyalty to his or her company. Loyal employees have a twofold advantage; they are

more productive and less likely to leave their organization. The researchers also acknowledged that organizations in which extensive training for firm-specific skills was provided would be more likely to implement work-family policies. Here, the policies would be cost effective because the expense of rehiring and retraining new employees is greater than the expenses of policy implementation. Also, high performance work practices such as self-directed teams and job rotation will increase the probability of work-family policy adoption. This type of environment would not be possible in an organization with low levels of commitment and high rates of turnover, both of which are influenced by access to policy benefits.

Next, Davis and Kalleberg (2006) wrote that the external economic pressures faced by organizations included the recruitment and retention of skilled employees. Skilled employees often have many options when considering a company to work for and therefore, employers wishing to entice workers may be more inclined to include work-family policies into their benefits packages. As noted in McDonald et al. (2005), policies used for recruitment tools often remain symbolic if the work culture does not advocate their use. Davis and Kalleberg also hypothesized that the proportion of women within an organization will be positively associated with the existence of work-family policies. As a side note, they recognized that the causal relationship could be reversed in that organizations that have such policies in place are more likely to attract female employees. Either way, they assumed that individual need of employees factored into a company's policy adoption. Finally, they stated that organizations in which the core workforce constituents are managers or

professionals would be more likely to offer work-family policies because of the high demand for these skilled workers. Both the internal and external economic pressures felt by organizations have to do with their characteristics. Whether it be to try and retain the employees they have or recruit more skilled workers, policy implementation will only be enticing if there is employee need for such policy and if the workplace culture advocates its use.

According to Davis and Kalleberg (2006), the final pressure felt by organizations was external, institutional pressure. This has to do with the organization's concern for its appearance to the community and society as a whole. Organizations may adopt policies because they feel they are accepted and legitimate practices, whether or not they aid in recruitment and retention of employees. Large organizations are more susceptible to criticism if they do not follow trends in policy adoption. Specifically, organizations are likely to implement policies when their competitors do. Also, companies may adopt and spend more energy implementing policies if they are worried about legal issues. For example, Davis and Kalleberg hypothesized that organizations required to report information regarding equal opportunity to the government would be more likely to offer work-family policies. There are also normative pressures that stem from human resource departments within an organization. The professionals in these departments are trained and up-to-date in the latest policy trends and therefore can act as advocates for work-family policies, which will in turn boost the legitimacy of their organizations. Finally, Davis and Kalleberg examined how interested the organization was in the practices of other

organizations, specifically the training practices.

Davis and Kalleberg's (2006) results showed that high performance work practices, percentage of women in the organization, having to report equality statistics, and attention to training programs of other companies were factors that most strongly supported work-family policy implementation. For each of the four policy elements, results varied to support Davis and Kalleberg's assumption that each policy element was more or less likely to be adopted by different organizations. Flexible scheduling was most strongly associated organizations who dealt with economic pressures, both internal and external, rather than institutional pressures. Unpaid leave, on the other hand, was influenced by external institutional pressures, which made sense due to the fact that unpaid leave was mandated by the federal government through the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993. Paid leave was best explained by both types of external factors while dependent care was explained partially by all three. These results showed that organizations that invest a great deal in training their employees were not necessarily more likely to offer benefits. Also, though occupations with high concentrations of women tend to be associated with lower pay and fewer benefits, the results of this study showed that organizations with higher concentrations of women were more likely to provide many policy elements. Organizations that were inclined to receive more external, institutional pressure were the most likely to offer all four policy elements. Since larger companies are the most prone to this type of pressure, Davis and Kalleberg concluded that employees in large organizations have the most access to work-family policies, though this could also be

due to the increased amount of resources of a large company, not just its exposure to institutional pressure.

Davis and Kalleberg (2006) pointed to the strong response to institutional pressures and suggested that extensive policy adoption may only be possible through increased legitimacy. Like many other scholars in the area, they encouraged continued development of data collection techniques. A longitudinal analysis of the subject would aid in determining the effect that work-family policies have on employee retention, recruitment, tardiness, and absenteeism. In addition to information about organizations, the researchers suggested that more attention be paid to data regarding employees. Which workers are able to benefit from policies was an area of study not examined in this particular analysis. Overall, Davis and Kalleberg advised organizations to recognize the diversity of their workforce and the different needs they have at different stages in life.

### **Work-Family Policy Backlash**

Not all researchers are concerned with under-utilization of work-family policies. Contrary to many of the articles regarding work-family policy, Young (1999) introduced the notion of a “backlash” against the implementation of policies that aim at relieving work-family conflict. Young argued that the assumption that the majority of the workforce is composed of workers who are married and raising children is false. To support this claim, she cited data from the Current Population Survey which showed a decrease in the percentage of married people and parents in the workforce between 1970 and 1996 (Society for Human Resources Management,

1996a, as cited by Young). She also cited a trend that employees without spouses or children are one of the fastest growing segments in organizations. She attributed these changes to the reality that people get married and bare children later in life than previous generations with some individuals never marrying or having kids. Due to financial obligations and increased longevity, people are also staying in the workforce longer than they used to. All of these elements taken together show that married people with children are no longer the primary force in the workplace.

Young (1999) also confronted the assumption that dependent care is the primary work-life issue with which employees deal. One study from 1997 of the Baxter Healthcare Corporation found that less than 15 percent of participants reported that better child care or elder care assistance would alleviate their work-life conflict. In fact, employees were most concerned with “being able to work some days at home on a regular basis” (p. 35). Therefore, with today’s changing workplace demographics, policies meant to alleviate conflict between family responsibilities and work obligations may not be absolutely necessary. Young asserted that they are even unfair to the majority of workers.

Next, Young (1999) reviewed the current work-family policies and scholarship with regards to the uncertainty of the previous assumptions. She first noted that the area of work-family policy is often expanded to “work-life” policy which encompasses programs that include more than just parents and married employees. Still, there has been a continued emphasis on dependent care and more parents have utilized such policies when compared to employees without children.

The controversy of “work-family backlash” arises because childless employees feel that they are penalized by being expected to work longer hours and subsidize the expenses associated with parental benefits. While some employees without children may qualify for elder care assistance, they may not be able to access benefits such as flexible scheduling and unpaid leave as easily as employees with children. Like employees with children who worry about negative perceptions when utilizing work-family policies, childless employees are even less likely to use such policies when their personal lives conflict with work responsibilities. They fear that they will be viewed even more harshly than people with children because others view parenthood as a more practical reason to utilize policies.

Young (1999) next criticized researchers for being so concentrated on issues surrounding work-family conflict, but not examining the effect such policies had on single and childless employees in the organizations. She wrote that an electronic database search for work-family research only returned three articles that did not focus on married employees, but even then they had to do with single parents. A search for literature concerning childless employees also only found three articles. While this obviously was not exhaustive, it definitely represented the direction at which most literature in this field is aimed.

Young (1999) presented the unmistakable disconnect between workplace composition and the attention paid to unmarried and childless employees by both practitioners and scholars. At the moment, the “backlash” has been the worst consequence of this shortcoming, but Young agreed with the researchers who

predicted the future of discrimination lawsuits brought by single and childless employees. Organizations should also be concerned about the effect of employees' perceptions of support on their job satisfaction, retention, and commitment to the company. Although much of the policy implementation has been completed in an effort to increase satisfaction and commitment and reduce turnover of employees with family responsibilities, if the demographics have changed as Young suggested, the majority of employees are no longer benefiting.

The major question that Young intended to grapple with concerns what is fair when it comes to work-family benefits. To examine the fairness of policies, she used the organizational justice theory as a framework. There are three forms of justice within organizational justice. First, there is distributive justice which has to do with the outcomes of a situation. Procedural justice takes into account the process by which a decision is made, and interpersonal justice has to do with the way an employee is treated in any given situation. Young also outlines three principles of fairness. Equity is the concept that each individual gets what he or she deserves based on merit. Equality is the notion that everyone receives an equal part no matter what their input. The need principle allocates resources on the basis of individual circumstances. Different principles will obviously produce different outcomes and different perceptions about the fairness of a situation or decision.

Young (1999) explained that organizational justice theory could be a very useful tool to organizations seeking to examine the fairness of their practices. This type of examination would then allow employers to better explain their stance and

reasoning behind specific policy details to both current and future employees. An understanding would then benefit the organization by affecting the employee's perception of justice and increasing his or her commitment and job satisfaction. Using the justice framework to explain policy choices also helped take the individual out of the mix. Policies regarding work-family conflict often provoke intense emotion from employees. Organizational justice theory shifts the focus from individuals to company values as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

There are three major themes that can be drawn from the literature surrounding work-family policy. First, most of the studies found that larger organizations are the most likely to adopt policies. This could be due to a host of reasons. As suggested in Davis and Kalleberg (2006), large organizations are more prone to feel pressures from external factors and, in response, make changes that aid in their appearance as legitimate places of employment. Larger companies may also have more resources, such as separate human resource departments, when compared to smaller companies. When examining an organization's policies and practice, researchers often only look at formal policies, which are more prevalent in larger organizations. Small companies may have fewer employees who would benefit from work-family policies and, as Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) found, some elements of policy implementation are based on individual-level factors. Or perhaps it is that there is more research regarding large organizations, and therefore it would appear that they are more likely to adopt policies. Compiling the information from the

studies reviewed, one can also deduce that communication is especially important to policy utilization in large organizations, since those organizations are the most likely to implement work-family policies. As Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) mentioned, the elements of the policies that are considered ambiguous and controversial are the least likely to be utilized by employees of an organization. Increased communication would decrease the ambiguity and controversy surrounding work-family policies.

Second and overlapping with the need for communication, social context has a tremendous effect on policy use by employees. Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002), McDonald et al. (2005), and Waters and Bardoel (2006) all cited workplace culture as a major factor in employee utilization of benefits. In fact, workplace culture may be one of the major areas for future research. Many of the researchers suggested that changing the attitudes of supervisors and coworkers in favor of policy use would aid in its movement from a symbolic recruiting tool to a practice that actually accomplished its goal, which is to reduce the conflict between work life and family life. Without this change, employees will continue to be anxious about using policy benefits. It is not hard to understand the stigma that may be associated with taking advantage of such policies. Employees are not being unreasonable when they worry about the possible detriments to their careers once they use the benefits provided by work-family policies. It is unfortunate that people, especially women, are often viewed as less than committed when they choose to take time off work to start or add to a family.

Finally, it is not hard to see that work-family policies are usually reported to have positive effects on both the employee and organization. But despite the many affirmative reasons illustrated, policy use does not appear to be as widespread as one might expect. The explanations provided by McDonald et al. (2005) do a great job of clarifying why there is a difference in employer provision and employee utilization, and the studies conducted by Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) and Waters and Bardoel (2006) both offer data that can be used as a starting point for a solution. The future research recommended by all of the authors centered on much of the same opinion. There is a definite need for more research involving the effects of policy on more than just an employee's commitment to the organization. Glass and Estes (1997) pointed out that the policy implications for the employee's children have hardly been studied at all. The researchers who have studied social context suggested expanding research overtime and to more than one organization. This would allow for comparison between companies and an even better understanding work-family policy implementation and utilization.

As suggested in this literature review, most scholars accept that work-family policies are more helpful than harmful despite the hesitance by many covered employees to avail themselves of these benefits. Although Young (1999) made several valid points against the justification of work-family policy in presenting an alternative view of work-family policy, it seemed her conclusions were similar to those of other advocates. She illustrated a changing workforce demographic and argued that work-family policy should be expanded to include more than just parents;

there should be a “work-life” policy. Overall, the researchers would agree that organizations should recognize that employees have more than one focus in their lives. A career, while it certainly may be a priority to many people, is not the only source of their identity. Therefore, employers should provide the support necessary to ease the conflicts that arise from integrating work and life and employees should not have to worry about the detriments utilizing those benefits might have on their careers.

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