

Work-family balance in Malaysia: Does work-family policy make a difference?

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In Western literature, work-family policy is seen as an important agenda to address work-family balance issues. However, there is a lack of evidence on the relationship between work-family policy and work-family balance in Eastern cultures. The aim of this study was to advance the understanding of work-family policy and its relationship to work-family balance (i.e., conflict and enrichment) in Sarawak, East Malaysia. A sample of 506 employees from three public and three private sector organizations was surveyed twice in three months. By way of questionnaires, participants completed measures of work-family policy by Haar and Spell (2003), work-family conflict by Carlson et al., (2000) and work-family enrichment by Carlson et al., (2006).

The results showed that all six organizations offered some policies related to pregnancy, leave and financial assistance. More policies were offered in the public than the private sector. In contrast to western developed countries, no organization offered a flexible work practices policy. At Time 1, knowledge of work-family policies was negatively related to work-family conflict (WFC) only, while utilization of policies was positively related to work-family enrichment (WFE) and family-work enrichment (FWE) and negatively related to work-family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC). At Time 2, both knowledge and utilization of policies were not related to WFC and WFE. In sum, work-family policies are in place in the Malaysian organizations investigated and they do make a difference in employees' work-family balance. However, these findings suggest that work-family policies only have a short term impact on minimizing conflict and enhancing enrichment. As such, aspects of Eastern culture in relation to the knowledge and utilization of work-family policies are discussed.

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