

Press Release

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EdUHK Survey Finds Gaps between Employers' and Employees' Expectations for FFEPs

Hong Kong is well-known for its fast pace of life, and working professionals often find themselves juggling between their career and family, which can lead to a high level of stress. To ensure employees can balance their roles between work and family, the government has actively promoted family-friendly employment practices (FFEPs) in recent years. However, a study conducted by the Department of Psychology at The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) found that FFEPs have not been widely adopted in Hong Kong. There is also a gap between the expectations of employers and employees regarding these measures.

Funded by the Equal Opportunities Commission* (EOC), the EdUHK research team conducted a study between February and December 2021, collecting 400 questionnaires from employees who have family care responsibilities. The team also conducted in-depth interviews with 25 employers and managers to gain a thorough understanding of the implementation of FFEPs from a management perspective. They found that the employees surveyed needed to take care for two family members, on average, and that it took three hours per day to do so.

The study found that over 85% of the respondents considered FFEPs to be 'not very prevalent' or 'totally not prevalent' in Hong Kong. Some employees who had previously worked in large corporations even indicated that they had never heard of FFEPs being provided in the workplace or that it was not very prevalent. Some managers responded that it is employees' responsibility to take care of their parents, and that this responsibility should not be shifted to the company.

The study also found that there is a gap in the expectations of employers and employees regarding FFEPs. Employees with family care responsibilities wanted a five-day working week (72.8%) the most, followed by a flexible work schedule (67.3%), special casual leave (66.5%), family medical insurance (64.8%), and critical incident support (58.3%). However, the most commonly provided FFEPs are compassionate leave (70.8%) and marriage leave (69.4%), which are benefits that employees may not be able to frequently use. The five-day working week (61.1%) ranked only third.

Even though most respondents were able to frequently enjoy a five-day working week (77.1%), or occasionally work from home (43.7%) and enjoy flexible working hours (40.6%), some respondents still hesitated to apply for FFEPs because they did not know how to apply (39.1%) or their job nature restricted their opportunity to enjoy the benefits (34.8%).

The survey results showed that companies in the ‘Real Estate, Professional and Business Services’ (95.7%), ‘Finance and Insurance’ (92.3%), and ‘Import/Export, Wholesale and Retail’ (85.7%) sectors were generally more willing to offer a five-day working week for their employees, while companies in the “Accommodation and Food Services” (20.0%) and “Manufacturing” (23.1%) sectors were less supportive.

Appendix 1: Provision of a Five-Day Working Week in Different Industries

Industry	No	Yes
Accommodation and Food Services	80.0%	20.0%
Manufacturing	76.9%	23.1%
Social and Personal Services	62.9%	37.1%
Construction	62.3%	37.7%
Transportation, Storage, Postal and Courier Services	57.1%	42.9%
Information and Communications	16.7%	83.3%
Import/Export, Wholesale and Retail	14.3%	85.7%
Finance and Insurance	7.7%	92.3%
Real Estate, Professional and Business Services	4.3%	95.7%

Dr Henry Ho Chun-yip, Assistant Professor of the Department of Psychology at EdUHK, who was in charge of the survey, pointed out that there is a gap between the expectations of employers and employees regarding FFEPs, owing mainly to employees’ desire to spend more time to take care of their families. However, employers, in general, do not consider providing support for specific family matters, such as parental leave or special leave, their responsibility. Instead, they tend to replace them with employee benefits, such as compassionate leave and marriage leave.

Dr Ho said “Employees who have to manage both work and family responsibilities may experience psychological and emotional distress, which can eventually affect their job performance, leading to an undesirable situation for both employers and employees.” He suggested that employers and employees should communicate more frequently, and that employers should provide flexible work arrangements, such as a flexible work schedule, to support the diverse family needs of employees.

Dr Ho also pointed out that the “Accommodation and Food Services”, “Manufacturing”, and “Transportation, Storage, Postal and Courier Services” industries are less willing to provide FFEPs for their employees. He said the work nature of these industries may limit low-level workers’ enjoyment of FFEPs, so their demands tend to be easily overlooked. He suggested that the government should provide more support for companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, and consider recognising and rewarding exemplary employers through programmes such as the "Caring Company Scheme" to encourage the effective implementation of FFEPs.

Notes: Funding Programme for Research Projects on Equal Opportunities 2020/21

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