

A Sectoral Study on Family Friendly Policies for Women Employees

Dr. Kirti Gupta

Professor,

Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University's, Institute of Management & Entrepreneurship Development,
Erandwane Campu, Pune- 411038

Email – Kirti_gupta2004@yahoo.co.in Phone: 9860442165

Ms. Reshma Kabugade

Assistant Professor,

Gourishankar Institute of Management Sciences, Tal : Karad, Dist: Satara

Email – reshma.kabugade2008@gmail.com, Phone: 9730427028

Abstract:

Improved education and employment opportunities for women coupled with rising costs of living have seen a steady rise in the number of working women in most fields. Pune is a growing hub for the different sectors and it is observed that there is a marked presence of women in all the sectors.

Since a working woman shoulders more responsibility and needs to take initiatives both on family and job front, there is need for provision of family friendly policies for balancing both these responsibilities. This paper attempts to throw light on the different family friendly policies provided for the women employees in different sectors, and explores the extent to which these policies are benefiting the women employees. Lastly it brings out the expectations of the women employees regarding the different policies in place and also efforts needed further for maintaining work life balance.

Keywords: Family friendly policies, Work life balance, Equal opportunities.

1. Introduction

Improved education and employment opportunities for women coupled with rising costs of living have seen a steady rise in the number of women employees in all the fields. Pune is a growing hub for the different sectors and it is observed that there is a marked presence of women in all sectors here especially the service sector. The service sector accounts for majority of women employees than any other sector and as per the Nasscom's paper on gender inclusivity issues; India has the most number of women employed in the service sector.

Organizations today strive to create affable conditions for workforce to enable them to balance work with their personal life. The role of human resources manager has become more challenging than ever as he has to deal with a diverse workforce; not to ignore the increasing presence of women employees in the workforce. This requires him to be sensitive and proactive towards the issues regarding the women employees in an organization. This concern has drawn the attention of top management towards formulating policies and schemes especially for women employees so as to attract and retain them and also improve their productivity.

More and more women are joining challenging careers today and when the day is done at the office, they often carry more of the responsibilities and commitments back home. Due to the dual roles of home and work, the working women experiences lot of pressures and needs to find strategies and support from all areas to strike a balance between the two.

In the Indian context, though the number of working women is on the rise, the efforts made by employers for enabling the women to shoulder the dual role efficiently are not in sync with it. With the rapidly changing social fabric of the Indian family in terms of dual working couples, urbanization, nuclear families etc, the working woman in Indian context also needs the support from employer and government to enable work life balance.

2. Family Friendly Policies:

The term *family friendly* refers to the provisions made by either the employer or the government which makes it possible for employees to balance their family and work more easily and fulfill responsibilities on home and work front more efficiently. These are framed keeping in view the needs of children, parents, elderly family members, and children with special needs etc. Some commonly known family friendly policies are on-site child care facilities, transportation, switching to part-time, allowing work away from worksite, child and dependent care, flexible leave policies, and time off for family emergencies (Daley, 1998; Folsom & Botsch, 1993; Greenfield, 1997; Ezra & Deckman, 1996). These policies can contribute a long way in enabling women to remain in the workforce and contribute to the family and society. Also, the employers are benefited by retaining skilled employees and developing talent also, thereby reducing the turnover rate.

3. Review of Literature:

Many studies focusing on these issues have been carried out in other countries. Working women are particularly affected by extended work hours (Piotrkowski et al 1987) and a child's well being suffers as a result of lack of time with parents (Piotrkowski et al 1987). Research indicates that lack of sensitive, responsive, and consistent care from overworked parents or substitute providers can lead to decreased cognitive and social skills (Percl & Menaghan 1994). Spousal support is most effective in helping women deal with the demands of multiple roles (Cohen & Syme, 1985; Duxbury & Higgins, 1991; Eckenrode & Gore, 1990; Holahan & Gilbert, 1979; Ross & Mirowsky, 1988). It is necessary for a working woman to find the management strategy best for her because the family needs of all women are bound to be different. For example, childbearing employees may require leave time; mothers of preschoolers may need childcare and a reduced work schedule in order to support the emotional needs of their children. Women with older children may need after-school assistance and, perhaps, a more flexible work schedule. Women who are care-givers for older adults may need leave for emergencies (Glass & Estes, 1997). Thus, "these different family and work factors mean that the policies that are optimal for one class of employees at one point in time may have little or no effect on reducing work/family conflict for another class, or even for the same employees at another point in time (Glass & Estes, 1997: 293)." Research evidence supports the fact that employers with family-friendly policies have more reliable employees (Alverson, 1999).

One way of improving prospects for women could be to restructure the work, for example with flexible working hours, part-time job assignments, split location positions performed partly at home, and job-sharing (Mankidy, 1988). Marni Ezra and Melissa Deckman in their study *Balancing Work and Family Responsibilities* (1996), concluded that the more satisfied both parents (and nonparents) are with their balance between work and family, the more satisfied they are with their jobs. They further claim that because fathers were found to be significantly happier with work life balance than mothers (especially those with younger children), finding innovative ways to help mothers balance work and family better is increasingly crucial to a contented work force and suggest the use of on-site child care and flextime to significantly improve mothers' work-life balance and overall satisfaction level.

C.C. Holland (2006) found that smart companies know that keeping employees happy in and out of the workplace through family-friendly policies translates to business success. Many organizations are now focusing on creating family-friendly programs and a company culture that allows for better work-life balance, including flexible schedules and generous family-leave policies. An article on work life balance (2010), draws a comparison between the work life policies provided in America and India women employees. It was found that women abroad got more facilities at workplace as compared to Indian counterparts.

4. Problem focus

Family friendly policies help women employees to maintain a balance as nurturer and provider. Also, such policies help build a healthy relationship between the employee and employer and keep the employee motivated. With the fast changing social fabric of the Indian society, joint families are being replaced by nuclear families and double income also becoming a necessity, the onus of child care is on the mother who is shouldering dual responsibility. In such a situation, gestures of caring for these women employees by implementing family friendly policies like crèche facilities, flexi-time, special leaves etc would go a long way in making the job stress free for the women employees.

Many researchers have gone through employee benefit, policies provided to the women employee, women employee's work-life balance, in general. This paper focuses mainly on the women employees employed in the different sectors and the different family friendly policies made available to them in the Indian context.

Objectives:

- i) To identify the family friendly policies for women employees in different sectors
- ii) To compare facilities and special leaves provided to women employees at workplace in the sectors.
- iii) To suggest the family friendly policies expected by the women employees.

5. Research Methodology:

The city of Pune has leading business organizations from different sectors. This study seeks to compare and contrast the provision of family friendly policies provided by the employers especially to the women employees in sectors namely information technology, manufacturing, education and service(banking-insurance). The survey method is adopted for achieving the above objectives. Stratified sample consisted of women employed in four major sectors as strata. The details about the different sectors are :

IT sector – This sector consists of BPO, KPO and software engineers etc. Large number of women employees are found in this sector as compared to others.

Service (Banking and Insurance sector) – Next to the IT sector, this is another preferred sector of married women.

Education sector – Considered as more sophisticated field for working by women, large number of women employees both married and single are employed here.

Manufacturing sector - In manufacturing sector women employee are mainly working for administration and clerical positions. Basically number of women employees in this field is less as compared to other sectors.

Primary data was collected through questionnaires having fifteen questions including both open ended and close ended questions and interviews of HR managers. Secondary data was accessed through journals, magazines, bulletins, company records, circulars, etc. The tools for data collection were prepared based on survey of literature and expert's opinions. Sample size consisted of 150 employees as follows:

Table 1: Sampling details

Sector	IT	Service	Education	Manufacturing	Total
Sample Size	30	50	50	20	150

Employees from different organizations of each sector were selected as per the above plan.

6. Respondents Profile:

The profile of the sample of sample respondents:

- Respondents from the IT and Education sector had post graduate qualifications whereas those from service sector saw more of graduation as the highest qualification. 40% of the employees were having the experience up to 5 years and only about 20 percent of the employees had experience above 15 years.
- Majority of the employees ranged from age-group 20-40. The proportion of single women employees was the highest in the IT sector, whereas the other sectors represented more of married women.
- About 35 per cent of the employees had no children, followed by about 30 Percent each of total employees having a single child, or two children. Also, in the education sector four employees were there with three children each. Majority of the children were in the age group 5-10 years i.e school going age group. Of the rest, one fifth had children in age group upto five years and between 10-15 years each. Education sector also showed employees with older children.

7. The major findings of the study were :

- It was found that there was no provision for day care facility at the workplace for children. Most of the respondents had children who did need to be cared for and felt that it would certainly help if such facilities were made available for them.
- There was no Child Bonus facility available for the employees. The child bonus facility was desirable as it helps the family with an allowance for the additional responsibility arising out of the new addition to the family.
- Transportation facility was available for most in the IT sector. The IT sector employees had the transportation facility available, which facilitated better concentration on the work and relief from stress of travelling to IT companies which were generally located in IT parks on the outskirts areas. In the other sectors, the women had to make their own arrangements for travel to workplace.
- Medical and credit facilities were provided to employees from all the sectors. These were given priority so as to deal with emergencies arising for the employees on the health or finance front.
- Welfare facilities were present for all but the education sector. There was marked absence of sufficient welfare facilities for employees in the service and education sector. Facilities for safety, adequate rest rooms, canteens were also not very satisfactory for the service sector, whereas they were well provided for in the IT sector.
- Flexi timings were not available in most of the sectors except the IT sector. Flexi timing facility is provided in the IT sector and about twenty five percent of the organizations in the service, education and manufacturing sector.
- Overall, it was found that the I.T. sector provided maximum facilities as compared to other sectors. Though the work style and nature in the IT sector was very fixed nature, the women employees in the IT sector were quite comfortable with the policies mostly because there was a clearcut communication regarding policies and dealing with the issues regarding the women employees, Flexitime and work from home made up for the demanding nature of work in the IT sector.

8. Special provisions and leaves by employers:

- Leave for Rearing Special Children: It is observed that there is absence of leave for rearing special children and also no sabbatical leave provision in all the sectors. With the joint families fast disappearing and urbanization, the employees with special children find it very unsuitable for caring for Special children if they have one. Also, some employees are having dependent parents to care for, where it becomes difficult to balance the responsibilities.
- Sick leave, personal leave, marriage and maternity leaves are provided in all the sectors. These commonly observed leaves were provided in all of the sectors in varying proportions.
- Festival holidays are apparently available for all the sectors, again in varying proportions as per the provisions of the sector.

9. Equal Opportunities Provision:

- Education opportunities for interviews existed for all in the education sector, followed by decline in service sector, IT and manufacturing reason cited as preference for the male counterparts. Equal opportunities in promotion and career development were observed in IT, Service and Education sectors, whereas they were evident partially in the manufacturing sector.

10. Expectations of Women from organizations regarding the Family friendly policies:

When women are working equally with men, implementing family friendly policies for them will help them to balance work-life and excel at work. Provision of appropriate family friendly policies and facilities by the organizations would help to reduce the role conflicts and also promote the women employees, thus improving the productivity and lowering the turnover thus leading to healthy employee relations in the organization.

Some respondents declared that although, rules, regulation and laws are available for prevention of sexual harassment in organizations, but in small firms women employee face problems of sexual harassment from their colleagues or top level authority. Many women employees, felt and suggested that provision of leave for child

care and elder care was needed. Flexibility in employment pattern whenever possible was expected in the form of job sharing, part-time employment, staff working from home or telecommuting, flexible starting and stop times and flexible core business hours, and periodic paid and unpaid work interruptions for child care and elder care.

Conclusion:

Conflict between work and family has a real consequences for women may include serious constraints one career choices, limited opportunity for career advancement and success in the work role and need to choose between two apparent opposites an active and satisfying career or marriage and children. For effectively and efficiently performing multitasking roles, women employee needs more family friendly policies as compared to men. Now days they are getting facilities equally to the men employee but they need some more facilities like Day care for children, child bonus, rest room, health etc. and leave benefit like Sabbatical, leave for raring special children, caring for the elderly at home and holiday for special occasion etc.

To summarize, family-friendly policies are a win-win situation. They're good for children, parents, and elders; they are in the best interest of employers; and, in the long run, they benefit communities and the society in general. In the Indian context, certain additional facilities and leaves for the women employees are certainly worth considering as it would go a long way in retaining talent, improving productivity and striking about a work-life balance for these women employees. In the Indian scenario it is imperative that the organizations realize the need and importance of the family friendly policies for women employees and take proactive steps to implement the same. This will be a great stride towards stress free workplace for the women employees.

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