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### Work-family balance : prevalence of family-friendly employment policies and practices in Hong Kong

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# Work-family Balance

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Increasing interest in impact of work/family issues on employees, family members, and organizations in Western societies

## Shifts in work & family structures:

- smaller family sizes
- increased participation of women (with children) in the work force
- long work hours
- more dual-career/income families
- expanded responsibilities for children care & elder care

These have weakened the cohesion of the family as an institution

Changes in family structures are transforming the workplace

Changes in parental work patterns are transforming family life

Changes in employment practices, technology, and social developments have placed the issue of work-family balance at the forefront of occupational health concerns (Poelmans, O'Driscoll, & Breham, 2005)

**“24/7” access**

The balancing of work and non-work (e.g., family, elder care) responsibilities is of increasing national & global concern since 1990

Unbalanced work-family relationships can result in

- adverse health conditions
- low job satisfaction
- poor job performance

## **Definition of Work-family Balance:**

1. Balance defined by the degree of time, involvement, and satisfaction in the work and non-work domain.
2. Balance as a composite of work satisfaction, home satisfaction, work functioning, family functioning and role conflict.



## Antecedents of Work-family Imbalance

Time-based demands (working hours)

Strain-based demands (job demands e.g., perceived workload, needs to work hard & quickly)

Strain-based demands are more stressful, can take a short time (e.g., supervisor's critical & nasty comments, but can exert long-term strain), induce negative emotions & fatigue, can spillover to home

Employee absenteeism due to work-family imbalance has direct and indirect cost (health care) to government bodies, e.g., it costs Australian employers approximately \$5 billion per annum

The conflicts between work and family demands are probably felt most strongly at women's managerial levels (Schein, 2005).

In the United States, women have made significant progress in entering and advancing in management.

## Implications of research findings:

Efforts to enhance women's status in management must focus on changing the design & structure of the work itself to facilitate the interface between work & family

The unresolved increase of work-family imbalance point to the value and need of the various available **“Family-friendly Employment Policies and Practices” (FEPP)**.

Family-friendly Employment  
Policies and Practices (FEPPs)  
in overseas countries

## **Definition of Family-friendly Employment Policies and Practices (FEPPs)**

FEPPs are policies and practices adopted by governmental bodies and companies to help families balance work and family life, in order to alleviate tension and work and family domains.

Family-friendly practices refer to formal or informal terms and conditions that exceed the statutory minimum, designed to enable an employee to combine caring responsibilities with paid employment.

FEPPs are adopted to support the needs of employees with domestic caring responsibilities.

The purpose of FEPPs is to support families to meet childcare challenge, and to ensure fairness at workplaces.

*Alternative terms:* Family-friendly practices, work-life practices, work-life friendly, work-life strategy, Family-Friendly Workplace Arrangement

- Research so far shows that work-family arrangements are most common in public sector organizations and large organizations (OECD, 2001).
- Organizations mainly offer flexible work arrangements, such as flexible work hours and part-time work.
- Leave arrangements & child-care support are less common (OECD, 2001)
- Employers in member states of the European Union, such as Germany, Austria, & South European countries, more frequently offer extra-statutory leave & child-care arrangements than do employers in the US or Canada (OECD, 2001).

**A recent study on part-time work (van  
Rijswijk & Bekker et al., 2004)**

In a study of 160 part-time & 29 full-time employed mothers (with a partner) working in 2 insurance companies in Netherlands. Part-time work was associated with a lower level of work-to-family interference.

Therefore, part-time work can enhance the work-family balance.



# Government Actions

Launched work-life balance campaigns focusing on promotional activities and the voluntary compliance of employers :

- *developed websites* on work-life balance as a virtual platform to provide newsletters, cases studies, publications etc

# Government Actions

– *initiated award programmes to promote work-life balance*

- UK: Work-Life Balance Campaign 2000
- New Zealand: EEO Trust Work and Life Awards 2003
- Australia: national Work and Family Awards 1992; OEA Better Work-Life Balance Project for SMEs in 2003
- Singapore: Family Friendly Award 2002

# Government Actions

## – *introduced legislation to support work-life balance*

- UK: Right of Parents to Request Flexible Working Arrangements in 2003 promoted by UK's Employment Opportunities Commission
- UK: Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- New Zealand: Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Paid Parental Leave) Act 2002; Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992
- Australia: Workplace Relations Act 1996
- Canada: Canada Labour Code 2001: more lenient on bereavement leave, provided job protection for new parents

# Government Actions

## – *introduced family-friendly legislations*

- Netherlands: *Equal Treatment of Working Hours Act 1996; Adjustment of Hours Law 2000; Work and Care Act 2001;*
- Denmark: *Act on Part-time Work*; extended paid maternity/parental leave up to 52 weeks; attempting a life-course savings scheme

# Government Actions

- *Individual promotion programmes or policies*
  - France: Reduction of hours in the statutory work week
  - Belgium: time credits system
  - Ireland: annual “Family-Friendly Workplace Day” since 2001 (newly named “Work Life Balance Day” since 2004) under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness in 2000
  - US: “Work and Family Month”; *Family and Medical Leave Act* 1993 first launched in California

# Common Findings

## Employee demands

- Flexible hours
- Part-time working
- Understanding and trusting culture
- Emergency or short-notice flexibility
- Paid or unpaid special leave
- Formalization of policies

# Common Findings

## Polices in use

- Flexible hours
- Compressed hours
- Part-time working
- Enhanced maternity leave & benefits
- Unpaid leave
- Childcare schemes/ allowances
- Teleworking arrangements
- Guaranteed festival leave

# Common Findings

## Business benefits

- Sickness absence ↓
- Retention rate ↑
- Cost ↓
  - **‘...replacing a leaver was likely to cost a minimum of one-third of the recruit’s first year salary.’** –DfEE, UK
- Productivity ↑
- Company attraction ↑
- Morale and commitment ↑



# Common Findings

## Difficulties to implement FEPPs

- No employee interest expressed
- Not fit well with strategic plan and/or mission
- May cause customer complaints about lack of availability
- May cause difficulties in ensuring office coverage
- May cause problems scheduling meetings
- Technology infrastructure is a barrier
- Employees may abuse workplace flexibilities
- The benefits do not outweigh the costs
- Lack support from government

# Successful Business Cases

## After adopting FEPPs,

- Increased return rate after maternal leave from 34% to 61% (NRMA, Australia)
- Reduced turnover rate from 19% to 14% (Unigard Insurance Group, US)
- Saved \$3 Million during first year, and \$12M by the end of 2nd year (IBM, US)
- 10% increased in productivity and 10% drop in absenteeism (Matsushita Kotobuke Electronics, Canada)
- Reduced burnout from 39% to 28% (Northwestern National Life Insurance, US)
- Reduced medical cost (SPRING, Singapore)
- Successful also in SME (DfEE report, 1999)
- Reduced work stress (Marks & Spencer, UK, 2002)

# Successful Business Cases

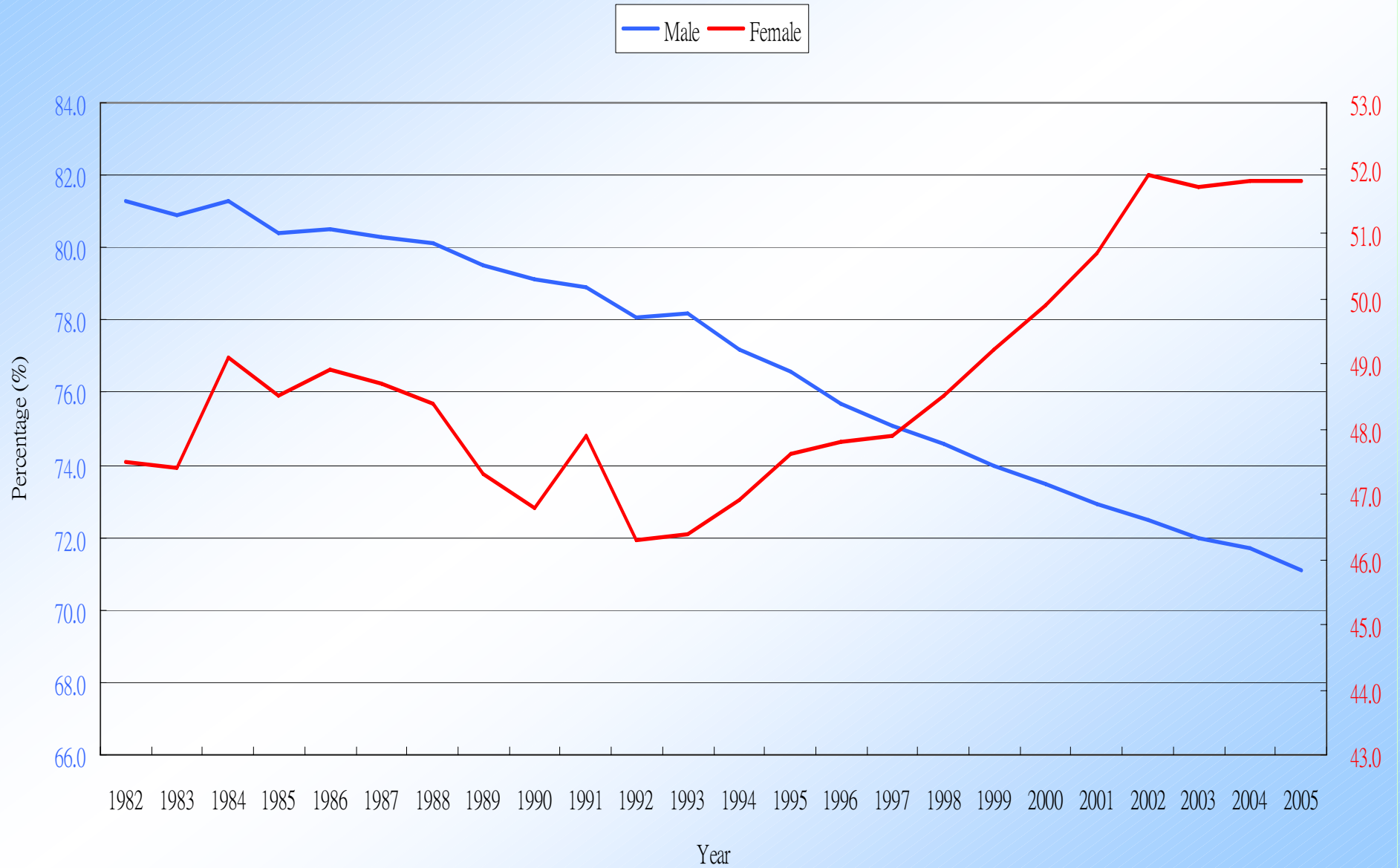
As concluded by Cascio and Young (2003), best companies for working mothers (give flexibility) seem to have superior profitability and productivity, relative to other industries. The 10 Best in 2002 include:

Abbott Laboratories, American Express, Bank of America, Booz Allen Hamilton, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Colgate-Palmolive, Computer Associates, Fannie Mae, General Mills, IBM.

# Are FEPPs relevant to HK?

- **Whilst work-family conflict & work-family balance are popular national debates , Hong Kong is recognized under-represented by its contributions to academic knowledge and governmental policy.**
- **Adopting Family Friendly Workplace can help to alleviate work stress in Hong Kong (about 40% of workforce feel either 'high' or 'very high' work pressure, amounting to 1.25 m employees)**

Labour Force and Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPRs) by Sex in HK



Source: HKCSD, 2006

# Research findings in different occupational groups in Hong Kong by Prof. Siu

- Staff who scored higher in family demands reported higher levels of work pressure, more physical/psychological symptoms, more fatigue, and worse job performance.
- Staff who scored higher in work/life imbalance reported higher levels of work pressure, more physical/psychological symptoms, and more fatigue.
- Higher scores in work-life balance, the higher in Saliva IgA level (physiological indicator of immunity)
- More family demands, the lower in IgA level

***Thank You!***