

The Aims of this Study:

The call to expand the lens of work-family studies into different countries with diverse contexts has been made by a number of researchers in the field (Heymann, Earle and Hanchate, 2004, Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport, 2006). In particular the call has focused on the need to consider contexts outside North America, Europe and Australia in which much of the existing work-family research has taken place. Nevertheless there remains a noticeable gap in work-family research in developing countries and especially in Africa. South Africa is a particularly interesting country in which to locate a study on work-family integration because it presents unique challenges for addressing the combination of work and care. High levels of poverty and income inequality are features of the post-apartheid South Africa in which African and female-headed households carry a disproportionate burden of the welfare challenge facing the society (Bhorat, 2004). In addition to dealing with the challenges of poverty and unemployment, women in South Africa have also been most affected by the enormous burden of care arising from the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

There is an absence of research in South Africa that examines employer involvement in the adoption of work-family arrangements. In addressing the gap, this study tests predictions of organisational characteristics associated with the adoption of work-family arrangements in a sample of South African employers. It builds on existing studies in the USA (Goodstein, 1994; Ingram and Simons, 1995) and Australia (Bardoel, Tharenou and Moss, 1999) that have used institutional theory (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983) and resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978) within a combined perspective as proposed by Oliver (1991) and expanded to include the role of managerial interpretation (Milliken, Martins and Morgan, 1998; Bardoel, 2003). Scholars have advocated the use of an additive model that draws on several theoretical perspectives (Barringer and Milkovich, 1998; Bardoel, 2003).

Methodology:

The data collection for this study will take place in a sample of companies comprising those companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) with more than 50 employees. These companies provide a range of different types of industries, different size companies and geographical distribution throughout South Africa. A further 17 major State owned enterprises (SOE's) in South Africa will be included in this sample. This will permit an assessment of the adoption of work-family arrangements in public versus private sector establishments. Previous studies have been criticised for limiting the sample to only public and non-profit sectors (Goodstein, 1994:363). Human resource directors at each organisation will be contacted for completion of an online questionnaire followed by telephonic administration of the questionnaire to non-respondents. Data will be analysed using SPSS.

Results:

The results of the data analysis will provide information on which organisational characteristics act as predictors of the adoption of work-family arrangements in South African organisations. Previous studies have found that the organisational characteristics associated with the adoption of work-family arrangements included organisational size and sector (Goodstein, 1994; Ingram and Simons; 1995; Bardoel et al, 1999). These will be tested in this South African study along with predictions relating to trade union membership and the proportion of female employees in the organisation as a whole and in senior levels of the organisation.

In past studies only a few work-family arrangements were selected to test work-family responsiveness. Goodstein (1994) for example only used childcare and flexible workplace options as the dependant variable. By contrast, Bardoel et al (1999) developed an index of 36 individual practices divided into five categories. This study will use the index of practices derived from Bardoel et al (1999) and amended for application in the South African context. The results of this study should provide information on the nature and extent of work-family practices in the sample analysed with additional information on the extent to which these practices are available to employees in the organisation.

Conclusion:

This study is important because it provides new data on employer provisioning of work-family arrangements in a country where there is little research on employer adoption of work-family arrangements and no previous research testing theories of organisational adaptation in the context of employer adoption of work-family arrangements. The study will also enable further testing of the additive theoretical model combining managerial and institutional factors in identifying organisational characteristics related to the provision of work-family benefits by employers.

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