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**EMPLOYEE CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED
WITH THE PROVISION OF WORK-FAMILY
POLICIES AND PROGRAMS**

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ABSTRACT

Are organisations responding to significant changes in Australian labour force demographics by providing more family-friendly programs? This paper explores variations across companies in the implementation of work-family programs and policies related to demands of key constituent groups. The present evaluation indicates that certain employee demographic factors (in particular, employees with dependants, women, union members and, long serving employees) are likely to predispose an organisation to offer certain types of work-family benefits.

INTRODUCTION

Using data from a representative sample of human resource management professionals from Australian organisations, this paper explains variations across companies in the implementation of work-family programs and policies related to demands of key constituent groups. The principal hypothesis is that companies are more likely to adopt work-family programs and policies if their internal labour force is comprised of constituent groups that need and desire family friendly policies.

As in many Western societies, Australian organisations are becoming increasingly interested in the provision of practices to assist work-family relationships (Junker, 1998; Kramar, 1997; Spearitt & Edgar, 1994). Australian companies have experienced a recent growth of family friendly policies including, maternity and parental leave, flexitime, on-site childcare, and child and eldercare referral services (Spearitt & Edgar, 1994). The main factors that have sparked this interest include demographic changes, changing family values, changing business needs, recognition of overlapping roles of work and family, and Government legislative changes (Spearitt & Edgar 1994). Moreover, Abbott, De Cieri, and Iverson (1998) estimated that turnover costs associated with work-family conflict were as high as \$75,000 per employee.

Are organisations responding to significant changes in Australian labour force demographics by providing more family-friendly programs? There has been some recognition of changes at a government level indicated by the establishment of the Work and Family Unit by the Department of Industrial Relations in 1993. Australian workforce demographics have undergone significant changes. Women comprise one of the fastest growing segments of the labour force. For example, women now comprise 43.2% of the workforce (compared to only 25% 30 years ago) and in the Australian Public Service this figure is 48% (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 1996). The percentage of couple families with one or both partners employed was 76% in June 1997. In addition, one or both partners were employed in 91% of all couple families with dependants present (ABS, 1997). The percentage of couple families with both partners employed is rising steadily from 46% in June 1993 to 49% in June 1997 (ABS, 1997). Overall, more than 40% of men and women workers have dependant children. In 47% of one parent families with dependants present, the parent was employed (ABS 1997). These figures indicate that both men and women are likely to have pressures to find ways to assist them manage their work and family lives.

This study identifies whether organisations respond to certain demographic characteristics of their workforce in terms of providing work-family benefits and practices. Work-family practices are defined in this study as any benefit or working condition that an organisation has in place that assists an employee to balance the domains of family and work. A number of notable researchers (Baron, Mittman, & Newman, 1991; Goodstein, 1994; Ingram & Simons, 1995) have concluded that responding to the increasing demands for work and family balance is a major challenge for many organisations, one that has been relatively underresearched.

Goodstein (1994) concluded that organisational scholars are increasingly conceptualising organisational responsiveness to institutional pressures as a matter of strategic choice. Earlier, Oliver (1991) defined institutional pressures in terms of five factors: cause, constituents, content, control, and context. Oliver proposed that a key influence on an organisation's strategic responses related to the characteristics of the constituent groups that made up the organisation. This type of institutional pressure is concerned with who is exerting institutional pressures on the organisation and is influenced by the multiplicity of constituent demands and also the organisation's dependence on these constituents (Oliver, 1991).

The notion that critical constituents play an important role in employer provision of work-family policies and programs provides the theoretical framework for the main hypothesis of the present investigation. It is noteworthy that the few studies (Goodstein, 1994; Ingram & Simons) that have considered the role of constituent groups in the provision of work-family benefits have focused only on a limited set of employee characteristics including the percentage of women employees (Goodstein, 1994; Ingram & Simons);

percentage of parents (Goodstein, 1994); and, percentage of female managers in the organisation (Ingram & Simons, 1995).

This evaluation extends the characteristics of constituents considered previously and explores their influence on organisational responsiveness to providing work-family programs. Characteristics considered include employee age, employee location, tenure, employees who have dependent children, employees with working spouses, percentage of women in the workforce, and workforce status (part-time versus full-time). Thus this study extends Goodstein (1994), and Ingram and Simons (1995) by assessing a comprehensive and broad range of work-family practices.

HYPOTHESES

Female concentration in the workforce

Findings have been mixed in relation to female workplace concentration as a predictor of employer provision of work-family practices. For example, Morgan and Milliken (1993), Osterman (1995), Ingram and Simons (1995), and Glass and Fujimoto (1995) found that female concentration was either not associated with, or weakly associated with employer provision of work-family benefits. In contrast, Vanderkolk and Young (1991) and Goodstein (1994) reported that the percentage of female employees was related to the provision of work-family practices.

Glass and Fujimoto (1995) proposed that inconsistent findings were related to demand factors. For example, employers forced to compete for female labour to fill certain jobs, were more likely to develop work-family responsive practices. Moreover, organisations with an abundant female labour force did not need to provide work-family practices. However recent studies indicate that working women typically take responsibility for home and childcare demands (Ingram & Simons, 1995). Thus, working women are more likely to be influential in setting the company work-family agenda if employers are dependent on female employees. Overall, it is considered that the greater the ratio of female employees in the organisation, the greater the need for work-family practices. Hence,

Hypothesis 1: The higher the percentage of women in the organisation, the greater the level of responsiveness to institutional pressures for employer provision of work-family programs.

DEPENDANT CHILDREN

Growth in the number of working parents (ABS, 1997a) provides an impetus to broaden the discussion of work-family issues to include men and women. Squichurk (1998) reflects this view,

Over the past 12 months particularly, we've seen a recognition that parenting is not just a women's issue. In the past, flexible work practices, while technically accessible to all were confined to women, because it was seen as limiting your career. Now there is a real understanding that it's an issue for all employees who have responsibilities for childcare, eldercare; or who just want to have a life. (Junker, *The Sunday Age*, September 6, 1998)

Hypothesis 2: The higher the ratio of employees with dependant children in the organisation, the greater the level of responsiveness to institutional pressures for employer provision of work-family programs.

EMPLOYEE AGE

Using a case study approach, Vanderkolk and Young (1991) found firms that had innovative work and family practices were characterised, amongst other things, by having a relatively young workforce. They postulated that younger employees were more likely to have young children and therefore needed work-family practices to assist them balance personal and work lives.

Hypothesis 3: The higher the percentage of employees under 35 years old in the organisation, the greater the level of responsiveness to institutional pressures for employer provision of work-family programs.

WORKING SPOUSES

The changing demographic figures indicate that men and women are likely to experience difficulties in balancing their work and family life. Hence,

Hypothesis 4: The higher the percentage of employees with working spouses in the organisation, the greater the level of responsiveness to institutional pressures for employer provision of work-family programs.

UNION MEMBERSHIP

Another factor that has been shown to influence an organisation's work-family programs is union membership. Morgan and Milliken (1993) stated that the research had been mixed as to whether the presence of unionisation was linked to the provision of work-family benefits. Their study found in a US context, that the extent of unionisation of the workforce was a nonsignificant factor. However Hill (1987), stated that the degree of union influence in relation to social issues differs from country to country.

Hypothesis 5: The higher the percentage of employees who are union members, the greater the level of responsiveness to institutional pressures for employer provision of work-family programs.

Other characteristics of employees that will also be examined for their importance in relation to organisation's provision of work-family practices include work-force status, tenure and location.

TENURE

Hypothesis 6: The higher the percentage of employees who have been employed in the organisation for over two years, the greater the level of responsiveness to institutional pressures for employer provision of work-family programs.

WORKFORCE STATUS

Hypothesis 7: The higher the percentage of part-timers employees, the greater the level of responsiveness to institutional pressures for employer provision of work-family programs.

RURAL DWELLERS

Hypothesis 8: The higher the percentage of city dwellers in the organisation, the greater the level of responsiveness to institutional pressures for employer provision of work-family programs.

METHOD

Sample

The sample for this study was derived from 387 human resource management professionals who are members of the Australian Human Resources Institute (Victoria). Table 1 shows characteristics of the respondents and organisations surveyed. As can be seen there is a broad range of employers and industries participated in the survey.

Osterman (1995) noted that no single answer regarding work practices is likely to be applicable to all occupational groups within an establishment. Thus, he asked respondents about work-family practices in an organisation in relation to the core job to collect data on work organisations. In line with Osterman (1995),

the present study sought information regarding core employees directly involved in making products and in providing services, or administrative support.

Table 1: Characteristics of survey respondents and Organisations surveyed

| Characteristic | Percentages |
|--|---|
| Respondent category | 80.4% Human resource personnel (e.g. senior HR Manager, HR officer) |
| | 19.6% Other (e.g. CEO, small bus owner) |
| Respondent gender | 57.7% Female |
| | 42.3% Male |
| Occupational Groups of Core Employees | 4.2% Manager and Administrators |
| | 28.2% Professionals |
| | 12.4% Para professionals |
| | 3.7% Tradesperson |
| | 12.9% Clerk |
| | 10.8% Salespersons |
| | 17.4% Plant/machine operator |
| | 10.3% Labourer |

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Employment Sector | 73% Private Sector |
| | 27% Public Sector |
| Industry | 2.6% Mining |
| | 21.9% Manufacturing |
| | 2.4% Electricity, gas, water |
| | 1.8% Construction |
| | 5.0% wholesale/retail trade |
| | 5.5% transport/storage |
| | 4.2% Communication |
| | 21.4% Finance, property, bus services |
| | 11.6% Public admin/defence |
| | 16.1% Community services |
| | 7.4% Recreation, personal, other services |
| Ownership | 21% some form of family ownership |
| Organisational size | 7% under 25 |
| | 4.2% between 25 and 50 |
| | 7.0% between 51 and 100 |
| | 13.8% between 101 and 200 |
| | 20.3% between 201 and 500 |
| | 15.6% between 501 and 1000 |
| | 8.1% between 1001 and 2000 |
| | 7.5% between 2001 and 4000 |
| | 5.7% between 4001 and 8000 |
| | 10.9% over 8000 |

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Work-family practices. A comprehensive list of 23 individual policies was derived from five categories based on Bardoel and Tharenou (1997), and Pitt-Catsoupes, Mirvis, and Litchfield (1995): flexibility (7 items; e.g., flexitime), leave (4 items; e.g., paternity leave), child and dependent care (4 items; e.g., on site or near site company childcare centre), career path alternatives (3 items; e.g., re-entry scheme), and employee support programs (5 items; e.g. professional and personal counselling).

Respondents estimated the extent to which their organisation provided each practice on 5 point Likert scales (0 = not available, 1 = being considered, 2 = offered informally on a pilot basis, 3 = available to less than half the employees, 4 = available to more than half the employees). For each category, the responses to various practices were averaged to yield an aggregated rating scale. Hence, every participant generated five composite scores, one corresponding to each category. Table 2 shows Cronbach alpha internal reliability levels associated with each category. Values range from $\alpha = 0.57$ to $\alpha = 0.74$. Two factors contributed to middling-to-high reliability levels. First, some categories comprised only 3 items. Second, a scarcity of resources could produce an inverse relationship between items, which may partly offset the usual positive relationship. That is, organisations that offer one provision will possess fewer resources to implement other policies. In this light, these levels of alpha reliability can be regarded as encouraging.

Table 2: Cronbach alpha reliability levels associated with each category of work familypractices

| Category | Cronbach's alpha | Number of items |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| • Flexibility | .74 | 7 |
| • Leave | .62 | 3 |
| • Child and dependent care | .59 | 3 |
| • Career-path alternatives | .58 | 3 |
| • Employee support programs | .57 | 5 |

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Respondents estimated the ratio of employees in the organisation who are female, union members, under 35, part-time, parents of dependent children, rural dwellers, the percentage of employees who have worked at the organisation for more than two years, and the percentage of employees who have working spouses. Respondents also indicated the occupation category of the organisation.

The Australian Standard Classification of Occupations was used to classify major occupational categories for the largest groups of non-managerial employees in the respondents' organisation. The codes ranged from: 1 = manager or administrator; 2 = professional; 3 = para professional; 4 = tradesperson; 5 = clerk; 6 = salesperson or personal service worker; 7 = plant and machine operator or driver; and, 8 = labourer or related worker.

Female concentration amongst employees was measured on a 6-point scale, where 0 represented no females and 5 represented 80-100% females. Union membership was gauged using a similar scale.

In line with Tharenou (1997) organisational demographic variables were measured using 5-point interval scales. Each scale represented a different ratio. For instance, to gauge the age of each workplace,

respondents estimated the percentage of employees over 35 years old (1 = all under 35 years old; 2 = majority under 35, minority over 35; 3 = about 50:50; 4 = majority over 35, minority under 35; 5 = all over 35 years old). For the other items, higher scores corresponded to a large percentage of rural dwellers, full-timers, employees who have worked at the organisation for more than two years, employees without children, and employees without working spouses.

Data analysis

To identify predictors that influence work-family practices, a series of multiple hierarchical regression analyses were carried out, one corresponding to each category of work-family practices. Variables were entered in three steps. During the first step, the current position of the respondent was entered as a control dummy variable, where 1 represents Human Resource (HR) personnel and 0 represents other positions. During the second step, the primary demographic variables were entered. These variables included the percentage of employees who are female, over 35, union members, and rural dwellers. In addition, the primary occupational category of each organisation was included in this step. During the third step, the secondary demographic variables were entered - factors that are partly determined by the primary demographics. These variables included the percentage of part-timers, parents with dependent children, employees with working spouses, and employees who have worked in the organisation for more than 2 years.

RESULTS

Table 3 presents the output of the regression analysis that investigated the predictors of flexible work options. The primary demographic variables at step 2 significantly improved R^2 . In particular, flexible work options were more likely to be available when the organisation comprised many females. Furthermore, these practices were more prevalent when the principal occupational category was at the higher end of the spectrum (e.g. professional). Likewise, the secondary demographic variables at step 3 improved the fit significantly. Organisations that comprised more part-time employees and more parents of dependent children tended to offer a greater range of flexible work options.

Table 3: Output of regression analysis associated with the relationship between flexible work options and organisational demographics

| | <u>Step 1</u> | | <u>Step 2</u> | | <u>Step 3</u> | |
|-------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> |
| Position | -.251* | .119 | -.106 | .118 | -.113 | .511 |
| Occupational category | | | -.050* | .024 | -.050* | .117 |
| Under 35: Over 35 | | | .079 | .060 | .029 | .023 |
| Metropolitan: Rural | | | .028 | .037 | .010 | .065 |
| Male: Female | | | .156** | .035 | .124** | .037 |
| Non-union: Union | | | -.001 | .035 | -.032 | .039 |
| Part time: Full time | | | | | -.183** | .035 |
| Under 2 yrs: Over 2 yrs | | | | | -.036 | .068 |
| % dependent children | | | | | -.131* | .064 |
| % working spouses | | | | | .025 | .062 |
| Intercept | 1.51** | .108 | .922** | .269 | 2.13** | .511 |
| <u>R²</u> | .114 | | .331 | | .379 | |
| <u>ΔR²</u> | .013* | | .110** | | .114* | |

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

Table 4 displays the results of the regression associated with leave policies. Again, the inclusion of the primary predictors at step 2 augmented R² significantly. Organisations that were heavily unionised were more likely to offer leave policies. The variables are step 3, however, did not significantly raise R².

Table 4: Output of regression analysis associated with the relationship between leave options and organisational demographics

| | <u>Step 1</u> | | <u>Step 2</u> | | <u>Step 3</u> | |
|-------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> |
| Position | .961** | .134 | .941** | .136 | .900** | .137 |
| Occupational category | | | -.045 | .027 | -.040 | .027 |
| Under 35: Over 35 | | | .124 | .069 | .103 | .075 |
| Metropolitan: Rural | | | -.023 | .043 | -.027 | .044 |
| Male: Female | | | -.067 | .041 | -.100* | .046 |
| Non-union: Union | | | .081* | .040 | .082* | .041 |
| Part time: Full time | | | | | -.083 | .079 |
| Under 2 yrs: Over 2 yrs | | | | | .098 | .075 |
| % dependent children | | | | | .113 | .073 |
| % working spouses | | | | | -.094 | .070 |
| Intercept | 2.62 | .121 | 2.53 | .310 | 2.59 | .596 |
| <u>R²</u> | .370 | | .418 | | .435 | |
| <u>ΔR²</u> | .137** | | .175** | | .189 | |

*p < 0.05

**p < 0.01

Table 5 provides the results of the regression associated with the provision of child and dependent care. The variables entered at step 2 significantly improved the fit. Organisations with a large number of females and union members tended to offer more child and dependent care. Moreover, child and dependent care was more likely to be provided when the principal occupational category was at the upper end. The secondary demographic variables also augmented R² significantly. As predicted, organisations that comprised many parents of dependent children provided a broader range of policies relating to child and dependent care.

Table 5: Output of regression analysis associated with the relationship between child/dependent care and organisational demographics

| <u>Step 1</u> | <u>Step 2</u> | <u>Step 3</u> |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|---------------|---------------|---------------|

| | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> |
|-------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Position | -.101 | .128 | -.001 | .127 | -.020 | .127 |
| Occupational category | | | -.092** | .025 | -.090** | .025 |
| Under 35: Over 35 | | | .090 | .064 | .002 | .070 |
| Metropolitan: Rural | | | .031 | .040 | .025 | .040 |
| Male: Female | | | .091* | .038 | .074 | .042 |
| Non-union: Union | | | .095* | .037 | .067 | .038 |
| Part time: Full time | | | | | -.090 | .073 |
| Under 2 yrs: Over 2 yrs | | | | | .115 | .070 |
| % dependent children | | | | | -.134* | .067 |
| % working spouses | | | | | -.091 | .064 |
| Intercept | .612** | .116 | .175** | .290 | 1.14** | .551 |
| <u>R</u> ² | .043 | | .290 | | .343 | |
| <u>ΔR</u> ² | .002 | | .084** | | .118* | |

*p < 0.05

**p < 0.01

Table 6 presents the output derived from the regression analysis that investigated the predictors of career-path alternatives. Again, career-path alternatives were more likely to be when the principal occupational category was at the upper end. None of the other primary demographic variables at step 2 attained significance. Furthermore, only one of the secondary demographic variables influenced the provision of career-path alternatives; these options were more likely to be offered when most of the employees had been working at the organisation for more than two years.

Table 6: **Output of regression analysis associated with the relationship career path alternatives and organisational demographics**

| | <u>Step 1</u> | | <u>Step 2</u> | | <u>Step 3</u> | |
|-------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> |
| Position | -.397** | .0129 | -.298* | .131 | -.331* | .130 |
| Occupational category | | | -.071** | .026 | -.069** | .026 |
| Under 35: Over 35 | | | .055 | .066 | -.059 | .072 |
| Metropolitan: Rural | | | .056 | .041 | .054 | .041 |
| Male: Female | | | .065 | .039 | .075 | .043 |
| Non-union: Union | | | .033 | .039 | .045 | .039 |
| Part time: Full time | | | | | .023 | .076 |
| Under 2 yrs: Over 2 yrs | | | | | .232** | .071 |
| % dependent children | | | | | -.101 | .069 |
| % working spouses | | | | | -.062 | .066 |
| Intercept | 1.01** | .117 | .724* | .301 | .658 | .568 |
| <u>R</u> ² | .116 | | .265 | | .334 | |
| <u>ΔR</u> ² | .027 | | .070* | | .112** | |

*p < 0.05

**p < 0.01

Finally, Table 7 displays the results of the regression associated with employee support programs. The primary demographic variables at step 2 significantly enhanced the fit. Organisations with a large number of females and union members tended to provide more employee support programs. Moreover, these programs were more prevalent when the principal occupational category was at the upper end. The secondary demographic variables at step 2 did not significantly raise R^2 . Nonetheless, a closer scrutiny of the beta coefficients revealed that organisations that comprise a high percentage of parents with dependent children tended to offer more employee support programs.

Table 7: Output of regression analysis associated with the relationship employee support programs and organisational demographics

| | <u>Step 1</u> | | <u>Step 2</u> | | <u>Step 3</u> | |
|-------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> | <u>B</u> | <u>SE</u> |
| Position | .106 | .140 | .104 | .142 | .095 | .142 |
| Occupational category | | | -.084** | .028 | -.083** | .028 |
| Under 35: Over 35 | | | -.015 | .072 | -.105 | .078 |
| Metropolitan: Rural | | | .078 | .045 | .075 | .045 |
| Male: Female | | | -.087* | .042 | -.081 | .047 |
| Non-union: Union | | | .093* | .042 | .066 | .042 |
| Part time: Full time | | | | | -.014 | .083 |
| Under 2 yrs: Over 2 yrs | | | | | .125 | .078 |
| % dependent children | | | | | -.159* | .075 |
| % working spouses | | | | | -.040 | .072 |
| Intercept | 1.43** | .127 | 1.75** | .324 | 2.25** | .618 |
| <u>R</u> ² | .041 | | .236 | | .283 | |
| <u>ΔR</u> ² | .002 | | .056** | | .080 | |

*p < 0.05

**p < 0.01

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Hypothesis 1 proposed that the higher the ratio of women in the workforce the more likely the organisation is to offer work-family benefits. Statistical testing revealed that female concentration was positively related to flexible work options, child and dependant care and employee support programs. These findings support Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 tested the relationship between employees with dependant care responsibilities and work-family benefits offered. Data analyses showed that the presence of employees with dependant care responsibilities was positively related to flexible work options, child and dependent care, and employee support programs. These findings supported Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 7 assessed whether the percentage of part-timers in the organisation was related to the work-family benefits offered. Not surprisingly, organisations with a higher percentage of part-timers were more likely to offer flexible work practices (of which part-time work is one of them). However, of more significance is that none of the other work-family categories were positively related to work-family programs and policies. Therefore Hypothesis 5 was only weakly supported.

Hypothesis 6 assessed the link between employee tenure and the provision of work-family benefits. For those organisations that had a greater percentage of employees who had been with the organisation for more than two years the multiple regression analysis confirmed there was a positive link to the availability of career path alternatives. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was partially supported. Hypothesis 7 posited that there was a positive link between union membership and work-family policies and programs offered. This was also partially supported as those organisations that had higher percentage of union members amongst their employees were more likely to offer leave and dependant care options.

DISCUSSION

This exploratory study to determine the links between employee characteristics and provision of work-family practices utilised Oliver's (1991) framework of constituent institutional pressures. Overall, there is evidence to suggest that certain constituent characteristics are associated with particular work-family practices offered by organisations. Findings of the present investigation provide support for the view that an organisation's dependence on certain constituents combined with a multiplicity of these constituent demands contributes to institutional pressures to provide certain benefits for employees (Oliver, 1991).

In relation to employer involvement in work-family issues, organisations did take into account the role of critical constituents (in particular, employees with dependants, women, union members and, long serving employees). Our findings differ from Glass and Fujimoto's (1995) who reported that there was no evidence to suggest that access to work-family practices was influenced by personal characteristics of employees.

The present findings reveal a trend for organisations that employ a higher proportion of females to more likely to provide flexible work options, child and dependant care, and employee support programs. Previous studies have been mixed in relation to female concentration as a strong predictor of employer provision of work-family practices, some significant (Glass & Fujimoto, 1995; Ingram & Simons, 1995; Morgan & Milliken, 1993) and others not (Goodstein, 1994; Osterman, 1995; Vanderkolk & Young, 1991). Findings from the present investigation suggest that organisations are selective in the types of programs offered and are more likely to select policies that are helpful for particular constituents. For example, programs are more likely to be provided in female dominated organisations in order to support female care-giving roles. Flexible work options such as flexitime provide employees with the option of dropping off or picking up children from school. Obviously, dependent care options directly impact on the caregiver's role. Similarly, employee support programs such as counselling or a work-family kit provide female employees with assistance in this role. Similar reasons could be posited for why organisations that are more dependent on

employees with dependant children are more likely to provide flexible work options, child and dependant care, and employee support programs.

Several hypotheses were not supported by the findings. The age of the workforce and the work-family practices offered were not significantly related to the provision of work-family practices. Previous studies have not assessed the link between the age of the workforce and provision of work-family practices, hence there are no serious study results for comparison. This result could perhaps be ascribed to a shortfall in the item that assessed age. Respondents were asked to rank their organisation in terms of the ratio of employees under or over the age of 35 years old. It may be that 35 years old is not indicative of employees with dependant care responsibilities. This consideration, combined with a trend for people to have children later in life, may mean that 40 years old could have been more reflective of employees with dependant care responsibilities. This study also found that the presence of working spouses and location of employment (i.e. rural versus city) was not linked to the provision of work-family practices.

CONCLUSION

The present evaluation indicates that certain employee demographic factors are likely to predispose an organisation to offer certain types of work-family benefits. However, the findings also suggest that organisations tend to tailor work-family programs and policies to the particular characteristics of key constituent groups. For example, those organisations characterised by a higher proportion of female employees are most likely to offer flexible work options, dependant care options and employee support programs rather than leave or career path alternatives. This finding suggests that while organisations are prepared to be family friendly they are selective in terms of what they provide. Thus, work-family benefits are likely to be matched to specific needs of constituent groups (in particular, employees with dependants, women, union members and, longer serving employees).

As identified by Goodstein (1994), a weakness characterising prior research was a lack of an overarching theoretical framework that enabled the nature of strategic responses and causal determinants to be specified. This analysis attempts to provide a more coherent framework for understanding how organisations strategically respond to constituent pressures and which constituents are more likely to impact on these responses.

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