



1 Introduction

The interaction between work and family has long been of concern to policy makers and researchers. Initially this concern was driven by the substantial increase in the rate of female labour force participation over recent decades,¹ particularly of mothers, and what the implications of this were for the ability of mothers to combine paid employment and child-rearing successfully. More recently, there has been a growing awareness that the balance between work and family is also important for men (Russell and Bowman 2000).

An important component of the ability of people to balance work and family commitments is the availability of working arrangements that facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life. Such arrangements are often referred to as “family-friendly” work practices. Many different categorisations of family-friendly work-practices have been proposed. The OECD has recently used the following categories: leave from work for family reasons; changes to work arrangements for family reasons; practical help with child care and care of the elderly; and relevant information and training (see Appendix A for more details).

Over the last twenty years both the number of employers offering a range of family-friendly work practices, and the number of employees availing themselves of such opportunities has increased (Junor 1998; Work and Family Unit 1999; Russell and Bowman 2000). While much is known about broad trends in the availability and use of family-friendly work practices, much less is known about differences *within* and *between* organisations in the access to, and use of, these work practices.

To date, existing research on differences within organisations has been based on small-scale case studies of large organisations, often selected for their reputation for providing innovative solutions for employees seeking to balance family and work responsibilities. This research has identified differences in internal access to family-friendly work arrangements, which is often related to the position of employees in the firm (Breakspear 1998; Glass and Estes 1997; Whitehouse and Zetlin 1999; Biggs and Han 2000).

The number and types of workplaces that report having family-friendly work arrangements, and the number and characteristics of employees who report having access to such arrangements, have been well documented (Evans 2001; Junor 1998; Morehead *et al.* 1997; Whitehouse and Zetlin 1999; Wolcott and Glezer 1995; Work and Family Unit 1999). One of the conclusions which can be drawn from this research is that employers are more likely to say they offer family-friendly work practices than employees are to report using these practices. Differences in responses of these two groups is, in part, explained by differences in employee and employer questioning about family-friendly work practices. In general, surveys have asked employees what they do, rather than what they are *allowed* to do – the latter being the question generally asked of employers.

Qualitative studies have found that employees will not take advantage of family-responsive policies – particularly leave, work reduction and work schedule policies – if they feel that doing so will jeopardise their job security, work assignments or chances of promotion (for example, Whitehouse and Zetlin 1999). Further, employees often have been found to be unaware of their entitlements (ACTU 2000).

For employees to have the *possibility* of access to family-friendly work practices, those practices obviously must be available in the first place. The nature of the changes needed to increase access to family-friendly work arrangements across the spectrum of all employment situations therefore depends upon the distribution (and hence availability) of such work arrangements both between and within different organisations. For example, at one extreme, organisations might make available family-friendly work practices to all or no employees; at the other end of the spectrum, such arrangements might be available to some, but not all, employees. The solution, then, lies in an increase both in the overall number of organisations offering these work practices, and greater coverage of employees within organisations generally.²

This paper looks at the extent to which access to family-friendly work practices is influenced or determined by differential access *within* or *between* organisations. The analysis is based upon the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey 1995 (AWIRS95), a linked employee–employer data set.

The rest of this report is structured as follows. The next chapter looks at the types of family-friendly work arrangements analysed in the report and outlines the theory and empirical literature. Chapter 3 examines the institutional context for practices within the Australian labour market and, in particular, Australian Workplace Agreements and awards. Chapter 4 describes the AWIRS95 Survey and the measures of family-friendly work practices available. An analysis of the distribution of family-friendly work practices within and between workplaces is undertaken in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 provides a formal statistical model of the factors that determine which employees within a given firm are most likely to have access to family-friendly work practices. Finally, Chapter 7 presents some concluding comments, highlighting the implications of the results of this research for future policy and practice.