

Perceptions of Work-Family Balance: How Effective are Family-Friendly Policies?

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Abstract

The increase in the proportion of mothers with young children returning to paid employment has generated considerable interest in how women juggle the demands of the workplace with the demands of family. Making workplaces more family-friendly has potential benefits for both employees and employers, but research findings are mixed about the take-up rate of such benefits and the outcomes for improving work-family balance. In this paper, we analyse data collected from 1688 women employed in the service sector in Queensland. We examine whether women's perceptions of work-family balance are affected by access to and use of a range of family-friendly work entitlements including part-time employment, subsidized child care, various types of leave, control over rosters and variations in weekly employment hours. Our findings indicate that negative perceptions of work-family balance are linked to long work hours, having to work extra hours and unpredictable work hours. This suggests that what women need most is control over the length and scheduling of their working hours.

JEL Classification: J280; J220; J290

1. Introduction

Like other western countries Australia has experienced dramatic changes in the structure and organization of families and labour markets over the last 30 years. One of the most significant changes has been the increasing number of women who work for pay. Between 1978 and 2010 the labour force participation rate for women increased from 44 per cent to 59 per cent (ABS, 2010). Among married women, the growth in numbers in the labour force is even more marked. In 1979 only 39 per cent of married women were in the labour force. By 2011, this figure had risen to 62 per

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cent (ABS, 2011). But women's employment patterns still look very different from men's. For example, most women work part-time for a large part of their working lives, particularly when their children are young. With the exception of The Netherlands, Australia is, in fact, internationally distinctive among developed countries in the number of women who work part-time. In 2010, women held 70 per cent of all part-time jobs in Australia (ABS, 2011) and 53 per cent of women with a child aged 0-4 were employed, but most were in part-time jobs (ABS, 2010). Most men, on the other hand, work full-time for almost all of their working lives.

One of the contributing factors explaining women's predominance in part-time employment is their continued responsibility for unpaid labour and care work. Research has shown that despite women's and mother's increased involvement in paid work, little change has taken place in the organization and provision of unpaid domestic and care work. Although there is some evidence that men are spending greater amounts of time on childcare and some additional time on domestic work than in previous cohorts, there is little overall change in the gender division of labour in the home (Chesters *et al.*, 2009). Women still perform more than twice as much domestic and childcare work compared to men (Baxter *et al.*, 2008; Chesters *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, even when men do perform childcare, research suggests that they rarely spend time alone with children, suggesting that this work is undertaken in conjunction with mothers, or with mothers very close by and that men rarely take overall responsibility for childcare activities (Craig, 2007; Hosking *et al.*, 2010).

There is abundant evidence that changes in women's workforce participation rates, combined with the lack of change in household responsibilities, has led to increasing difficulties and stress for women attempting to combine paid and unpaid work responsibilities. According to ABS data, trying to achieve a balance between work and family is one of the main reasons women who are working feel rushed or pressed for time. In 2007, in couple families where both parents were working, two-thirds of mothers (67 per cent) who felt rushed said this was a result of trying to balance work and family responsibilities. In contrast, in couple families where one parent, often the father, was employed, only 12 per cent of mothers gave this reason for always or often feeling rushed or pressed for time (ABS, 2009).

Of women with young children who reported wanting fewer hours of paid work, 79 per cent reported 'caring for children' as the main reason they would like to work fewer hours (ABS, 2009, p. 21). Of men with young children who reported wanting fewer hours, 31 per cent reported 'other family reasons' as the main reason, 22 per cent reported 'caring for children' and 21 per cent selected 'social reasons/recreational activities/free time' (ABS, 2009, p.21). Women were more likely to use working from home as a method of balancing work and caring responsibilities. Thirty two per cent of women cited 'caring for children' as the main reason they worked from home. Only five per cent of men who worked some hours at home reported caring for children as the main reason with the most commonly reported reason being catching up on work or meeting deadlines (38 per cent). Thirty per cent of men and 29 per cent of women reported they sometimes felt their work and family responsibilities were in balance while 17 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women reported their work and family responsibilities were rarely or never in balance (ABS, 2009, p. 24).

Some organisations and employers have introduced a range of family-friendly entitlements, such as flexible work hours, carers leave, unpaid leave, shorter working hours, part time work, job sharing and more informal arrangements, such as allowing parents to bring children to work on occasion and working from home. The ABS reports that in 2007, 14 per cent of the 2.4 million parents who worked as employees had used some form of working arrangement to provide care to someone in their household in the week prior to the survey (16 per cent of mothers and 12 per cent of fathers) (ABS, 2009). But research has shown that the availability of such entitlements varies considerably across sectors and organisations with employees in the public sector usually afforded greater access to family-friendly entitlements, than employees in the private sector (Earle, 2002; and Whitehouse, 2001).

There is also evidence that access varies within organisations according to length of tenure and level in the hierarchy (Whitehouse and Zeitlin, 1999). As many researchers and commentators have noted, working for an organisation offering family-friendly work entitlements does not necessarily mean that all employees will be allowed to, or feel able to, take advantage of such opportunities (Gray and Tudball, 2002; Whitehouse and Zeitlin, 1999; and Bond, 2004). In addition to a lack of knowledge about what workplace entitlements and policies are available to them, some employees may not feel able to access these entitlements. Without a supportive workplace environment that endorses using family-friendly entitlements, employees may not make use of available work practices because they believe that to do so might jeopardise their job security, their chances of promotion, or their perceived level of commitment to work for the organization (Whitehouse and Zeitlin, 1999).

This research underscores the need to examine not just access to entitlements, but also use of entitlements. The provision of family-friendly arrangements in themselves will not necessarily lead to better work-life balance outcomes unless the broader organisational and workplace culture endorses the use of these entitlements. In this paper we examine how perceptions of work-family balance are related to access to, and use of, a range of family-friendly workplace entitlements. We focus on two specific occupations within the low-paid care service sector – childcare workers and dental assistants. The two occupations we consider here are overwhelmingly dominated by women in their early to mid-childbearing and childcaring years. Issues of work-family balance are likely to be particularly relevant to workers in these two occupations.

2. Method

Data

The data come from a broader project undertaken by researchers at the University of Queensland in partnership with the Queensland Office for Women and the Queensland Office of Fair and Safe Work. The ‘Women-Work-Care’ project was broadly designed to evaluate recent legislative changes in pay and equity in female dominated care work in Queensland. The project surveyed 1767 people working in childcare centres and dental surgeries in Queensland in 2009. A two stage sampling process was used whereby childcare centres and dental surgeries were first selected and contacted using lists from the Yellow Pages. In the second stage, Centre Directors and Practice Managers were contacted and asked to distribute self complete mail back questionnaires to employees.

To ensure adequate representation across regions quotas were set for capital city, metropolitan, peri-urban and regional centres. Only one per cent of respondents were men so we are unable to consider the effect of gender on work-family balance. We restrict our sample to women who indicated both their occupation and how well their work commitments fitted with their family and social commitments (n= 1688). Further details of the project are provided in Chesters *et al.* 2010.

There are a number of limitations with our sample. First, we do not have a representative sample of childcare workers or dental assistants in Queensland or Australia and therefore must be cautious about the generalisations we draw from our findings. Second, our sample is restricted to two specific occupations in the low paid service sector and we cannot generalise to other occupations or industries. As others have suggested however, the care workforce in Australia, as elsewhere, is facing a number of challenges over the next few decades and relatively little is known about their job conditions and characteristics (King and Martin, 2007; and Meagher, 2007). Our research helps to fill this gap.

Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable is perception of work-family balance, or work-family fit. Respondents were asked how well does your work fit with your family/social commitments with response options: very well (1), well (2), not very well (3) and not at all well (4). We recoded this variable so that higher values corresponded with more positive perceptions of the balance or fit between work and family. Note that we also ran all models as logistic regressions in which the dependent variable was coded as a binary response variable with two categories combining those who responded very well and well into one group and those who responded not very well and not well into one group (results not shown). Our results showed the same substantive conclusions.

Independent Variables

Our independent variables include six measures of access to and use of family-friendly workplace entitlements. The measures on which we have information about both access to and use of family friendly entitlements are: part-time work; reduced hours; flexible start and finish times; job-sharing; employer provided or subsidised childcare; and bring child to work occasionally if needed. Each measure is included in the analysis as a dummy variable coded 1= yes.

We also have information about access to, but not use of, a range of other workplace characteristics, some of which may be characterised as measuring the level of family friendliness of the respondent's work arrangements. These are whether the respondent has a second job; ever has to work extra hours; has a say in their roster; ever has to work at short notice; ever has to take work home; and is able to choose their annual leave dates. Since one of our aims here is to evaluate how access, as opposed to use of, family friendly entitlements is associated with perceptions of work family balance, and since these are questions which may be more appropriately described as measuring the family friendliness, or unfriendliness of the workplace rather than entitlements as such, we group these variables separately in our models and describe them broadly as work characteristics. Each of these variables is included as a dummy variable coded 1= yes.

Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics for All Variables

	<i>Childcare Workers</i>	<i>Dental Assistants</i>
	<i>Mean (std dev.)</i>	<i>Mean (std dev.)</i>
Work/family balance	3.13 (0.69)	3.39 (0.66)
Hours/week	34.05 (7.72) %	33.32 (8.94) %
Access to:		
Part-time work	38	43
Reduced hours	41	50
Flexible start and finish times	39	49
Job-sharing	41	40
Employer provided/subsidised childcare	36	6
Bringing your child to work	31	16
Used:		
Part-time work	20	18
Reduced hours	17	22
Flexible start and finish times	24	37
Job-sharing	17	21
Employer provided/subsidised childcare	8	<1
Bringing your child to work	13	9
Personal Characteristics		
15-19 years of age	6	11
20-29 years of age	37	45
30-39 years of age	27	16
40-49 years of age	16	17
50+ years of age	14	11
Post school qualification	92	73
No dependent child	59	69
Youngest child 0-4 years	14	10
Youngest child 5-12 years	16	10
Youngest child 13-15 years	11	10
Partnered	60	58
Unpaid care	14	10
Work Characteristics		
Other job	7	9
Extra hours	54	50
Work at short notice	46	24
Take work home	53	11
Has say in roster	68	75
Choose annual leave	92	88
N	837	851

We also include in our models a number of variables measuring personal characteristics, including hours worked per week, age, occupation, education, relationship status, age of youngest child living at home and whether the respondent has other unpaid caring responsibilities. Hours per week is a continuous variable ranging from 4 to 74. We include occupation as a dummy variable coded 0= dental worker and 1= childcare worker. Age is included as a series of dummy variables: 15-19

(reference group); 20-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50+ years. Education is included as a dummy variable coded 1= post-school qualification. Age of youngest child is included as a series of dummy variables: no child under 15 living at home (reference group); youngest child aged under 5; youngest child aged 5 to 12 years; youngest child aged 13 to 14 years. Relationship status is included as a dummy variable coded 1= partnered (cohabiting or legally married). A dummy variable was also created measuring whether the respondent has other unpaid caring responsibilities, such as caring for a sick relative (coded 1= yes).

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics for all variables. These results show that childcare workers report more negative perceptions of work-family balance than dental assistants, perhaps due to the fact that they are more likely to have dependent children at home than dental assistants (41 per cent compared to 31 per cent), and are also more likely to report responsibility for other unpaid care work (14 per cent compared to 10 per cent). Flexible start and finish times is the most common entitlement used by both groups with 24 per cent of childcare workers and 37 per cent of dental assistants reporting having used this entitlement.

Analytical Strategy

We estimate a series of ordinary least squares regression analyses to determine the effect of access to family-friendly working conditions and use of family-friendly working conditions on perceptions of work-family balance. Preliminary analysis indicated that average hours per week was the most important predictor of perceptions of work-family balance. We thus include this variable in all of the models. In the first model, we include average hours worked per week and the measures of access to family-friendly working conditions. We then add our control variables measuring personal characteristics in model 2, followed by the work characteristic variables in model 3. We repeat the same process for the analyses examining the effect of using family-friendly entitlements on perceptions of work-family balance.

3. Results

Our first set of models, reported in table 2, show the relationship between access to family-friendly working conditions and work-family balance. In model 1, having access to part-time work is the only family friendly working condition associated with a better perception of work-family balance. Surprisingly access to employer-provided or subsidized childcare is negatively associated with perceptions of work-family balance. When we include the respondent's characteristics in the second model we find that the effects for access to part-time work and paid work hours remain significant, however the effect for employer-provided or subsidized childcare is no longer statistically significant. The positive association between access to part-time work and perceptions of work-family balance holds in the final model with all controls.

When we estimate the models with measures of the use of family friendly working conditions, as shown in table 3, we find that flexible start and finish times is associated with more positive perceptions of work-family balance. After controlling for personal characteristics (model 2) and work characteristics (model 3), women report more positive perceptions of work-family balance if they have used flexible start and finish times. In other words, being able to vary when the work day commences and finishes is associated with significant improvements in women's perceptions of work-family balance.

Table 2 - Ordinary Least Squares Regression Coefficients Predicting Perceptions of Work-Family Balance Controlling for Access to Family-Friendly Entitlements

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
Part-time work	0.12*** (0.04)	0.10** (0.04)	0.07* (0.04)
Reduced hours	0.003 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)
Flexible start and finish times	0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)
Job-sharing	0.01 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)
Employer provided/subsidised childcare	-0.15*** (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)
Bringing your child to work	-0.03 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)
Personal Characteristics			
Hours/week	-0.02*** (0.002)	-0.02*** (0.002)	-0.02*** (0.002)
Childcare worker (1=yes)		-0.23*** (0.04)	-0.14*** (0.04)
15-19 years of age(ref)			
20-29 years of age		-0.06 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.06)
30-39 years of age		-0.05 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)
40-49 years of age		0.13 (0.08)	0.16* (0.07)
50+ years of age		0.13 (0.08)	0.15* (0.07)
Post school qualification (1=yes)		-0.001 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)
Partnered (1=yes)		-0.03 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.03)
No dependent child (ref)			
Youngest child 0-4 years		-0.12* (0.06)	-0.13* (0.06)
Youngest child 5-12 years		-0.10 (0.06)	-0.09 (0.06)
Youngest child 13-15 years		-0.10 (0.06)	-0.08 (0.06)
Unpaid care (1=yes)		-0.10* (0.05)	-0.09 (0.05)
Work Characteristics			
Other job (1=yes)			-0.08 (0.06)
Extra hours (1=yes)			-0.19*** (0.03)
Has say in roster (1=yes)			0.18*** (0.04)
Work at short notice (1=yes)			-0.15*** (0.03)
Take work home yes (1=yes)			-0.10* (0.04)
Choose annual leave (1=yes)			-0.01 (0.05)
Constant	3.82*** (0.07)	4.00*** (0.09)	3.98*** (0.10)
N	1688	1688	1688
Adj. R-squared	0.0654	0.1020	0.1510

Notes: *p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001; Standard Errors in parentheses; A dummy variable for missing cases on education was included in the models (coefficients not reported).

Table 3 - Ordinary Least Squares Regression Coefficients Predicting Perception of Work-Family Balance Controlling for Use of Family-Friendly Entitlements

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
Part-time work	0.06 (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)	0.04 (0.04)
Reduced hours	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)
Flexible start and finish times	0.18*** (0.04)	0.16*** (0.04)	0.16*** (0.04)
Job-sharing	0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	-0.001 (0.04)
Employer provided/subsidised childcare	-0.24** (0.09)	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.06 (0.09)
Bringing your child to work	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.06 (0.06)
Personal Characteristics			
Hours/week	-0.02*** (0.002)	-0.02*** (0.002)	-0.02*** (0.002)
Childcare worker (1=yes)		-0.021*** (0.03)	-0.12*** (0.04)
15-19 years of age (ref)			
20-29 years of age		-0.06 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.06)
30-39 years of age		-0.03 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.07)
40-49 years of age		0.14 (0.08)	0.17* (0.08)
50+ years of age		0.15* (0.07)	0.17* (0.07)
Post school qualification (1=yes)		-0.002 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)
Partnered (1=yes)		-0.03 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.03)
No dependent child (1=yes)			
Youngest child 0-4 years		-0.12* (0.06)	-0.12* (0.06)
Youngest child 5-12 years		-0.08 (0.06)	-0.06 (0.06)
Youngest child 13-15 years		-0.11 (0.06)	-0.08 (0.06)
Unpaid care (1=yes)		-0.11* (0.05)	-0.10* (0.05)
Work Characteristics			
Other job (1=yes)			-0.07 (0.06)
Extra hours (1=yes)			-0.19*** (0.03)
Has say in roster (1=yes)			0.16*** (0.04)
Work at short notice (1=yes)			-0.16*** (0.03)
Take work home (1=yes)			-0.10** (0.04)
Choose annual leave (1=yes)			-0.01 (0.05)
Constant	3.82*** (0.08)	3.97*** (0.10)	3.96*** (0.11)
N	1688	1688	1688
Adj. R-squared	0.0706	0.1083	0.1586

Notes: *p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001; Standard Errors in parentheses; A dummy variable for missing cases on education was included in the models (coefficients not reported).

The importance of time at work for influencing perceptions of work-family balance is shown by other results in the models in both tables 2 and 3. In every model we find that increased hours at work is related to more negative perceptions of work-family balance. This is one of the most consistent findings across all of the models shown here. Further there is clear evidence that having unpredictable work hours is related to more negative perceptions of work-family balance. Again this is a finding that is consistent across all models, including those controlling for access to family-friendly conditions, as well as those controlling for use of family-friendly entitlements. Working extra hours, having to work at short notice, take work home or not having a say in the timetabling of the work roster are all significantly associated with more negative assessments of work-family balance.

Of the personal characteristics considered here, women aged over 40 have more positive perceptions of work-family balance than younger women. This is surprising as the reference groups here is women aged 15-19 years who might be expected to have fewer family commitments than older women. Less surprising is the finding that women with young children report more negative perceptions of their work-family balance than women without children. Research has shown that women with young children have the longest total work weeks when considering both paid and unpaid work and least access to leisure time (Craig, 2007; and Sayer *et al.*, 2009). We also know that women's time on housework tasks increase by around six hours per week with the birth of the first child (Baxter *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, despite research showing that more educated men spend more time on childcare than their less educated counterparts, ample research shows that women still bear the main burden of responsibility for childcare in most households, and that men rarely take care of young children on their own. The latter suggests that men 'help' with childcare rather than take full responsibility and that their help does not relieve women of concomitant involvement in childcare activities (Craig, 2007).

Interestingly our findings show that childcare workers have significantly more negative perceptions of work-family balance than dental assistants. This is a consistent finding across all of the models. This is a slightly perplexing finding as it would seem likely that working with children might be a more intrinsically rewarding activity for those who choose this occupation than assisting with dentistry. In fact, our data show that over 70 per cent of childcare workers report choosing to enter childcare because they really wanted to care for young children or really wanted to be an early childhood educator. In contrast, only about half of dental assistants report similar intrinsic reasons for entering dentistry with 12 per cent reporting that they really wanted to care for patients and 37 per cent reporting that they really wanted to work in the field of dentistry. However it may be that childcare work has more of the characteristics that lower women's perceptions of work-family balance than is the case for dental assistant work. In other words, there may be less control and certainty over work hours than in dentistry work where appointments are set well in advance and work hours are more tightly organised according to set schedules. We have also found in other research (Chesters and Baxter, 2011) that childcare workers report lower levels of satisfaction with their work than dental assistants, even after controlling for a range of workplace and personal characteristics.

4. Discussion

Our aim in this paper is to examine whether access to and use of various family-friendly entitlements are associated with women's perceptions of work-family balance in two occupations in Queensland. Women's, and in particular mother's, increased participation in the labour market, has led to a growing awareness by governments, employers and workers of the consequences of poor work-family balance including detrimental effects on the health, wellbeing and happiness of parents, and in turn, potentially children (Strazdins *et al.*, 2007; and Masterman-Smith and Pocock, 2008). Our analyses suggest that providing access to family-friendly entitlements is only the first step in addressing these concerns. It is also important that workplace cultures encourage and support use of family-friendly entitlements. Previous studies have reported that workers sometimes feel reluctant to use work entitlements for fear of giving the impression that they are not totally committed to their jobs or the company (Hochschild, 1997). The term 'mommy track' for example, has been used in the United States to characterise the experiences of women who have been put on slow-track career pathways or overlooked for promotion or career opportunities because of their caring responsibilities (Auerbach, 1990). The notion of the 'ideal worker' based on a traditional male model of full-time, continuous work, often with long hours and minimal interruptions from family commitments, is still a pervasive feature of many workplace cultures.

One of the key findings from our results is the importance of flexible start and finish times for improving perceptions of work-family balance. Of the various entitlements considered here, this is the entitlement most often used by the women in our sample and is closely associated with perceptions of work-family balance. Women with flexibility about when they arrive at work and when they leave have the most positive perceptions of work-family balance, and this association remains when all other entitlements and characteristics of workers and workplaces are held constant. On the other hand, one of the least used and least available entitlements is employer-provided subsidised childcare. This is probably a more expensive option for employers to provide and will be of benefit only to employees with young children. Flexible start and finish times on the other hand will be of benefit to all employees and is likely to impose minimal disruption or expense for employers.

Overall our results clearly indicate that control over working hours is the most important issue underlying positive perceptions of work-family balance. This means not only being able to vary start and finish times, but also access to part-time work, shorter hours, not having to work extra hours, having a say in the weekly roster, not having to work at short notice and not having to take work home. In other words, for the women in our sample, negative perceptions of work-family balance stem in large part from the pressures caused by long hours of work and uncertainty of work hours.

Interestingly, working shorter hours does not necessarily mean that women who are employed part-time have more positive perceptions of work-family balance than women who are employed full-time. Our results show no difference in perceptions of work-family balance between those employed part-time and those employed full-time, although access to part-time work is associated with more positive perceptions of work-family balance. This accords with earlier research showing that part-time employment is not necessarily the answer to work-family balance problems for women. Previous

research shows that women in part-time employment have larger total workloads and less satisfaction with time pressure than women who are not in employment or who are employed full-time (Rose *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, there is much evidence to suggest that part-time jobs are less well-paid, more precarious and of lower quality than full-time jobs (Chalmers, forthcoming; and O'Reilly and Bothfield, 2002).

Finally, we find that childcare workers have significantly lower perceptions of work-family balance than dental assistants, even after controlling for all personal and workplace characteristics. This is in line with our earlier research comparing levels of job satisfaction for childcare workers and dental assistants where we found that childcare workers reported lower levels of satisfaction than dental assistants (Chesters and Baxter, 2011). Together these results suggest that either the kinds of people entering these two occupations differ in their circumstances and orientations to work, or the characteristics of the work lead to poorer outcomes, or some combination of both. Our sample of childcare workers tend to be slightly older than our sample of dental assistants, are more likely to have dependent children and more likely to have other unpaid care responsibilities. These characteristics may be associated with greater time pressures in managing work-family balance. However the differences remain even when these characteristics are held constant suggesting unmeasured factors are driving these results. Further research is needed to examine these differences in job experiences between the groups.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, although there is debate about the effects of using family-friendly entitlements on career progress and security and also debate about whether family-friendly entitlements reinforce gender divisions by encouraging women to maintain their responsibilities for unpaid work and care, particularly by encouraging them to work part-time (Strazdins *et al.*, 2007; and Chalmers, forthcoming; and Chesters and Baxter, 2011), it is clear from our findings that access to and use of family-friendly entitlements associated with working hours are associated with more positive perceptions of work-family balance. Further research is needed to examine whether these results are applicable to women in a broader range of occupations and industries and across larger and more representative samples. Our focus here is on women in low-paid care jobs in the service sector. It is important to understand how work-family balance varies across different groups and within occupations and whether women employed in professional and managerial occupations for example, are able to access and use a wider range of family-friendly entitlements than women in the low-paid service sector. Our research suggests that what women need most is control over the length and scheduling of their working hours. If this is possible, then the benefits are likely to extend not only to women's perceptions of work-family balance, but also to their families, children and employers.

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