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Review article

WORK-FAMILY BALANCE AS THE MAIN PILLAR OF FAMILY POLITICS

Abstract

In the article, we provide an overview of the literature on work-family balance, including a discussion of the major causes and outcomes of work-family balance. This article introduces work-family border theory - a new theory about work-family balance. This article formulates a conceptual model that links work, family, and boundary-spanning demands and resources to work and family role performance and quality. To address the challenges that working parents carers face in reconciling work and family responsibilities, the European Commission proposed the „Work-life balance“ Initiative in April 2017. This initiative is a key deliverable of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Directive on work-life balance sets some new or higher standards for parental, paternity and carers leave, and the right to request flexible working arrangements. In this study, we clarify what politics are known in European Union member states. Here, we analyse the importance of introducing family-friendly policies, for the work-family balance and what the best policy recommendation to our country are. The article closes with suggestions for further work for Macedonian family-friendly policies.

Keywords: LABOR MARKET, WORK, BALANCE, PARENTS, FAMILY

Introduction

Over the past few decades, a dramatic change has occurred in the labour market and demographic profiles of employees. Families have shifted from the traditional male „breadwinner“ role to dual-earner couples and single-parent families (Frone, Russell, & Barnes 1996). Workers' perspectives and expectations have also changed to work. New orientations towards personal and career development, and increased awareness and need for a balance between work and life have affected organizations through incentivizing the introduction of policies such as flexible working. As a result of these demographic, employment, and organizational trends, both men and women have experienced an increase in demands from the familial, household, and work domains (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton 2000).

Although the literature is replete with discussion on work-life balance, the definitions of work-family balance are many and varied. Almost every article on work-family balance has a different definition of what work-family balance actually “is.” Work-family balance is defined as “achieving satisfying ex-

periences in all life domains to a level consistent with the salience of each role for the individual.... (that) introduces the possibility of a hierarchy of roles; however... it does not demand that a hierarchy is neither necessary nor desirable for balance" (Reiter 2007). Greenblatt is describing work-family balance as acceptable levels of conflict between work and family demands (Greenblatt 2002).

Greenhaus and colleagues define work-family balance as the "extent to which an individual is equally engaged in -and equally satisfied with- his or her work role and family role" (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw 2003).

Family-friendly policies are defined as those policies that help to balance and benefit both work and family life that typically provide three types of essential resources needed by parents and caregivers of young children: time, finances, and services (UNICEF 2019). Mutual investment by families, businesses, and the country in this critical phase of human life lay the foundation for children's success in school, adults' success at work, the ability of children and families to exit poverty, and lifelong health.

In 2018, 75 percent of men and 48 percent of women were employed or looking for work (UNICEF 2019). Many more women work in the uncounted informal sectors, trading, waste picking, hawking, or doing unpaid care work at home. This work keeps them busy at, or away from, home. For the majority of parents all over the world – both fathers and mothers – employment policies, covering both the formal and informal sectors and conditions at work, greatly impact the well-being of their families. This is especially the case for workers in vulnerable situations and low-income families, where children may be at particular risk of being deprived of basic rights and access to essential services. Better care for young children, enabled by supportive conditions at work, is not only in the interest of young children and families, but it also yields benefits for businesses, across some indicators of workers' productivity, earnings, gender equality, business growth, brand equity, talent recruitment and retention, and improved employee health, engagement, and morale. These policies also are significant for improved equitable social and economic growth in countries. However, family-friendly policies, such as non-standard work i.e. flexible working time, paid parental leave, breastfeeding breaks, quality childcare, and child benefits are not yet a reality for most parents around the country. Many children in rural and underdeveloped places lack adequate childcare and nutrition.

Social structures and the work environment have been shown to affect the stresses associated with parenting. Family-friendly policies can help to reduce parenting stress and promote wellbeing among parents. This, in turn, leads to better businesses, happier families, and healthier children (UNICEF 2019).

Many governments and companies of the European Union member states have already adopted family-friendly policies and procedures, with maternity leave and increasingly paternity leave, being good examples. However, the changes are not fast enough or substantial enough to address the balance that workers strive to achieve between work and family.

Work-life balance vs Work-family balance

The term work-life balance was the contribution of „New ways to Work and the Working Mothers

Association“ in the United Kingdom during the late 1970s to describe the balance between work and personal life (*Burnett* 2011). In the United States, the phrase „work-life balance“ was first used in the year 1986 in the relation of prioritization of hours between work and non-work activities (*Ibid*). Within the next decade, the concept becomes very popular in the work environment (essential not only for the employee themselves but also for the employers too), particularly among the western nations. Together with the popularization of the work-life balance concept, the preview of the concept has got narrowed from work to non-work balance (work to personal life balance) to work to family life balance (*Fisher, Bulger, & Smith* 2009). The work-family balance construct-which speaks about the magnitude of balance between the work domain and the family domain (e.g., *Greenhaus and Powel, 2006; Voyandoff, 2005; Fro-ne, 2003*). And the work-life balance construct-which speaks about the magnitude of balance between work domain and non-work domain non-work domain includes family, personal life/self-care, friends, society, religion, etc. (*Smeltzer, et al., 2016; Glasgow & Sang, 2016*).

The work-life balance is a construct which is wider than work-family balance construct as the former construct is not only capable of explaining the whole amount of variance that the work-family construct can explain but also can explain the variance in the dependent variable (work domain, family domain, and personal life domain) beyond work-family balance construct can explain (*Deepu Jose, 2017*). Due to the professional and scientific interest of the authors for the family on the one hand and social rights on the other hand, in the paper, only the existing policies for the family-work balance are explored.

Work-family balance politics at the European Union

One of the aims of the European Pillar of Social Rights is the Work-life balance Initiative, which addresses the challenges of work-family balance faced by working parents and carers. (*European Pillar of Social Rights, booklet, adopted by The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, 2017*). The Pillar sets out 20 key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets structured around three chapters: equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, social protection, and inclusion. Therefore, a directive on the balance between the working and professional life of parents and carers have recently been adopted in the European Union. It sets several new or higher standards for absent parents, paternity, and guardianship and enforces a greater use of flexible employment contracts. It aims to increase the inclusion of women in the labour market and greater use of parental leave by male workers (*Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Coun-*

cil of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers).¹ The new act also provides opportunities for workers to be granted leave to care for relatives who need support. The legislation means that parents and carers will be better able to reconcile their professional and private lives, and companies will benefit from more motivated workers. This directive is a further step towards promoting equality between women and men across the European Union. This will reduce the amount of unpaid work undertaken by women and allow them more time for paid employment, and also fostering a family-friendly culture. The term „friendly“ refers to a company that makes efforts and enables the employee to more easily balance family and private life, ie to be fulfilled both at home and at work.²

Legislative measures

The European Union aims to reinforce its social dimension and deliver more effective rights to citizens. The European pillar of social rights envisages a social Europe for all European citizens. Priorities include:

- equal access to the labour market
- fair working conditions
- work-life balance

To modernize the existing legal framework, the Commission has proposed a directive on work-life balance which will preserve existing rights and build on them with improved and new rights for both women and men.

The new act seeks to promote a good balance between family and professional commitments and to provide more equal opportunities for women and men in the workplace and at home. European Union and national legislation and policies should help employees to reconcile work and family life, help companies to retain talent, promote flexibility for both employers and workers, promote equal opportunities, generate economic growth and benefit society as a whole, including children and persons who need family care. The general objective of this directive is to ensure the implementation of the principle of equality between men and women concerning labour market opportunities and treatment at work and to allow parents and people with caring responsibilities to better reconcile their work and caring duties. Equality between men and women is a fundamental principle of the European Union. However, across the European Union, women remain considerably underrepresented in

¹ The directive on better work-life balance for parents and carers was published in the Official Journal on 12 July 2019. The Council adopted the directive on the 13 June 2019. The directive enters into force 20 days after its publication in the Official Journal. European Union member states have to transpose the provisions into national law by 2 August 2022.

² See: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/changing-policies/business-government-family-friendly/main#:~:text=A%20family%2Dfriendly%20workplace%20or,their%20family%20and%20work%20obligations>.

the labour market and management. In particular, this new initiative seeks to encourage a better sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men. The work-life balance package should help working parents and carers by not obliging them to choose between their family lives and their working careers.

The Commission's proposal for a directive on work-life balance for parents and carers sets new or higher minimum standards to create more convergence between European Union member states, preserving and extending existing rights as follows:

- paternity leave - new right at the European Union level,
- parental leave - proposed to be paid,
- carer's leave - new right at the European Union level, and
- flexible working arrangements - to include carers and update the level of protection.

The presidency of the Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement on some key elements of the proposal for a directive on work-life balance for parents and carers on 24 January 2019. (*Work-life balance for parents and carers. Council of the European Union, 2019*).

Paternity leave. Fathers or second parents can take at least 10 working days around the time of the birth of a child paid at a level equal to that currently set at the European Union level for maternity leave. The right to paternity leave will not be subject to a prior service requirement. However, the payment of paternity leave can be subject to a six-month prior service requirement. Member states with more generous parental leave systems are allowed to keep their current national arrangements.

Parental leave. Individual right to 4 months, from which 2 months are non-transferable between the parents and are paid. The level of payment is set by the member states. Time and support for all key caregivers are important for young children's development. Families benefit by not losing income at a critical time when their infants are born or adopted and families' needs increase. Paid parental leave has short- and long-term positive effects on family income.

Carers' leave. A new concept at the European Union level - for workers caring for relatives in need of care or support due to serious medical reasons - 5 working days per year. This may vary among member states - they may allocate leave on a case-by-case basis and may introduce additional conditions for the exercise of this right.

Flexible working arrangements. There is also an extension of the right to request flexible working arrangements for working carers in addition to this right for all parents. A flexible work arrangement empowers an employee to choose what time they begin to work, where to work, and when they will stop work (*Leslie, Manchester, Park, & Mehng, 2012*). The idea is to help manage work-family balance and benefits of flexible arrangements can include reduced

employee stress and increased overall job satisfaction. Workplace flexibility has been a topic of considerable interest to researchers, practitioners, and public policy advocates as a tool to help individuals manage work and family roles. Overall, this type of arrangement has a positive effect on incompatible work/family responsibilities, which can be seen as work affecting family responsibilities or family affecting work responsibilities.

Non-legislative measures

To complement the legislative proposal, the Commission's initiative contains a set of non-legislative measures to support member states in achieving the common goals. These include:

- ensuring protection against discrimination and dismissal for carers and parents, including pregnant women and workers coming back from a leave;
- encouraging a gender-balanced use of family-related leaves and flexible working arrangements;
- making better use of European funds to improve long-term and child-care services;
- removing economic disincentives for second earners which prevent women, in particular, from accessing the labour market or working full-time (*The European Council, 2019*).

Conclusion

Both work to family conflict and family to work conflict are associated with negative effects for the individual. Not only does work-family conflict cause problems for individuals, but it is also detrimental to organizations. While some careers allow a relaxed relationship between work and family life, many others demand significant reductions in the area of leisure and family.

The conclusion is, to what extent a balance between work and family will be achieved depends on several factors, and above all on the policies that will be supported by the country on the one side, and the conditions and requirements of the job itself on the other.

Recommendations that existed in literature mostly refer to: non-standard work (flexible working time, part-time working, job sharing); reduced working hours (a reduction of weekly working hours from 8 to 6 hours per day with full wage compensation); compressed workweeks imply work schedules with fewer, but longer workdays (the number of worked hours per week is the same); organizational practices (tailored to the need of different organizations depending on culture, demographic and needs of the organization and its employees); allowing work away from the worksite (an employee may work from home or some other remote site some or all of the time); parental leave (the conditions of access and detailed rules are defined by law and/or collective

agreements in the Member States); carer's leave (new right at the European Union level); flexible emergency leave (this offers a certain number of days a year to attend to medical or other emergencies, usually with pay); family-oriented events (many employers arrange company picnics, Christmas parties, and other events to include employees' families). Blaževska, Zaharia, Chudzicka, Šurbanovska, & Fritzhand, 2016 in their paper state that gender and cultural context should be taken into account when examining the flexibility and the transition between the boundaries of the work and family domain in employees.

Family-friendly policies need to be designed as a holistic and balanced package of time-related, service-related, and finance-related policies to provide adequate provisions, not only time (*Halpern 2005*). The policies need to accommodate a variety of family forms and non-standard work situations and consider the range of roles that women perform as workers and caregivers. Four key actors are needed to advance family-friendly policies as four corners of a diamond: the country, businesses, families, and communities (including civil society and international organizations, trade unions, community-based organizations, the non-profit sector, and informal networks). This „diamond of care“ can come together in an integrated approach for family-friendly policies. Family-friendly policies are not just the right thing to do, but also the smart and equitable thing to do (*UNICEF 2020*).

Family plays an important role in achieving this balance, too. In the modern working world, we run the risk of the family becoming a by-product of a successful career. The country has a responsibility to foster and encourage healthy family life. After all, for many employees, a family is the key to a healthy and happy life. If this is neglected in favour of professional life, you run the risk of the entire work-life balance toppling. It is also crucial to move from viewing work-family balance as an individual matter to a shared responsibility of governments, private sector employers, and families.

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