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**CORRELATES OF THE USE AND PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF  
FAMILY FRIENDLY INITIATIVES**

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## ABSTRACT

The present research investigated the relationship between family friendly initiatives (FFIs) and work-family conflict (WFC), performance, psychological strain, and turnover intent. In addition to considering the use of FFIs the current study also examined the perceived importance of FFIs, currently a neglected variable in FFI research. The importance of considering factors that may impact on the relationship between the use of FFIs and outcomes was also addressed in the current study by examining several support variables both within and outside the organisation, as well as psychological job involvement and effort in the work and family domains. Respondents were from one large New Zealand organisation that had well established FFIs in place. A self-report questionnaire was developed that contained items from existing scales as well as some items developed specifically for the current research. Overall 169 male and female employees returned useable questionnaires resulting in a response rate of 51 percent. As expected women perceived FFIs to be more important than men, but only those women with dependents. Interestingly the men in the current study showed higher levels of WFC than the women. In terms of 'outcomes' use of FFIs was positively related to intention to stay, this relationship was mediated though by team leader support and the work-family balance dimension of organisational support. Use of FFIs was also positively related to psychological strain suggesting that as strain increases so does the use of FFIs. Limitations of the current research along with suggestions for future research.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades the business environment, the nature of work, and the workforce itself have undergone major changes. The economic forces driving these changes include deregulation, global competition, technological innovation, consolidation, privatisation of many public sector organisations, and a shift from manufacturing to service (Geurts, Rutte, & Peeters, 1999; Kirchmeyer & Cohen, 1999). As organisations try to increase productivity and remain competitive with fewer people and fewer resources, the result is people working longer and harder, with less security and commitment (Fallon, 1997; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997).

The most dramatic change over the last few decades has been the growing number of women entering the workforce. International statistics show that women now make up around 50 percent of the workforce in Western Europe, Australasia, and the U.S.A (N.Z. Department of Statistics, 1996; Poole & Langan-Fox, 1997), compared to around 20 percent in the 1950s (Napoli, 1994; Parasuraman & Greenhouse, 1997). Consequently, the traditional family comprising dad the full-time breadwinner and mum the full-time caregiver, is fairly uncommon in contemporary society (Rothausen, 1999). Families are now extremely diverse and include couples who both work, single parents, blended families, and workers with both elderly and young dependents (Callister, 1996; Mitchell, 1997). In the U.S.A, for example, nearly half of all workers are part of dual-earner families, 62 percent of women with children under six are employed, and 75 percent of women with children aged 6-17 years are in paid work (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997). In New Zealand both parents are employed full time in 40



percent of two parent families, 49 percent of women with children aged 1-4 years are in the workforce, and over 60 percent of women with children aged 5-17 are currently employed (N.Z Department of Statistics, 1996). In the U.S.A single parent families make up 23 percent of the workforce and are the fastest growing sector (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997).

Increased pressures have contributed to the concern about the detrimental effects that juggling work and family can have on both individuals and organisations. Work and family interaction has become a major social issue in the last decade and is investigated by researchers from many disciplines including psychology, management, and sociology (Barnett, 1998; Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; Marshall & Barnett, 1994; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997).

The emphasis in the work and family literature that organisations cannot afford to dismiss work-family issues has seen the advent of the family-friendly workplace (Callister, 1996; Frankel, 1998; Freidman & Galinsky, 1992; Lobel, Googin, & Bankert, 1999). Initiatives implemented by organisations to assist employees in balancing work and family life are varied and include parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and on-site childcare (Aryee, Luk, & Stone, 1998; Dex & Scheibl, 1999; Galinsky & Stein, 1990). However, there is criticism that such initiatives are often underutilised (Frankel, 1998; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999), and are frequently unsupported by the prevailing organisational culture (Kossek & Ozeki, 1999).

There is an acknowledged paucity of research examining family friendly initiatives (FFIs) and work-family conflict (WFC) in the same study (Kossek & Ozeki, 1999), as well as a lack of research examining the

relationship between FFI's, WFC, and various work outcomes (Kirchmeyer & Cohen, 1999). Research also suggests that FFIs on their own may not be sufficient to achieve desirable outcomes and may be of no benefit if other factors such as having a supportive supervisor are not present (Pulman, 1998; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Warren & Johnson, 1995).

The main purpose of the current research is to provide a comprehensive study that focuses on the relationship between FFIs and WFC and also examines pertinent work outcomes including performance and turnover intent. The current study focuses not only on the use of FFIs, but also on the perceived importance of FFIs which is a neglected variable in previous FFI research.

In keeping with research which suggests that other factors aside from FFIs are also important, the current research examines several sources of support from within and outside the organisation, and also investigates the relationship that psychological factors such as job involvement have with various outcomes including WFC, performance, turnover intent, and psychological strain. The term outcome in the current study is intended to reflect areas that are salient to both individuals and organizations. It is not used to imply that differences in these areas are caused by the predictor variables.

The following chapters provide some context for the study by discussing the pertinent work and family literature, the research to date on family friendly initiatives, and taking a detailed look at the variables included in the present study along with the specific research aims.