

Is using work–life interface benefits a career-limiting move? An examination of women, men, lone parents, and parents with partners

ALISON M. KONRAD^{1*} AND YANG YANG²

¹*University of Western Ontario, Richard Ivey School of Business, London, Ontario, Canada*

²*University of Pennsylvania, Wharton School of Business, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.*

Summary

Using a large national sample based on Workplace and Employee Survey data collected by Statistics Canada in 2001 and 2002, we examined the effects of employee usage of seven organizational work–life interface benefits on promotions. Analysis predicted promotions in 2002 when number of promotions received by 2001 were controlled. The main effect of using work–life interface benefits on promotions was positive, indicating that using these benefits is not a career-limiting move. Gender, presence of young children, and marital status interacted with the use of work–life interface benefits. Single parents benefitted less than other employees from using work–life interface options. Altogether, these findings suggest that the ongoing positive effects of conservation of time and energy resources for employees outweigh the initial short-term negative effects of signaling and stigmatization. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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Although employees rate work–life interface benefits as highly desirable (Haar & O’Driscoll, 2005), many worry that using these benefits is a “career-limiting move” that reduces one’s chances for promotion (Pleck, 1993). Indeed, in a field experiment examining the reactions of 299 senior professionals in public accounting firms, hypothetical employees who used a flexible work arrangement were viewed as less promotable, and male users were penalized significantly more than their female counterparts (Almer, Cohen, & Single, 2004).

The view that using work–life interface benefits is a career-limiting move is consistent with theories of signaling and stigmatization. Signaling theory (Spence, 1973) argues that managers generally have incomplete information about the abilities and motivations of their employees and must rely on signals or observable qualities to make reward allocation decisions in organizations. Utilization of work–life interface benefits is a clearly observable characteristic that might be stigmatized (Goffman, 1963) or discrediting in some contexts. If organizational decision-makers stigmatize employees who use work–life interface benefits, then benefits usage sends a signal that reduces opportunities for promotion.

In contrast to this negative view, much research documents that workers who utilize work–life interface benefits, when compared with their colleagues, perform equally well or better and are equally or more committed to the employer (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobföll, 1989) suggests that benefits utilization has positive effects on employees because it enhances their capacity to respond effectively to multiple work and family demands. By increasing employee resources, benefits utilization allows employees to perform effectively in both their work and family roles. Over

*Correspondence to: Alison M. Konrad, Richard Ivey School of Business, University of Western Ontario, London, ON, Canada. E-mail: akonrad@ivey.uwo.ca

time, consistent high performance should outweigh initial negative signals associated with benefits utilization, resulting in an increased probability of promotion.

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, we tested the predictions derived from COR theory (Hobföll, 1989) and those derived from signaling (Spence, 1973) and stigmatization (Goffman, 1963) theory to document the “base rate” relationship between use of work–life interface benefits and subsequent promotions in a nationally representative sample of employers and employees in Canada. The second purpose of this study was to examine potential moderators of the association between utilization of work–life interface benefits and promotions derived from gender-role theory (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991) and stereotype activation theory (Huntsinger, Sinclair, Dunn, & Clore, 2010). Gender-role theory (Gutek et al., 1991) suggests that supports for managing the work–life interface are more important to women, because the feminine gender role in the family, particularly the motherhood role, can be difficult to integrate successfully with the paid work role. Supporting the value of work–life interface benefits to women’s career advancement, Dreher (2003) found that the provision of work–life interface benefits in 1994 was positively associated with the representation of women in senior management positions in 1999 in his study of 72 Fortune 500 firms.

Alternatively, stereotype activation theory (Aquino, Stewart, & Reed, 2005; Huntsinger et al., 2010) implies that perceptions of women as relatively uncommitted workers (Lyness & Judiesch, 2001) result in benefits utilization being particularly detrimental to their promotion prospects. Women, particularly mothers of young children, are susceptible to stereotypes that they are relatively uncommitted to the paid work role. Single parents of young children may be suspected of lack of capacity to perform well in the workplace, given lack of the support of a partner or spouse in the home. Stereotype activation theory suggests that benefits utilization is a more stigmatizing signal for these two groups, such that mothers of young children and single parents are more likely to be stigmatized for using work–life interface benefits.

We examine the relationship between use of seven common types of work–life interface benefits and subsequent promotions. Our study design has several advantages. First, our large national sample of 6524 women and 8396 men provides us with a sufficient number of respondents to allow for a reliable examination of statistical associations for employees in a variety of different family situations, including mothers and fathers of young children and single parents. The longitudinal nature of the data allows us to assess the association between benefits utilization in 2001 and promotions received between 2001 and 2002.

Second, because our sample includes employees working for a large number of different employers, our data show considerable variation in availability of work–life interface benefits. Many studies in this area examine samples of employees working for the same organization (Bagger, Li, & Gutek, 2008; Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001; Smith Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002; Valcour, 2007), and although they have provided valuable insights, they are limited by a lack of variation in the benefits provided at the workplace.

Third, previous research either examines the combined effects of many benefits (Baral & Bhargava, 2010; Casper & Harris, 2008; Hammer, Neal, Newsom, Brockwood, & Colton, 2005) or only tests the effects of one or two practices in one study (Hill, Ferris, & Baker, 2004; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006; Kossek & Nichol, 1992). Both methods are limited as the former fails to examine the different roles played by each work–life benefit, and the latter ignores the comprehensiveness of work–life practices implemented in organizations. To overcome these problems, we focus on seven commonly adopted work–life interface benefits and examine their effects, both combined and individually. This methodology allows us to examine whether the outcomes of using benefits differ depending on the extent to which they stigmatize employees and/or provide substantive resources enhancing employee performance. For instance, reducing work hours is more likely to signal reduced commitment to the job than using child care or elder care services, but reducing work hours may also provide critical resources that allow employees to perform effectively in both their paid work and family roles.

Fourth, previous studies have shown that availability and actual use of work–life interface practices are not equivalent (Kossek, Barber, & Winters, 1999). Usage of work–life interface arrangements is often hindered by managerial resistance and/or employee concerns about negative career impact (Behson, 2005; Cook, 2009; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Therefore, this study measures usage rather than simply availability of work–life interface practices to examine how these practices influence promotions for women and men.

Fifth and finally, whereas most previous studies examining the impact of work-life interface benefits have focused on outcomes such as attitudes, work-life conflict and distress, and to a lesser extent, performance, we examine the impact on promotions. Although employees worry that using work-life interface benefits is a career-limiting move (Behson, 2005), the actual impact on careers has been under-studied. In fact, beyond a qualitative examination of a relatively small number of individuals (Hochschild, 1997), we are unaware of previous research examining the impact of using work-life interface benefits on subsequent promotions.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Various theories of work stressors and strain provide the foundation for much scholarship in the area of work-life interface, such as the job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2006), the resource drain perspective (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), and coping or buffering models (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999). More recent work has drawn upon COR theory as a relatively well-developed integrative model of the links between stressors, strain, and coping mechanisms (Halbesleben, Harvey, & Bolino, 2009). COR theory states that people are motivated to build and maintain a resource base consisting of, “those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right, or that are valued because they act as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources” (Hobföll, 2001, p. 339). People experience stress when they are threatened with or experience resource loss or fail to gain sufficient resources following prior investments (Hobföll, 2001).

Applied to the impact of utilization of work-life interface benefits, the COR theory (Hobföll, 2001) implies that people will value these benefits as sources of support that help them to maintain effective performance in the face of multiple and sometimes competing work and family demands. Meta-analytic research shows that stressors such as role conflict, role overload, and work-family conflict are negatively associated with both objective and subjective measures of job performance (Gilboa, Shirom, Fried, & Cooper, 2008). Another meta-analysis indicates that stressors perceived as hindrances to work performance are particularly strongly negatively related to performance, due to increased strain and decreased motivation (Lepine, Podsakoff, & Lepine, 2005). Lepine et al. (2005) argued that conflicting demands are likely to be viewed as hindrances to work performance because effort expended to cope with conflicting demands depletes resources that could have been devoted to the job (p. 766).

These meta-analytic findings suggest that to the extent work-life interface benefits reduce stress caused by work-family conflict, they should also have a positive effect on job performance. Much scholarship documents using work-life interface benefits result in positive attitudes and stress reduction for employees (Allen, 2001; Behson, 2005; Breaugh & Frye, 2007; Cook, 2009; Eaton, 2003; Frye & Breaugh, 2004; Hammer et al., 2005; Hill, 2005; Lambert, 2000; Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011; Sahibzada, Hammer, Neal, & Kuang, 2005; Taylor, DelCampo, & Blancero, 2009; Thompson et al., 1999). Empirical studies, including meta-analytic findings, also show that the use of work-life interface benefits is positively associated with employee performance (Baltes et al., 1999; Eaton, 2003; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Lambert, 2000). These findings are consistent with the idea that work-life interface benefits are resources that are valued by employees. These resources are valued because they help employees cope with both the challenges of the job and the hindrance stressors generated by work-family conflicts to maintain a high level of energy, motivation, and capability to apply to their paid job and family roles.

Theoretically, promotions result from demonstrated ability to perform well in the work role, to learn the organization's specific systems, processes, and norms (Pfeffer & Cohen, 1984), and to contribute in an expanded capacity within a position of greater responsibility (De Pater, Van Vianen, Bechtoldt, & Klehe, 2009). Although promotions are significantly influenced by social networking and organizational sponsorship as well as by human capital and anti-female gender bias (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005), research shows that performance is positively associated with receipt of promotions (Castilla, 2008; Yap & Konrad, 2009). Furthermore, managers' perceptions of an employee's level of family interference with work have a negative impact on ratings of promotability (Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon, 2009). Given

that utilization of work–life interface benefits is associated with higher performance, a stronger commitment to the firm, and reduced family interference with work, COR theory implies that benefits utilization will be positively associated with receipt of subsequent promotions.

Whereas COR theory (Hobföll, 2001) provides a positive view of work–life benefits utilization for individual career advancement, signaling and stigmatization theory imply a more cautionary view. Signaling theory (Spence, 1973) argues that because information about employee abilities and motivation is often incomplete or ambiguous, managers must rely on signals or observable qualities to make reward allocations in organizations. Research findings documenting a decrement in promotability ratings for employees who use work–life interface benefits (Almer et al., 2004) support the notion that benefits utilization constitutes a negative signal that is stigmatizing (Goffman, 1963) or discrediting to the employee. Because benefits utilization is clearly observable, whereas employee motivation and ability are not, managers might use benefits utilization as a heuristic device to screen out particular candidates during the promotion decision-making process. Hence, signaling theory implies that benefits utilization will be negatively associated with receipt of subsequent promotions.

One way to approach these seemingly contradictory predictions is to examine different types of benefits separately rather than assuming that all work–life interface benefits have the same effect. The association between utilization of work–life interface benefits and subsequent promotions is likely to differ depending upon whether the employee is accessing benefits that provide substantive resources and/or potentially signal lack of career commitment. Usage of scheduling flexibility, reduced work hours, or work-at-home benefits directly affects an employee's work hours, scheduling, and possibly workload and, as such, impacts upon managers and coworkers who must adjust their activities to provide the accommodation. Some of the documented difficulties associated with employees using work–life interface benefits include increased scheduling and/or workload burdens on coworkers, added coordination problems for managers, and less face time at the workplace (Van Dyne, Kossek, & Lobel, 2007). Employees who choose to reduce their work hours, to work at home, or to select a flexible or compressed scheduling option could possibly be perceived as causing disruptions, burdening managers and coworkers, and reducing their commitment to the paid work role. Therefore, usage of these benefits potentially sends negative signals that reduce the probability of future promotions.

On the other hand, scheduling flexibility, reduced work hours, and a work-at-home option provide employees with important substantive support in the form of time, energy, and flexibility for combining the potentially heavy and competing demands of paid work and family. Despite the fact that these benefits may require greater accommodation on the part of managers and coworkers, the replenishment of critical resources provided by these benefits may be necessary to support employee job performance combined with family role demands. Time and energy resources may be particularly valuable for enhancing growth and readiness to take on the additional responsibilities associated with promotion. Therefore, although employers might initially stigmatize employees who use flexibility benefits (Almer et al., 2004), over time, strong employee performance is likely to override initial negative signals about employee commitment or ability to add value. Hence, our longitudinal prediction is based on COR theory and argues that over time, utilization of flexibility benefits is positively associated with promotion.

Use of benefits such as employee assistance programs, elder care, or child care does not have direct effects on employee work hours, scheduling, or workload. As such, employees who choose these options signal to the employer as well as coworkers that they are not scaling back their paid work efforts and are minimizing the extent to which they allow their benefits utilization to impinge on productivity and work flow. Hence, use of these benefits does not send a negative signal to decision-makers regarding future promotability. These benefits do not provide employees with additional time, energy, and flexibility to combine potentially heavy and competing paid work and family role demands, however. As such, use of dependent care benefits may not provide a sufficient level of resources to employees to enhance job performance and readiness for promotion.

H1a: Utilization of reduced hours, flexible scheduling, compressed scheduling, or work at home benefits is positively associated with receiving a subsequent promotion.

H1b: Utilization of child care, elder care, or employee assistance benefits is unrelated to receiving a subsequent promotion.

Gender as a moderator of the relationship between benefits utilization and promotions

Given the long history of the gender division of labor in the household, which continues in contemporary society (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010), gender is a factor that should be considered when studying the work-life interface. Gender-role theory (Wood & Eagly, 2002) focuses upon the different societal expectations held for women and men, whereby women more than men are expected to fulfill care-giving needs in the family, whereas men more than women fulfill their family obligations by providing income through paid work. Gender-role theory recognizes that this traditional paradigm is not enacted in all cases; however, it emphasizes that this paradigm sets normative expectations for the behavior of women and men.

Gutek and her colleagues (Bagger et al., 2008; Gutek et al., 1991) have theorized and found that gender-role expectations influence the work-family interface (see also Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). Consistent with gender-role theory, as each child is added to the family, women reduce their time commitment to paid work and increase their level of household labor (Becker & Moen, 1999; Gjerdingen & Center, 2005; Katz-Wise, Priess, & Hyde, 2010), whereas men increase their hours of paid work (Hammer et al., 2005; Jacobs & Gerson, 2001; Moen & Yu, 2000). As a result of gendered parenting expectations (Becker & Moen, 1999; Cha, 2010; Moen & Yu, 2000), mothers on average assume more child care responsibility than fathers do, which means that the arrival of children creates more work-family conflict for women than it does for men (Beatty, 1996; Hill, Yang, Hawkins, & Ferris, 2004; Maume & Houston, 2001; Nelson & Burke, 2000).

Evidence also suggests that women and men react differently to the provision of work-life interface benefits (Pedersen, Minnotte, Kiger, & Mannon, 2009). A large-scale quantitative study found that for women but not for men, the number of both preschool-aged and school-aged children increases the likelihood of wishing one could reduce hours of paid work (Clarkberg & Moen, 2001). Other research have shown that flexible scheduling reduces work-family conflict (Casper & Harris, 2008) and enhances commitment (Carlson, Grzywacz, & Kacmar, 2010) more effectively for women than for men. In sum, gender-role theory (Wood & Eagly, 2002) argues that in families with young children, women experience greater more work-family conflict than men do, and combined with COR theory, it implies that women have a greater need for the support provided by work-life interface benefits.

Alternatively, stereotype activation theory suggests a risk to women of utilizing scheduling work-life interface benefits, particularly flexibility benefits. Stereotypes influence attitudes and behavior by providing people with cognitive shortcuts when making decisions about how to judge and interact with others (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). Regarding work-life interface, women face stereotypes regarding their commitment to both their paid work and family roles. On the one hand, mothers who work for pay are viewed negatively as more self-oriented and less caring for their children than mothers who do not work for pay (Bridges & Etaugh, 1995; Etaugh & Nekolny, 1990). On the other hand, working women who are mothers are viewed as relatively uncommitted to the paid work role (Lyness & Judiesch, 2001), less agentic (i.e., less independent, unemotional, power oriented), and hence, less competent than working women who are not mothers or working men (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008).

Research shows that the level of stereotype activation depends upon a variety of contextual factors (Huntsinger et al., 2010). With regards to promotion decisions, stereotypes regarding women's performance in the paid work role more than the family role are likely to be activated because of greater salience and perceived relevance to the decision context. Another factor known to enhance stereotype activation in the workplace is the application of organizational practices, such as affirmative action, which have been developed to serve the needs of a specific stereotyped group (Aquino et al., 2005). Utilization of flexibility benefits is likely to activate the stereotype of working mothers as relatively non-agentic and uncommitted, with the result that benefits utilization is a more stigmatizing signal for women than for men.

To summarize, gender is related to both the need for work–life interface benefits and the potential to be stigmatized for using these benefits. Gender-role pressures mean that mothers of young children have a greater need than fathers do for the support provided by work–life interface benefits, and the potential for stereotype activation means that benefits utilization is more likely to be a negative signal regarding mothers' than fathers' work commitment. Given that compared with fathers, mothers of young children have a greater need for the substantive resources of time, energy, and flexibility to fulfill their more demanding family roles, the relatively modest resources provided by dependent care benefits are unlikely to be sufficient to support women's job performance when family responsibilities are substantial. Even the greater substantive support provided by scheduling flexibility, reduced work hours, and/or working at home may be insufficient to ready mothers of young children to take on the added responsibilities associated with promotion. Given the substantial work–family conflict generated for mothers of young children, use of work–life interface options is unlikely to be associated with subsequent promotions for this group. Usage of these benefits is more likely to help men and women without children to increase their performance and energy to take on additional responsibilities beyond the threshold required for subsequent promotion.

H2a: A three-way interaction between gender, number of young children, and utilization of reduced hours, flexible scheduling, compressed scheduling, or work at home benefits will obtain such that using these options will be less beneficial to subsequent promotion for mothers of young children than for women without young children or for men.

H2b: Utilization of child care, elder care, or employee assistance benefits will not show a three-way interaction with gender and number of young children in predicting subsequent promotion.

Work–life interface practices and the experiences of single parents

Single parents are particularly likely to experience role overload because they must fulfill the three roles of income provider, homemaker, and childcare giver without the help of an adult partner (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001; Spencer-Dawe, 2005). Demonstrating that these expanded roles lead to overload, one study found that having more children, being a lone mother, and working more hours lead to impaired health (Floderus, Hagman, Aronsson, Marklund, & Wikman, 2008), whereas another study showed that both hours of paid work and number of children are positively associated with strain among single mothers (Campbell & Moen, 1992). Although the vast majority of single parent families are led by women, the number of single fathers is increasing (Pong, Dronkers, & Hampden-Thompson, 2003). Like single mothers, single fathers have fewer sources of social support than fathers with partners (Janzen, Green, & Muhajarine, 2006; Ravanera, 2006). Both single mothers (Weitof, Haglund, & Rosen, 2000) and single fathers (Janzen et al., 2006) experience poorer health outcomes than their partnered counterparts. Single parents also experience poorer mental health than their partnered counterparts, due in part to higher levels of work–family conflict (Chandola et al., 2004).

Usage of flexibility benefits could be particularly stigmatizing for single parents, because of perceptions that they violate social norms and make poor life decisions (Brush, 1997). But, COR theory (Hobföll, 2001) suggests that work–life interface practices are likely to be particularly important to single parents because they provide needed support in a situation of role overload. As such, good performance over time should minimize stigmatization from benefits utilization.

The relatively modest benefits provided by employers, however, may be inadequate for fulfilling the resource needs of single parents. Dependent care benefits do not provide additional time, energy, or flexibility for handling

the substantial family demands generated when there are young children in the home and no adult partner to share the load. Although changing the time, place, and amount of work provides more substantial support than dependent care options do, even flexibility benefits may be insufficient for enhancing job performance of single parents to the level where they are ready to take on the additional responsibilities associated with a promotion. As such, we expect that utilizing the more substantively supportive benefits of reduced work hours, scheduling flexibility, and working at home will enhance promotability more effectively for parents with partners than for single parents.

H3a: A three-way interaction between marital status, number of young children, and utilization of reduced hours, flexible scheduling, compressed scheduling, or work at home benefits will obtain such that using these options will be less beneficial to subsequent promotion for single parents of young children than for parents with partners or people without young children.

H3b: Utilization of child care, elder care, or employee assistance benefits will not show a three-way interaction with marital status and number of young children to predict subsequent promotion.

Method

We used the Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) data collected by Statistics Canada in 2001 and 2002 to test our hypotheses. On the basis of the industry, region, and size, Statistics Canada used a stratified sampling method to draw the workplace sample from the Business Registration List containing all businesses operating in Canada. The employee sample was then drawn based on lists provided by each employer responding to the workplace survey. Twenty-four employees were randomly selected from each company, and all employees were surveyed if the companies had fewer than 4 employees. To create a longitudinal database, the same employers and employees who had responded to the 2001 surveys were also surveyed in 2002.

In this study, we used data from the 2002 employee survey to measure the dependent variable of promotion. For measures of predictors and control variables, we used information from both the employee and the workplace surveys in 2001. Creating a lag between the predictors and the outcomes and controlling for promotions received in 2001 when predicting promotion in 2002 facilitated the testing of causal relationships. The response rates to the 2001 and 2002 employee surveys were 86.9 and 90.9 per cent, respectively. The data sets consisted of 20 377 employees in 2001 and 16 813 employees in 2002. We focused only on those employees who responded to both the 2001 and 2002 surveys. The final sample for this study contained 14 920 employees including 6524 women and 8396 men.

Measures

Promotion

The dependent measure in 2002 assessed the receipt of a promotion from the current employer between 2001 and 2002. Total number of *promotions* respondents had received from the current employer by 2001 was statistically controlled.

Work-life interface benefits

The 2001 employee survey asked the participants whether they used seven work-life interface benefits in the past 12 months. Correlations among the usage measures for the seven different benefits ranged from $-.10$ to $.20$, and

90 per cent of them were trivial, that is, of magnitude of less than .10. The largest correlation (.20) was found between having flexible hours and working at home. We created two indices from responses to these survey items. The index of usage of *flexibility* options counted usage of reduced work hours, flexible scheduling, compressed scheduling, and working at home (possible range = 0 to 4). The index of usage of *dependent care* options counted usage of child care, elder care, and an employee assistance program (possible range = 0 to 3). We also examined the use of each practice individually to gain a better understanding of the effects of usage of specific work–life interface benefits.

Demographics

The 2001 employee survey asked the participants' *gender* (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*), *marital status* (1 = *married or living with a partner*, 0 = *single*), *number and ages of children*. We created two variables by counting the number of young (aged 6 years and younger) and older (aged 7 to 18 years) children in the home.

Control variables

We controlled for two measures taken from the workplace survey. *Firm size*, measured as number of employees, is often significantly associated with the adoption and coverage of work–life practices (Konrad & Mangel, 2000). We coded *industry* category as 0 = *manufacturing* and 1 = *service*. We also controlled for employee *age*, *annual earnings*, and *educational level* (four dummy variables indicating less than high school (reference), high school, some college, and college degree and above), taken from the employee survey.

Analyses

We analyzed the data for the whole sample including women and men, single and married respondents, and people with and without children. We show a correlation matrix in Table 1. We used logistic regression analysis to test the hypotheses, and we tested usage of flexibility and dependent care benefits in separate sets of equations. This method provided for a clean test of the hypothesized three-way interactions because only the three related two-way interactions had to be statistically controlled. We first entered control variables, including gender, number of children aged 6 years and younger, number of children aged 7 to 18 years, and marital status as well as firm-level and individual-level control variables. We log transformed both *organizational size* and *annual earnings* to address the skewed distributions. We also entered usage of either flexibility or dependent care benefits at Step 1. In the second step, we entered the two-way interactions among the four predictors of benefits usage, gender, number of children aged 6 years and younger, and marital status. In the third step, we entered the three-way interaction terms.

Because we sampled employees within employers, concerns arise regarding autocorrelation among data points generated within the same organization. The use of logistic regression analysis is not particularly troubling in this case, however. On average, there were only six employee respondents per organization, limiting the amount of autocorrelation in the data. Furthermore, because we are examining use rather than availability of work–life interface benefits, respondents within the same organization differ on the value of the major independent variable of interest to us. Our conceptual arguments are most concerned with use of work–life interface benefits, a factor that varies between employees in the same organization, and our chosen analysis reflects our conceptual arguments.

We weighted all analyses to avoid biased population estimates. Statistics Canada assigns each company a sampling weight which reflects the probability that any particular data point was included in the WES sample. For instance, 265 forestry, mining, and oil and gas extraction workplaces were included in the 2001 WES workplace sample, representing a total of 10 362 workplaces. The 2001 workplace sample included 568 retail workplaces, which represented a total of 229 893 Canadian retailers. In order to ensure that disseminated findings accurately reflect the population of Canadian workplaces, Statistics Canada requires researchers to weight the WES data in analysis to reflect the probability of selection for each type of workplace.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Industry (0 = <i>manufacturing</i> ; 1 = <i>service</i>)	0.77	0.42	1.00														
2. Size (log number of employees)	1.78	0.81	-.04**	1.00													
3. High school graduate	0.34	0.47	-.07**	-.06**	1.00												
4. Some college	0.10	0.30	-.05**	.01	-.24**	1.00											
5. College graduate and above	0.30	0.46	.14**	.25**	-.47**	-.22**	1.00										
6. Age	39.41	11.21	-.03**	.07**	-.00	.05**	.05**	1.00									
7. Log annual salary	4.52	0.24	-.13**	.30**	-.14**	.06**	.40**	.26**	1.00								
8. Promotions by 2001	0.82	2.16	-.01	.01	.04**	-.01	.04**	.01	.16**	1.00							
9. N children aged 7 to 18 years	0.54	0.91	-.04**	.07**	.01	-.03**	.08**	.13**	.14**	.02	1.00						
10. Gender (0 = <i>M</i> ; 1 = <i>F</i>)	0.51	0.50	.26**	.02*	-.02**	.02*	.05**	-.02*	-.26**	-.08**	.01	1.00					
11. Marital status (0 = <i>single</i> ; 1 = <i>married</i>)	0.71	0.46	-.08**	.06**	.01	-.01	.12**	.33**	.24**	.04**	.27**	-.04**	1.00				
12. N children aged 6 years and younger	0.26	0.59	-.03**	.01	.01	-.02*	.07**	-.17**	.06**	-.01	-.04**	-.09**	.24**	1.00			
13. Flexibility usage index	0.03	0.79	.10**	.05**	-.08**	-.01*	.19**	.01	.16**	.03**	.07**	-.01	.03**	.04**	1.00		
14. Dependent care usage index	0.01	0.22	.04**	.18**	-.05**	.04**	.11**	.07**	.11**	.03**	.01	.03**	.08**	.01	.08**	1.00	
15. Promotion in 2002 (1 = <i>yes</i> ; 0 = <i>no</i>)	0.27	0.44	-.01	.02**	.03**	-.02*	.02	-.11**	.08**	.16**	-.07**	-.08**	.04**	.01	.06**	.04**	1.00
N	14920																

Note:
*Correlations are significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Logistic regressions predicting promotions from schedule flexibility index scores.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Step 1					
Constant	-.3,49 (.46)***	-3.47 (.46)***	-3.45 (.46)***	-3.44 (.46)***	-3.53 (.47)***
Service industry	.07 (.05)	.07 (.05)	.07 (.05)	.07 (.05)	.07 (.05)
Size	.03 (.03)	.03 (.03)	.03 (.03)	.03 (.03)	.03 (.03)
High school graduate	.19 (.05)***	.19 (.05)***	.19 (.05)***	.19 (.05)***	.19 (.05)***
Some college	-.04 (.08)	-.04 (.08)	-.04 (.08)	-.04 (.08)	-.04 (.08)
College graduate and above	-.02 (.06)	-.02 (.06)	-.02 (.06)	-.02 (.06)	-.02 (.06)
Age	-.03 (.00)***	-.03 (.00)***	-.03 (.00)***	-.03 (.00)***	-.03 (.00)***
Log annual salary	.75 (.11)***	.75 (.11)***	.74 (.11)***	.74 (.11)***	.76 (.11)***
Promotions by 2001	.24 (.01)***	.24 (.01)***	.24 (.01)***	.24 (.01)***	.24 (.01)***
N children aged 7 to 18 years	-.19 (.02)***	-.19 (.02)***	-.19 (.02)***	-.19 (.02)***	-.19 (.02)***
(1) Gender (0 = M; 1 = F)	-.24 (.04)***	-.24 (.04)***	-.24 (.04)***	-.24 (.04)***	-.24 (.04)***
(2) N children aged 6 years and younger	-.09 (.03)*	-.09 (.03)*	-.10 (.04)**	-.07 (.04)	-.03 (.16)
(3) Married	.03 (.05)	.03 (.05)	.03 (.05)	.03 (.05)	.01 (.06)
(4) Schedule flexibility	.14 (.02)***	.14 (.03)***	.13 (.02)***	.13 (.03)***	.08 (.06)
Step 2					
(1) × (4)		-.01 (.05)	.05 (.04)	-.01 (.05)	-.63 (.22)**
(2) × (4)				.09 (.05)	.01 (.07)
(3) × (4)				-.07 (.07)	-.08 (.17)
(1) × (2) × (4)				-.13 (.08)	.73 (.23)**
(2) × (3) × (4)					954.42***
Step 3					
Chi-square Step 1	954.42***	954.42***	954.42***	954.42***	954.42***
Chi-square Step 2		.09	1.47	3.18	7.47
Chi-square Step 3				2.58	12.19***
Chi-square	954.42***	954.50***	955.88***	960.18***	974.08***
Cox and Snell R ²	.06	.06	.06	.06	.06
N	14 920				

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown with their standard errors in parentheses.

**p* < .10;

***p* < .05;

****p* < .01;

*****p* < .001.

Results

H1a predicted that utilization of flexibility benefits, specifically, reduced hours, flexible scheduling, compressed scheduling, or working at home, would be positively associated with receiving a subsequent promotion. We show the results of the logistic regression analysis testing this prediction in Table 2. The number of flexibility benefits used showed a significant and positive main effect on promotions (Model 1), supporting H1's prediction. The impact of using a flexibility benefit on the odds of subsequent promotion was 1.15 (*e* to the power of .14), indicating that workers who used a flexibility option in 2001 were 14 per cent more likely to receive a promotion by 2002 than their equivalent counterparts who did not use a flexibility option.

Examining usage of the individual flexibility options separately (Table 4) showed that the main effects of using flexible scheduling, reducing work hours, and working at home were all significant and positive, indicating an increased probability of subsequent promotions whereas using a compressed work week was unrelated to promotion outcomes. The impact of usage of each of these benefits on the odds of a subsequent promotion was 1.17 (17 per cent increase) for flexible hours (*e* to the power of .16), 1.26 (26 per cent increase) for working at home (*e* to the power of .23), and 1.16 (16 per cent increase) for reduced work hours (*e* to the power of .15).

H1b predicted that usage of dependent care benefits, specifically, child care, elder care, or employee assistance plans, would be unrelated to receiving subsequent promotions. We show the results of the logistic regression analysis testing this prediction in Table 3. Findings indicated that use of these dependent care benefits was positively associated with receipt of subsequent promotions, refuting this prediction (Model 1). The impact of using a dependent care benefit on the odds of receiving a subsequent promotion was 1.51 (*e* to the power of .41), indicating that workers who used a dependent care option in 2001 were 51 per cent more likely than their equivalent counterparts to receive a promotion by 2002.

Examining usage of the individual dependent care options separately (Table 4) showed that use of employee assistance was positively associated with receiving a promotion, increasing the odds of receiving a subsequent promotion by 1.73 (*e* to the power of .55, a 73 per cent increase in probability), whereas using elder care or child care was not significantly associated with subsequent promotion.

H2a predicted a three-way interaction between gender, number of young children, and utilization of reduced hours, flexible scheduling, compressed scheduling, or work-at-home benefits such that these options would be less beneficial to subsequent promotion for mothers of young children than for women without young children or for men. Regression analysis indicated that this three-way interaction was not a significant predictor for the index of usage of flexibility options (Table 2, Model 4), refuting the hypothesis. Examining usage of the individual flexibility options in Table 4 indicated that working at home, flexible hours, and compressed work week all showed significant three-way interactions with gender and number of young children, but the effects of flexible hours and compressed work week were in the direction opposite to that obtained for working at home. To show the forms of these relationships, we plotted the interactions and calculated simple slopes by using web-based interaction utilities (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006) (see Figure 1). The form of each relationship is different, which refutes the hypothesis that all flexibility benefits have the same association with gender, presence of young children, and subsequent promotion.

The top panel of Figure 1 shows the relationship between using flexible hours and subsequent promotion for women and men, comparing employees with no young children to parents who have one young child. The simple slopes indicate that using flexible hours is unrelated to subsequent promotion for men without children and women with one young child. Using flexible hours has a significant positive association with promotion for men with one young child and women without children. The direction of this effect is only somewhat consistent with H2a's prediction that using flexibility options would be least beneficial to promotions for mothers of young children. The hypothesis is not supported for the comparison between mothers of young children and men without young children. Although the simple slope for mothers of young children is negative, it is not statistically significant and, therefore, not reliably different than the non-significant positive association observed for men without young children.

The hypothesis is supported for the comparison of mothers of young children with fathers of young children and women without children. The magnitude of the effect indicates that compared with men without children (the

Table 3. Logistic regressions predicting promotions from dependent care index scores.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Step 1					
Constant	-3.62 (.46)***	-3.62 (.46)***	-3.67 (.46)***	-3.66 (.46)***	-3.70 (.46)***
Service industry	.08 (.05)	.09 (.05)	.08 (.05)	.08 (.05)	.07 (.05)
Size	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)
High school graduate	.19 (.05)***	.19 (.05)***	.19 (.05)***	.19 (.05)***	.19 (.05)***
Some college	-.05 (.08)	-.05 (.08)	-.05 (.08)	-.05 (.08)	-.03 (.08)
College graduate and above	-.01 (.06)	-.01 (.06)	-.01 (.06)	-.01 (.06)	-.01 (.06)
Age	-.03 (.00)***	-.03 (.00)***	-.03 (.00)***	-.03 (.00)***	-.03 (.00)***
Log annual salary	.79 (.11)***	.79 (.11)***	.80 (.11)***	.80 (.11)***	.81 (.11)***
Promotions by 2001	.24 (.01)***	.24 (.01)***	.24 (.01)***	.24 (.01)***	.24 (.01)***
N children aged 7 to 18 years	-.19 (.02)***	-.19 (.02)***	-.19 (.02)***	-.19 (.02)***	-.19 (.02)***
(1) Gender (0=M; 1=F)	-.25 (.04)***	-.25 (.04)***	-.24 (.04)***	-.24 (.04)***	-.23 (.04)***
(2) N children aged 6 years and younger	-.10 (.04)**	-.10 (.04)**	-.12 (.04)**	-.10 (.04)*	-.08 (.17)
(3) Married	.03 (.05)	.03 (.05)	.04 (.05)	.04 (.05)	.02 (.06)
(4) Dependent care	.41 (.08)***	.35 (.13)**	.34 (.09)***	.04 (.16)	-.96 (.45)*
Step 2					
(1) × (4)		.10 (.17)		.42 (.19)*	-1.87 (1.7)
(2) × (4)			.30 (.10)**	.46 (.14)**	1.57 (.46)**
(3) × (4)					
(1) × (2)					
(2) × (3)					
(1) × (2) × (4)					
(2) × (3) × (4)					
Step 3					
Chi-square Step 1	947.34***	947.34***	947.34***	947.34***	947.34***
Chi-square Step 2		.36	8.38**	13.24**	37.69***
Chi-square Step 3				.87	2.63
Chi-square	947.34***	947.70***	955.72***	961.45***	987.66***
Cox and Snell R ²	.06	.06	.06	.06	.06
N	14 920				

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown with their standard errors in parentheses.

**p* < .05;

***p* < .01;

****p* < .001.

Table 4. Usage of individual work-life interface benefits and promotion.

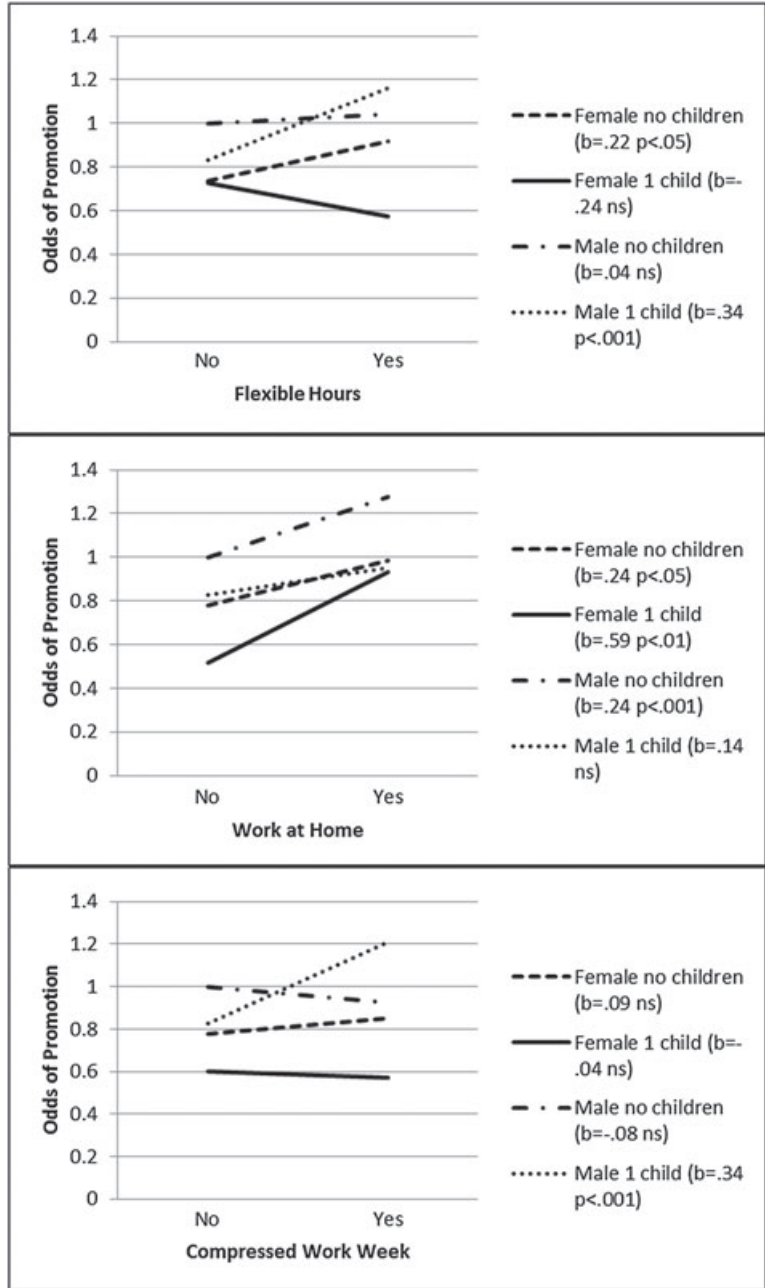
	Assistance	Elder Care	Child care	Work at home	Flexible hours	Compressed work week	Reduced hours
Main effect							
Benefit	.55 (.10)***	.15 (.32)	-.07 (.25)	.23 (.05)***	.16 (.04)***	.01 (.09)	.15 (.08)*
Two-way interactions							
Gender (0 = M; 1 = F) × Benefit	.32 (.23)	1.07 (.78)	.32 (.56)	.00 (.09)	.20 (.08)*	.14 (.18)	-.97 (.16)***
N children aged 6 years and younger × Benefit	.29 (.14)*	3.20 (.92)***	.56 (.30)	.05 (.07)	.06 (.07)	.29 (.13)*	.08 (.15)
Three-way interaction: Gender × N children aged 6 years and younger × Benefit							
N children aged 6 years and younger × Benefit	.33 (.15)*	.75 (1.63)	1.09 (.64)	-.10 (.09)	.29 (.08)***	.46 (.16)**	-.02 (.34)
Gender (0 = M; 1 = F) × Benefit	.31 (.23)	1.86 (1.55)	.42 (.57)	-.01 (.09)	.18 (.08)*	.17 (.18)	-.96 (.17)***
Gender (0 = M; 1 = F) × N children aged 6 years and younger	-.03 (.07)	-.12 (.07)	-.11 (.07)	-.22 (.08)**	.17 (.08)*	-.07 (.07)	-.13 (.07)
Gender (0 = M; 1 = F) × N children aged 6 years and younger × Benefit	-.34 (.40)	6.40 (5.77)	-.68 (.72)	.46 (.15)**	-.75 (.15)***	-.60 (.31)*	.12 (.38)
Three-way interaction: Married × N children aged 6 years and younger × Benefit							
N children aged 6 years and younger × Benefit	-.2.06 (1.93)	2.58 (.96)**	-2.05 (3.53)	.56 (.36)	-1.59 (.39)***	-.96 (1.14)	-1.17 (.56)*
Married × Benefit	1.85 (.52)***	1.33 (.84)	-.02 (1.01)	.05 (.13)	.10 (.12)	.16 (.32)	-.54 (.20)**
Married × N children aged 6 years and younger	-.10 (.16)	-.05 (.16)	-.07 (.16)	.08 (.19)	-.63 (.20)**	-.10 (.16)	-.19 (.17)
Married × N children aged 6 years and younger × Benefit	2.07 (1.93)	NA	2.77 (3.55)	-.54 (.37)	1.76 (.39)***	1.30 (1.14)	1.39 (.58)*

Note: There was an insufficient number of people to test the interaction of marital status, number of young children, and the usage of elder care. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown with their standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .05$;

** $p < .01$;

*** $p < .001$.



Note. Number of children indicates children age 6 and under; b-values are simple slopes.

Figure 1. Gender by number of young children by use of work–life flexibility benefits

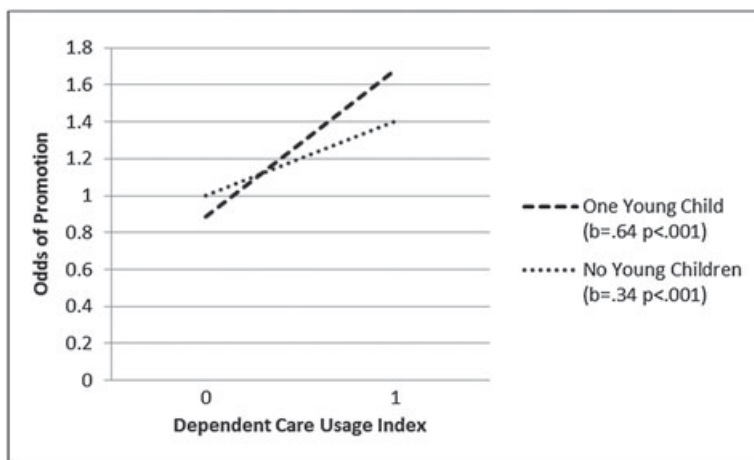
comparison group in the analysis), using flexible hours increases the odds of promotion for women without children from .74 (26 per cent less chance of promotion) to .92 (8 per cent less chance of promotion). Using flexible hours increases the odds of promotion for fathers of one young child from .83 (17 per cent less chance of promotion relative to comparison group) to 1.16 (16 per cent greater chance of promotion). Using flexible hours reduces the odds of

promotion (though not significantly, according to simple slope analysis) for mothers of young children from .72 (28 per cent less chance of promotion relative to comparison group) to .57 (43 per cent less chance of promotion) and, hence, is less valuable for this group.

The middle panel of Figure 1 shows the relationship between working at home and subsequent promotion for women and men, comparing employees with no young children in the home to parents who have one young child. Simple slopes indicate that working at home shows the strongest positive relationship to subsequent promotion for women with young children ($b = .59, p < .01$). Working at home is also positively associated with promotion for women without children ($b = .24, p < .05$) and men without children ($b = .24, p < .001$), but the magnitude of these positive effects is less than half that observed for mothers of young children. For men with young children, working at home was unrelated to subsequent promotion ($b = .14, ns$). The relatively strong positive impact of working at home on promotions for women with young children is in the direction opposite H2a's prediction. The magnitude of the effect for mothers of young children showed that relative to the comparison group (men without young children), working at home increased the odds of promotion from .52 (48 per cent less chance) to .93 (7 per cent chance of promotion).

The bottom panel of Figure 1 shows the relationship between a compressed work week and subsequent promotions for women and men, comparing employees with no young children to parents who have one young child. Simple slopes indicate that a compressed work week is unrelated to subsequent promotion for men and women without children and for mothers of young children, but is positively related to promotion for fathers with one young child. The direction of this effect is somewhat inconsistent with H2a's prediction that a compressed work week would be least beneficial to promotions for mothers of young children. The fact that the slope of the effect did not differ for mothers of young children and people without children is not consistent with the prediction. However, the comparison between mothers of young children and fathers of young children indicated that fathers benefitted more than mothers did, which is consistent with the hypothesis. The magnitude of this effect indicated that relative to men without young children (the comparison group in the analysis), a compressed work week was unrelated to the odds of promotion for mothers of one young child, which were .60 (40 per cent less likely than comparison group) for users and .57 (43 per cent less likely) for non-users. By comparison, for fathers of one young child, a compressed work week increased the odds of promotion from .83 (17 per cent less likely than comparison group) to 1.21 (21 per cent more likely than comparison group). Hence, mothers benefitted less than fathers did.

H2b predicted that using child care, elder care, or employee assistance benefits would not show a three-way interaction with gender and presence of young children to predict subsequent promotions. This hypothesis was



Note. Young children are children age 6 and under; b-values are simple slopes.

Figure 2. Number of young children by use of dependent care benefits

supported in the regressions examining the effects of the index of dependent care usage on the outcome variable (Table 3, Model 4). Furthermore, the findings in Table 4 show that when examined individually, none of the three dependent care options showed a three-way interaction with gender and number of young children to predict subsequent promotions, also supporting H2b.

Interestingly, the two-way interaction between presence of young children and dependent care usage is significant and positive (Table 3, Model 3). The plot of this interaction and calculation of simple slopes (Preacher et al., 2006) (Figure 2) indicates that usage of dependent care was positively associated with subsequent promotion for workers with or without young children. However, the magnitude of this positive relationship is almost twice as large for parents of young children ($b = .64, p < .001$) than for workers without young children ($b = .34, p < .001$). This finding suggests that dependent care supports are particularly valuable for maintaining the career advancement of workers who are parents of young children. The magnitude of the effect showed that compared with people without young children who do not use dependent care (the comparison group in the analysis), using dependent care options increased the odds of promotion from .89 (11 per cent less likely to be promoted compared with the comparison group) to 1.68 (68 per cent more likely to be promoted).

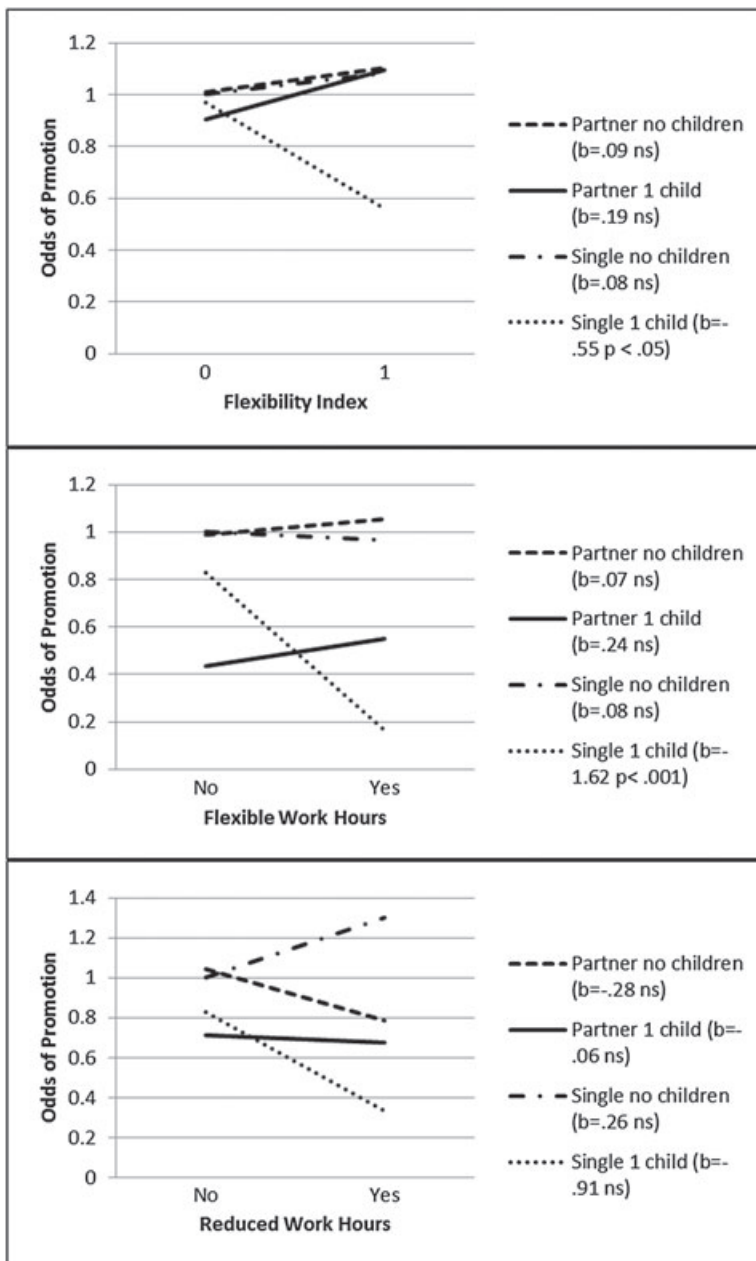
H3a predicted that a three-way interaction between marital status, number of young children, and utilization of work-life flexibility benefits would obtain such that using these options would be less beneficial to subsequent promotion for single parents of young children than for parents with partners or people without young children. This hypothesis was tested by examining the three-way interaction between marital status, number of young children, and utilization of flexibility benefits (Table 2, Model 5). This interaction was statistically significant and is plotted in the top panel of Figure 3. The simple slopes (Preacher et al., 2006) indicate that for single parents of young children, using a flexibility option is negatively associated with subsequent promotion ($b = -.55, p < .05$), whereas for parents with partners or for people without children, using a flexibility option is not significantly associated with subsequent promotion. These findings support H3a's prediction that flexibility benefits would be less beneficial to subsequent promotions for single parents than for parents with partners or people without children. The magnitude of the effect showed that compared with single workers without young children (the comparison group in this analysis), single workers with one young child who did not use a flexibility option were .97 as likely (or 3 per cent less likely) to receive a subsequent promotion. The odds of receiving a promotion dropped to .56 for single parents with one young child if they used a flexibility option, indicating that they were 44 per cent less likely to be promoted than the comparison group.

Examining usage of the individual flexibility options in Table 4 indicated that using flexible hours and reducing work hours both showed significant three-way interactions with marital status and number of young children in the home to predict subsequent promotions. We show plots of these interactions and simple slopes (Preacher et al., 2006) in Figure 3.

The simple slopes in the middle panel of Figure 3 show that using flexible hours is unrelated to subsequent promotion for employees with spouses or partners regardless of the presence of young children or for single employees without young children. But for single parents of young children, using flexible hours is steeply negatively associated with subsequent promotion ($b = -1.62, p < .001$), reducing the odds of promotion from .83 (17 per cent less likely) to .16 (84 per cent less likely) compared with single workers without children who do not use flexible hours (the comparison group in the analysis). This finding supports H3a's prediction that using flexible hours is least beneficial to subsequent promotions for single parents of young children.

The simple slopes in the bottom panel of Figure 3 show that, consistent with prediction, reducing work hours is most strongly negatively related to subsequent promotion for single parents with young children than for single employees without children or for parents of one young child with spouses or partners. However, the steep negative slope is not statistically significant for single parents with one young child ($b = -.91, ns$). The upper-level statistic for the region of significance for the three-way interaction (Preacher et al., 2006) was 3.89, indicating that only when single parents have four young children does this negative slope become steep enough to be statistically different from zero.

H3b predicted that utilization of child care, elder care, or employee assistance benefits would not show a three-way interaction with marital status and number of young children to predict subsequent promotions. This hypothesis was supported in the regressions examining the effects of the index of dependent care usage on the



Note. Number of children indicates children age 6 and younger; b-values are simple slopes.

Figure 3. Single by number of young children by use of work-life flexibility benefits

outcome variable (Table 3, Model 5, non-significant three-way interaction). Furthermore, the findings in Table 4 show that when examined individually, none of the three dependent care options showed a three-way interaction with marital status and number of young children to predict subsequent promotions, also supporting H3b.

Discussion

Theorizing about the career impact of using work–life interface benefits must balance possible negative signaling (Spence, 1973) and stigmatization (Goffman, 1963) effects against the resources needed to sustain job performance over time (Hobföll, 1989, 2001). Signaling and stigmatization theories (Goffman, 1963; Spence, 1973) imply that decision-makers draw a negative inference about the commitment and competence of employees who request a flexible work arrangement (Almer et al., 2004). On the other hand, COR theory (Hobföll, 1989, 2001) implies that the time and energy resources garnered from the use of flexibility benefits enhance employee motivation and performance. Using a work–life flexibility benefit sustains job performance and commitment in the long run, eventually overriding managers' initial fears and leading to sustained or enhanced promotion probability for the employee.

Career outcomes are unlikely to be positive for employees who refrain from using work–life interface benefits when they need them. In the short term, such employees avoid the possibility of a negative stigma of benefits utilization, but they risk motivation and performance losses in the long run. Managers and coworkers are likely to develop negative views of employees who allow work–family conflicts to impact performance and attendance, who develop a lack of commitment to the job, or whose high stress levels affect interactions with colleagues, all of which are factors linked to work–family conflict in meta-analytic research (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Byron, 2005). Hence, avoiding the use of flexibility benefits will not maintain an employee's good standing with managers and colleagues if those resources are needed to avoid performance decrements.

Consistent with the logic that any possible stigmatization from using work–life benefits is relatively short lived compared with the longer-run performance benefits of doing so, our findings show little evidence that benefits utilization is associated with reduced promotion opportunities. Rather, the main effect findings link utilization of flexibility benefits to an increased probability of subsequent promotion. This finding supports the prediction based on COR theory (Hobföll, 1989, 2001) that using flexibility benefits enhances the chances of promotion because these benefits provide time and energy resources that help employees to be more effective at work.

Utilization of dependent care benefits is also positively related to subsequent promotions in our data, but examining the impact of individual practices showed that this positive main effect was limited to the use of employee assistance programs. Employee assistance programs provide counseling and other social services to employees and their families during periods of strain or crisis (McShulskis, 1997). Our findings suggest that using these services is beneficial for maintaining performance resulting in career advancement for employees. We also found a two-way interaction effect indicating that use of dependent care benefits is more strongly positively associated with subsequent promotions for parents of young children than for other workers. This finding suggests that providing dependent care supports can maintain career advancement for parents while their children are young.

This set of findings suggests that worries about sending a negative signal (Spence, 1973) or being stigmatized (Goffman, 1963) for using work–life interface benefits are generally overblown. Although it is true that use of work–life interface benefits, particularly flexibility benefits such as reduced work hours, flexible scheduling, and working at home, increases scheduling and/or workload burdens on coworkers, adds coordination problems for managers, and results in less face time at the workplace (Van Dyne et al., 2007), utilizing these benefits garners substantive support for the employee. The additional resources in the form of time, energy, and flexibility gained from utilization of benefits allow employees to perform well in both their paid work and other life roles (Hobföll, 1989, 2001). Hence, using flexibility options engenders benefits as well as costs, and our findings of null to positive promotion effects indicate that over time, the benefits to performance outweigh the costs of initial stigmatization.

The level of family role responsibilities is a significant moderator of the relationship between benefits utilization and promotion outcomes, however. When family role responsibilities are substantial, as in the case of mothers of young children or single parents, finding a way to perform well in multiple roles simultaneously is likely to be more important than worries about being stigmatized (Goffman, 1963) or sending a negative signal (Spence, 1973) at work. Mothers of young children experience greater work–family conflict than other demographic groups (Hill,

Yang, et al., 2004), because of gendered expectations that they will engage in highly involved parenting (Cha, 2010). For mothers of young children, use of flexibility benefits may activate stereotypes that they are relatively uncommitted to the workplace (Lyness & Judiesch, 2001). Our findings show that benefits utilization is either unrelated (flexible hours, compressed work week) or positively related (working at home) to subsequent promotions for mothers of young children. These findings suggest that flexibility benefits differ in the extent to which they generate sustained job performance over time (Hobföll, 1989, 2001) to override initial negative signals stigmatizing employees who utilize such benefits. Working at home in particular seems to benefit promotion for mothers of young children, perhaps because this option allows mothers to maximize their performance in both the parenting and employee roles.

For single parents, benefits utilization may validate stereotypes that they make poor life decisions and are therefore less capable of high job performance (Brush, 1997), and as such, they are more likely than other employees to be stigmatized for using flexibility benefits. Over time, utilization of flexibility benefits is negatively related to subsequent promotions for single parents of young children. These findings suggest that work-life interface benefits do not provide sufficient resources to single parents of young children to prepare them to take on the additional responsibilities associated with a promotion. It is possible that single parents with young children who utilize more work-life interface benefits do not seek promotion in the short term because they do not wish to add a more responsible job to an already demanding set of roles.

Study limitations

Like all research, this study has limitations, which must be considered when drawing inferences from the findings. Using Statistics Canada data, we had no control over the measures, and we were not able to examine the important outcome variables of work-family conflict and facilitation. The benefits of using this data set were the large sample size, the generalizability of the findings to the population, the inclusion of measures of utilization for several key work-life interface benefits, and the measurement of independent variables 1 year prior to the measurement of outcome variables, which minimized common methods bias. Also, the inclusion of a large number of employers enhanced the amount of variation in the data on employer practices compared with data collected from a single organization or a small number of organizations. The value of being able to use these data to link benefits utilization to the important outcome of promotions more than outweighs the lack of other outcome measures. Future research is needed to improve our understanding of the underlying mechanisms that cause the positive career effects of using work-life interface benefits.

Another limitation is our inability to determine how employees were granted work-life interface benefits with these data. Recent research has shown that employees actively negotiate with their supervisors for idiosyncratic work arrangements ("I-deals") (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2008). Little is known, however, about whether using benefits created through I-deals relates differently to subsequent promotions than benefits procured from formalized employer practices. Furthermore, norms regarding usage of work-life interface benefits in the specific workplace (Kossek et al., 2001; Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010) may influence the link between benefits usage and promotions. Future research could examine contextual factors at the organizational level as potential moderators of the relationship between using work-life interface benefits and career outcomes.

Implications for theory

Hobföll's (1989, 2001) COR theory suggests that using work-life interface benefits should be positively associated with subsequent promotions whereas Spence's (1973) signaling theory implies that the use of benefits will be negatively associated with subsequent promotion. These two predictions are only partially competing, and the findings of the present study are best interpreted by combining both theoretical perspectives. Specifically, career

outcomes seem to be determined by the extent to which the positive resource effects are stronger than or equivalent to negative signaling effects and sufficient to allow employees to take on the added job responsibilities associated with promotion. Hence, the promotion outcomes of using work–life interface benefits are best predicted by balancing the implications of COR theory against those of signaling theory.

A critical factor affecting this balance is time. Signaling theory (Spence, 1973) emphasizes the impact of heuristics on decision-makers in the absence of complete and unambiguous information. An employee's request for a flexibility accommodation can create ambiguity for a manager, who might begin to question the employee's commitment to the job or ability to handle multiple role demands effectively. Because flexibility arrangements provide the employee with time and energy resources to support sustained job performance, over time, ambiguity about the employee's commitment and competency declines. Our findings indicate that utilizing work–life flexibility benefits results in subsequent promotion, which implies sustained employee commitment and performance over time. Conceptually, these findings indicate that the ongoing support from work–life interface benefits enhances promotion probability by conserving and replenishing needed resources (Hobföll, 1989, 2001) over the long term. These long-term benefits outweigh the relatively short-term costs of stigmatization, which suggests that acquiring the resources needed for effective performance is more important to career outcomes than avoiding possible stigmatization by failing to use valuable benefits.

Gender moderates the relationship between using work–life flexibility benefits and subsequent promotion, indicating that gender needs to be considered in theorizing about work–life interface. Different flexibility options result in different outcomes, and these outcomes were consistent with a gender-role perspective (Gutek et al., 1991). Scheduling flexibility is more beneficial to fathers of young children, consistent with the gender-role argument that mothers' greater resource needs given their care-giving responsibilities are insufficiently met by this relatively modest employer offering. A compressed work week is also more beneficial to fathers than to mothers, perhaps because working longer days (but fewer of them) each week is more difficult for mothers, who are expected to engage in highly involved parenting (Cha, 2010). Working at home is more beneficial for mothers than for fathers, consistent with the assignment of care-giving and household tasks to women (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Cha, 2010).

Furthermore, our study can offer some insights into a configurational approach to human resources management. The configurational approach suggests that the bundle of practices offered at the organizational level can create a synergistic effect that is greater than the simple sum of individual practices (Delery & Doty, 1996). Little is known about how such synergistic effects are created, however. In other words, how each individual practice relates to the whole bundle has not been fully explored. Our findings of the significant effects of several individual benefits and combinations of different types of benefits make us speculate that the synergistic effect of a bundle of practices may result from a few benefits. In this sense, understanding individual benefits or individual human resource management practices is critical, and research in this regard should be valued.

An alternative speculation is that those non-significant individual benefits may not directly influence career advancement, but their existence may improve employee perceptions of the organizational climate for combining work and family (Kossek et al., 2001) and, consequently, increase the likelihood that employees will use the individual benefits that best fit their situation. Hence, the presence of a bundle of practices may facilitate the functioning of specific practices and may play an important role in enhancing organizational effectiveness. Therefore, another way of understanding synergistic effects is to distinguish the practices that have direct effects on an outcome from the practices that do not have a direct effect on an outcome but can improve the effectiveness of the whole bundle of practices through impacts on mediating or moderating factors such as climate, work attitudes, and motivation.

Finally, our study provides insights and future directions for research on careers. Our study shows that unlike practices that are directly intended for employee career advancement such as mentoring and training, other organizational practices more distally related to career outcomes may affect employee careers. This perspective offers a broader view for understanding career management. Future research could adopt a broader perspective on the organizational practices influencing career development to examine whether different sets of practices are most beneficial for women, men, single parents, and parents with partners.

Implications for practice

Work-life interface benefits improve attitudes, retention, and performance (Baltes et al., 1999; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007) for employees with many role demands, and our findings showed that using these benefits is positively associated with the chances of promotion for both women and men. These findings should help to assuage employee fears that using work-life interface benefits is a “career-limiting move” (Almer et al., 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Pleck, 1993). This study is the first longitudinal quantitative analysis to examine the impact of using work-life interface benefits on promotions, and we are heartened that the impact turns out to be positive. It appears that these benefits enhance promotion probability for employees, because of improved performance resulting from the reduction of strain from multiple role demands. The documented positive impact of work-life interface benefits on performance and job attitudes suggests that these benefits do help employees cope. Employers can encourage the career growth of workers with substantial role responsibilities outside of work by providing work-life interface options (Hill, Ferris, et al., 2004). Although providing this support might cause disruption for colleagues and managers, these accommodations provide work units with opportunities to learn new ways to work smarter, with the result that there is “less need to be there” for everyone (Van Dyne et al., 2007).

We examined seven types of work-life interface benefits offered by employers, considerably more than most empirical studies on this topic. As such, we were able to make comparisons between benefits to identify which practices are most effective. Our findings indicated that mothers of young children who work at home benefit in terms of career advancement. Fathers of young children benefit from flexible scheduling and use of a compressed work week. These findings support the value of providing a variety of substantive supports and allowing employees to choose those options that maximize performance both in the family and in the paid work role. The outcomes of providing work-life interface benefits are mutually beneficial in that the employer derives enhanced performance and the employee gains career advancement. Using flexibility options is less beneficial for single parents of young children, and these employer-provided benefits may simply be insufficient to prepare these employees to take on added responsibilities at work while their children are still young.

Conclusion

Using work-life interface benefits is not a career-limiting move. In fact, work-life interface benefits replenish employee resources in the form of time, energy, and motivation, and users of these benefits receive more promotions than their non-using counterparts. The support for sustained job commitment and performance over time provided by flexibility benefits appears to be more important to career outcomes than any initial negative stigma that might be attached to employees who request a work-life accommodation. Single parents benefit less from using work-life interface benefits than others, however, which suggests that the strain of multiple roles is more difficult for this group to overcome.

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Author biographies

Alison M. Konrad, PhD, is professor of Organizational Behavior and holder of the Corus Entertainment Chair in Women in Management at the Richard Ivey School of Business, University of Western Ontario. Her research focuses on organizational practices for enhancing diversity, inclusion, empowerment, and enhanced quality of life for a diverse set of organizational stakeholders.

Yang Yang, PhD, is a postdoctoral Fellow at the Management Department of the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests include workplace inclusivity, diversity initiatives, work–life balance, and human resource management.

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