AN OVERVIEW OF THE STATE INFLUENCES ON WORKERS' WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the role of the State as a policy maker in the emergence and development of work/non-work policies in the Malaysian public sector organizations. State policies on work/non-work provisions can play an important role in determining the way workers manage their work/non-work lives. Adopting qualitative case study in three public sector organizations in Sabah, Malaysia, findings show that the State, as a policy maker, is the main provider of work/non-work arrangements for public sector workers. It is evident that the role of the State is not just important in terms of providing work/non-work provisions such as maternity / paternity / parental leaves but also in implementing and supporting beneficial work practices and arrangements e.g. flextime and crèche. Although these arrangements were found to be beneficial, particularly for workers with young children in integrating their work-life responsibilities, this study also found that the needs of single workers with parental/siblings commitment were not met by the State. Additionally, familial and communal supports are also expected to be available outside the work environment.

Keywords: Work-life integration; The State; Public sector policy; Workers; Malaysia.

1   INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the role of the State as a policy maker in the emergence and development of work/non-work policies in the Malaysian public sector organisations. State policies on work-life provisions can play an important role in determining the way workers manage their work/non-work lives (Den Dulk *et al.*, 1999; Poelmans *et al.*, 2003). There are different State approaches and these tend to vary according to different theories of State intervention. Factors such as social expectations about men's and women's roles, overall approaches to State–market–family relationships; and family-, gender-, and employment-supportive policies (such as public provisions for maternity and parental leave and benefits, family leave, and tax policies and social programs that include publicly funded childcare) were found to be important in influencing the way workers managed their work/non-work lives (Korabic *et al.*, 2003). According to Korabic *et al.* (2003), a country's gender role ideology has an important role to play in determining their commitment to work/non-work life provisions. They expect that institutional support (i.e. organizational support and governmental support) will be more readily available and extended family support systems less available in countries that are higher on individualism and egalitarian gender–role ideologies. They argued that people in countries with high levels of individualism and more egalitarian gender role ideologies have an enhanced sense of entitlement such that they expect support from their organizations and countries in the form of work/non-work life policies. As Poelmans and Sahibzada (2004: 417) state, "Incongruences between the country´s involvement in family affairs and companies' apathy for the same issue are likely to result in frustrated expectations and higher levels of work-family conflict, especially among individuals with a strong

sense of entitlement". Hence, the suggestion is that people in collectivistic countries such as in Malaysia do not expect support from their organizations and instead expect support from their family. This assumption will be discussed in the paper.

2   STATE APPROACHES IN WORK-LIFE ISSUES

Work-family issues are found in the policy discourse of most Western nations and expressions such as 'family-friendly workplaces', 'flexible workplaces' and 'work-life balance' are now commonplace in the lexicon of industrial relations and welfare policy (Blunsdon & McNeil, 2006). Although some countries already have an established integrated family and employment policy, for example, France and Sweden (Fagnani, 2005; Hardman, 1998), in Malaysia, so-called work/non-work policies are still in their infancy. The Malaysian Government launched the 'Family First' campaign in 2003.

One of the major drivers behind the introduction of work/non-work arrangements at the State level in the UK, for example, has been the increased participation of women in paid employment (Dex and Smith, 2002). Work/non-work arrangements are therefore expected to be more available in workplaces with a higher proportion of women. Women have become increasingly involved in paid employment and men have become more involved with the care of the family. In many countries, the increasing labor force participation of women means that the working couple is emerging as the norm rather than the exception. In addition, changes in marriage and divorce patterns are increasing the number of single parents who are the main breadwinners for families. In the Malaysian context, women form a substantial force in the labor market.

In the Ninth Malaysian Plan (9MP) (Economic Planning Unit, 2006), efforts were undertaken to provide an enabling environment to ensure more effective participation of women in national development. Women were equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to be more competitive and versatile to meet the challenges of a knowledge-based economy. Although women's labor market participation in Malaysia has been increasing, from a mere 30 per cent in 1970 (Subramaniam & Selvaratnam, 2010) to 49 per cent by 2011 (Economic Planning Unit, 2011), according to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), Malaysia is one of the few countries in the Asia-Pacific, where women are still under-represented in the labor market (UNESCAP, 2007; Malaysia Department of Statistic, 2011). Under-utilization and under-representation of women's participation is influenced by the prevailing societal culture and religious traditions (Omar & Davidson, 2001) whereby cultural norms and traditions influence women to prioritize family commitments (Rowley *et al.*, 2010). Hence, the Malaysian Government continuously endeavors to encourage greater female participation in the labor force and socio-economic development of the country. As women's labour market participation is much lower in Malaysia compared to other countries, this may suggest that work-life integration is achieved within households by women working in the domestic sphere.

As the greater involvement of women in the labor market requires a better integration of work and non-work responsibilities, effective labor market policies encompass more than job creation. In Malaysia, measures have been introduced to ensure the provision of necessary support facilities to enable women to enter the labor market. However, despite the Government's effort to attract women to the labor market through the establishment of, for example, flexi-time, extended maternity leave, and extended paternity leave, and encouragement for employers to establish on-site crèches, Subramaniam and Selvaratnam's (2010) study on workers' perception of work-life arrangements found a gap still exists between workers' practical needs and the availability of work/non-work arrangements in Malaysia. The interaction between the State as policy maker and workplaces as the implementer of work/non-work arrangements was not examined. Hence, the question is raised: to what extent does the State as employer and policy-maker support and influence the emergence and development of work-life arrangements in Malaysia?

Several studies map the instrumental support at a national level, that is, the level and nature of public work-life policies: childcare facilities, leave arrangements and policies regarding working hours (Den Dulk, 2001; Kovacheva *et al.*, 2007; Saraceno *et al.*, 2005). However, less is known about their impact on workers' work-life integration. Raghuram *et al.* (2001) found that national differences relating to cultural values impact on the structure of work and adoption of flexible work arrangements. For instance, part-time work is more prevalent in low-power distance (the degree to which unequal distribution of power and wealth is tolerated) and individualistic countries, whereas telecommuting is found more frequently in low masculinity countries such as Norway and Sweden. Additionally, shift work has been found to be systematically related with cultural values (low uncertainty avoidance, high power distance, high collectivism), whereas temporary work has not been related with any value orientation (Raghuram *et al.*, 2001). In many developed countries, State policies relating to work-life arrangements, such as flexible working hours, job sharing, on-site crèche, longer

maternity and paternity leaves, career break, and working from home have been found to help workers' successfully integrate their work-life roles and responsibilities (Thornthwaite, 2004; Coussey, 2000; Glass & Estes, 1997). In Malaysia, given the increase in dual-earner households and women's participation in the labor market, the Government as a State-employer provides standard work-life provisions to all public sector organizations to cater to such groups' work-life needs in order to maintain their active contribution to the economy. This raises the question: to what extent does the Government as a State-employer in Malaysia support public sector workers integration of work-life spheres?

3   RESEARCH METHODS

The research adopted a qualitative case study research design of three organizations – higher learning institution (Unico), medical services (Hospico) and revenue services (Custco). The data collection was based on in-depth interviews with seventy one employees from Unico, Hospico and Custco and three Human Resource Managers from each respective organization. For ethical reason, the organizations and interviewees will remain anonymous and thus, pseudonyms are used. Unico is a higher learning institution with 1599 workforces. Meanwhile, Custco is a government agency responsible for administrating the nation's tax revenue policy and employed 752 people. Hospico, on the other hand, is a center of specialist services for women and children and had 1076 workers. This study employed thematic analysis to analyze the data.

4   RESULTS

In Malaysia, the 'Family First' campaign was launched at the national and State level in 2003 among civil servants to better integrate work/non-work roles and responsibilities. The Malaysian Government through its 9MP (2006-2010) Chapter 15 urges society throughout the nation to uphold the values of caring for family and community. Its aim is to recognize the family as a social priority and a basic unit in the society that needs to be protected and supported by the community and nation.

4.1   The State's Work-Life Policies

The State's standard work-life provisions which are to be implemented by all public sector organisations are as shown in Table 1. These policies include childcare assistance for workers who earn salaries of less than RM2000.00 a month and encouragement for the setting up of an on-site crèche in all public sector workplaces. Additionally, flexible working arrangements are also highlighted whereby the Malaysian Government, in its endeavor to encourage more women to participate in paid work, has initiated the implementation of staggered start and finish times for public sector employees.

Table 1: Work-life Standard Provisions by the State for Malaysian Public Sector Workers

STANDARD PROVISIONS
Five working day week[1]
60 – 90 days paid maternity leave[2]
7 days paid paternity leave[3]
Parental leave (up to 5 years)[4]
40 days Hajj leave[5]
3 days bereavement leave (unrecorded leave)[6]

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[1] Service Circular No.13, 2005

[2] Service Circular No. 14 2010

[3] Service Circular No. 9, 2002 (effective 1 January 2003)

[4] Service Circular No. 15, 2007, Service Circular No. 9, 1991, Service Circular No. 2, 1998

[5] General order 34, 35 and 55 Chapter 'C', Service Circular No.4, 1984, Service Circular No. 9, 1991

[6] Enacted under Service Circular No. 10, 2002 (effective 1 January 2003), this provision was introduced to allows workers to pay their last respects and assist at their immediate family member's funeral.

Longer lunch break on Friday
Leave to take examinations[7]
Leave for sports involvement[8]
Flexible start and finish time[9]
Annual air fares for officers to visit hometown ('balik kampung') if working in another state / region (Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah or Sarawak)[10]
Financial assistance for childcare at public sector working premises[11]

The Malaysian Government's awareness of the life (non-work) sphere being of equal importance to the work sphere can be seen from the varied improvements instituted in work-life arrangements provided. These include: enhancement of maternity leave entitlement from 42 days, before the year 1998, to 90 days, to allow working mothers more time to recover after giving birth and to breastfeed their infants before returning to work; extension of paternity leave from three to seven days which indicates the Government's awareness of working fathers' need to integrate their work and non-work responsibilities; increase in parental leave by up to five years reflecting awareness of the importance placed on parenting responsibilities amongst working citizens and the government's support of this; and the introduction of annual free air tickets for workers and their immediate families to visit their hometown targeted at those posted to regions far from their hometown (Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah or Sarawak). National initiatives and policies, such as the 'Family First' campaign, are designed to help employees to accommodate and integrate both work and non-work responsibilities. In view of all these provisions and the related findings from this research it is believed that the influence of the State is important in ensuring the effectiveness of workers' integration of their work/non-work lives, apart from the terms and conditions of employment (Warhurst *et al.*, 2008).

Table 1 also shows the Government awareness of the need to integrate work-life responsibilities when the Government emphasized workers' quality of work-life through Hajj leave[12]. Following that, the number of work-life arrangements provided to fulfil workers' needs and desires to better manage their work-life spheres increased. This demonstrated the Malaysian Government's awareness of the non-work sphere being equal in importance to the work sphere. Since then, although the development of work-life arrangements has been relatively slow, it has improved over four decades. Table 1 shows the standard provisions related to work-life arrangements that all public sector organizations should implement.

In the private sector, labor costs are low relative to those in industrialized countries, while productivity remains high. Basic wage rates vary according to location and industrial sector. Supplementary benefits, which can include bonus, free uniforms, free or subsidized transport, performance incentives and other benefits, vary from company to company. Salary rates and fringe benefits offered for management and executive level personnel also vary according to the industry and employment policy. In addition to salaries, most companies also provide fringe benefits, such as free medical treatment, personal accident and life insurance coverage, free or subsidized transport, annual bonus, retirement benefits and enhanced contributions to the Employees' Provident Fund.

Generally, workers in Peninsular Malaysia are covered by the Employment Act 1955 and workers in Sabah and Sarawak are covered by the Sabah Labor Ordinance and Sarawak Labor Ordinance, respectively.

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[7] The purpose of this leave is to enable workers to take any examination that can enhance their quality of life. It is enacted under General Order 44 and 57 Chapter 'C' and Service Circular No. 9, 1991 (effective 1 January 1992)

[8] Enacted under General Order 46 and 57 Chapter 'C', Service Circular No. 11, 1980, Service Circular No. 5, 1985 (effective 18 December 1980), this provision is introduced to enable workers to participate in sports.

[9] Service Circular No. 2, 2007

[10] Service circular No. 22, 2008. 'Balik kampung' is the tradition of visiting one's hometown and family members. The reason for the Government's support of this tradition is to enable workers who might be working away from their families (immediate and extended) to maintain a close relationship with them, to remind them of the importance of the family institution, and to enhance a sense of belonging. In other words, this provision will remind workers of their obligation towards their family as well as their responsibilities at work.

[11] Service Circular No.4, 2007

[12] Hajj is the annual pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca), Saudi Arabia. It is the fifth pillar of Islam, a religious duty that must be carried out at least once in a lifetime by every able-bodied Muslim who can afford to do so.

However, these laws and regulations are meant for workers working in the private sector. Regulations regarding the work/non-work elements provided by the Government have been enforced to all civil servants throughout the country. This paper focuses on the rules and regulations related to work/non-work policies under Malaysian Government agencies.

General Order (GO), a public sector services handbook containing rules and regulations related to human resource and the Service Circular (SC) have been established to provide guidelines for implementing terms and conditions of employment specified by government. The SC is issued every year to indicate additional provisions, amendments or cancellations. The Letter of Service Circular (LSC) is also issued from time to time as an additional provision.

4.2   The Organizations' Work-Life Policies

In addition to the statutory provision of work and non-work arrangement as outlined by the Government (as illustrated in Table 1), public sector organizations are able to implement additional work-life arrangements. In some cases, this means that they offer extra provisions for employees to aid the management of employees' work and non-work lives. As illustrated in Table 2, these arrangements vary from one organization to another depending on the nature and the background of the organization.

Table 2: Work-Life Provisions by Organisations

WORK-LIFE PROVISIONS UNDER ORGANISATIONAL DISCRETION	AVAILABILITY IN THE CASE STUDIES		
	UNICO	HOSPICO	CUSTCO
Crèche	√[+]	-	√[++]
Fitness center / sports facilities	√	-	√
Fitness-related activities	√	√	√
Prayer room/ Mosque	√	√	√
Religious-related activities	√	√	√
Adjustable shift working hour*	√	√	√

Flextime:
   Staggered start and finish time*
   Flexible working time*
	√	√	√

Early finish time in the month of Ramadan for Muslim married women**	√	√	√
Workers' housing quarters	-	√[°]	√[°°]
Family involvement related activities	√	√	√

Notes:

[+] Not located on the site

[++] Located at workers' housing area

* Applicable only to certain occupations / jobs

** Not applicable to those who work shift hours

° Limited unit and only to certain medical officers and/or single clinical workers

°° Limited unit

As illustrated in Table 2, although the State encourages all Government departments to provide an on-site crèche, a number of factors impede the effective implementation of an on-site crèche. In Unico and Custco, for example, although crèches are provided for their workers, they are not located within the working

premises. In Unico and Custco, for example, although crèches are provided for their workers, they are not located within the working premises. In Unico, the location is not the only issue, the crèche is run by Unico's Female Staff and Wives Association instead of directly under the Human Resource Department. In the case of Custco, the crèche is located at the housing quarters rather than at the workplace because Custco's departments are scattered around the region and it is impossible to provide an on-site crèche in each department. Moreover, as Custco is dominated by male workers, an on-site crèche was not raised as a priority for employees or the union. Meanwhile, Hospico does not provide a crèche due to lack of space within the working area although female workers dominated. Hence, most of workers in the three cases rely on a private crèche or other supportive parties, such as spouse, parents, relatives or neighbors to mind their children.

To promote wellness and wellbeing, Unico and Custco have provided fitness centers as well as sport and fitness-related activities. Such facilities are important due to the aim of the organization to produce healthy citizens who are expected to work in a healthy, happy and productive way. In Hospico, although there was no fitness center provided, fitness-related activities were arranged for workers such as an obesity clinic, exercise-based dance, and so forth to help workers enjoy their non-working sphere, particularly after long tiring working hours or during the lunch break. It seems that all the three cases focused on sports and recreational facilities as the prime provision to enhance work/non-work life.

4.3   Managing Work and Non-Work Life

The in/ability to manage work/non-work interactions is crucially influenced and very much dependent upon by the availability or absence of provisions at work. This is also very much dependent upon the nature of their informal relationships such as having supportive colleagues and managers, their life-cycle position, the extent of work demands, and the degree of family support received.

4.3.1   Accommodating

The evidence indicates that the nature of the workers' work/non-work relationships varied according to the strategies they adopted. In some cases, respondents had supports in place to help cope with and develop strategies to deal with work intrusions on the other spheres of their life. The provision of flexible working arrangements, for example, enabled workers to have control over their working time. Evan, an Assistant Senior Pharmacist in the Pharmacy Unit, married with young children, found flexible working hours to be accommodating as he shared his experience:

> *"The flexi hour system is useful because if I start work at 7.30 p.m. I can take the children to school on the way and then when I finish work at 4.30 p.m. I can avoid the traffic jams on the way home. The flexi hour arrangement also enables me to go back home early and start preparing dinner (I do the cooking) while waiting for my wife to come back from work. … The long Friday lunch break allows me to go to the bank to pay bills, etc. Working five days only also allows us to spend time together as a family during the weekend."*

This was also supported by Sam and Siti, both are Academicians, who noted:

> *"Operationally (the work-life policy) it is very useful. If it is taken away, it can be detrimental to the employees."*

> *"I find it relaxing working here because the flexi hours allow me to do what I need to do, like being their mother, being their driver, being their feeder…My routine here suits me very well because it doesn't prevent me from doing other things I need to do…I might need to spend all day at my workplace but I can still deal with my personal affairs such as paying bills at the bank. This organization enables me to prosper and to function as a mother because of the flexible hours that I'm entitled to work."*

The privileges provided by the Government and the organizations in the form of flexible working time appear to have assisted workers in managing their work/non-work spheres.

4.3.2   Conflicting

Findings also showed that workers with young children who struggled to integrate their work/non-work spheres and did not receive support were seen to be experiencing conflict. This is a result of the absence of organizational policies and supports, such as an on-site crèche and superiors' support, as well as social support. Both an on-site crèche and support from the supervisor were found to be important in assisting

workers to meet their caring roles and responsibilities at work. Conflict occurred when workers experienced a clash between their work demands and non-work responsibilities and found it difficult to handle both at the same time. This had been experienced by Nora, *a* married Radiographer and had a baby, as she noted:

> *"At the moment, it is difficult to work at night or during public holidays as I have a problem finding suitable childcare provisions. The childcare centre to which I used to send my child has closed. .. If I send my child to a 24 hour childcare centre then I need to pay extra money. My husband works as an Assistant Medical officer so if both of us find ourselves having to work shifts, we have no alternative but to send our child to a 24 hour childcare centre. However, last Christmas holiday both of us worked at night and the childcare centre was closed. We had no other option but to bring our child here (to the workplace) and take turns to look after him in the rest room."*

This was supported by Mary, a Superintendent Officer, married with 3 children aged 8 years old to 8 months:

> *"Practically, my working hours are not suitable for me as I have a baby aged eight months. I work every day from Monday to Friday, and also over the weekend. I have to find someone to look after my children (as my maid only works half a day), including my baby…An on-site crèche is needed but this organization has so many departments scattered everywhere, hence the lack of a crèche facility."*

The fact that workers had to take their children to their workplace shows that there was limited or no childcare facilities available to them and that the time they spent with their partners and children was fragmented.

This study also found that workers with parental/sibling care commitment were found to be juggling between work and home responsibilities because of lack of work-life policies, for example, the elder care referral services or leave to provide elder care and siblings. This can be seen from the quotes below:

> *When my mom was sick for she diagnosed with stroke, I took a month and a half unpaid leave to look after her. (Lisa, administrative officer)*

> *Recently my mother was diagnosed with cancer. As the 3rd child from 6 siblings, we take turn to look after my sick mom. Every time she has to undergo the radiotherapy and chemotherapy treatments, I will always take the day off. Even when she has to go for review now at the hospital, I still take the day off once a month. Since there is no leave provided for elderly care, I have to take my annual leave instead. (Lilly, a single administrative officer)*

> *I think being single, I lose so many things as I don't get any benefit from the maternity leave, family day, childcare center. I will not get any benefit from all the provisions…It would be better if single worker to be participated in making any policy or to be involved in the policy committee. At least, siblings care provisions or something like that can be provided. You see, my time is always full and normally it is fulfilled with working demand as well as fulfilling family needs especially my siblings. I don't have time to pamper myself, let alone finding any boyfriend. (Ayu, a single administrative officer)*

Lisa, Ayu and Lilly's comments indicate that fulfilling work and family responsibilities was important to them. Work demands left Ayu exhausted and with little time for herself. For Lilly and Lisa, despite work demands, being grateful and showing love to her mother was more important than her paid work responsibility. Ayu also felt responsible for her siblings. In a society where the family institution is significantly important, caring for parents and siblings is viewed as a desirable quality to maintain good relationships in the family.

The evidence shows that workers with parental/sibling commitments were also concerned about their work/non-work integration. Without social and organizational support and appropriate policies, workers will continue to struggle to integrate their work/non-work lives and experience conflict between work and family life responsibilities.

The long working hour culture was exacerbated by the understaffing problem which also contributed to work intensification and thus lead to work-life conflict. Findings also indicate that long working hours was the norm in the organizational case studies and work tends to gradually encroach on personal and family time. Working long hours can affect workers' well-being and contribute to 'work creep' which affects work performance. Most importantly, it also affects workers' non-work life. John, a Radiographer with five years of

service, and married with a young child, found himself trapped in working one hundred hours per week due to the lack of staff:

> *I work 100 hours a week. I work shift hours alternately with fixed office hours. For example, if today I work office hours 8.00 a.m. till 5.00 p.m., I will do shift duty from 8.00 a.m. until 2.00 p.m. the next day and then 2.00 p.m. until 10.00 p.m. The following day I will work from 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. On the weekend I work from 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. and another duty from 5.00 p.m. to 8.00 a.m. As this department is short-staffed, I don't have a day off after the night shift like clinical staff in other departments. We are on-call duty at any time based on a roster system and work weekends as well. I have to cover for and perform someone else's duty if they are unable to work.*

In a busy Emergency Department, a shortage of workers results in increased workloads for all staff members. Dr. Hannah, a Medical Officer and Head of the Emergency Unit in Hospico, married with young children, confirmed this scenario when she shared her experience of working under pressure in the unit.

> *I once cried when I had to work non-stop every other shift. At the time there were lots of patients and they kept on complaining as they wanted to be treated quickly. They were not critical cases but there were only two MOs working at the time due to staff shortages. Because I was working non-stop I lacked rest and this caused stress. I cried because I felt burdened by the heavy workload.*

It is obvious that due to lack of work-life policies such as on-site crèche, elder care referral service and long working hours, workers will continue to struggle to integrate their work/non-work lives and experience conflict between work and family life responsibilities.

4.3.3 Social Supports

The findings also indicate that in some cases, respondents had supports in place to help cope with and develop strategies to deal with work intrusions on the other spheres of their life. These were in the form of social support from family/extended family members and also include paid support. Family members have a unique opportunity to provide both emotional support and instrumental support to the worker, outside the work environment. Despite the insufficient work-life arrangements/policies provided at work, juggling long and inconsistent working hours and experiencing work intensification, support from parents for example, was found to help workers cope with the pressures of integrating work/non-work responsibilities. This can be seen from the quotes below:

> *The seven days paternity leave was not sufficient. Fortunately, my mother helps me to look after my baby and my wife. Thank God!" (Mohad, Custco marine officer).*

> *I have a childminding problem as I could be considered a single parent who has to do everything as my husband is away working and living somewhere else. Fortunately, I receive support from my parents most of the time. I send my son to their house when I am working. Sometimes, if I have to attend urgent job activities in the evening I leave my child at a 24 hour crèche or send him to a relative's house or ask my parents to stay with my son at my home until I return home from work. (Putih, an academician in Unico)*

Social supports from family members and paid helper were found to be able to help workers cope with the pressures of integrating their work/non-work lives, thereby enabling them to work without distractions. Thus, an understanding family was essential as time spent with family members could be disrupted by work matters at any time.

5 DISCUSSION

The Government has implemented various work-life benefits for its civil servants. This includes the implementation of a five day working week to enable working parents to have more quality time with their family; extended paternity leave from three days to seven days; extended unpaid parental leave up to five years; and special bereavement leave provision for three days for funeral arrangements for immediate family death.

It is evident that the role of the State is not just important in terms of providing work-life leave provisions such as maternity, paternity and parental leaves, but also in implementing and supporting beneficial work practices and arrangements e.g. flextime and on-site crèches. Although these arrangements were found to be beneficial, particularly for workers with young children in integrating their work/non-work lives, this study

found that work-life conflict also occurred among workers with parental/sibling commitments, whose needs were not met by these arrangements. Hence, the State and related organizations should also consider developing and putting in place elderly/family care related provisions.

Although Korabik *et al.* (2003) argued that workers in individualist countries expect support from management while collectivistic societies expect support from the family, this study found that both institutional and familial supports were expected to help workers in work/non-work integration. In addition, for workers with financial wealth and ability, communal supports (i.e. paid helper and private crèche) were also needed and expected when institutional and familial supports were absent. As Malaysian society is known for being highly collectivist and placing strong emphasis on the extended family (Hassan *et al.,* 2010), institutional supports (organizational and Government) are expected at work. Additionally, familial (spouse and family) and communal supports (neighbors and paid help) are also expected to be available outside the work environment. Within the context of this research, it is seen that the gender ideology as suggested by Korabik *et al.* (2003) is somewhat different in a multi-ethnic and multi-religion society like Malaysia, as workers expect support not just from their organizations but also from their family and the community. Thus, the State as a policy maker and public sector organizations as implementers and deliverers of public services, need to be proactive if they want to enhance work/non-work arrangements.

Additionally, despite public sector organizations being authorized to implement all the best policies in terms of work-life arrangements, working hours in most of these organizations are invariably high and there is general acceptance of this culture, resulting in there being very little difference in terms of work-life integration. Unlike the situation in European countries where the European Working Time Directive has been introduced to guide workers on maximum work hours allowable, e.g. doctors should not work more than 48 hours per week in hospitals (Morris-Stiff *et. al.,* 2005), in Malaysia, there is no such working time directive issued, except for the General Order Chapter G (1974) which only mentions working time and overtime in general without specifying the maximum hours one can work, regardless of working pattern. The absence of a working time directive which sets the maximum working hours allowable in the national agenda has resulted in workers working long hours at the organizational level (Ibrahim, 2015).

6   CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The State's role in influencing the emergence and development of work/non-work policies to retain female participation in the labor market has grown. Although female labor participation has increased in Malaysia, it remains relatively low compared to that in other Asia-Pacific countries (UNESCAP, 2007). Consequently, the Government, as a State employer, is endeavoring to attract more female workers into the labour market and increase their contribution to the country's economy and productivity by establishing several work-life policies and proclaiming their introduction through the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry.

The State as policy maker is the main provider of work/non-work arrangements for public sector workers. Public sector organizations which act as Government machinery to deliver services to the people, need to be proactive if they want to enhance work-life arrangements. Through national policies e.g. the 'Family First' campaign, both work and non-work responsibilities are assumed to be integrated.

Offering work-life provisions at the State level does not automatically result in positive work-life integration experiences for employees in Malaysia. Hence, a range of other supports i.e. from superiors, colleagues, family (and extended family), neighbors and paid help are also needed to assist in smooth work-life integration. This emphasizes the need to understand work-life issues from a multi-level perspective. A multi-level approach not only provides in-depth analysis of the degree to which workers integrated, conflicted or alternated between their work/non-work lives but also assists in analysis of the influence of factors at the macro- (role of the State), meso- (role of trade unions and organizations) and micro- (individual perspective) levels, thereby providing in-depth understanding of the work-life spheres from multiple levels.

In Malaysian society, the family institution and family responsibilities are strongly upheld. The most widely applied work-life policies in Malaysian public sector organizations are those related to maternity leave, parental leave, and flextime arrangements – which are particularly useful for 'married employees with children' as compared to other groups of employees. The priorities of the State in introducing and providing these work-life arrangements suggest that the Government is trying to attract and increase female participation in the labor market, particularly in the public sector. This implies that the State's work-life provisions were gender biased and that this strategy was aimed to encourage women with children to continue working or to return to work after childbirth. The Government's over-emphasis on attracting and retaining working mothers has resulted in an imbalance in provisions for other groups of workers. For

example, apart from the 'annual *balik kampung* package', there are no other work-life arrangements provided for employees with parent and/or sibling care commitments. Furthermore, provisions for elder care referral services or leave to provide elder care are neglected in the national agenda. The State, as a policy maker, needs to ensure that all groups of workers, regardless of gender or status, are catered for when it comes to enhancing and implementing work/non-work arrangements.

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