



PhD thesis

Beyond work-family conflict: work-life balance supports for employees with differing family structures

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Beyond Work-*Family* Conflict: Work-Life Balance Supports for Employees with Differing Family Structures

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Work-life balance can be defined in a variety of ways. The most prevalent model asserts that when an individual faces competing demands amongst roles it leads to conflict between roles. Research has focused on work-family conflict. The focus on 'family' has meant that research has largely focused on employees with children. A lack of UK based research has examined work-life balance experiences of those from a range of family structures. This includes perceptions of supports for work-life balance. Flexible working is one of the main supports. In the UK the right to request flexible working policy was extended in 2014 from parents and carers to all employees, so examining perceptions of fairness in relation to employees with differing family structures is particularly pertinent in light of this. Therefore, this research aimed to examine perceptions of supports for work-life balance, in particular the extension to the right to request flexible working, from the perspective of Human Resources (HR) and line managers and employees. It also explored the work-life balance experiences of employees with differing family structures, including work-personal life conflict, enrichment and boundary management. In study 1, HR managers and line managers were interviewed. They claimed they were already going beyond the right to request legislation prior to 2014 and that their workplaces were supportive. They could see benefits to the change in legislation, such as it being fairer to all employees. They also saw some barriers, such as the potential for value judgments to be made when considering requests, with employees without children possibly seen as having less legitimate reasons. In study 2, employees were interviewed. Differences in work-life balance experiences and the use of sources of support from work and outside of work were reported across employees with differing family structures. However, the vast majority recounted difficulties with work-personal life conflict and boundary management and reported guilt and self-blame for this, and few experiences of work-personal life enrichment were reported. While they felt the extension of the right to request was fair, contradictory responses suggested parents may be perceived as having a greater need. In study 3, findings from a quantitative survey showed minimal differences between employees with and without children. Work demands was a key predictor of both work-personal life conflict and personal life-work conflict. Resources, such as support and fairness perceptions were not predictors of reduced conflict. However, manager support and fairness perceptions (in terms of the availability of work-life balance supports) predicted work-personal life enrichment and being male predicted personal life-work enrichment. The results contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of work-life balance that includes the experiences of single people who live alone, and couples without children, as well as those with children. The findings have implications for managers to ensure fairness in their processes and to aid in establishing a healthy workplace culture that minimises work demands and work-personal life conflict. The implications for employees are to consider boundary management approaches which may help reduce work-personal life conflict. Future research should include an even more inclusive and diverse sample.

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In loving memory of Gran

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Chapter 1. Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will review the literature surrounding work-life balance. It will first examine the complexities surrounding the definition of work-life balance followed by a discussion of the theories and models of work-life balance. Issues with the conceptualisation and the focus on ‘family’ within research exploring work-life balance will be discussed, particularly the dearth of research exploring the experiences of those with different family structures. A key component of this thesis is the policy context, so flexible working, the extension to the right to request flexible working, and perceptions of fairness of work-life balance policies and supports will then be discussed. The antecedents of work-personal life conflict and enrichment will then be explored, drawing on the job demands-resources model of work stress. Much of the data collected for this research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the aim was, therefore, not to examine work-life balance and flexible working in light of the pandemic. Thus, most of this literature review focuses on research that is not explicitly linked to the impact of the pandemic. However, there is a dedicated section exploring the impact of the pandemic towards the end of this review. Finally, the overall aims of this programme of research and the research questions for each of the three studies will be outlined, followed by a discussion of the use of mixed methods within this thesis.

1.2 Defining work-life balance.

According to Wong and Ko (2009) there is no universally accepted definition of work-life balance and one of the reasons behind this may be the ever-changing social, economic and legislative conditions in different countries. Historically, studies have tended to focus on working parents or those with caring responsibilities, and thus difficulties in managing work

and family, often focusing on work-family conflict which can be described as a specific form of role conflict when ‘the pressures from the work (family) role are not compatible with pressures from the family (work) role’ (Allen & Armstrong 2006, p.77). Although some studies have adopted the term “work-life” balance, it does not necessarily mean that studies have explored issues for those with non-traditional family structures and have explored the broader conceptualisation including for example, those without families, single people and couples without children (Crooker et al., 2002).

However, the term “work-life balance” may help to move away from the traditional focus on work-family conflict in working parents to a broader term which encompasses a wider and inclusive group of employees, and therefore includes a wider array of non-work roles which includes social, religious, community and leisure activities including hobbies and sports (DfEE 2000; James, 2011). Adopting this term is not without its drawbacks, as “balance” implies an equal weight on either side and implies there should be an equal amount of work and non-work activities to achieve perfect balance (Guest, 2002). Guest (2002) also argues there is a need to be careful with the terms “work” and “life”. According to Guest, “work” can be defined as paid employment and “life” as the activities outside of work, but this also holds its own issues as sometimes individuals may be working but not being paid (e.g. to meet deadlines outside of work, commuting times related to work). The use of the term ‘life’ also implies that work is not part of life, so perhaps work-non work or work-personal life balance (or conflict) would be more appropriate.

In a review of literature, Kalliath and Brough (2008) examined the definition of work-life balance further and concluded no definition existed which met the accepted criteria of construct validity. The paper examined six definitions of work-life balance, each defined as slight

variations to the constituents of work life balance i.e. (1) work-life balance defined as multiple roles, (2) equity across multiple roles (3) satisfaction across multiple roles, (4) fulfilment of role salience between different roles i.e. being able to focus on the roles perceived to be most important, (5) the relationship between conflict and facilitation (i.e. where roles facilitate each other rather than conflict) and (6) the perceived control between multiple roles. In a comparison between the definitions, the authors concluded work-life balance should be defined as “the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual’s current life priorities” (Kalliath & Brough, 2008, p.326). Similarly, McMillan, Morris and Atchley (2011) recognise in their paper that the phrase means many different things to different people and have explored a multitude of definitions. For example, they explored the traditional view of Frone (2003, p.143) who defines it as a “lack of conflict or interference between work and family roles” and the view of Greenhaus et al. (2003, p.513) who defined it as the “extent to which an individual is equally engaged in and equally satisfied with his or her work or family role”. More recently, Brough et al., (2020) highlighted that a previously overlooked domain approach proposed by Casper et al., (2018) may be another way to define work-life balance. Casper et al., (2018) claim that work-life balance includes three domains; affect (emotional), effectiveness (sense of success) and involvement, and that these are instrumental in contributing to a sense of balance between work and non-work life.

Haar (2013, p.4) who conducted research on a sample not limited to parents, defined work- life balance as the “extent to which an individual is able to adequately manage the multiple roles in life including work, family and other major responsibilities”. For some this could be work and family only, but for others it may be work and sports or community and church, or any other non-work roles they may have. To summarise, there is a need to understand the

complexities and implications of using the term “work-life balance”, but it is the complexities, which allow for the debate on this matter (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Focusing on the definition can itself be problematic, but since this programme of research focuses on employees with and without a partner, and with and without children, it would be best to work with the definition which was provided by Haar (2013) as this includes managing roles, but is not focused just on work and family.

1.3 Theories in the field of work-life balance

When exploring the area of work-life balance it is crucial to explore the frameworks which underpin this concept. However, research in this area does not always explicitly refer to conceptual frameworks (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Additionally, researchers have tried and failed to find a single model (Higgins, Duxbury & Irving, 1992). Although not widely discussed, according to O’Driscoll (1996) and Guest (2002), the following five models can be used to explain the relationship between work, and life outside of work: the segmentation model, the compensation model, the instrumental model, the spillover model and the conflict model.

According to the *segmentation* model, work and non-work are two distinct domains which hold no influence on each other, and are lived as two separate entities; however, this can be considered as a theoretical possibility, rather than a model with empirical support (Guest, 2002). It has been developed from its earlier description, and if mentioned in current research, it refers to the process individuals employ to create boundaries around their work and family lives (Schultz & Higbee, 2010). This is different to the original description of segmentation, as current research recognises the influence one domain has on the other, and the blurring of boundaries which can occur, which will be discussed later. The *compensation* model on the

other hand, proposes that when something is lacking in one domain it can be made up for in the other (Guest, 2002). It has been argued that this can be divided into two categories; supplemental compensation, which refers to a lack of positive experiences at work being pursued at home or vice versa, whereas reactive compensation is where negative experiences are made up for in positive home experiences or vice versa (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). Conversely, Clark (2000) argues that the compensation model does not explain, predict or help to solve problems for those balancing work and non-work responsibilities and can be considered as limited in terms of usefulness. This is due to the purely theoretical nature of this model, a view echoed by Zedeck (1992) who claims that this theory only has a limited focus and misses the intricacies involved in work-life balance, such as the relationships between employees and their families and work colleagues and the way individuals hold their own abilities to create their own boundaries. The *instrumental* model states that activities in one sphere will facilitate success in the other domain; an example of this model would be an individual who is willing to embark on a tedious job and seek to work long hours, so that they can earn money required to purchase a new home (Guest, 2002). These three models are now rarely referenced in research as Hislop (2008) concludes it is not clear how segmentation, compensation and the instrumental model differ whereas the spillover and conflict models, which will be discussed below, remain more commonly cited in research.

According to the spillover model, spillover can be classified as positive or negative. An example of positive spillover would be when positive experiences from one domain crossover to the other, such as positive feelings crossing over to promote better performance at work, or negative spillover which is where negative experiences can interfere with role performance (Hanson, Hammer & Colton, 2006). Spillover, which is bi-directional in nature, can be further divided into three subsections; values (importance of work and family), affect (mood and

satisfaction), and skills (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). However, some have argued that the spillover model can be considered as too basic or simplistic to capture the complexities associated with the relationship between work and family life (Madsen & Hammond, 2005). Thus, the *conflict model* remains more popular and provides a considerably detailed framework compared to other models (Madsen & Hammond, 2005).

The conflict model is rooted in role theory, and work-family research has frequently used role theory as the theoretical background of work-family conflict research. According to role theory, family and work each have their own roles such as father and manager, and these roles have their own expectations (from others) as to what is appropriate behaviour for those roles, and if there is a discrepancy between others expectations and self-expectations within the domain, it can lead to strain (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). The conflict model which is rooted within role theory states that when an individual faces competing demands amongst roles, it can result in high levels of conflict and possibly overload (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). There is increasing pressure to meet demands, however the abilities to meet these demands are limited and time is finite (Goode, 1960). Carlson, Kacmar and Williams (2000) assert there are three types of conflict, time-based, strain based, and behaviour based, and these are bi-directional in nature. Time based conflict can occur when time devoted to one role makes it difficult to participate in another role. Strain based conflict can occur when the strain in one role interferes with or intrudes on participation in another role. Behaviour based conflict occurs when specific behaviours which are required in one role are incompatible with the behavioural expectation in another role. Gutek (1991) argued that each type of conflict has two directions, conflict from family interfering with work and conflict from work interfering with family which creates six dimensions. Carlson, Kacmar and Williams' (2000) scale (with 6 subscales) captures the bi-directionality and the three components they propose

(time, strain and behaviour). Although there is much support for this scale (Matthews et al., 2010), there is criticism that many scales do not capture the multidimensional element (Matthews, Kath, Barnes and Farell, 2010) and the focus of this measure is work and *family* (Netmeyer, Boles & McMurrian, 1996). Other scales such as the scale developed by Fisher, Bulger, and Smith (2009) are bi-directional, but focus instead on work and personal life, and thus are more inclusive of people with and without partners and/or children.

The conflict model is the most commonly used approach, as it can be argued that models such as the segmentation model see work and family as two separate concepts, and domains such as community are excluded (Voydanoff, 2005). Although the conflict model can be considered as one of the most cited models, there is no single prevailing framework, and no perspective is universally accepted (Moen, Kelly, & Huang, 2008), with research in this area considered as challenged by a lack of “commonly accepted basic language” (Pitt-Catsouphe et al., 2006, p.362). This may be due to the numerous theories that are used to conceptualise the interrelationships between work and family life with no attempt to consider which are the most prominent in the field (Fine & Fincham, 2013).

Furthermore, a criticism of traditional work-family conflict research was that it did not consider the potential for a positive side to combining work and non-work life, so more recently, research has begun also focusing on enrichment or facilitation. The concept of enrichment can be defined as “when the experiences in one role improve the quality of life for the individual in another role” (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006, p.73). It is becoming more widespread in research as not only does it focus on the conflict experience, but also the positive nature of work and home life, and the benefits which may arise from this multiple role participation. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) developed a model of enrichment in which resources including skills,

perspectives, flexibility, psychological and physical social capital and material resources from one role improve performance in the other role either directly (instrumental path) or indirectly through their influence on positive affect (affective path).

A different term which is used, often interchangeably with enrichment is facilitation. Shien and Chen (2011) state the key difference between enrichment and facilitation is the level of analysis. Enrichment emphasises positive outcomes in terms of the individual and facilitation emphasises positive outcomes in terms of the functioning of the entire system. It is argued by Carlson et al. (2006) that work-family enrichment is distinct from other positive constructs of work and family, as they argue there are other terms such as enhancement which can be defined as the “acquisition of resources or experiences that are beneficial for individuals facing life challenges” (Sieber, 1974 p.568). This differs from enrichment as enrichment focuses on enhanced role performance in one domain as a function of resources gained from another. Another positive term is positive spillover, and the basic notion of this is that “moods, skills, values and behaviours from one domain are transferred to another domain in ways that make the two domains similar” (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000, p.180). Carlson et al. (2006) said this differs from enrichment as it states that experiences can be transferred, unlike enrichment which states that experiences in one domain can improve performance in the other. Carlson et al. (2006) see facilitation as the most similar to enrichment, with the only difference lying in the level of measurement as stated earlier e.g. enrichment is when the positive experiences from home enhance the performance at work whereas facilitation would state that this positive experience will help the workgroup or supervisor relations.

Carlson et al. (2006) claim the differences are subtle between enrichment and facilitation but at the same time capture the complexities associated with work-family research. However,

according to Carlson et al. (2006, p.134) the confusion and lack of clarity regarding the positive terms of work and family life has led to a situation of a “conceptual and measurement hodgepodge”. With some even arguing that when referring to the positive aspects of the work-life interface, enrichment and facilitation are simply synonyms (McMillan et al., 2011; Frone 2003). Consequently, previous measurements, such as Greenhaus and Powell using items which were measuring positive spillover, did not fit the conceptual definition of enrichment. Due to these reasons, Carlson et al. (2006) developed a bi-directional scale to measure work family enrichment. It is claimed that unlike previous measures of the positive aspects of work and family, this measure considers the multidimensional nature, is bi-directional, whilst also capturing the complexities of the construct. However, similarly to their conflict scale, the focus is on family, and such scales are lengthy at 18 items. In contrast Fisher, Bulger, and Smith (2009) developed a bi-directional measure that focuses instead on work and personal life, and this is more inclusive of people with and without partners and/or children. Much research on enrichment is quantitative but, for example, a study using an ethnographic approach explored both conflict and enrichment amongst a sample in Norway (Loevhoeiden, Yap & Ineson, 2011). The authors found that middle managers used resources from their work to help them with their home lives, and team building work activities actively enhanced mood which helped them with their attitude towards family life too. Similar results were found by Poppleton, Briner and Kiefer (2008) by employing diary methods.

Overall, enrichment and facilitation are often used interchangeably to describe how family and work can benefit each other, and in research, the distinction is often not clear, as they are all considered positive constructs.

While focusing on the positive side of combining work and non-work roles has been a step forward, the focus on time in mainstream, generally quantitative work-family conflict research has been criticised. Time based conflict is considered the most prevalent form of conflict (Hammer & Thompson, 2003). However, Thompson and Bunderson (2001) argued that work-non work conflict is a function of the phenomenology of time. This approach does not deny that there are objective time constraints but complements the focus of much work-family conflict research by arguing that the subjective meaning of time is more important than the hours worked, and individuals may experience work in different ways even though they work the same number of hours. In other words, if an employee believes the time spent at work is meaningful, they will feel a sense of personal satisfaction, so work time can mean different things to different people. For some, work time may be ‘passionate commitment’ or ‘carefree entertainment’, whereas for others it may be ‘resented obligations’ or ‘aimless puttering’. The other key aspects of Thomson and Bunderson’s theory are the roles of identity, having control of work-life activities and the time spent in ‘identity affirming’ activities. For example, Thomson and Bunderson (2001) put forward the notion of the “anchor identity” in which it is argued that the salience which is attributed to the role i.e. centrality of the role to identity is one of the factors which help explain conflict. It is argued that work-and non-work roles are not equals but one may appear more salient than the other. It is argued that conflict arises when the identity of an individual is anchored to one particular role, but the individual is forced to spend time in the alternative role. The authors argue that this is rarely discussed as the focus of theories of work-life balance has been on the time or demands associated with different roles.

Thomson and Bunderson’s work built upon *Boundary theory* which was developed by Nippert-Eng (1996) which states that we create boundaries around our work and personal lives and this can be to either keep them separate or for the purposes of merging, and it is this construction

which allows for segmentation or integration which depends on various factors which include, but are not limited to, family members and co-workers. *Border theory*, which is very similar was proposed by Clark (2000) who argued that individuals actively create boundaries which vary in their strength. Both theories suggest that the strength of the boundary can be characterised by permeability and flexibility. Permeability refers to the elements from one domain being found in another (e.g. a permeable work boundary is when a family member calls an employee in the workplace). Flexibility on the other hand refers to an individual's willingness and ability to leave one domain to attend to the demands of the other (e.g. leaving work to attend a family event). There are two other important aspects to this theory; segmentation (which has no relation to the segmentation model mentioned previously) and integration, and they exist on a continuum. Segmentation exists when there is low flexibility to leave one domain to attend the other and low permeability of boundaries (an individual at this end of the continuum would keep work and home life separate). Whereas with integration, there is high flexibility and high permeability of boundaries (at this end of the continuum an individual would keep the two domains freely interactive). Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000) propose the primary benefit of segmenting is maintaining clarity between domains, however this means the transition from one domain to the other is more difficult, and this could cost the individual. It is also argued that even though integration means a smoother transition the domains can become blurred, which could, for example, make it difficult to 'escape' from work. The use of mobile communication devices such as work phones, laptops, tablets and remote working feeds into this overlap/blurring of work and non-work roles (Kossek, 2016) as it's possible to easily work during personal time. Nevertheless, Carlson et al. (2006) claim that boundary permeability could be an important predictor of enrichment, and research exploring this could help people effectively monitor boundaries to allow benefits to cross boundaries.

Like Thompson and Bunderson (2001), Ashforth et al. (2000) also highlighted the importance of role identity and the way in which individuals gravitate towards the role which provides the individual with the most rewards, and also that segmentation and integration strategies can be used to mitigate any identity conflict (Roberts & Creary, 2013). In turn, if one role is more valued it becomes a part of self and when an individual identifies themselves in terms of that role it leads to role identification (Ashforth et al., 2000). This is important to consider because although people typically have multiple identities (Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006), one typically emerges as more important. For parents their role identification may be as a parent, whereas for a single individual it could be as a girlfriend/ daughter /friend or a role which is work related such as banker or lecturer due to the absence of parental responsibilities (Park, 2005).

Kossek et al. (2012) built upon this work, especially that of Nippert-Eng (1996), and put forward the notion of boundary management styles, arguing that a boundary management style is the combination of: cross-role interruption behaviours separating and integrating the domains of work and family (Nippert-Eng, 1996), perceived boundary control (Karasek, 1979) and role identity centrality (Settles, 2004). They propose that these are the three main characteristics that are applicable to work-non work boundary management and created six boundary management profiles (work warriors, overwhelmed reactors, family guardians, fusion lovers, dividers and non-work eclectics) by combining these three boundary management characteristics. Perceived boundary control refers to the psychological interpretations of perceived control over the boundary environment. Identity centrality refers to the value an individual places on their identities of work and family, where the term family is used to refer to relationships beyond children and partners and includes friends etc. Cross-role interruption behaviours represent the degree to which individuals allow interruptions from

one role to another. For example, ‘work warriors’ have low boundary control, are work centric, and have asymmetrical interruption behaviours with high work to non-work interruptions.

In qualitative research focusing on boundaries, Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep (2009) explored how people experience and try to manage these boundaries. Their model contained four main points "(1) individual preferences for work-home segmentation or integration combined with environmental influences (such as work and home climates and other individual preferences) to create various dimensions of work-home boundary (in)congruence; (2) work-home boundary incongruence leads to boundary violations (episodes of breaching the preferred work-home boundary) and work-home conflict; (3) boundary violations also lead to work-home conflict; and (4) individuals invoke boundary work tactics to reduce and manage incongruence, violations, and conflict". Ammons (2013) notes that instead of focusing on whether someone fits into a category of an ‘integrator’ or “segmentor”, it is more important to explore what patterns of boundary work mean in the context of the lives of employees. Ammons (2013 p.56) stated “much like pebbles, individual boundaries are diverse and unique”. Kinman and McDowall (2009) also emphasise the importance of individuality as they note that the level of work-life conflict experienced will be dependent on whether the preferences for integration and segmentation they experience match their ideal situation.

Ultimately, Greenhaus & Powell (2006) called for continued exploration of theoretical frameworks but the state of research in regards to this has largely remained the same, with the same theories outlined above referred to in research (Pradhan, 2016). Submitter et al. (2020) in their review of work- balance theories noted there is still no single prevailing model or theory and there are still five core theories/models used (the segmentation model, the compensation model, the instrumental model, the spillover model and the conflict model, as discussed above),

and the chosen theory is usually based on the nature of the study. Sometimes theories are not even mentioned in research and thus much research exploring work-life balance has been said to be atheoretical or theoretically inconsistent (Casper et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the conflict approach has arguably been the main focus of much research, especially quantitative research, but largely due to spotlight on parents and carers, there have been calls to broaden the conceptualisation of family to be more inclusive of people without partners and/or children.

1.4 Broadening the conceptualisation of ‘family’ in work-family conflict.

Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli, and Bell (2011) argue that the concept of work-family conflict should be extended to incorporate other employees (i.e. those without children or with different ‘family’ structures) and Kossek et al. (2010) call for organisations to identify and support the diversity of individuals’ needs for managing the interface between work and personal life. This also relates to issues in terms of what the “life” component of work-life balance is, as literature has largely focused on ‘life’ as consisting of caring activities for dependent children, therefore implying that work-life balance is a concern of working parents, leading to research often excluding other members of the workforce (Kelliher et al., 2019). Individuals in the workplace may be unmarried/single people, those with extended families, older people with grown-up children, single parents or couples without children. It has been argued that it is important to explore the experiences of this wide range of groups rather than focus on employees with ‘traditional’ family structures i.e. a heterosexual couple with children (Crooker et al., 2002) and policies to support employees’ work-life balance should seek to be inclusive (Southworth, 2013). This is what Young (1996, p.197) argued, commenting that “single adults without dependent children are not an insignificant minority, although their absence from the organisational literature might suggest that they are”. This view was echoed in a review of twenty-four years of work-life research carried out by Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood and

Lambert (2007) who failed to trace studies focusing on single parents or singles without children, and pointed out that what we knew about work-life research was based on the experiences of “heterosexual, Caucasian, managerial and professional employees in traditional family arrangements” [p. 37]. Although there has been some progress in research in more recent years (e.g. Wilkinson, Tomlinson, & Gardiner, 2017; Wilkinson, Tomlinson, & Gardiner, 2018), it is still noted that single employees and those without children are seen as “invisible” within the work-life debate (Culpepper et al., 2020). A more recent systematic literature review found that research is still concentrated on working women, married workers and dual-earner couples and there is a research gap in regards to single professionals’ who do not have children. In their review they suggest that future studies should consider the research question “In what ways do single professionals manage their work–life issues and view their organization’s work-life balance policies in terms of fairness?” (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021).

In relation to previous research comparing work-personal life conflict experiences amongst those with different family structures, little UK based research exists. However, research conducted by Waumsley, Houston and Marks (2010) in the UK stated that work-family conflict scales did not adequately measure the conflict experience of those without children, and found that both women with and without children experienced conflict, but for those without children there was more conflict from work into their lives generally, and those with children had more conflict from family into work (than life generally into work). Although the sample was large and included single, cohabiting or divorced/separated women, only 14% were single compared to 52% married.

Research carried out in Norway which compared different family structures found that conflict between work and home life was more profound amongst those living in two-parent families

and single parents, than amongst couples without children and singles (Innstrand, Langballe, Espnes, Aasland & Falkum, 2010). However, even though conflict between work and home was less amongst singles and couples without children, private life and work life did significantly impact each other in most employees. This study included single parents, and other research has looked specifically at the ways in which the daily lives of those who are separated are coordinated (Bakker & Karsten, 2013). For example, in their qualitative study, the authors found that the daily lives of separated parents can be more fragmented and single parents (usually mothers) do not have a partner to share the household responsibilities so this can lead to them sacrificing personal time in order to fulfil home responsibilities. In a study conducted in Belgium, married parents and divorced parents' work-family conflict levels were compared. Divorced mothers were significantly more likely to experience work-family and family-work conflict. No differences were found for fathers. Single mothers were significantly more likely to experience work-family conflict compared to mothers with a partner (original or new), but single fathers were significantly more likely to experience family-work conflict compared to fathers with partners (Van den Eynde et al., 2019).

Hamilton, Gordon and Whelan-Berry (2006) examined work-personal life conflict amongst single women in the USA (with no children and never married), married women, and married women with children. In this research, levels of work-personal life conflict reported were similar between the three different groups. Similarly, a study conducted in New Zealand by Haar (2013) reported work-life balance was found to be equally important for parents and non-parents. However, Haar did not specify whether the non-parents were single, or couples who did not have children, and simply categorised this whole group as non-parents. In a qualitative study conducted by Marquardt, Roberto, and Buss (2016) in the USA with single adults without dependent children, it was found that they highly valued their 'family' role and experienced

conflict especially if they were caregivers. Caregiving revolved around eldercare for ageing parents or relatives, and included helping with illness-related care, financial management, errands, and helping around the house. Importantly, the family role in this study referred to parents, siblings, and other family members, consequently not limiting the term family to children.

As most of the research cited above, except, for example, Waumsley, Houston and Marks (2010), was not conducted in the UK it cannot necessarily be generalised as there are differences in policies, workplace environments and number of hours' employees spend at work across countries. However, Wilkinson, Tomlinson, and Gardiner (2017) explored the work-life challenges faced by managers and professionals who live alone in the UK and found that inaccurate assumptions were made about how 'solo-living' employees spend their non-work time, and the legitimacy of non-work time and private life was often questioned. As this group lived alone, they also had reduced levels of emotional and financial support and were more vulnerable to disappointments at work, but this may also be due to their strong attachments to their work role. Nevertheless, the focus of this research was only on single workers and not also, for example, couples without children, and relatively little research has examined the work-life balance experiences of employees with family structures that don't involve partners and/or children in depth.

Considering the research discussed above it would appear that any perception that those without children are living a "carefree" life (Peterson, 2014 p.22) can be refuted, as they experience similar levels of conflict compared to those who have children. However, their experiences of combining work and personal life, and any conflict between the two, may be quite different. As well as, in some cases, possibly working/being expected to work longer

hours (Culpepper et al., 2020), single people and those without children may be involved in pursuits outside of work, which even though do not necessarily involve family (e.g. leisure activities or volunteering), can take up similar amounts of time and resources (Casper, Weltman & Kwesiga, 2007). Furthermore, some employers see those without children as having no family, with the term ‘family’ solely relating to childcare, thus overlooking responsibilities to other family members, which may lead to differences in the evaluation of the availability and importance of non-work time (Akanji et al., 2020).

Additionally, lack of social support may be an issue for single people (Hamilton et al., 2006), or alternatively, for some, it may come from different sources, such as from a housekeeper, members of their religious community or roommates (Salamin, 2021). Qualitative research found that single faculty members of a University in the USA felt they were asked to take on more undesirable work in order to facilitate the work-life balance of their colleagues who had ‘traditional’ family structures. They also felt that, unlike their colleagues, they did not have the support from home or the same access to benefits to help them with their work-life balance (Culpepper et al., 2020). Additionally single employees noted that single workers have familial responsibilities that are not captured in the nuclear family, but are paramount within the extended family, and yet they are reluctant to disclose those responsibilities.

One suggestion to deal with these issues is to broaden out from focusing on the domain of family. As discussed earlier, Fisher, Bulger and Smith (2009) developed a bidirectional measure of work-personal life conflict for all workers regardless of their family structure. This was based on interviews with employees (from a range of family structures) and a review of existing literature that measured work-family conflict, whilst rewording items to “personal life” instead of family. The results indicated that the measure performed as well as the previous

work-family conflict scales and it was an improvement on previous measures as it was inclusive of all workers. The responses from the survey, which included those without children, were consistent with prior research indicating that asking about personal life (not just family) is important. It is also crucial to explore enrichment in this way, as there are likely to also be benefits from personal life, other than from family, which can provide enrichment. Additionally, skills gained outside of work can be utilised in the workplace (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002). There may also be differences in levels of enrichment based on family structure or relationship status. For example, higher levels of personal life-work enrichment have been reported for both men and women who live with a partner compared to those who live alone, but for men, only the relationship status was important for work-personal life enrichment, as men with a partner had higher levels of work personal life enrichment (Hagqvist et al., 2021). Similar results were reported by Lapierre et al. (2018).

Therefore, since much past research has tended to focus on work-family conflict in employees with children or caring responsibilities, the present programme of research will explore and compare both bi-directional work-personal life conflict and enrichment, as well as boundary management, in employees with differing family structures. To explore this, it is important to understand the policy context related to supports for work-life balance. A key support is flexible working. In 2014 the right to request flexible working legislation was extended from parents and carers to all employees, and further changes will be introduced in 2024. Therefore, the policy context is an important factor to consider alongside a broader conceptualisation of work-family conflict. It should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic, which will be explored specifically later in this chapter, has led to more remote working, but this example of flexible working was not as a result of the right to request.

1.5 Policy context: flexible working and the right to request

McCarthy, Darcy and Grady (2010) claim that to help employees manage work and home life, work-life balance policies are usually offered. Flexible working is one of the most common provisions offered (Dex & Smith, 2002). There are many different types of flexible working, the most common being job sharing, remote working, part time work, reduced hours, compressed hours and flexitime. This also includes the less commonly known, annualised hours (individuals have a set of core hours over the year but they have flexibility over when and how these hours are worked), staggered hours (different start and finish times to other workers), and phased retirement (workers who have reached the retirement age can choose when to retire which includes requests to work part time or reduce hours) (Gov, 2014). Thus, the vast majority of forms of flexible working are about work time (i.e. when work is done), but remote working is about place of work (e.g. working from home).

In the United Kingdom employees have the right to request flexible working but this legislation has undergone many changes since its introduction as part of section 47 of The Employment Act (2002). This act included the right to request, an amendment in working patterns relating to hours, times and location. It was open to employees who were parents to children under the age of 6 or were caring for a child under the age of 18 with a disability. Following consultation this right was extended to those who had caring responsibilities for someone over the age of 18 according to the Flexible Working Regulations (2006) and the Work and Families Act (2006). Following further consultations regarding this legislation, this was further extended in 2009 to those with parental responsibilities for children under the age of 17 as part of the Flexible Working Regulations (amendment) 2009. There were plans for an extension to parents of children under the age of 18 in 2010, however this did not come into force and the next

change was the extension in June 2014. This was under part 9 of the Children and Families Act (2014) and part of the amendment to Part 8A of the Employment Rights Act (1996).

The legislation (at the time of writing) states that (after 26 weeks of continual service) all employees have the right to apply to their employer to work more flexibly and this includes changes to hours, patterns, times or place of work following the ACAS guidelines (ACAS, 2013). The guidelines for handling the request in a reasonable manner take into account many factors. For example, the details required when requests are made are: the date of the application and the change to working conditions the employee is requesting, the effect the change might have on the employer and how this could be dealt with, and a statement regarding any previous requests which have been made. The reason why the request is being made is not required and should not be part of the decision-making process. The employer should then meet to discuss the request as soon as possible; however a meeting is not required if the request is to be approved. Any discussion regarding the request should take place in a private place (if possible) and the discussion should centre around the changes that are being requested and how they may benefit the business and the employee, and these should be weighed up against any adverse impact on the business (i.e. the business case should be considered). If a request is rejected it should only be due to a variety of business reasons including a burden of additional costs, inability to reorganise work or recruit additional staff, a detrimental impact on quality, performance, or the ability to meet customer demand or a planned structural change to the business. If a request is rejected a right to appeal should be offered.

More recently, following a government consultation in December 2022, further changes to the right to request flexible working arrangements will come into effect on 6th April 2024. These will: “1) make the right to request flexible working a day one right, 2) introduce a new

requirement for employers to consult with the employee when they intend to reject their flexible working request, 3) allow two statutory requests in any 12-month period (rather than the current one), 4) require a decision period of two months in respect of a statutory flexible working request (rather than the current three), 5) remove the existing requirement that the employee must explain what effect, if any, the change applied for would have on the employer and how that effect might be dealt with” (Gov.co.uk, 2024, p.1). These changes should go even further to help those seeking flexible working to support their work-life. However, it should be noted that although these changes are positive, 49% of organisations asked were not aware of these changes and for those who don’t offer this ‘day one’ right already, approximately 46% felt it would be difficult for them to support this change (CIPD, 2023).

Prior to June 2014 there was a lack of legislation to support those who had non-traditional family structures. It is important to recognise the potential impact of the 2014 changes to the right to request flexible working since the single worker, and those without children, had often been ignored in terms of workplace policies (Casper, Weltman & Kwesiga, 2007; Nord, Fox, Phoenix, & Viano, 2002; Ryan & Kossek, 2008; cited in Keeney et al., 2013). However, this does not mean that flexible working was not already offered to those to whom the legislation did not apply in some organisations. In other words, some organisations were already going beyond the legislation prior to 2014. In a survey conducted by CIPD (2012) on more than 1000 employers and 2000 employees, two thirds of employers provided the right to request flexible working to all employees, this included a mixture of small, medium and large organisations, although, arguably, this is more likely in public sector organisations and less likely in small organisations. Keeney et al. (2013) suggested that there is a need for policies that are inclusive of all individuals in an organisation and not just those with spouses and children, and such

policies create a more supportive and inclusive workplace (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood & Lambert, 2007).

Although the right to request was extended to all employees, this does not mean that workers will feel comfortable about making requests. There may be stigma attached to requesting flexible working, which has often been faced by women in the workplace because the traditional “ideal worker” according to Williams (2000) and Acker (1990) is founded on a male worker who is only dedicated to his job and unburdened by caring responsibilities. Where men are faced with stigma it is treated as gender non-conforming, but for women it can be seen as gender conforming behaviour because they are requesting flexibility due to family obligations (a behaviour which is more expected) (Williams, Blair-Loy & Berdahl, 2013), as the focus of flexible working is still very much on helping women with childcare needs (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019). Stone and Hernandez (2013) discovered amongst professional women that those who requested flexible working or took leave due to caring responsibilities faced severe stigma, and if women went part-time it led to a decrease in their status which eventually led them to leave work altogether. This stigma applies even after the changes to the right to request flexible working in 2014. The uptake of formal working arrangements has not increased as much as expected, despite over 80% of men and women surveyed in the UK stating that the ability to combine their family and work lives is very important when choosing a new job (Chung, 2017b). The reasons identified for this are related to the stigma co-workers and managers have towards working flexibly and the potential consequences on their careers (Chung, 2020). In their study they found that 1/3 of (UK) workers agreed that workers who work flexibly make more work for others, 32% said they would be less likely to be promoted, and 39% said they had suffered due to colleagues working flexibly.

Whittock, Edwards, McLaren and Robinson (2002) also note particular difficulties for women in terms of career progression and promotion. Women are more likely to work part-time due to childcare in the UK (Eurostat, 2016) and Whittock et al. found that women who worked part time were the most stigmatised as they were less likely to be promoted. This is because women were often excluded from ‘male’ networks and were being marginalised which can result in lower pay and limited career opportunities (Walsh, 2013). This has been reflected in research which found that flexible work arrangements may still invite bias against workers and stigma, particularly against mothers, because it still clashes with ‘ideal worker’ norms mentioned earlier. However, more positively, the authors concluded that flexible work arrangements are now leading to smaller ‘pay penalties’ for mothers and stigma is reducing in comparison to the previous decade of research (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019). Women without children also face challenges as they may be regarded as employees who can work unsociable hours (Prowse & Prowse, 2015; Peterson & Engwall, 2016). Professional women may therefore avoid using work-life balance policies because they are concerned with how they may be viewed and how it may impact career progression (Southworth, 2014; Hothchild, 1997; Clutterback, 2004). This may be more pronounced in certain occupations such as academia, as Lynch et al. (2020) claim it has been said that ‘real’ academics are the ones who prioritise their career over caring responsibilities. With Reuter (2018, p. 103) going as far as saying there is an unspoken rule implying that “serious, responsible [women] scholars do not have children because motherhood responsibilities might hinder their careers.”

Some have argued that men suffer more negative reactions than women (Wayne & Codeiro, 2003). Men who asked for flexible working due to family related matters, have been reported to be viewed as feminized for “acting like a women” and economically punished, whilst also being stigmatised as poor workers (Rudman & Mescher, 2013 p.53). An issue can also arise

once the request to work flexibly is made, as Tipping et al (2000) state that according to a survey, men are more likely to have their requests turned down. Men are also more likely to say that they experienced negative outcomes due to their co-worker's flexibility, whereas mothers are more likely to say they experienced negative consequences themselves in regards to their careers due to their flexible working requests (Chung, 2020). However, it has been reported that in the years since the extension of the right to request, there has been an increase in flexible working requests, more so in larger employers compared to smaller (Post-Implementation Review of the 2014 Flexible Working Regulations, 2021), so, it's possible there has been a decrease in the levels of stigma.

Research around the difference policies make in terms of work-life balance is still mixed with it alternating between having some benefits and having no real influence (Yerkes, Standing, Wattis & Wain, 2010). Furthermore, some argue that it is a means of increasing responsibility and a takeover of the private world of the employee by removing the when, where, and how long to work (Golden & Geisler 2006; Everingham, 2000). In other words, for some people this blurring of boundaries between work and non-work domains may make it difficult to 'escape' from work, or indeed from home life in order to concentrate on work. Prowse's (2015) research also revealed the mixed findings in terms of flexible working research. They concluded that flexible working was detrimental for those without caring commitments as they were asked to cover work for those who did, so individuals working flexibly may have a negative effect on the work-life balance of those who do not. A reason for the mixed findings may also be due to the types of flexible working, as temporal flexibility (flexibility in terms of when to work) has been found to be helpful for work-life balance as it helps parents deal with unpredictable family circumstances such as an ill child or school closures (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019). However, the impact of remote work on work-personal life conflict is varied as it is

dependent on many things. Remote work can be considered a resource if employees feel a sense of autonomy and micromanagement is avoided, and if the use of information and communication technology (ICT) doesn't lead to issues with boundary management or social isolation. If these factors are considered, it can have a positive impact on wellbeing and work-life balance (Charalampous et al., 2019). If these factors are not considered, it may be that remote working has the opposite effect. However, on the whole the positives outweigh the negatives when looking at research exploring all the different forms of flexible working (Galea, Houkes & De Rijk, 2014) and the widely held belief is that it is a mutually beneficial arrangement for employees and employers, as it may increase recruitment, retention and commitment (Matos & Galinsky, 2014).

The majority of studies that have explored the use of flexible working do not state whether they have explored it in terms of formal or informal arrangements (Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). Where research has stated or at least differentiated between these types of flexible working, they have focused on formally requested flexible working, for example the systematic review by Menezes & Kelliher (2011), only focused on formal arrangements due to the easier identification. There is limited evidence which specifically refers to these informal arrangements and they are not defined in a consistent manner. De Menezes & Kelliher, (2017) define formal arrangements as those made through an organisations flexible working policy via a written request considered by the line manager and an HR department, whereas informal arrangements do not go through this 'official' process but are agreed via a discussion/negotiation between a line manager and an employee. These informal arrangements usually involve flexibility over working hours and/or remote working, but do not involve changes to employment contracts. One study which did compare formal arrangements and informal, found that informal arrangements enhanced performance at work whereas a formal

arrangement had a negative effect on performance (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017). Furthermore, some job roles lend themselves well to flexibility, for example, jobs which were traditionally ‘office based’ and where there is an ability to change the location of work and timings (Cañibano, 2019). Other roles, for example, more customer-facing roles, such as working as a school teacher, do not have such potential for innate or intrinsic flexibility, so flexible working would usually involve a formal request to, for example, work part-time and would be more difficult to accommodate (Sharp et al., 2019).

1.5.1 The role of employers and HR and line managers

While flexible working may be a mutually beneficial arrangement for employees and employers, as it may increase recruitment, retention and commitment (Matos & Galinsky, 2014), it may be difficult for some organisations to deliver, especially small to medium enterprises (SMEs). Much research on flexible working has focused on large organisations (Persaud, 2001; Maxwell, Rankine, Bell & MacVicar, 2007). In small businesses, a key difference lies in the formalities; Gray and Mabey (2005) reported that for organisations with less than 100 employees, the approaches to human resource management are informal in comparison to large organisations. Kotey and Sharma (2016) found that for SME’s the main issues related to flexible working were the limited resources available and if the requests were carried out, they would be carried out informally. This is reflected by Maxwell, Rankine and MacVicar (2007) who found that amongst small businesses in Scotland flexible working was an informal arrangement, and the most commonly used was part-time work and shift swaps, although there were issues related to this in terms of the administrative aspects (particularly the managing of the arrangement). In terms of cost, small businesses often lack the finance and knowledge related to the implementation and the management of flexible working arrangements (Singh, Garg & Deshmukh, 2008; Terziovski, 2010). In addition to this is the

focus on business requirements, as flexible working is considered when it suits the business not the employee (McDonald et al., 2005; Dex & Scheibl, 2001). The owner-managers in small businesses have been known to have a personal influence when it comes to approval of flexible working arrangements (Maxwell, 2005) and although managers may be supportive in general, this may not apply to a large number of requests which would not be seen as positive.

The roles of HR managers and line managers are generally crucial in the effective implementation of flexible working. Their roles can intertwine, and according to the CIPD (2012), many of the responsibilities which used to be carried out by HR have now effectively been outsourced to line managers, such as objective setting and payroll activities, with line managers crucially involved in day-to-day people management. In other words, even though, traditional day-to-day HR functions now lie in the hands of line managers (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003), HR still plays a key role in communicating policies and giving managers somebody to turn to when they need support. In a report by Glynn, Steinberg & McCartney (2002) it was found that most managers indicated that HR is where they would go for advice when they face work-life balance challenges, such as being approached by an employee with a work-life balance query they felt unable to solve alone. The HR manager plays a key strategic role in the adoption of strategies that deal with a variety of demands but they all have the potential to create significant outcomes for the workplace, and one of these strategies involves work-life balance supports such as flexible working policies (Dowling & Fisher, 1997; Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Kossek, Dass & DeMarr, 1994; Yeung & Brockbank, 1994; De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott & Pettit, 2005). From the perspective of the organisation work-life balance is a strategic issue for human resource management as it has been argued that to retain employees and be seen as a good employer, organisations need to provide flexible work-life balance strategies to aid the changing needs of the employees (Bruck, Allen & Spector, 2002; Lambert,

2000; Macran et al., 1996; Cappelli, 2000; Lewis & Cooper, 1995; De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott & Pettit, 2005).

Alongside HR managers, line managers also play a crucial role. Wyles and Hemming (2014) suggest line management behaviour has a direct impact on employee development, their treatment, autonomy and the quality of their teamwork and communication. They also state that the line manager holds great responsibility in terms of representing and communicating the organisation's goals and objectives. A view reflected by ACAS (2016) who suggest the first tier of line management has the greatest influence on employees' attitudes towards the organisation. According to a systematic review conducted by De Menezes & Kelliher (2011) which analysed the relationship between flexible working arrangements and individual and organisational performance, they concluded that line manager attitudes to work life balance played a role in the link between flexible working arrangements and performance (for individuals and organisations). This is also supported by other research (Goodstein, 1994, 1995; Wood, De Menezes & Lasaosa, 2003).

One of the barriers to successful work-life balance is the organisational culture. An unsupportive culture might involve opposition towards the use of flexible working arrangements from supervisors and managers along with employee perceptions that the use of these policies would lead to negative repercussions (Swanberg, James, Werner & McKechnie, 2008). This is reflected in the workplace employment relations survey where 77% of managers reported that balancing work and family commitments were the employee's responsibility in 2011, and this is an increase compared to the survey conducted in 2004 where the percentage was 66% (Van Wanrooy et al., 2013). There has been a call for research around work-life "initiatives" to pay attention to the workplace environment and the manager sub-cultures which

exist within the workplace (Peters & Heusinkveld, 2010). Managers play a key role in relation to flexible working as they can facilitate the policy, or impede it (Yeandle et al., 2003) and influence the organisational culture to create an environment where employees feel comfortable (or not) discussing their work-life balance needs (Watkins, 1995). If managers are resistant, or employees feel there are negative attitudes towards use of policies they are less likely to approach their manager to put in a request. Bond and Wise (2003) note that managers are often put under pressure to achieve in the business and this is often incompatible with formal work-life policies.

McCarthy, Cleveland, Hunter, Darcy & Grady (2013) found that the more available (in terms of range and quantity) work-life balance supports were, the more supportive the supervisor and workplace were perceived to be, and this was consistent with previous research (Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Thompson, Jahn, Kopelman & Prottas, 2004; Breugh & Frye 2008; Lapierre et al., 2008). However, the uptake of such supports can also depend on the perceived supportiveness of the workplace culture, supervisor/line manager support, and support from HR managers (Thompson, Thomas & Maier 1992; Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness, 1999; McCarthy, Cleveland, Hunter, Darcy & Grady 2013). As work-life balance policies are formally designed and adopted at organisational level, usually by HR managers, and are largely implemented and managed at the unit level by line managers/supervisors (McCarthy, Darcy & Grady, 2010; McConville & Holden, 1999; Parris, Vickers & Wilkes, 2008; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Ryan & Kossek, 2008), these are key informants regarding policies, including changes, such as to the right to request flexible working in 2014. Research by Lyonette, Lewis, Anderson, Payne and Wood (2017) on HR managers' views of work-life balance policies suggested that in their experience some line managers were resistant to work-life balance policies, such as flexible working, in part, because it is line managers who have to

cover work and continue to deliver an effective service when employees wish to work flexibly. This could result in a gap between policy and implementation in practice. However, there is a scarcity of research which has explored how line managers manage and implement the policies designed to help employees with work-life balance (Ballantine et al., 2022; Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux and Brinley, 2005), even though they have a fundamental role in the implementation of flexible working arrangements (Maxwell, Rankine, Bell & MacVicar, 2007). McCarthy, Darcy and Grady (2010) examined the effects of line manager work-life balance policy and practice behaviour and its impact on employee work-life balance experiences. Line managers were found to be a critical determinant of the effectiveness of work-life balance policy.

1.6 Perceptions of fairness of policies and supports for work-life balance

In the past, the exclusion of single workers and those without children from organisational policies to support work-life balance has led to feelings of social exclusion and a sense of injustice (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005; Grandey, 2001). Casper, Weltman, and Kwesiga (2007) developed a measure of 'singles' friendly culture to examine how employees without children perceived the support they receive from their organisations for work-life issues compared to those with families. Their measure included five facets: social inclusion, equal work opportunities, equal access to employee benefits, equal respect for non-work role and equal work expectations. Using their measure, they found that single employees perceived less equity in how their organisation dealt with work life issues compared to those with families which has implications for counter-productive work behaviours. In America, these feelings of unfairness led to the emergence of 'work-family backlash' (Young, 1999), whereby those who cannot make use of family friendly policies experienced feelings of resentment (Kirby & Krone, 2002). In the UK a qualitative study of professionals' work-life balance reported little evidence

of backlash (Wilkinson et al., 2018), but it was still found that there were feelings of unfairness present amongst around a quarter of participants. However, for childfree employees, these feelings are often multifaceted. In Finland, employees without children have been found to feel a sense of unfairness in the ways in which they are able to schedule their annual leave, finding that parents often get priority when requesting leave during holidays like Christmas and Easter and school holidays, but at the same time they understand why this might be the case (Mård, 2021). However, this can still lead to feelings of unfairness as single employees feel that their non-work time is almost less important. Therefore, for those without children, as reported in an American study, it's important to acknowledge their non-work time as being equally vital, because this group has a range of responsibilities and interests and non-work pursuits which they consider important and which can impact their work-life balance (Boiarintseva et al., 2021). In a cross-country analysis, participants in Italy assigned greater priority for work-life balance arrangements to female employees with children, compared to childfree women, however the Dutch participants did not (Filippi et al., 2024). These views may vary depending on the country as work cultures have been found to be more 'singles friendly' in more egalitarian countries with the highest in Denmark and lowest in Italy (Šimunić et al., 2024). It's important that people feel included and feel they can make use of policies as Parker and Allen (2001) found that those who made use of family friendly policies had more positive feelings towards policies compared to those who had not used the available policies; similar results were reported by Grover (1991).

Perceived fairness is an important factor to consider, and it has been defined as the "belief about the exchange relationship between employees and employers that deals with the offering and usage of work/family benefits" (Parker & Allen, 2001 p.456). Perceptions of fairness have been studied using the theory of organisational justice (Greenburg, 1987). This comprises

different types of justice, for example, according to Beauregard (2014), distributive justice relates to the fairness of the outcomes employees receive e.g. whether employees perceive that they are being given fair access to work-life balance policies and procedural justice refers to the fairness of an organization's procedures for making decisions e.g. if they believe that the procedures in place for allocating work-life policies are fair. Beauregard, (2014) recognised that fairness perceptions are under researched. She adapted Colquitt's (2001) organizational justice scale to reflect perceived fairness of work-life balance initiatives and found that perceptions of unfairness led to counterproductive work behaviours. In terms of distributive justice, the extension to the right to request in the UK may therefore have benefits in terms of perceptions of fairness experienced by those who were previously excluded from such policies. However, in terms of procedural justice, they may not always be helped by such policies. In a qualitative study of UK employees one participant who had no children said that their request to change their hours slightly due to rush hour traffic was refused, but another participant with children requested a change in hours to pick up children and this was accepted (Wilkinson et al., 2018). A study in Nigeria which found that decisions that would impact work-life balance were made based on group membership and marital status so single employees experienced lower procedural justice (Akanji et al., 2020)

On the other hand, the extension to the right to request may lead to a role reversal in the perceptions of fairness, with feelings of unfairness possibly starting to emerge from employees who have families or caring responsibilities who may feel that the right to request being extended to all may make their requests more likely to be turned down. Guidelines published by ACAS (2014) are a reminder that the right to request should be based on a business case, however this will not necessarily prevent the emergence of value judgements from the line manager's perspective who may have pre-existing knowledge of an employee's personal life

and so may still favour requests from employees with greater family needs. In qualitative research, Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper and Sparrow (2014) revealed that in practice, work-life balance policies such as flexible working are often interpreted by management as being aimed at mothers.

Therefore, the present programme of research will examine attitudes towards, knowledge about and uptake of flexible working practices and the right to request legislation, as well as perceptions of fairness among employees with differing family structures, and also line managers and HR professionals. As flexible working should help employees to manage work and personal life, flexible working can be considered as one of the antecedents of work life balance and antecedents will be explored next.

1.7 Antecedents of work-life balance

Since work-personal life conflict has health implications (e.g. Berkman et al., 2015; Cooklin et al., 2016; Emslie, Hunt, & Macintyre, 2004; Shockley & Allen, 2013) and implications for organisational factors such as job performance and organisation commitment (e.g. Li, Bagger, & Cropanzano, 2017; Muse, Harris, Giles, & Field, 2008), much quantitative research has tended to focus on trying to understand the antecedents of conflict. Outcomes of work-personal life conflict and personal life-work conflict tend to be negative in terms of both physical and also mental health. In a longitudinal study carried out by Frone, Yardley & Markel (1997) family-work conflict was related to elevated levels of depression and poor physical health, and work-family conflict related to heavy alcohol consumption. This was re-affirmed by Frone, Russell & Cooper (1997a), who concluded that poor physical health was only related to family-work conflict and not work-family conflict. Similarly, Thomas and Ganster (1995) and Madsen and Hammond (2005) concluded that increased work-family conflict was related to increased

levels of depression. A further study by Frone (2003) revealed that work family conflict was also related to burnout and somatic complaints (in addition to the previously mentioned aspects of anxiety and depression). Furthermore, a study exploring role conflict found that employees who experience high levels of role conflict were less likely to engage in health promoting behaviours (such as eating healthily, consuming less alcohol and maintaining a healthy weight), and also reported higher levels of depression and emotional exhaustion (Pomaki, Supeli & Verhoeven, 2007).

It is important to widen research exploring antecedents in order to match the changing workforce, using more inclusive samples and measures that do not simply focus on family. However, research largely focuses on work-family conflict, with some studies even specifically looking at a sample such as married parents with children under the age of five (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz & Shockley, 2013). In a meta-analytic review of the antecedents of work-family conflict conducted by Michel et al. (2011) work role stressors, work role involvement, work social support and other work characteristics (which includes flexible work practices) were key predictors of work-family conflict, whereas family role stressors, family social support, and family climate were predictors of family-work conflict.

Since the key antecedents are generally work role stressors and various work resources, the proposed research will draw on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model of stress (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) to examine negative (demands) and positive (resources) antecedents by not only focusing on work role stressors but also focusing on possible resources such as flexible working and support. The job-demands resources model is a model of occupational stress and is rooted in the job demands control model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) and the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). According to Demerouti et al. (2001) demands refer to

organisational, social and physical aspects of the job, which require sustained effort (mental or physical), and are associated with costs (physiological and psychological). Resources are physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job that may do any of the following things: (a) achieve work goals, (b) reduce job demands, or (c) stimulate personal growth and development. The UK Health and Safety Executive Management Standards cover various areas of work that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. These include job demands and the absence of various resources such as colleague and manager support. They developed a measurement tool to assesses these factors, which is often used in research (e.g. Payne and Kinman, 2019).

1.7.1 Demands

A variety of job demands have been found to increase work-family conflict (Grönlund, 2007). Bakker, Demerouti and Dollard (2008) note that the specific job demands which have been found to be predictors of work-family conflict are; work pressure (Dollard, Winefield, & Winefield, 2001; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Wallace, 1997), an unfavourable working time schedule (Demerouti, Geurts, Bakker, & Euwema, 2004; Geurts, Rutte, & Peeters, 1999; Scholarios, Hesselgreaves, & Pratt, 2017), work or work-role overload (Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996), and emotional demands (Bakker & Geurts, 2004). Job demands have also been linked to health outcomes with job demands a commonly studied form of stress and a key determinant of depression and work-to-family conflict (Cooper, Dewe & O'Driscoll, 2001).

The job demand which is most often associated with work-family conflict is work pressure (Dollard, Winefield, & Winefield, 2001; Wallace, 1997). Work pressure can include a variety of aspects, which can relate to low levels of autonomy in the job, time pressure (specifically

relating to deadlines) or even high levels of role ambiguity (Bromet, Dew, & Parkinson, 1990; Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992a). Nevertheless, high levels of job pressures/demands are linked to increased levels of work-family conflict with Grzywacz and Marks (2000) concluding in their study, that policies/programmes which aim to reduce work pressure will reduce work-family conflict. Some researchers have looked at work pressure in regard to the amount an employee is involved in their job role, with high levels of job involvement (psychological involvement in and importance of work to the individual, representing an internal or self-induced source of work-role pressures) linked to higher levels of family to work conflict (Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996).

An unfavourable working time schedule has been identified as another job demand (Demerouti, Geurts, Bakker, & Euwema, 2004). This demand could be in regards to hours worked, un/favourable time schedules, or working unsociable hours. Unpredictable work hours such as those given to UK police officers which are often driven by employer demands have been linked to higher levels of work-family conflict and perceived stress (Scholarios, Hesselgreaves, & Pratt, 2017). In terms of hours worked there is a vast amount of evidence supporting the notion that long full-time hours can lead to higher levels of work-family conflict (Byron 2005; Wharton and Blair-Loy 2006; Allan, Loudoun, & Peetz, 2007). For example, in a study conducted by Geurts, Rutte, & Peeters (1999), those who work in the medical environment, where work regularly includes long hours (60-100 hours a week) and irregular hours (shift patterns which include night shifts), one of the predictors of work-family conflict was the unfavourable worktime schedule (along with a high workload and issues with employee-supervisor relations). The level of conflict did not depend on whether or not the employees were part of a dual-career family, were parents, had flexible childcare arrangements or had a social supportive home situation. The amount of conflict increases with the number of working

hours, with the more hours worked, the higher the levels of work-family conflict experienced (Thorntwaite, 2004; Weston, Gray & Stanton, 2004). Related to hours worked is the issue of involuntary overtime, as those who have to participate in involuntary overtime, have been found to experience work-family conflict (Berg, Kalleberg & Appelbaum, 2003).

Some have argued that too much focus has been put on the role of time pressures, and time flexibility when work overload has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of work-family conflict (Skinner & Pocock, 2008). This has reflected in previous research in the field which supported the notion that work overload was the most consistent and strongest predictor of work-family conflict (Geurts & Demerouti, 2003; Ilies et al., 2007). However, it is most likely that this is due to a combination of factors, as a cluster analysis conducted on working mothers found that the cluster who experienced the highest levels of work-family conflict were those who had long working hours, high work overload, and also a lack of support from others (Losoncz, & Bortolotto, 2009).

The majority of research has focused on the demands from work rather than home demands (Guest 2002). Traditionally, number of children and childcare arrangements alongside the employment situation of the partner were considered home demands but these have been found to be unreliable predictors of work-life balance (Montgomery, 2003). Therefore, (Peeters et al., 2005) instead proposed that home demands should be subcategorised into quantitative home demands, emotional home demands, and mental home demands. They developed a scale to assess these and found all three forms of demands were related more to family-work conflict. Thus, as discussed earlier in relation to Michel et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis of antecedents, while work role stressors are key predictors of work-family conflict, family role stressors tend to be predictors of family-work conflict.

1.7.2 Resources

Baker and Demerouti (2007) note resources (which may help achieve work goals, reduce job demands or stimulate personal growth and development) can include social support or performance feedback, however they are not restricted to these two sources of support. Therefore, the key resources that will be explored in the present research will be flexible working, organisational culture and support (including supervisor/manager support, as well as support from other sources).

1.7.2.1 Flexible working

As stated earlier in this chapter (section 1.5), flexible working can take many forms including flexibility in place (e.g. remote working) or time (e.g. part-time hours or change to hours). This can include formal requests or an informal discussion/agreement with the line manager. Most studies which have explored the use of flexible working do not state whether they have explored it in terms of formal or informal arrangements (Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). Therefore, the research discussed in this section includes all forms of flexibility. Kattenbach et al. (2010) argue that research studies exploring flexible working and its effect on wellbeing are scarce (Costa et al 2004). However, Kattenbach et al (2010) examined flexibility as a resource in their research to assess the impact of working time restrictions on work-non work conflict. They found that the negative impact of time restrictions (no flexibility to vary working times) outweighed the positive outcomes of time autonomy (flexibility to vary working times) on work-non-work conflict. However, the impact of flexible working on work-personal life conflict and personal-life work conflict is largely positive. As the work domain is thought to be a more proximal antecedent of work-family conflict, and the family domain a more proximal antecedent of family-work conflict (Allen, et al., 2013), Allen et al. found that flexible working was associated with reduced work-family conflict but not with family-work conflict. Shockley

and Allen (2007) obtained similar findings and also found that the association was stronger if the participants had a greater family responsibility. This is reflected in the meta-analysis conducted by Byron (2005) who found that work related antecedents were related more to work-family conflict and family related antecedents were related more to family-work conflict, however some antecedents such as job stress and family stress were associated with both directions of conflict, and employees that have less support from co-workers or less flexible schedules have more work-family conflict than family-work conflict.

A study carried out on women in Sweden revealed that those who had requested to work flexibly (particularly part-time work) were less likely to experience conflict between their work and family lives (Cousins & Tang, 2004). Some researchers have also noted the differences between different types of flexible working and its relationship to conflict. It was found that part-time work and flexitime were related to lower work-family conflict and working from home was associated with higher levels of conflict (Russell, O'Connell & McGinnity, 2009) possibly because boundaries between work and home may become blurred. Research on remote work is mixed though as some have found that working from home gives employees more opportunities to manage the demands of work and non-work roles thereby reducing work-family conflict levels, with those who spend more time working from home reporting lower work-family conflict (Golden, Veiga, & Simsek, 2006). This could depend on how remote work is implemented, as the positive effect of this was more pronounced for those who had higher levels of autonomy in the roles and had schedule flexibility. If this is not the case, it may be that remote working can be detrimental.

1.7.2.2 Organisational culture

It is often assumed that the availability of policies is an important support to help people in managing their work and home life. However, if the workplace culture and line managers are unsupportive, policies will not have the same effect, as the employee needs to believe the organisation cares about why they need to take advantage of such policies for them to be used most effectively (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). A supportive organisational culture has been defined as one that takes pride in their employees and one that is concerned with the welfare of their employees (Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999). Specific aspects of workplace culture can include a long hours culture, which can undermine flexible working policies (Andreassi & Thompson, 2008), managers' and co-workers' sensitivity to family responsibility, and the belief that using workplace policies will damage careers (Anderson et al., 2002; Thomson et al., 1999). For those who are employed in a workplace where there is a long hours culture, they may view having work-life balance as a luxury (Moen et al., 2013).

A supportive and positive organisational culture is said to have a positive impact on work-life balance (Allen, 2001; Thompson & Prottas, 2006; O'Driscoll et al., 2003, Thomson et al., 1999; Premeaux et al., 2007). It is well documented that supportive work environments have been linked to less work-family conflict (O'Neill et al 2009; Allen, 2001: Kossek, Colquitt & Noe; 2001). Tombari and Spinks (1999) and Kropf (1999) have emphasised the importance of supportive culture and Shabi (2002) highlights the need for leadership by example, in managers creating a work culture where managers and employees can openly discuss work-life balance.

1.7.2.3 Support

Most of the literature has focused on assessing the perceptions of the support employees receive from their supervisor/line manager as an antecedent. Anderson, Coffey and Byerly (2002) created a model showing that one of the predictors of work-to-family conflict was lower management support, and managerial support had a direct relationship with all employee outcomes. Support from supervisors or line managers has been found to reduce work-family conflict (e.g. Den Dulk & de Ruijter, 2008; Goh, Ilies, & Wilson, 2015; Paustian-Underdahl & Halbesleben, 2014; Thompson & Prottas, 2006). Research has also explored this link along with co-worker support. Griggs, Casper and Eby (2013) concluded that supervisor support was also related to less work-family conflict, however co-worker support was not related to work-family conflict. Conversely the model developed by Pisarski et al. (2008), found greater supervisor and colleague support were significant predictors in reducing work-family conflict due to the team climate being perceived as more trustworthy, collaborative and with higher levels of control over their work environment. Both of these forms of support are important because support from colleagues can help individuals because a colleague can fulfil the work responsibilities of another employee, whereas support from a manager can help to reduce responsibilities at work (Köse et al., 2021).

Outside of work, support from a spouse is related to reduced conflict in both directions (work-family and family-work) (Wallace, 2005; Voydanoff, 2005). Few studies have examined support from non-work sources other than spouses but Griggs, Casper and Eby (2013) concluded child support was a significant predictor of work-family conflict for those in low-income families because in low-income families children help out with household responsibilities. Participants who had neighbour support reported lower time-based family-work conflict and community support was related to lower time and strain-based work-family

conflict as well as strain-based family-work conflict. For employees with non-traditional family structures, the role played by the community and friends may also assume more importance. Non-work support is crucial for those who do not have a spouse or children. For example, it has been stated that unlike those who have a partner and/or a traditional family structure, single people do not receive support from their spouse when considering the non-work responsibilities they may have (Ruppanner & Huffman, 2013).

Finally, supervisor support was also found to be an antecedent of work to family enrichment, with supervisor and family support predictors of family to work enrichment (Bhargava & Baral, 2009). Similarly, family social support increased family to work facilitation (Karatepe & Bekteshi, 2008). In a qualitative study which included employees from Europe, North America, Asia, South America and Africa, supportive family relationships were found to be an important component of family-to-work facilitation (Hill et al., 2007).

Therefore, this research will also examine the influence of job demands, flexible working, organisational culture, line manager support and colleague support, as well as support from non-work sources, on work-personal life conflict and enrichment.

1.8 COVID-19 and work-life balance

COVID-19 was first declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern at the end of January 2020 and then a pandemic in March 2020. On 23rd March 2020, the Prime Minister of the UK announced the first UK lockdown and ordered people to stay at home and those who could work from home should do so. During the first lockdown, with the exception of furloughed and frontline workers, for many, both work and non-work activities took place in their homes with home becoming their new workplace (Adisa et al., 2022). In 2019 (pre-

pandemic), only 5% of employees did some work from home but in April 2020 (lockdown), this increased to around 46.6%, with 86% stating that they were working from home due to the pandemic (ONS, 2020).

Remote work was the form of flexible working mostly notably impacted by the pandemic, due to many employees working from home, but this also led to flexibility in hours, especially for those home-schooling children, as illustrated by a review of 40 empirical studies on the experience of work-life balance and remote work during the pandemic. Shirmohammadi, Au and Beigi (2022) identified 4 themes. 1. Flextime vs. work intensity. This related to the claim that flexibility over schedules generally increases work-life balance but during the pandemic studies found higher workloads being reported and therefore lower levels of work-life balance. Many reasons were cited for this including always needing to be online, working in the evening, and feeling like an immediate response was needed. 2. Flexplace vs. space limitation. This referred to how pre-pandemic, flexibility of the working environment, was sometimes associated with better work-life balance due to the ability to engage in family and personal activities. During the pandemic, the key to good work-life balance was having adequate space and this was not available to all (e.g. when multiple members of the household were working /studying from home). 3. Technologically feasible work arrangement vs. technostress and isolation. This related to the use of technology as being the key to successful remote work but during the pandemic, technology often left many feeling unprepared, constantly connected and consequently this meant employees faced difficulties creating boundaries between work and non-work. 4. Family-friendly work arrangement vs. housework and care intensity. It was noted that prior to the pandemic, remote work sometimes (not always) aided in reducing work-personal life conflict as it helped employees balance their work and home responsibilities saving time and energy for the family role. However, the authors note that during the pandemic,

remote workers faced increased home demands such as increased childcare responsibilities and housework with no access to domestic help, causing issues balancing work and home life.

Nevertheless, the research exploring remote work and the impact on work-life balance during the pandemic has been quite mixed. Some studies have indicated that working from home had a positive effect on work-life balance (Putri & Amran, 2021), but noted at the same time, employees felt like when they were working from home, they couldn't communicate as easily with their co-workers. Whereas other research has identified some positives (closeness to family, increased technological ability, helping to maintain good health and flexible working times) and negatives (irregular patterns and timings of work, blurred boundaries and increase in home costs) (Srimulyani & Hermanto, 2022). A more complex analysis was put forward by Vaziri et al., (2020) and this may explain the mixed findings. They used a person-centred approach to examine the work-family interface before and during the pandemic. They identified three profiles. 1, beneficial (low conflict and high enrichment), 2, active (medium conflict and enrichment), 3, passive (low conflict and enrichment) and found that transitions from some profiles were more likely than others. People who had a passive profile prior to the pandemic were more likely to move to an active profile, but people with a beneficial profile were more likely to sustain this profile during the pandemic. The study found that those who had a beneficial profile had the resources to manage the demands, thus the pandemic allowed them to foster these resources again to avert the more undesirable profile transition.

Another reason for the mixed findings might be due to differing family structures. During the pandemic home demands may have shifted with childcare responsibilities becoming one of the most incompatible demands with work. The primary reason behind this was the lack of control and resources to deal with the responsibilities which often included home schooling (Metselaar

et al., 2023). The role of gender may have had an impact. In a study comparing mothers and fathers non work tasks during the lockdown, mothers spent more time on household tasks and childcare and less time on paid work compared to men during the pandemic (Andrew et al., 2020). However, even prior to the pandemic, many mothers reported feeling like they had to cope with a multitude of home demands to be a good mother (Emslie & Hunt, 2009) or sacrifice their personal time (Camilleri & Spiteri, 2021). However, prior to lockdown, many of those who worked from home had a choice about how often they did and may have been able to set boundaries according to their preferences, but this was not possible during lockdown. The modes of working were limited and forced and related to a loss of control.

Those without children faced their own challenges with work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been noted that much research focused on parents in terms of their increase in caring responsibilities, however those without children were almost 'invisible' in the research, but they faced their own struggles. Those who were single and didn't have children were reported as losing track of their working hours, because they had no schedules to follow and no one to keep them 'on track' which inevitably lead to poor work-life balance (França, 2022; Utoft, 2020). Wilkinson et al., (2023) who explored the views and experiences of those who lived alone found that although some demands were not specific to this group, they had unique challenges. Technology was the main route to social support for this group, but there was already an increased use of technology during lockdowns, so this type of support was limited. They also felt that working parents' needs were prioritised and many 'solo living' professionals had increased workloads due to covering for those with families which in turn impacted their work-life balance.

Post-pandemic many employees expect access to flexible working (Alexander et al., 2021; Hickman & Robison, 2020). This may be because there has been a change in the psychological contract as remote work in particular has converted from being a ‘perk’ to a core privilege that employees feel entitled to, however there is still great variation in the amount of flexibility different companies are willing to provide (Smite et al., 2023). However, overall in the UK, most (76%) of the employees asked in a recent CIPD survey (2023) believed that the pandemic would lead to long-term changes towards more flexible working. 39% of employers said they would be more likely to grant requests for flexible working (besides working from home) compared to before the pandemic and 40% have reportedly seen an increase in formal requests following the pandemic. These are positive changes, as both employee and employer attitudes seem to have shifted somewhat. According to some studies, the preferred choice for most employees is to work between 1-3 days a week from home (although some prefer only home or only office), indicating that hybrid work is now a popular option, but not for all, so employers need to be mindful not to use a one size fits all approach (Barrero et al., 2021; Bloom, 2020) and many job roles (e.g. customer-facing jobs) do not lend themselves to this kind of working pattern. Remote work post-pandemic has similar benefits and challenges to before the pandemic, with benefits including the increased flexibility, autonomy and, for some, increased work-life balance (Babapour Chafi et al., 2022).

1.9 This programme of research

The overarching aims of this research are to examine perceptions and impacts of supports for work-life balance, in particular the extension to the right to request flexible working, from the perspective of different organisational actors, including HR and line managers and employees. A key focus is on perceptions of fairness, especially in relation to employees with differing family structures. Additionally, it explores the work-life balance experiences of employees

with differing family structures, including work-personal life conflict, enrichment and boundary management. A mixed methods approach was employed to address the overarching aims and a number of research questions from both the qualitative and the quantitative components of the research are outlined below.

The first qualitative study (chapter 2) involved semi-structured interviews to explore the views of line managers and HR managers in terms of the work-life balance supports offered at their workplaces. The specific research questions for the first study were:

- What are the views of HR professionals and line managers regarding work-life balance supports their organisations offer?
 - Do they believe they effectively and fairly support employees with different family structures?
- How do HR professionals and line managers view the 2014 change to the right to request flexible working?
 - What benefits and barriers do they perceive, or have they already experienced related to the 2014 change?

The second qualitative study (chapter 3) involved semi-structured interviews to explore employees' work-life balance experiences, as well as experiences and views of supports offered in their workplaces. The specific research questions were:

- What are employees' experiences of work-life boundary management, conflict and enrichment?
- What are their experiences of work-life balance supports (policies, culture and line manager support) and perceptions of fairness of supports?
- How do they view the 2014 changes to the right to request flexible working?

- Do these experiences, perceptions and views differ across employees with different family structures?

The quantitative element of the research programme (chapter 4) utilised a questionnaire study and aimed to examine the key antecedents of work-life balance. The specific research questions were:

- What are the antecedents of bi-directional work-personal life conflict and enrichment? In particular:
 - What roles are played by role **demands** and **resources** such as various forms of support, Singles/childfree-friendly work culture, and use of policies?
 - What role is played by perceptions of fairness?
- Are there differences in the antecedents and work-life balance outcomes between employees with different family structures?

1.10 Methodology of this programme of research

This programme of research used mixed methods. Mixed methods research provides a better understanding of complex phenomena or research problems (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) defined mixed methods studies as when a single study combines both quantitative and qualitative methods. Mixed methods research has also been defined as “research in which the investigator collects, analyses, mixes, and draws inferences from both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a program of inquiry” (Cameron, 2011, p96). Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) state that it is a research design with its own philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and

the mixture of qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Cameron, 2011). Although there are differences between the definitions, according to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) the two principles which draw mixed methods researchers together are rejection of 'either-or' at all levels of the research process and subscription to the iterative, cyclical approach to research.

Moving on from the definition, the usefulness and appropriateness of mixed methods research is important to consider. Mixed-methods research is useful when simultaneously addressing quantitative questions such as correlational relationships, causal relationships and descriptive research, along with qualitative questions based on the examination of experiences and perceptions among other factors (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Plano Clark and Badice (2010) illustrated a wide range of questions which can be addressed with mixed-methods research compared to mono-methods such as when there are separate research questions (one or more qualitative research questions connected to one or more quantitative research questions), hybrid research questions (one question with two distinct parts, so one part is addressed using a quantitative approach and the other part is addressed using a qualitative approach), combination research questions (separate quantitative and qualitative questions with at least one combined mixed research question), general overarching research questions (i.e., broad questions that are addressed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches); emergent research questions (i.e., new or modified research questions that arise during the design, data collection, data analysis, or interpretation phase) amongst many others. The current research will utilise combination research questions because there are separate research questions (for the qualitative and quantitative components) but there is also an overarching aim which is

addressed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Additionally, according to Creswell (2014) there are four major types of mixed methods designs which are used in published studies. These are convergent (merging both approaches to generate two interpretations), exploratory sequential (qualitative builds into a quantitative phase), explanatory sequential (quantitative followed by qualitative in order to explain the quantitative results) and intervention design (qualitative data is incorporated into an experimental trial). The current research used a convergent design as both approaches were used in order to gain a full understanding of the research problem.

Regardless of research questions the use of mixed methods should be befitting, as Bryman (2008) states that the main concern of mixed methods research is that it is often not sufficiently justified. Creswell (2013) offers nine steps in conducting a mixed methods study: (1) determine if a mixed methods study is needed to study the problem; (2) consider whether a mixed methods study is feasible; (3) write both qualitative and quantitative research questions; (4) review and decide on the types of data collection; (5) assess the relative weight and implementation strategy for each method; (6) present a visual model; (7) determine how the data will be analysed; (8) assess the criteria for evaluating the study; (9) develop a plan for the study. These steps were largely followed in this programme of research as it was determined at the start that a mixed methods approach was needed to address the overarching research question which had been developed. The feasibility has been examined throughout the study and both qualitative and quantitative questions were developed as part of the research proposal alongside determining the types of data collection. The current research had equal weight attributed to both qualitative and quantitative components when exploring the experiences of the employees, but only a qualitative method was used when exploring the views of managers. The data analysis of all the studies was pre-determined (with some scope for flexibility) and a clear plan

was developed. The final stage which involved planning and development of the programme of research. The research paradigm which has been adopted, will be discussed next.

1.10.1 Paradigms and the pragmatic approach

The two paradigms which are usually cast as opposites within the epistemological debate within social sciences are those of positivism and constructivism (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Hughes & Sharrock, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). There are also two main schools of thoughts within the paradigm debate: the pragmatists who encourage the use of mixed methods research and argue against the “false dichotomy” that exists by combining the methods, and the “purists” who state that paradigms and methods should not be mixed (Creswell, 1994). In order to integrate quantitative and qualitative research strategies an alternative framework has been developed, although there is little agreement on the nature of this framework (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Feilzer, 2010; Greene et al., 2001).

The most commonly cited is the pragmatic approach which focuses on the research problem and the consequences of research, and it is said to offer an ‘alternative worldview’ to that of traditional positivist and constructivist stances (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, Miller, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Pragmatism aims to solve ‘real world’ problems by philosophically accepting there are multiple realities, and that one does not have to be constrained to a positivism or constructivist approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, pg. 20; Dewey, 1925; Rorty, 1999). Ultimately pragmatism requires a knowledge of both quantitative and qualitative methods, and the main aim is to find out whether the research has helped to find out what the researcher wants to know by interrogating a particular question, theory or phenomenon (Hanson, 2008). Pragmatism acknowledges the importance of quantitative and qualitative research methods and is flexible in that it allows for top-down

deductive research and inductive bottom-up research, which capture the complexities and ‘messiness’ of social life (Feilzer, 2010). The current research aims to adopt a pragmatic approach as it was determined in the beginning that to address the research questions, it was necessary to combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies. By adopting a pragmatic approach it’s possible to see the research as not being constrained by adopting a positivist or constructivist stance, and it allows the researcher to acknowledge that both qualitative and quantitative methods are necessary to develop a thorough understanding of the proposed questions.

Those who argue for the incompatibility of combining the qualitative and quantitative approaches largely subscribe to the idea that the underlying paradigms are vastly different and that by combining them the foundations of both philosophies would be destroyed (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Noblitt & Hare 1988; Rosenberg 1988). There are those who take a more pragmatic position (Reichardt & Cook 1979; Steckler et al. 1992) and those who aim to conduct mixed methods research (i.e. Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003b). There are those who argue that the paradigms underlying these different research approaches are incompatible (Smith, 1983). However, Bryman (1988) challenged this and suggested that they could be combined. Nevertheless, when using mixed methods the qualitative data can provide a deep understanding and the quantitative analysis can provide a detailed analysis of the patterns of responses. Mixed methods is often used in nursing and education studies (Timans et al., 2019) and counselling psychology (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Its use has been argued to be less frequent in organisational research (Elsbach & Kramer, 2015). However, since the COVID-19 pandemic there has been an increasing amount of organisational research using mixed-method to explore the impact of the pandemic. This includes investigations on occupational burnout and job satisfaction (Alrawashdeh et al., 2021), technostress (Califf et al., 2020), mental health in the

workplace for those in healthcare settings (Crowe et al., 2021; LoGiudice & Bartos, 2021) amongst many others. Therefore, the current research aimed to address this call for more mixed-methods research by first conducting a qualitative study that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2. Qualitative Study with Human Resources managers and line managers.

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, work-life balance policies are usually offered to help employees manage work and home life (McCarthy, Darcy & Grady, 2010). The most common (and statutory) policy in the UK offered to help employees manage work and home life is the right to request flexible working (Dex & Smith, 2002) and this right was extended to all employees in the UK in June 2014, with further changes proposed from April 2024.

McCarthy, Cleveland, Hunter, Darcy & Grady (2013) suggest the role of HR managers in influencing work-life outcomes has not been adequately explored. Yet uptake of supports for work-life balance depend on a variety of factors including the support from the gatekeepers of work-life balance policies such as HR managers. They concluded that the existence of work-life balance supports alone is not related to better work-life balance outcomes, but that organisational support is amongst one of the most important correlates of work-life balance. McCarthy et al. (2013) also found that employees reported less role conflict and greater job satisfaction when they perceived their supervisor (line manager) as supportive.

Line managers are the closest to employees in terms of supervision and are the most responsible for their performance. They play a crucial role in the workplace, and one of their many responsibilities is translating people management policies into practice (Amri et al., 2022; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003; Purcell et al., 2003). There is a lack of research which has explored the role line managers or senior managers play in terms of policies in the UK (Ballantine et al., 2022; Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux & Brinley, 2005), particularly in terms of how line managers manage and implement the policies designed to help employees

with work-life balance. This is even though managers play a crucial role when implementing flexible working arrangements within an organisation (Maxwell, Rankine, Bell & MacVicar, 2007). McCarthy, Darcy and Grady's (2010) study aimed to explain the effects of line manager work-life balance policy and practice behaviour and the impact on employee work-life balance experiences. They concluded that line managers are a critical determinant of work-life balance policy effectiveness. Similar results were reported in a study that focused on retailing, tourism and finance sectors (Maxwell, 2005). Nevertheless, research conducted in the UK in this area is scarce, although there has been some research conducted in the USA (Laharnar et al., 2013) the Netherlands (ter Hoeven et al., 2017) and Ireland (Daverth et al., 2016).

It's important to explore the views of both HR managers and line managers because if both are seen as supportive, this impacts the use and effectiveness of flexible working arrangements (Gregory & Milner, 2009). When employees' feel a lack of perceived fairness in the availability and allocation of work-life balance initiatives, this can lead to counterproductive work behaviours, so perceptions of fairness are important (Beauregard, 2014).

The 2014 extension of the right to request flexible working legislation could be perceived as fair as the right was extended to all employees. Those with children who made use of policies before often felt a sense of stigma and unfairness in terms of career progression (Chung, 2020; Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Southworth, 2014). However, those who couldn't make use of them (e.g. those without children) sometimes felt a sense of unfairness because they felt penalised for not having children (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Young, 1999). However, there are also potential barriers for employers in terms of the costs that may be incurred, particularly for smaller businesses, and how managers may implement these changes (Kossek et al., 2011).

Therefore, to gain a full insight into policy changes it is important to gain the views of those who are at the front line of policy changes. In a review which looked at 50 years of work-family research, it was suggested that the future agenda of research in this area should focus on exploring societal and organisational multi-level influences which includes policies (Kossek et al., 2021). The authors note that research has under examined factors such as policy implementation, culture and the role of supervisors (line managers). This is evidenced by the lack of research that has explored HR managers and line managers perceptions of the 2014 changes to the right to request flexible working in the UK. The current study examined the attitudes of HR managers and line managers towards work-life balance policies, the 2014 policy change to the right to request and the perceived fairness of these policies. As they are responsible for implementing policy in practice, their attitudes towards policies and any concerns they may have could ultimately impact the culture of the workplace, and employee uptake of work-life balance supports. This study aimed to address the following research questions:

- What are the views of HR professionals and line managers regarding work-life balance supports their organisations offer?
 - Do they believe they effectively and fairly support employees with different family structures?
- How do HR professionals and line managers view the 2014 changes to the right to request flexible working?
 - What benefits and barriers do they perceive, or have they already experienced related to the 2014 change?

2.2 Method

2.2.1 Design

The current study adopted a qualitative methodology utilising semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR managers and line managers. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012) there are four forms of interviewing styles in qualitative research: focus groups, internet interviews, casual conversations, semi-structured/unstructured interviews. The semi-structured interview is known as the core form of qualitative interviewing and they usually involve an interview taking place at a scheduled time and the researcher would have prepared questions in advance with plans to ask follow-up questions, and probe for more information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews are well suited to address the research questions of this study as the aim of interviews is to explore attitudes, values, beliefs and motives (Richardson, Dohrenwend & Klein, 1965, Saldana & Omasta, 2017). They are also good for gathering data when the research involves asking about personal experiences (McArdle, McGale & Gaffney, 2012). A variety of skills are also required when conducting interviews which were taken into consideration, these include asking the questions in a clear manner, being non-judgemental, letting people talk and paying attention to the answers (Hove & Anda, 2005).

2.2.2 Participants

The current study involved interviewing current HR managers (n=7) and line managers (n=7). The inclusion criteria were that participants had to be employed either as a HR manager or were responsible for 'line managing' a group of individuals (in any sector or organisation) and were employed in the UK. The exclusion criteria was anyone who was not employed as either a HR manager or was not responsible for managing staff, or if they worked in these roles outside of the UK. Thus, purposive sampling was required to recruit participants in the relevant

role across different organisations and sectors. Snowballing was also used as managers were asked about any other individuals they knew who may want to participate in the study. For example, recruitment adverts were placed on LinkedIn, and some associated HR forums and groups which included “HR Grapevine”, “Linked: HR”, “Human Resources Professionals” (powered by HR Drive) and the “Step-up club” community forum. This led to the recruitment of some HR managers and then these managers were asked if they knew any other HR managers in other organisations or line managers who they wouldn’t mind asking to participate. Line managers were also recruited by directly messaging them on LinkedIn if their current roles indicated line management responsibilities. Along with snowballing, an opportunity sampling method was employed. This involved asking any personal contacts if they knew any HR managers or line managers and asking any contacts of the researcher’s supervisory team if they knew anyone within this role who wouldn’t mind being interviewed.

A combination of private sector (n=6) and public sector (n=8) individuals were recruited, as policies and practices may differ between these two sectors. The public sector can be defined in a variety of ways, however the Office for National Statistics (2024 p.1) determine the difference between these sectors by using the following question “does the government exercise significant control over the general corporate policy of the unit?” Therefore, if the government exerts substantial control over the organisation (such as those in the current study who were working in the NHS, the fire service and schools) they would be classified as belonging to the public sector. Whereas the private sector would refer to places where the government does not have significant control (such as those in the current study employed by an airline, a bank or a HR consultancy).

The age of the managers across the sample ranged from 26-62 years old ($M = 45$, $SD = 8.74$). The HR managers included those with a variety of family structures including 2 who were single, 2 married with children, 1 married without children and 2 who had partners and no children. Whereas all line managers were married, and only one did not have children. All HR managers who volunteered to participate in the research were female, however there were two line managers who were male (demographic information can be found in tables 2.1 and 2.2). Although it would have been preferable to obtain views from males and females, HR is a profession which is dominated by women with a report finding that 71% of HR professionals are female (Namely's HR Careers Report, 2021). This is also reflected in statistics which show that the top occupations where women are highly concentrated include nursing, social workers, counsellors and HR (Elkins, 2015). However, this statistic does not reflect the sample of line managers. It would have been preferable to have more male participants. Nevertheless, this is a limitation of using an opportunity sample as in some cases it can provide a biased sample (Paarsch & Golyaev, 2016) and in the present research those who volunteered to participate were predominantly female.

Table 2.1

Sample demographics of HR managers

Name	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Organisation	Interview
HR1	46	Female	Married: 2 children	University	In-person
HR2	46	Female	Living with partner: 0 children	Publicly funded government agency	Telephone
HR3	26	Female	Single: 0 children	Fire service	Telephone
HR4	50	Female	Single: 0 children	Fire service	Telephone
HR5	46	Female	Married: 0 children	Airline	Telephone
HR6	38	Female	Married: 1 child	Consultancy organisation	Telephone
HR7	33	Female	Has a partner: 0 children	Charity	Telephone

Table 2.2

Sample demographics of Line Managers

Name	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Occupation	Interview
LM1	62	Female	Married: 4 children	Head teacher at a School	In-person
LM2	47	Female	Married: 1 child	Practice Manager at a GP Practice	Telephone
LM3	53	Female	Married: 1 child	Head of Department at a University	In-person
LM4	51	Male	Married: 2 children	Team Manager at a Foreign Exchange	Telephone
LM5	45	Female	Married: 0 children	Head of HR consultancy	Telephone
LM6	42	Female	Married: 2 children	Head of Resourcing at a Bank	Telephone
LM7	42	Male	Married: 3 children	Clinical Lead in NHS	Telephone

2.2.3 The interview

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed to cover a range of topics (see Appendix A). The interview started with some demographic questions which included a question enquiring about their job role (e.g. “Can you tell me your job title and a bit about your role in the organisation?”) and if they were aware “of the number of flexible working requests processed in a 6-month period?”. Other topics which were included were the flexible working policies offered in the workplace (e.g. “Could you tell me about the policies or practices offered at this organisation to help employees with balancing work and home life before the recent June 2014 change to the right to request flexible working?”) and probes to enquire “who the policies were open to?” and if they were “introduced due to legislation?”. The participants were then asked about the changes to the right request flexible working (e.g. “What are your thoughts on the extension of the right to request flexible working from parents of young children and carers only to all employees introduced in June 2014?”). Participants were also asked about attitudes towards those who make use of these policies in the organisation (e.g. “What do you think are the general workplace attitudes and culture towards those who make use of these policies?”) and how fair they perceived these policies were towards those with different family structures before the policy changes (e.g. “Prior to the changes to the right to request, how fair do you think the policies in this organisation were towards those with different family structures?”) as well as after, and if these requests were “solely based on the business case?”. The interview was then closed with some general work life balance questions (e.g. “How effective do you think your policies are in helping employees balance work and home life?”).

The interviews were not strictly limited to these questions because they were semi-structured, and the researcher did use additional prompts if she felt she needed to probe a certain topic

further. In addition to this, there was an open-ended question at the end of the interview to enquire if the participants wanted to talk about anything else.

2.2.4 Procedure and ethical considerations

A research proposal for study 1, along with relevant information, was submitted to the Psychology Department Ethics Committee at Middlesex University and the research was approved on 30th May 2014. The information included an information sheet, debriefing sheet, consent form and semi-structured interview schedule. Before the interview (face-to-face and telephone) was conducted, participants were provided with an information sheet via email and were asked to return the consent form via email. If the consent form was not returned, a verbal version of the consent form was read out over the phone and consent was always gained (and audio recorded) before the interview took place. For those who returned the form prior to the interview, verbal consent was also gained, as there was often a short space of time between the consent form being returned and the interview-taking place. Participants were reminded of the confidentiality of the interview and the right to withdraw at any time. On average the interviews lasted approximately forty minutes. A combination of face-to face and telephone interviews were used (see table 2.1 and 2.2). Where it was possible to conduct a face-to-face interview, it was preferred, if not, a telephone interview was conducted with the phone call being made from a confidential space of a cubicle within Middlesex University. The interviews were recorded using a USB voice recording device, and participants were asked if they approved this, and once the interview had been conducted, they were debriefed. In addition to this, if the interview was conducted in-person they were provided with a debriefing sheet. If the interview was conducted over the phone, they were emailed a copy of the debriefing sheet. The sheet contained a brief overview of why the study was conducted along with details of the researcher, supervisors and organisations they could contact if they felt any distress (such as the

organisation Working Families). The interviews were then transcribed verbatim, and they were checked for accuracy before the audio files were destroyed.

2.2.5 Saturation of Data

Sample size can depend on the point when theoretical saturation is deemed to be reached. For example, to stop investigating when no further themes are found (Glaser & Strauss 1965, 1990; Bowen, 2008), or when new information produces little or no change to the list of codes (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). There have been a variety of ranges given in terms of when saturation might be reached ranging from 6 to 63 participants (Francis et al., 2010; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006; cited in Fugard & Potts, 2015; Guest et al., 2006; Wright, Maloney & Febowitz, 2011). These examples exemplify the point of saturation can be extremely varied. Although this can make it hard to make predictions in terms of sample size, it can be regarded as a flexible approach when collecting data. However, the idea of saturation has also been questioned (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016; Saunders et al., 2017; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Braun, Clarke, & Weate (2016) maintain that rather than suggesting a point of saturation, a minimum of 6 participants should be used when using thematic analysis, however this is noted as a suggestion rather than an aim, as it depends on the research question(s). They also highlight that even specifying a ‘sample size’ can risk going into the realm of positivist-empiricist framings which is something to be avoided in qualitative research. Saturation has often been unquestioned and been thought of as a requirement of thematic analysis but Braun and Clarke (2019) state that even though it is identified as the most common form of justification for sample size in qualitative research, particularly in the area of health, they have never suggested a specific sample size which would be regarded as the minimum to “reach data saturation” and that saturation has been poorly ‘operationalised’ because the criteria for saturation and what

counts as data saturation is largely unexplained. Therefore, the controversy surrounding it must be acknowledged.

Nevertheless, the concept was considered to be of potential use in the current study since the HR and line managers were speaking primarily about their views on a limited topic. The process by which the point of saturation was determined involved keeping notes from each of the interviews and doing preliminary coding. Both groups of managers shared very similar views on, for example, the fairness of supports and the change to the right to request, and so little new information was coming out of later interviews and thus recruitment was ended after 14 interviews.

2.2.6 Analysis

The approach used for the qualitative component of this research was reflexive thematic analysis. Thematic analysis gained popularity following the publication of the Braun and Clark paper in 2006. Although there are other versions of conducting thematic analysis (e.g., Boyatzis, 1998; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Joffe, 2011), the Braun and Clarke method has remained the most cited and systematic method and this method is used across a wide range of disciplines including Psychology. The essence of thematic analysis is uncovering themes or some “level of patterned response or meaning” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.82). It involves searching for themes that are crucial to the description of the phenomenon in question (Daly, Kellehear & Glikman, 1997).

Thematic analysis was chosen over other methods such as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) due to its flexibility and appropriateness within a mixed methods programme of research. According to Braun & Clarke (2021), it’s often mistakenly said that ‘off-the shelf’

methodologies such as IPA are superior as they have a theoretically informed framework, whereas thematic analysis is theoretically independent. It's noted by the authors that what is most important, is that the method used fits the purpose of the project and that the research questions, methods, and project's purpose are in alignment and that there is coherence in the research design. Braun and Clarke have also defended their work against critics who believe that thematic analysis is not a 'sophisticated approach' and argue that those who believe this, lack the understanding about the potential of thematic analysis, particularly the flexibility of this method. It has been suggested that although it is flexible, it provides a rich, detailed and complex account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This view is reiterated by Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013) who posit that the approach is robust enough for a study on a novel phenomenon and the quality of the data is dependent on the amount of energy and time the researcher spends on the process of data collection and analysis. The current study has utilised the flexibility of this approach whilst maintaining the rigour required when conducting qualitative research.

The flexibility of thematic analysis allows for harmony and for the research questions to be addressed in the most suitable way. In addition to this, in the current qualitative study within this thesis, a small homogeneous sample, as is required for IPA (Larkin et al., 2006), would not fit. The aim is to explore the experiences of a range of HR managers and line managers across different sectors. Using thematic analysis allows for patterns to be identified across the data and across these groups.

As thematic analysis is theoretically flexible but not atheoretical (Braun & Clarke, 2020), it is important to note the approach taken to guide the data analysis within this study. There are a variety of ways to approach reflexive thematic analysis including inductive v deductive,

semantic v latent coding of data and theme development, and a critical realist v constructivist approach, underpinning analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023). They state that researchers should make an active choice in terms of how they engage with the data, and they should ask themselves 3 questions based on the approaches listed above. 1) Did they engage with the data with a semantic focus (i.e. coding by reporting on explicitly stated experiences, meanings and ideas, or was there a latent focus (i.e. where coding is based on more implicit concepts and ideas)? To answer this, the current study used semantic coding as all coding and analysis was based on the interviewees dialogue, involving ideas and concepts that were explicitly stated. 2) Were the codes developed in a ‘bottom up’ inductive way (i.e. content driven analysis) or was a ‘top-up’ deductive approach (i.e. analysis driven by theoretical concepts) taken? The current study employed an inductive approach as the interview content is what steered the analysis and the analysis was not driven by theory. 3) Is the approach grounded in any epistemological, ontological or conceptual frameworks (e.g.(post)positivism and essentialism or contextualist/critical realism or critical/constructionist orientations? The current study employed a critical realist approach.

Critical realism has been said as being a scientific alternative to constructivism and positivism, drawing elements from both in terms of the ontology and epistemology, but at the same time not being associated with a particular set of methods but as a general methodological framework (Fletcher, 2017). Although it was developed in the 1970’s it is seeing a resurgence in modern literature. Critical realism proposes that our knowledge of the world involves subjective interpretation, and this is imperfect because these interpretations are based on the conceptual frameworks in which the researcher operates (Bhaskar, 1998). According to Lawani (2021, p.16) the “critical realist ontology is that there is a real world that is independent of perceptions, the epistemology is that knowledge is obtained by observing and interpreting

meaning to explain the elements of reality that must exist prior to the events and experiences that occur, and the methodology is an intensive study with a limited number of cases, and the task of the researcher is to provide a rich and reliable explanation of patterns of events.”

Moreover, critical realism is not tied to a single method of research but supports the use of a variety of research methods that can be chosen according to the aims of the research (Zachariadis et al., 2010). It can be said that it offers a middle ground as it combines ontological realism and epistemological relativism (Willis, 2023). In addition, it allows the methodological choices of the research to depend on the nature of the object of study and what needs to be learnt.

Using a critical realist stance, data was analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This started with *Phase one* familiarisation with the data; this involves reading and re-reading of the interviews whilst being actively aware of any patterns which may emerge during the reading of the transcripts. Therefore, the researcher followed this process and after reading through all the interviews, the data was re-read several times and summary notes were made (which may have been helpful for coding at a later stage). *Phase two* involves generating initial codes; once the data was considered familiar, initial codes were developed across the interviews. This was done manually without the use of specialist software. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) this can be via notes, highlighters or “post-it” notes. The researcher combined two of these methods, first by keeping notes in the margins of the interview transcription documents, and second by highlighting quotes in different colours relating to different codes. *Phase three* comprised of searching for themes; at this stage Braun and Clarke (2006) note that the key feature is sorting the codes into different themes, and this can be done via mind maps, tables, writing notes and organising “theme piles”. The researcher

who had coded all the data and copied these codes on a separate page decided that creating tables would be the most appropriate method (based on previous experience). Some initial themes were developed by grouping codes and the refinement of themes was left for the next stage. *Phase four* involves reviewing themes; at this stage Braun and Clarke (2006) state that there are two levels to refining the themes. Level one is to review the themes at the level of the coded extracts and the second level is considering the validity of the themes individually in relation to the data set. Therefore, the researcher first read all the coded extracts to see if the themes adequately fit the extracts, and as some did not, some themes were reworked to fully capture the essence of the coded extracts. Then moving on to level two, the themes were compared against the entire data set, and during this process some additional extracts were discovered, and themes were further refined. The *fifth phase* is defining and naming themes; Braun and Clarke (2006) note that this step is about identifying the essence of each theme and writing a detailed analysis to identify any sub themes. At this point the researcher named the final themes which would be written up. It was established that three themes (each with two sub themes) captured the data fully and provided the most parsimonious representation of the data. *The sixth phase* involves producing the report once the final themes have been established. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) the write up involves telling the story of the data with sufficient evidence of the themes in the data. The researcher wrote up the final themes, but whilst writing up the themes they were further refined. Themes were also reviewed by supervisors, and this allowed further refinement of themes and to ensure the most salient quotes were used.

2.3 Results

Three main themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews which were conducted, and these are displayed in figure 2.1 along with their subthemes. The first main theme (a good

existing environment) relates to the positive environment which participants believe has always existed in the workplace of the participants including informal flexibility; it has two subthemes (inclusivity of flexible working supports and positive workplace culture). The second main theme focuses on the fairness of the legislation and has two subthemes (before the change and after the change). The third main theme (consequences of the changes) centres on the potentially negative and positive impact this change in policy could have in the workplace, particularly focusing on two sub themes (benefits and barriers). Although the participants generally stated they had a good existing environment, this theme explores the participants' reservations and benefits which they feel could potentially arise.

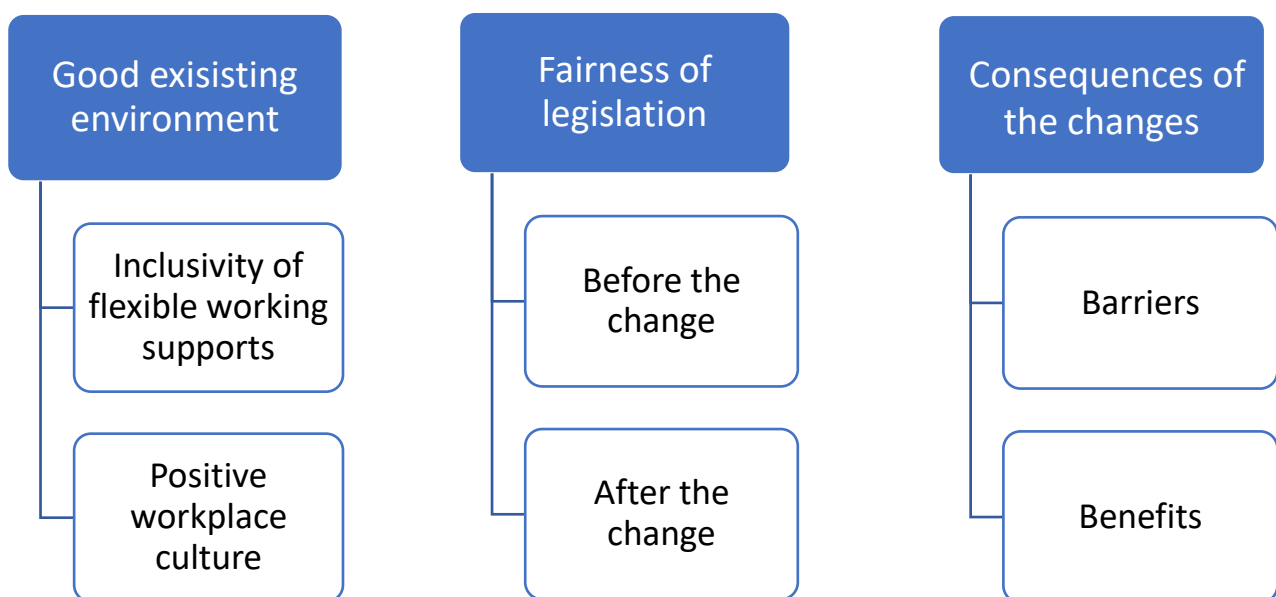


Figure 2.1. Thematic map displaying the main themes and sub themes from HR managers and line managers' interviews.

2.3.1 Theme 1: Good existing environment

This theme describes perceptions of the positive environment which participants believed had always existed including prior to the June 2014 changes to the right to request flexible working. Nearly all the HR and line managers claimed that they were doing a lot already and put forward the notion that a supportive environment existed in their workplaces in terms of the flexible working policies being inclusive (in terms of not being limited to only parents and carers), and a positive work culture which may encourage employees to make use of the policies or that provides support via informal flexibility. Their narratives focused on showing they are a good employer, doing the right thing, especially compared to other organisations. The theme had two subthemes: inclusivity of flexible working supports and positive workplace culture.

2.3.1.1 Subtheme: Inclusivity of flexible working supports.

All the participants said that they were already going beyond the legislative requirements and flexible working supports were open to all employees within their organisations, reporting that “it'd be open to everyone... no discrimination there” [LM1]. Although this may not reflect all organisations, those who were interviewed reported the policies as inclusive, and not restricted to parents and carers. There was an understanding that there may be many reasons why an employee may request flexible working, and that the focus of these policies was not on those who have children. The managers stated that they have always extended the right to request. However, it is important to note that just offering this does not necessarily mean in practice requests will be granted.

“We’ve always extended the right to request flexible work to those, not just who meet the legal minimum requirement, but we’ve extended that out to all employees. So, whether they have carer responsibilities, other domestic issues they need to deal with,

and to work flexibly for. It may be that they want to do some sort of study. And that's not related to work, but something that they want to do. So, we extend the right to work flexibly out to people who need to do that. So, it's a pretty open door. But it is an open door to all types of requests." HR2

This is also in reference to leave, which is offered to employees to support their work-life balance, and not just changes to working hours, as some workplaces have generous leave arrangements which go beyond the legislative requirements. Although the leave at Christmas was specific to this workplace, the quote does exemplify the focus on going beyond legislation. The quote also demonstrates the "us and them" account, emphasising how they as a workplace are doing more/offering more in comparison to other workplaces. This could be seen as an almost defensive stance or a demonstration of downward social comparison (i.e. comparing yourself to someone who is worse off than you (Wood, 1996).

"We have a flexible working policy that has always been open to any member of staff so they can request...uh different ways of working so we have always offered they can reduce their number of hours, work work different work patterns; we have always offered that to everyone... we have dependants leave, ummm ours is more generous than most... we offer 5 days paid dependency leave as well as three half days for urgent uh well for medical appointments, umm we close for two weeks at Christmas which is on top of the annual leave allowance so that's very generous allowance" HR1

Although this inclusive policy was reported to exist for all those who were interviewed in the current research, there was an acknowledgment from the participants that this may not be "normal". It was recognised that there may be other organisations which did not provide such

inclusive flexibility to staff in the workplace prior to June 2014. The two quotes below also reiterate how these managers view their organisations as different and superior to others in terms of what they offer. This again, could relate to downward social comparison, but may also be an attempt to keep the narrative framed on how they are a good employer with the aim to be seen to be doing the right thing.

“I think we really, really do provide a lot of flexible options to our employees. I think you would be hard-pressed to find other organisations that do provide quite as much as we do”. HR3

“Well here in academia, we’ve always been very flexible, academics don’t work 9-5 but that’s just how it is here” LM3.

There was some acknowledgement of differences in how requests were treated depending on the staff members’ job role. The differences depending on the job role, illustrate a common problem which existed prior to the extension to the right to request, and still exists now, which is that some jobs are more amenable to flexible working than others. For, example it is more difficult to agree flexible working for teachers who have to be at school to teach lessons from 9am-3.30pm, than it is for support staff who may be able to do some of their work remotely or outside of school hours.

“We’ve always had a policy of trying to accommodate staff requests for any part-time working. This tends to be more with the support staff rather than the teachers, so for many years we’ve had support staff that work part-time. The teachers tend to work full-time, but although we do have some teachers who do work part-time as well.” LM1

Tailoring work hours around a specific job role may be easier to support for some staff than for others, as was noted in the previous quote. Additionally, line managers are faced with the problem of having to deliver a service and it may be difficult to do this if employees work flexibly and they cannot cover their work. According to the legislation, the requests are based on the 'business case', with the business generally having to come first, but there may be informal ways around this, which attempt to retain the positive work environment and support employees. Therefore, the view of the majority of line managers was that if there is a request to, for example, fulfil childcare responsibilities or other reasons for a change in hours, in order to accommodate the request a "one off" change in hours can be agreed rather than a permanent change in working hours. This is illustrated by the quote below, but it should also be noted that this informality could potentially reduce fairness across an organisation if other line managers are not prepared to be informally flexible. It's also important to note that when they discuss flexibility, they often refer to childcare issues which means there is still a focus on children when considering the 'life' aspects of work-life balance.

"We normally discuss the work, the working hours, and offer flexibility then, to tailor the clinic around the individuals. So, they normally tell us on that shift 'Is there a chance to maybe shorten that date because I'm going to struggle with childcare?' So, we do look at it on an individual basis, and generally we try to be as accommodating as we can. But like I say, overall, I've got to deliver a service, and sometimes you do have to say 'Well, unfortunately, we could do it as a one-off, but not on a regular basis.'" LM2

Nevertheless, the consensus amongst all the participants was that the policies and practices in their workplaces have not favoured certain staff in terms of them having children or not. They

have been supportive of those with different family structures, and if there is potential for the request to be granted, it will. Thus, the perception amongst the participants is that being a parent has no relevance in terms of decision-making. This messaging came most strongly from HR managers, who unlike line managers are not on the front-line of dealing with requests and covering work. For example, in the quote below, the HR manager stated that anyone can make a request, but again, in practice, this doesn't mean that requests will be granted.

“I mean I don't think people, in my organisation anyway I haven't heard anyone basically saying, “Because I'm not a parent I can't request,” or whatever because we've always had that thing, you can always request and if we can do it, we will” HR5.

2.3.1.2 Subtheme: Positive workplace culture

The availability of flexible working policies is important, but it is not enough because this doesn't necessarily mean that employees will feel able to utilise them. A lot is dependent on the workplace culture and how comfortable those in the workplace feel making the request to work flexibly. Therefore, this sub-theme focuses on the importance of positive culture which was reflected across the interviews. It is best illustrated by the following HR manager who clearly outlined that line managers need to be open and promote a positive culture of work-life balance. Thus, line managers are seen as the ‘gatekeepers’ of the workplace culture. However, despite referring to the policy as open to all, the participant still refers to employees with parental or caring responsibilities.

“Like I said, for us it's not about the policy, it's about the culture. So, it's about fostering a culture of flexible working, and encouraging work-life balance. For the policy, to a certain extent, even though it's open to all, it just sits on the shelf.... The

most important thing is that managers really evaluate how to work with their teams to encourage work-life balance, and caring and parental responsibilities, things like that” HR2.

If there is fear related to making the request, an employee will not feel comfortable to make it. Creating a positive culture therefore includes removing fear. Interviewees in most of the workplaces claimed that there was a lack of fear and nervousness around making the decision to request flexible working.

“Well, I don’t think people are frightened to. I think if they think they need to do it, they will do it. But there’s no pressure or thinking ‘Oh, I don’t...’ They’re not nervous about making that request, they will make it!” HR4

Most HR managers drew on their own experience of the positive workplace culture and lack of fear. Some felt that their line managers promote the importance of family, and don’t always see the need for their employees to apply for “official leave” if they need to attend family commitments or other responsibilities, such as leaving work early to attend their child’s school “talent contest” in the quote below. It also exemplifies the trust line managers have in their employees that they will make up the time later. However, as discussed earlier, informal flexibility relies on the attitudes of individual line managers, who may be seen as the gatekeepers of the workplace culture, so some employees may not be so fortunate. Additionally, again the narrative seemed to naturally revolve around children; it’s possible this is a reflection of an entrenched attitude that ‘life’ means dealing with parental responsibilities, although in this case the participant was using herself as an example and she has a child.

“I just need to tell my manager that 'Is it okay if I be off by three to four and I come back and do my job by the time my office hours are over?' And in my case, if you take a specific example, twice I've had, he'll just send me off, 'Okay, go attend your talent contest in the school and come back, and you don't need to apply for leave and things like that.'” HR6

An example of support not only applying to those who have parental commitments was given by an HR manager who spoke of an employee who had returned to work after ill-health and was supported and reassured that she should not feel guilty about taking more time-off or focusing on herself. For some employees there may be the potential worry that by taking the time, they may be seen as less committed, but reassurance was given. However, health issues may be seen as a legitimate reason and not supporting health issues seen as socially unacceptable, but, for example, leave to take care of a sick dog or even to play golf may be viewed differently, and this will be discussed further under the third theme.

“I had one of my colleagues who fell ill very badly, for a week she went off, and then she wanted to come back again, and she relapsed. And she called up the HR, and she was very apologetic, 'I am really sorry my work is affected.' and things like that, so my manager was saying to her very carefully, that 'Nobody's telling you or questioning your commitment to the company. Just take this time off and focus on your health, because that's more important'.” HR6

These views of a positive culture were also reflected amongst the line managers, and related to this is that they see themselves and their employees as a team that look out for each other. In

other words, the employees look out for the organisation and the organisation and managers look out for their employees, so it goes both ways, and this emphasises loyalty within the team. In terms of flexible working, in this specific case, the flexibility is again informal; employees may work shorter hours when they need to, but when it's required, they may work more hours to help their team and their line manager. This can be viewed as supportive because there is flexibility, but it may also illustrate the opposite if an employee is expected to put their personal life aside when the management need them to work extra hours. There is again a focus on children in the quote.

“I think within our organisation, most of my employees have been with me in excess of ten years, so I think the culture is very positive, we all work together as one team, and I think because they have been there a long time, their children have grown up with the practice, and I think it's just recognising that actually, they work until three o'clock, but if we were very short, they would make arrangements and work longer for us.” LM2

2.3.2 Theme 2: Fairness of the legislation

The main theme of fairness emerged across all the interviews and the way in which this theme manifested was divided into two sub themes which relate to the feelings of fairness before the change and after the change to the right to request flexible working legislation in June 2014. The consensus amongst the participants as outlined in the previous theme was that they had a workplace environment which effectively supported flexible working for all employees. Therefore, when discussing fairness, the focus of this theme is on perceptions of the fairness of the legislation.

2.3.2.1 Subtheme: Before the change

Managers reported that the right to request flexible working legislation prior to 2014 was potentially unfair. This is because participants felt that since it applied to those who had children or caring responsibilities, it could lead to a feeling of unfairness amongst those who didn't have these responsibilities; if you didn't fall into either of these categories you couldn't apply, and this exclusion was felt to be the source of unfairness.

“Well by the nature of the legislation it wasn't fair because it only favoured those with children” HR1.

“I think that they probably weren't as fair. Because, obviously, if you didn't have children, or you weren't caring for a relative, then it wasn't available to you, you couldn't apply” HR3.

For some HR managers, this went beyond a lack of fairness to prejudice against those who didn't have children.

“In terms of law itself obviously the law of the land did more to kind of stipulate so obviously people who weren't parents, so as a general rule were prejudiced” HR5.

Some HR managers felt that if their workplace didn't already support employees with different family structures, they would have felt a strong need to make changes to go beyond the legislation. There was an understanding that people have a variety of family structures and a variety of responsibilities in their lives. There are individuals who may have multiple caring responsibilities, which exemplifies the need to support not just those with children.

Nevertheless, the focus was still on those with caring roles outside of work and this was already part of legislation prior to 2014.

“...but if I was in an organisation where it wasn’t, I would feel very strongly about the need to change it. And that may be to do with, I think, well, to do with the experiences in HR, people that you see in different circumstances. Personally, my stepdaughter’s got learning difficulties. And my partner is the carer for both her and his mother. So, I see that there’s a very important and strong need for this sort of legislation, to extend it out” HR2.

Conversely, from the perspective of two-line managers although they thought the legislation wasn’t fair before the changes, they noted that in certain job roles or certain work patterns everyone was treated equally and expectations for those with and without children were the same. For example, for those who work shifts, regardless of the workplace attitudes and culture and whether or not they have children, everyone had to work their shift.

“Because obviously we’re not treating people fairly, then. So, the understanding is that everybody, if they’re covering a late shift, so for example, my receptionists, they work on a rota, but whether they’ve got children or not children, they’ll cover their fair share of earlies and lates” LM2.

“Well in the airport it runs around the clock, so it doesn’t make a difference to your shifts if you have children because everyone has to work their shift pattern so whether the policy applies to parents or not it’s always been fair, I reckon” LM4.

2.3.2.2 Subtheme: After the change

Across the interviews there were feelings of fairness towards the legislation after the June 2014 changes, and this was regardless of whether the participants had children or not, and there were no perceptions that the policy change now disadvantaged people with children. There was a widely held view that because the policy states that the individual who is making the request doesn't have to say why they are requesting and this is not part of the decision-making process when considering requests, this makes the overall process fair because it avoids bias, prejudice or line managers making value judgements relating to the reason for a request. However, it should be noted that line managers may know some details of employees' personal lives, such as whether they have children, so value judgments may still be possible.

“I think it's a fair policy, like I said it's the uniformity for everyone, so one doesn't feel more prejudiced against the other at the moment so it's just one applicable policy where everyone has a right to request depending on their circumstances.” HR5

HR managers also felt this provides some protection for the managers so if they do have to turn a request down, the reasons for it would not then fall back on line managers being seen as prejudiced.

“Because the employee doesn't have to give a reason why they want to work flexibly and if if the line manager asked the reason and then turned the request down that could be seen as some sort of bias or prejudice” HR1.

The other aspect which emerged across the interviews in relation to the fairness of the change was not about avoiding the negative aspects such as bias or prejudice, but it was more in terms

of the positive aspects such as the consistency that this new policy brings, which means that all staff now have fair access to this policy. This also makes it easier for managers to be ‘seen’ as being fairer, so being seen to be fair is important.

“I think it’s a really good thing. I think it is good that it’s available to all staff and we are treating all staff fairly and consistently.” HR3.

Some of the interviewees went further and mentioned how employees with different family structures may have different needs. Therefore, by making this policy available to all, there is an acknowledgement that people have other things in their lives, beyond childcare responsibilities, which may warrant the need to request flexible working. Here there was a specific mention of employees without children and how they may have difficulties impacting their work, but the example given was again health and illness, which was an example given by other managers. So when managers are thinking of examples of why employees may request flexible working, they are often not looking beyond childcare, other caring responsibilities or personal ill health.

“I think that’s fair enough. I think it’s a good idea, because people that don’t have children are thought of as a bit narrow to say that if you’ve just got children, you have problems in working. There’s a lot of people that don’t have children, but there’s people that, together with ill health, what happens within their lives, I think it is much better that it’s across the board” HR4.

Although the quote below refers to caring responsibilities again, there is still a reference to employees without children and not favouring employees because they are parents.

“I think that's fantastic really because it's not only people with children who require a flexible type of working arrangement, I mean people look after their elderly parents or siblings who are not doing too well and so and so forth. So, I think that's brilliant where you have a uniform thing for each and every one, so you're not favoured if you like just because you're a mother with children.” HR5

The line managers also reiterated these points, as employees may have a husband/wife or elderly parents who need an equal amount of care as a young child. The quote reflects that people's lives and agendas matter intrinsically; so valuing others and others' priorities is important. It also suggests, in contrast to a proposition earlier, that line managers do not necessarily know the details of employees' personal lives.

“I think it's understandable of the person's needs. Because they could have elderly parents. They may not have children, but they could have elderly parents that they need to look after, or maybe a husband who's sick, or a wife who's sick. So, you don't know people's backgrounds, so I think it's quite reasonable for everybody to be entitled to this.” LM6

Although the right to request for those caring for parents or other family members may have been included in policy prior to June 2014, ‘other reasons’ were not. This legislation is now considered as fairer by participants because it allows people to use the policy for whatever is important to them in their non-work lives. The quote below refers to discrimination, supporting HR managers who spoke of prejudice in relation to the legislation prior to 2014. The example given for other non-work responsibilities by this participant was pet ownership.

“Well yeah, because like you say, why should it be... other employees are being discriminated against because they haven't got young children. So no, I think it's got to apply to everybody... some people, they might have pet commitments instead of family commitments, I think it's got to be open to everybody” LM2.

Further to this, the topic of equality was reported amongst many managers as this would now ensure equality across family structures, as there are other reasons why people would request flexible working other than childcare and caring commitments, such as wanting to take part in other activities or roles outside of work. Whatever the reason may be, the policy change was believed to provide equality and fairness.

“...so, they could want to teach in a school for three days a week and do something else. We've had teachers who are artists as well and had another life outside of school. Also, with elderly parents, or young children, there's a wide variety of reasons why people would want to have flexible working arrangements.... Well, I think it makes it all equal, an equal playing field. You don't have to have a child.” LM1

2.3.3 Theme 3: Consequences of the policy changes

The extension to the right to request flexible working policy can have a variety of consequences, and these were mostly characterised as either benefits or barriers to the policy change, so these are the subthemes of this final theme.

2.3.3.1 Subtheme: Barriers

When participants discussed barriers, these often did not relate to their own organisations, as they believed (as discussed under the first theme) that they had a good existing environment and were already going beyond the legislation before June 2014. If people didn't see barriers in their workplaces, they could see the potential barriers at other workplaces. As discussed under the first theme, this could be part of a narrative of showing they are a good employer, especially in comparison to other organisations. However, there were also cases where they saw potential in the future for problems in their own organisations, although none had arisen as yet. They raised issues of covering work and the potential costs related to the provision of certain types of flexible working.

“Only, I suppose, the difficulties that could be created by somebody requesting flexible working arrangements, and as a school it would be hard to accommodate. That's the only thing, really. It could be financial. Because we find that flexible working, job shares, tend to be more expensive than one person doing the job” LM1.

The potential costs of providing flexible working could cause even greater issues for SMEs. For example, granting a request for flexible working would mean that they would potentially have to hire another individual to cover the work for the person who was making the request.

“I think the barriers would only affect an organisation where the manpower is not as high and as you started which they would need to increase their costs to maybe get another person in to be able to give an individual flexible working” HR5.

Furthermore, if too many people started making requests it could lead to issues related to the expectations of their employees, i.e. that if they make requests the requests will be granted, especially if requests from colleagues had been granted. Again, this may be particularly problematic for SMEs. As they have smaller teams, there are less people who could cover work. For example, if there was a team of 5 and 4 wanted to compress their work hours to finish at 3pm rather than 5pm, that would only leave one person working until 5pm. This highlights the importance of the business case. In other words, if the business can't 'afford it', they don't have to grant it, but the possibility that requests may increase is still a worry.

“And I think there's always that worry that yeah, it's for everybody, but how do you manage everybody's expectations. Because if you get a high influx of people asking for flexibility, smaller companies won't be able to cope with that.” HR4

Thus, one of the main barriers that could be faced would be the feasibility of granting the requests. There are some workplaces, where once one request has been granted within a team, it is not feasible to grant another. Again, the business case may support a second request not being granted, but the fact that the first request had been granted could lead to perceptions of a lack of fairness and resentment.

“But we do have concerns about, obviously, if you agree one flexible working pattern within a team, and then somebody else steps forward, if you've already agreed the first one, realistically I think it's very very difficult to agree the second one” HR3

While decision-making about whether to grant requests should be based on the business case, in practice, the decision may still be based on a balance between personal judgements and the

business case. Although employees are not expected to give a reason for making a request to work flexibly, it may be that line managers will have some idea of the reason and thus value judgments in decision-making may become tricky to avoid. This could lead to a form of indirect discrimination, and this was a problem that was reflected across most of the interviews. There was a distinct concern about how line managers could potentially discriminate against those who may request flexible working for reasons they do not consider sufficiently important, but that they would still use the business case as the argument for turning the request down.

“indirect discrimination because if someone asked to have Friday off to play golf the line manager wouldn't say to us I don't want to give this person Friday off because all they want to do is play golf, what they would say to HR is, I can't really accommodate this request because we really need someone on a Friday to do x y and z and they would never be blatantly discriminatory but then there maybe indirect discrimination”

HR1

There was a lack of focus on people with children versus people without children and an understanding that there are many reasons why people may make a request, however, some reasons may be considered more legitimate than others. Agreement amongst the interviewees was that requests due to certain reasons may be considered more “seriously” by line managers, which as discussed above, should not be the case because employees should not have to state why they are making the request. However, the reason may come up in the course of discussion or employees may disclose the reason to emphasise the need for flexible working. Often it is health reasons or parental or caring responsibilities which managers might rate as the highest ranking. As discussed under the second theme, the extension of the right to request was considered to be fair because employees may have a variety of reasons for wanting flexibility,

but the examples given by participants were often various caring responsibilities or personal ill health, and not playing golf or cycling.

“If the person has got some really extraneous personal circumstances as to why they want to work flexibly that is I would say is going to come out in the meeting with the line manager. Now if they said my partner is dying from cancer I really need to cut down my hours I think the line manager is going to pull out stops to help that person, umm and so they may look at the business reasons at a slightly different light in a more flexible light than if someone says, I wanna cut down my hours because I want to go cycling every afternoon” HR1

2.3.3.2 Subtheme: Benefits

Across the interviews, all the participants agreed that the policy change had a variety of benefits, including work-life balance, equality or employee engagement. However, the most prevalent benefit which was raised across participants was the uniformity it provides across organisations. Even though in the participants’ organisations they already provided flexible working to all employees prior to the 2014 policy change, this is not the same in all organisations, and this policy change essentially ensures all companies follow the same guidelines.

“I just think if those are guidelines then we as companies need to abide by, so everyone should share in terms of what the law provides, so in those terms it’s good because you don’t have one company doing something and the other company doing something else because now you do have a guideline issued by the government where you need to abide by. So, I guess it’s the uniformity of it is positive.” HR5

There was a consensus amongst interviewees that, for those with different family structures, the policy changes opened up the potential to help everybody have a better work-life balance.

“Well, I think employers in general, I think it gives a better work-life balance for other individuals. So, I think, as I said to you before, instead of limiting it to people who’ve got children, other people can think ‘Well, if I want to go down the flexible route, I could.’ I think it was a bit limiting before. So that’s just in general, because we’ve always been flexible, but I think for more employers, and employees, I think there’s much more flexibility for them now.” HR4

There was also a perception that supporting flexible working and supporting work-life balance can also increase employee loyalty to the company, which may also increase retention. The view amongst all the HR and line managers was that this policy change may have multiple benefits for their business and their employees, including reduced absenteeism, increased motivation and commitment, happiness, and improved line manager-employee relationships. The managers could see the bigger picture and beyond how it will only help the employee.

“I think it's good for the employees as well, offering more flexibility; it makes you retain your employees. You get the buy-in and the loyalty from them. And like you say, at the end of the day, it is about getting a work-life balance for everybody. If you've got that, you've got a happy workforce. And it reduces absenteeism, because if you keep saying no to them, all they're going to do is phone in sick on the days that they've got a problem. So, it's just better to try and accommodate requests as best possible. And then you're more likely to retain your employees moving forward.” LM4

“Benefits of flexible working, I think it increases motivation, I think people work harder. I think that there is a stronger employee loyalty. I think there’s a stronger relationship between employer-manager and employee” HR2.

Finally, for the majority of the HR managers one of the potential consequences of the extension of the right to request was not only encouraging work-life balance but also promoting employee engagement. For those who work in the service industry, this could lead to a positive impact on the service they provide.

“Other benefits, I think obviously the fact we discussed earlier, it’s increased work-life balance, hopefully by having people work flexible working patterns that they want to be working, and works for them, then they’re going to have increased employee engagement, which is better for the service, hopefully increase the service we provide, make it better” HR3.

2.4 Summary of findings

The first research question related to the views of HR professionals and line managers regarding work-life balance supports their organisations offer and if they feel they effectively and fairly support individuals with different family structures. This question was addressed primarily in the first theme. HR and line managers reported there was already a good existing environment in terms of the supports that were offered in their workplaces, such that prior to 2014, they already went beyond the legislation and offered flexible working to all. This is supported by a CIPD (2012) survey stating that two third of the employers asked prior to the

legislative changes, were already offering flexible working to all employees. However, the narrative seemed to be to show they were a good employer, doing the right thing. This narrative can facilitate reputation management because organisations increasingly want to be seen as a good employer, this can reduce recruitment expenses and turnover, make the company appear as a more attractive place to work and enhance loyalty (Herman & Gioia, 2001; Tkalac Verčić & Sinčić Ćorić, 2018). This narrative can also be related to social comparison theory (Wood, 1996), as the managers appeared to make downward social comparisons by suggesting they were doing more than other organisations.

There were also references to efforts to support some informal, occasional flexibility if formal requests couldn't be accommodated permanently but there was a focus on mostly how this would apply to parents. However, HR and line managers reported that, in their workplaces, they were fairly supporting everybody and that there was a positive workplace culture which meant employees should feel comfortable in making requests. This is important in terms of the benefits of these policies for work-life balance, because previous research has suggested that if policies do not match the company's culture (i.e. fair and inclusive policies but unsupportive culture), it can actually lead to higher levels of work-family conflict (Kossek et al., 2011) because people may not feel comfortable using the policies. However, while they made it clear supports didn't just focus on employees with parental responsibilities, they tended not to look beyond caring responsibilities or ill health as reasons for employees requesting flexibility. This may be problematic. For example, previous research conducted in an Australian organisation which provided flexibility for all employees and claimed to be inclusive, found that when employees were interviewed, it was a commonly held belief that even though it was technically open to all, flexibility and part-time hours were said as being "for" mothers. Additionally, those

without children felt reluctant to “take it away” [part-time hours] from parents who they felt may be more in need (Turnbull et al., 2023).

The second research question about the changes to the right to request legislation and potential benefits and barriers was mostly answered by the final two themes. Before the change the interviewees agreed that by excluding everyone who didn't have children (or caring commitments) the policy was unfair, and possibly even discriminatory. These feelings are what prompted the term ‘work-family backlash’ used to describe the feelings of unfairness felt from those excluded from these policies (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Young, 1999). This is because to fairly support those with different family structures it’s important that other commitments don’t exclude people from requesting. After the change interviewees felt that the policy now supported those with different family structures and everyone was ‘in theory’ treated equally, especially as individuals don’t have to give their reasons for making the request, so they may request for other reasons such as pet care. However, it’s important to note that although the policies are now fairer, it will depend on how the managers handle these requests. It has been highlighted that many managers lack the knowledge, self-efficacy and skills in managing flexible working arrangements (Buick et al., 2024).

In terms of the perceived barriers to the change in legislation, participants could see the potential for future barriers or barriers at other workplaces. Barriers included the potential costs of implementing flexible working supports, that it may be more difficult to grant requests for certain job roles than others, managing employees’ expectations, the feasibility of granting a potentially increased number of requests, and the potential for value judgments if line managers are aware of the reasons for requests and factor this into their decision-making. For example, one organisation in the USA with supposedly award-winning work-life policies found that in

reality, managers based their requests on if the employee was a high performer or a valued worker rather than the ‘business case’ (Kelly & Kalev, 2006). This is also potentially problematic for those with family structures that don’t involve childcare or caring responsibilities, as their reasons for making requests may not be considered sufficiently legitimate (examples given here were playing golf or cycling). Implementation is important because research is still needed on how managers implement flexible working practices (Buick et al., 2024), and the current study found that although the reasons behind the request do not need to be stated, they may still “emerge” during the discussion with a line manager or be known already, so it’s important the managers are clear on how they implement these policies and ensure it’s done fairly. Nevertheless, the potential benefits of these changes included the uniformity of the policy across workplaces and equality across employees. This was a notable finding as employees who don’t have children or live alone describe feeling a lack of understanding of their challenges (Wilkinson et al., 2018). Other benefits were the potential for increased employee work-life balance, improved employee-line manager relations and organisational benefits. It was positive to hear about the range of benefits discussed by managers, as they aligned with the benefits of flexible working outlined by CIPD (2024) who report that flexible working is good for people and business as it can increase productivity (by increasing motivation and employee satisfaction), diversify the workforce (by attracting and retaining a diverse workforce) and make work ‘work’ for everyone (by creating inclusive workplaces).

The findings, however, may only be reflective of this particular sample of HR and line managers. It’s possible that only those who felt positively about the work-life balance policies offered by their organisations chose to participate, additionally, participants were from a limited number of occupations and sectors. Therefore, the findings do not reflect less positive

experiences of organisations or, arguably, the experiences of SMEs. This must be kept in mind when considering the broader applicability of the findings. However, the goal of qualitative research is to provide a rich understanding of a specific topic, and not to generalize (Polit & Beck, 2010). The implications of these findings and how they relate to previous research will be discussed more fully in chapter 5.

2.5 Conclusion

In summary, HR managers and line managers reported they were going beyond the legislation before the changes to the right to request came into effect. However, they could see issues associated with opening this policy to all, although mainly in terms of how it may impact other organisations and not their own. Both of these points could be related to making downward social comparisons to other organisations, an attempt at driving the narrative that they are a good employer and doing the right thing, and possibly also socially desirable responding. It was acknowledged that policy changes made things fairer for all employees, however the conversations quite often returned to highlighting the benefits of these policies for parents, carers or managing ill health. This could be problematic in terms of how fairly all the requests will be dealt with, and whether reasons for requests, where known, could be taken into account. This is why it's important to also gain the views of employees and the next chapter will explore their views as well as their work-life balance experiences.

Chapter 3. Qualitative Study with employees.

3.1 Introduction

The study discussed in the previous chapter explored HR and line managers views of work-life balance supports provided to employees in the workplace, especially the change to the right to request flexible working with a focus on fairness. The findings suggested that those in managerial roles felt that in their workplaces, there was already an inclusive and fair approach to the flexible working support provided and there was a positive workplace culture. However, this positive view may not reflect what employees believe and experience. The study discussed in this chapter focuses on the work-life balance experiences of employees, whilst also seeking to gain their views on the fairness of supports, and particularly on the changes to the right to request flexible working legislation. This will ensure this research gains the views from both employees and managers. Although both studies focus on these legislative changes, this study focuses more on the personal experience of how employees manage the interface between work and 'life'. Whereas the previous study found that the management believe that the legislative changes will ensure things are fairer for those of different family structures compared to before the changes, the current study will explore perceptions of fairness from the perspective of the employee.

As discussed in chapter 1, Kossek et al. (2010) called for organisations to identify and support the diversity of individuals' needs for managing the interface between work and personal life. Additionally, Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli, and Bell (2011) argue that the concept of work-family conflict should be extended to incorporate employees without children and those with different family structures. Nevertheless, it has been said that 'research on work-life balance has focused almost exclusively on work-family conflict among parents and failed to include workers without children' (Verniers, 2020, p. 107). In relation to previous research examining

the work-personal life conflict experiences amongst those with different family structures, little UK based research exists on this understudied group. However, Wilkinson et al. (2017) examined the experiences of UK professionals' who lived alone and have no children. In their qualitative study they suggested that inaccurate assumptions were made about solo-living professionals' non-work time, and the legitimacy of their non-work time was questioned. They also revealed there was an absence of emotional and financial support, and a lack of support in relation to the disappointments faced at work. UK based research is important as the policy context differs in different countries, and thus attitudes and perceptions of fairness may also differ. Other research conducted by Waumsley, Houston and Marks (2010) in the UK stated that work-family conflict scales did not adequately measure the experience of those without children but found that both women with and without children experienced conflict. It's important to explore this topic qualitatively to gain an understanding across employees with different family structures.

It is often assumed that the availability of policies is an important support to help people in managing their work and home life. However, if the workplace culture and line managers are unsupportive, policies will not have the same effect (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). An organisational culture which is regarded as supportive and positive has been found to have a positive impact on work-life balance (Allen, 2001; Thompson & Prottas, 2006; O'Driscoll et al., 2003, Thomson et al., 1999; Premeaux et al., 2007). Historically, a lot of the policies offered to employees to help manage work and home life have targeted those with children, such as the right to request flexible working before 2014. While some workplaces (such as those in the study in the previous chapter) may choose to go beyond this, the exclusion of single workers and those without children from policies to enhance work-life balance in many organisations led to feelings of social exclusion and a sense of injustice from these employees (Smithson &

Stokoe, 2005; Grandey, 2001). This led to the emergence of the term ‘work-family backlash’ in the USA (Young, 1999), whereby those who cannot make use of family friendly policies experienced feelings of resentment (Kirby & Krone, 2002). In the UK, however, a more recent qualitative study which explored work-life balance of managers and professionals without children who lived alone reported little evidence of backlash (Wilkinson et al., 2018). However, around 25% of participants still reported a lack of fairness in regards to organisational needs based provisions i.e. participants felt like the needs of working parents *only* were acknowledged.

Research conducted in the USA by Culpepper et al. (2020) revealed that single faculty members of a University felt they were asked to take on more undesirable work in order to facilitate work-life balance for their colleagues who had traditional families, and they felt they had no access to benefits to help them with work-life balance and also did not have the same support from home. Culpepper et al. (2020) concluded that the focus of research has been on the work-life balance experiences of those in traditional family structures, with single employees and those without children being seen as “invisible” within the work-life debate. Additional studies have been carried out on single employees in Nigeria (Akanji et al., 2020), professional couples with no children in the USA and Canada (Boiarintseva et al., 2021), cross-country research in Italy and the Netherlands comparing parents and childfree employee attitudes (Filippi et al., 2024) and cross cultural research across 4 European countries on single employees without children (Šimunić et al., 2024), with the findings all indicating that those without children experience their own issues with work-life balance or perceive they may be penalised in terms of picking up extra work or deprioritised for work-life balance arrangements.

More research exploring this in the UK is needed especially as the policy context differs across countries. The changes to the right to request flexible working in the UK should mean that employees with all family structures are included. However, it's important to explore how supports for work-life balance, particularly these changes are perceived. For example, do employees with children feel the changes are fair or do they have any concerns about how this might impact them? Do single workers and those without children feel the changes are sufficient or do they worry that there may still be different views and expectations of them in the workplace? It is also important to explore the context, including experiences of managing the interface between work and personal life, as well as the needs of employees with a variety of different family structures. Therefore, the present study aims to address the following research questions:

- What are employees' experiences of work-life boundary management, conflict and enrichment?
- What are their experiences of work-life balance supports (policies, culture and line manager support) and perceptions of fairness of supports?
- How do they view the 2014 changes to the right to request flexible working?
 - Do these experiences, perceptions and views differ across employees with different family structures?

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Design

The current study employed a qualitative design, with semi-structured interviews utilised to collect data. The rationale for the choice of semi-structured interviews is outlined in chapter 2. As discussed in chapter 2 (section 2.2.1), interviews are well suited to address the research questions of this study as the aim of interviews is to explore attitudes, values, beliefs, and motives (Richardson, Dohrenwend & Klein, 1965; Saldana & Omasta, 2017).

3.2.2 Participants

Participants who were employed in the UK in full-time jobs were invited to participate in this study. The primary sampling strategy employed was opportunity sampling, although purposive sampling was also necessary due to wanting to recruit participants with a range of family structures including single employees with and without children and married/cohabiting employees with and without children. Snowball sampling was also used and this included sending emails to those who had already participated in the previous study (study 1) which involved interviewing HR managers and line managers, asking if they knew anyone who wouldn't mind being interviewed. Additionally, a recruitment advert was published on various forums such as the 'Step Up' community, Netmums, and Reddit (particularly the 'sample size' subreddit). Additionally, the recruitment advert was emailed to some potential participants. This included the researcher asking her contacts if they knew anyone who would be interested in taking part. The researchers' supervisors also emailed some of their own contacts who would be eligible for the study. The advert was also posted on social media platforms such as Twitter both by the researcher and by colleagues, this resulted in some retweets by groups such as 'Working Families'. As the study required an hour-long phone or Zoom interview and participation from employees with different family structures was required, the recruitment of

participants took some time. In order to boost recruitment, in the latter stages, participants were offered an Amazon voucher in return for their time, and the researcher also pledged to donate £5 to the Alzheimer's Society for each interview. Initial recruitment took place late in year 2017 and was paused in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This lengthy period of time was due to difficulties recruiting and personal extenuating circumstances. Recruitment was restarted in June 2022. This was because working patterns and the way in which people experienced their work and home lives substantially changed during the pandemic and June 2022 was felt to be sufficiently in the 'post-pandemic' period. This meant that 10 participants were recruited before the pandemic and 7 in the 'post-pandemic' period. Post-pandemic participants were asked about any continuing impact of the pandemic on the way they worked, but any substantial changes in working patterns had not continued.

A sample of 17 participants were interviewed and all were female. Although it would have been preferable to have male participants, one of the limitations of using an opportunity sample is that it can provide a biased sample (Paarsch & Golyaev, 2016) and in the present research those who volunteered to participate were all female. This does mean the findings can only speak to women's experiences. Previous research around work-life balance has found women are often the focus of work-life balance research. In a systematic review of work-life balance and gender which aimed to identify recent research including males and females, out of 584 articles only 92 were identified as including males and females (Sharma, 2019). This may be because despite the decline of gendered role stereotypes, the changes in the labour market, work-life balance is still seen as mainly an issue for women (Cesaroni et al., 2018; Poggesi et al., 2017).

The ages of the participants ranged from 24-54 ($M=38$, $SD=8.5$) and this included 2 single parents, 5 participants who were married with children, 5 participants who were either single or not cohabiting (with no children), and 5 participants who were married or cohabiting (with no children). All the participants who had children had at least one child who would be considered dependent (i.e. under 16) and lived at home. The occupation of the participants was varied but they were employed in professional ‘white-collar’ occupations. The majority of the participants ($n = 12$) described themselves as White (this includes: White British, White Welsh, White other and White Dutch), 3 described themselves as Mixed, 1 described themselves as Black and 1 participant described themselves as British Asian. The demographic details of all the participants can be found in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1

Demographics of employees

Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	No. of children	Occupation and Sector
Maya	44	Married	2 Children	Managing Director
Caroline	36	Married	2 Children	Head of Operations
Susie	40	In a relationship (not cohabiting)	0 Children	Head of Content
Hannah	36	Married	3 Children	Features Editor
Hazel	35	Married	1 Child	Assistant Director
Eve	26	In a relationship (not cohabiting)	0 Children	Account Executive
Ivy	54	Married	3 Children	Non-qualified teacher
Molly	42	Married	0 Children	Teacher
Clara	49	In a relationship (cohabiting)	0 Children	Governance Manager
Victoria	40	In a relationship (cohabiting)	0 Children	External Returns Officer
Michelle	35	Single	0 Children	Senior Law Associate
Ava	25	Single	0 Children	Operations Coordinator
Penny	49	Single Parent	1 Child	Nursery Assistant
Louisa	43	Single Parent	1 Child	Teacher
Sofia	24	In a relationship (cohabiting)	0 Children	Market Research Supervisor
Lila	32	Married	0 Children	Head of Chaplaincy
Olivia	37	In a relationship (not cohabiting)	0 Children	Business Analyst

3.2.3 The interview

A semi-structured interview schedule was designed to address the research questions, and the questions were also developed based on the literature in the area. Once the interview schedule had been developed, and ethical approval gained (see below), pilot interviews were organised. Two pilot interviews were conducted to identify if the questions needed to be developed any further or amendments made. Some small wording changes were made, and the order of the interview questions were rearranged to ensure the interviews ‘flowed’. Potential repetitive questions were also removed, and further prompts were added. The interview started with demographic questions which included asking about the participants age, ethnicity and household setup and if they had children. The demographic questions were designed to ensure the questions revealed information about the participants’ family structure (e.g. household setup and number of children) and the questions allowed the researcher to report that the sample included people from different ethnicities and age ranges. Then questions moved on to asking about their position within their workplace and their work patterns and what they found enjoyable and stressful about their jobs. These questions were partly based on the JD-R model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and were designed to help participants open up about their feelings towards their roles and also to enquire about their work patterns and position. This is because the roles that individuals hold and the ways in which they work, including the demands of the role, can impact their work-personal life conflict. The interview then shifted to discuss life outside of work; what they did when not at work and what aspects of their home lives they found most enjoyable and most stressful, and the support provided outside of work. This drew on literature in the area, particularly when developing questions about roles and support outside of work. As this study aimed to not only focus on the typical work-family roles, some prompts were also included to ask about a range of ‘non-work’ roles, such as those outlined in literature, including social, religious, community and leisure activities including hobbies and sports

(DfEE 2000; James, 2011). Similarly, when asking about non-work support, research has indicated that for single people there may be a lack of support and the sources of support may differ e.g. it may be from a housekeeper, roommates or members of the community (Hamilton et al., 2006; Salamin, 2021). Therefore, it was important to include questions and prompts to ask the sources of support and what kind of support was provided. Questions were then asked about work-life balance and how they combined their work and non-work lives and managed the boundaries between these two roles. The conflict model (Carlson, Kacmar & Williams, 2000) and enrichment model (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), alongside border theory (Clark, 2000) were all used as the basis of the questions in this interview section. The conflict model was the basis of the questions which asked participants how much their work and home lives conflicted with the other, whereas enrichment was used as a basis of the questions asking about the positive aspects of combining the two roles. Whereas border theory (Clark, 2000) was used to form the basis of the questions which asked how much participants segmented and integrated these two roles and about managing boundaries. The work of Kossek (2012) was drawn upon to enquire about how much control they felt they had over their boundaries and how much they felt their work was a part of their identity and how they described their non-work identity. In the final section of the interview the participants were asked about how their workplace supported them and their views on the flexible working policy. Before these questions were asked, participants were informed about what a flexible working policy was, and the policy changes that came into force in 2014. An open question was also included at the end of the interview to ask if they wanted to discuss anything that was not covered.

3.2.4 Procedure and Ethical Considerations

A research proposal, along with relevant information, was submitted to the Psychology Research Ethics Committee at Middlesex University. This included an information sheet,

debriefing sheet, consent form and semi-structured interview schedule. The recruitment and data collection commenced once the ethics application was approved in July 2015, with amendments approved September 2017, and further amendments approved in May 2022. The approval letter (including approval of amendments) can be found in appendix F.

If participants responded to any of the recruitment adverts that were placed (as outlined in section 2.2.2), they were thanked for their interest in the study and sent the information sheet and consent form via email. They were asked about their availability for an interview, with a broad range of days and times offered. This included weekdays (both daytime and evening times) and weekends to allow for maximum flexibility. Participants were asked to provide a contact number for the researcher to call and a time was agreed upon. For later interviews conducted via Zoom, the researcher sent a link for the call. If more than a few days passed between the initial 'booking' and the interview, a follow-up reminder email was sent to confirm the participants' availability.

Participants were asked to reply to the email attaching a signed consent form if they were happy to proceed with the interview. If the consent form was not returned, a verbal version of the consent form was read out and consent was always gained (and audio recorded) before the interview took place. For those who returned the form prior to the interview, there was often a short space of time between the consent form being returned and the interview taking place, therefore verbal consent was also gained from everyone. Participants were reminded of the confidentiality of the interview and the right to withdraw at any time.

Following this, 17 interviews were conducted, and the average length of an interview was approximately one hour, ranging from 45 minutes to 90 minutes. The interview schedule can

be found in appendix D. Interviews were conducted over the phone or in the later stages of recruitment, over Zoom. The interviews were recorded, and participants were asked if they permitted this. The interviews were all audio recorded, with no video recordings made, as the recordings were only for the purposes of transcription. The interviews were conducted from a confidential space and participants were informed and asked for their consent to record the audio conversation.

Once the interview had been conducted, they were debriefed. The debriefing sheet contained a brief overview of why the study was conducted along with details of the researcher, supervisors, and organisations they could contact if they felt any distress (such as the organisation Working Families). Those who were offered Amazon Vouchers were then emailed the vouchers with instructions on how to redeem them. A note was made to ensure a donation would be made to charity once all interviews had been completed. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and audio files destroyed once the transcription was checked for accuracy.

3.2.5 Analysis

A reflexive thematic analysis approach, with a critical realist underpinning was used. This involved using the six-phase thematic analysis technique outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) that employed an inductive and semantic approach to coding and theme development. A discussion about critical realism and why reflexive thematic analysis was chosen is discussed in chapter 2 section 2.2.6. Data was analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). A detailed explanation of this method was covered in chapter 2; however the steps will be briefly explained in order to describe the approach used in this study.

Phase one involves familiarisation with the data: as the researcher transcribed the majority of the interviews, she was already very familiar with the data. Despite this, the data was re-read collectively, and summary notes were made upon the reading of each individual interview. *Phase two* involves generating initial codes and this was done manually. First the transcripts were printed with wide margins and notes on initial codes were made in the margins of the interview transcription documents. Then some quotes were highlighted, and colour coded to relate to the codes. Finally, some of these quotes and codes were then typed into a document to facilitate the next step. An example of a code developed from the interviews was “finding it hard to say no”. The initial codes were reviewed by the supervisors, who also carried out some of their own coding on some interview schedules and these were compared with those developed by the researcher. *Phase three* comprised searching for themes: some initial themes were developed by grouping codes and the refinement of themes was left for the next stage. For example, the code mentioned in phase two “finding it hard to say no” was combined with other similar codes such as “mum guilt”, and “blames oneself” to develop a theme which was titled “feelings of guilt and self-blame”. *Phase four* involves reviewing themes. The researcher first read all the coded extracts to see if the themes adequately fit the extracts, and some did not. For example, a theme which was titled “role perceptions and expectations”, did not fully reflect the earlier codes so this theme was reworked to fully capture the essence of the coded extracts. Then the themes were compared against the entire data set, and during this process some additional extracts were included, and themes were further refined. For example, upon further comparison against the data set, the previously mentioned “role perceptions and expectations” theme, worked better once amalgamated amongst other broader themes, rather than a theme in its own right. The *fifth phase* is defining and naming themes. At this point the researcher assigned the final theme names which would be written up. Two themes (one with

2 subthemes and the other with 3 subthemes) captured the data and was considered to provide the most complete representation of the data. *The sixth phase* involves producing the report. The final themes were written up, whilst some further refinements to theme names were made. This was to ensure they fully captured and told the story that came across during the interviews. A draft of the themes and report was reviewed by supervisors, ensuring the most salient quotes were used and to allow for any further refinement.

3.3 Results

After conducting thematic analysis, two main themes were identified, and these are displayed in the thematic map below (Figure 3.1). The first main theme focused on the difficulties managing work and personal life, with many experiencing conflict between these roles, although there were also some references to enrichment. Participants often blamed themselves for these difficulties and many struggled with boundaries between their work and personal life leading to work-personal life conflict. The second main theme focused on the role supports played in the participants' experiences, with them reporting receiving support from home and sometimes support from work. They also discussed the role of the right to request flexible working as a potential support and perceptions of fairness.

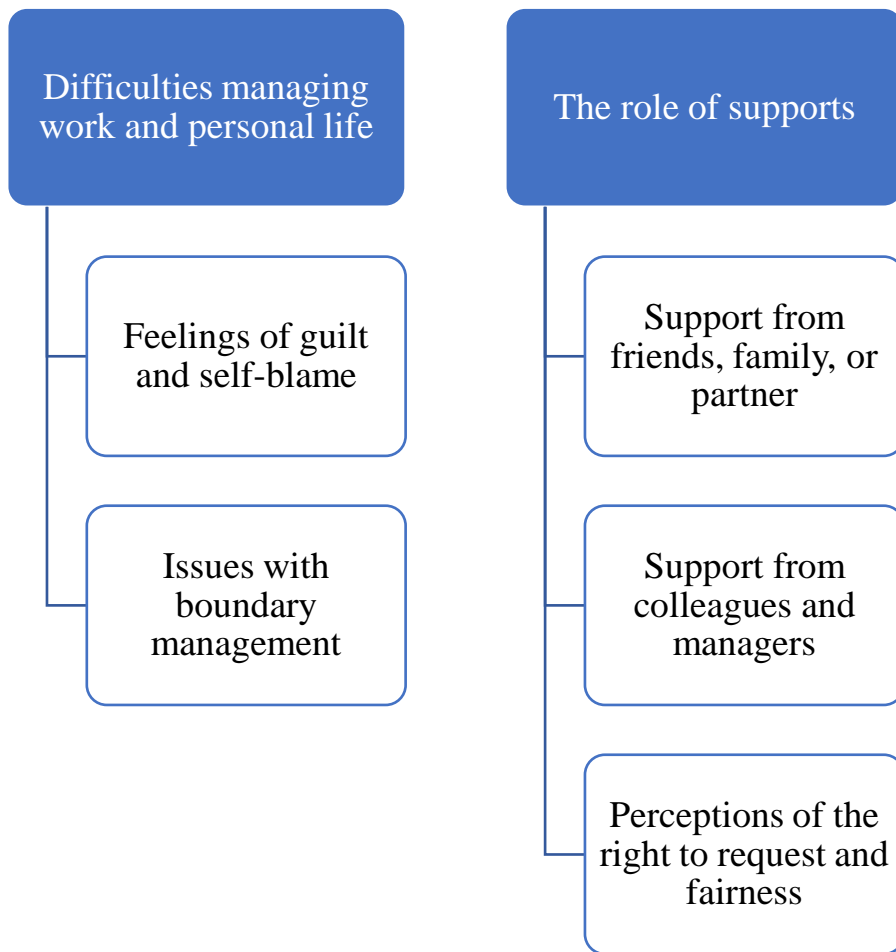


Figure 3.1

A thematic map displaying the main themes and subthemes from employee interviews.

3.3.1 Theme 1: Difficulties managing work and personal life.

Many participants experienced issues managing their work and personal life. A lack of boundaries between work and personal life and work-personal life conflict seemed to be normalised, and this was the case for employees with different family structures. The workplace culture seemed to facilitate this, as this was the ‘norm’ among colleagues. Nevertheless, the participants often described how they blamed themselves and they experienced guilt for not maintaining a better work-life balance, including guilt for not spending more time with family but also guilt when not working. This subject of guilt and self-blame is explored in the first subtheme.

3.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: Feelings of guilt and self-blame

The majority of participants struggled with work-personal life conflict and conveyed perceptions of their own responsibility over how they had difficulties managing their work and home life. This sense of blame was intertwined with feelings of guilt; often guilt about not spending time with children or other family, but also sometimes about not working when participants felt they should be, even during ‘home’ time. Michelle who was single at the time of the interview and lived alone thought achieving work-life balance appeared to be an illusion and alluded to the feelings of self-blame and guilt.

“You know what work-life balance is a myth isn’t it, and you know, I like the idea of it but it just doesn’t exist for me. I guess it’s also my own fault because how do you, how do you actually do it? I could turn around and say you know what, I think I am only paid for these many hours and so I am not going to spend another minute thinking or doing work, but I can’t. I just can’t help it. It just plays on my mind, and then if I don’t do things,

I am behind. Or if I do the work things, then what about time I should be spending with my friends and family?” (Michelle, single, no children)

Clara indicated the importance of having time off, and the significance of thinking about things other than work, but being able to enjoy this time off was easier said than done, indirectly conveying a sense of guilt for not working:

“You know, it's putting the time in because you've got a duty, but also you, you know, it's having a duty to yourself to be able to enjoy your time off and uh, sometimes, you know, it's quite difficult.” (Clara, cohabiting, no children)

This sense of guilt for not working when one is ‘free’ or at home was not limited to those who lived alone or did not have children. There were many occasions where a respondent described the feeling that when one is not engaged in work, they should be. For those with children, having ‘me’ time (i.e. time away from work and from childcare) was also associated with a sense of guilt. Hazel described below how she couldn’t engage in her hobby of reading without feeling like she should be working:

“I love, I love reading um, trashy novels just because I find it’s a really good way to switch off my brain. But I tend not to do that very often just because, I just feel guilty. I feel like there’s other stuff I could be doing for work instead.” (Hazel, married with a child)

Participants often were acutely aware that what they were doing (i.e. working during ‘home’ time) was having an impact on their home life. At the same time, they felt that this was the norm amongst their colleagues and if they didn’t work during personal time, they would be the only ones doing so. This indicates the role of the workplace culture, as described by Ivy:

“Well, I would describe work-life balance as not taking work home. Not having to think about work when you get home and having time for family. In the past three years I failed at this quite badly actually, but then I know I wasn’t the only one.” (Ivy, married with 3 children)

Ava also succinctly describes this predicament:

“If I turn around and say no, then I would be the odd one out.” (Ava, single, no children)

Despite believing that struggling with work-personal life conflict was an experience shared amongst their peers and widely accepted as the ‘norm’, participants still often blamed themselves for not being able to say “no”. There was a belief that not dealing with work-related matters during ‘home’ time required a lot of strength and willpower, as Maya stated:

“A lot of mums at school gates, they all say “you work full-time” and that’s really my, that’s my issue cause I’m not strong enough to say “well I’m gonna take Monday off and I’m not gonna pick up the phone and I’m gonna turn my emails off” (Maya, married with 2 children):

A key consequence of not being able to say no is that the majority of participants with children felt a sense of 'mum guilt'. Participants recounted that the expectations of being a good Mum mean spending time with children as much as possible, but this is not always possible due to work, so they are faced with a no-win situation, as noted by Maya:

“Umm, well I think [pause] there’s that mum guilt that you feel that you’re not giving your, Well, don’t wanna say you, like me, well I think a lot of you know, mums feel that way that they’re not giving a 100% to one or the other. I think that I certainly feel guilty sometimes that you know, oh I wish was, but I don’t feel, I think I do alright actually. I’m able you know, I’ve always made sure I’ve dropped, I think I’m around enough and also the reality is I have to work.” (Maya, married with 2 children)

However, another mother felt that it was important not to be confined to her role as a mum and placed a strong emphasis on her work role. She made it clear that her work role is a positive thing in life and the fact that she works and is a mum provides a good role model for her children, highlighting some work-personal life enrichment. According to Hannah:

“I think I noticed when I went back to work and then went home to my kids. If I had to do it all the time. I would go quite crazy. I think I think for my own mental health, it's really important for me to work. Okay. And I really enjoy working. I like making money. I like having a role where I'm not just somebody's mom, some wife. And I think it's really important for my kids to see that women work, too. You know, I've got boys and I want them to grow up knowing that, you know, it's a shared thing, that parenting

is a thing and working is a thing, and you can do both.” (Hannah, married with three children)

Some work-personal life enrichment was also described by Lila, who felt the skills and traits that she needed and developed as part of her role at work were directly transferrable to her home life. Here, Lila describes how these attributes make her a better person at home too.

“Well in my role you have to have empathy, right? This role is a huge part of me and one thing I do, is use my listening skills all the time at work, I am there for people in their time of need to provide comfort and understanding, and that’s my role, so I think my listening skills and my compassion for sure benefit my life at home, because it means I can be a better person at home for sure.” (Lila, married, no children)

3.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: Issues with boundary management

Although there were a minority of participants who did purport to separate work and home, the underlying concern seemed to be difficulties managing boundaries between work and home. It’s important to note that the majority of the participants had jobs where there was some form of flexibility. This was not a result of COVID-19 as all the participants interviewed post-pandemic reported that their work patterns had returned to how they were before. Their roles had some intrinsic flexibility. This intrinsic flexibility may be helpful for managing work and home life but also meant there was the potential for blurred boundaries to occur. For example, it was commonplace for participants to check emails and respond to them when at home. Difficulties managing boundaries between work and home life was something which occurred

for those across family structures, although there were some differences between those with and without children which will be noted below.

One boundary management issue specific to those with children, is that sometimes they were not able to stay in the office or to work past a certain time. Unless they had help from a grandparent or partner or childcare, they had to leave work in order to pick up and look after their children. This meant there was this set time where work had to stop and ‘mum time’ had to start. This also helped participants prioritise what was important at work, as when boundaries were fixed and not variable, things had to get done by a certain time, and as reported by Maya having children, therefore, also created some personal life-work enrichment:

“You know my approach you know, and also it made me prioritise more cause I had to leave work at 5, I had to leave work at 5, so you know, I had to cut off work so, I definitely think um, I think it makes you more rounded and exposing yourself to different people and different situations so I think um, certainly my work benefitted from me having children.” (Maya, married with 2 children)

However, even if parents are able to leave work at a certain time, or try to set boundaries, some of those with children reflected on how there is no sense of ‘downtime’, as they have many tasks or activities which revolve around their children when they are not working. This may be particularly the case for single parents. For example, Louisa when asked about her experiences of work-life balance said:

“Work-life balance is a lottery concept; it doesn’t exist for me. I am very involved in my son’s life so the ‘job’ as a parent never ends. I nearly always have something for him to do after school and on weekends so although I would like to keep work and home life separate, I will still have something to do related to one job or the other. Every day I have to go through everything for tomorrow and that’s after the school day is supposedly done.” (Louisa, single parent)

Even if there was a temporary boundary when those with children had to leave work to fulfil parental responsibilities, some then did more work after the children were in bed. Blurred boundaries or spill over mostly occurred from work to home rather than vice versa, with Louisa also adding:

“I find that it only ever spills over in one direction and not into work, unless you include the very rare hospital visit and things like that” (Louisa, single parent)

Intrinsic job flexibility, such as being able to complete work tasks away from the office such as emails, was a part of many of the interviewees’ jobs and some appreciated this flexibility may be helpful for managing work and home life. However, Hazel talked of this leading to boundaries becoming blurred, and suggests that personal preference for more separate or more blurred boundaries is crucial:

“But I think because, because of things like mobile phones and having your emails on you the whole time and you know you have a laptop that you take home and stuff, the, the line between the two is so hazy and I

think for some people that works and they like the fact that they can flip between um, the two and I think especially in my team you know, we all, cause we all have young children, we all like the flexibility but I do think I'm, from my perspective I find, I think I would rather a job at five-o-clock finish, but you know, when my day was over, it was over" (Hazel, married, one child)

This was similar for those who did not have children as they also struggled to separate work and home time and admitted to completing work tasks when they were supposedly in 'home' time. There is also the risk that for those without children, they do not have an enforced boundary of, for example, the school pick up to separate work and home, as was evidenced by Ava who said:

"Well sometimes you just gotta do work when you aren't working isn't it? I mean, how many times do I end up working after hours because I can. No point waiting to answer my emails or finish a project that I could just stay late and just finish. Well not always finish, but make some progress or reply, or just do something about it rather than waiting until the morning. Um, there will always be another thing popping up tomorrow anyway and so I have the early evening to just carry on, so I just do. Maybe I should just wait until the morning, but it just, it niggles at me! At least if I do it, then I can watch Netflix in peace." (Ava, single, no children)

Nevertheless, there was a minority of interviewees such as Lila who were very strict about not answering emails outside of work hours. She felt she could control her boundaries and separate

work and home, and said the following about her home life, which similarly to Ava refers to ‘downtime’ and also making time for her family, which in her case was her partner and cat:

“My husband and I are very strict especially on Fridays to switch off. Like really just switch everything off and we will always make time for date-night. We will go out for meals, go bowling, go mini-golf or something like that. My work is so intense, and I do worry about work things sometimes, so these things are important you know. We have to make time for each other, urm, and we have to switch off from work. So, home time is all about me, him and my cat! [laughter].” (Lila, married, no children)

3.3.2 Theme 2: The role of supports.

This theme focuses on three main forms of support that may help participants cope and support their work-life balance. One was the support from support networks in their non-work lives. This included friends, family and/or a partner, where applicable (first subtheme). They played a large role in the lives of participants and even though the ways in which they provided support was varied, they were seen as the largest sources of support in employees’ lives. Overall, for those with children, it seemed that without this support it would be difficult to manage their work and home lives. For those without children the support was something that was generally helpful, but not a practical necessity. However, the workplace did also provide support and colleagues were often the main source of support at work, with managers sometimes providing additional support on some occasions, but this wasn’t always the case (second subtheme). Finally, one other form of support for work-life balance that can help to reduce levels of work-personal life conflict is the right to request flexible working policy so their perceptions of the fairness of such policy were examined in the final subtheme.

3.3.2.1 Subtheme 1: Support from friends, family, or partner

Although the amount of support varied it was clear that participants sought some form of support from their partner (if they had one) alongside friends and family. Emotional support and having someone to talk to or communication using technology seemed important for single participants who did not have children or for single parents. This support was often provided over the phone, or over video calls and support did not always seem ‘nearby’. This was evidenced by Michelle:

“I ring my mother every day, nearly every day, often we facetime each other and she’s just there when I need to talk things through after a long day....I also have a sister who I speak to quite often” (Michelle, single, no children)

Although there were only two single mothers in the sample, they reported a reluctance to ask for instrumental/practical support as the focus was trying to do it on their own and not be dependent on others. Penny said:

“Friends I think and family as well, just any support that I need really. You know anything that goes on in my life, I feel like I have got that there. Friends and certainly family members as well, urm I can go to them, and I do feel like they would support me. Based on things that have gone on in the past, definitely...but I would only ask if there was something I really needed help with.” (Penny, single parent, one child)

Penny also noted that as a single mother she did not have support from a partner with daily household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning and administrative aspects, which meant she had a lot to do on her own:

“Well, it’s busy I suppose, cos I am a single parent. When I get home it’s sort of straight on with any jobs that need doing around the house, get dinner sorted um, and spend time with my son before relaxing and going to bed. That’s weekdays I suppose. Weekend, I do try to see friends when I can, but also do stuff with my son. But again, it’s catching up with things, anything around the home that needs doing, or anything else. I suppose there is never a time where you think, “what will I do today?”. Yeah, there is always something for you to be getting on with, and doing I think...”

(Penny, single parent, one child)

For couples with children there was an emphasis on instrumental support, this could be from a partner, but was often focused on friends and grandparents who would ‘chip in’ to manage work and home life. However, the process of organising this support wasn’t always straightforward, as stated by Hazel:

“My mum, my mum typically will come down once a week. She’s quite disorganised and she’ll sometimes be late, but the plan will generally, used to be that she would um, I think it’s on Tuesdays that she would pick up my son from nursery.” (Hazel, married with a child)

In some cases, for those married with children there was support provided from those outside of the family. Caroline in particular had a lot of support including someone living in to help with childcare and domestic tasks and a cleaner:

“I have yes, I have a cleaner once a week, and the au pair does 80% of the laundry and 100% of the ironing. Erm so yeah the (sigh). I suppose compared to most I have quite a lot of support in that erm area which is great, if I didn’t erm well I wouldn’t be able to do the hours I do or I might not sleep (laugh)...she lives in with us and she erm 3 days 3 or 4 days a week take well, the younger one to school. And you know gets the kids set up in the morning to go to school. Just a bit of laundry and things in the day. Erm and then collects from school. Does whatever the club is after school, swimming or whatever it is and then prepares their dinner...erm so that’s so that’s 3 to 4 days per week. It just depends on what my schedule is that week.” (Caroline, married, two children)

Although Caroline’s case may be quite extreme, without some kind of practical support, it seemed like going to work in some cases would not be possible and partner support (where appropriate) was also important: “well if I didn’t have my partner’s support, I don’t think I would’ve been able to return to work!” said Victoria. However, negotiating this partner support and utilising it, did not come without its own problems, such as concerns about fairness in sharing responsibilities at home. According to Hazel:

“And like this week especially, my son’s on a term-time contract so, he’s got, they don’t have space for him this week in his um, in his like child

minder so, my husband has him all week and I'm, I've got a rough week and I'm probably gonna have to stay here really late tonight and I just feel bad and I know, part of me knows that I should just stay here because I'm more likely to get the work done and the other part of me feels really bad for my husband at home. So, I find that quite bad. I, I think it's a typical, it's not, I don't think it's a typical guilt that people feel but it's fairly um, particular to our situation, it's just like trying to be fair in how we divide the time that we have available to us." (Hazel, married with a child)

3.3.2.2 Subtheme 2: Support from colleagues and managers

Support from colleagues came in many different forms; some alluded to emotional support, but it was often more practical, such as helping with additional work that employees were given or giving tips and suggestions on how to carry out certain tasks. This also made employees feel they are working in a place where everyone helps each other out, rather than just looking out for themselves, thus alluding to a positive workplace culture. Ivy said:

"well everybody supports each other, and will try to help each other, and listen and and think of ways that we can can alleviate extra additional work and suggest things, well I've tried this do not try that, in practical terms, but I don't know don't know, we try to support each other and we have different ways to help each other" (Ivy, married with 3 children)

However, there was at times reluctance to ask for this support due to the impact it could have on others in the workplace. Seeking support could lead to a colleague having to do more or

having to potentially pick up where someone left off, which may impact their levels of work-personal life conflict. Hannah pointed out this predicament:

“Slightly depending on who else was in, obviously the problem about the weekend working is that, everyone has to do it, so there is often somebody who is not in cos they’re are having a lieu day, so you [sigh] if you leave early you can do it, but if you leave early, but then you are leaving other people to take the wrap and potentially have to stay later, so it does have a knock on effect” (Hannah, married with three children)

Moving on from supportive colleagues to management. Management were largely seen by participants as being supportive towards their employees. For example, in some cases line managers were seen as reassuring and available to help, as Clara said:

“I have regular one to ones and you know, I know I can pick up the phone, I can email them and she, she's very responsive.” (Clara, cohabiting, no children)

However, not everyone agreed. For some, this kind of support came across as superficial and not genuine but rather a ‘show’ of support, as Lila said,

“there are monthly meetings with the manager to “check-in” but it’s all, it’s all just a box-ticking exercise, rather than actual support” (Lila, married with no children)

Personal circumstances of line managers sometimes were perceived to have an influence on how supportive they are. For example, those with children may understand the needs of parents and be supportive, although no participant suggested that if a line manager had different personal circumstances this would make them less likely to be supportive. However, once again Hannah raised concerns that support organised by her line manager may have a knock-on effect on colleagues which may impact their workload or work-life balance.

“so there’s that there is a feeling of kind of yes of course my boss in that role also has small children, he would have understood and I am sure he would have let me go early, but it would have put a lot more pressure on other people than in my current role, so there’s always that element that you are very aware that if you are not there other people are having to work harder because you are not there, which I think particularly if you are a woman and are prone to guilt it’s quite you know prevalent”
(Hannah, married with three children)

3.3.2.3 Subtheme 3: Perceptions of the right to request and fairness.

As discussed earlier, there was already some innate flexibility within the roles of the majority of the participants, so experiences of the right to request were not reported. However, participants were asked their views towards the changes to the right to request. Views seemed quite similar across the interviews, and it was clear that the changes were viewed as positive due to the belief that everyone deserves support equally. There may be an element of social desirability bias in responses, and at times the responses seemed a little contradictory, perhaps suggesting that some people, such as those with caring responsibilities, should be prioritised. Caroline, discussed the right to request flexible working now being open to all:

“Well, I think it’s it’s, yeah it should be equal for everyone. Not just because you’re a parent. Erm you might have another reason for wanting to have more time, and get that work-life balance... why should you then not be able to leave work at 3 o’clock on a Friday. (Laugh) ...When all your colleagues who have children are. I think it’s it should be open to all”. (Caroline, married, two children).

There was the feeling that opening up the policy to all employees makes things feel fairer, as those without children will feel that they are on equal grounds with everyone else. Clara noted:

“Um, I think then it, can make your work work life balance better because then you feel you can have an open and honest discussion with your manager and the law now reflects a more, a broader approach. Yeah. Speaking as someone who doesn't have children. I, you know, although it sounds harsh, one feels one would be penalized for this prior to these changes”. (Clara, cohabiting, no children)

However, it was also acknowledged that although the policy may be more inclusive, and the changes are positive, this does not mean that all of the requests to use this policy could be accommodated, and opening it to all may compound this. Caroline said:

“Because you know, I guess, if you give it to one person. Then you kind of need to be open to giving it to everyone, and you can’t say oh well I’ve

given to that person, so that's run out. There's no, I can't give it to everyone." (Caroline, married, two children)

Similarly, Clara was aware of others making use of compressed work hours but was also aware that doesn't mean it would be granted if she requested it.

"I don't want to say that the precedent has been set, but I'm aware of colleagues that have changed their working pattern. And I don't know if that was done through an official process, but you know, I can think as I said, for example, um, one individual will do, um, has, can compress their working hours into four working days. So to do slightly longer days. I suspect maybe down to family commitments....So I think that that's what I'm acutely aware of where, you know, part of my job is working with policies and procedures. So it also clear to me that just because the agreement was made for that individual at that point in time, it doesn't necessarily mean it's going to be the same for me." (Clara, cohabiting, no children)

Related to this, while the policy may be considered fairer now that it is open to all, there were some concerns about whether the way requests would be dealt with would be fair. Requests should be based on the business case, but as managers know their employees' personal circumstances, they might make their own personal judgments in deciding whether to grant a request. However, there wasn't any pronounced concerns that an employee's personal circumstances (e.g. whether they have children) would be used in this way. Susie said:

“Um, well they might not want to if they don’t trust the employee... in which case they shouldn’t even work with them, yeah I can imagine that some employers get a bit nervous if they feel like they can’t control how the employee works” (Susie, non-cohabiting relationship, no children)

Although participants said they felt the change to the right to request made things fairer, because people had issues to deal with in their non-work lives which extended beyond parent and carer responsibilities, some participants, including those without children, also made seemingly contradictory statements, suggesting that those with children might need to be prioritised. Also, similarly to the HR and line managers in chapter 2, when considering other reasons for needing to request flexible working, they tended to focus on caring responsibilities and illness. Susie noted:

“and I think that’s fair enough because if you have family and your child is ill and those type of scenarios then they should be prioritised, but other people with other life circumstances should also be able to be flexible for example if their partner has a problem or if their parents are ill or something, there are so many other things and why someone would need to work flexibly” (Susie, non-cohabiting relationship, no children)

Sofia, who unlike Susie was in a cohabiting relationship talked of how outside of official flexible working requests, colleagues with children were informally accommodated for a variety of reasons related to their children, although she did not express any concern about this:

“Not officially, so the only thing I have noticed is that people who do have children, they do take time for them, urm, so there is one quite senior person who will quite often have out-of-office emails set saying I am not in for the first hour, urm, because I had to go to something with my kids, and I don’t think anybody complains about that” (Sofia, cohabiting relationship, no children)

Louisa said she could see the issue from both sides, but went on to suggest that those who are single have more time to work because they don’t have childcare demands. Whereas an employee with children would need to be accommodated, at least informally, for time off for emergencies.

“I can see it from both sides, as a parent, you may, you may get called to pick your child up from nursery or from school because of illnesses, urm, and there is nothing you can do about it. It might be that you don’t have childcare, something happened to your childminder, or whatever the case is. You aren’t able to do anything because you have to look after your child or you have to collect your child. That in itself starts to increase the amount of time off that you would have. Whereas a single person wouldn’t sort of have that sort of responsibility, and they would more or less be able to work later in some cases, and come in earlier.” (Louisa, single parent, one child).

Similarly, Hannah, described how people who are younger than her and don’t have children do not have the same pressures or demands outside of work compared to a parent:

“I think it's tricky if you work with people in very different situations, you know, there are other women, mothers in the office who have a lot of the same issues I do. So, in news there are kind of a lot of young men who aren't married and have families and not facing the same pressures. So, for them, coming to the office is not such a big deal in terms of, you know, what they have to get back to when they go home”. (Hannah, married with three children)

3.4 Summary of findings

The overarching research question of this study was whether experiences, perceptions and views differ across employees with different family structures, and this was addressed within each of the three research questions that were outlined/asked.

The first research question focused on exploring employees' experiences of work-life boundary management, conflict and enrichment. This question was mostly answered within the first theme. It was found that the employees experience work-personal life conflict and generally they blamed themselves for this, rather than the organisation. Parents expressed feelings of guilt about not being able to spend time with children and experiencing 'mum guilt'. This is supported by previous research which indicates that mothers who experience high levels of work-personal life conflict and perceive themselves deviating from the “ideal” mother role, also report higher levels of guilt (Maclean et al., 2021). Whereas not being able to enjoy their time off freely, and feeling guilt about not working, even when they were at home, applied across all participants. Issues surrounding boundary management were also covered in the first theme with the majority of participants having difficulties managing the boundaries between

their work and home life, primarily as many had some intrinsic flexibility within their job role such as the ability to do some work from home or outside of 'standard' working hours. While in some respects flexible boundaries may be helpful and some people may prefer this integration of work and personal life, it also seemed to lead to blurred boundaries and conflict, but primarily from work to personal life. Previous research has reported mixed findings, as working from home has been associated with higher levels of conflict (Russell, O'Connell & McGinnity, 2009), but it has also been found that for those who prefer to have flexible schedules and have autonomy, it is related to lower work-life conflict (Golden, Veiga, & Simsek, 2006). Nevertheless, even if preferences are met, blurred boundaries for employees who are overcommitted to their work role can still be linked to higher levels of work-personal life conflict (Kinman & McDowall, 2009).

Those who had children considered they had a temporary boundary due to having to leave work to pick up their children, but at the same time had a lack of downtime and often picked up work related matters after children were asleep. Whereas for those without children, there was no enforced boundary, and they could just continue to work. However, this might enable them to have downtime later or else they enforced a boundary to spend time, with, for example a partner or pet. Nevertheless, there was a minority of cases who kept strict boundaries between work and home life, but this was rare. While there were a lot of examples of work-personal life conflict, there were few examples of work-personal life enrichment, although some participants did refer to some ways in which their work may have improved their home life (e.g. a role model to their children) and their home life may have improved work (e.g. children make you prioritise work tasks and make you a more rounded person).

The second research question related to the experiences of work-life balance supports in relation to the policies, culture and line manager support and perceptions of fairness. This question was addressed primarily in the second theme. Although it was not the aim to specifically investigate support outside of work, this emerged as an important source of support. For those who were single the type of support from outside of work was mostly emotional support and often communication was using technology. This is supported by recent research which has stated that single employees use technology as their main route to social support (Wilkinson et al., 2023). Whereas for parents their experiences of support were more in the form of practical support such as help with looking after the children, however this was often difficult for them to negotiate. In relation to workplace support, for most of the interviewees, there was no use of policies and most of their jobs included intrinsic flexibility or had the ability to informally agree occasional flexibility. However, overall, they felt supported by their colleagues, but could also see how if they were to ask a colleague for support it may impact their colleague's levels of work-personal life conflict instead. Support was also generally seen as available from line managers. There was a suggestion that this may not always be entirely genuine, but there was no suggestion that managers were more supportive of employees with certain personal circumstances, or that there was a poor workplace culture with an expectation from management for employees to work all hours. However, under the first theme, participants spoke of it being the norm to work outside of work hours among their colleagues, so they felt they had to do this too.

The third research question focused on how participants viewed the changes to the right to request flexible working. This was largely covered in the final subtheme, and perceptions of fairness were also covered there. As discussed, many employees had innate flexibility within their role, but when asked about their views of the changes to the right to request, everyone felt

it was fairer, and those without children felt they would have been penalised before. However, there were contradictory responses at times. For example, after saying that it was good that flexible working was open to all, even those who did not have children went on to say they could see why someone who did have children may need to be prioritised. This is similar to previous research where employees without children have been found to assign greater priority to female employees with children than female employees without children when considering work-life balance arrangements (Filippi et al., 2024). Participants in the current research also noted that they had observed the use of informal flexibility to deal with childcare needs, especially emergencies, and employees with children agreed with this need. Furthermore, employees with children seemed to regard those with no children as perhaps being less in need, as they have less home demands and can work longer. The implications of these findings and how they relate to previous research will be discussed more fully in chapter 5.

3.5 Conclusion

Participants, regardless of their family structure, reported experiences of work-personal life conflict. However, they blamed themselves and felt guilty when not working but also guilty about not spending time with children or not being able to enjoy their time off freely. Most of the participants reported difficulties with managing the boundaries between work and home life but there were a few exceptions to this, especially where participants maintained boundaries. More positively some examples of how work enriched personal life and vice versa were evident, but the focus was largely on conflict experiences. Participants sought support in various forms, and it differed according to the family structures of employees. Those who had children often sought support from family to help with childcare and regarded those with no children as possibly being less in need of flexible working policies. Whereas those without children often sought emotional support and reported some contradictory responses in terms of

whether parents may have a greater need when it comes to work-life balance policies. Nevertheless, they all reported the 2014 changes to the right to request to be fair. The next chapter aims to explore work-life balance experiences of employees quantitatively.

Chapter 4. Quantitative Study with employees

4.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters explored perceptions of work-life balance supports qualitatively. This was first by conducting interviews with line managers and HR managers (study 1) followed by interviews with employees, which also explored their personal experiences of work-life balance and supports (study 2). The findings of study 2 suggested that regardless of their family structure, participants tended to have difficulties managing the boundaries between their work and personal life, although there were differences in experiences between those with and without children. Participants often struggled with feelings of guilt and blamed themselves for experiencing conflict between work and personal life. Workplace support was often found to be helpful, but non-work support was more relied upon, although the types of support used differed between those with and without children. When exploring the perceptions of the right to request flexible working, there were some contradictory responses; participants felt the situation was fairer since the changes, but at the same time some felt that employees with children may need to make use of this policy more than others and so may need to be prioritised.

The current study aims to complement the previous studies by investigating work-life balance quantitatively. Whereas the qualitative methods in study 2 allowed exploration of the individuals' work-life balance experiences, the current study will utilise a range of measures which will allow comparison amongst various groups and to explore the predictors of bi-directional work-personal life conflict and enrichment. As discussed in chapter 1, since work-personal life conflict has health implications (e.g. Berkman et al., 2015; Cooklin et al., 2016; Emslie, Hunt, & Macintyre, 2004; Shockley & Allen, 2013) and implications for organisational factors such as job performance and organisation commitment (e.g. Li, Bagger, & Cropanzano, 2017; Muse, Harris, Giles, & Field, 2008), research has tended to focus on trying to understand

the antecedents. It is important to widen research exploring antecedents in order to match the changing workforce, using samples and measures that do not focus on family. However, research largely focuses on work-family conflict, with some studies specifically looking at a sample such as married parents with children under the age of five (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz & Shockley, 2013). A study in the UK by Waumsley, Houston and Marks (2010) looked at a range of employees and stated that work-family conflict scales did not adequately measure the experience of those without children and found that both women with and without children experienced conflict. However, quantitative research specifically looking at employees with different family structures is limited.

In a meta-analytic review of the antecedents of work-family conflict conducted by Michel et al. (2011) work role stressors, work role involvement, work social support and other work characteristics (which includes flexible work practices) were key predictors of work-family conflict, whereas family role stressors, family social support, and family climate were predictors of family-work conflict. Since the key antecedents of work-personal life conflict are generally work role stressors and various work resources, this research will draw on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model of stress (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) to examine negative (demands) and positive (resources) antecedents by not only focusing on work role stressors (demands) but also focusing on possible resources such as support and use of work-life balance policies. As the antecedents of personal life-work conflict are more often from outside of work (Michel et al., 2011), home demands and support will also be included. The majority of research has focused on conflict, but there is an increasing amount of research that includes the positive aspects to combining work and personal life known as work-life enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), with studies finding that skills that are gained in your

home/personal life can be applied in the workplace and vice versa (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002).

Additionally, perceived fairness is an important factor to consider when discussing work-life balance supports (Parker & Allen, 2001). A recent systematic review found that there is still a lack of research that has included single professionals' perceptions of fairness of work-life balance policies and how they manage their work and personal life issues, due to literature largely focusing on working women, married workers and dual-earner couples (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). However, there is little research looking at fairness perceptions as antecedents of work-personal life conflict. For example, perceptions of fairness in relation to the availability and allocation of work-life balance policies (Beauregard, 2014) or whether the workplace culture is equally friendly to those of differing family structures in terms of equality of treatment and supports for work-life balance (Casper, Weltman & Kwesiga, 2007).

Since these factors have not been examined in a single study and in order to provide an account of work-life balance experiences from those across different family structures, this chapter will focus on the quantitative element of the research programme which utilised a questionnaire study. The study aimed to address the following research questions:

- What are the antecedents of bi-directional work-life conflict and enrichment? In particular:
 - What roles are played by role demands and resources such as various forms of support, singles/childfree-friendly work culture and use of policies?
 - What role is played by perceptions of fairness?
- Are there differences in the antecedents and work-life balance outcomes between employees with different family structures?

4.2 Method

4.2.1 Design

The study was a cross-sectional questionnaire design with data being collected over the period of one year from August 2019 to July 2020. The survey was left open for this length of time to maximise the response rate, as building responses was quite slow. Additionally, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during the middle of data collection, the survey was left open to allow for a reasonable response rate in the ‘during lockdown’ phase (post-March 2020) for comparisons to be made with the ‘before lockdown’ phase (pre-March 2020), when conducting analyses.

There were four main outcome variables namely, work-personal life conflict, personal life-work conflict, work-personal life enrichment and personal life-work enrichment. All other measures were classified as predictors including gender, marital status, and whether or not participants had children. Organisational fairness was assessed using measures of distributive and procedural justice. Singles/childfree-friendly work culture was assessed using three subscales (equal access to work-life balance policies, respect for non-work roles and equal work expectations). Other predictors included support (colleagues and line manager) and demands at work, support (family and friends) and demands from home and finally the use of work-life balance policies. As the COVID-19 pandemic began during data collection, some of the data were collected during national lockdowns were in place, so whether participation was before (prior to 23rd March 2020) or during the lockdowns was a further variable.

4.2.2 Participants

In total 492 participants opened the questionnaire. A final sample of 302 participants was used for analysis. Data was only retained from those who had progressed more than 97% through the full survey and many who were excluded did not get beyond the information and consent page. The large majority of those who completed the survey were female ($n = 204$, 67.5%), and around one third of respondents identified as male ($n = 96$, 31.8%), with one participant who identified as non-binary, and one who did not respond to this question. The ages of the participants ranged from 18-70 ($M = 34.55$, $SD = 11.48$). Around half of the participants were married or cohabiting (52.3%) with the rest either in a relationship and living apart or single (47.7%). The majority of the participants did not have any children (71.9%), but for those who had children (27.8%), they had between 1-6 children ($M = 2.04$) and one participant did not respond. The mean number of hours worked was 38.73 ($SD = 12.05$) and the most common work sector where participants were employed was the education sector (21.2%). Further details regarding the participants' demographics can be found in table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1

Demographic details of participants

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	204	67.5
Male	96	31.8
Non-binary	1	0.3
Not stated	1	0.3
Marital Status		
Single or not living with partner	144	47.7
Married or living with partner	158	52.3
Children		
Yes	84	27.8
No	217	71.9
Not stated	1	0.3
Work Sector		
Accountancy, banking and finance	17	5.6
Business, consulting and management	19	6.3
Charity and voluntary work	6	2.0
Creative arts and design	6	2.0
Education	64	21.2
Energy and utilities	5	1.7
Engineering and manufacturing	12	4.0
Environment and agriculture	2	0.7
Healthcare and social care	53	17.5
Hospitality and events management	7	2.3
IT, media and internet	16	5.3
Law, law enforcement and security	8	2.6
Leisure, sport and tourism	4	1.3
Marketing, advertising and PR	16	5.3
Property and construction	6	2.0
Public services and administration	14	4.6
Recruitment and HR	11	3.6
Retail and sales	24	7.9
Science and pharmaceuticals	4	1.3
Transport and logistics	7	2.3
Supervisor or Manager of Employees		
Yes	83	27.5
No	215	71.2
Not stated	1	0.3
When the questionnaire was completed		
Before lockdown	181	59.9
During lockdown	121	40.1

4.2.3 Measures

An online survey was developed using Qualtrics comprising of a number of pre-published scales, some of which were amended slightly for the purposes of this study (this will be discussed below).

4.2.3.1 Demographics

The survey started with demographic questions which included questions on age, gender, how many children, how many children under 16, and how many children lived at home. Participants were also asked about work-related demographics such as which sector they worked in and if they managed any employees and how many hours they worked.

4.2.3.2 Work-personal life conflict and enrichment

The first scale was the measure of bi-directional work-personal life conflict and enrichment developed by Fisher, Bulger and Smith (2009) which had 17 items in total and participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which they felt a particular way during the last 3 months and had to respond on a 5-point Likert scale (not at all, rarely, sometimes, often, almost all of the time). Work-personal life conflict was measured using 5 questions, such as “I come home from work too tired to do things I would like to do” ($\alpha = .91$). Personal life-work conflict was measured using six questions which included questions such as “I have difficulty getting my work done because I am preoccupied with personal matters at work” ($\alpha = .86$). Three questions were asked to calculate personal life-work enrichment such as “I am in a better mood at work because of everything I have going on for me in my personal life” ($\alpha = .81$), with an additional three questions measuring work-personal life enrichment e.g. “my job gives me energy to pursue activities outside of work that are important to me” ($\alpha = .78$). High scores

mean higher levels of conflict but also higher levels of enrichment. Items within each subscale were summed and mean scores were calculated for each of the subscales for further analysis.

4.2.3.3 Use of work-life balance policies

The next scale enquired about the use of work-life balance policies. The method of measuring this variable was adapted from a similar style employed by Hamilton, Gordon and Whelan-Berry (2006) in their research. Respondents were informed about what a work-life balance policy was I.e. that it is used as a universal term which encompasses general policies such as flexible working, and a variety of more specific policies (e.g. working from home, compressed hours, paid time off for family issues) which may help employees to manage their work and personal lives. They were then asked to select all of the work-life balance policies they had used. Policies listed included, for example, compressed hours, job share and shift swapping (15 policies in total). Participants had an opportunity to state if any other policy was not listed, which they could then specify. A summed score was created to calculate how many policies were used.

4.2.3.4 Organisational Justice

Organisational justice was measured using an 11-item multidimensional scale of organizational justice. This measure was originally developed by Colquitt (2001) and was adapted by Beauregard (2014). The current study very slightly adapted the version used by Beauregard (2014). Where Beauregard referred to “work-life options”, this was changed to “work-life balance policies”. Two subscales were used. Procedural justice was explained as the “procedures used to allocate work-life balance policies (e.g. flexitime, job sharing, reduced hours, working from home) in your organization” and was measured using seven items ($\alpha = .89$). Items included “I would be able to express my views and feelings during these

procedures”. The subscale for distributive justice was evaluated using four items. This subscale was also adapted as participants were informed that the items referred to the availability of “work-life balance policies” in their organization, and items included “my access to work-life balance policies reflects my need for such benefits” ($\alpha = .90$). The responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Higher scores denote higher perceptions of fairness and justice. Items within each subscale were summed and mean scores were calculated for each of the subscales for further analysis.

4.2.3.5 Singles/childfree-Friendly Work Culture

Singles/childfree-friendly work culture (SFWC) was measured using an adapted version of the ‘singles-friendly culture’ scale developed by Casper, Weltman and Kwesiga (2007). The original scale had 41 items and five different ‘factors’ (social inclusion, equal work opportunities, equal access to benefits, respect for non-work roles, equal work expectations). In the current study, three of these subscales (equal access to work-life balance policies, respect for non-work roles and equal work expectations) comprising 13 items were retained for inclusion and were adapted so that questions referring to ‘singles’ were changed to refer to employees without children. Participants were asked “to what extent do you agree that each of the following statements represent the culture at your organization?” with responses recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The respect for non-work roles subscale originally had 3 questions and all 3 questions were used in the current study. This included questions like “my line manager treats all employees’ requests for time off the same, regardless of why the employee wants the time off” ($\alpha = .78$). The equal work expectations subscale originally had 7 questions but only 6 questions were used, including “in my organization, work assignments are made without considering family status” ($\alpha = .77$). Finally, the equal access to work-life balance policies subscale originally had 7 questions but

only 4 questions were utilised in this study, including “My organization provides work-life balance policies that are relevant for employees with children and employees without children” ($\alpha = .85$). The questions which were repetitive were removed. The original scale was quite lengthy amongst an already long survey when considering all the scales used. For example, a question removed was “The work-life balance policies provided by my organization are desirable to both employees with children and employees without children.”, as this was similar to the example provided above. Research has indicated that a good questionnaire should be around 30 minutes and if they become longer than this a participant can often speed up and ‘rush’ through which can impact reliability and the quality of responses (Sharma, 2022). Therefore, the scale was slightly shortened but the subscales remained reliable. Higher scores denote higher perceptions of the workplace culture being equally friendly to those of differing family structures. Items within each subscale were summed and mean scores were calculated for each of the subscales for further analysis.

4.2.3.6 Support outside of work

Support from friends and family was measured using a modified version of the social support scale developed by Cutrona and Russell (1987). The reliable alliance subscale was used which had four questions and it was adapted to specifically refer to family (rather than the general phrase of ‘people’ e.g. “there are people I can depend on”) and then the same four questions were asked again referring to friends, for example “I can depend on my family to help me if I really need it” ($\alpha = .78$) and “I can depend on my friends to help me if I really need it” ($\alpha = .74$). It was highlighted that the phrase family included extended family, partner/spouse and children, and that they should refer to the extent each statement described their relationships in the last 3 months. As per the original measure, a 4-point Likert scale was used (“strongly

disagree” to “strongly agree”). Items within each subscale were summed and mean scores were calculated for each of the subscales for further analysis.

4.2.3.7 Home demands

A 3-item scale developed by Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker and Schaufeli, (2005) was used to measure home demands. Respondents were informed that “the following questions will ask you about your home demands. When responding to the following questions, ensure your responses reflect your home demands in the last 3 months” and a question included in this scale was “do you find that you are busy at home?” ($\alpha = .83$). Items were scored on a 4-point Likert scale, this ranged from “never” to “always”. Items were summed and a mean score was calculated for further analysis.

4.2.3.8 Demands and support at work

The Health and Safety Executive management standards indicator tool (2021) was used to measure demands, and support at work. The original tool covers six areas (demands, control, manager support, peer support, relationships, role and change), however only the demands ($\alpha = .87$), manager support ($\alpha = .88$) and peer support ($\alpha = .85$) subscales were used in this study. This included 9 items about work demands (e.g. “Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine”), four items regarding manager support (e.g. “I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem”) and four items which asked about peer support (e.g. “My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems”). Questions were responded to on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “never” to “always” and participants were asked to ensure their responses reflected their work in the last six months. Items within each subscale were summed and mean scores were calculated for each of the subscales for further analysis.

4.2.4 Procedure

Ethical approval was granted by the Middlesex University Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee on 8th July 2019 (approval ID: 7350). Participants were then recruited to complete the online survey using a variety of methods, but primarily four methods were used. The first method was using existing contacts; this involved the researcher emailing existing contacts who met the recruitment criteria of being employed in the UK and able to communicate in English with details about the study and the link for completing the questionnaire. The second method was a snowballing approach which similar to the first method involved asking existing contacts to forward the questionnaire link to anyone they know who may be interested. The third method involved posting a recruitment message on online forums such as Reddit and parenting and working professional forums and social media sites such as LinkedIn and Twitter. This was only done after seeking permission from the owner/moderator where appropriate. The advert was also shared on the researcher's personal twitter page and this was then shared further by some followers and organisations. The fourth method was posting the link on the website SurveyCircle. This survey sharing website promotes surveys and points are collected by participating in surveys; the more surveys individuals participate in, the more support they get back by others participating in their study.

Once participants clicked on the survey link, this led them directly to the information sheet page which contained details regarding the purpose of the study and why they were being invited to participate. Participants were informed that participation was entirely voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time until one month after participation which was clearly outlined on the information sheet and debriefing form. They were notified that it was an online questionnaire, and it would take around 25-30 minutes to complete. The possible benefits and disadvantages of taking part were outlined so that they could make a fully informed decision.

They were notified that the data collected would be anonymous as ID numbers were used to identify data and that all data would remain confidential (it was ensured that no data related to IP addresses was collected to further ensure anonymity). Finally, they were provided with the contact details of the researcher and the supervisory team and directed to the next page which was a consent form containing a series of statements. They needed to agree with all statements by placing a tick next to each one in order to proceed to start the survey. They then completed the survey, which was spread across several pages, and upon completing the final scale, the participants were directed to the debriefing sheet, which outlined the details of the study in more detail. In case participants felt they needed further support, they were provided with details of support services alongside the contact details of the researcher and supervisors. A reminder regarding withdrawal, anonymity and confidentiality was also provided. They were instructed to close the survey after they had finished reading the sheet. The data from the survey was then downloaded as an SPSS data file in preparation for analysis.

4.2.5 Analysis

First, analyses were conducted involving independent samples *t*-tests to examine differences between groups on four dichotomous categorical variables (male v female, married v single, children v no children, before v during lockdown) in terms of their levels of bi-directional work-personal life conflict and enrichment, support and demands at work, support and demands at home, organisational justice, singles/childfree-friendly work culture, and policy use. This was followed by Pearson's correlational analyses to examine the relationships amongst the continuous variables, and the four outcome variables (work-personal life conflict and enrichment in both directions). Finally, four hierarchical regression analyses were conducted (one for each outcome variable) to examine the extent to which demographic variables and measures of support and demands at home, support and demands at work,

singles/childfree-friendly work culture, justice, and policies used, would predict bi-directional work-personal life conflict and enrichment. A significance value of .05 was used for all tests, apart from the t-tests where a Bonferroni correction was applied and as 16 tests were carried out, the significance was adjusted to 0.003.

4.3 Results

Demographic details of participants were presented in table 4.1 as part of the method section. Due to the large number of variables, all means and SD's for each of the scales can be found in the correlation matrix (table 4.3). In terms of the 4 outcomes variables, for work-personal life conflict, the mean of 3.08 suggests that on average participants indicated that they experienced conflict sometimes. The same applied for personal life-work enrichment ($M=3.13$) indicating that they sometimes experienced personal life-work enrichment. However, the mean for personal life-work conflict was lower ($M=2.27$) indicating that this form of conflict on average occurred less often, along with work-personal life enrichment ($M=2.57$).

4.3.1 Independent Samples t-tests

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine dichotomous categorical variables of interest including: 1. males and females, 2. employees with and without children, 3. employees who were single and married/cohabiting, and also to examine 4. participants who responded before and during the lockdown in terms of differences between each pair of groups on work-personal life conflict and enrichment, support and demands at work, support and demands at home, organisational justice, singles/childfree-friendly work culture, and policy use. The large majority of the results were not significant. All the *t*-tests can be found in table 4.2 with a summary of significant results provided below.

Those with children ($M=2.97$, $SD=.77$) had a significantly higher level of home demands compared to those without children ($M=2.54$, $SD=.66$), $t(296) = -4.86$, $p<.001$.

When comparing males and females on the subscales of work-life balance, two out of the four subscales yielded significant results. Males ($M=2.87$, $SD=.99$) had significantly higher levels of work-personal life enrichment in comparison to females ($M=2.43$, $SD=.79$), $t(298) = 4.07$, $p<.001$. Similarly males ($M=3.39$, $SD=.85$) reported higher levels compared to females ($M=3.01$, $SD=.87$) of personal life-work enrichment $t(298) = 3.54$, $p<.001$. Whereas females ($M=2.76$, $SD=.73$) reported significantly higher home demands compared to males ($M=2.44$, $SD=.65$), $t(295) = -3.59$, $p<.001$.

There were no significant differences between those who were cohabiting or married compared to those who were single.

Those who responded before the lockdown ($M=2.14$, $SD=.73$) reported significantly lower levels of personal life-work conflict compared to those who responded during the lockdown ($M=2.46$, $SD=.89$), $t(300) = -3.34$, $p<.001$.

Table 4.2

t-test results of study variables including means and standard deviations

Variable	Children	No children		Male	Female		Married or cohabiting	Single		Before Lockdown	During Lockdown	
	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>t</i>
1. Work-personal life conflict	2.96 (1.01)	3.14 (.89)	1.52	2.90 (.94)	3.16 (.90)	-2.26	3.04 (.98)	3.14 (.86)	0.97	3.12 (.96)	3.04 (.87)	.72
2. Personal life-work conflict	2.21 (.74)	2.29 (.84)	.78	2.33 (.85)	2.24 (.79)	.88	2.17 (.82)	2.38 (.79)	2.30	2.14 (.73)	2.46 (.89)	-3.34*
3. Work-personal life enrichment	2.61 (1.02)	2.55 (.83)	-.51	2.87 (.99)	2.43 (.79)	4.07*	2.60 (.92)	2.54 (.84)	-0.64	2.48 (.84)	2.70 (.93)	-2.23
4. Personal life-work enrichment	3.16 (.97)	3.12 (.84)	-.34	3.39 (.85)	3.01 (.87)	3.54*	3.22 (.90)	3.03 (.85)	-1.87	3.11 (.89)	3.16 (.87)	-.41
5. Policies used	2.80 (2.21)	2.16 (1.45)	-2.55	4.87 (2.92)	5.37 (3.18)	-1.27	2.21 (1.29)	2.50 (2.08)	1.27	2.39 (1.70)	2.30 (1.78)	.36
6. Procedural Justice	3.18 (.99)	3.27 (.90)	.78	2.65 (2.44)	2.20 (1.22)	1.84	3.23 (.92)	3.27 (.94)	.42	3.13 (.97)	3.44 (.83)	-2.86
7. Distributive Justice	3.35 (1.15)	3.39 (.98)	.28	3.50 (.92)	3.32 (1.08)	1.42	3.36 (1.06)	3.40 (1.00)	.32	3.31 (1.10)	3.50 (.90)	-1.58
8. Equal access to WLB policies	3.28 (1.13)	3.18 (1.10)	-.66	3.31 (1.02)	3.16 (1.15)	1.08	3.15 (1.16)	3.28 (1.04)	.97	3.08 (1.20)	3.41 (.92)	-2.57
9. Respect for non-work roles	3.36 (1.01)	3.27 (1.06)	-.66	3.37 (.99)	3.26 (1.07)	.83	3.23 (1.11)	3.36 (.97)	1.05	3.21 (1.08)	3.42 (.98)	-1.65
10. Equal work expectations	3.32 (.81)	3.17 (.81)	-1.39	3.41 (.69)	3.12 (.84)	2.89	3.15 (.84)	3.28 (.77)	1.39	3.15 (.84)	3.32 (.76)	-1.83
11. Home demands	2.97 (.77)	2.54 (.66)	-4.86*	2.44 (.65)	2.76 (.73)	-3.59*	2.72 (.75)	2.59 (.68)	-1.64	2.67 (.73)	2.64 (.71)	0.30
12. Family support	3.17 (.75)	3.16 (.68)	-.17	3.10 (.69)	3.19 (.71)	-1.06	3.24 (.68)	3.07 (.71)	-2.06	3.22 (.71)	3.07 (.68)	1.77
13. Friends support	3.06 (.63)	3.04 (.62)	-.28	2.98 (.63)	3.08 (.62)	-1.21	3.10 (.64)	2.99 (.60)	-1.50	3.07 (.65)	3.02 (.58)	0.61
14. Work demands	2.92 (.91)	3.00 (.71)	.86	2.94 (.78)	3.00 (.77)	-.64	2.96 (.82)	2.99 (.71)	.32	2.98 (.83)	2.98 (.66)	-0.09
15. Peer Support	3.38 (.95)	3.44 (.79)	.52	3.56 (.78)	3.37 (.85)	1.74	3.43 (.89)	3.43 (.76)	-.07	3.46 (.84)	3.38 (.82)	0.78
16. Manager support	3.21 (1.07)	3.32 (.87)	.84	3.48 (.77)	3.20 (.97)	2.44	3.31 (.98)	3.27 (.87)	-.37	3.24 (.93)	3.36 (.91)	-1.06

**p*<.0031 (Bonferroni correction value)

4.3.2 Correlational analyses

Pearson's correlational analyses were conducted to examine the relationships amongst the continuous variables, and in particular to examine relationships with the four outcome variables: work-personal life conflict, personal life-work conflict work-personal life enrichment and personal life-work enrichment.

When examining which variables had a correlation with work-personal life conflict, it was found to be significantly correlated with most of the study variables. This included significant positive correlations with home and work demands (higher demands related to higher work-personal life conflict) and significant negative correlations with justice, two of the singles/childfree-friendly work culture subscales and support at work (higher levels of equity on two forms of singles/childfree-friendly work culture, justice and support at work were related to lower levels of work-personal life conflict). All relationships were in the expected direction.

However, personal life-work conflict was correlated with far fewer variables, but there were significant positive correlations with one subscale of the singles/childfree-friendly work culture, home and work demands. With higher levels of personal life-work conflict associated with higher demands and greater equity in work expectations. There were significant negative correlations with support variables (except manager support) with more support related to lower personal life-work conflict.

Work-personal life enrichment was significantly positively correlated with policy use, justice, two of the singles/childfree-friendly work culture subscales, and peer and manager support, indicating higher levels of support, policy use, justice and a more singles/childfree-friendly

work culture was related to higher levels of work-personal life enrichment. It was negatively correlated with home demands and work demands, indicating higher levels of demands were related to lower levels of work-personal life enrichment. When examining personal life-work enrichment, many of the variables were significantly positively correlated including justice, two of the singles/childfree-friendly work culture subscales, family, friends and work support, and it was negatively correlated with work demands. This indicates that higher levels of support, justice and a more singles/childfree-friendly work culture was related to higher levels of personal life-work enrichment, whereas higher work demands were related to lower levels of personal life-work enrichment.

Some other noteworthy correlations are between policy use and fairness measures. Those who used more policies perceived higher levels of procedural justice and distributive justice in the provision of work-life balance policies. Those who used more policies also had higher scores on two of the three singles/childfree-friendly work culture subscales. In addition, there were strong correlations between two of the three singles/childfree-friendly work culture subscales and the distributive and procedural justice scales. Finally, higher scores on procedural and distributive justice, and two of the three singles/childfree-friendly work culture subscales were significantly correlated with lower job demands and greater support from colleagues and their line manager. A correlation matrix with the full results can be found in table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3

Correlation matrix of study variables including means and standard deviations

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Work-personal life conflict	3.08	0.92	-														
2. Personal life-work conflict	2.27	0.81	.271***	-													
3. Work-personal life enrichment	2.57	0.88	-.310***	-.120*	-												
4. Personal life-work enrichment	3.13	0.88	-.139*	-.125*	.481***	-											
5. Policies used	2.35	1.73	-.128	-.018	.135*	.085	-										
6. Procedural Justice	3.25	0.93	-.205***	-.073	.373***	.223***	.196**	-									
7. Distributive Justice	3.38	1.03	-.321***	-.082	.386***	.183**	.184**	.664***	-								
8. Equal access to WLB policies (SFWC)	3.21	1.11	-.311***	-.063	.363***	.240***	.211**	.731***	.625***	-							
9. Respect for non-work roles (SFWC)	3.30	1.05	-.200**	-.042	.309***	.173**	.155*	.619***	.545***	.815***	-						
10. Equal work expectations (SFWC)	3.22	0.81	-.021	.181**	.108	.042	.083	.145*	.104	.295***	.323***	-					
11. Home demands	2.66	0.72	.321***	.213***	-.163**	-.081	-.022	-.0784	-.122*	-.069	-.065	.099	-				
12. Family support	3.16	0.70	-.025	-.236***	.004	.195**	.076	.155**	.125*	.189**	.204***	-.056	-.065	-			
13. Friends support	3.05	0.62	-.105	-.183**	.060	.164**	.051	.116*	.102	.167**	.218***	.009	-.085	.465***	-		
14. Work demands	2.98	0.77	.610***	.284***	-.293***	-.117*	-.057	-.323***	-.372***	-.405***	-.367***	.032	.357***	-.190**	-.164**	-	
15. Peer support	3.43	0.83	-.242***	-.146*	.382***	.265***	.152*	.349***	.280***	.464***	.498***	.112	-.059	.279***	.371***	-.280***	-
16. Manager support	3.29	0.93	-.279***	-.053	.481***	.255***	.151*	.421***	.351***	.543***	.588***	.108	-.129*	.261***	.283***	-.327***	.708***

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

*** Correlation is significant at 0.001 level

4.3.3 Hierarchical regression analyses

Hierarchical multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which demographic measures and measures of support and demands at work, support and demands at home, justice, singles/childfree-friendly work culture and policies used would predict work-life balance. Four regression analyses were conducted; one for each of the outcome variables: work-personal life conflict, personal life-work conflict, work-personal life enrichment and personal life-work enrichment. Each regression analysis had four steps which will be described under the first regression below.

4.3.3.1 Hierarchical regression analysis predicting work-personal life conflict

In step one, demographic variables (i.e. gender, whether or not the participants had children and their marital status) were entered along with whether the data was collected before or during the COVID-19 lockdown. At step one, the demographic variables did not significantly contribute to the regression model ($F_{(4,214)} = 1.19, p = .316$) with only 2% of the variance explained, and none of the variables made a significant contribution. At step two, work demands and support variables (i.e. work demands, peer support and manager support) were added. This model was significant ($F_{(7,214)} = 18.51, p < .001$) predicting 38% of the variance with work demands ($p < .001, \beta = .56$) the sole significant variable. At step three, home demands and support variables were added (i.e. family support, friends support and home demands) producing a significant model which explained 39% of the variance ($F_{(10,214)} = 13.20, p < .001$). The only significant variable was work demands ($p < .001, \beta = .55$). At the final step (step four) distributive justice and procedural justice, singles/childfree-friendly work culture variables (i.e. respect for non-work roles, equal access to policies and equal work expectations) and policy use were added yielding a significant model ($F_{(16,214)} = 9.55, p < .001$). The only significant

variables were work demands ($p < .001$, $\beta = .53$) and respect for non-work roles ($p < .01$, $\beta = .28$), so higher work demands and greater perceptions of equal respect for non-work roles predicted greater work-personal life conflict. This final step predicting work-personal life conflict explained 44% of the variance. All the beta values from the final step can be found in table 4.4 along with R^2 change for each step which shows only steps 2 and 4 made a significant contribution.

4.3.3.2 Hierarchical regression analysis predicting personal life-work conflict

In step one when predicting personal life-work conflict, entering the demographic variables yielded a significant model ($F_{(4,214)} = 3.14$, $p < .05$) which explained 6% of the variance. The significant variables were marital status ($p < .05$, $\beta = -.16$) and before and during the COVID-19 lockdown ($p < .01$, $\beta = .16$). At step two, work demands and support variables were added and this model was significant ($F_{(7,214)} = 5.46$, $p < .001$) explaining 17% of the variance. There were four significant variables in this step, marital status ($p < .05$, $\beta = -.16$), before and during lockdown ($p < .01$, $\beta = .13$), work demands ($p < .001$, $\beta = .29$) and peer support ($p < .05$, $\beta = -.20$). In step three, home demands and support variables were added and this increased the variance to 22% and produced a significant result ($F_{(10,214)} = 5.17$, $p < .001$). The significant variables were marital status ($p < .05$, $\beta = -.17$), work demands ($p < .01$, $\beta = .22$) and family support ($p < .05$, $\beta = .17$). In step four, with the addition of justice, policy use and singles/childfree-friendly work culture variables, the model retained its significance ($F_{(16,214)} = 3.74$, $p < .001$). The only significant variables were marital status, ($p < .05$, $\beta = -.16$) and work demands ($p < .05$, $\beta = .20$), so higher work demands and being single predicted greater personal life-work conflict. This final step predicting personal life-work conflict explained 24% of the variance. All the beta

values from the final step can be found in the table 4.4 below along with R^2 change for each step which shows steps 1, 2 and 3 made a significant contribution.

Table 4.4

Summary of Hierarchical regression analysis predicting work-personal life conflict and personal life-work conflict

Work-personal life conflict					Personal life-work conflict			
	β from final step	t from final step	R^2 change at each step	F change	β from final step	t from final step	R^2 change at each step	F change
Step 1			.022	1.19			.056	3.14*
Before or during COVID-19 lockdown	-.059	-1.003			.119	1.755		
Gender	.088	1.523			-.004	-0.064		
Children	-.049	-.759			-.026	-0.351		
Marital Status	.011	.178			-.163*	-2.376		
Step 2			.363	40.69***			.117	9.73***
Work demands	.538*	8.217			.195*	2.568		
Peer support	-.138	-1.694			-.162	-1.718		
Manager support	-.017	-0.211			.136	1.415		
Step 3			.008	.88			.045	3.91*
Family support	.097	1.474			-.136	-1.781		
Friends support	-.075	-1.138			-.063	-0.832		
Home demands	.059	0.930			.116	1.580		
Step 4			.043	2.50*			.026	1.12
Policies used	-.073	-1.299			-.026	-0.402		
Distributive justice	-.135	-1.786			-.027	-0.307		
Procedural justice	.084	1.013			-.144	-1.501		
Respect for non-work roles	.284*	2.910			.060	0.531		
Equal access to policies	-.199	-1.832			.041	0.330		
Equal work expectations	-.031	-0.517			.092	1.307		

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

NB. β values are only reported for the final step.

4.3.3.3 Hierarchical regression analysis predicting work-personal life enrichment

In step one when predicting work-personal life enrichment, entering the demographic variables yielded a significant model ($F_{(4,214)} = 3.88, p < .01$) which explained 7% of the variance. The significant variables were gender ($p < .01, \beta = -.19$) and before and during the COVID-19 lockdown ($p < .05, \beta = .16$). In step two, work demands and support variables were added and this model was significant ($F_{(7,214)} = 11.14, p < .001$) explaining 27% of the variance. There were four significant variables in this step, gender ($p < .05, \beta = -.14$), before and during the COVID-19 lockdown ($p < .05, \beta = .14$), work demands ($p < .01, \beta = -.18$) and manager support ($p < .05, \beta = .33$). In step three, home demands and support variables were added, and this increased the variance to 28% and produced a significant result ($F_{(10,214)} = 7.97, p < .001$). The significant variables were; before and during the COVID-19 lockdown ($p < .05, \beta = .14$), work demands ($p < .05, \beta = -.16$) and manager support ($p < .001, \beta = .33$). In step four, with the addition of justice, policy use and singles/childfree-friendly work culture variables, the model retained its significance ($F_{(16,214)} = 6.23, p < .001$). There were two significant variables in this final step; manager support ($p < .001, \beta = .33$) and distributive justice ($p < .01, \beta = .22$), so greater support and greater perceptions of distributive justice of work-life balance policies predicted work-personal life enrichment. This final step predicting work-personal life enrichment explained 33% of the variance. All the beta values from the final step can be found in the table 4.5 below along with R^2 change for each step which shows steps 1, 2 and 4 made a significant contribution.

4.3.3.4 Hierarchical regression analysis predicting personal life-work enrichment

In step one, demographic variables were entered to predict personal life-work enrichment, and at this first stage the model was significant ($F_{(4,214)} = 3.36, p < .05$) and explained 6% of the

variance. The only significant variable was gender ($p < .01$, $\beta = -.22$). In step two, work demands and support variables were added and this step was significant ($F_{(7,214)} = 5.27$, $p < .001$) explaining 15% of the variance. Gender was the sole significant variable ($p < .01$, $\beta = -.18$). In step three, home demands and support variables were added and this increased the variance to 16% and produced a significant result ($F_{(10,214)} = 3.91$, $p < .001$). Similar to the previous steps gender was a significant variable ($p < .01$, $\beta = -.19$). In step four, which added justice, policy use and singles/childfree-friendly work culture variables, the model retained its significance ($F_{(16,214)} = 3.08$, $p < .001$). Gender was the only significant variable ($p < .01$, $\beta = .19$), so being male predicted greater personal life-work enrichment. This final step predicting personal life-work enrichment explained 20% of the variance. All the beta values from the final step can be found in the table 4.5 below along with R^2 change for each step which shows steps 1 and 2 made a significant contribution.

Table 4.5

Summary of Hierarchical regression analysis predicting work-personal life enrichment and personal life-work enrichment

Work-personal life enrichment					Personal life-work enrichment			
	β from final step	t	R^2 change at each step	F change	β from final step	t	R^2 change at each step	F change
Step 1			.069	3.88**			.060	3.36*
Before or during COVID-19 lockdown	.097	1.518			.011	0.152		
Gender	-.105	-1.682			-.189*	-2.752		
Children	.019	0.272			-.016	-0.214		
Marital Status	.006	0.091			-.037	-0.523		
Step 2			.205	19.47***			.091	7.41***
Work demands	-.120	-1.695			-.067	-0.854		
Peer support	.086	0.968			.107	1.105		
Manager support	.328*	3.643			.107	1.098		
Step 3			.007	.68			.010	.77
Family support	-.060	-0.839			.086	1.096		
Friends support	-.058	-0.806			.015	0.197		
Home demands	-.057	-0.825			.012	0.158		
Step 4			.053	2.65**			.038	1.58
Policies used	.087	1.419			.059	0.880		
Distributive justice	.215*	2.617			.114	1.261		
Procedural justice	.036	0.399			.012	0.122		
Respect for non- work roles	-.123	-1.161			-.211	-1.813		
Equal access to policies	.022	0.187			.192	1.485		
Equal work expectations	.063	0.949			.018	0.251		

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

NB. β values are only reported for the final step.

4.4 Summary of results

There were two main research questions in the current study, and one was to examine the antecedents of work-life conflict and enrichment, and in particular the roles of demands and resources such as various forms of support, singles/childfree-friendly work culture, and use of policies. In terms of conflict, for both directions of conflict between work and personal life, work demands remained a significant variable in the final step of the regression model and was the main predictor, so higher work demands predicted greater conflict, indicating it's a key antecedent. This is consistent with previous research which has linked a range of job demands to work-family conflict (Cooper, Dewe & O'Driscoll, 2001; Grönlund, 2007; Scholarios, Hesselgreaves, & Pratt, 2017).

Having a more singles/childfree friendly work culture in terms of the respect for non-work roles significantly predicted work-personal life conflict but higher levels of equity in respect for non-work roles was related to higher levels of conflict. The direction of this relationship was unexpected. It's possible that employees felt that if everyone was treated equally regardless of their family structure and requests for taking time off work are treated equally, then ultimately this could lead to more work-personal life conflict as more requests would have to be turned down. However, the singles/childfree friendly work culture scale is a relatively new scale developed in the USA, and due to the unexpected findings, it would be necessary to look at this further in future research to draw any conclusions. Additionally, those who were single reported experiencing higher personal life-work conflict compared to those who were married, this could be explained by the lack of support single people receive in their personal life as they don't have a spouse to share with (Ruppanner & Huffman, 2013) which leads their personal life to impact their work-life more than those who are married.

To address the research question in terms of enrichment. For work-personal life enrichment, manager support and distributive justice were significant predictors in the final step of the regression model, indicating greater support from a manager and greater perceptions of fairness in the availability and access to work-life balance policies (i.e. distributive justice) predicts greater work enrichment of personal life. This supports previous research that has found supervisor support to be a predictor of work-family enrichment (Bhargava & Baral, 2009). Support and fairness/justice were not key predictors of conflict, so it appears they were more important for enrichment, particularly work enrichment of personal life, indicating the positive impact these two factors can have. However, for personal life enrichment of work, the only significant variable in the final step of the regression model was gender, indicating that men experienced more personal life enrichment of work than women. Preliminary analysis (*t*-tests) also revealed that men had significantly higher levels of work enrichment of personal life than women too. Other research has also found that men experience higher levels of enrichment compared to women, but this is usually work enrichment of personal life (Hagqvist et al., 2021).

The second research question focused on exploring any differences in the antecedents and work-life balance outcomes between employees with different family structures. In terms of measures of fairness, *t*-test findings did not show evidence that employees' status, in terms of whether they had children, were married or their gender had an impact on their perceptions of fairness, including justice in the availability and allocation of work-life balance policies, and perceptions that the workplace culture is friendly to those with differing family structures. In other words, there were no differences on these variables between employees with and without children, employees who were married/cohabiting or lived alone, or between men and women. Thus, it did not seem to be the case that, for example, single people or those without children perceived policies or the culture were less fair to them. This is somewhat similar to what was

found by Wilkinson (2018), who found that the majority of their participants did not report feelings of backlash against the exclusion of single people who live alone but there was still a minority who felt some unfairness, as was supported by the previous qualitative study (study 2) in this programme of research too.

Furthermore, *t*-tests revealed no differences between those who had children and didn't have children, and those who were married/cohabiting and single in levels of bi-directional work-personal life conflict. However, those who had children had significantly higher home demands, which was expected based on previous research that has found that those with dependent children (especially mothers) have higher family demands compared to those with older children and with no children, and this is often due to the unpredictable nature of demands and lack of control over the work and family interface (Ahmad, 2008). Women also had significantly higher home demands than men and this may be because women often report having to deal with a multitude of home demands particularly if they have children and because women still (more often than men), take responsibility for domestic and caring tasks at home (Rashid et al., 2016).

Finally, the findings from the *t*-tests also showed that those who had completed the survey during the lockdown had significantly higher levels of personal life conflict with work compared to those who completed it before lockdown however, when this variable was entered into the regressions it did not appear to be a key predictor as it was not significant in any of the final regression models. During lockdown, work-personal life conflict was dependent on many factors as it was dependent on the amount of children who lived at home, the ages of the children (due to home-schooling) and the degree to which work and home lives were integrated

(Schieman et al., 2021). The findings of the current study suggest that the level of work demands was the most important factor in levels of conflict.

4.5 Conclusion

Although there were relatively few differences in the antecedents and outcomes for those in different family structures, it was found that those with children and women had higher home demands compared to those without children and men respectively. In regards to fairness, no differences were found across family structures as single people or those without children did not perceive policies or the culture as being less fair. The key predictor of bi-directional work-personal life conflict was work demands; higher work demands predicting greater conflict. Men were also found to have higher levels of personal life-work enrichment in comparison to women. And greater support from a manager and greater perceptions of fairness in the availability and access to work-life balance policies were related to (and key predictors of) work-personal life enrichment. The way in which these findings sit within the full programme of research and their implications will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. Overall discussion

5.1 Introduction

Work-life balance has been defined as the “extent to which an individual is able to adequately manage the multiple roles in life including work, family and other major responsibilities” (Haar, 2013, p.4). However, previous research in this area has primarily focused on ‘family’ as being the other role in employees’ lives, thereby focusing on parents and how they manage their work and home lives. For example, work-family conflict which is rooted in role conflict theory states that when an individual faces competing demands amongst roles, it can result in high levels of conflict and possibly overload (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Boundary theory, which is another work-life balance theory, states that individuals create boundaries between their work and personal lives which involves segmentation or integration of these two domains (Nippert-Eng, 1996), however when integrating work and home lives (rather than segmenting) there is potential for this to lead to boundary blurring and the use of work devices at home can feed into this (Kossek, 2016). It is noted that single employees and those without children are often seen as “invisible” within the work-life debate (Culpepper et al., 2020), even though research in the UK has found that both women with and without children experience work-personal life conflict (Waumsley, Houston & Marks, 2010).

Conflict between roles can lead to a variety of negative consequences. The job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) can be used to examine the determinants of various work-related outcomes such as work-family conflict; it includes both negative (demands) and positive (resources) antecedents. Since the key antecedents are generally work role stressors and various work resources, the current research drew upon the job demands-resources model to examine the work demands and possible resources such as flexible working and support, and the role of and experience of these in relation to work-personal life conflict.

There is a range of research which has found that high levels of demands at work can increase work-family conflict (Bakker, Demerouti & Dollard, 2008; Demerouti, Geurts, Bakker, & Euwema, 2004; Grönlund, 2007; Dollard, Winefield, & Winefield, 2001; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Home demands have also been linked to increased family-work conflict, but research has been more mixed in this area with some noting that only certain demands are linked to conflict (Guest 2002; Montgomery, 2003; Peeters et al., 2005).

Moving from demands to resources, several studies have outlined the range of resources that can help to reduce work-family conflict. Flexible working is one resource that has been found to have a positive impact on work-family conflict (Allen, et al., 2013; Kattenbach et al., 2010), with it usually being found to be most helpful in the direction of work conflicting with family (Byron, 2005; Shockley & Allen, 2007). However, research on flexible working reports mixed findings, with some research finding that some forms of temporal flexibility can be helpful for work-life conflict (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019), whereas other forms of flexible working like remote work can be helpful if there is autonomy but can also lead to blurred boundaries (Charalampous et al., 2019).

Prior to June 2014 there was a lack of legislation to support those who had non-traditional family structures, such as those without children. There has been evidence suggesting that single workers and those without children felt excluded and a sense of injustice due to the lack of policies available to them (Grandey, 2001; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). The legislative changes that came into force in the UK in 2014 regarding the extension to the right to request to all employees, in theory provided equality across employees with different family structures with the potential to positively impact work-life balance. However, in practice, previous

research has found that employees who live alone and do not have children often find that there is a lack of understanding about the challenges they face and they feel overlooked (Wilkinson et al., 2018).

Resources other than flexible working which help people in managing their work and home life include organisational culture, with a more supportive and positive organisational culture having a positive impact on work-family conflict (Allen, 2001; Kossek, Colquitt & Noe; 2001; O'Neill et al 2009). Additionally support from colleagues and managers (e.g. Den Dulk & Ruijter, 2008; Goh, Ilies, & Wilson, 2015; Paustian-Underdahl & Halbesleben, 2014; Thompson & Prottas, 2006) has been linked to decreasing levels of work-family conflict. As noted above, line managers and the organisational culture may not only directly impact work-family conflict, but may also impact whether employees feel able to request supports for work-life balance such as flexible working and possibly whether such requests would be granted. Support at home and from outside of work (Ruppanner & Huffman, 2014; ten Brummelhuis, & van der Lippe, 2010) can additionally help to reduce the levels of work-personal life conflict and personal life-work conflict being experienced, but these forms of support may differ across family structures (e.g. single workers do not have a partner who might provide support).

5.1.1 Aims

Therefore, the present programme of research aimed to examine perceptions, uptake and impacts of supports for work-life balance, in particular the extension to the right to request flexible working, from the perspective of different organisational actors, including HR and line managers and employees. A key focus was on perceptions of fairness, especially in relation to employees with differing family structures. Additionally, since much past research has tended to focus on work-family conflict in employees with children or caring responsibilities, the

present programme of research explored the work-life balance experiences of employees with differing family structures, including work-personal life conflict, enrichment and boundary management. It was an interesting time to carry out this research, due to changes in the policy context. That is, the right to request flexible working legislation was extended in 2014 from parents and carers to all employees, and further changes are being taken forward in 2024 to make the right to request a day one right (Gov.co.uk, 2024). However, there is still a lack of research on those with differing family structures.

In order to examine views and experiences pertaining to employees with differing family structures a mixed-methods approach was used. This was by first qualitatively exploring the views of HR managers and line managers on supports for work-life balance and the changes to the right to request flexible working (study 1), and then by exploring employees' views and experiences of the same, as well as their work-life balance experiences (study 2). Finally, a quantitative questionnaire-based study investigated the predictors of work-life balance and perceptions of fairness and differences between employees with different family structures (study 3).

This chapter will aim to bring together the findings of the studies and discuss these in relation to previous research in the area. The strengths and limitations and implications for practice and future research in the area will be debated, alongside reflexivity and reflection before drawing some final conclusions.

5.2 Discussion

The next section of this discussion aims to bring together the findings of all the studies through common themes and discuss these in relation to previous research in the area.

5.2.1 Workplace culture, support and flexible working

The research questions in study 1 focused on HR and line managers' views of work-life balance supports and whether they effectively and fairly support their employees. Many managers claimed to have extended the right to request flexible working to all, even before the 2014 changes. This supports the CIPD (2012) survey where two thirds of employers provided the right to request flexible working to all employees before the legislative changes, so it appears that this is common. In study 2 when interviewing employees, they recounted how there were relatively few instances of official policy use as many of their jobs had some degree of intrinsic flexibility, such as being able to do work at home, often outside of standard work hours, or that they were able to informally agree occasional flexibility. The latter was mainly related to childcare, so could feel exclusive to those without children, but participants did not share concerns about this. Providing this kind of occasional, informal flexibility was also discussed by managers in study 1. Although many studies do not specifically refer to informal arrangements, these arrangements were becoming more popular in workplaces (even prior to covid) and have been found to enhance performance at work (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017), so there are benefits to both the employee and management of making these provisions.

Another common theme which emerged in study 1 and in study 2 was the 'positive workplace culture'. Employees suggested there was a positive workplace culture, but many employees reported working long hours and experienced work-personal life conflict, for which they blamed themselves. They noted that this was the 'norm' and everyone else was doing the same, indicating some issues within the workplace culture. However, this justification provided by the employees may be because they were employed in professional occupations. Research suggests that people employed in professional and managerial roles where there is a long hours

culture may regard work-life balance as a luxury (Moen et al., 2013). From the perspective of the managers, they claimed to support all employees and felt that everyone should feel comfortable to make a request for flexible working. However, they did not provide many specific examples of when they have made these accommodations for all and tended to focus on hypothetical examples relating to child or other caring responsibilities or illness, rather than considering other reasons employees without these family responsibilities may wish to work flexibly. With the managers it is difficult to know to what extent they were wanting themselves and their organisation to come across in a positive light. One of the problems with policy is whether it is effectively implemented in practice. For example, one of the barriers to successfully supporting work-life balance is the organisational culture, such as the opposition towards the use of flexible working arrangements from supervisors and line managers, along with employee perceptions that the use of these policies would lead to negative repercussions (Swanberg, James, Werner & McKechnie, 2008). Therefore, it was positive to hear these attitudes from management, as line managers play a key role in influencing the organisational culture to create an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing their work-life balance needs (Watkins, 1995). However, it is possible that in the case of managers it was more related to virtue signalling rather than real actions. Many companies and managers engage in this behaviour which entails socially accepted statements that aim to show “how good you are” (Bartholomew, 2015, n.p.), or “a form of vanity...dressed up as selfless conviction” (Shariatmadari, 2016, n.p.). Furthermore, it may be that the managers who participated had positive attitudes, and managers who would be less supportive of work-life balance were not interested in the research.

Therefore, employees were also asked about this in study 2, and although overall they felt supported by their managers, some could see that some managers may not be entirely genuine

in their support when they said things such as “my door is always open”. It has been claimed that this terminology is often used by those who are ‘undermanaging’, a term used to refer to those who are not leading or coaching but rather leaving everything to their employees, so they don’t have to engage in ‘proper’ management (Tong, 2023). Additionally, employees stated that they could rely on their colleagues for support, but at the same time felt that if they asked for help or wanted to work flexibly this may then have an impact on the workloads of others, supporting previous research from a work-life balance survey indicating that 35% of workers agreed that those who work flexibly generate more work for others (Chung, 2020). This is problematic especially as those who may make use of these policies are often parents and this may then lead to feelings of resentment from single employees. The term work-family backlash has often been used to reflect the push-back from childfree employees who feel like they are being penalised in the workplace for not having children such as taking on additional hours to cover for those who have children or caring responsibilities (Filippi et al., 2024). However, research in the UK has found that although solo living professionals express some feelings of unfairness, there was no evidence of backlash (Wilkinson, 2018). Therefore, the current research indicates that in practice, managers need to ensure that those who are single or don’t have children are not feeling like they are being left with additional responsibilities.

5.2.2 Experiences of work-life conflict and enrichment

In study 2 many of the employees experienced conflict between work and personal life, and there was agreement that conflict was usually only in the direction of work to personal life. Participants in study 2 experienced feelings of guilt when they weren’t working and blamed themselves for the conflict they were experiencing. For parents (all women), they experienced “mum” guilt because they felt work often got in the way of spending quality time with their children, so they felt guilt when they weren’t working and guilt when they were. This is similar

to results from a qualitative study which noted that the narrative of mothers was to try to minimize problems with work–life balance and try to ‘just get on with it’ and ‘cope’. Additionally, many of the women in their study defined a good mother as ‘one who “keeps going” and copes with the multifarious demands that her family make of her’ (Emslie & Hunt, 2009, p. 50). In addition to this, many of the women in the sample in the present research had professional jobs (i.e. fairly ‘high ranking’ positions) which may have made things even more difficult. Working mothers holding executive and managerial roles have been found to find it extremely difficult to manage their work and home lives due to factors such as the amount of planning and organisation involved, time management, and how they feel they must sacrifice their own time for hobbies and similar interests whilst trying to organise and seek support from their spouses and parents (Camilleri & Spiteri, 2021). Therefore, it’s possible that due to the demographics of the participants in the current study, they may have faced additional pressures due to their roles within the workplace. Studies within the area of work-life balance have had an over-representation of white-collar workers and an under-representation of blue-collar workers (Chang et al., 2010; Gragnano et al., 2020) and it is likely that those in blue collar occupations face different challenges in terms of work-life balance but also in terms of how they may make use of flexible working. Those in ‘lower level’ jobs may benefit the most from having control over their schedules yet part time work would have a negative impact due to the loss of income (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018).

For those who did not have children, the guilt was more in one direction, i.e. guilt about not working when they were at home/free, and this in turn made it difficult to enjoy time off freely. This is consistent with recent research as those working from home often feel guilty when taking breaks as it may make them appear as not working hard enough from a work perspective, whereas from a personal perspective, guilt is seen as a significant deterrent to taking breaks

(Walker et al., 2023). Workers in Walker's research also recognised that this guilt was not always rational as taking time to wind down at home would be likely to increase productivity. Although this was common across participants with different family structures in the current study, it did appear more for those who were childfree, as parents have the focus of children outside of work.

One thing that did help the individuals with their work life balance was support from home. For single participants, they in particular sought support in the form of phone calls or video calls, and emotional support from parents, friends and family. This supports recent research that found for single people (who live alone), technology is usually their main route to social support (Wilkinson et al., 2023). Whereas for the parents, it was practical support related to childcare such as help picking up children from school, or someone to look after them and help with day-to-day tasks. As noted earlier, many of the women in the study 2 sample had professional jobs, so it's likely they had an income that facilitated this practical support, which may not be an option to many workers. Single parents faced their own difficulties balancing their work and home lives, especially because they had no partner to support childcare or tasks at home, but they seemed more reluctant to ask for help. This may be the reason why when compared to married, childless and cohabiting counterparts, single parents have the worst work-life balance (Van den Eynde et al., 2019). However, there were only two single parents in study 2.

However, in the quantitative study (study 3), there was no evidence in the multiple regression analysis that resources such as support reduced conflict. Work demands was found to be the main predictor of both work-personal life and personal life-work conflict. Work demands has been found to be a consistent predictor of conflict in previous research (Grönlund, 2007;

Dollard, Winefield, & Winefield, 2001; Wallace, 1997). Even though there were only a few significant predictors, it was not surprising that work demands was the main predictor with higher work demands related to greater conflict in both directions. Also having a more singles/childfree friendly work culture in terms of the respect for non-work roles significantly predicted work-personal life conflict but higher levels of equity in respect for non-work roles was related to higher levels of conflict. The relationship's direction was unexpected, but it may be that employees felt that treating everyone equally, regardless of family structure or reasons for time-off requests, could increase work-life conflict. Some may have believed that certain employees should be prioritised to reduce this conflict, with evidence in Study 2 suggesting a perception that those with children should take priority. The singles/childfree-friendly work culture scale was adapted slightly in this research to focus on child-free rather than single employees. This scale was chosen due to its relevance and lack of alternatives, but it is not frequently utilised, so further research is needed before any conclusions can be made due to this unexpected result. Another unexpected result was that marital status was found to be a significant predictor of personal life-work conflict with single people experiencing more conflict than those who were married. This may be due to the lack of ability for single people to share and discuss their issues with a partner or to share responsibilities in their home life meaning there is more conflict with work (Ruppanner & Huffman, 2013).

Although those with children had higher home demands, there was no evidence that having children (or not) made a difference to bi-directional work-personal life conflict, which appeared to be the same for these groups. This emphasises the importance of broadening the conceptualisation of 'family' in work-family conflict research to include those without 'typical' families, e.g. childfree singles and couples without children, as proposed by Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli, and Bell (2011) and others.

There was some evidence in study 2 related to enrichment in both directions. A parent explained how they were a role model to their children demonstrating some work-personal life enrichment, and a participant without children spoke about the transferable skills and traits from work to her home life. There was some personal-life work enrichment discussed when a participant considered the ways in which negotiating childcare can help when trying to prioritise tasks at work. In the model of enrichment developed by Greenhaus and Powell (2006), in which a range of resources are listed, it appeared that for the participants in study 2 there was a focus on skills and perspectives, and they mostly focused on how it improved performance using an instrumental path. Ultimately, there was more emphasis on the participants' conflict experiences in study 2.

The quantitative data (study 3) yielded some significant predictors of work-life enrichment in multiple regression analysis. Although there were relatively few significant predictors, when exploring work-personal life enrichment, it was found that greater support and greater fairness (in the form of distributive justice) was related to greater work-personal life enrichment. The role of support in relation to enrichment is consistent with previous research which has found supervisor support to be an antecedent of work to family enrichment, with supervisor and family support predictors of family to work enrichment (Bhargava & Baral, 2009). Support plays a key role within facilitation (a similar concept to enrichment) with family social support reported to increase family to work facilitation (Karatepe & Bekteshi, 2008). Whereas in the current study the only predictor of personal life-work enrichment was being male. Although, previous research has found that men experience higher levels of enrichment than women, this is usually in the direction from work to personal life, rather than personal life to work enrichment (Hagqvist et al., 2021). However, there is evidence that male managers/leaders

experience increased personal life-work enrichment, in terms of their transformational leadership behaviour, when they have a child (Stellner, 2022). Additionally, men are more likely than women to experience enrichment in both directions when receiving social support (Lapierre et al., 2018). Similarly, in preliminary analyses in this research, men had higher levels of both work-personal life and personal life-work enrichment. The lower levels of enrichment amongst the female participants may also explain the limited amount of content in the interviews in study 2 that related to enrichment as the sample was all female.

5.2.3 Boundary management

Issues surrounding boundary management were also covered in study 2 with the majority of participants having difficulties managing the boundaries between their work and home life, primarily as many had some intrinsic flexibility in their job, such as being able to do work at home, often outside of standard work hours. This form of flexibility can help because it can help to ease conflicting demands (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Hill et al., 2008), however it can also lead to issues related to the need to be available more, increasing demands and longer hours, therefore research has obtained similar findings to the present research about difficulties managing boundaries (Hagqvist et al., 2020; Kelliher et al., 2019). There was a minority of cases who kept strict boundaries between work and home life, however these two participants did not have children and highlighted the importance of their home/personal life. Segmentation was either used as a way to reduce the levels of work-personal life conflict or to eliminate it altogether. This is in line with the primary benefit of segmentation proposed by Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000) as it allows for clarity between domains. In a longitudinal study, employees who used segmentation and were able to avoid engaging in work-related tasks during non-work time, reported low work-family conflict four months later (Žiedelis et al., 2023)

For those who had issues with boundary management there were differences across family structures. Those who had children, considered they had a temporary boundary due to having to leave work to pick up their children, but at the same time had a lack of downtime. Downtime can mitigate the pressures associated with work and family time demands (Dugan & Barnes-Farrell, 2017). However, this feeling of a lack of downtime/time to themselves and its impact on work-family conflict is a common theme in qualitative research, especially among women with children under the age of 15 (Manzoor & Hamid, 2021). Additionally, the issue of working parents, particularly women, continuing with ‘home work’, has been named the ‘second shift’, referring to the statistics that working mothers put in one month of labour more than their spouses every year when considering paid work, housework, and childcare (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). They also reported often picking up work related matters after children were asleep.

Blurring of boundaries may help some employees to organise their time. It may be a preference for some but not others. As stated earlier, according to boundary theory some may prefer integration whereas others prefer separation/segmentation of their work and personal lives (Nippert-Eng 1996). Research indicates that there is a large variation in terms of how employees separate/integrate these two roles. Those with children may prefer this integration of roles, but what’s important is the “fit” between the level of work-personal life integration and separation that participants *experience* and their *ideal* situation, as this is a strong predictor of work-personal life conflict, however even if this is the case, if employees are overcommitted to their role, then this can also lead to perceptions of higher levels of work-personal life conflict (Kinman & McDowall, 2009).

For those without children, there was no enforced boundary, and they could just continue to work as there was nothing to stop them from doing so, although there were reports of doing this so downtime was possible later. In a qualitative study of childfree employees which examined balancing work and home life during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was noted, because their home was now their office, their boundaries of work and home life vanished. They ended up working more and more; there was no movement between ‘work’ and ‘home’ as they had no children or anything to stop them working. This meant that work became all-consuming and absorbed their homes (Utoft, 2020). There are also links to identity with work being considered the main pillar of an employee’s identity without children due to the absence of parental or caregiving responsibilities (Park, 2005). This may indicate why the differences between those who lived alone and did not have children were observed compared to those with children.

5.2.4 Changes to the right to request: perceptions of fairness, benefits and barriers.

In the qualitative study with HR and line managers (study 1), they felt they were already fair to all employees as they extended the right to request to all employees before 2014. They stated that the policy was unfair, and possibly discriminatory before the changes, and that the policy was much fairer post 2014, particularly because employees do not have to provide a reason for making the request. However, they could see the potential for value judgments to be made when a line manager considers a request. Similarly, all of these same points were found in the employee interviews (study 2). This was important to explore because when employees perceive policies and the way in which the policies are enacted to be fair, it’s related to increased trust and commitment, improved job performance and reduced conflict (Cropanzano et al., 2007).

While HR and line managers claimed they saw relatively few barriers in their workplaces relating to the 2014 extension of the right to request, they could see the potential barriers at other workplaces or in the future. As noted above, the potential for value judgments being made relating to reasons for requests and thus potential discrimination in making decisions about the requests was considered a possible barrier. For example, there is potential for those without children to be discriminated against if their reasons for making requests are not considered sufficiently legitimate. Often when work–life balance policies are discussed at workplaces, the discussion does not relate to choices to pursue their hobbies or other aspects of non-work life. Instead, discussion is focused on women’s access to flexible working arrangements to accommodate childcare needs (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019) which emphasises the still very present focus on children.

Although the reasons behind the request do not need to be stated, they may still “emerge” during the discussion with a line manager or the circumstances of employees may just be known to the manager. This was similarly claimed by employees themselves in study 2. Even those without children said that they could see why those with children might be prioritised, and they gave examples of parents being accommodated with informal flexibility too, but without any sense of concern. This was an interesting finding as previous research conducted in America suggested that often those without children, who may feel less comfortable to make use of family friendly policies, experience feelings of resentment (Kirby & Krone, 2002). However, it does support a recent study which found that even employees without children assign greater priority to mothers compared to female employees without children when considering work life balance arrangements (Filippi et al., 2024). Some employees with children in study 2 also alluded to a need for parents to be prioritised. They suggested that those without children don’t have the same home demands, have more time to work and also

wouldn't require informal flexibility for childcare-related emergencies. Thus despite perceptions of fairness of the change to the right to request being universally shared by participants, there were these contradictions. In a study of childless employees, Mård (2021) found that parents often get priority in terms of personal arrangements such as leave, but at the same time, childless employees understand why parents are being prioritised.

Other potential barriers to the extension of the right to request for managers were managing employees' expectations and the feasibility of granting a potentially increased number of requests and the costs of implementing flexible working supports. An increase in requests has been reported in the years after the extension to the right to request, although larger employers (over 50 staff) were more than twice as likely to receive flexible working requests compared to smaller workplaces (5-49 staff) (*Post-Implementation Review of the 2014 Flexible Working Regulations*, 2021). It's possible that there may be an even larger increase with the legislation coming into effect in April 2024, making flexible working a day one right, as 46% of the organizations asked in a CIPD survey felt it would be difficult for them to support this change (CIPD, 2023). However, despite these concerns, the governmental review found no evidence of unreasonable increases in costs or burdens on the businesses studied.

Nevertheless, the potential benefits of these changes discussed in study 1 were multiple. Benefits of the changes included the uniformity of the policy across workplaces and the potential for increased employee work life balance, improved employee-line manager relations and organisational benefits such as commitment, retention and employee engagement. The benefits of providing flexible working reflect research which indicates that it can increase retention and commitment (Matos & Galinsky, 2014). Also, the potential for it to increase work-life balance is corroborated by research suggesting that flexible working is associated

with reduced work-family conflict (Allen, et al., 2013), and those that request to work flexibly are less likely to experience conflict between their work and family lives (Cousins & Tang, 2004). Nevertheless, use of flexible working policies did not predict reduced work-personal life conflict in multiple regression analysis in study 3, although it was correlated with perceptions of fairness of the availability and allocation of work-life balance policies.

5.3 Strengths and limitations

Despite delays to completing this programme of research, which I will reflect on later, and some relevant research being published in the interim, it remains the case that the focus on family in most research means there is limited evidence focusing on the experiences of employees without children, and so this programme of research calls for a broader focus on personal life in this field. Thus, one of the strengths of this research programme was the focus on individuals from a range of family structures. This included those with children, without children, single parents and those who were single or were married/cohabiting with a partner. In addition, the mixed methods design enabled some in depth focus on experiences in interviews, but also a much larger scale questionnaire based quantitative study allowed the investigation of the predictors of work-life balance. Using mixed methods, and particularly including a qualitative component was important. Qualitative research has largely been overshadowed by the vast amounts of quantitative research, even though the topic of work-life balance would benefit from the understanding of how individuals construct the meaning of social experience (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017).

Related to the use of qualitative methods, the consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research checklist (COREQ) by Tong, Sainsbury & Craig (2007) was taken into account ensuring quality. For example, to name a few items, this included ensuring that the

methodological orientation underpinning the study was included, information about how the participants were recruited was outlined, and how the themes were identified was explained. Most of the items on the checklist were included within different sections of this thesis, although it is noted that a few items were not explicitly noted, such as the fact that transcripts were not returned to participants for comment, and they did not provide feedback on the findings. Thus, the inclusion of a completed checklist could have provided clearer and more comprehensive reporting of the quality of the qualitative research component.

Another strength was that this research was situated within the context of the changes to the right to request flexible working policy in order to explore perceptions of fairness in relation to work-life balance supports, particularly for employees without children. Although there has been research which has explored the use of flexible working arrangements, and fairness of policies for specific groups, research has not focused on the extension of this policy as a central issue. For example, Wilkinson et al. (2017) did not explicitly consider the right to request changes and only included participants who lived alone. The current research not only focused on this group, but also gained the views from employees with a range of family structures, as well as multiple sources, since it included employees to explore their experiences, and the addition of HR managers and line managers. This enabled a more comprehensive exploration from those who can make use of policies and those who will have to enact them and process requests.

There were a number of limitations though. The samples were not as inclusive as they could have been as they mainly relied upon convenience sampling. Study 1 included some views from male participants, but only from two line managers, there were no male participants in study 2, and study 3 had approximately 32% male participants. This may have impacted the

themes developed in study 2, which can only speak to the experiences of women, and also the findings in study 3 as research has indicated that women tend to experience more difficulties with work-life balance than men (Helvacı et al., 2017). Additionally, it has been argued that studies on work-life experiences of both women and men should be developed for the purposes of understanding better the gendered inequities in the organization of 'life' (Özbilgin et al., 2011). This was not possible with an all-female sample in study 2. It has been noted that fathers have their own work-life issues but that the discourse for fathers' work-life balance is essentially different due to the historical context in which work-family conflict theory has been developed and as such the challenges for men and women may be different (Van den Eynde et al., 2019). Additionally, although there were participants from a range of family structures, only 2 single parents (mothers) were interviewed in the qualitative component of the research and ideally, in order to be more inclusive, there should have been more participants recruited from this specific group and a larger number of participants overall.

Data was also not collected regarding ethnicity (for some studies) and sexual orientation (for all studies), but for study 2 it was observed that no participants who volunteered to take part were in same sex relationships. The job roles and experiences of the participants from study 2 indicated that most women were employed in professional and often 'high-ranking positions' within their workplaces, and therefore their views and experiences may have differed from those employed in blue collar occupations.

Due to the use of mostly opportunity sampling techniques, when managers were interviewed for study 1, it's possible that only those who were aware of the policies and felt positively about them chose to participate in the research. They may also have provided socially desirable responses, especially when asked their thoughts on the right to request being extended from

parents/carers to all. The same could apply to employees, and this may explain some of the contradictory responses.

The impact of the pandemic on a programme of research which was not about the pandemic was a limitation. Data collection in study 2 was paused, but data collection in study 3 continued. However, when study 2 data collection was resumed post pandemic, the participants in this study seemed to have returned to similar (i.e. pre-pandemic) work patterns. Preliminary *t*-tests were conducted as part of study 3 where some participants completed the questionnaire before and some during lockdown. Participants had higher personal-life work conflict during lockdown compared to those who participated before lockdown, however regression analysis revealed that in the final step it was not a key predictor of personal life-work conflict.

5.3.1 Reflexivity

My role within this research process must be acknowledged considering the two qualitative studies that were conducted. I will also reflect here more generally on hinderances during the research journey. Embarking on this PhD process has been a long journey within which I have experienced work-life balance issues of my own. When I started this process, I was a graduate academic assistant, but soon after this I was promoted to the role of associate lecturer. As time went on, my responsibilities within the Department of Psychology increased and I am currently a co-programme coordinator of the foundation year programme which includes leading 2 modules (designed from scratch), with all sessions delivered by myself and a colleague. This is alongside solely designing and running a new module on the Psychology of stress, motivation and work-life balance in 2019 and taking on a group of dissertation students every year. All these modules and the others on which I only teach were also impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic when everything had to be adapted to be delivered online, and alongside this I was

facing challenges with the impact of the pandemic on my PhD topic. I also had some prior knowledge of the topic of work-life balance, with it having been the topic of my undergraduate and master's dissertation and topic of the module I designed. Thus, both personal and professional knowledge and experiences in this field may have impacted what kind of topics were covered in the interviews and the questionnaire, but it hopefully meant I also had a deeper understanding of the subject.

All these factors listed above impacted my research in some way because I could empathise with the work-life balance experiences of the people I interviewed. During the employee interviews and when developing themes surrounding the feelings of guilt and self-blame, and as someone who does not have children and therefore may be seen as less likely to have issues balancing their work and home life, these are things that resonated with me. This may also have influenced the kind of questions that were included in the employee interviews. On the other hand, as I do not have children it may have been possible that there was less probing when those with children told me about their family life, as maybe I could not fully understand the situation from their perspective. However my supervisors reviewed the questions and ensured that leading questions were minimised, and the positive aspects of balancing work and home were also reflected in the questions asked. Similarly, when the codes and themes were developed, they were reviewed by my supervisors and they also looked at transcripts, including from those with and without children, so this ensured that there was an agreement that the themes were reflective of the observations made in the interviews.

The original plan was for my PhD to be submitted much earlier, however due to extenuating circumstances such as an extremely high workload and a bereavement, it was necessary to take some breaks from study, and then there was the pandemic. My PhD process was impacted by

the COVID-19 pandemic in many ways, even though much of the data was collected before this. As someone with anxiety, having to deal with a pandemic and fears of my elderly parents catching covid before the development of the vaccine, redesigning the materials for work and trying to do my PhD, put an increasing amount of pressure on me. This also meant that the interviews had to be halted as the pandemic and lockdowns impacted the way in which people worked (such as involuntary remote working for many people, and children being schooled at home). Thus, the pandemic had a huge impact on the subject of my research. As all the interviews for study 1 and many of the interviews for study 2 had been conducted already, a decision was made to retain the focus of my research and complete interviews for study 2 at a later date, rather than refocus on the impact of the pandemic. When the interviews resumed, I included some further questions that included asking if there was a continuing impact on their work or their work-life balance but the working patterns for all had returned to as they were pre-pandemic. Although the completion of data collection for study 2 was delayed, data collection for the quantitative study had gained momentum in 2020 so a decision was made to continue with this and then to examine whether participants had completed the survey before or during the lockdown as a variable in the research.

5.4 Implications for practice and future research

Future research should ensure that a diverse sample, which includes participants from different ethnicities, same-sex parent families, and manual and service workers and other under-researched groups are included in research within this area. Relying on mainly opportunity sampling, as in the present programme of research, is not sufficient to achieve this. Additionally, the way in which the data is collected could be improved as although cross-sectional research has its strengths, a longitudinal study or quasi-experimental study could be conducted in the future to determine causality (Demerouti et al., 2004).

In addition to this, it may be useful to look at the perceived fairness of multiple different aspects of the employment relationship. In a study of managers who had no children, and lived alone, they noted that most studies of perceived fairness only focus on one policy and are “context specific” whereas for those who don’t have children it may be more useful to explore the employment relationship more fully (Wilkinson et al., 2018). Additionally it may be useful in future to carry out more cross-cultural/national research when examining the views of those without children and how they are perceived, as the way in which they are perceived as deserving of making use of policies may differ, with those in Northern and Western European societies having a more positive attitude towards being childfree than Southern European countries and Eastern Europe (Merz & Liefbroer, 2012).

In the UK, it would also be useful to examine many of the issues in this thesis after the 2024 changes to the right to request legislation are implemented, to see if managers’ concerns about managing this are warranted, and to look at employees’ experiences. This is because some organisations have reported concerns about how they will support the day one right for their employees (CIPD, 2023).

There are several implications for practice. Managers would need to ensure that when employees request to work flexibly and when considerations are made which may impact their personal time, those who do not have children are treated fairly. The findings indicated that for this group of employees, although everything ‘felt’ fair, it’s possible that value judgements could be made about the legitimacy of their non work time and thus their requests. Therefore, managers should ensure they are fully informed on the guidance provided by sources such as ACAS (2014) which highlight how to effectively process a flexible working request. This will

ensure they are clear in their messaging which will also ensure a fair approach is used. There is a need for managers to convey that the policy is open to all their staff and not provide mixed messages or contradictions, as this can make some employees feel they are not comfortable to make a request (Kossek et al., 2010; ter Hoeven et al., 2017).

Additionally, it would be prudent for managers to consider the wide range of potential home demands for employees with children and without children, as childcare is not the only home demand. As was noted in study 2 there may be a variety of reasons why those without children have home demands and they may feel these are not considered to be important. This is particularly important for employees who live alone as they often feel that there is a lack of understanding about the challenges they face and their home demands, and that these are often overlooked (Wilkinson et al., 2018).

Employers should consider what can be done about the high levels of work demands and bring in some measures to address work demands, with it being a key predictor of work-personal life conflict. Although there are tertiary interventions such as providing mindfulness (Grover et al., 2017), including micro break activities at work (Kim et al., 2017), or even cognitive reappraisal and autonomy (Zhang & Parker, 2022), that can reduce the impact of work demands, these do not address the actual source of high levels of work demands. Therefore, these should be used alongside organisational strategies such as task restructuring, creating new protocols, on-the-job training, performance development and skills training, as these are effective primary interventions that can decrease job demands (Croon et al., 2014; Taris et al., 2003). Additionally, HR managers could monitor the job demands amongst employees to enable them to take immediate actions to address them, such as using a smartphone application that regularly asks employees about their job demands (Bakker & De Vries, 2021).

Employees may also need to be supported with managing boundaries between work and personal life. For example, the tendency to work long hours and use devices at home could be reconsidered via guidelines or setting specific working hours or providing training. An example of this is the ‘right to disconnect’ law introduced in many countries such as France, where employees have a right to be able to refrain from emails or taking work calls during their time off to improve work-life balance and reduce boundary management issues (Muller, 2020). Therefore, companies could introduce guidelines or even set hours which enable employees to ‘disconnect’ once their working day is finished. However, this should be alongside destigmatising a less frenetic pace of work (Akanbi, 2021). This needs to be carefully considered though. While this may work well for employees who prefer segmentation of boundaries, many employees may prefer integration or use flexible boundaries to help them manage their work-life balance and having to ‘disconnect’ may not help this group. However, employees may need to work together to take some pro-active steps, especially as many participants in study 2 said that it was colleagues working in this way that made them feel they also had to. For example, if they have autonomy over their hours, they should ensure that their segmentation and integration preferences are not leading to increasing amounts of work-personal life conflict (Kinman and McDowall, 2009). For example, working flexible hours can be helpful for those with children so they can complete the school-run, however when work is picked up again later, employees could keep track of the working hours they then complete to ensure that the number of hours doesn’t exceed the hours missed. Line managers also need to be at the forefront of ensuring the workplace culture does not lead to expectations or promotion of working long hours and work time interfering with personal life, and part of this will be leading by example.

5.5 Conclusions

There have been calls for some years now for greater attention to be paid to employees with less traditional families, such as those without children, in work-life balance research and debates. The current research aimed to include those from a variety of family structures and found that in the qualitative interviews, employees, regardless of family structures had issues with boundary management and work-personal life conflict, but the ways in which they experienced these issues and the types of support they sought/had available differed. In the quantitative component, work demands were found to predict greater work-personal life and personal life-work conflict and additionally single individuals were found to have greater personal life-work conflict. However, having children (or not) appeared to have no impact. Men experienced more personal life-work enrichment than women. Greater line manager support and perceptions of fairness of the availability of work-life balance policies predicted greater work-personal life enrichment. The changes to the right to request flexible working which in 2014 was extended to all employees regardless of their family structure was perceived to be fairer by employees and HR and line managers in qualitative interviews. However, employees alluded to the need to prioritise parents. Additionally, it was felt that there was potential for value judgments based on people's status as a parent, when making decisions about flexible working requests, which may negatively impact requests made by those without children. The current research aimed to fill a gap by shifting the narrow focus to a broader focus, since all employees may face struggles with work-life balance and may desire supports to help with this, but there is still a need to open this up to an even more inclusive sample in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview schedule for study 1

Interview Schedule – Employee Interviews

Demographic questions

- Age
- Marital status
- Number of children
 - Live at home or away?
- Job title and can you tell me a bit about your role in the organisation?
- Number of requests they usually process in a 6-month period

Policies offered and effectiveness.

- What factors might contribute to employees experiencing poor work-life balance? What factors might facilitate good work-life balance?
- Could you tell me about the policies offered at this organisation to help employees with balancing work and home life before the legislation changed (prior to June 30th, 2014)
 - Who were these policies open to?
- Could you tell me about any changes you made to the policies after the legislation changed (after June)
- How effective do you think each of these policies are in helping employees balance work and home life?
- What more could be done to help employees balance work and home life?

Changes in the right to request.

- What are your thoughts on the extension of the right to request flexible working from parents of young children and carers only to all employees?
- How have these changes been implemented in your organisation?
 - E.g. can you tell me a bit about the policy? What is the evaluation process when requests are made?
 - Has policy and practice in relation to this changed much from before and if so How?
- Have there been any changes so far in the volume of requests or the types of individuals who are requesting flexible working?
- What do you think are the benefits of these changes?
- What are the barriers to the changes?
 - Did you anticipate any problems prior to implementing the changes?
 - Have you experienced or do you anticipate any problems in the future due to these changes? (Prompt: e.g. too many requests, problems for line managers in covering work, increased number of rejected requests).

Attitudes and fairness

- What do you think are the general workplace attitudes and culture towards those who make use of these policies (Prompt: e.g. in terms of commitment, culture of presenteeism)

- Do you think there are any differences in the treatment and expectations of single employees or those without children compared to those with children? (Prompt: e.g. in workloads, working late etc.)
 - **LM ONLY**- Are there any differences in your expectations?
- Prior to the changes to the right to request, how fair do you think the policies in this organisation were towards those with different family structures? (Prompt: how did you feel about the fact that only parents and carers could make requests?)
- How fair do you think the policies in this organisation are now towards those with different family structures? (Prompts: is it fairer or not since changes to the right to request?)
 - Are decisions about requests solely based on the business case or do you feel that other factors may be considered when making decisions?
 - If there are other factors, what are they? (prompt: e.g. Would knowing an employee's personal circumstances affect your decision when dealing with the requests e.g. children)

Is there anything else you would like to discuss that we did not cover?

Appendix B – An example transcript from study 1

[transcript removed to preserve anonymity]

Appendix C – Ethical Approval Letter, Information sheet, Consent form, Debriefing form, for
Study 1

Middlesex University Department of Psychology
Application for Ethical Approval and Risk Assessment

No study may proceed until approval has been granted by an authorised person. For collaborative research with another institution, ethical approval must be obtained from all institutions involved. If you are involved in a project that has already received ethical approval from another committee or that will be seeking approval from another ethics committee please complete form 'Application for Approval of Proposals Previously Approved by another Ethics Committee or to be Approved by another Ethics Committee'

STUDENTS: Please email the completed form to your supervisor from your University email account (...@live.mdx.ac.uk). Your supervisor will then send your application to the Ethics Committee (Psy.Ethics@mdx.ac.uk). You should NOT email the ethics committee directly.

STAFF: Please email the completed form to Psy.Ethics@mdx.ac.uk from your University email account (...@mdx.ac.uk)

This form consists of 8 sections:

1	Summary of Application and Declaration
2	Ethical questions
3	Research proposal
4	Information sheet
5	Informed consent
6	Debriefing
7	Risk assessment (required if research is to be conducted away from Middlesex University property, otherwise leave this blank. Institutions/locations listed for data collection must match original letters of acceptance)
8	Reviewer's decision and feedback

Once your file including proposal, information sheet, consent form, debriefing and (if necessary) materials and Risk Assessment form is ready, please check the size. For files exceeding 3MB, please email your application to your supervisor using WeTransfer: <https://www.wetransfer.com/> this will place your application in cloud storage rather than sending it directly to a specific email account. If you/ your supervisor have confidentiality concerns, please submit a paper copy of your application to the Psychology Office instead of proceeding with the electronic submission.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Application number: PG113

Decision and date: Approved 30.05.14

RISK ASSESSMENT (complete relevant boxes):

Not Applicable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Signed by	
Date	

LETTER/S OF ACCEPTANCE/PERMISSION MATCHING FRA1 (RISK ASSESSMENT) RECEIVED (SPECIFY):

	Date	From	Checked by
All	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Part	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Part	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

DBS Certificate(s) (complete relevant boxes):

Not Applicable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Not received yet	
Seen by & added to file	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Date	

1 Summary of application (researcher to complete)

Title of Proposal:	Beyond work-family conflict: work-life balance in employees with different family structures							
Submitted by:	Staff		Student (UG)		Student (PG: MSc/MA)		Student (PG: MPhil/PhD)	X
Name of Supervisor	Dr Nicola Payne							
Name of Student Researcher(s) and student number(s)	Neelam Ghuman M00476428							
Proposed start date	01/07/2014			Proposed end date		01/12/2014		
Details of any co-investigators (if applicable)								
1. Name:			Organisation:			Email:		
2. Name:			Organisation:			Email:		
3. Name:			Organisation:			Email:		

Research area and methodology (put an X in as many boxes as apply)

Clinical		Cognition + Emotion		Developmental	
Forensic		Health	X	Occupational	X
Psychophysiological		Social / Psychosocial		Sport + Exercise	
Analysis of existing data source/secondary data analysis		Experimental		Field Experiments	
Observation (humans and non-humans)		Qualitative	X	Questionnaire-based	

	Yes/No
1.1 Are there any sensitive elements to this study (delete as appropriate)? <i>If you are unclear about what this means in relation to your research please discuss with your Supervisor first</i>	No
1.2 Does the study involve ANY of the following? <i>Clinical populations; Children (under 16 years); Vulnerable adults such as individuals with mental or physical health problems, prisoners, vulnerable elderly, young offenders; Political, ethnic or religious groups/minorities; Sexually explicit material / issues relating to sexuality; Mood induction; Deception</i>	No (skip to 1.4 if No)
1.3 If the study involves any of the first three groups above, the researcher may need a DBS certificate (Criminal Records Check). PG students are expected to have DBS. Does the current project require DBS clearance? <i>Discuss this matter with your supervisor if you are unsure</i>	No
1.4 Is this a resubmission / amended application? <i>If so, you must attach the original application with the review decision and comments (you do not need to re-attach materials etc if the resubmission does not concern alterations to these). Please note that it is the responsibility of the applicant to identify the amended parts of the resubmission.</i>	No

By submitting this form you confirm that:

- you are aware that any modifications to the design or method of the proposal will require resubmission;
- students will keep all materials, documents and data relating to this proposal until completion of your studies at Middlesex, in compliance with confidentiality guidelines (i.e., only you and your supervisor will be able to access the data);
- staff will keep all materials, documents and data relating to this proposal until the appropriate time after completion of the project, in compliance with confidentiality guidelines (i.e., only you and other members of your team will be able to access the data);
- students will provide all original paper and electronic data to the supervisor named on this form on completion of the research / dissertation submission;
- you have read and understood the British Psychological Society's *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, and *Code of Human Research Ethics*.

Information sheet

Work-life balance support and flexible working for employees with different family structures

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of this programme of research is to explore the work-life balance experiences of and supports for employees with a wide range of family structures including those with 'traditional' families and with 'non-traditional families' i.e. single people, and those without children. You are being invited to participate in the first component of the research programme which will involve obtaining the views of HR and line managers about any supports for work-life balance, such as flexible working, offered by your organisation, your views on how these may apply to employees with different family structures and any benefits or barriers you have experienced or anticipate due to the recent changes in the right to request flexible working (meaning that all employees now have the right to request).

What will happen to me if I take part?

Along with this information sheet you have also been sent a consent form which you will be asked to return by email if you wish to participate. Participation will involve an interview. The interview will be conducted by phone with the researcher who will make the call to you in a quiet cubicle space located within Middlesex University to ensure confidentiality. Interviews will last approximately 40-60 minutes and will take place at a time which suits you. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed in order to be prepared for a thematic analysis, which involves identifying themes across all of the interviews I conduct.

What are the possible disadvantages to taking part?

There are no known risks to taking part in the study, however if you have any questions, contact details can be found at the bottom of the page.

Consent

You will be asked to sign a consent form prior to taking part in the research which should be emailed back to the researcher prior to the interview. The interview will not take place if this is not returned. At the start of the interview you will also be asked to provide verbal consent. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you decide to take part, you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen to the data?

Interviews will be anonymized and names will be removed/changed and any aspects of the interview that may potentially identify you or your organisation will also be removed. Confidentiality is guaranteed as there will be no disclosure of identifiable information and all records will be kept securely. Once interviews have been transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed and the transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer. The data will be used to form part of my MPhil/PhD thesis and maybe used for subsequent publications.

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The Middlesex Psychology Department's Ethics Committee have reviewed this proposal.

Thank you for reading the information sheet

Researcher

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Informed consent



Middlesex University School of Health and Education
Psychology Department
Written Informed Consent

Work-life balance support and flexible working for employees with different family structures: 2014-2015

Researcher's name: Neelam Ghuman

Supervisor's name and email: *Dr Nicola Payne: n.payne@mdx.ac.uk*

- I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher, and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.
- I have been given contact details for the researcher in the information sheet.
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.
- I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and I provide my consent that this may occur.
- I understand that the interview will be recorded and then transcribed

Print name

Sign Name

Date: _____

To the participant: Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Health and Education Ethics committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: _____

Work-life balance support and flexible working for employees with different family structures

Thank You

Thank you very much for participating in this project. Your support is greatly appreciated. The aim of this study was to update research in the field of work-life balance in the context of the changing backgrounds of the UK workforce (i.e. an increasing number of employees deciding not to have children) and the pressure upon them in both work and non-work roles during the recession and subsequent austerity. This is because previous research, as well as supports for work-life balance, have tended to focus on the issues of work-life balance for those who fall within the typical "traditional" family structure. Work-life balance is important for all employees, and it's crucial that research reflects this. The extension of the right to request flexible working to all employees may increase fairness perceptions among employees with non-traditional family structures but it is possible that this may create concerns for organisations.

The interviews conducted aimed to explore the views of HR and line managers in regards to the changes to the right to request legislation and the benefits of and barriers to these changes, alongside exploring the perceived effectiveness and fairness of work-life balance supports offered to their employees.

You are reminded that the data collected during the research will not be identifiable and will be kept strictly confidential and also the data you have provided may be used for analysis and subsequent publication.

There are no known risks involved in taking part in this study however in the unlikely case you may feel distressed we suggest you contact the Samaritans by calling 08457909090. For more information about other ways in which you can contact the Samaritans please visit the following website: www.samaritans.org. For more specific advice and information about work-life balance you may wish to contact Working Families by calling 0300 012 0312 or for more information and other forms of contact you may visit the following website: www.workingfamilies.org.uk.

If you have any further questions regarding the study, please get in touch using the contact details given below.

Thank you again for taking part in this study.

Researcher

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02084114006

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Supervisor

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London, NW4 4BT
c.woodrow@mdx.ac.uk
0208 411 5009

Interview Schedule – Employee Interviews

Demographic questions

I'm going to start with some demographic questions, so can you please tell me your...

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Can you describe your household setup (alt: Who are you living with?)
 - Age and occupation of partner (if applicable)?
 - Do you have children? (***if appropriate* probe:** might this change in the future?)
 - ***Only for those with children***
 - Ages of children?
 - Children who live away from home?

Okay now I'm going to ask you about your job, in terms of your role and your work hours...

[added to all post-covid interviews] If you can focus on work and non-work life as it is now because any comments on the impact of COVID would be asked about separately.

Position and work pattern (work life)

- Can you tell me your job title and a bit about your role in the organisation?
- Can you describe your weekly working pattern/hours? Are they always the same or do they change every week?
 - Have these always been the hours you've worked here? (If they have changed-how/when/why?)
- How much flexibility do you have over the duties and times you have to work (without submitting an official request to work flexibly)?
- What aspects of your job do you find most satisfying or enjoyable?
- What aspects of your job do you find demanding or stressful? E.g. How do you feel about your workload? (prompt: in what ways is it ok/not okay?)

Now that we have spoken a bit about work, I am going to ask you about your life outside of work.

Life outside of work

- Can you describe your life outside of work?
 - Prompt: What do you do when you are not at work? e.g. this might include the time you spend with family, friends or pets, your social life, hobbies, voluntary work, household chores, caring responsibilities
- From whom do you receive support in your life outside of work and what kind of support do they provide?
- What aspects of your non - work (home) life do you find demanding or stressful?
- What aspects are the most satisfying or enjoyable?

Okay now moving on. Since we have spoken about work and your life outside of work. I

would like to ask you about how you manage to combine your work and life outside of work, which is often referred to as work life balance.

Work life balance.

- What does work-life balance mean to you?
- How would you describe your work-life balance?
 - Do you feel like the demands of your work and non-work roles conflict in any way, if so, how?
 - What sort of effect does this have on you e.g. your health and well-being?
 - Do you feel your work and non-work roles benefit each other in any way, if so how? (e.g. there might be skills you use in your personal life that help you at work or perhaps successes you experience at work help you feel happier in your personal life).
 - Can you give an example?
- How important is your work to you? How much do you feel it is part of your identity? (Prompt: Have you always felt like this (when/why did this change)?)
- How important is your life outside work to you? **What is important to you outside of work?** How do you primarily see your non work identity e.g. parent, partner, friend, etc.? (Prompt-Have you always felt like this (when/why did this change)?)
 - ***Probe about identity centrality if not covered***

I would like to move on to ask you some questions about the extent to which your work and home life are more separate or integrated ...

Boundary management

- How much does your work life spillover into your home life? E.g. do you check work emails, worry about work at home, discuss work outside of work etc. Get examples.
- How much does your non work life spillover into your work life? E.g. take family/social calls when at work, discuss home life at work etc. Get examples.
 - *Check if spillover/interferences are equal both ways? *
- Do you prefer to try to keep your work and non-work life separate or do you prefer them to integrate or overlap more?
 - How much control do you feel you have over this?
 - What do you do to unwind or detach from work?

- **[added to all post-covid interviews]** So far, we have talked about your work, your life outside work and how you manage combining the two, the pandemic may have had an impact on all of this during the lockdowns, but in many cases, people have now returned to some kind of 'normality'. Is there anything you would like to add about any differences in, for example, the way you work, or your work-life balance right now compared to before the pandemic.

Work life balance supports.

In this final section of the interview, I would like us to talk about how your workplace supports you and your WLB and specifically your views on flexible working policy.

- How does your workplace support work-life balance? Probes: are you aware of any policies? what's the workplace culture like [e.g. expectation to work long hours, to not let home life interfere with work]? What support do you receive from your line manager? What support do you receive from your colleagues?
- Do you think there are any differences in the treatment and expectations of employees with different family structures (e.g. single employees or those without children compared to those with children)? (Prompt: in terms of working late/policies offered)

One of the ways workplaces support WLB is through the right to request flexible working legislation, whereby employees may submit a request to their employer or line manager to, for example, reduce their hours, compress their hours, job share, work flexitime, work from home sometimes etc.). Requests do not have to be granted. Officially the decision to grant a request is based on whether your employer or line manager feels it is possible to grant a request without detriment to the business.

- Have you ever officially applied for flexible working (and by this, I mean have you formally submitted a request) or anything similar to this?
 - Tell me about it (prompt: the reason for application/process/success/manager's response? How has it helped you manage your work and home life?)
 - ***If participant has never requested flex working***
 - If you were to request flexible working, how do you think your line manager would respond?
- You may or may not be aware that prior to June 2014, only those with parental responsibilities for children under the age of 17 or those who had caring responsibilities had to be offered the right to request to work flexibly. In June 2014 this policy changed so that now anyone (not just parents or carers) has the right to request to work flexibly.
 - What is your view of this? Benefits of changes? Problems caused by the changes.
- As I said earlier, Officially, decisions to grant flexible working requests are based on whether it is possible to grant a request without detriment to the business. However, do you think other factors might influence a line manager's decision (e.g. if there are other factors what are they?)
 - How fair do you think workplace support and policies are towards those with different family structures? (e.g. single people, those without children, those with children etc.)

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

Appendix E – An example transcript for study 2

[transcript removed to preserve anonymity]

Appendix F – Ethical Approval Letter, Information sheet, Consent form, Debriefing form, for Study 2



Middlesex University Department of Psychology
Application for Ethical Approval and Risk Assessment

No study may proceed until approval has been granted by an authorised person. For collaborative research with another institution, ethical approval must be obtained from all institutions involved. If you are involved in a project that has already received ethical approval from another committee or that will be seeking approval from another ethics committee please complete form 'Application for Approval of Proposals Previously Approved by another Ethics Committee or to be Approved by another Ethics Committee'

UG and MSc STUDENTS: Please email the completed form to your supervisor from your University email account (...@live.mdx.ac.uk). Your supervisor will then send your application to the Ethics Committee (Psy.Ethics@mdx.ac.uk). You should NOT email the ethics committee directly.

PhD Students and STAFF: Please email the completed form to Psy.Ethics@mdx.ac.uk from your University email account (...@mdx.ac.uk)

This form consists of 8 sections:

- 1) Summary of Application and Declaration
- 2) Ethical questions
- 3) Research proposal
- 4) Information sheet
- 5) Informed consent
- 6) Debriefing
- 7) Risk assessment (required if research is to be conducted away from Middlesex University property, otherwise leave this blank. Institutions/locations listed for data collection must match original letters of acceptance)
- 8) Reviewer's decision and feedback

Once your file including proposal, information sheet, consent form, debriefing and (if necessary) materials and Risk Assessment form is ready, please check the size. For files exceeding 3MB, please email your application to your supervisor using WeTransfer: <https://www.wetransfer.com/> this will place your application in cloud storage rather than sending it directly to a specific email account. If you/ your supervisor have confidentiality concerns, please submit a paper copy of your application to the Psychology Office instead of proceeding with the electronic submission.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY – PLEASE HIGHLIGHT ANSWERS IN BOLD

Application No.:	PG062	Decision:	APPROVED	Date:	08.07.15
------------------	-------	-----------	-----------------	-------	----------

RISK ASSESSMENT (complete relevant boxes):

Required:	No	Signed by:	Student	Supervisor	Programme Leader
Date:					

LETTER/S OF ACCEPTANCE/PERMISSION MATCHING FRA1 (RISK ASSESSMENT) RECEIVED (SPECIFY):

	Date	From	Checked by
All			Supervisor Ethics Admin
Part			Supervisor Ethics Admin
Part			Supervisor Ethics Admin

DBS Certificate(s) Required? (complete relevant boxes):

DBS certificate required?		Seen By:	
DBS Certificate Number:		Date DBS Issued:	

1 Summary of application (researcher to complete)

Title of Proposal:	The work-life balance experiences of employees with different family structures		
Submitted by:	STAFF PG UG		
Name of Principal Investigator/Supervisor	Supervisors: Dr Nicky Payne and Dr Chris Woodrow		
Name of Student Researcher(s) and student number(s)	Neelam Ghuman- M00476428		
Proposed start date	31st June 2015	Proposed end date	01 December 2015
Details of any co-investigators (if applicable)			
Name:	Organisation:	Email:	
Name:	Organisation:	Email:	
Name:	Organisation:	Email:	

Topic/Research Area (PLEASE HIGHLIGHT IN BOLD AS MANY AS APPLY)

Social/Psychosocial	Occupational	Forensic	Developmental	Health
Psychophysiological	Cognition & Emotion	Sport & Exercise	Psychoanalysis	Clinical

Methodology (PLEASE HIGHLIGHT IN BOLD AS MANY AS APPLY)

Qualitative	Field experiments	Observation (humans and non-humans)
Experimental	Questionnaire	Analysis of existing data sources / secondary data sources

PLEASE HIGHLIGHT ANSWERS IN BOLD

1.1	Are there any sensitive elements to this study? <i>If you are unclear about what this means in relation to your research please discuss with your Supervisor first</i>	Yes No
1.2	Does the study involve ANY of the following? <i>Clinical populations; Children (under 16 years); Vulnerable adults such as individuals with mental or physical health problems, prisoners, vulnerable elderly, young offenders; Political, ethnic or religious groups/minorities; Sexually explicit material / issues relating to sexuality; Mood induction; Deception</i>	Yes No
1.3	If the study involves any of the first three groups above, the researcher may need a DBS certificate (Criminal Records Check). PG students are expected to have DBS clearance. Does the current project require DBS clearance? <i>Discuss this matter with your supervisor if you unsure</i>	Yes No
1.4	Is this a resubmission / amended application? <i>If so, you must make the revisions on the version of the application with the reviewer's decision and feedback on it so that when the application is re-reviewed the reviewer can:</i> <i>a) (in the case of revise and resubmitted applications) check the revisions requested and whether they have been made.</i> <i>b) (in the case of an amended application) check the original decision(s) by the reviewer(s) and clearly see where the amendments have been made.</i> <i>Please note that in all cases it is the responsibility of the applicant to identify the amended parts of the resubmission.</i>	Yes No

By submitting this form you confirm that:

- you are aware that any modifications to the design or method of the proposal will require resubmission;

Amendments to Application in 2017

From: Monica Izarra Millan <M.IzarraMillan@mdx.ac.uk>
Sent: Thursday, September 7, 2017 2:14 PM
To: Neelam Ghuman <N.K.Ghuman@mdx.ac.uk>
Cc: Psy.Ethics <Psy.Ethics@mdx.ac.uk>
Subject: RE: PG062 – 2015 (student number M00576428) Amendment Form APPROVED

Dear Neelam,

Your Amendment Form has now been approved by Nicky Brunswick.

Many thanks

Best wishes,
Monica

Monica Izarra
Department and Programme Administrator
Faculty of Science & Technology
Psychology Department
Middlesex University
The Burroughs
Hendon NW4 4BT

Telf. +44 (0)2084113017
Room TG34, Town Hall
Email: M.IzarraMillan@mdx.ac.uk

Further Amendments to application in 2022

From: Monica Izarra Millan <M.IzarraMillan@mdx.ac.uk>
Sent: Thursday, May 5, 2022 10:02 AM
To: Neelam Ghuman <N.K.Ghuman@mdx.ac.uk>
Cc: Nicola Brunswick <N.Brunswick@mdx.ac.uk>; Camille Alexis-Garsee <C.Alexis-Garsee@mdx.ac.uk>; Nicola Payne <N.Payne@mdx.ac.uk>
Subject: RE: Paper Ethics extension and amendments PG062-2015

Dear Neelam,

Please note that your attached extension form and amendments have now been approved.
Attached I am providing a copy of your approved extension form for your records.

Best wishes,
Monica

Monica Izarra Millan
Senior Programme Administrator
MORE System Administrator
Faculty of Science and Technology
Psychology and London Sports Institute
Tel: 0208 411 3017
Email: M.IzarraMillan@mdx.ac.uk

Information sheet

Psychology Department
Middlesex University, Hendon, London NW4 4BT



The work-life balance experiences of employees with different family structures

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of this programme of research is to explore the work-life balance experiences of and supports for employees with a wide range of family structures including single people, married or cohabiting people and those with and without children. You are being invited to participate in a component of the research programme which will involve examining employees' experiences of work life balance and managing boundaries between work and home life, whilst also exploring views on flexible working policies and workplace culture and fairness.

What will happen to me if I take part?

Along with this information sheet you have also been sent a consent form which you will be asked to return by email if you wish to participate. Participation will involve an interview. The interview will be conducted by phone or via video call with the researcher who will make the call to you in a private space to ensure confidentiality. Interviews will last approximately 60 minutes and will take place at a time which suits you. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed in order to be prepared for a thematic analysis, which involves identifying themes across all of the interviews I conduct.

What are the possible disadvantages to taking part?

There are no known risks to taking part in the study, however if you have any questions, contact details can be found at the bottom of the page.

Consent

You will be asked to sign a consent form prior to taking part in the research, which should be emailed back to the researcher prior to the interview (n.k.ghuman@mdx.ac.uk). The interview will not take place if this is not returned. At the start of the interview you will also be asked to provide verbal consent. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you decide to take part, you may withdraw without giving a reason, within one month of completing the interview. The researcher will donate £5 to the Alzheimer's Society per participant and this will be made as a total payment once data collection for this study is complete. This payment will still be made if you choose to withdraw during or after the interview. You will also receive a £6 amazon voucher.

What will happen to the data?

Interviews will be anonymised, and names will be removed/changed and any aspects of the interview that may potentially identify you or your organisation will also be removed. Confidentiality is guaranteed as there will be no disclosure of identifiable information and all records will be kept securely. Once interviews have been transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed, and the transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer. The data will be used to form part of my MPhil/PhD thesis and maybe used for subsequent publications in academic conferences or journals.

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed.

The Middlesex Psychology Department's Ethics Committee have reviewed this proposal.

Thank you for reading the information sheet

Researcher

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Hendon, London, NW4 4BT,
n.k.ghuman@mdx.ac.uk
02084114006

Supervisor

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02084115467

Supervisor

Dr Camille Alexis-Garsee
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c.alexis-garsee@mdx.ac.uk
02084115605

Informed consent



Middlesex University School of Science and Technology Psychology Department Written Informed Consent

Title of study: The work-life balance experiences of employees with different family structures

Researcher's name and email: Neelam Ghuman (n.k.ghuman@mdx.ac.uk)

Supervisors name and email: Dr Nicky Payne (n.payne@mdx.ac.uk) and Dr Camille Alexis-Garsee (c.alexis-garsee@mdx.ac.uk)

- I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.
- I understand that my interview will be audio recorded and transcribed in order to be prepared for a thematic analysis.
- I have been given contact details for the researcher in the information sheet.
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from participating in the project at any time (until one month after the completing the interview) without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.
- I understand that I can ask for my data to be withdrawn from the project within one month of completing the interview.
- I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication (in PhD thesis, academic conferences or journals) and I provide my consent that this may occur.

Print name: _____

Date: _____

Psychology Department
Middlesex University
Hendon
London NW4 4BT

The work-life balance experiences of employees with different family structures

Thank You

Thank you very much for participating in this project. Your support is greatly appreciated. The aim of this study is to update research in the field of work-life balance in the context of the changing backgrounds of the UK workforce (e.g. an increasing number of employees deciding not to have children) and the pressure upon them in both work and non-work roles during the current economic climate. This is because previous research, as well as supports for work-life balance, have tended to focus on the issues of work-life balance for those who fall within the typical "traditional" family structure (i.e. couples with children). Work-life balance is important for all employees, and it's crucial that research reflects this. Another area explored in this research was policy changes, specifically the 2014 extension of the right to request flexible working to all employees. These changes may increase fairness perceptions among employees with non-traditional family structures, but it is possible that this may create concerns for organisations.

The interviews conducted aimed to explore employees' experiences of work-life balance, whilst exploring a variety of non-work domains, as well as exploring perceptions of fairness of work-life balance supports and views on the changes to the right to request flexible working among employees with a range of family structures.

You are reminded that the data collected during the research will not be identifiable and will be kept strictly confidential and also the data you have provided may be used for analysis and subsequent publication. You have the right to withdraw your data within one month of completing the interview.

The researcher will donate £5 to the Alzheimer's society per participant and this will be made as a total payment once data collection is complete. You will also receive a £6 Amazon Voucher which will be attached to an email.

There are no known risks involved in taking part in this study, however, in the unlikely case you may feel distressed you could contact the Samaritans by calling 08457909090. For more information about other ways in which you can contact the Samaritans please visit the following website: www.samaritans.org. For more specific advice and information about work-life balance you may wish to contact Working Families by calling 0300 012 0312 or for more information and other forms of contact you may visit the following website: www.workingfamilies.org.uk.

If you have any further questions regarding the study, please get in touch using the contact details given below.

Thank you again for taking part in this study.

Researcher

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c.alexis-garsee@mdx.ac.uk
02084115605

Appendix G – Questionnaire for study 3

Start of Block: Demographic Questions

Q3 Demographic questions

Q4 Gender

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)
- ☐ Other (specify) (3) _____

Q5 Age

Q6 Marital Status

- ☐ Single (1)
- ☐ In a relationship (cohabiting) (2)
- ☐ In a relationship (living apart) (3)
- ☐ Married (4)
- ☐ Widowed (5)
- ☐ Divorced (6)
- ☐ Separated (7)
-

Q7 Do you have children?

- ☐ No (1)
- ☐ Yes (2)
-

Display This Question:

If Do you have children? = Yes

Q8 How many children do you have?

Display This Question:

If Do you have children? = Yes

Q9 How many children do you have under 16?

Display This Question:

If Do you have children? = Yes

Q10 How many children live at home?

Q11 Which of the following sectors most closely matches the one you work in?

- ☐ Accountancy, banking & finance (1)
- ☐ Business, consulting & management (2)
- ☐ Charity & voluntary work (3)
- ☐ Creative arts & design (4)
- ☐ Education (5)
- ☐ Energy & utilities (6)
- ☐ Engineering & manufacturing (7)
- ☐ Environment & agriculture (8)
- ☐ Healthcare & social care (9)
- ☐ Hospitality & events management (10)
- ☐ IT, media & internet (11)
- ☐ Law, law enforcement & security (12)
- ☐ Leisure, sport and tourism (13)
- ☐ Marketing, advertising & PR (14)
- ☐ Property/construction (15)

☐ Public services & administration (16)

☐ Recruitment & HR (17)

☐ Retail & sales (18)

☐ Science & pharmaceuticals (19)

☐ Transport & logistics (20)

Q12 Do you supervise/manage any employees?

☐ Yes (please state how many) (1)

☐ No (2)

Q13 How many hours do you typically work per week? (specify)

End of Block: Demographic Questions

Start of Block: Your experience of work-life balance

Q14 Your experience of work-life balance

Q15 Please indicate the frequency with which you have felt a particular way during the **last 3 months?**

	Not at all (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Almost all the time (5)
I come home from work too tired to do things I would like to do (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My job makes it difficult to maintain the kind of personal life I would like (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often neglect my personal needs because of the demands of my work (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My personal
life suffers
because of
my work (4)

☐☐☐☐☐

I have to miss
out on
important
personal
activities due
to the amount
of time I
spend doing
work (5)

☐☐☐☐☐

My personal
life drains me
of the energy
I need to do
my job. (6)

☐☐☐☐☐

My work
suffers
because of
everything
going on in
my personal
life. (7)



I would
devote more
time to work
if it weren't
for
everything I
have going on
in my
personal life.
(8)



I am too tired
to be
effective at
work because
of things I
have going on
in my
personal life.

(9)

When I'm at
work, I worry
about things I
need to do
outside work.

(10)

I have
difficulty
getting my
work done
because I am
preoccupied
with personal
matters at
work. (11)



My job gives
me energy to
pursue
activities
outside of
work that are
important to
me. (12)

☐☐☐☐☐

Because of
my job, I am
in a better
mood at
home. (13)

☐☐☐☐☐

The things I
do at work
help me deal
with personal
and practical
issues at
home. (14)

☐☐☐☐☐

I am in a
better mood
at work
because of
everything I
have going
for me in my
personal life
(15)

☐☐☐☐☐

My personal
life gives me
the energy to
do my job.
(16)

☐☐☐☐☐

My personal
life helps me
relax and feel
ready for the
next day's
work (17)

☐☐☐☐☐

End of Block: Your experience of work-life balance

Start of Block: Use and take up of work-life balance policies

Q16 Use and take up of work-life balance policies

Q17 There will be many references to ‘work-life balance policy or policies’ throughout this questionnaire. This is used as a universal term which encompasses general policies such as flexible working, and a variety of more specific policies such as those listed in the question

below (e.g. working from home, compressed hours, paid time off for family issues) which may help employees to manage their work and personal lives.

Q18 Please select **all** of the work-life balance policies below that you believe are available at your organization

- ☐ Compressed hours (1)
- ☐ Flexitime e.g. flexible start & end times (2)
- ☐ Job share (3)
- ☐ Onsite child care (4)
- ☐ Paid maternity/paternity leave (5)
- ☐ Paid time off for family issues (6)
- ☐ Paid time off for personal issues (7)
- ☐ Part time work schedules (8)
- ☐ Reduced hours (9)
- ☐ Sabbaticals (10)
- ☐ Shift swapping (11)
- ☐ Telecommuting/working from home (12)

- ☐ Term-time only working (13)
- ☐ Unpaid time off for family issues (14)
- ☐ Unpaid time off for personal issues (15)
- ☐ Any other policy not listed: please specify below (16)
-

Display This Question:

If If Please select all of the work-life balance policies below that you believe are available at your organization q://QID298/SelectedChoicesCount Is Greater Than 0

Carry Forward Selected Choices from "Please select all of the work-life balance policies below that you believe are available at your organization"



Q19

Please select **all** of the policies you have used.

If you have not used any policies, please proceed to the next page by clicking the red arrow at the bottom right corner of the page.

- ☐ Compressed hours (1)
- ☐ Flexitime e.g. flexible start & end times (2)
- ☐ Job share (3)
- ☐ Onsite child care (4)
- ☐ Paid maternity/paternity leave (5)
- ☐ Paid time off for family issues (6)
- ☐ Paid time off for personal issues (7)
- ☐ Part time work schedules (8)
- ☐ Reduced hours (9)
- ☐ Sabbaticals (10)
- ☐ Shift swapping (11)
- ☐ Telecommuting/working from home (12)
- ☐ Term-time only working (13)

- ☐ Unpaid time off for family issues (14)
- ☐ Unpaid time off for personal issues (15)
- ☐ Any other policy not listed: please specify below (16)
-

End of Block: Use and take up of work-life balance policies

Start of Block: Organizational Fairness (Beauregard version)

Q20 Organizational fairness

Q21 The following items refer to the procedures used to allocate work-life balance policies (e.g. flexitime, job sharing, reduced hours, working from home) in your organization. Using the scale below as a guide, please respond to each of the following questions.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I would be able to express my views and feelings during these procedures (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would have influence over the outcome arrived at by these procedures (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

These
procedures
are applied
consistently
to all
employees
(3)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

These
procedures
are free of
bias (4)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

These
procedures
are based on
accurate
information
(5)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I would be
able to appeal
the outcome
arrived at by
these
procedures
(6)

☐☐☐☐☐

These
procedures
uphold
ethical and
moral
standards (7)

☐☐☐☐☐

Q22 The following items refer to the availability of work-life policies (e.g. flexitime, job sharing, reduced hours, working from home) in your organization. Using the scale below as a guide, please respond to each of the following questions.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
My access to work-life balance policies reflects my need for such benefits (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My access to work-life balance policies is appropriate for my personal or family situation (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My access to
work-life
balance
policies
reflects my
desire to use
them (3)

☐☐☐☐☐

My access to
work-life
balance
policies is
justified,
given my
personal or
family
circumstances
(4)

☐☐☐☐☐

End of Block: Organizational Fairness (Beauregard version)

Start of Block: Organizational culture (shortened)

Q23

Organizational

culture

1

Q24 To what extent do you agree that each of the following statements represent the culture at your organization?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
My organization provides work-life balance policies that are relevant for employees with children and employees without children. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

All employees receive the same level of work-life balance policies, irrespective of family status.

(2)

Employees without children and employees with children have equal access to work-life balance policies in this organization.

(3)



My line manager is supportive of having work-life balance policies that appeal to both employees with children and employees without children. (4)



My line
manager
treats all
employees'
requests for
time off the
same,
regardless of
why the
employee
wants the time
off. (5)



My
organization's
policy
requires all
employees'
request for
time off be
treated the
same,
regardless of
why the
employee
requests time
off. (6)



Workers in
my
organization
are equally
understanding
when
employees
without
children are
away from
work for
personal
reasons as
when
employees
with children
are away for
family
reasons. (7)



My line
manager
makes work
assignments
without
considering
an
employee's
family
situation. (8)



My line
manager
makes
decisions
about who
will travel for
business
without
considering
employee
family status.
(9)



In my organization, work assignments are made without considering family status.

(10)

The amount of overtime employees in my organization are expected to work is not influenced by family status.

(11)



My family
status does
not influence
the number of
hours I am
expected to
work in my
organization.

☐☐☐☐☐

(12)

My
coworkers
believe that
employee
family status
should not be
considered
when making
work
assignments.

☐☐☐☐☐

(13)

End of Block: Organizational culture (shortened)

Start of Block: Culture (full version)

Q25 Organizational culture 2

Q26 To what extent do you agree that each of the following statements represent the philosophy or beliefs of your organization (remember, these are not your own personal beliefs—but pertain to what you believe is the philosophy of your organization).

	A great deal (1)	A lot (2)	A moderate amount (3)	A little (4)	Not at all (5)
Work should be the primary priority in a person's life (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employees who are highly committed to their personal lives cannot be highly committed to their work (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Attending to
personal
needs, such
as taking time
off for sick
children, is
frowned upon
(3)



Individuals
who take time
off to attend
personal
matters are
not
committed to
their work (4)



It is assumed
that the most
productive
employees
are those who
put their work
before their
family life (5)



The ideal
employee is
the one who
is available
24 hours a
day (6)



End of Block: Culture (full version)

Start of Block: Personal life demands and support

Q27 Personal life demands and support

Q28 The following questions will ask you about your home demands. When responding to the following questions, ensure your responses reflect your home demands in the last 3 months

	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Most of the time (3)	Always (4)
Do you find that you are busy at home? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you have to do many things in a hurry when you are at home? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you have to carry out a lot of tasks at home [household/caring tasks]? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q29 In answering the following questions, think about your relationships with friends and family members. Please indicate to what extent each statement describes your relationships in the last 3 months

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
I can depend on my family to help me if I really need it. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If something went wrong, my family would not come to my assistance. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can't depend on my family for aid if I really need it. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can count on my family in an emergency. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can depend on my friends to help me if I really need it. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If something
went wrong, my
friends would
not come to my
assistance. (6)

☐☐☐☐

I can't depend
on my friends
for aid if I really
need it. (7)

☐☐☐☐

I can count on
my friends in an
emergency. (8)

☐☐☐☐

End of Block: Personal life demands and support

Start of Block: Demands and support at work (Shortened version)

Q30 Demands and support at work

Q31 The following questions will ask you about your working conditions. When responding to the following questions, ensure your responses reflect your work in the last six months.

	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
I can decide when to take a break (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have unachievable deadlines (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I am given
supportive
feedback on
the work I do
(5)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I have to work
very
intensively
(6)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I have a say in
my own work
speed (7)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I have to
neglect some
tasks because
I have too
much to do
(8)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I have a
choice in
deciding how
I do my work
(9)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I am unable to
take
sufficient
breaks (10)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I am
pressured to
work long
hours (11)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I have a
choice in
deciding what
I do at work
(12)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I have to work
very fast (13)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I have
unrealistic
time
pressures (14)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I can rely on
my line
manager to
help me out
with a work
problem (15)

☐☐☐☐☐

I get help and
support I need
from
colleagues
(16)

☐☐☐☐☐

I have some
say over the
way I work
(17)

☐☐☐☐☐

I receive the
respect at
work I
deserve from
my
colleagues
(18)

☐☐☐☐☐

I can talk to
my line
manager
about
something
that has upset
or annoyed
me about
work (19)

☐☐☐☐☐

My working
time can be
flexible (20)

☐☐☐☐☐

My
colleagues
are willing to
listen to my
work-related
problems (21)

☐☐☐☐☐

I am

supported

through

emotionally

demanding

work (22)

☐☐☐☐☐

My line

manager

encourages

me at work

(23)

☐☐☐☐☐

Q32 The next page is the final page and you will not be able to return to previous pages once you move on.

End of Block: Demands and support at work (Shortened version)

*Appendix H – Ethical Approval Letter, Information sheet, Consent form, Debriefing form, for
Study 3*



Psychology REC

The Burroughs
Hendon
London NW4 4BT

Main Switchboard: 0208 411 5000

08/07/2019

APPLICATION NUMBER: 7350

Dear Neelam Ghuman and all collaborators/co-investigators

Re your application title: Quant - work-life balance - occupational

Supervisor: Camille Nicola Alexis-Garsee Payne

Co-investigators/collaborators:

Thank you for submitting your application. I can confirm that your application has been given approval from the date of this letter by the Psychology REC.

Although your application has been approved, the reviewers of your application may have made some useful comments on your application. Please look at your online application again to check whether the reviewers have added any comments for you to look at.

Also, please note the following:

1. Please ensure that you contact your supervisor/research ethics committee (REC) if any changes are made to the research project which could affect your ethics approval. There is an Amendment sub-form on MORE that can be completed and submitted to your REC for further review.
2. You must notify your supervisor/REC if there is a breach in data protection management or any issues that arise that may lead to a health and safety concern or conflict of interests.
3. If you require more time to complete your research, i.e., beyond the date specified in your application, please complete the Extension sub-form on MORE and submit it your REC for review.
4. Please quote the application number in any correspondence.
5. It is important that you retain this document as evidence of research ethics approval, as it may be required for submission to external bodies (e.g., NHS, grant awarding bodies) or as part of your research report, dissemination (e.g., journal articles) and data management plan.
6. Also, please forward any other information that would be helpful in enhancing our application form and procedures - please contact MOREsupport@mdx.ac.uk to provide feedback.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

Chair

Psychology REC



Information Sheet

MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANT SHEET (PIS)

1. Study title

The work-life balance experiences of employees with different family structures

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Contact us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the purpose of the study?

You are being invited to participate in a research study which will involve a questionnaire examining your experiences of work-life balance whilst also exploring how this may be affected by work-life balance policies and perceptions of fairness, workplace culture, and demands and support at home and at work. We are particularly interested in how experiences differ for employees with different family structures e.g. women and men with and without children, single, married or co-habiting etc.

4. Why have I been chosen?

It is important that we assess as many participants as possible, and you have indicated that you are interested in taking part in this study. You were invited as you are an employee of a UK organisation, and the aim is to recruit 300-400 participants.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If you do decide to withdraw from the study then please inform the researcher as soon as possible, and they will facilitate your withdrawal. If, for any reason, you wish to withdraw your data please

contact the researcher before 1st February 2020. After this date it may not be possible to withdraw your individual data as analysis may already have begun. However, as all data are anonymised, your individual data will not be identifiable in any way. A decision to withdraw or a decision not to take part, will not affect you in any way. If you wish to withdraw you will need to quote a random participant code that will be generated and is provided at the top of the consent form on the next page, so please make a note of this code and our contact details.

6. What will I have to do?

After reading this information sheet you will be asked to provide consent if you wish to participate. Participation will involve completing an online questionnaire which contains multiple choice questions. The questionnaire should take approximately 25-30 minutes to complete.

7. Will I have to provide any bodily samples (i.e. blood/saliva/urine)?

No

8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no known risks to taking part in the study, however if you have any questions, contact details can be found at the bottom of the page. In case participation raises any anxieties for you, contact details of support organisations can be found when you exit the questionnaire. Appropriate risk assessments for all procedures have been conducted and will be followed throughout the duration of the study.

9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We hope that participating in the study will help you. However, this cannot be guaranteed. The information we gain from this study will help us to update research in the field of work-life balance in the context of the changing backgrounds of the UK workforce and may ultimately help to improve supports for work-life balance.

10. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

The research team has put a number of procedures in place to protect the confidentiality of participants. You will be allocated a random participant code which you will see on the next page (at the top of the consent form) that will always be used to identify any data you provide. Your name or other personal details will not be associated with your data. All electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer. All information you provide will be treated in accordance with

the UK Data Protection Act. This study is for research purposes only, so there will be no repercussions associated with this research for you as a participant, and no one at your workplace will know you have participated or have access to your data.

11. What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research study will be used to form part of my MPhil/PhD thesis. The results may also be presented at conferences or in journal articles. However, the data will only be used by members of the research team and at no point will your personal information or data be revealed. Please note that in order to ensure quality assurance and equity this project may be selected for audit by a designated member of the research ethics committee. This means that the designated member can request to see the data file containing the anonymous data from all participants.

12. Who has reviewed the study?

The study has received full ethical clearance from the Research ethics committee who reviewed the study. The committee is the Middlesex University Psychology Department's Research Ethics Committee.

13. Contact for further information

If you require further information, have any questions or would like to withdraw your data then please contact:

Researcher: Neelam K Ghuman, Middlesex University, London, NW4 4BT,
n.k.ghuman@mdx.ac.uk, 02084114006

Supervisor: Dr Nicola Payne, Middlesex University, London, NW4 4BT,
n.payne@mdx.ac.uk, 02084115467

Supervisor: Dr Camille Alexis-Garsee, Middlesex University, London, NW4 4BT,
c.alexis-garsee@mdx.ac.uk, 02084115605

Further participation

If you might also be interested in participating in a telephone interview as part of this programme of research, please send me an email. For every interview conducted a £5 donation will be made to charity and a £5 amazon voucher offered.

Thank you for taking part in this study. Please make a note of your participant code (which you will see on the next page at the top of the consent form), any important information and the research teams' contact details.

Consent form

Version Number 1

Participant Identification Number: \${e://Field/Random%20ID}

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: The work-life balance experiences of employees with different family structures

Name of Researcher: Neelam Ghuman, n.k.ghuman@mdx.ac.uk

Supervisor's name and email: Dr Nicola Payne, n.payne@mdx.ac.uk and Dr Camille Alexis-Garsee, c.alexis-garsee@mdx.ac.uk

I
agree

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated June 2019 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have been given contact details for the researcher

☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I am free to withdraw my consent without giving a reason

☐

I agree that the data file that contains my data may be seen by a designated auditor (i.e. a Chair of the Psychology Ethics Committee or representative of the University Ethics Committee) to monitor correctness of procedure

☐

I understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and provide my consent that this might occur

☐

I understand that I can ask for my data to be withdrawn from the project until data analysis begins on 1st February 2020.

☐

I agree to take part in the above study

☐

The work-life balance experiences of employees with different family structures

Thank You

Thank you very much for participating in this project. Your support is greatly appreciated. The aim of this study is to update research in the field of work-life balance in the context of the changing backgrounds of the UK workforce (e.g. an increasing number of employees deciding not to have children, having children later in life or bringing children up within single parent families) and the pressure upon them in both work and non-work roles. This is because previous research, as well as supports for work-life balance, have tended to focus on the issues of work-life balance for those who fall within the typical "traditional" family structure (i.e. couples with children). Work-life balance is important for all employees, and it's crucial that research reflects this.

The questionnaire aimed to explore employees' experiences of work-life balance, whilst exploring the impact of a variety of work and non-work factors such as work and home demands and support, workplace policies and culture. Another area explored in this research was the perceived fairness of workplace work-life balance policies. Here you were asked about your own experiences but also shown a 'vignette' focusing on a hypothetical employee and asked about your perceptions of whether their treatment in the workplace was fair. There were several versions of this vignette where factors such as the gender of the hypothetical employee, whether or not they have children, if they were granted the request to work flexibly, and how the request was dealt with were presented to you differently compared to other participants. This was to see whether these factors effect perceptions of fairness.

You are reminded that the data collected during the research will not be identifiable and will be kept strictly confidential and also the data you have provided may be used for analysis and subsequent publication. If, for any reason, you wish to withdraw your data please contact the researcher before 1st February 2020. Please quote the participant code that was provided at the start of your questionnaire (at the top of the consent form). After this date it may not be possible to withdraw your individual data as analysis may already have begun. However, as all data are anonymised, your individual data will not be identifiable in any way. A decision to withdraw, or a decision not to take part, will not affect you in any way.

There were no known risks involved in taking part in this study, however, in case you feel distressed you could contact the Samaritans by calling 08457909090. For more information about other ways in which you can contact the Samaritans please visit the following website: <http://www.samaritans.org>. For more specific advice and information about work-life balance you may wish to contact Working Families by calling 0300 012 0312 or for more information and other forms of contact you may visit the following website: www.workingfamilies.org.uk

If you have any further questions regarding the study, please get in touch using the contact details given below. Thank you again for taking part in this study.

If you might also be interested in participating in a telephone interview as part of this programme of research, please send me an email. For every interview conducted a £5 donation will be made to charity and a £5 amazon voucher offered.

Researcher: Neelam K Ghuman, Middlesex University, London, NW44BT | n.k.ghuman@mdx.ac.uk | 02084114006

Supervisor: Dr Nicola Payne, Middlesex University, London, NW44BT | n.payne@mdx.ac.uk | 02084115467

Supervisor: Dr Camille Alexis-Garsee, Middlesex University, London, NW44BT | c.alexis-garsee@mdx.ac.uk | 02084115605