

IIRA World Congress 2009

Rapporteur's Report

Work, Family and Community

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The inclusion of a special stream on *work, family and community* in the 2009 World Congress of the IIRA marks a significant broadening of the scope of the subject and the interests of the contributors and participants to the Congress.

The rise of work, family and life pressures on employees and organizations is one of the most significant contemporary phenomena of employment in today's economies. Major shifts in female labour market participation rates, the breakdown of the standard working week, changes in social attitudes to parenting and family, mobility of populations and changes in public policies have contributed to the need for a much greater gender and spatial awareness in industrial relations theory and practice. Furthermore, the spill-over from work and family issues has generated a growing interest in the consequent effects on communities and within households of these labour market and social changes. The changed context in which we now live and work is significant for all the papers presented in this stream, sometimes explicitly framing the studies, at other times silently but surely forming the backdrop for the studies.

On my reading of previous IIRA World Congress programs, work, family and community have not been brought together so purposefully before¹. Of course, this is not to say that there has not been a trend to incorporate newer areas of interest in IIRA Congresses. For example, gender, work and family started to be more explicitly canvassed from the 11th World Congress in Bologna, 1998 with a special forum called: 'Squaring The Circle: Quality Of Work And Family Life, Industrial Relations in a Wider Social Context'. The difference with this 15th World Congress's stream is that we are aiming to consciously and intentionally bridge the gaps between the workspace, the family space and community space. This is not an easy task in either a theoretical, policy or practical sense, but by bringing these areas 'inside' the industrial relations system and interests, rather than leaving them outside our purview, we are addressing a critique often made of industrial relations scholarship (Wajcman, 2000). Work is not distinct from individuals in families and by extension, it is not distinct from communities. The inter-relationships and inter-dependencies become far more pronounced as more and more women and mothers enter the paid work force.

These issues challenge and stretch us intellectually and practically. They also raise many questions: What is the nature of the connections between work and families and their communities? How do we theorise them? What is the impact of different regulatory regimes and what is the influence of company policies on people's work and family lives? Furthermore, how do government policies and company policies interact with union bargaining agendas and how do they all, in turn, impact on the home and community lives of employees?

The papers in this stream begin to answer these questions. They traverse the local, the global, the nation state and the multi-national organisation, sometimes focussing exclusively on one case in one town and at other times examining the connections between the various levels of regulation. Reflecting the international reach of IIRA the papers draw on research in diverse welfare states regimes, from

¹ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/iira/congresses/index.htm> accessed 24 July 09

post communist to egalitarian social democratic welfare states and at either end of the regulation spectrum, from the USA to Finland, and from the industrialised to industrializing countries. The papers cover single country studies and comparative papers. They utilise qualitative, quantitative and mixed methodologies. In all, the papers reflect the multi-disciplinary and multi-method approaches of industrial relations research. The resulting, rich empirical work and information are of use to the practitioner and the scholar, to the worker, the manager, the union representative and the government policy maker. In no sense is the work presented in these papers devoid of reality or potential social importance.

Within the selection of papers, four broad topic areas are identified. These are:

- Government policies
- Company policies
- Community effects
- Working hours

Of course, to some extent these categories are arbitrary and it must be noted that some very interesting parallels and trends emerge when one reads all the papers.

Policy implications, for example, are a notable feature of many of the papers. Yet, a policy focus can be a double edged sword for industrial relations scholarship. The focus on policy or current practise does give industrial relations a certain topicality and social justification but it has also detracted from theory building and theory testing, resulting in the underdevelopment of theory as some argue (Kelly, 1997). It is with pleasure then that we see the papers in the stream not only utilising theory, but also developing theory – for example, to explain union action, community response and manager and employee interactions. In particular, many of the papers either implicitly or explicitly note the need for more nuanced understandings of business strategies and public policies and their impact on employees. Likewise, the prevailing gender order and traditional breadwinner norms are often challenged, either directly or indirectly, by the authors. The papers suggest that across all the countries represented, a one system, single theory, static approach is not the most useful way of dealing with or explaining the problems and challenges inherent in the contemporary employment relationship. More dynamic, multi-layered and nuanced analyses are required.

Government policies

One of the clearest observations across the papers in this stream is the interest in government policies and the policy schism apparent between the European Union, with high levels of regulation, and the US, with low levels of state regulation. This report begins with papers comparing national policies and then moves to those papers that analyse specific country level policies.

Richard Block, Joo-Young Park and Young-Hee Kang build on research using quantitative benchmarking analysis to compare legislated labour standards for annual leave and family related leave in developed nations. They find that the US sits at the bottom of the rankings both in terms of the length of annual vacation leave, which is not mandated in the US, and in terms of the entitlement to family leave. The underlying and pervasive market based philosophy of the US, which assumes that over the long run the market will best determine these arrangements, contrasts markedly with the developed countries, and especially the European Union, where the presumption is the government must actively regulate the labour market in order to equalise power between employers and employees. Despite a consensus emerging in all developed economies that some protection for work and family is needed, as Block and colleagues show, the level and scope of this protection differs widely.

Where Block *et al* developed an index, Suzan Lewis and Laura Den Dulk use a comparative, qualitative case study approach to analyse flexible work arrangements in seven European countries representing welfare state regimes from post Communist states to the Nordic egalitarian social democratic welfare

states. They find that despite national context differences, there is a convergence of employee experience due to work intensification and perceived or real threats to job security. In their approach, Lewis and Den Dulk stress the need to 'build whole pictures of phenomenon rather than fragmenting or studying isolated social experiences' if the social world or work is to be properly understood.

Moving to specific policies, the Dutch life-course savings scheme (LCSS) is analysed by Lei Delson and Jeroen Smits. The LCSS was introduced in 2006 to give employees some control over time and to increase workforce participation and Delson and Smits question whether this time sovereignty assists workers balance work and family. They undertook an extensive survey, with 45,000 responses, to update results from earlier work which showed that purchasing power was the main factor explaining use of the scheme. Young people, females, part-timers and employees with partners participated in the scheme more than others. Of interest is whether uptake patterns are changing as the scheme matures and public awareness increases.

From a Danish setting, Trine Larsen argues that flexicurity policies have been too narrow and implicitly gendered by not including child and elder care policies and needs, which are most acutely experienced by women. In a comparative study of workers with care responsibilities in Denmark, Portugal, Finland and the UK, she finds that except for Denmark the work-family tensions are more difficult for worker carers of elders, than for parents; whereas in Denmark the opposite was the case. More attention to government policies to support workers with elder care responsibilities is advocated.

Focussing on the effect of public policies on one group of workers in Canada and Australia, Donna Baines suggests that for women, who are the overwhelming majority of workers in the low paid community services sector, public policies are essential to balancing work and family and must be introduced in Australia if this workforce is to be sustained. Paid parental leave, quality child care and quality part-time work are all necessary. Without them, Baines argues, the gender order is perpetuated, increasingly loading women with care duties at home *and* in the workplace and ever reinforcing inequities between men and women.

Company policies

A question intriguing many researchers is what induces companies to introduce family-friendly policies? In South Africa, Lisa Dancaster is examining the drivers for the introduction of corporate level work and family policies. In terms of public policy, demographics and the work and care situation, the national context contrasts markedly with many other countries and there are unique challenges for South African companies policy makers. The high levels of poverty and income inequality, coupled with disproportionate numbers of female headed households who are also carrying the burden of care arising from the HIV/AIDS epidemic, make this a most interesting research project. The preliminary analysis of data from 114 companies provides information on both the nature and extent of work-family arrangements in these South African organisations and also provides findings on the organisational characteristics predicted as determinants of work-family arrangements in South Africa.

The relationship between business strategy, HPWS and a firm's adoption of work-life balance policies is at the centre of the paper by Jing Wang. Using longitudinal data and linked employer and employee survey from the Canadian Workplace and Employee Survey, Wang concludes that there is a positive relationship between HPWS, product leadership strategy and the adoption of some work-life balance policies, notably fitness, recreation and employee assistance programs. The provision of child care and elder care services was very uncommon in the sample. Firms pursuing cost leadership strategies are less likely to offer work-life balance policies.

Where firms have introduced family friendly policies there follows the questions of how effective are the policies and who do they benefit? Against a backdrop, now common to many countries, of longer working hours, declining birth rates, higher divorce rates and dual earner families, the South Korean government strengthened the institutional framework to promote family friendly management. In this context, the paper by Byoung-Hoon Lee, Jong-Sun Kim and Hye-Young Kang uses panel data to analyse the spread of policies and the relationship with High Performance Work Systems (HPWS). They find that the diffusion of policies is limited, they do not always benefit the firm and, contrary to existing literature, are not necessarily compatible with HPWS.

In addition to an interest in what drives companies to introduce family-friendly policies, is the question of how accessible and useful are policies in practice. Two papers address this particular question. The paper by Trish Todd and Jennifer Binns examines management's problem with work life balance policies in four agencies in the Western Australian public sector. Bringing together two sets of discourse on work-life balance, from the HRM and IR literatures, Todd and Binns argue that the real issue confronting management is that in order to make policies really available to employees, systematic barriers associated with workloads, job design and organizational culture need to be removed. They suggest this is perhaps a harder task than management are prepared to undertake.

Similarly, the paper by Gillian Whitehouse analyses how parental leave policies are actually accessed within the firm by examining the critical relationship between employees and their direct supervisors. Whitehouse uses the concept of the 'ideal worker' to both gather qualitative data and to analyse this data from eight organisations in the private and public sectors. The study finds that the barriers to use of parental leave policies are the product of intra-organisational dynamics involving occupational status, gender relations, employee agency and the pay and staffing policies that managers have to contend with, resulting at times in a need to 'balance the books' rather than the work and family needs of employees.

Gender pay and income gaps are concerns for many scholars and with this the income position of women in retirement is also increasingly relevant. As divorce rates and female participation rates rise and as workforces age, the problems become more pressing. Against such a backdrop, the gendered impact of the move to Defined Contribution (DC) pension schemes in Japan is examined by Satoshi Watanabe. Watanabe tests why fewer Japanese women than men enrol in DC schemes, even though there are income benefits for them. The results show there is a significant difference in knowledge between men and women and that women are less likely to take the risk of investing in DC schemes, a concern for those encouraging female income security in older age.

Continuing the theme of ageing workers, Helen de Cieri, Christina Costa, Trisha Pettit and Donna Buttigieg focussed on manager's perspectives of the ageing workforce in Australian private and public sector companies. They argue that age should be treated as part of diversity but despite the value gained from diversity, organisational strategies and policies aimed at older workers have not yet received the same attention as other work and family policies. Their findings suggest that while there is an emerging realisation of the importance of the issues there is still much progress to be made at the organisational level and that HR managers have an important obligation to educate business leaders.

Continuing the gender related theme, Kate Purcell and Peter Elias examine the expansion of higher education in the UK and the related gender outcomes. The growth in the knowledge industry and the knowledge economy are two significant changes in policy and approach of many governments. In the UK, they have resulted in increasing numbers of people in tertiary education as well as an increasing proportion of females in higher education (at 55%, this is considerably

more than a decade ago). Purcell and Elias carefully trace the labour market changes and outcomes and find that the gender pay gap continues although there have been some changes in female participation in 'elite' occupations. These are complex phenomena that require carefully considered policy responses.

Community effects

In different parts of the globe, scholars are studying very similar events and coming to complementary conclusions. A detailed account by Paul Blyton and Jean Jenkins of the closure of the Burberry clothing factory in South Wales (where coal mining used to dominate) shares many similarities with the closure of a nickel mine in south-western Western Australia, studied by Robyn Mayes and Barbra Pini. Utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods and stressing the unified social organism brought to life by the connections between work and community, Blyton and Jenkins study the effects of the clothing plant closure beyond the factory gates. Their analysis serves to highlight the importance of income and security for people's work and family well-being, for without these fundamentals, not only do families struggle to survive but so too do communities.

In a very similar vein, Mayes and Pini argue that the 'connection between (mining) work and families and communities are under theorized' in the industrial relations literature. They study the recent and sudden closure of a nickel mine in Western Australia. Here the very intricate relations between gender, class, ethnicity and residence indicate the need for more contemporary and nuanced research on work, family and community. The changing relations between mine workers and their managers, original town residents and the new mining employees, between husbands and wives, immigrants and governments, and the way in which this web of relations shaped and reshaped work and the local community call out for a complex conceptual framing of work, family and community.

Polany's 'embeddedness' concept is the starting point for Andries Bezuidenhout, Rob Lambert and Edward Webster. These authors examine white goods firms located in three towns in three countries. In a way not dissimilar to Blyton and Jenkins and Mayes and Pini, Bezuidenhout and colleagues study the impacts of corporate restructuring on employee's lives beyond the workplace, making a point of studying the sites of reproduction and care – the homes of workers. In each of the companies, the employees are faced with growing insecurity brought on by outsourcing and relocation of production. In the South African community, the home offers a 'fragile stability' for the extended family; in Korea to be without a job is to experience 'social death', driving the workers to increase their work effort and insurance policies. In the Australian town, a strong sense of fatalism pervaded the employees and union organisers, inhibiting them from taking further action against the global company's restructuring. Bezuidenhout *et al* conclude that workers respond to insecurity and change by retreat to the household and to community action. These two sites cannot be ignored if we are to understand the impact of globalisation and corporate change on worker's lives.

Faced with the situation of declining unionism in many countries, Amanda Tattersall argues that the relationship between unions and communities, at the global and local scales, is crucially important to understanding and developing the potential for union renewal. Tattersall specifically examines coalition building with community groups, defined as coalition unionism', and argues that three types of union power are possible: relational power, class-movement power and place-based power. This framework is tested with union case studies in three locales in Australia, Canada and the USA, each of which utilises a different source of power. The studies show that while not unproblematic, 'positive sum coalitions' offer the richest form of long term collaborative power for unions.

All of the papers in this community section signal new directions in theory as well as research, indicating very positive and exciting directions for industrial relations.

Working hours

The final but by no means less relevant theme is that of working hours. Isik Zeytinoglu, Gordon Cooke and Sara Mann focus on one specific area of work and family working hours tension, that of weekend work. This is a growing feature of many countries. The authors use Statistics Canada data to determine which businesses demand weekend work and whether weekend work is carried out by women or those with particular family status characteristics. Many women do work weekends and the perception is that they do so for household and child care reasons. Yet, Zeytinoglu *et al* find that in Canada, women are not more likely to work weekend work than men and there is no relation to having dependent children. However, the higher their wage, education qualifications and years of experience the less likely women are to work on weekends. The results also suggest weekend work was more associated with business and industry characteristics, with employers with higher proportions of part-time workers more likely to have weekend work, such as in retail, real estate and forestry. A call for nuanced policy responses is made so that government recognise the implications of weekend work for different segments of the labour market.

Lonnie Golden and Barbara Wiens-Tuers closely interrogate working time effects on the well-being of US employees, differentiating between voluntary overtime and involuntary overtime as well as the impact of flexible start and finishing times. They find that lack of control over extra hours exacerbates stress and that back pain, physical health and daily fatigue are heightened with employer mandated overtime. Overall, work and family stress is related to worker control over hours of work, leading Golden and Wiens-Tuers to conclude that research should focus on choice in working hours, and that policy should focus on enhancing employee's rights to refuse overtime.

The role of collective bargaining in setting or providing work and family benefits or entitlements also attracts attention from some of the papers in this stream, (although papers with a family friendly interest could also be found in the 'Voice and Representation Stream', see for example Berg, Baird, Kossek and Kamudi).

In a detailed study of enterprise based bargaining in one agency in the Australian Public Service, Sue Williamson demonstrates how the concept of 'equality bargaining' can be utilised to highlight the processes unions engage in to increase the number of family friendly provisions available to employees. Williamson shows that such bargaining can be a resource intensive and fragile process. Williamson also documents the relationship between the bargaining agenda and broader community movements to show that context and social debates can strengthen the bargaining process and positively influence the outcomes for unions and their female members.

The theme of collective bargaining and working hours in Denmark is taken up by Anna Ilsøe, who questions whether 'organised decentralism' allows for reconciliation of employer and employee needs for flexibility. Ilsøe surveys 226 industrial sector firms in 2008 and finds an emphasis on 'flexitime provisions', that is, the ability to vary start and finish times, to the benefit of employers and employees. However, for those employees who do not have access to negotiated provisions there is some resentment and conflict, which was identified by one manager as 'flexitime jealousy'.

The perspective of co-workers on flexible working arrangements is the specific subject of the paper by Clare Kelliher and Deirdre Anderson. Interviews and questionnaires were used to collect the data in six large firms to test co-worker attitudes. The survey data found that co-workers reported being relatively unaffected by working with flexible workers and even expressed some improvement in their own performance as a result. Interviews also generally

supported these findings, with just a small number of respondents reporting resentment about absent colleagues.

The issue of working hours and resistance to change is more complicated than a binary analysis of the interests of employers and employees would suggest. When a gendered analysis is undertaken, as Sara Charlesworth does, the resistance to change is shown to come from some, but not all, employees and managers. In a study of working time arrangements in a 'densely masculine', blue collar workplace, Charlesworth shows the need for, and tensions around, changing working time norms. Not only did the minority female workforce prefer more flexible and shorter working times, so too did some of the men whose life circumstances had changed. Challenging the 'ideal worker' norm, however, is not without its problems, as the Charlesworth account demonstrates.

Conclusion

The papers in this stream of the 2009 IIRA World Congress illustrate the depth and range of enquiry and scholarship about work, life and community that is now in progress. While these papers give fresh and contemporary insight into policies, practices and outcomes, the tensions around the control of time and ownership of working spaces are not new. In this 1889 poem by 'Banjo' Patterson,² one of Australia's most popular poets and the author of *Waltzing Matilda*, the narrator dreams of trading his city office for work in the outdoors, where his mate Clancy appears free to control his own work day and work place:

I am sitting in my dingy little office, where a stingy
Ray of sunlight struggles feebly down between the houses tall,
And the foetid air and gritty of the dusty, dirty city
Through the open window floating, spreads its foulness over all.

And I somehow rather fancy that I'd like to change with Clancy,
Like to take a turn at droving where the seasons come and go,
While he faced the round eternal of the cash-book and the journal --
But I doubt he'd suit the office, Clancy, of 'The Overflow'.

It is with a sense of optimism that I speculate that the research and debates presented in this stream on work, family and community will contribute in a meaningful way to the realisation of our own, modern dreams on where and how to best integrate our work, family and community needs.

References

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² Excerpt from AB 'Banjo' Patterson 'Clancy of the OverFlow', *The Bulletin* 1889