'Family Friendly' Policies: Distribution and Implementation in Australian Workplaces

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Abstract

'Family-friendly' policies have recently gained a high profile in Australia, featuring increasingly in political rhetoric, company policies, industrial provisions and human resource management discourse. While initiatives to enhance the combination of work and family responsibilities may make relatively minor contributions to equal employment opportunity efforts, they do bring into consideration some of the broader social impediments to gender equity in paid employment. Some assessment of their accessibility and impact is therefore warranted. In this paper we examine the distribution of work and family provisions in the Australian labour market, and provide an assessment of their implementation in selected organisations. Our findings indicate that access to work and family provisions is uneven across the Australian labour market, particularly in the private sector; and suggest that even where provision is exemplary, the impact is at best moderate.

Introduction

Work and family policies have the potential to address some of the most resilient barriers to women's advancement in the paid labour force by bringing into the public arenas of industrial negotiation and regulation issues arising out of the gendered division of domestic and caring labour. However the impact of such policies is highly contingent not only on the type and distribution of provisions, but also on the way they are implemented in workplaces and utilised by male and female employees.

In this paper we seek to contribute to debates on both the distribution of work and family measures in the Australian labour market, and their impact at workplace level. We begin with a brief clarification of how 'family friendly' policies are conceptualised in this paper, and the implications for our analyses of the current policy framework in Australia. Our empirical research is then reported in two sections. The first focuses on the distribution of work and family policies. Recent research on this topic suggests a number of propositions which we test using data from the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS95). The second section of the analysis examines arguments about the efficacy of family friendly provisions, and the potential to impact on problems of career retention for women and the gendered domestic division of labour. In this section we draw on evidence from employees and managers in six case studies of organisations with progressive work and family policies.

'Family friendly' initiatives

A wide variety of provisions come under the general rubric of 'family friendly' measures. While in a fundamental sense the most family friendly policies are arguably adequate wages, job security and the absence of work intensification, the debates under examination here focus more narrowly on specific initiatives designed to facilitate balancing work and family commitments. These tend to fall into four main groups: leave provisions (such as parental and family leave); flexible hours provisions (including part-time work, job sharing, flexible start and finish times); child care provision or assistance; and support measures (counselling and referral services) (for alternative categorisations, see Glass and Estes, 1997, 294; Glass and Fujimoto, 1995; Bardoel et al, 1998).

Clearly, not all measures have the same potential to facilitate the combination of work and family responsibilities. Moreover, some may be introduced for reasons other than family friendliness, and in some circumstances may constrain rather than enhance the ability to balance work and

family commitments. A commonly recognised example is hours flexibility, which may assist with the combination of work and family responsibilities if based on employee autonomy over start and finish times, but be inimical to this goal if it involves irregular shifts or unpredictable hours. These complexities need to be factored into any evaluation of debates over the distribution and effect of work and family policies.

The Australian context

In Australia, work and family measures can be found in industrial relations legislation, provisions in industrial agreements and company policies, and a wide range of informal measures at workplace level. As the other papers in this symposium have shown, Australian legislative standards are comparatively low (see Earnshaw, this volume, for an overview of European provisions; Earle, this volume, for a description of Australian provisions). Responsibility for the broader range of work and family measures lies primarily at workplace level with individual employers – an approach consistent with the pursuit of flexibility through the decentralised system of industrial negotiation adopted by Federal and most State governments. However, it is clear that enterprise bargaining is not in itself the main vehicle through which family friendly measures are being developed. For example, within the sample of enterprise agreements held in the Agreements Database and Monitor (ADAM) in early 1998,[1] only 10 per cent contained a provision covering at least one non-statutory family friendly measure (ACIRRT, 1998, 31-32). Although the recent report of the Work and Family Unit (1999) suggests a higher uptake in industrial agreements, this reflects a broader definition of 'family friendly'. Thus, while 67 per cent of certified agreements at federal level were reported as containing one or more 'family friendly' measure (Work and Family Unit, 1999, 85), the most common were flexible hours provisions such as accrual of rostered days off and time-off-in-lieu – measures not necessarily applied for family friendly purposes.[2] Provisions such as paid parental leave and family leave were shown to be more common in Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) (Work and Family Unit, 1999, 88), but this reflects the high proportion of the sample (over a third) in Government employment (see Work and Family Unit, 1999, 92).

However legislation and industrial agreements are not the only avenues through which family friendly measures may be introduced, as some exemplary corporations have shown. Governments have offered encouragement to corporations in the form of promotional material and recognition

of outstanding achievement, such as the corporate awards sponsored by the Work and Family Unit in the federal Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (see also Department of Training and Industrial Relations, 1997; DEETYA Equity and Participation Branch 1998:1, 7-8).

We argue that this combination of relatively limited regulatory provisions with encouragement for exemplary performance is conducive to a high level of variability across the labour market in the provision of work and family measures. The next section examines the debates over the determinants of policy distribution, and produces some evidence for the Australian case.

The distribution of family friendly measures: the Australian evidence

While there is widespread recognition of an increase in the propensity to combine paid work with family responsibilities and a general advancement in access to family supportive provisions, the idea of a 'polarisation' associated with the provision of work and family policies is suggested in a number of recent analyses of European and North American data. At the basic level of labour force attachment, for example, British analyses have shown that the break in employment experienced by women after childbirth is narrowing, and has at least halved between 1950 and 1970 (Joshi and Hinde, 1993). However, as Macran, Joshi and Dex (1996) show on the basis of longitudinal data from a 1946 and a 1958 cohort of women, a reduction in time spent out of the labour market is most likely for better educated women who begin their families relatively late. Thus there is an increasing disparity in labour market continuity between these and other women. In speculating on the reasons for the increasing disparity, Macran Joshi and Dex suggest – among other factors – differential access to, or ability to utilise, work and family policies that facilitate career retention (1996, 290).

There are several reasons to expect variations in type and extent of work and family policies across the labour market, particularly where policies are primarily employer driven. Choices made on economic or efficiency grounds by employers about the cost effectiveness of family friendly measures are likely to produce quite distinct approaches in different sections of the labour market. On the one hand, businesses seeking to avoid high levels of absenteeism and labour turnover among highly skilled employees may view career retention assistance as cost effective. On the other hand, businesses operating in areas where productivity is linked to minimising

the cost of labour are more likely to adopt numerical flexibility than staff retention strategies.

The idea that progressive work and family policies will be conducive to business efficiency has been widely discussed in the literature as a 'rational choice' (Glass and Estes, 1997, 301ff) or 'business case' (Dickens, 1994) approach. This view suggests that skill retention strategies will be most likely to be evident where training and replacement costs are high, and/or where the number of employees facing work/family conflict is high. Several studies have (somewhat indirectly) tested these propositions; seeking evidence of an association between policy provision and variables such as occupational type and female concentration. The number of family friendly measures has been shown to be influenced by occupational mix, with professional, technical and managerial workers more likely to be covered (Glass and Fujimoto, 1995; Osterman, 1995). The evidence on female concentration is more varied, but we argue that this is to be expected in light of the reverse side of the 'business case' coin alluded to above. Females are concentrated in several low skill areas of employment where there is little incentive to engage in progressive work and family measures, hence the relationship between female concentration and policy provision is unlikely to be linear.

These considerations suggest a degree of complexity in predicting the determinants of work and family provisions, even if explanations are limited to those consistent with a 'rational choice' model in which employers are driven by considerations of skill retention. We argue that the main predictors from the perspective of such a model would be wage levels and occupational status as indicators of the cost of problems such as labour turnover. The proportion of women and the use of non-standard workers would be likely to have different effects in different sections of the labour market, with the significance of non-standard employment depending on its type and purpose (in particular, whether it is permanent or contingent). A 'market driven polarisation' would be supported if wage level and professional occupations were positively associated with the incidence of work and family programs, while the use of contingent forms of non-standard workers was negatively associated.

However, a rational choice view is not the only perspective on the determinants of policy provision. An alternative 'institutional' (Glass and Estes, 1997) view draws more on management style, particularly 'the rise of professional personnel management' and the consequent 'social construction of these practices [including work and family policies] as "rational" and "efficient"' (Glass and Fujimoto, 1995, 386). Professional

personnel management institutionalised in a formal human resource management layer injects a degree of rule bound formality into employment management, as well as prioritisation of social justice and equity concerns alongside more immediate economic pressures. Formal procedures – 'bureaucratic formalization' (Glass and Fujimoto, 1995, 387) – are thus likely to support the development and implementation of policies like work and family measures.

Size of workplace is important in this context as it increases the likelihood of a professional human resource management layer and formalisation of procedures throughout the organisation. Existing evidence lends some credence to this position, at least with respect to formal policy provision (Glass and Fujimoto, 1995; Seyler et al, 1995; Osterman, 1995). Again, however, there are contradictory possibilities in relation to size and bureaucratic structure, with some analysts emphasising the difficulty of dealing with work and family concerns through rigid work rules, and the benefits of flexibility in smaller organisations (see Glass and Fujimoto, 1995, 388). Thus more subtle aspects of management style such as flexibility, responsiveness, or a family supportive culture may be determinants. Other aspects might include participatory techniques designed to engender company loyalty. For example, Osterman (1995) demonstrates a relationship between 'high commitment work systems' and the adoption of work and family programs (1995, 697).

Predictors of work and family initiatives could thus include indicators of the formality and structure of management as well as size of organisation. Overlapping these factors are existing policy measures, particularly comprehensive and well-regulated EEO programs. While these may be part of a formal human resource management approach, and thus more prevalent in large organisations, they may also be factors with explanatory power in themselves.

Extending this collection of predictors is the presence of actors such as unions which may contribute to pressure for the development and application of work and family policies. A further (although somewhat broader) determinant could be whether the organisation is in the public or private sector. While many of the factors mentioned so far may be sector dependent (for example, occupational structure, size, formal management structure, EEO programs, unionisation) there is also a potential for sector to represent more than these individual variables. For example, a history as an EEO pace setter, a public concern for social justice and some degree of detachment from commercial pressures may be less quantifiable aspects of sector differences.

In summary, potential explanations for the prevalence of work and family policies are more complex than many previous analyses have suggested. They range from market pressures (possibly producing a 'market polarisation' scenario involving delivery of comprehensive work and family programs to high skill employees, and an alternative 'contingent employment' strategy in areas of lower skill), to management style and regulatory provisions. We expect that a degree of polarisation will be evident in the Australian labour market, but that both 'rational choice' and 'institutional' types of variables will have some explanatory power. We now turn to an analysis of the AWIRS95 data to evaluate these propositions.

The evidence from AWIRS95

The large body of survey data collected in the 1995 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS95)[3] enables us to conduct an initial investigation of the relative importance of the types of factors discussed above for the distribution of work and family policies at workplace level in Australia. An important advantage of workplace level survey data for our purposes is that it allows identification workplace practices rather than only formal provisions.

In order to construct an overall measure of the 'family friendliness' of workplaces, we allocated scores for the presence of selected variables drawn from the workplace survey. These included a range of leave provisions to care for household members, some types of flexible working time arrangements, child care provisions, elder care assistance and support measures. Variables were thus drawn from each of the four categories outlined earlier in the paper, although we restricted our choice to measures that appeared unequivocally family friendly, excluding – for example – many of the general working time flexibility provisions. Further details of the composite variable, Workplace Family Friendliness (WFF), are provided in the Appendix.

Our independent variables were workplace level characteristics chosen to represent the components of the different types of explanations discussed above. These included: dominant occupation at the workplace; average weekly wage; proportion of contingent workers; organisational and management structure; size of workplace (that is, number of employees); the existence of equal employment opportunity policies; union activity; and sector. We did not include the proportion of women as this correlated strongly with occupation which we judged to be the more important variable for our investigation, although we reiterate that our occupational variable is limited to dominant occupation at the workplace. The AWIRS variable

'non-core workers' was utilised to represent contingent workers as it did not include permanent part-time workers who might be more appropriately seen as indicative of a skill retention approach,[4] and the AWIRS variable 'structured management' was suitable to represent organisational and management structure.[5] We have applied the latter measure as an indicator of a formally organised and relatively autonomous management layer which might routinise the application of matters such as work and family measures. A further AWIRS constructed variable utilised was 'union activity',[6] which provided a more subtle indicator than simply levels of union membership.

Modelling WFF as a function of sector (public or private), dominant occupation at the workplace (including three categories – 'paraprofessionals and professionals', 'clerical and sales', and 'plant operators and labourers' – and omitting 'trades' as the base category for comparison), average workplace weekly earnings, percent of non-core workers, workplace size (number of employees at the workplace), active union, structured management, and a written EEO policy produced the results set out in Table 1.

Table 1. Determinants of Workplace Family Friendliness (WFF)

Independent variables	OLS Regression Coefficients (standardised)
Average workplace weekly earnings	.121***
Paraprofessional/professional	.178***
Clerical/sales	.195***
Plant/labourers	.094*
% non-core workers	-.083**
Structured management	.126***
Number of employees	.104***
Active union	.020
Written EEO policy	.131***
Public sector	.251***
Adj R^2	0.267
N	1177

***p.001; **p.01; *p.05

The adjusted R^2 of 0.267 indicates that work and family policy provision depends on far more than the variables included in this model, however this result compares quite favourably with other studies in this field,[7] and our intent is to test specific predictors, rather than fully 'explain' the provision

of policies. The results suggest some support for a 'market polarisation' effect – both average workplace weekly earnings and the para-professional/professional occupational category are significant and positive, while the percent of non-core workers shows a negative relationship with WFF. We emphasise, however, that these are standardised coefficients and the substantive effects of earnings and non-core workers are extremely small. Moreover, while all three listed occupational categories have positive coefficients, indicating that they are more likely to be associated with WFF than the excluded category 'trades', predominance of clerical and sales occupations is as strongly associated with the dependent variable as predominance of the more costly para-professional and professional groups. Overall, therefore, the results are consistent with a market polarisation model, but the relationships demonstrated are relatively weak.

Turning to institutional and regulatory determinants, structured management and size of workplace are positively related to the development of work and family measures, although the substantive effects are small for workplace size. Union activity is not statistically significant in this analysis however, in spite of a positive bivariate correlation with WFF.

Table 2. Workplace Family Friendliness (WFF) – Public and Private Sector Determinants

Independent variables	OLS Regression Coefficients (standardised)	
	Public sector	Private sector
Average workplace weekly earnings	.196***	.085*
Paraprofessional/professional	.028	.281***
Clerical/sales	.239*	.209***
Paint/labourers	.021	.152**
% non-core workers	.135**	-.143***
Structured management	.087	.155***
Number of employees	.105*	.096**
Active union	.176**	-.057
Written EEO policy	.142**	.155***
Adjusted R^2	.163	.180
N	336	841

***p.001; **p.01; *p.05

The strongest relationship is with sector – an important result as it is present alongside a range of other variables that might be expected to displace it (for example, size, dominant occupation, union activity, structured management, EEO policy). In order to examine further the role of

sector the sample was split into two groups – public and private – to identify if any of the variables were having different effects in the different sectors. These results are reported in Table 2.

While the overall explanatory power of each of these models is less than that of the model reported in Table 1, the strategy is used simply to indicate whether the relationships noted in the earlier analysis differ across sectors. This is shown to be the case, as some of the relationships exhibited in Table 1 exist in only one sector, or differ in direction between sectors. The negative relationship with proportion of non-core workers is evident only in the private sector, actually becoming positive in the public sector. Although these relationships are very small, the opposite signs of the coefficients across sectors are consistent with the use of different types of non-core workers in each case. For example, a casualisation scenario involving reliance on non-core workers in association with a lack of work and family policies appears to be a private sector phenomenon. In the public sector, non-core workers may be more likely to be contractors and agency workers, present in workplaces that are relatively good providers of work and family policies. Such an interpretation does not imply, however, that non-core workers in the public sector receive the benefits of the policies provided. Both contract and temporary workers typically fall outside the scope of such policies.

The effect of 'dominant occupation' variables also differs between sectors, retaining their explanatory power primarily in the private sector. Within the public sector, perhaps, work and family benefits may be spread more evenly across different types of workplaces. Similarly, structured management retains significance only in the private sector, perhaps reflecting more uniform management arrangements across the public sector. In both sectors, however, the significance of an EEO policy remains, thus suggesting a universal importance to this variable, even when size and other management criteria that might be expected to displace it are controlled for.

In sum, while the statistical relationships are relatively weak, this section of the analysis indicates (perhaps unsurprisingly) that a polarisation model is more evident in the private sector, with public sector provision somewhat more even and clearly more extensive. The strength of sector as a determinant of policy provision adds to concerns over reliance on decentralised bargaining arrangements as vehicles for the spread of family friendly measures. Apart from the apparent importance of established EEO provisions across both sectors, the analysis suggests different types of determinants across sectors, but it does little to elaborate the specific advantages of 'public sectorness'. We suggest that this is most likely to lie in long

established EEO practices and regulatory history that are not readily visible in workplace survey data.

Thus far, the analysis has addressed the spread of family friendly measures across Australian workplaces, but the data have not permitted consideration of the more vexed questions of policy implementation and effectiveness. While we are assuming that access to work and family provisions is better than no access, the issue of delivery is of little value without some understanding of impact. We therefore turn now to an examination of implementation and efficacy in selected case studies.

The impact of family friendly measures: evidence from best case scenarios

This section of the paper reports on a set of interviews of managers and employees (the latter through focus groups) in organisations with reputations as good providers of work and family policies. Our rationale was that examination of these 'best case scenarios', while not representative of the labour force as a whole, would bring to light some of the impediments to successful implementation of policies and their capacity to deliver progressive outcomes. If no progressive potential is evident in these cases, we hold little hope for the strategies in general. By 'progressive potential' we mean outcomes for employees trying to balance work and family commitments, rather than economic benefits from the perspective of the organisation, such as reduced labour turnover. For a recent analysis of the latter, see Glass and Riley (1998).

For this section of the analysis, six organisations were selected for detailed investigation on the basis of their reputations for exemplary work and family policy provision. They were drawn from mining, manufacturing and service industries, and included both public and private sector organisations. Interviews with managers and employee focus groups were conducted during 1997-8. Given the conflicts noted over a 'business case' approach we were first concerned to identify the rationale for policy initiation in these organisations and to establish the extent to which provisions were perceived as having the status of entitlements. Our other area of concern was evidence of outcomes suggestive of some impact on career access for women and the gendered division of domestic labour. Even among policies which appear unambiguously family friendly in intent, outcomes are likely to be contingent and contrasting scenarios can be envisaged. For example, rather than enhancing career advancement, the use of work and family policies may sharpen a distinction between 'career' and

'family' choices (Zetlin and Whitehouse, 1998). At the extremes, therefore, the possibilities are career facilitation and a more equal division of domestic labour at one end, and career restriction with possible legitimation of women's double burden at the other.

On the first issue, it was apparent that very different rationales under-pinned the adoption of work and family measures in these organisations. At one extreme (the manufacturing company), a more flexible approach to work and family simply accompanied the adoption of a new 'team culture' which sought enhanced productivity through performance targets and de-volved management. In this case, more flexible provisions were available primarily for sales and administrative staff as factory floor workers operated quite rigid shifts. Another of our cases was more in line with a concept of 'corporate good citizen', providing quite extensive services for employees in a remote location, including building a child care centre (although not providing free places for staff). The rationale in this instance was closely linked to what the manager we interviewed described as a 'competition with the unions for the hearts and minds of our staff' (Management Interview, Case 5). The finance industry organisation we studied appeared concerned mainly with its corporate profile as a good employer of women, and implemented an extremely comprehensive set of programs, backed up by training programs at lower levels of management. And while it was in the two public sector organisations that the most explicit articulation of em-ployee rights was found, processes of restructuring and redundancies obvi-ously coloured employees perceptions about the wisdom of accessing such policies in these workplaces. In sum, the policies in all six organisations were in some ways vulnerable, and employees were somewhat uncertain about the exercise of their 'rights'. Even in the case with the most exemplary policy provision:

> I think there's another thing looming in that we've gone through voluntary redundancy at this stage and there is talk about getting around to compulsory redundancy. I think people may feel that if they've taken carer's leave or significant amounts of leave, that [they might] be seen to be non-productive or things like, you know, you're not getting enough work done [and] that might count against you later ... I think there's that state of flux and also there's uncertainties with downsizing.(Focus group response, Case 3)

Balancing those limitations, there was some evidence that culture change accompanied the concerted implementation of these policy meas-ures, such that whatever the rationale for introduction there were some barriers to rolling back provisions. For example, while the finance organi-

sation had adopted progressive policies in an attempt to limit labour turnover of skilled female staff (and to become 'employer of choice' within the industry by winning a corporate award), the initiatives became embedded in a developing organisational framework involving the creation of specific positions to drive the development of a more 'woman friendly' organisation, and seemed to have moved beyond being contentious.

> I think all this stuff [work and family policy] has been accepted and it's just part and parcel of coming to work now and I don't think any of these will be taken away ... some organisations overseas have been doing this for a long time and they have come to the conclusion that they're not going to bother any more with evaluation, they're not going to go on doing their hard data assessment of reduced absenteeism because they couldn't really quantify it in a way that would say, 'Yes this has enhanced our profits in this way.' So what they've decided to do is [accept that] for us as a corporation it's good for our image as employer of choice. (Management interview, Case 1)

These comments referred mainly to the adoption of paid maternity leave and they suggest some limits to the business case view. Not only does the lack of concern for strict cost/benefit analysis question the business case rationale for policy adoption, there is also the suggestion that policies initially seen as innovative and experimental may gradually become accepted as part of normal workplace entitlements. However, there is also evidence that such provisions can become vulnerable if used in industrial negotiation as part of a wages package (see Charlesworth, 1999). Moreover, the longer term security of work and family measures appear to be dependent on the type of initiative. For example, we found that the costly areas of child care provision were particularly vulnerable. In two organisations, earlier commitments to work based childcare in sites across Australia were sidelined in the face of federal government funding changes. This is an issue of some concern as discussion in the employee focus groups continually reiterated the difficulties of finding adequate child care, particularly where working hours were extended.

What the cases also made very clear was the disparity between the presence of policies and their implementation within the workplace. As with similar studies in this field (see, for example, Breakspear, 1998) we uncovered perceptions of a great deal of variability at line management level, with a sense in many cases that line managers without family responsibilities, or those with a wife not in paid employment, were least likely to be sympathetic to pressures faced by employees. The perception was not limited to

employees or to the issue of whether supervisors themselves had children. Managers in one organisation noted, for example:

> We've always done very well on our score card with the Affirmative Action Agency, but the extent to which that's being picked up by local managers ... it's been pretty, very patchy. (Management interview, Case 1).

Occasional specific resentment from co-workers also detracted somewhat from the extent to which work and family policies were perceived as rights within the workplace:

> There are individuals in this place who ... resent people taking leave, even if it has no impact at all on their particular work, it's resented. I've had comments like, 'It's a pity I can't take it for my sick cat'. (Focus group response, Case 3)

These difficulties in implementation and the wariness about policy utilisation may indicate little more than a cultural adjustment process, which in at least one of the organisations we studied was addressed through a concerted program of training workshops. Nevertheless, career advancement was clearly viewed as a problem for those with family responsibilities, particularly in view of the time commitments required in moving up a career ladder:

> I mean, don't even look at being promoted unless you want to put the ten hours [a day] in really. (Focus group response, Case 1, Focus group 1).

While this was seen as a purely time commitment issues, in another area within the same organisation there seemed to be a definite stigma attached to family responsibilities. Respondents observed that all the women who had children and who had taken time off were locked into a non-career section of customer service. In some cases this was explicitly linked with taking maternity leave:

> I felt everyone had ... discounted me completely because, 'Oh, she's gone off to have a baby. Don't teach her anything new'.

> I think that maternity leavers are sometimes disadvantaged. I know a lot of managers don't like it. They don't like women going on maternity leave and they don't like them coming back and going again.

> As soon as you take time off instantly you're at a disadvantage. It's the way it is ... if you don't have children you're probably going to do better. It's one of the sacrifices you make. (Focus group responses, Case 1, Focus group 2)

Evidence of men making such sacrifices was hard to find in the data given the small number of men participating in our focus groups. One man who had taken up a part-time position while his wife continued to work full-time offered a small glimmer of hope about the impact of work and family policies – in his case the decision on which partner would work part-time was taken not on the basis of who was the lower earner, but on the basis of whose employer offered the best flexibility for family purposes. While he noted that part-time work had put his career on hold for some years (and thus that he suffered some of the same disadvantages women faced in similar circumstances) we had no way of judging whether the career penalties were similar for men and women in that organisation.

Regarding the associated issue of domestic labour, there appeared little evidence of serious challenge, although without accurate information on the sharing of tasks it was hard to interpret responses. Our respondents varied between the 'My husband's from the old school ... old, old, old school' to 'I have a husband that 100 per cent supports me'. The one confirmation of themes in the literature (for example, Baxter, 1998 on ideas of 'justice' in the sharing of housework; Wajcman, 1998, p. 153 for similar examples) was the tendency to rather contradictory statements from a few women whose assertions of high levels of support did not seem to be borne out by their descriptions of that support in practice. The husband offering 100 per cent support, for example, was in a job where it seemed he was unable to get away from work to offer practical support except on limited occasions.

In sum, the case study evidence offers little confirmation that comprehensive work and family policies are having a major impact. Clearly, questions can be raised about motivations for implementation and the long term sustainability of some measures, but the main problems appear to be associated with generating the organisational and social changes necessary for a successful integration of work and family life. These problems were evident in both public and private sector organisations, although the case which stood out as having gone the furthest towards accommodating work and family provisions was in the public sector.

Conclusion

Our analysis has shown that the delivery of comprehensive work and family policies in Australia is uneven, particularly in the private sector, and that the determinants of provision vary across sectors. Better performance in the public sector suggests some risks in looking to corporate excellence and

market competition as the driving forces of policy initiation. While commendable examples can be identified, the other side of the 'rational choice' model is reliance on numerical flexibility rather than skill retention in areas of the labour market. As Dickens (1999) has argued, the business case needs to be bolstered with supportive regulatory measures. One way to minimise polarisation effects would obviously be to upgrade minimum standards, with universal access to paid maternity leave a useful starting point in the Australian context. The research also suggests that formal commitments to EEO are of some significance in both sectors, so a strengthening, rather than the current weakening, of this regulatory framework seems apposite.

The more difficult problems of implementation and efficacy are unlikely to be eroded in the short term. While the employees we spoke with were appreciative of the provision of work and family policies at their workplaces, there was some sense that these were less than entitlements, and that risks might be attached to their utilisation. Clearly this varied across the organisations studied, yet none was immune to these perceptions, particularly where restructuring or other changes were under way. In all cases there was some sense that organisational cultures and the demands for performance from middle management led to perceptions that those who use work and family policies may be disadvantaged in terms of careers and workplace status, compared with those who do not utilise such provisions. Thus although employees were evidently better off with, than without, access to the various policy provisions, the research suggests that it will take some time to translate comprehensive initiatives into the type of outcomes that impinge directly on the organisational and domestic constraints on women's career advancement.

Notes

1 At this time the database consisted of 4376 agreements drawn from both State and Federal jurisdictions. The most common 'family friendly' provision was access to unpaid personal leave which was present in 9.4 per cent of cases. The next most frequent provision was paid personal leave, present in 3.8 per cent of cases (ACIRRT 1998).

2 In particular, averaging of hours over a longer period, which the report identified as prevalent among AWAs, has in many cases been introduced with the intent of reducing costs incurred through overtime and penalty rates.

3 The AWIRS95 database contains survey data from approximately 2000 workplaces and 19000 employees, on approximately 2000 variables. The main AWIRS survey utilises the workplace as a unit of analysis, and includes only those with 20 or more employees (see Department of Workplace Relations and Small Business, 1997; Morehead et al, 1997).

4   Proportion of non-core workers in the AWIRS sample was the sum of casual employees, agency workers, home or outworkers and contractors and their employees, as a percentage of the total workforce at the workplace.

5   A positive score for 'structured management' was based on use of, or performance on, factors such as labour productivity measurements, disciplinary and grievance procedures, work study or job redesign; supervisor training; joint consultative and other committees.

6   Union activity is a constructed variable in the AWIRS data set based on measures of the time senior delegates spend on union activity and the frequency of meetings.

7   See, for example, Bardoel, Tharenou and Moss (1998) and Osterman (1995).

Appendix

The relative family-friendliness of workplaces was represented by a composite of relevant variables from the Employee Relations Management Questionnaire (main survey) of AWIRS95. These included: access to a range of leave provisions including paid maternity and paternity leave and provisions to care for family members (for example, family leave, carers leave, special leave, flex leave, long service leave); indicators of hours flexibility for employees (for example, the influence over the time the largest occupational group can start and stop work each day); childcare provisions (such as provisions of a work-based child care centre, financial assistance for child care, subsidised/reserved places at child care centre, holiday care programs); the provision of welfare, employee assistance schemes or other counselling services; and elder care assistance. The variables were summed to form the composite variable *WFF*. The internal consistency of *WFF* was tested via reliability analysis, which returned a Chronbach's alpha coefficient of .575, $Q(13, 1120) = 4174.1$, $p<.0001$.

Omitted from the composite variable were provisions required by law (unpaid parental leave), those established in the Family Leave Test Case, and measures we did not consider unequivocally 'family friendly'. Earlier versions of our composite variable were more inclusive, and also weighted those measures we considered most advantageous. The version used here is based on a relatively narrow definition of 'family friendly' in line with the concerns noted in the paper, and accords equal weight to each component. Overall, however, we can report that the different versions of our index tended to produce similar findings.

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