Retention of Working Mothers

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Abstract:

This is a study of challenges facing professional woman in the development of work life balance after the birth of a child. In explores how such events can affect the employment status of mothers, as well the ability of firms to retain female talent. In particular it looks at how simple organizational changes, such as the including of flex-time and flex-place can affect retention, moral, and perceived work life balance

Women today desire to have it all: a successful career, spouse and children, but if women are unable to balance all three, the first thing they choose to give up is their career (Hewlett, 2002). Men on the other hand, seldom find themselves struggling to balance their family life with their careers. Even with the change in society of traditional domestic roles, women still end up carrying the main burden of making sure their children are taken care of while managing their own career and household responsibilities. Men only share in part of these responsibilities.

The bigger problem society faces today is retention of working mothers in organizations throughout the United States. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has reported many other countries offer superior parental leave and child-care provisions than the United States, which ultimately results in a higher number of women in the workforce. As mentioned previously, women want it all: children, career and a family; however, they struggle to balance everything because of the lack of flexibility in organizations, fear of not being able to sustain a successful career and fear of work-family conflict that can arise in the household.

Establishing Balance thru Flextime and Flex-place

Today, many working mothers are unable to balance the responsibilities of having a successful career, a spouse and children. Even though men share in part of the household responsibilities, the majority of the burden ends up falling on the women. If women are unable to balance all three, the first thing they choose to give up is their career because they do not have flexibility within their workplace. Women need flexibility in order to balance their work and home life so that work-family conflict does not arise. Work-family

conflict is "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Boyar et al., 2008, p. 216). In other words, working mothers are unable to balance the demands that come from the workplace with the pressures that result from the home, thus resulting in conflict between both domains. Once the working mothers utilize flexible work arrangements in order to resolve the work-family conflict that exists, the problem that needs to be addressed is whether or not the corporate culture has fully embraced flexibility and stigmatizes employees who are perceived as taking advantage of such programs.

The purpose of this study was to examine if Human Resources Managers can retain working mothers at a large consumer packaged goods company through flexible work arrangements such as Flextime and Flex-place. This study was limited to women with children. Flexible work arrangements (FWA) are generally defined as work options that permit flexibility in terms of *where* work is completed, often referred to as telecommuting or flex place and *when* work is completed, often referred to as flextime or scheduling flexibility (Rau & Hyland, 2002). Flex-place is also referred to as the virtual office where employees can essentially work anytime or anywhere with the help of telecommunication technologies.

This study also explores the meaning of culture within a specific CPG organization. The examination of culture is important to this study, because it is likely that women utilizing flexible work arrangements at the CPG Company would only remain at the company if the organizational culture supported work life balance. When organizations implement Work Life Balance programs such as flexible work

arrangements, Human Resource managers must promote them company wide, so that women do not feel looked down upon for utilizing them. Culture within an organization must accept work life balance initiatives so that women do not fear that their career will be in jeopardy. It is the responsibility of Human Resources managers to build a supportive work life balance culture for working mothers, so that they are able to utilize the flexible working arrangements implemented within their organization. Therefore the study is specifically concerned with answering the following:

- o Can Human Resources Managers retain working mothers at a large consumer packaged goods company through flexible work arrangements?

- o Can building a supportive work life balance culture help working mothers to utilize flexible work arrangements at a large consumer packaged goods company?

Evolution of Gender Roles in the United States

The following statistics would seem to suggest that women desire to change their roles in society and increases their participation in the workforce. According to the United States Census Bureau, the population of working women has increased from 14.8 million in 1967 to 43.2 million in 2009. For men, the population increased from 36.6 million in 1967 to 56.1 million in 2009 (U.S Census Bureau, 2009). This represents a 192% increase for women versus 53% for men. In addition, compared to the year 1950, today's labor force is comprised of older and more diverse individuals and is increasingly made up of women. First of all, the increase of women participating in the labor force went from 34% in 1950 to 60% in the year 2000. Secondly, Mitra Toossi's monthly labor review discovered that:

. . . the number of women in the labor force rose from 18 million in 1950 to 66 million in 2000, an annual growth rate of 2.6 percent. The share of women in the labor force grew from 30 % in 1950 to almost 47 % in 2000. Finally, the number of working women is projected to reach 92 million by 2050, which is based off an annual growth rate of 0.7 percent (Toossi, 2002, p. 15)

Psychological Health of New Mothers

In 2007, employment rates among mothers of infants was 55% and the majority of new mothers went back to work by the time their baby was three months old. The literature suggests that employment has many benefits, such as improving health and physical functioning for both men and women. However, for working mothers with young children, these workforce benefits are much less prevalent. Although employment for both men and women can be positive, it can also lead to conflict and additional stressors that can negatively impact an individual's health. This type of conflict occurs when work and family are combined. In addition, mothers that have younger children have greater work-family conflict than mothers of older children. Working mothers also face this type of conflict more so than working fathers. This is due to the fact that mothers are continuing to be the main caretakers of their family and manage parenting responsibilities, even though fathers have increased their participation with their children over the years (Marshall & Tracy, 2009, p. 380).

The main question that Marshall and Tracy (2009) investigated was which factors that contribute to create greater health risk for employed mothers of young children. Marshall and Tracy felt that it was vital to find out what happened when employment and

parenting were combined and how that grouping would affect mothers of infants. In their research experiment, four microsystems were analyzed: Paid work microsystem, family microsystem, child health microsystem and the work-family microsystem. Microsystems in the workplace can be defined as "face-to-face connections among individuals" (Marshall & Tracy, 2009, p. 381). Paid work microsystems can be described as how working conditions, job demands and worker control are related to the health and well-being of individuals. For example, women are vulnerable to the health effects of poor working conditions. Research has also shown that work-family conflict is associated with longer working hours and poorer health and well-being among working mothers of young children. Family microsystems are represented by family size as well as the existence of a partner or spouse. In regards to women's health, women with multiple children or women that were not married were more prone to experience depression. Moreover, when couples have multiple children, they struggle to balance both work and family domains because of the increased workloads at the home. Stress can be reduced in the household if the partners or husbands choose to help out with some of the domestic responsibilities. The third microsystem consists of young children's health where children experience illnesses such as ear infections, upper respiratory infections and gastrointestinal infections. These infections affect children the most at one year old and have a negative impact on working mothers. Working mothers' productivity tends to be affected as well because they either cannot focus while at work or they need to leave their job during the day to care for their sick child. Finally, the work-family microsystem is a combination of the paid work microsystem and the family microsystem, where the responsibilities from the work

microsystem interfere with accountabilities from the family microsystem. In the work-family microsystem, individuals result in both positive work-family gains as well as negative work-family conflict (Marshall & Tracy, 2009).

Why Women Can't Have It All

Over the past ten years, research has shown that many women end up achieving success within their careers, but this does not necessarily mean that they are happy. Their unhappiness is due to the fact that many women do not end up having children, which is not by their own choice. Statistics show that in the United States, by the middle of a woman's life, between a third and a half of all wealthy career women do not have children. According to Hewlett (2002), "33% of women such as, business executives, doctors, lawyers and academics in the 41-to-55 age bracket are childless. In corporate America, 42% of women are childless" (p. 2). Countless women desire children so much that they go to extraordinary medical measures in order to experience the joy that comes with parenthood. The question that needs to be examined is why high-achieving women must struggle to have children in society? Hewlett surveyed high-earning men and women in January 2001. Hewlett focused on two age groups: younger generation, age 28 to 40 and the older generation, age 41 to 55. She only targeted the top ten percent of high-earning women. High-achieving men were also involved in the survey, but only a small sample of them. For her research, she differentiated between women who earned more than $55,000 in the younger generation and $65,000 in the older generation. After the survey was conducted Hewlett discovered that many high-earning women do not end

up having children because of the struggle it takes when women try to have children later in life due to possible infertility. Moreover, women do not end up having children because their careers become too demanding for them to handle. In addition, they may end up without children as a result of the struggle that takes place between the male and female relationships, or in other words, the conflict that occurs between men and women in the household. For example, many women do not want to give up a certain lifestyle. Women also do not want to have to juggle household responsibilities because they feel as though they will be the primary caretakers versus the men sharing in the responsibilities. Therefore, in order for women to start achieving everything they desire - careers, family and children - businesses must realize how much it costs for them to lose highly educated women whey they go to start their families. Women can also request more from their partners and discuss with them that it should not be the sole responsibility of the mother to care for the child and household, but it is an equal partnership.

Sheryl Sandberg

A primary example of a high-achieving woman who stands for equal partnerships is Facebook's Chief Operating Officer, Sheryl Sandberg. She published the book *Lean In* where she talks about how she is able to balance both her work and family. She further expressed how women should learn to speak up at the workplace, move forward and take ownership of their own careers and ensure they end up marrying a man who will support their career. In one of Sandberg's chapters in her book titled *Make your partner a real partner*, she states that out of twenty-eight women who have served as CEO's to Fortune 500 companies, twenty-six were married, one was divorced and only one of them never

got married . She talks about the stereotypical *designated parent* where one of the parents, normally the woman, ends up taking care of all the childcare responsibilities (Sandberg, 2013).

Hewlett and Sandberg share several commonalities where they discuss how women have to deal with many hardships that men never have to face. The main problem is that men do not have to deal with choosing career over family. Hewlett (2002) found that when a man is successful he is most likely guaranteed to marry and have children. Women, on the other hand, remain childless if they choose to have a successful career.

Another hardship women encounter over men is trying to catch up in their career if they do choose to have children. What this means is that many women choose to either stop working for several years when their children are younger or choose to take on a part time job so that they have the flexibility they need in order to care for their children. This break in working mothers' full time employment explains why a wage gap exists between men and women, especially in the United States. By the time women enter the workforce again, they end up starting at a salary that is substantially lower than their male counterparts. "[In] France, women earn 81% of the male wage, in Sweden 84%, in Australia 88% while in the United States, women earned 78% of the male wage" (Hewlett, 2002, p. 4). This suggests the existence of the wage gap between men and women is a result of workplaces not supporting working mothers

Work Life Balance

The workplace has undergone momentous changes since the 1990's. The first

change was that corporate downsizing forced the traditional employment contract to change. The second change was the increased use of part-time and temporary workers in organizations. The third and final change was that because there are greater numbers of women in the labor force, the result was increased levels of conflict between work and family life. As a result of these changes in the workplace, companies needed to look at their organization as a whole and assess the types of strategies that were needed to retain their employees. With the help of human resources, many organizations are choosing to develop and implement practices that speak to work/life balance (WLB). In an effort to recruit, motivate and retain highly valued employees, it is imperative that human resources managers develop work life balance strategies that help their employees manage their hectic day-to-day lives. Organizations do not want their working mothers to choose to leave their current employer in the highly competitive market that exists today.

Why Support Work-Life Balance?

In order to develop a supportive work-life/family culture, human resources managers must prove that work life balance programs have a positive impact on their organization. Most people believe that work life balance programs only keep employees from leaving their current organization because of the flexibility to accommodate personal lifestyles. However, work life balance programs are also proven to make organizations more profitable and contribute to the well-being of each and every employee. There have been multiple studies conducted on work life balance programs that reported higher levels of perceived organizational performance and productivity in organizations. Moreover, organizations face a deficit when they have high turnover rates and withdrawal from their

employees.   Turnover can often be a result of the conflict that occurs between an employee's work and family life.   Therefore, work life balance programs can benefit organizations by retaining the highly regarded employees that have been recruited and trained by the talent acquisition teams.   These programs will also help to decrease withdrawal behaviors that lessen the value of investments in employees, such as absenteeism, lateness and reduced work effort.   However, some work life balance policies do not have a direct positive benefit on company's' profits.   Therefore, HR Managers must choose wisely when implementing work life balance programs.   They need to examine the type of population that exists within their organization and choose to implement the WLB programs they know will help to keep productivity high.   It is not just about implementing programs that will retain employees and keep them satisfied, but it is about choosing the right practices that will motivate employees to perform at high levels within their organization.   At the end of the day, work life balance programs need to continue to be cost effective so that the company is still profitable.

Even though work life balance policies exist within organizations, research has found that they are not the only factor for reducing work-family conflict and absenteeism. Organizations do not take into consideration that Human Resources managers should be promoting an organizational culture where employees and managers support one another so that working mothers do not fear they will have to suffer career consequences when utilizing WLB programs.   In other words, Human Resources managers should develop a supportive work-family culture within their organization.   When a supportive work-family culture exists, working mothers are more likely to utilize the family-friendly benefits such

as flextime and flex-place. In order to promote a supportive work-family culture within

their organization as well as understand why working mothers may not utilize such WLB

programs, Human Resources managers must understand four dimensions: managerial

support, career consequences, organizational time demands and gender related perception.

The first dimension, managerial support, is one of the most important components

of work-family culture because managers can be responsible for either encouraging

working mothers or discouraging them to utilize work life balance programs. The second

dimension of a supportive work-family culture is understanding the perception of career

consequences when working mothers utilize WLB programs. The third dimension,

organizational time demands, refers to the amount of hours employees are supposed to

dedicate to the workplace. The final dimension of a supportive work-family culture is

gender perception. As mentioned previously, the existence of the wage gap between men

and women is a result of workplaces not supporting working mothers. Many women feel

that they will essentially *lose out* if they choose to utilize the WLB programs, so instead

they stop working until their children are older or take a job opportunity that is less

demanding. However, one component organizations fail to recognize is that work-

life/family policies are not necessarily gender-neutral. The majority of these programs

are geared towards mothers' working conditions. The data would seem to indicate that

"women with dependent children have been the largest demographic group to use WLB

programs. Women have greater personal experience than men in dealing with WLB

issues and are more likely than men to take priority" (Wei, Yili, & Tian, 2013, p. 107).

Men are also pegged as the *breadwinners* and typically pursue job opportunities with

long hours, travel and demanding responsibilities. This stereotypical difference between men and women also affects how much men utilize WLB programs. Therefore, Sheryl Sandberg was would indeed seem to be correct when she stated, *Make your partner a real partner*. If both partners supported one another in regards to working and taking care of family responsibilities, they would both have opportunities to utilize the WLB programs. Finally, there would also be a decrease in the wage gap between men and women because women would have less of a desire to stop working and/or take on part-time roles.

Introduction to Flexible Work Arrangements

Allen, Johnson, Kiburz and Shockley define that "Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA) are work options that permit flexibility in terms of "where" work is completed (often referred to as telecommuting or flex-place) and/or "when" work is completed (often referred to as flextime or scheduling flexibility)" (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013, p. 345). Flexible work arrangements assist employees in organizing work and non-work related responsibilities and are extremely successful in attracting, motivating and retaining top talent within an organization. There are five main categories that exist for flexible work arrangements: part-time work, job sharing, telecommuting and the virtual office, compressed working hours and flexible working hours.

Flextime

The average company operates five days a week from Monday to Friday where employees typically work through a five-day workweek. In addition, standard company hours for employees consist of a 9:00am to 5:00pm schedule. The first category of

flextime is compressed work weeks where employees are able to work fewer work days but work longer hours. Compressed workweeks offer several advantages to employees. First of all, employees' commute to work can be reduced significantly. Secondly, when employees work a compressed workweek, they are working longer hours per day. Therefore, an organization's operating hours can be extended, which ultimately provides better services to customers and assists businesses in increasing their profitability. This is especially true for companies in the United States that do business with companies overseas. The next advantage of compressed workweeks is improving employees' quality of life. Thousands of employees commute about an hour or more to work every day. According to a University of California/Irvine professor, "there is a positive correlation between commuting and blood pressure, and commuting leads to such negative effects as lowered ability to concentrate and to tolerate frustration. Compressed workweeks help to reduce the emotional and physical stress of commuting" (Hung, 1995, p. 6). Finally, an organization's operation may improve by the implementation of compressed workweeks. When employees are happier about their work schedule, their morale tends to be higher and they will have the desire to work harder, thus increasing their levels of productivity. Moreover, tardiness and absenteeism will decrease as well.

In addition to compressed workweeks, flexible working hours is the other type of flextime that exists in organizations. Flexible working hours is where employees adjust their hours throughout the workday and step outside of the core 9–5 work schedule. As long as employees work 40 hours per week, they can flex their schedule to accommodate their lifestyle. For example, if a working mother needs to pick up her child at a daycare

facility, she may flex her work schedule to 8:00am – 4:00pm. She is still working eight

hours per day and with this schedule, this working mother will maintain her 40-hour per

week schedule.

Flex-place

Flex-place is known as telecommuting or *telework* in organizations where

employees can utilize telecommunication technologies so that employees can complete

their work responsibilities away from their workplace. Telecommuting normally occurs

in an employee's home, however, another remote location where an employee may

choose to work is a coffee shop. These specific locations away from the workplace are

known as the *virtual office*. Since the 1990s, companies have tried to increase employee

productivity and decrease costs through the use of telecommuting as a business practice.

This is due to the increase in the number of teleworkers, which has grown to

approximately 11.1 million in the last decade.

Marissa Mayer

Many organizations now require the use of telecommuting due to the need for

work-life balance, especially for working mothers. Yahoo's CEO, Marissa Mayer, is

against promoting telecommuting in her corporation and is not a prime example to other

organizations desiring to implement flexible work arrangements. Marissa became the

CEO of Yahoo in 2012 while she was five months pregnant. Yahoo working mothers

were extremely excited because they thought she would promote a family-friendly

culture throughout the workplace. After Marissa gave birth to her child, she came back

to work shortly thereafter, only taking two weeks off and installing a nursery right next to her office. Directly after the birth of her child, Marissa sent out a memo to all employees banning workplace flexibility, which outraged working mothers. According to the annual 100 Best Companies for Working Mothers survey, "Women need flexible work options, like telecommuting, for child care as well as elder care, managing chronic illnesses or other personal matters. The 2012 Top 10 list Bank of America, Ernst & Young and IBM are among the country's most flexible companies for families" (Pesce, 2013, para. 8). In addition to this survey, Fortune's top one 100 companies to work for shows Google as their number one company to work for.

To argue against Marissa Mayer, the solution is not to ban telecommuting altogether; however, companies also must not allow working mothers to potentially telecommute five days a week away from the office. It is understandable that managers believe that employees can be more creative if they have direct contact with their peers in an office, over coffee or over breakfast. However, CEOs like Marissa Mayer should be able to work with their Human Resources leadership teams to find a happy medium where employees do not abuse flexible work arrangements and work from home a day or two per week to keep both parties satisfied. At the end of the day not all positions and employees can have the full flexibility to telecommute five days a week away from the office.

Work Life Balance for Countries in the OECD

Women's roles have also changed in other countries outside the United States. To adapt to the increase of women in the workforce, other countries are offering both

maternity and paternity leave for mothers and fathers of new infants. The main

difference between benefit offerings to new parents between the United States and

countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is

that the United States does not offer paid paternity leave to new fathers. Working

mothers in the United States struggle with the burden of work and childcare, whereas it is

more of a shared responsibility outside the U.S.

The United States provides women with twelve weeks of unpaid maternity leave

as a result of the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act. However, the one caveat is that

companies must have fifty or more employees in order to offer maternity leave to their

women. Norway and Sweden offer both paid maternity leave as well as paid paternity

leave. Specifically for paternity leave, Norway offers up to fourteen weeks paternity

leave and twelve weeks paid leave. Sweden offers up to ten weeks paternity leave and

eight weeks paid leave.

Even though the United States does not offer paternity leave to its employees, it

still has the highest percentage of women in senior management positions of any country

in the OECD. Work life balance is necessary in the United States because women are far

more likely to work full time than in other developed countries. Cornell University

economists Francine Blau and Lawrence Kahn conducted a survey and discovered that

"American women are as likely as American men to be company managers, while

women in the researchers' comparison group of 10 other developed countries were only

half as likely as men to have made it that far" (Hymowitz, 2013, p. 2). Blau and Kahn

uncovered that women in the United States take 47% overall share of the U.S. labor force

which is extremely close to the 43% for women in senior management positions.

Furthermore, in regards to gender equality, the United States is ahead of countries in the

OECD. The World Economic Forum ranks the U.S. eighth in opportunity and economic

participation ahead of the following countries: Iceland, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands

and Sweden (OECD, 2012).

Survey Results

The following are the results of a survey administered at a large consumer

packaged goods company in the northeastern United States.

Question 1: I utilize flextime at [Company Name] throughout my workweek.
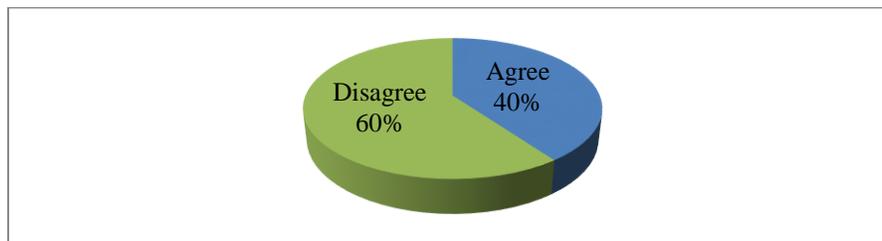
Question 2: I utilize flex-place at [Company Name] throughout the workweek.
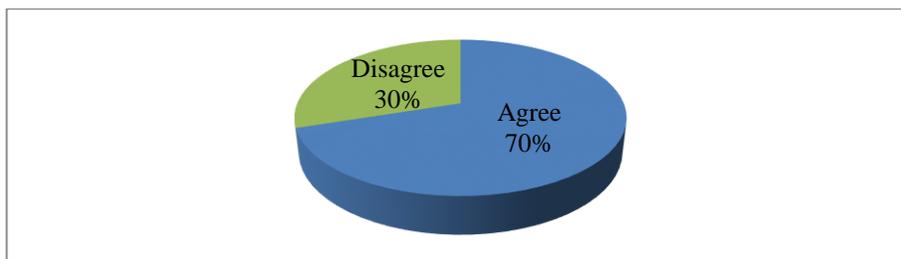
Question 3: If [Company Name] did not allow me to utilize flextime and/or flex-place, I would not remain at [Company Name].
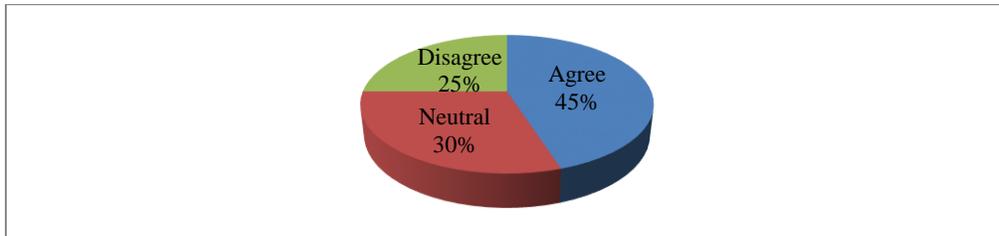

Question 4: [Company Name]'s flextime and flex-place makes a difference in my personal well-being.
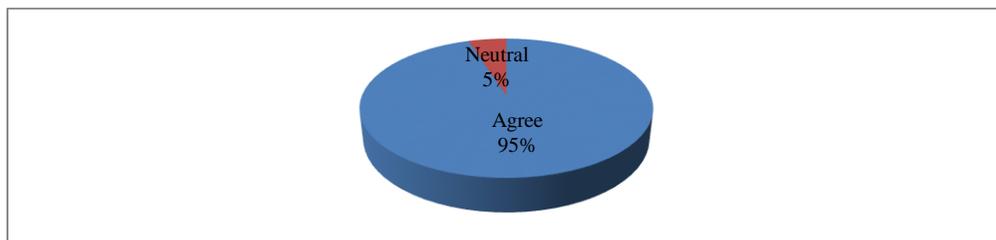

Question 5: I have no *work-life balance* if [Company Name] does not allow me to utilize flextime and/or flex-place.
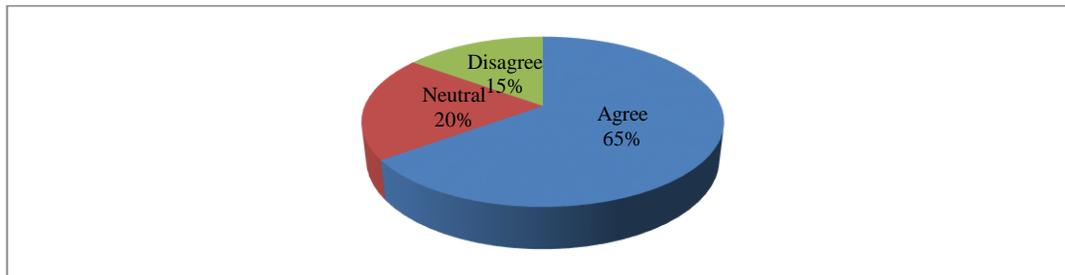

**Question 6: I am satisfied with [Company Name]'s maternity leave policy.**
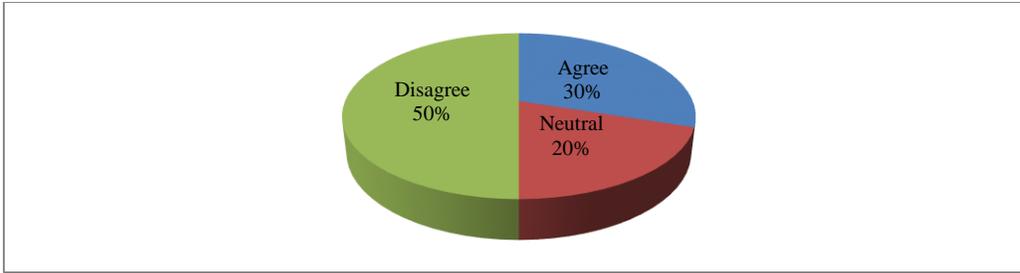
**Question 7: My income makes a significant difference in my family's well-being.**
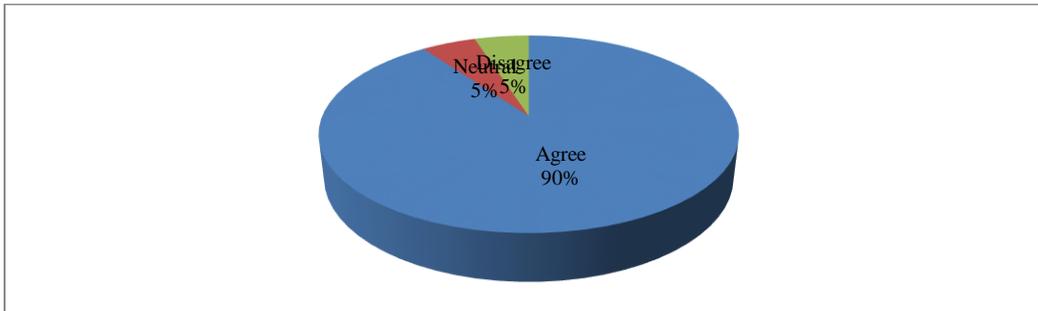
Question 8: I am married and/or living with a partner.
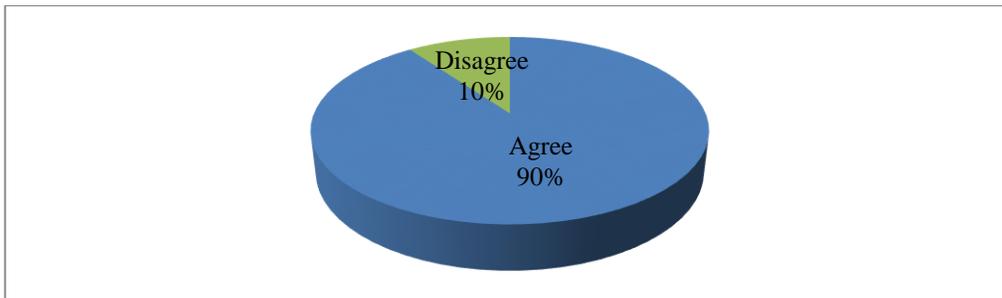
Question 9: I have more than one child.
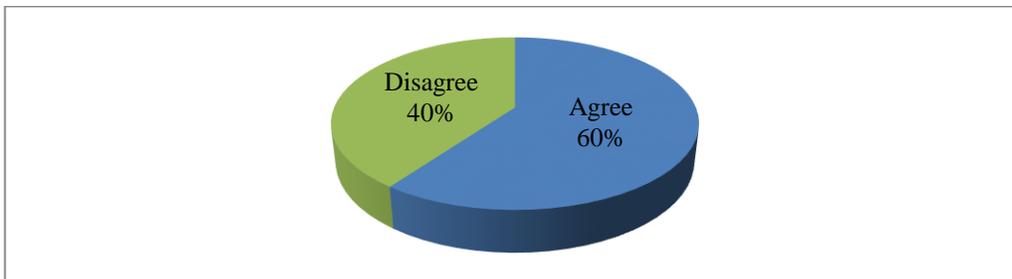
Question 10: I have a child/children under the age of five.
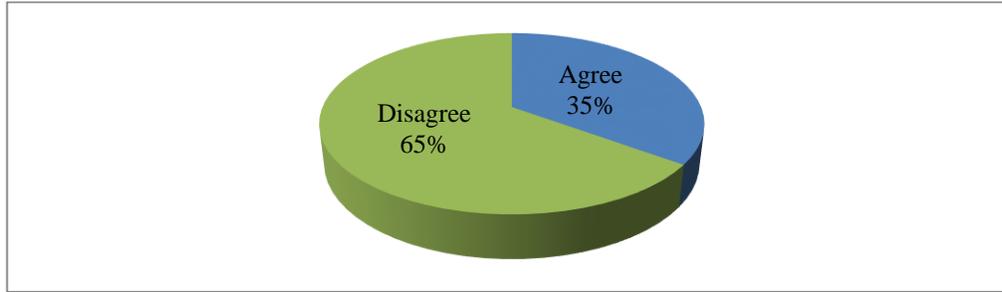
Question 11: All of my dependent children between the ages of 1 to 14 attend school

full time.
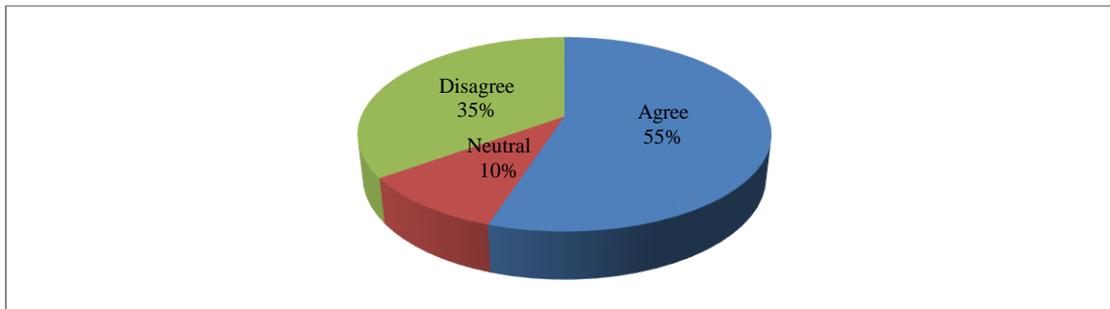
Conclusion

The survey administered by the author affirmed the two research questions to be true: human resources managers can retain working mothers at a large consumer packaged goods company through flexible work arrangements and building a supportive work life balance culture helps working mothers to utilize flexible work arrangements at a large consumer packaged goods company. More specifically, the data suggests through the survey results that human resources managers can be truly successful in retention of working mothers at a large consumer packaged goods company through flex-place such as Telecommuting and the Virtual Office. Moreover, even though the data suggests that

building a supportive work-life/family culture does in fact help working mothers to utilize flexible work arrangements at a large consumer packaged goods company, The assumption that my CPG company does not promote a supportive culture proved to be false. The CPG company's programs are effective in creating a culture that would permit a work life balance to exist. In fact 65% of working mothers agreed that the CPG company fosters a culture where they feel comfortable enough to take advantage of their flexible work arrangements. Additionally, it is reasonable to conclude that the that working mothers utilizing flexible work arrangements at the CPG company would only remain at the company if the organizational culture supported work life balance. This assumption was supported by question three from the survey results where 45% of working mothers agreed that if the CPG company did not allow them to utilize flextime and/or flex-place, they would not remain at the company.

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