

Assessment of the Provision of Family Supportive Organization: Self-report Among Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Provision of family supportive workplace is crucial to maintain sustainability of organisation. The main objective of this study was to assess the employees' perceptions regarding the extent their workplace is family supportive. Participants were forty-six (46) teachers in Klang Valley and surrounding states who were drawn based on purposive sampling from March to October 2016. Self-report, structured with open-ended and closed ended questions was distributed to the participants to gather the data. The findings include the aspects of work arrangement, recognition of care and responsibilities, workplace culture and environment, and provision of family physical facilities. The findings revealed that school settings were particularly lacking in terms of providing physical facilities and supportive supervisor behaviour that could promote family support and wellbeing at the workplace. Thus, it is hoped that these findings will highlight the important needs and concern of teachers regarding the provision of a workplace that is family sensitive. Further implication and suggestions are outlined.

Keywords: Family Supportive Workplace, Family Friendly, Employer, Employee, Teacher

1. Introduction

A transformative program among teachers and school system according to the Annual Report in 2015 has reflected an evident change in the policy, curriculum and implementation of teaching and learning process in accordance to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2016). The commitment to transform the education system which is in tandem with the technological landscape and global aspirations, forces the teachers to be more proactive in their job performance and add responsibilities (Jamil, Razak, Raju, Mohamed, 2007). Teacher, as a profession has also been recognised as a complex and skilled practice which require them to constantly engage in continuous growth of knowledge, skills and attitudes (Sudtho, Singhasiri & Jimarkon, 2015).

The changes occurred due to the transformation of education system implies that teachers face more complex roles and responsibilities. According to the literature, the effects of increasing job demands and expectations among teachers result in increased level of stress (Swathi & Reddy, 2016; Azlihanis, Naing, Aziah, Rusli & Mohd Rahim, 2009) and deteriorating

psychological wellbeing (McDonald, Vickers, Mohan, Wilkes & Jackson, 2010). Studies also highlight that work-family conflict and work responsibilities among teachers result in emotional exhaustion (Panari & Simbula, 2016); and incompatibility to balance work and family requested roles (Nastiti, Fang, Indarti, Chen, 2016; Sultana, Norhirdawati, Zahir, & Yaacob, 2014), reduced marital quality (Cabrera, Bliese, Hoge, Castro & Messer, 2010) and lack of parent-child care and interaction (Roeters, VanDer Lippe & Kluwer, 2010).

There is a growing body of research that indicates the need to establish a healthy workplace that is sensitive towards work-family matters. A healthy and supportive workplace is very important to enhance teaching performance (Panari & Simbula, 2016) and job and family satisfaction (Nastiti, Fang, Indarti, Chen, 2016). Perceived supportive workplace manifests employee satisfaction and reduces work/family conflict (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006). Family supportive workplace is also related to higher affective commitment (Casper, Harris, Taylor-Bianco & Wayne, 2011), increased productivity (Francis & Lingard, 2012; Hill, Hawkins, Ferris & Weitzman, 2001; Perry-Smith, 2000; Wallace & Young, 2008); improved quality of life and spiritual and subjective well-being among employees (Deiner & Suh, 1997); and positive attitudes towards the organisation (Berg, Kalleberg & Appelbaum, 2003). The positive effects of the provision of family supportive environment has, in turn reduced turnover rates, absenteeism and burn-out (Warr, 2003).

Most of the study exploring family friendly work environment was conducted in the western countries and in different work settings, which bring out distinct issues and challenges. Therefore, a model of family supportive workplace that is culturally and contextually appropriate is needed so that the employees perceive the support and benefits provided by the organisation as beneficial and helpful. The article is aimed to exert the perceptions of teachers regarding their employer's role in providing a family supportive workplace. The expected outcome of the article would be an understanding of the needs and requirement of teachers and assist employers in developing good practices of family supportive workplace.

2. Literature Review

Family supportive or family friendly work environment (FFWE) may include any family-supportive policies and services to facilitate employees in managing their family responsibilities (Allen, 2001). It may also consist of tangible services, voluntarily offered by an organisation to compromise with the employees' work and family life affairs (Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2001). However, according to the OECD, "...only employees can decide, whether any service is family-friendly" (OECD, 2001, p. 147). Most of the research has come out with solutions with structural and dynamic aspects of the workplace such as provision of on-site childcare centre, extended period of maternity and paternity leave, medical allowance for family and other benefits for employees and their family members (Secret, 2001).

At present, there are evidences of positive impacts towards employees whose organisations provide a family supportive and friendly work environment, but limited to certain work setting (Casper, Harris, Taylor-Bianco & Wayne, 2011; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006). There is a dearth of research focusing on the needs of employees in the academic settings to have a workplace that offers family friendly facilities in the workplace and how they impacted on the employees' job performance and satisfaction. A study among Italian school teacher has examined how work responsibilities, work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion are interrelated. The study using self-report questionnaire among 264 secondary school teachers revealed that teachers' wellbeing is reduced when they must face work-to-family conflict and responsibilities (Panari & Simbala, 2016). Nastiti et al. (2016) concur that educators who are confronted with educational transformation and reformation exacerbate the family-work conflict. The result of the study in elucidating work-family conflict among 134 Indonesian lecturers in the period of education reform using an online-survey indicated that job and family satisfaction mediate the negative relationship between the work-family conflict and life satisfaction (Nastiti et al., 2016).

Organisational role and effort in the provision of family friendly workplace and culture, therefore, play a significant role in reducing the conflict. A meta-analytic examination of the value of five facets of FFWE posits that provision of a workplace that offers a basic facilities valuable for employees to help them sort their family and work matters could facilitate work-life balance (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006). Structural run-of-the-mill benefits such as health, life, dental, vision and visibility insurance, flexible working time, lactation support, family bonding activities could assist workers to feel comfortable and appreciated. Policies such as flexibility work schedule and ability to work from home also profited employees who can choose a more optimal labour supply to the organisation (Lauber & Storck, 2016).

The establishment of FFWE is also subjective to the needs and requirement of the workers based on the differences of work setting, gender and marital status (Casper, Harris, Taylor-Bianco & Wayne, 2011; Lauber and Stork, 2016; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006). Perceived provision FFWE increases the likelihood of employees to retain and feel loyal to the organisation. A study among 168 Brazilian professionals (including managers, directors and consultant) who work full time in a variety of industries highlighted that employees who perceived their employers to be supportive will in turn, reciprocate by responding to their employers through emotional attachment, thus improved retention period (Casper, Harris, Taylor-Bianco & Wayne, 2011). Family friendliness in the physical facilities provided by the employer in the organisation are the main concern of the employees which also could improve quality of life, particularly female workers. Lauber and Stork (2016) added that a workplace that provide facilities such as quality and affordable childcare, financial support for childcare and arrangement for children care affect the workers' wellbeing, increased working time and job satisfaction. Besides, female worker responded by accepting more challenging responsibilities and easy transition to work after maternal leave.

Malaysia is a majority Muslim society and practices Islam as its main religious teaching that drives many aspects of life. Therefore, harmonious and peaceful workplace should be the main priority and major concern of living to maintain its sustainability. It encompasses the establishment of workplace that is *fitriah* and *maqasid shari'ah* driven. The concept of *maqasid shari'ah* is one of the elements in Islam that upholds the rights of everyone. The purposes of the laws are to protect human life and improve system towards good aspect of work and relationships with other people (Mahazan et al., 2015). The concept of *maqasid shari'ah* is relevant to the application of providing a supportive workplace setting. It is aimed to promote the wellbeing of the people, which lies in safeguarding their faith (*deen*), their lives (*nafs*), their intellect (*aql*), posterity (*nasl*) and wealth (*mal*). The objectives of *daruriyat* (essential), *hajiyyat* (the complimentary) and *tahsiniyat* (the embellishment) are required to be achieved to protect human life and improve quality of life (Shukri & Musa, 2012).

A study investigating corporate companies that apply *maqasid shari'ah* in its practice of corporate social responsibilities highlighted that provision of workplace that is conducive, safe and healthy for the employees to work in could improve organisational performance (Arsad, Said, Yusoff, Haji-Othman, & Ahmad (2014). The study examined annual reports of sample of 114 *shari'ah* compliance companies from 2010 to 2011 and used Smart PLS to test the relationship between Islamic corporate social responsibility and firm performance. The company's compliance to *maqasid shari'ah* is reflected through the corporation's disclosure of activities and effort in safeguarding their lives (*nafs*) such as offering a high-quality preventive health care services to families, communities and school children. Besides, corporation's practices of protecting the wealth (*mal*) of the employees are evident in the establishment of counsellor, coaches and consultant services to help workers who face personal and/or work-related issues.

In a similar vein, the concept of *fitriah* should also be emphasized which draws a distinction between men's and women's role in performing their responsibilities. It is very important to understand the tendencies, sensitivities, requirement and capabilities that are present in every human being (Rahman, 2012). Relevant to the roles of men and women in the teaching workforce, the basic elements of *fitriah* (comprise of other components such as productivity, talent, character and aspiration) are dynamic and responsive to the influence of surroundings.

Most of the studies reviewed in exploring FFWE were conducted in the corporate organisation and in different social and cultural context, which highlight distinct issues and challenges. This article aims to explore the needs and requirement of teachers in school setting regarding the role of their employers in providing a workplace that is family supportive.

3. Methods

The study was qualitative in nature. This approach was undertaken to answer the research questions based on the background of the study. Teachers from selected schools in Klang Valley and surrounding states in Malaysia were drawn to participate in this study. A qualitative approach was employed to understand the social situation from the participants' perspectives (Kothari, 2004). Fifty teachers were originally sampled for this study. The sample included both female and male teachers who have children aged 0 to 12 years. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the participants who fit the selection criteria. At the end of data collection, a total of 46 teachers participated in the study.

Self-report, structured questions were distributed individually to teachers and through emails by two research assistances that were well trained in data collection process. The research assistances distributed the self-report questions to individual teachers that they personally knew who work in several school settings in Klang Valley and surrounding states. Upon completion, the participants were instructed to return the completed questions to the research assistances personally or through e-mail correspondence. Data were collected from March to October 2016. The self-report, structured questions, was developed based on the review of relevant literature to obtain opinions from the participants. The questions include close-ended and open-ended questions which require the participants to bring out their own opinion freely on the issues at hand without having any predetermined constraints. This method was most suitable as it collects data in a non-interfering manner.

The self-report, structured questions were aimed to identify the teachers' perceptions toward their employer's role in providing the family-friendly workplace. The self-report questions consisted of four aspects of the family-friendly initiatives in the workplace specifically in school settings which included work arrangement, recognition of care and responsibilities, workplace culture and environment and provision of family friendly physical facilities. The collected data were analysed based on the aspects of family supportive workplace as themes of findings. A qualitative software of Nvivo8 was used to facilitate data analysis.

3. Result and Discussion

The discussion of the findings was organized based on four (4) aspects of the family-friendly initiatives in the workplace namely work arrangement, recognition of care and responsibilities, workplace culture and environment and provision of family friendly physical facilities.

3.1 Alternate Work Arrangement

The participants were asked whether the employers help them balance work-life and work-family responsibilities such as providing flex-time or allowing job sharing. Out of 46 participants, 70% of them agreed that their employer helped the employees in balancing their work-life and work-family responsibilities.

There were 10 participants who said that the employer gave flexibilities and leniency to the employees in managing and solving their family matters. Employees could change their schedule with colleagues when needed. For example;

“If there were any emergency or any family-related matters that need to be solved, the employer give permission to take leave to address that matters” (P1)

“The employer gives permission to take leave (leave without record) if the children, or any family members are sick or to manage any family issues”. (P12)

There were 14 participants who said that the employers provide a flexible schedule and tasks such as efficient and systematic schedule and enough rest time. The participants also indicated that the division of task was based on employee’s capabilities and expertise. Participant 20 and 23 illustrated their points of view:

“The employer makes a distribution of job or task among staffs during peak period”. (P20)

“The employer divides the tasks and appoints a leader to lead and monitor the task”. (P23)

In contrast, 30% of the participants indicated that their employers were not supportive in helping them to balance their work-family responsibilities. For example,

“The employer needs to ensure that the resting times of the employees are not being used for work purpose only ... such as using weekend time to do a training program, while it is supposed to be the time for family.” (P24)

Based on above statement, Participant 24 explained that the employer’s request to work during weekend, for instance, exemplifies the unsupportive employers’ behaviour interrupting their family quality time. There were 11 participants who said that the employer should provide work arrangement that balance the work-life and work-family responsibilities.

3.2 Recognition of Care Responsibilities

The participants were asked whether their employers support employees in terms of dependent care responsibilities such as providing information about childcare resources, emergency leave for sick child or elderly care support, and whether the employees can bring child to work when needed and any on-site family seminar.

Most of the participants (65%) indicated that their employers support them in terms of allowing them to look after the dependent care responsibilities. There is a sense of empathy shown by the employers. Employers allowed them to bring their children to the office or

workplace setting if they have any problem with babysitter or there are no other carers to look after their children. Participant 10 and 16 illustrated:

“The employer allowed the staff to bring in their children to workplace if there are no other carers or allowed staff to start work a bit late to manage their children with school but on a condition, they have no class during that time.” (P10)

“Employer allows the employees to bring their children to the workplace if they have unavoidable issues such as when the baby sitter has a day off.” (P16)

There were a few participants who emphasized that their employers provided them with a sense of support and encouragement. For them, the behaviour of the employer helped them to be more productive and feeling a sense of satisfaction towards their work. Participant 22 said,

“The employers concern about the employees and always give moral support.” (P22)

In fact, the employees also indicated that their employers took the initiative to organise family event such as seminar on health care issue among family members. For example, Participant 19 said,

“The employer gives an exposure about family health care especially during crisis like Dengue or Zika virus.” (P19)

One of the participants said that the employer took an initiative to offer a panel health centre to the employees and their family. Participant 5 said,

“The employer provides access to health care to the employee and family, and being lenient to the employees in taking care of the family member who is sick.” (P5)

Meanwhile, 35% participants indicated that the employers need to offer this kind of recognition of care responsibilities towards the employees. Participant 26 said that,

“Yes, it is needed as these responsibilities were the basic things among two parties and closely related to each other.” (P26)

The above statement indicates that some of the participants highlight that their employers are responsible to provide a working environment that helps to balance work and family responsibilities.

3.3 Workplace Culture and Environment

A clear majority of the participants (72% from 46 participants) agreed that their employers promote workplace culture and environment that instil flexibility and work-life balance. For instance, school management is encouraged to respond positively when their employees talk about work-life issues, leading by example and providing strategies for a better work-life balance.

There were 10 participants who said that the employers are always ready to listen to employees' problem regarding their workplace, family or are receptive to any suggestions offered to their organization. Participant 5 said;

"Morning roll call was done every week to listen to the employees regarding their problem with work, family and workplace and listen to the opinion from employees for the betterment of the organization." (P5)

There were six (6) participants who said that the employer organized a seminar or any program that related to continuous professional development program to the employees. The employer's behaviour in organising workshop, seminar and forum to enhance professional skills in return that may potentially improve their work performance. In fact, one of the participants shared that the employers encourage the employees to further their studies to enhance teaching experience. One of the participants describes;

"The employer organized leadership training program to the employees besides providing them with useful tools such as educational books and useful advices." (P29)

Meanwhile, about 28% participants indicated that their organisation did not practice positive and conducive workplace culture and environment. A few of participants in this study reacted that their employers should offer positive aspect of work culture and working environment such as discussing about work-life issues more openly and leading by example. Participant 21 said and Participant 45,

"Yes, it is needed (to offer workplace culture and environment), the employer should give chances to the employees in attending a program or seminar to increase their work-family quality, and the employer can organize a program to enhance employer's performance." (P21)

"Yes, it is needed (for the employer to offer a positive workplace culture and environment) so that it can decrease pressure." (P45)

Clearly, the statements of the participants highlight that any professional programs organised by the employer could help the employees to enhance work-life quality and possibly to foster a positive working culture and environment.

3.4 Provision of Family Friendly Physical Facilities

The participants were asked whether their employers offer facilities such as quality, affordable and accessible on-site childcare facility, co-working space, playroom, drop-in emergency room, breastfeeding and nursing room.

Most of the participants (85%) responded that their employers did not provide physical facilities which become the essence of the provision of family supportive working environment. Thirty-one (31) participants mentioned that their employers should provide physical facilities that help them to balance their work-family matters to improve productivity and quality of work. For example, Participants 13 and 14 indicated;

“Yes, that kind of facilities need to be provided to create a more productive and quality work.” (P13)

“Yes, it is needed so that the employees do not need to go to other places, if anything happened to the children, they can act immediately, and besides the work quality also can increase.” (P14)

Nevertheless, although the participants required their employer to provide a conducive physical facility, they think that it is more than sufficient if the employers could provide a flexible working arrangement for the employees.

“It is unnecessary (to provide physical facilities) ... it is enough to just provide flexibility of working hours.” (P19)

Some participants reasoned out that financial allocations as well as the nature of the workplace are the challenges to provide certain physical amenities. Participant 1 and Participant 29 said,

“It is dependent on the workplace; it is preferable for office environment.” (P1)

“It is dependent on the situation and type of occupational sector.” (P29)

In contrast, there were a few of the participants (15%) who said that their employers provided physical facilities in their schools. Only one (1) participant indicated that the employer provided a resting place for the employees who bring their children to work when there is an emergency. The participant said;

“My employer provides a room to rest, a place for children to rest, play or sleep (if there are no jobs or task.” (P16)

Four participants said that their workplace provides facilities such as comfortable office, emergency room or treatment room for employees as well as childcare centre. The following participants describe their responses;

“Employer provided a comfortable office space, emergency room or medical room.”
(P24)

“Employer provided a few facilities such as treatment room as a transit place for the children from school.” (P44)

“The employer provides access to a pre-school for staff and surrounding community’s children.” (P20)

In reflection to the above accounts by participants, there is a critical need for the employer to provide physical facilities such as on-site childcare centre in the school setting. Based on the findings, most of the participants in this study indicated that their employers helped them in terms of providing an alternate work arrangement such as balancing work-life matters, flexible work management or job sharing. Provision of creative work arrangement helped the employees to feel more appreciated and thus, improve their job efficiency. Being aware of the employees’ work schedule and family background could help create a more cooperative and reciprocal way of working. They emphasized that employers need to look seriously at the work schedule of the employees by allowing more flexible schedule to maintain work-life balance. The employees also perceived their employers’ behaviour to be supportive in listening, understanding, leading by example and being sensitive towards the issues related to work-family conflict. This finding is paralleled with the study of Achour (2013) who referred this type of support as emotional support.

Besides that, the employer also offered instrumental support such as giving advice and assistance in helping employees to meet family responsibilities which directly influence employees’ life satisfaction as found in the study of Achour (2013). Although there are a few who indicated otherwise, the findings also highlight that the participants have the opinion that there is a critical need for the employers to provide a working culture that reflect conducive and supportive working environment. Most of the participants agreed that the employers should play a key role in providing a workplace that is conducive and support the effort to balance family-work matters, and in return improve their job productivity and enhance work performance.

It is evident from the findings that a clear majority of the participants indicated that there is no provision of physical facilities in the workplace. Facilities such as room for children during emergency or drop-in care service after school, childcare facility in school and nursing rooms were not provided. The participants indicated the importance of providing such facilities as it could improve work performance and productivity. Due to the increased number of

women participation in the teaching workforce, the participants also suggested that there is a necessity for the relevant authority to establish an on-site childcare centre or transit services so that teachers particularly, would not worry about their children's wellbeing. The participants have the opinion that more effort should be done to address the needs of teachers so that they could focus on their work matters while there are professional and affordable child care service that look after their children. A new research released from Horizon Workforce Consulting® (Bright Horizons, 2016) emphasized that access to childcare facilities sponsored by the employer improve the employees' wellbeing and assist in performing family responsibilities.

The article implicates that it is essential to take on the transformative effort to make school not only 21st century in the curriculum agenda but also in being a sustainable and ecological organisation. The article reveals the needs of having an organisation that could provide physical facilities that support family matters and thus could help the policy maker to establish those facilities in school settings. Provision of family support based on the needs of employees and appropriate physical facilities and cooperative working culture in Malaysian organisation is vital to help create a sustainable and encouraging workplace environment in line with the notion of *Maqasid Shari'ah* and concept of *fitrah* proposed by Islam. Nevertheless, the findings also revealed that financial constraint is the main barrier for the employer to implement a family friendly work setting. Organisation such as school solely depends on the ministry budget and financial allocation to provide physical facilities that promote family supportive school setting. Hence, the policy of the Ministry of Education directly affects the school working system.

This study is not without its limitations. The findings among participants of school teachers are focused among school teachers. Therefore, more research should be done in other areas of work setting particularly in public sector. In-depth interviews could be organised to obtain better insights of participants regarding issues and challenges that they faced in dealing with work-family issues. The small number of participants included in the study, although limited, signals the quest for employers to be sensitive and aware of their employees' needs and concern regarding provision of FFWE.

3.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the key points of the findings highlight the need for the employer, in this case the Ministry of Education to transform the school setting to fit in the requirements of work demand of teachers in tandem with the educational transformation program of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013- 2025. This effort is necessary so that teachers, as the employees would be better able to perform their job and responsibilities in the ever-increasing demanding work. This article aimed to specifically assess the teachers' perception of their employer's role in providing a workplace that is family friendly. Having to equip working environment that help the employees to balance work-life matters is crucial to improve productivity, efficiency and work performance.

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