

# Is Using Regular Flexible Leave Associated with Employee Wellbeing?

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## Abstract

*The use of flexible arrangements will likely increase with the Labour government's introduction of the National Employment Standards which provide employees with caring responsibilities the right to request flexible work arrangements. Data come from a sample of public servants (n=2168) surveyed in 2008, providing a unique setting to investigate the implementation process associated with work life balance policy. Results showed that employees who regularly used flexible leave compared with non users reported lower work interference in home life. The study found some interesting differences among men and women. Men appeared to benefit more than women from these arrangements. Mothers benefit but not when they work long hours. Users compared to non users perceived a more supportive and equitable workplace culture, and these variables were found to be stronger predictors of wellbeing than utilisation alone, highlighting the importance of creating an inclusive workplace culture to obtain positive outcomes.*

JEL classification: I19, L88, L59

## 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades industrialized nations have debated about work-life balance issues as participation in work and social life has changed for many workers (Fleetwood, 2007). Within Australia time pressure is experienced by most working parents (ABS, 2009a). Couples with children under 15 years of age are now both likely to be in the labour force, employment for single parents is increasing (ABS, 2007) and a greater number of employed persons have aged-care responsibilities (Hales, 2007). For many workers this means work increasingly interferes with home life and subsequently affects community connections (Skinner and Pocock, 2008). As well, the standard working week, estimated to be 38 hours in Australia (Fear and Dennis, 2009; Van-Wanrooy,

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Oxenbridge, Buchanan and Jakubauskas, 2007), and recently set as the maximum ordinary weekly work hours in the National Employment Standards (Fair Work Act, 2009) is not always achieved by all workers. Figures estimated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics report that in July 2010, 13 per cent of Australian employees were working between 41-49 hours per week and 15 per cent were working more than 50 hours.

These social changes have in part given rise to family-supportive arrangements becoming centralized policies used by government agencies and large organisations to address a range of human resource concerns (De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott and Pettit, 2005; Sheridan and Conway, 2001). Within Australia there has been much debate over the entitlements that are provided to assist employees' work-life balance (Bardoel, De Cieri and Mayson, 2008; Pocock, 2005; Whitehouse, Baird, Diamond and Soloff, 2007). This discussion has contributed positively for workers in the paid labour market, with the Labour governments introduction of a paid parental scheme commencing in 2011. The Labour government's Fair Work Act aims to promote equity in the workplace with the intention 'to balance work and family responsibilities (Gillard, 2008). In 2007 flexible work leave arrangements were used by only 18 per cent of working fathers and 15 per cent of working mothers to care for dependents (ABS, 2009a). Since 2010, the National Employment Standards (NES) provide employees with caring responsibilities the right to request flexible arrangements. It is likely that organisations will be faced with an increasing number of employees requesting the use of flexible leave. There is a need to recognise how to effectively implement policy to ensure that policy aims are achieved. While there is a dearth of North American literature on the topic, there is presently limited data on utilisation of family-supportive policy within an Australian context.

The data for this paper come from a study of work-life balance conducted in 2008 among Queensland public sector employees. The public sector make up a substantial proportion of the general labour force in Australia (estimated to be 16 per cent of the Australian labour market, ABS, 2009b). Family-supportive policy comprising a comprehensive range of entitlements is provided to the majority of these employees through industrial awards (Earle, 2002; OECD, 2002), with a formal policy offering flexible working hours since the 1990's, access to purchase additional leave since 1994 and a work from home policy since 2002 (DIR, 2002). Documentation from the Queensland Public Service commission website claims a high priority has been given to the development of a family-supportive culture and to addressing work-life balance issues. Equity and managerial factors are important aspects of the implementation process. Managers are encouraged to 'model best practice work life initiatives and promote a culture that supports the needs for all staff to balance work and life', and to 'actively reduce excessive workloads, long working hours and overtime', as well as to 'Ensure equal access and fair treatment of all employees in relation to work-life balance initiatives'. To compete as an employer of choice the framework has been referred to as work-life balance policy to target all employees and cater for a wide range of employee needs, rather than just mothers with dependent children. Given this well established policy, the public sector provide a relatively homogenous sample to investigate the role that policy implementation has in achieving outcomes of work-life balance for all employees.

## 2. Past Research on Family-supportive Leave

Substantial interest has been paid to how people integrate work and home life. From a role accumulation perspective (Kahn, 1990; Katz and Kahn, 1978), people have finite resources and multiple role engagement is predicted to lead to inter-role conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Dual roles can be enriching (Rothbard, 2001), and other perspectives conceive role integration by the extent to which people balance their responsibilities from different domains (Voydanoff, 2005), but as yet there is no agreed consensus among scholars, on how best to measure the way in which people integrate these roles (Ford, Heinen and Langkamer, 2007; Frone, 2003), and most research investigates this topic in terms of the negative conflict that is experienced (Thompson, Beauvais and Allen, 2006). Interference from multiple roles can occur in both directions, but past research has found that greater interference arises from work activities entering home life rather than the other way (Frone, 2003).

Flexible work arrangements are seen as ways to help people to manage these dual demands (Van Steenbergen, Ellemers and Mooijaart, 2007) giving employees flexibility over patterns of working hours, particularly for parents (Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2007). For employees who have access to entitlements, this means they may have some control over their work schedule including the ability to change their start and finish times, which days are worked, where work is performed and to negotiate the number of hours worked. Other entitlements include extending sick leave to care for all dependent family members including elderly relatives who live outside the household (De Cieri *et al.*, 2005; McDonald, Guthrie and Shakespeare-Finch, 2005). However, earlier speculations promoting these arrangements as strategies that have the potential to improve employee wellbeing and lead to increased productivity and retention of skilled employees has not shown the expected outcomes (Beauregard and Henry, 2009; Grzywacz, Carlson and Shulkin, 2008; Nord, Fox, Phoenix and Viano, 2002; Parkes and Langford, 2008; Sutton and Noe, 2005). It has been suggested that the positive findings found in the past have been associated with measurement error. Many of the early studies measured employee perceptions of access to leave arrangements rather than actual use of policy (Sutton and Noe, 2005), often comparing employees who have formal access with people who don't have policies available at all. Other studies were often based on poorly conceived measurement of the different forms of family-supportive leave, creating composite scores from different types of options that may have compromised showing their effectiveness (Voydanoff, 2007).

Gender is considered to be a critical factor relating to work family balance issues (see, review by Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux and Brinley, 2005). Past research has found that women are likely to place higher importance than men on access to flexible work arrangements (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2002). It is claimed that at particular stages in the life cycle women are more likely to benefit from these entitlements as a consequence of the gendered division of domestic labour (Hill *et al.*, 2008). However, in the North American literature, where much of this research has been conducted, there are mixed results in terms of who benefits most from work leave arrangements (Grzywacz *et al.*, 2008). A large multi-industry study found that while flexi-time was found to benefit most workers, and women compared with men, a combination of compressed working week with flexi-time was found to exacerbate stress for women (Grzywacz *et al.*, 2008).

In Australia part-time work has become a key strategy for Australian mothers to balance work and family responsibilities (Baxter and Gray, 2008). Evidence from a large Australian study of work life balance shows that part-timers experience less work-life stress (Skinner and Pocock, 2008), but both part-time and full-time working women are increasingly experiencing time pressure (Pocock, Skinner and Ichii, 2009, p. 26). However this research did not examine utilization of leave arrangements specifically.

As well as this, past literature in this area shows that how organisations implement policy is a critical factor in obtaining effective outcomes (Bardoel *et al.*, 2008; Ryan and Kossek, 2008). Leading scholars in this area, Ryan and Kossek (2008), propose that organisations create a culture of inclusiveness in the way that policy is implemented. They argue that only when the culture is inclusive that positive outcomes will be fully achieved. By inclusive they mean that supervisors' support policy in practice and employees perceive that access is equitable to all members of the organisation. Past literature has highlighted the role that management plays to reduce the gap between formal and informal policy (Hopkins, 2005; McDonald, Brown and Bradley, 2005). Furthermore, Gryzwacz *et al.*, 2008 compared utilisation and perceived access and found the latter variable was a stronger predictor of wellbeing. Consistent with international findings (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2002), Australian studies have found that managers act as 'gate-keepers' and their behaviour and attitudes establish informal practice (Broers and Sanders, 2006; McDonald, Guthrie and Shakespeare-Finch, 2005). However, there have been few studies in an Australian context that compare use of entitlements and perceived access in the relationship between utilisation and outcomes. Hayman (2009) recently found that perceived use of entitlements had a strong impact on wellbeing measures. However, this study didn't measure utilisation directly. Also the sample in this study were university employees who have unique work role characteristics which are not likely to be generalisable to most of the working population.

The present study builds on the work developed by Ryan and Kossek (2008) to investigate the extent to which an inclusive family-friendly culture contributes to the relationship between utilisation of flexible leave and employee wellbeing. Questions were designed in the study to measure perceived access that assesses equity in greater detail, which few studies have done. Three main questions are asked:

- Is use of regular flexible leave associated with lower work interference in home life?
- After taking account of utilisation is perceived inclusiveness (equity and managerial support), associated with lower work interference in home life?
- Does using regular flexible leave result in different outcomes for different employees: by gender, dependent status, dependent children and longer than standard work hours?

An investigation into the use of flexible work arrangements is timely given the introduction of the NES. This study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, it provides an empirical base of a comprehensive range of flexible work leave options within the Australian context for employees who have ongoing and continual caring responsibilities beyond the birth of a child. Secondly, in view of the increasing

number of organisations that have implemented flexible work leave arrangements it is hoped that it will contribute to a greater understanding of the implementation process to obtain the intended goals of policy.

### 3. Method

#### *The Sample and Procedure*

A large public sector union agreed to participate in the study with access to a database containing 21,000 members. The union sent out an introductory letter about the study encouraging participation in an online survey about work-life balance and utilisation of family-supportive provisions. A week later members were sent a link to a web-survey, which was open for three weeks in November-December 2008. Two reminder emails were sent out, resulting in a sample of 3737 participants (21 per cent response rate). Inspection of the missing data showed it was random. Using list-wise deletion an analytic sample of 2168 employees was obtained, which represented a nine per cent response rate from the total contactable population. Respondents were from all major state agencies and consistent in gender and age of the public sector population at the time of data collection. The population at the time was primarily women (63 per cent) and aged over 45 years (48 per cent), (QPS Workforce characteristics 2007-08). The sample was aged between 18 and 68. The average age of respondents was 44 years of age. The majority of the sample were women (65 per cent), which was consistent with the population. The sample was made up of 53 per cent of women who worked full-time, 33 per cent of men who worked fulltime, 12 per cent of women who worked part-time, two per cent of men who worked part-time, resulting in an under-representation of part-time working women who made up 24 per cent of the QPS population. Average working hours were 38.73, (SD=10.35). Only 10 per cent worked long hours which were recorded as 49 or more hours. Tenure was high among these employees, with 48 per cent of respondents employed for 10 or more years with their current employer. Most of the sample held administrative positions (64 per cent), that were non-supervisory roles (61 per cent). Supervisory roles were held by 22 per cent and 17 per cent held managerial roles. Most of the sample were married or cohabiting (73 per cent), about half (55 per cent) had either dependent children or responsibilities to care for a family member living outside the household.

#### *Measures*

The measure of work interference in home life (WIH) is derived from the Survey Work-home Interaction Nijmegen (SWING) scale (Geurts *et al.*, 2005). This subscale has shown established validity and reliability depicting interference in work and home life across different samples and subgroups (Jansen, Mohren, Ludovic, Janssen and Kant, 2010). Example items are 'you do not have the energy to engage in leisure activities with your partner/family/friends because of your job' and 'your work takes up time that you would have liked to spend with your partner/family/friends. A composite score was constructed by averaging across items to create a single measure, where higher scores reflected greater WIH. Internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha) for this subscale of .88 was obtained with this sample.

To measure flexible leave arrangements the present study developed items on the basis of policy and industrial agreements available to employees either formally or through negotiation with their manager (as covered under the Public Service Act 2008; Public Service Regulation 2008; Industrial Relations Act 1999, the Family Leave Award - Queensland Public Sector, and Certified Agreements; Enterprise Bargaining Agreements). The series of items measured access to a range of flexible work leave arrangements and utilisation within the past 12 months. Some items overlap but this was done to ensure that use of flexible arrangements was captured for employees with different levels of work schedule autonomy. Items included: being able to use flexitime and time-off-in-lieu, whether an employee could accrue or bank overtime to use later, change start and finish times, change number of hours worked (e.g., move to part-time hours), work from home regularly, take single days of leave, purchase additional annual leave, and pool all leave entitlements to be taken together. Response options were not used at all (1), used once or twice (2) regularly made use of this form of leave (3). Preliminary analysis of these items showed that use was high, 78 per cent of respondents reported using at least one form of leave within the past 12 months, although there was considerable variation across the different forms of leave (see table 1).

Table 1 - Awareness and Utilisation of Flexible Leave Arrangements in Past 12 months, per cent

	Women (n=1398)			Men (n=770)		
	Awareness	Regular Use	Used once/ twice	Awareness	Regular Use	Used once/ twice
Use flexitime	99	57	32	98	61	28
Change start and finish times	98	35	35	97	49	27
Bank TOIL use later	94	39	21	93	43	20
Take single days of annual leave	91	15	47	89	19	45
Change number of work hours	87	11	17	82	19	14
Purchasing additional annual leave	61	2	2	52	2	1
Pool all leave entitlements	52	2	9	48	1	6
Work from home	26	5	24	32	5	27
Regular use of at least one leave arrangement		75			80	

To model the relationship between use of leave and work to home interference a composite measure was formed into a binary indicator. This measured regular use of at least one of the options assessed (1= used at least 1 flexible item regularly, 0=infrequent or no use of flexible items). This allowed for the use of a range of flexible options, rather than assuming that more items would necessarily be of benefit to an individual.

Items to assess organisational culture were drawn from past literature (Broers and Sanders, 2006; Lyness, Thompson, Francesco and Judiesch, 1999), as well as being developed specifically for the study. At the time of the data collection the Lyness *et al.* scale was the most commonly used published scale relating to leave utilisation, focusing on managerial support, career consequences and organisational expectations and had been adapted by Broers and Sanders (2006) to measure access to work leave arrangements, but not utilisation among a group of Queensland private sector

organisations. However, at the same time research pointed to the diversity associated in utilisation (McDonald, Brown *et al.*, 2005) promoting the necessity for an inclusive workplace culture to close the gap between formal and informal work-life balance policy to become effective (Burgess, Henderson and Strachan, 2007; Ryan and Kossek, 2008). On this basis, the study developed items to tap equity and inclusion relating to access in more detail from a sample of employees who have formal entitlements, which may be more useful to practitioners interested in assessing the implementation process. For example 'part-time staff are treated the same as full-time staff', 'both men and women are given access to work and family balance leave arrangements', 'managers make use of work and family balance leave arrangements they are entitled to', 'employees without family responsibilities are often expected to make sacrifices for employees who have family'. These items assess equity more explicitly and were not measured by existing scales. Respondents were asked to rate items using a 7 point likert scale with 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted in SPSS version 17 using Maximum Likelihood extraction and Oblimin with Kaiser normalization as the rotation method. The factor analyses resulted in four factors 'a long hours culture', 'managerial support to make use of leave'; 'barriers to promotion' and 'equitable access', with eigenvalues of greater than one and item factor loadings ranging from .92 to .70, explaining 51 per cent of the variance. The full report of this scale can be obtained from the author. For the present paper the examination of workplace culture was restricted to two measures 'equitable access' (six items), and 'managerial support to make use of leave' (four items). The previous review of literature highlights that managerial support is a key factor. As well, the present study aimed to test Ryan and Kossek's proposal that equitable access is instrumental in the relationship between utilisation and wellbeing outcomes. Internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha) for each of these subscales was .76 and .80, respectively. Items in each subscale met the .35 criterion for item-total correlation. Composite scores for each score were constructed by averaging across these items, where higher scores reflected greater managerial support and perceived equitable access by respondents.

### **Control Variables**

Control variables in the analyses included age, gender (coded 1=women, 0=men) which was excluded when separate analyses for men and women were run, whether respondent was living in a close personal relationship or married (cohabitation, 1=yes, 0=no), whether the respondent had a working spouse (coded 1=yes, 0=no), whether the respondent had dependent children under 15 years of age in the household (coded 1=yes, 0=no), or responsibilities to care for elderly parents who live outside the household (coded 1=yes, 0=no). Supervisory/managerial role status (coded 1=yes, 0=no), worked fulltime (coded 1=yes, 0=no), worked long hours, 49 or more hours (coded 1=yes, 0=no).

### **The Analytic Strategy**

The paper sought to examine the effect of regular use of flexible leave on work interference in home life (WIH), to examine whether workplace culture (perceived equitable access to use leave and managerial support to use leave) had a greater influence after accounting for utilisation and to investigate differences in WIH between different groups of employees. To do this a series of Hierarchical Ordinary

Least Square (OLS) regression analyses were conducted using STATA (version 11) `nestreg: regress` command (presented in tables 3-4). A hierarchical regression analysis allows subsets of variables to be added into the model one step at a time to examine their contribution. At each step the reported z statistic is used to determine whether the additional variables are significantly different from zero. In each analysis the control variables were entered at step 1. Regular flexible leave was entered at step 2. Workplace culture subscales (perceived equitable access and managerial support to make use of leave) were entered at step 3. Interaction terms were entered in step 4 to examine specific hypothesis relating to differences in utilisation between men and women, employees who work long hours and dependent children status. Firstly, a full model combining both men and women was conducted to test gender differences in WIH after accounting for control variables and a gender by utilisation interaction to test whether flexible leave utilisation is associated with WIH differently for men and women. Following this separate analyses for men and women were conducted in order to investigate gender differences more generally. Preliminary analyses showed that utilisation of flexible leave varied by gender and that WIH varied by different independent variables for men and women based on other explanatory variables.

#### 4. Results

Data on employees' awareness and utilisation of the separate forms of flexible leave are reported in table 1. Respondents were mostly aware of leave entitlements that allow them to have some control over their work hours, such as flexitime, using time-off-in lieu, changing start and finish times. Fewer employees were aware of entitlements which allowed them to purchase additional leave, pool leave or work from home. On average respondents had used four different entitlements to some extent within the past 12 months and 78 per cent had used at least one form of leave regularly. Flexitime was the most common form of leave taken regularly (61 per cent of men, 57 per cent of women). Just under half of the sample had taken single days of leave, although fewer did this regularly (19 per cent of men, 15 per cent of women). About a quarter of the sample had worked at home during the past 12 months, but few did this regularly (five per cent), which was not surprising given the low level of awareness of this form of arrangement, although a formal policy on work at home has been established since 2002. A greater proportion of men than women reported changing their hours and banking TOIL to use later. Few respondents pooled their leave or purchased additional leave, although this form of leave was rated important by over half of the sample.

For brevity in the regression analyses, utilisation of regular flexible leave was constructed into a composite measure to examine its association with WIH. Respondents obtained a score of one if they had used at least one form of flexible leave regularly in the past 12 months. In table 2 descriptive statistics for the main explanatory variables and dependent variable are displayed and are broken down by gender, whether respondents had dependent children and whether they had used regular flexible leave or not. To examine comparisons between groups, t-tests and chi-square analyses were used to determine statistically significant differences, these are also reported.

Table 2 - Dependent and Explanatory Variables, by Gender, Dependent Children Status, Utilisation of Regular Flexible Leave, Means (SD)

	<i>Gender</i>		<i>Dependent Children Status</i>		<i>Utilisation of Regular Flexible Leave</i>	
	<i>Women (n=1398)</i>	<i>Men (n=770)</i>	<i>Have dependent children (833)</i>	<i>No dependent children (1335)</i>	<i>Use regular flexible leave (n=1673)</i>	<i>No utilisation (n=495)</i>
WIH	3.75 (1.5)	3.77 (1.4)	3.94 (1.5)	3.64 (1.5)	3.69 (1.4)***	3.98 (1.5)
Regular flexible leave (%)	.75	.80**	.76	.77	-	-
Equitable access	4.50 (1.2)	4.54 (1.2)	4.40 (1.1)	4.58 (1.1)***	4.63 (1.1)***	4.12 (1.1)
Managerial support	5.33 (1.5)	5.33 (1.4)	5.30 (1.7)	5.35 (1.4)	5.47 (1.4)***	4.88 (1.4)

*Notes:* p = \* <.05, \*\* <.01, \*\*\* <=.001. t-test and chi-square were used to test statistical differences between groups.

Firstly, we report on regular utilisation of flexible leave. Men reported a greater proportion of regular flexible leave taken than women (80 per cent of men compared to 75 per cent of women, Chi-sq=7.03, p=.008). This might be explained by the fact that about a third of the women with dependent children were employed part-time and already making use of a work leave arrangement to manage family demands. A number of factors influencing utilisation were also examined. For example, employees with higher role status (i.e., supervisors) might have more autonomy to make use of leave. The findings showed that overall a greater proportion of regular users of flexible leave were non-supervisors (61 per cent, compared to 39 per cent of supervisors). In the sample more men (44 per cent) than women (37 per cent) were supervisors, but there were no significant differences in utilisation between men and women who held supervisory/managerial roles (Chi-sq=.1383, p=.710). However, among the non-supervisory employees, men (83 per cent) used more regular flexible leave than women (76 per cent, Chi-sq=7.58, p=.006). These findings suggested that being a supervisor helped to access leave more for women than men, as 79 per cent of women who were supervisors compared to 73 percent of women who were not supervisors made regular use of flexible leave (Chi-sq=5.92, p=.015). Whereas for men role status was not associated with their utilisation (78 per cent of men who were supervisors compared with 82 per cent of men who held non-supervisory roles used flexible leave regularly, Chi-sq=2.2, p=.138). As you might expect full time status increased utilisation. Among women fewer part-timers used other flexible leave options (67 per cent compared to 77 per cent of full-timers (Chi-sq=11.37, p=.001), presumably because they are already making use of reduced hours regularly. Among men there were no differences in utilisation between part-time and full-time employees (73 per cent compared to 81 per cent, Chi-sq=1.43, p=NS).

Work interfering in home life (WIH) was measured on a seven-point scale and was moderate among this sample, with an average score of 3.7. Preliminary analyses suggest that there were no differences in WIH between women and men (t-test=.2240, p=.82). Users of regular flexible leave reported significantly lower

WIH scores (Mean = 3.69), than those who did not use flexible leave (Mean = 3.98,  $t$ -test=3.80,  $p$ =.001). Users of regular flexible leave also reported greater perceived equitable access and managerial support to make use of family-supportive policy. Employees with dependent children reported higher WIH (Mean=3.94) than employees who did not have dependent children (Mean = 3.64,  $t$ -test=-4.66,  $p$ =.000). Interestingly, respondents who did not have dependents reported greater levels of equitable access (Mean = 4.58) than those who had dependent children (Mean =4.40)  $t$ -test=3.47,  $p$ =.000). However perceptions of managerial support were generally high among the sample (Mean = 5.33), and there were no differences between men and women in their experience of managerial support to access leave ( $t$ -test=.83,  $p$ =.40).

The next section reports the regression models predicting work interfering in home life (WIH), (displayed in tables 3-4). The first model that was conducted used the combined sample (table 3) to examine gender differences in WIH, association of utilisation and gender differences in the relationship between utilisation and the dependent variable. After accounting for the control variables, the use of regular flexible leave was a significant factor and negatively associated with perceptions of work interfering in home life (step 2,  $\beta$ =-.28,  $p$  <=.000), suggesting that using flexible leave reduces interference between these two domains. However, when equitable access and managerial support were entered, the regular flexible leave coefficient became non significant (step 3,  $\beta$ =.07,  $p$  <=NS). At step 4 equitable access and managerial support remain stronger predictors of WIH (step 4,  $\beta$ = -.26 ,  $p$  <=.000,  $\beta$ = -.40,  $p$  <=.000), implying that when the workplace is perceived as family-friendly, work to home interference decreases. Additionally the regression analyses confirm the preliminary statistics that there were no main effects for gender on WIH (step 4,  $\beta$ =.20,  $p$ =NS). Two interaction terms were statistically significant. The interaction term showing that levels of WIH varied by gender and utilisation (step 4,  $\beta$ =.25,  $p$  <=.05), and also the three way interaction term depicting the affect of dependent status, long hours and use of flexible leave on WIH was significant (step 4,  $\beta$ =.49,  $p$  <=.05). Predicted scores from the final model were estimated to examine these effects. The average WIH score declined from 4.2 to 3.6 for men who use flexible leave regularly, while for women WIH remained more stable (3.8 to 3.7), suggesting that use of flexible leave was more beneficial for men in the sample. For the three way interaction between dependent status, long hours and use of flexible leave the predicted WIH scores on average declined for employees who used flexible leave. However for employees who had dependent children, who worked long hours and used regular flexible leave WIH scores (adjusted mean score = 4.6) were no different to those who did not use regular leave (adjusted mean score = 4.6), suggesting that when long hours are worked the use of flexible leave does not help to reduce WIH.

Turning to the regression analyses conducted with women only (see table 4), this pattern of responses is similar to the above results. After accounting for the control variables, the use of regular flexible leave was a significant factor and negatively associated with perceptions of work interfering in home life (step 2,  $\beta$ =-.18,  $p$  <=.05). At step 4 equitable access and managerial support remained strong predictors to decrease WIH for women (step 4,  $\beta$ =-.26,  $p$  <=.000,  $\beta$ =-.41,  $p$  <=.000 ). Additionally for women there was a significant interaction depicting the affect of flexible leave

on WIH when taking into account dependent status and long hours (step 4,  $\beta=.58$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Predicted scores were estimated and showed that for women who worked long hours using regular flexible leave would increase WIH, more so if they had dependent children (4.2 to 4.5), than if they did not (3.9 to 4.0). Where as for women who did not work long hours using regular flexible leave decreased WIH if they had dependents from 3.9 to 3.8, and if they did not have dependents from 3.7 to 3.5. At the final step, strong predictors for women that appeared to increase WIH were having dependent children (step 4,  $\beta=.30$ ,  $p < .000$ ), being a supervisor (step 4,  $\beta=.27$ ,  $p < .000$ ), and working full-time (step 4,  $\beta=.28$ ,  $p < .002$ ).

Table 3 - Estimated Coefficients for Hierarchical OLS Regression Model Predicting Perception of Work Interfering in Home Life (n=2168)

	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Step 3</i>	<i>Step 4</i>
<i>Intercept</i>	3.88	4.09	7.03	7.15
<i>Control variables</i>				
Age	-.01***	-.01***	-.01***	-.01***
Gender, 1=women	-.01	-.02	-.00	.20
Cohabit, 1=yes	.25**	.24**	.20**	.19**
Working spouse, 1=yes	-.20*	-.19*	-.14*	-.15*
Dependent children in hh <sup>1</sup> , 1=yes	.35***	.35***	.27***	.36**
Elder care responsibilities, 1=yes	.23**	.23**	.09	.09
Supervisor/manager, 1=yes	.32***	.33***	.23***	.23***
Fulltime, 1=yes	.20*	.24**	.22**	.21**
Long work hours 49+, 1=yes	.49***	.45***	.19	.08
<i>Resources</i>				
Regular use of flexible leave, 1=yes		-.28***	-.07	-.06
<i>Perceived organisational culture</i>				
Equitable access to use family supportive leave			-.26***	-.26***
Managerial support to use leave			-.40***	-.40***
<i>Interaction terms</i>				
Women x flexible leave				.25*
Dependent children x flexible leave				-.13
Dependent children x long hours x flexible leave				.49*
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.04	.05***	.35***	.36*

Notes: p = \* < .05, \*\* < .01, \*\*\* < .001. p levels on adjusted R<sup>2</sup> indicate significant change in variance from previous step

Response patterns for men showed slight differences (see table 4). After accounting for the control variables, the use of regular flexible leave was a significant factor and negatively associated with perceptions of work interfering in home life (step 2,  $\beta=-.48$ ,  $p < .000$ ). Consistent with the previous results, at step 4 equitable access and managerial support remained strong predictors decreasing WIH for men (step 4,  $\beta=-.27$ ,  $p < .000$ ,  $\beta=-.38$ ,  $p < .000$ ) and utilisation became non-significant in predicting WIH. Unlike the pattern for women, after accounting for all the explanatory variables, there was no significant effect of dependent status, long hours and use of flexible leave on WIH for men (step 4,  $\beta=.27$ ,  $p < .NS$ ). At the final step cohabitation remained a strong predictor increasing WIH for men (step 4,  $\beta=.42$ ,  $p < .000$ ) an interesting finding.

Table 4 - Hierarchical OLS Regression Model Predicting Perception of Work Interfering in Home Life – Separate Analyses for Women and for Men

	Women (n=1398)				Men (n=770)			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
<i>Intercept</i>	3.83	3.98	4.10	7.01	4.40	4.75	7.45	7.48
<i>Control variables</i>								
Age	.01***	.01***	.01*	.01**	-.02***	-.01***	-.01**	-.01**
Cohabit, 1=yes	.21*	.21*	.11	.11	.43*	.41**	.42***	.42***
Working spouse, 1=yes	-.33**	-.32**	-.17	-.17*	.00	.00	-.09	-.10
Dependent children in hh!, 1=yes	.42***	.41***	.33***	.30***	.28*	.30*	.20*	.19
Elder care responsibilities, 1=yes	.25*	.24*	.11	.10	.21	.21	.08	.07
Supervisor/manager, 1=yes	.35***	.36***	.27***	.27***	.25*	.23*	.16	.16*
Fulltime, 1=yes	.31**	.33**	.29**	.28**	-.37	-.33	-.21	-.21
Long work hours 49+, 1=yes	.32*	.29*	.15	.03	.75***	.68***	.27*	.75
<i>Resources</i>								
Regular use of flexible leave, 1=yes		-.18*	.14*	.13		-.48***	-.07	-.06
<i>Perceived organisational culture</i>								
Equitable access to use family supportive leave			-.26***	.26***			-.27***	-.26***
Managerial support to use leave			-.41***	-.41***			-.38***	-.40***
<i>Interaction terms</i>								
Dependent children x long hours x flexible leave				.58*				.49
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.04***	.04*	.35***	.35*	.04	.08***	.36***	.36*

Notes: p = \* <.05, \*\* <.01, \*\*\* <=.001. p levels on adjusted R<sup>2</sup> indicate significant change in variance from previous step.

## 5. Discussion

The paper sought to examine the relationship between the regular use of flexible leave arrangements and work to life interference. Specifically, the study examined the affect of utilisation in the context of employee perceptions relating to equity and managerial support to access family-supportive leave that is formally available. The data come from a large sample of public sector employees where established policy on a range of flexible work arrangements has been formally available to employees for over a decade providing a unique context in which to examine the role of implementation in obtaining intended goals of adopting family-supportive policy.

Overall the study findings show that the sample of public servants are making use of regular flexible leave and steps towards creating an inclusive workplace culture that balances work and home life is present for these employees. Regular flexible leave was associated with reduced work to life interference. The findings are consistent with other recent findings which highlight the importance of perceived culture (Hayman, 2009) and contribute to the view that creating an inclusive culture is a necessary part of the implementation of policy to obtain effective outcomes (Ryan and Kossek, 2008). Of particular importance is the finding that the measures used to assess perceptions of an inclusive culture were strongly associated with the dependent variable after accounting for utilisation, and when these variables entered the model, utilisation became a non significant factor in predicting work to home life interference. Including

these predictors in the models increased the variance from five to thirty-five per cent in predicting work interference in home life. It is argued that using leave leads to employees perceiving the culture as family-friendly and subsequently to positive perceptions relating to how they integrate work and home life. Organisations that adopt policy need to ensure that management support the policy in practice by ensuring that access is equitable regardless of employment status. Findings showed that among these employees the culture was not viewed as a long hours high commitment workplace, only eight per cent of the sample reported working more than forty nine hours a week, five percent were women and three percent men. Managers in the public sector are encouraged to discourage this and clearly this has been relatively successful, which has implications for organisations more generally.

There are also some interesting findings relating to differences in who benefits from utilisation. Some tentative evidence, warranting further investigation in future research, showed that men more so than women benefited from regular flexible leave. The separate analyses for men also showed that cohabitation was a strong predictor which increased WIH. Further aspects of the larger study which were not included in the current models showed that males generally felt that they were not able to meet their family responsibilities and perhaps the cohabitation variable may have tapped into this expectation. With equitable access high for both men and women, men reported greater use in changing start and finish times to meet these expectations and experiencing a greater perception that work was not interfering in home life as much.

For women, the separate analyses showed that for working mothers doing more than standard hours (49 or more hours), using flexible leave may not help them reduce work from interfering in home life. The women in this sub-sample were also likely to have the main responsibility in their household for child care, they also had high levels of reported organisational commitment in comparison to those who did not use leave regularly, making both work and home life expectations high and consistent with the 'super woman' views that suggest women use work leave arrangements not to ease the balance but to take on more family commitments.

The contribution of the findings in this study need to be interpreted in the context of its limitations. The study is cross sectional and relies on self report data which means that directions of causality cannot be established. The magnitude of the observed interactions that measure differences in benefit utilisation are small adding little to the explained variance in work interference in home life and warrant further investigation. In conclusion the results from this study provide organisations with a greater understanding of the implementation process and the recognition that establishing an inclusive culture to obtain intended goals is a necessary factor, it is not just sufficient to offer formal policy. Steps towards developing equitable access and managerial knowledge and support are necessary conditions to obtain policy outcomes. Evaluations that audit equity utilisation could be implemented into manager performance indicators in the way that build best practice as proposed by the ACREW Work/Life Research Program (Anne Bardoel, Cieri, Mayson, MacKenzie and Crozier-Durham) providing management with results that can demonstrate work life policy aims and outcomes effectively.

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