

THE HUMAN CAPITAL OF DUAL CAREER WOMEN IN SARAWAK : THE IMPACT OF WORKING TIME TOWARDS WORK FAMILY CONFLICT

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Abstract

Human capital development can be seen as a basis of excellence of future generation. In Malaysia, the women workforce comprises of 50% of the workforce and 70% of them are married working women. Hence the focus on developing the human women capital should be considered as one of the valuable human asset towards developing the nation. On the overall, many studies be it in the west or east has focused on the negative implication of work on family. Hence the objective of the paper is to study the relationship of working time and work family culture towards work family conflict. The following study was conducted in Sarawak among 60 working women. The data was collected through questionnaires that were distributed personally to the respondent at their respective workplace. The findings indicated that working time and work family culture have a positive relationship towards work family conflict. Finally, the paper will discuss various ways whereby organization can promote family friendly policies at workplace in order to promote the gender equality and also women capital in Malaysia. This is because in the future the involvement of women in the workplace is even going to be at the higher rate than before.

Keyword: *working women, working time, work family culture, work family conflict, family friendly policies.*

INTRODUCTION

The growing interest in work-life balance may originate from changes in many global and local domains. For example, the traditional family consists of the husband going out to work and the wife staying at home to look after their children is now becoming less common (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) and statistics demonstrate a greater participation of women in paid work, family structures altering, an aging workforce and the desire for some workers not to be 'married to the job' (Allis & O'Driscoll, 2008). In Malaysia, the increase of women in the workforce is not normal when it appears 53% of women are the major contributors to the workforce and out of these 61% are women who are in managerial and professional group (PSD, 2010). Of this total, about 70% of working women are married or having families of their own and also contribute to the increasing number of families with dual-careers (Jamilah et al, 2006).

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

As married couples, the wisdom to balance between the roles at home and at work is important to ensure the well being of the family (Sabitha, 2009). According to the popular belief, work is always believed to be as a burden or a propagator of negative impacts on the family. Therefore, efforts to balance the roles between work and family sometimes cause problems or stress (Kahn et al, 1964). Work and family conflict certainly has been under careful attention ever since to help deal with the pressures of work and family roles. Work and family conflict occurs when there is an overlap of roles which reflect incompatibility between work and family domain (Greenhaus &

Beutell,1985).

Role theory was used as a basis for the approach of conflict between the role and diversity of roles (Kahn et al, 1964). Role theory, which emphasizes the role of stress, occurs as a result of an overlap of work and family roles (Kahn et al, 1964). The interrole conflict occurs because it is not possible for the focal person to satisfy all expectations of his or her work and family roles since each role requires time, energy and commitment. Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) has divided work-family conflict into three types of conflicts, namely time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behavior-based conflict. Time-based conflict refers to the conflict that arises when the time devoted to one role makes it difficult for the individual to participate in the other role. Strain-based conflict arises when the strain symptoms (tension, anxiety, depression) experienced within one role intrude into the other role and therefore interfere with participation in that role. While, behavior-based conflict occurs when a specific behavior required in one role is incompatible with the behavior expectations within the other role.

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

Six studies conducted by research institutions in Malaysia that include professional women, including secretaries, nurses, medical doctors, bank clerks and factory workers resulted married women are experiencing work-family conflict at different levels in meeting the needs of work and family (Aminah, 2005). Apart from having the workfamily conflict, employed women, especially those holding management positions are at the risk of having high work stress than men (Sabitha and Norma, 2007). This shows that the conflict of work and family and workplace pressure are present among working women and it is consistent with the findings in western countries by Frone(1992).

Working Time

As noted earlier, the notion of time-based conflict is derived from the scarcity hypothesis which suggests that human energy is limited (Greenhaus & Beutell,1985). Thus, work time has been identified to be related to the intensity of work-family conflict experiences. Work-family researchers have assumed that the time committed to work contributes to conflict between employees' work and non-work roles (Aminah, 2005; Gutek et al 1991). Long working hours may have negative consequences for families and for workers who struggle to balance the demands of work and family roles. These are supported by other researchers that claim total work hour and the role in the family indicate if more time is devoted to work (family), the less time devoted for another role (Frone, et al.1997; Netemeyer et al, 1996). Research in the West, have proven that the working hours had a positive and strong relationship with the level of work-family conflict (Frone et al., 1997; Judge, Boudreau dan Brets, 1994).

Organizational Support

Despite of work time, organizational support has been viewed as a significant factor that can promote effective coping and enhance employee's well-being in the face of work-family conflict. Two major components of organizational support in helping

employees to balance work and family lives are mentioned regularly in the literature: organizational family friendly policies and organizational cultural support (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al, 1999). Work-family policies refer to benefits or programs that enable employees to manage their work better and family (Thompson et al, 1999). Whereby, organizational culture is defined as a system of shared meanings, values, beliefs, practices, group norms of members to produce behavioral norms with regards to the working conditions of the organization.

Both components are integrated and influence each other. Research has shown that the implementation of work-family policies is associated with positive outcomes both for organizations and employees. Several research have shown that the implementation of family-friendly policies is associated with positive outcomes including satisfaction workfamily balance (Ezra & Deckman, 1996), reduced work-family conflict (Goff et al 1990), greater commitment to their organization and a higher level of job satisfaction (Jones & McKenna, 2002). Despite these evidences, the provision of child-care center can increase productivity and employee morale, as well as reduce accident rates, absenteeism and turnover. Other researchers have found that flexible working hours, parental leave and help with elder care can reduce multiple-role strain, work-family conflict and increased satisfaction and commitment towards work (Frone & Yardley, 1996; Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

However, it is argued that the effectiveness of family friendly policy depend on a supportive organizational culture (Bernas & Major, 2000; Thompson et al, 1999).

Organizational culture is often cited as either the key facilitator or barriers to work-life policies, as cultural norms often over-ride formal policy intentions. A supportive culture can improve moral and motivate people to reduce stress and absentees. While family

friendly policies may aim to assist employees to manage multiple work and non-work responsibilities, the effectiveness of governmental policies may depend upon the organizational at hand. Lacking organizational support, employees may be dissuaded from using the benefits (Allen, 2001; Lu, 2007). Studies done in oil company in Malaysia, has commented that there were policies to support a friendly work environment but were not being implemented well due to organizational work culture (Maimunah & Mariani, 2008). Studies done in the past particularly in the West, is very strong to support that family-friendly policies can reduce work-family conflict and increase satisfaction and commitment towards work which depend upon on supportive environment (Allen, 2001, Kossek dan Noe, 1999).

Therefore, this study sought to answer the following research questions: Is there a relationship between work time and work-family culture towards work-family conflict? In addition, are the working women satisfied with the current family friendly policies that is implemented now? This study is significant as it aims to contribute to the theoretical knowledge about involvement of women in the workplace, as well as investigating whether the current policies relevant with their current need. In view of the fact that, the increasing number of women in the workplace, developing the women human capital is crucial in line with promoting gender equality in order to remain them in the workforce and helping in balancing work and family.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carries out among 60 working women in Sarawak. The respondents are administrators working in the Sarawak public service. For the study purposes, the respondents are chosen based on their marital status and must at least have one child. These criteria were outlined in order to ensure the samples have near similar work and

family roles. The data was collected through questionnaires that were distributed personally to each respondent at their respective workplace. This was done to ensure high return rate of the questionnaires. Work-family conflict was measured using the instrument developed by Carlson et. al., (2000), whilst family friendly policies used the instrument by Burke, (1996). The Cronbach's Alpha value for the entire instrument score above is $r = 0.80$.

FINDINGS

The sample consisted of 60 working women with 100% returned rate for the questionnaire. The age range of the respondents was 27 – 54 years old with the mean age is 40 years old. Majority of the respondents had bachelors degree (83.1%) followed by masters' degree (13.3%) and other qualifications (3.4%). In terms of the number of children, most of the respondent had 3 – 4 children (53.3%), followed by 1 – 2 children (40%) and 5-7 children (6.7%). Among the women in this sample, 65% did not have stay-in maids. The findings are similar with the research done by Sabitha (2009) among working women in Peninsular Malaysia that showed 90% did not have stay-in maids.

The relationship between work-family conflict and working time.

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

Descriptive findings revealed that on the average, the women worked 45 hours a week, meanwhile the average working hours in Peninsular Malaysia is 44 hours a week (Noor, 2006). In recent studies in the West, there has been an escalation of overwork which is 50 hours per week among the well-educated in managerial and professional positions. (Daly, 2001). Galinsky (2005) reported that 20% are working more than 49 hours per week. Therefore such trend affect working women in this sample which claimed 74.6% of them work more than 40 hours a day and 64% bring their work at home. Research had identified a link between job types and conflict levels. Employees in managerial and professional positions report higher levels of work family interfaces than those working in non-managerial and non-professional positions (Aminah, 2005).

Work-family conflict and work-family culture

Results of correlation analysis revealed that work-family conflict was positively related to work-family culture ($r=0.468$, $p<0.01$). The findings of most studies in the West show that family-friendly policies will reduce work-family conflict and enhance commitment and job satisfaction depend upon on supportive organizational culture (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al, 1999). In this context, the higher level of support from the organization, the lower work-family conflict face by the working women. Thompson et al (1999) found that when there was a supportive organizational culture, employees were able to manage work-family conflict more effectively, their loyalty and commitment to the organization was increased, and their retention rate was higher.

Furthermore, O'Driscoll et al. (2003) found that the availability of family-friendly

policies was not significantly associated with the levels of work-family conflict and stress. Nevertheless, the higher levels perception or organizational support and managerial support for work-family balance did display significant relationships with work-family conflict. Hence, the success of formal policies such as family friendly policies will be an effective way of helping employees to balance work and family when organizations provide a supportive work-family environment.

Satisfaction towards family friendly policy

In this study, the family friendly policies consist of leave policies, flexible work arrangements and employer-supported dependent care. With regard to family friendly policy, the results indicated that respondents were very satisfied with leave policy. The most common policies utilized were leave for mc (96.6%), maternity leave (91.6%), personal days-off (80%), family (personal) illness days (71.6%), leave for miscarriage (66.7%), paternity leave (65%), parental leave (63.3%) and leave for maternal physical assessment for pregnancy (51.7%). However, 58.3% response that leaves for breastfeeding was not widely implemented. These findings are in line with other findings that shows leave of absence, personal days-off, paid maternity leave and maternal physical assessment for pregnancy were the forms of leave most frequently used. Rosin and Korabik (2002) found that the more satisfied the employees were with family-friendly policies the less work-family conflict they experienced. This finding strongly supported the importance of a family-friendly policy in an organization. This statement is also supported by the most successful organizations such as Intel, Motorola, Telekom Malaysia Berhad, and Royal Selangor that have been implementing family friendly policies to suit the needs of employees, especially among female workers (Berita Harian, 2008; Sabitha,2009).

On the other hand, the findings on the usage of flexible work arrangement shown only times of arrival or leave of work are relevant in this context with 68.4% respondent are satisfied with the item. While other item such as reduce one working hour per day for those who have children less than 3 years old, limited working time at night for pregnant female employees, flexible working hours, compressed working week, telecommuting, job sharing, part-time arrangements and flexible workplace were not widely practiced in any of the organizations. Finally, the findings revealed that the use of employersupported dependent care such as child care resources, elder care resources and on-site childcare center was not given by their organization and majority of the respondent indicate a sign of non-applicable for those item. Therefore based on the result above, action should be taken to improve and strengthen the current work-family policies in order to suit with the need of working women. In this study, emphasis is towards strengthening flexible work arrangements such as flexible working hour and flexible work place, whereby employer-supported dependent focusing on the provision of childcare.

RECOMMENDATION

Although the concept of flexible working time is not much applied by many public organizations, its implementation can be considered to reduce the stress of work and family. Research has shown that 63.2% of women want to increase the number of children if the implementation of flexible work hours performed by the employer (LPPKN, 2004). Therefore, it is time for employers to consider that the implementation of flexible working time be aimed not only help women to work but in facing the dualwork family situation that is currently growing. Encouragement to provide flexible working hours has long been highlighted in each Women Summit, especially in recent

years. In fact, it was also stressed by the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak to provide flexible working hours for employed women in order to continue their works despite being a wife and reduce their desire to discontinue working (Women Summit, 2007, Women Summit, 2008).

Despite flexible working hours, a scheme of flexible workplace should be consider in helping working women juggling work and family. Even though the program is new in this country but recently the Ministry of Work has taken an initiative to start with flexible workplace. The first pioneer batch of this program consists of 39 draughtsman and quantity surveyors that work from home. The findings from the program revealed that the participant were happy, satisfied and the productivity levels have increased to 90 per cent and 100 per cent respectively (Berita Harian, 2010). It shows that the program is successful in its implementation and the program has been continued as it benefits both the employees and organization. Therefore, based on these findings, the program could be extended to other sector especially among the working women.

Child care center is not a new issue at work, but it is encouraged by the government to be established in government and private sectors. Previous studies reinforce the need for child care center that is when a woman is working outside, then certainly there is the issue of children's custody (Frone & Yardley, 1996; Gutek, Repetti and Silver, 1998 in Hobbler (2007)). A study in the Klang Valley shows that only the 74 child care centers in operation, covering 55 units run by the government and 10 were carried out by the private sector (Aminah et al., 2006). Proposals to provide more child care centers is critical as the number of working women is increasing, especially those in managerial and professional groups. The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak gave his assurance that a 10% tax deduction to employers who establish childcare facilities at work (Berita Harian, 2009). Obviously, the facilities to provide child care centers is critical to support and assist women who have worked with children and reduce the stress of work.

CONCLUSION

This study has verified that working time and supportive culture will influence working women to balance work and family commitment. The relevancy of family friendly policies is another issue that should be considering such as providing child-care center and implementing flexible working hours. All these effort certainly try to help the working women in facing the challenges of performing multi tasking in work and home. In spite of their number keep on increasing in the labor force, these initiatives will help the organization to promote gender equality in order to develop women human capital and the most important is to remain them in the workforce.

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