

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

1. More than 60% of the working adults in Hong Kong have caregiving responsibilities, and therefore have to juggle between both work and family commitments (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2018). However, employees with family responsibilities (employees with FRs) experience difficulties in balancing work and family obligations (Liu & Cheung, 2015). To facilitate work-family balance among employees with FRs, we need more in-depth understanding about Family-Friendly Employment Practices (FFEPs) / Family-Friendly Employment Policies and Practices (FEPPs) in Hong Kong.
2. The research team adopted a mixed-method sequential explanatory design, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected for a more robust and in-depth analysis. In the quantitative Study 1, a cross-sectional survey using purposive sampling was conducted to obtain responses from employees with FRs across different industries. In the qualitative Study 2, in-depth interviews with purposive sampling were carried out to obtain responses from employers and managers.
3. A total sample of 400 employees with FRs were recruited via purposive sampling in the cross-sectional survey, which provided a comprehensive understanding of FFEPs in Hong Kong. The surveys were conducted between February and May 2021. A total of 25 employers and managers were selected for in-depth interviews via purposive sampling, which helped to enrich the statistical results by enabling more in-depth discussions from a management perspective about promoting a family-friendly harmonious workplace. The interviews were conducted between November and December 2021.

Objectives of the study

4. This study aims to comprehensively examine:
 - a) The availability and types of FFEPs in different industries;
 - b) The factors that affect utilization of FFEPs among employees with FRs;
 - c) The associations between FFEPs and employee well-being;
 - d) The associations between job demands and employee well-being;
 - e) The most desired FFEPs among employees with different FRs;
 - f) The associations between organizational culture and employee well-being; and
 - g) The views and suggestions from employers and managers in providing FFEPs to address the needs of family care and identifying the difficulties of implementation facing industries and companies.

Key findings from the survey

Family Responsibility

5. On average, each respondent took care of approximately 2 family members and spent 3 hours per day in caretaking. The most common type of care recipient was spouse and parent (56.5%), elderly (34.8%), followed by child (15%).
6. The most common assistance provided by the respondents were “Emotional comfort and relief” (47.8%), “Take care of daily living and diet” (44.3%), and “Accompanying follow-up consultation” (22.5%).

Prevalence and Availability of FFEPs in the Workplace

7. For the prevalence of FFEPs, only 14.4% of the employees with FRs thought that they were “very prevalent” or “quite prevalent” in Hong Kong, while 85.6% of them thought that they were “not very prevalent” or “totally not prevalent” in Hong Kong.
8. Only 26.5% and 18.5% of the employees with FRs reported that their company has provided FFEPs and has joined the “Good Employer Charter”, respectively. More than half of the respondents stated that they did not know whether or not their current working company has provided FFEPs (50.8%) or has joined the “Good Employer Charter” (67.3%), suggesting that the respondents’ awareness of the company’s family-friendly policy was lacking.
9. A majority of the employees with FRs (88.5%) thought that it was “a bit necessary”, “necessary”, or “very necessary” for the company or organization to provide FFEPs to the employees.
10. The most common FFEPs provided by employers in Hong Kong include compassionate leave (70.8%), marriage leave (69.4%), five-day workweek (61.1%), birthday leave (57.8%), family medical insurance (44.3%), flexible work schedule (42.5%), work-from-home (39.5%), critical incident support (39.3%), employee assistance program (33.6%), and family recreational activities (33%).
11. There were significant differences by industry in terms of availability of FFEPs. Comparatively, respondents who worked in the “Real Estate, Professional and Business Services” industry were more likely to have five-day workweek, employee assistance program, birthday leave, compassionate leave, marriage leave, and family recreational activities. Respondents who worked in the “Finance and Insurance” industry were more likely to have five-day workweek and flexible work schedule. Respondents who worked in the “Information and Communications” industry were more likely to have flexible work schedule and work-from-home arrangement. Respondents who worked in the “construction”

industry were more likely to have flexible work schedule, birthday leave, compassionate leave, and marriage leave.

12. There were significant differences by occupation in terms of availability of FFEPs. Comparatively, “Managers and Administrators” were more likely to have family medical insurance, employee assistance program, and family recreational activities.
13. There were significant differences by company size in terms of availability of FFEPs. Employees of large-sized companies were more likely to have five-day workweek, critical incident support, family medical insurance, employee assistance program, birthday leave, compassionate leave, marriage leave, and family recreational activities.

Utilization of the Most Common FFEPs and Difficulties in FFEPs Application

14. Among the respondents, 77.1% of them frequently used five-day workweek. Moreover, they occasionally used a number of FFEPs provided by their organization, including work-from-home arrangement (43.7%), flexible work schedule (40.6%), family recreational activities (39.7%), family medical insurance (37.7%), critical incident support (34.7%), and employee assistance program (32.1%).
15. For compassionate leave (93.3%), marriage leave (95.9%), critical incident support (84.5%), family medical insurance (77.1%), employee assistance program (93.2%), and family recreational activities (83.1%), the majority of the employees with FRs used less than the number of days provided or reported low usage frequency because they are “not needed for personal circumstance”, suggesting that these are not due to work-related factors. Only for work-from-home (42.1%), the majority of the employees reported low usage frequency because they are “limited by the nature of work”.
16. Only 5.8% of the employees with FRs reported having encountered difficulties when applying for FFEPs. A notable proportion of them encountered difficulties when applying for five-day workweek (47.8%), special casual leave (39.1%), family medical insurance (34.8%), flexible work schedule (30.4%), and leave to care for sick elderly or persons with disability (30.4%).
17. Among employees with FRs who encountered difficulties in the application process, a notable proportion of them reported that the difficulties they countered were “Limited by nature of work” (34.8%). Only 34.8% of those who encountered difficulties chose to take action by complaining to colleagues, immediate supervisor, the management level, or human resources, while the majority of them did not take action because they “Worried about affecting career prospects”.

Family Responsibility and Most Desired FFEPs

- 18.** The FFEPs desired by most respondents to be provided by employers to facilitate work-family balance of employees with FRs include five-day workweek (72.8%), flexible work schedule (67.3%), special casual leave (66.5%), family medical insurance (64.8%), and critical incident support (58.3%).
- 19.** The least desired FFEPs include job sharing (11%), compressed work schedule (21.5%), part-time employment (22.5%), after-school care for children (24.8%), day care service for elderly or persons with disability (28.2%), and childcare support (28.3%).
- 20.** By type of caregivers (116 caregivers of infant, child, and teenagers, 228 caregivers of spouse and parent, and 163 caregivers of elderly, person with disability, and person with chronic illness), the most desired FFEPs include: (i) five-day workweek (infant, child, and teenager: 75%, spouse and parent: 71.9%, elderly, person with disability, and person with chronic illness: 72.4%); (ii) flexible work schedule (infant, child, and teenager: 74.1%, spouse and parent: 69.3%, elderly, person with disability, and person with chronic illness: 64.4%); and (iii) special casual leave (infant, child, and teenager: 74.1%, spouse and parent: 66.7%, elderly, person with disability, and person with chronic illness: 65%).
- 21.** There were significant differences by industry in terms of desire for five-day workweek, flexible work schedule, and family recreational activities. Comparatively, respondents who worked in “Transportation, Storage, Postal and Courier Services” (92.9%) showed more desire for five-day workweek, “Information and Communication” (100%) and “Finance and Insurance” (84.6%) showed more desire for flexible work schedule, and “Import/Export, Wholesale and Retail” (85.7%) showed more desire for family recreational activities.
- 22.** There were significant differences by age in terms of desire for flexible work schedule. Comparatively, younger respondents aged 18-24 (70.6%), 25-34 (75.4%), and 35-44 (81.9%) showed more desire for flexible work schedule than older respondents aged 55-64 (42.4%) and 65 or above (37.5%).

Correlates of Employee Well-Being

- 23.** The availability of daily life support, family-related leave benefits, mother-related support, and childcare support in the workplace are factors significantly associated with increased levels of family satisfaction and family functioning among employees with FRs.
- 24.** Jobs that are characterized by overtime work, after-hours/weekend work, irregular work schedule, work overload, organizational constraints, and interpersonal conflict are significantly associated with elevated levels of work-family conflict, caregiver burden, and depressive and anxiety symptoms. Irregular work schedule, work overload and

organizational constraints are significantly associated with reduced levels of family satisfaction and functioning among employees with FRs.

25. Supportive, fair, and family-friendly organizations are significantly associated with reduced work-family conflict, caregiver burden, and depressive and anxiety symptoms, as well as increased levels of family satisfaction and functioning among employees with FRs.

Key Findings from In-depth Interviews with Employers and Managers

Awareness, Understanding, and Perceived Prevalence of FFEPs

26. Employers and managers demonstrated insufficient knowledge and awareness of FFEPs. Some managers reported that they were not aware of any requests for FFEPs from their employees. In contrast, some managers who knew about FFEPs reported that they had observed their employees' requests for such support.
27. There is a lack of FFEPs across different industries in Hong Kong. Managers across industries observed insufficient policy and practice in the workplace to help employees maintain work-family balance.

Views and Attitudes towards Employees with FRs and FFEPs

28. From the perspective of the managers, employees with FRs are vulnerable to psychological and emotional distress due to the difficulty of juggling between work and family demands. Some interviewees believed that family-to-work interference affects employees' work performance. However, other managers believed that the performance of employees are largely determined by their individual ability rather than whether or not they have additional roles and responsibilities.
29. From the employers'/managers' perspective, it is widely accepted that employers across different industries, from small to large-sized companies, have the social responsibility to provide family-friendly organizational culture through adopting general types of FFEPs to help employees balance work and family life.
30. Some interviewees expressed that it is not necessary for the company to provide specific childcare, elderly or disability-related support because they believed that it is not the employers' responsibility. This is consistent with the survey finding that FFEPs addressing the specific needs of children, elderly, or persons with disability were the least offered FFEPs across respondent companies.
31. Several managers agreed that small-sized companies have fewer resources for adopting FFEPs in the workplace so small-sized companies are less adaptive than large-sized companies regarding FFEPs.

Suggestions for a Family-Friendly Harmonious Workplace

- 32.** Interviewees from large-sized companies were more likely to suggest providing more flexible hours to employees with FRs on an as-needed basis. This is consistent with the survey finding that flexible work schedule is one of the FFEPs desired by most respondents to be provided by employers to achieve work-family balance.
- 33.** Interviewees across different industries mentioned that the employer is the most significant stakeholder in implementing FFEPs. In terms of the lack of knowledge and awareness of FFEPs, employers are suggested learning from the successful examples of FFEPs that have led to a win-win situation for both employers and employees, such as exemplary employers signing Good Employer Charter or being awarded Caring Organization. Active learning would increase employers' awareness to work-family balance and create a positive attitude towards providing family-friendly support in the workplace.
- 34.** Some managers raised the concern of financial cost for implementing FFEPs. They suggested that financial subsidies or child daycare service provided by the Government can support small-sized companies.
- 35.** Regarding employees' apparent lack of clear information about the availability of FFEPs and the application procedures for family-friendly support, employers are suggested to increase transparency of employee benefits by communicating proactively with employees, updating the benefits and policies section of the intranet, and sending regular notification emails to staff regarding company FFEPs.
- 36.** Some managers believe that raising employees' awareness and knowledge about their rights to apply for FFEPs is important. Managers from different company sizes welcome their employees to express their family needs and are willing to accommodate employees' needs in maintaining work-family balance.

Recommendations

Based on our observations from the quantitative and qualitative studies, the following six recommendations on staff training, FFEPs provision, and resources for mental health support are made.

- 37.** Employers are suggested to offer work arrangement and leave benefits as FFEPs to support employees with different FRs. Five-day workweek, flexible work schedule, and special casual leave are highly demanded by employees among different family roles. By offering more general forms of family-friendly support, all employees with FRs can benefit by addressing their daily caregiving needs to help them achieve work-life balance.
- 38.** Family medical insurance and critical incident support are highly demanded so employers are encouraged to offer them to employees in case of health-related problems in the family

and in times of crisis. Leave to care for children, elderly or persons with disability, which are rarely provided by employers, should also be made available to employees with FRs as they may have an urgent need to take care of children, elderly or persons with disability. Situational FFEPs are mutually beneficial to both the organization and employees because they enable employees with FRs to quickly resume effective operation at work and at home.

- 39.** Employees with FRs received the least family-friendly support in the “Accommodation and food services”, “Manufacturing”, and “Transportation, storage, postal and courier services” industry. Business leaders and industry stakeholders of these notable sectors should therefore work closely with the Labour Department and EOC to devise viable solutions to cultivate a good human resource management culture and formulate FFEPs that can help their employees fulfil work and family responsibilities simultaneously. Different types of family-friendly support may be considered to accommodate the specific job requirements while also enabling employees to maintain work-life balance. Job sharing, reduced work hours, special casual leave, and family-related leaves, to name a few, are FFEPs that may be considered by manual labour and service industries.
- 40.** Employers are encouraged to have a written family-support policy and formally inform employees about the types of support that they are entitled to. The Government should also consider providing more resources and assistance to the EOC, the Labour Department and employers to proactively facilitate the adoption of FFEPs across industries in order to help employees balance work and family responsibilities, such as knowledge transfer forums can be lined up for human resources and management of business to create a platform that brings together impactful business leaders and industry stakeholders to share their insights on building a family-friendly harmonious workplace.
- 41.** The Labour Department and the Family Council should work together with EOC to provide more seminars and talks not only for the frontline/operational staff about stress management, resilience development, and work-life balance strategies, but also for the management staff about employee-oriented management practices. A better understanding about the importance of FFEPs will provide the foundation for a family-friendly harmonious workplace, creating a win-win situation for both employers and employees.
- 42.** Employers are encouraged to provide an employee assistance program (e.g., 24-hour hotline, psychological assessment, counselling service, and referral to specialists) as a mental health first aid for employees with FRs who experience personal, family, mental or emotional problems. These programs are typically company-funded and provisioned by a third-party service provider or vendor. For small and medium enterprises, they may lack the human and financial resources to provide such support for their staff. The Government may consider either providing financial subsidies or centralized support services for subscription by small and medium-sized enterprises.