Work-life balance and family friendly policies

Natalie Skinner
Janine Chapman
Centre for Work + Life
University of South Australia
GPO Box 2471, SA 5001
Author contact: Natalie.skinner@unisa.edu.au

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Abstract

This paper presents Australian and international research on work-life interaction. We review the work-life policies and practices that are likely to have the greatest impact on work-life outcomes, specifically reducing the negative impact of work on other life domains (work-life interference), and enhancing the positive effect (work-life facilitation). The review addresses four policy areas common in work-life studies of the general workforce: employee-centered flexible work practices; working hours (e.g. access to part-time work); paid and unpaid leave (e.g. parental leave); and access to childcare. It then considers the work-life literature related to two specific industries – the Australian public sector, and health and social services – to identify work-life issues and practices specific to each industry. We then conclude with a general discussion of challenges associated with the policy-practice gap, focusing particularly on work intensification and the role of organisational culture as the catalyst for policy uptake and effectiveness.

Work-life and work-family issues have been the subject of rhetorical, policy and research attention in Australia in recent years, leading to lively discussion about the implications of poor work-life fit for both individuals and society. Changes in the Australian labour market have seen the traditional male breadwinner/female homemaker household give way to a dual-earner norm; 63 percent of couples with children under 15 years are now in this category (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009).

One consequence of these changes is that experiences of combining paid work with other life domains – including family and care responsibilities – are increasingly common. Many studies from 2000 onwards have observed that workers are finding it harder to juggle their working lives with commitments at home, and work-life conflict, imbalance and strain are now common for working Australians. A recent Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2005), for example, reported that over 70 percent of those aged 18-65 would like to spend more time in leisure pursuits or with their family, and nearly 40 percent wanted to spend less time at work.

There is substantial evidence that the cost of poor work-life interaction on individuals, families and society as a whole is high. Canadian researchers have estimated the costs of work-family conflict to the health care system to be as high as C$2.8 billion (Higgins et al. 2004). In addition, a number of previous reviews and meta-analyses have demonstrated that experiences of high work-life conflict are linked to lower job satisfaction and organisational commitment, as well as impaired physical and psychological health (Allen et al. 2000; Amstad et al. 2011; Beauregard and Henry 2009). Recent data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey have shown that work-family strain predicts decreased physical and mental health throughout the subsequent year (Magee et al. 2012).

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Direct relationships between work-life interaction and performance, productivity or organisational profitability are more complex, given the range of factors that impact on these outcomes (Beauregard and Henry 2009). Meta-analyses of the association between work-life conflict, job performance and productivity estimate a small but negative correlation (Allen et al. 2000; Gilboa et al. 2008; Hoobler et al. 2010; Amstad et al. 2011). In their narrative review, Beauregard and Henry (2009) observe evidence for a positive effect of organisational work-life balance practices on recruitment, retention, attendance (including turnover intention), and productivity. One explanation is that employees reciprocate with increased loyalty, effort and productivity in exchange for the organisation's practical assistance with managing work-life demands, and in appreciation for the organisation's indication of care and concern as demonstrated by work-life policies and practices (Beauregard and Henry 2009). A German study estimated a productivity gain of 0.1 percent per hour per employee from work-family benefits. This was attributed to the positive effects of greater motivation and commitment, reduced illness and chronic health problems, and increased time for education and training (Prognos 2005, cited in Hegewisch 2009, 45). A large Finnish study of over 25,000 public sector workers observed that low work-time control was associated with increased medically certified sickness absence (at 28 months follow-up), whereas high work-time control alleviated the effects of work hours (domestic and paid work combined) on sickness absence (Ala-Mursula et al. 2006). Furthermore, positive experiences of work-life balance have been shown to generate organisational benefits including higher retention rates and attendance and lower turnover intentions (Beauregard and Henry 2009; Haar and Bardoel 2008).

In light of the above, issues of work and life are an increasing focus for policy initatives at government and organisational levels in Australia and beyond. There are four general policy areas that shape discussion in this domain (see Brough et al. 2008; Baird 2011; Hegewisch and Gornick 2011). The first relates to employee-centered flexibility, for example changing the location or scheduling of work to fit personal circumstances. Previous international reviews have shown strong evidence for the positive effects of flexible work practices on work-life balance, health and wellbeing and job outcomes (Nijp et al. 2012). Elsewhere, however, evidence is mixed regarding the degree to which flexible work practices impact on work-life outcomes (e.g. Allen et al. 2013).

The second main policy area related to work-life interaction is paid and unpaid leave, for example access to parental leave or holidays. Providing paid and unpaid family leave is considered best practice to enable workers to meet their paid work and family responsibilities (Baird and Whitehouse 2012, King et al. 2012, Work + Family Policy Roundtable 2013). Most research in this area addresses implications for gender equity in the workforce (women's participation in paid work) and at home (men's contribution to childcare). Longer periods of maternity leave are generally associated with better health outcomes for mother and infant (for a review of this research see Productivity Commission 2009). Australian research has observed that fathers are unlikely to use unpaid parental leave (Whitehouse et al. 2007), and international analyses report that fathers' uptake is most likely when framed as an individual right with universal eligibility; as a 'use it or lose it' policy; or with high wage compensation and allowances for flexible use (Smith and Williams 2007; Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Hegewisch and Gornick 2011).

The third policy area of interest is the length of working hours, with the majority of research from Australia and overseas suggesting a direct relationship between work-life conflict and long working hours or pressure to work long hours (e.g. Holden et al. 2010). Australia shows strong gendered patterns of working hours, with more men working full-time and long full-time hours. These gendered patterns of working are most evident for parents of young children, with women showing more variation in actual and preferred working hours

over the life-span, closely linked to childcare needs (Pocock et al. 2012; Drago, Wooden and Black 2006).

This leads into the forth main policy area, which relates to childcare and access to childcare. Similar to paid parental leave, access to high quality childcare is considered an essential support for parents' participation in paid work. As Bianchi and Milkie (2010, 710) observe: 'childcare ... forms the nucleus of what much 'work-family' conflict is about – how to care for children adequately when parents need or want to work outside the home'. Most Australian and New Zealand research in this area examines the impact of childcare accessibility (including quality and cost) on women's employment participation (Breunig et al. 2011); factors that influence parents' decisions to use particular types of childcare (e.g., family-provided or formal services); or issues related to children's health (Bohanna et al. 2012).

Aims and method

The broad aim of this paper is to review the evidence for work-life policies and practices that are likely to have the greatest impact on work-life outcomes, either by reducing the negative impact of work on other life domains (work-life interference) or enhancing the positive effect (work-life facilitation). We will examine these issues both in the general workforce and in specific industries.

The review comprises three main sections. The first section gives an overview of current research related to the four major policy areas most commonly discussed in the work-life domain: employee-centered flexible work practices, working hours, paid and unpaid leave, and access to childcare. This section draws from studies from the general workforce in Australia and New Zealand, supplemented by select international studies where evidence is sparse.

The second section reviews literature from two key industries: the public sector, and health and social services. This section examines work-life issues and outcomes in specific contexts that are typically characterised by long working hours and/or high and pressured workloads, providing evidence from which to further inform policy aimed at overcoming work-life challenges. The international studies in both review sections are highlighted throughout, given that the social, cultural and industrial relations context may differ from that of Australia and New Zealand (see Brough et al. 2008).

The final section is a general discussion of the findings with a particular focus on work intensity and organisational culture, as there is substantial evidence that work-life policies are unlikely to be effective unless these two issues are also addressed.

The criteria for studies included in the review are as follows:

1. The study must include quantitative measures of, or qualitative reference to, work-life outcomes (work-life conflict and/or work-life facilitation), conducted in Australia or New Zealand where possible
2. The study findings must be applicable to policy formation and development
3. The article must be published between 2000 and 2013 in a peer-reviewed publication.

The search strategy conducted from May to August 2013 comprised database searches of Web of Knowledge, Academic Search Premier, Business Source Complete, PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The search used the following search terms:

1. work-family or work-life,

2. work-family or work-life combined with the keywords policy, longitudinal/panel/ prospective/ intervention/experiment/evaluation/trial,
3. work/job/employment plus work-family or work-life combined with keywords flexible/flexibility, hours/time, leave and childcare.

Additional manual searches were also conducted on the websites of the major Australian longitudinal surveys: the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA), Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), and the Negotiating the Life Course (NLC) study. A manual search of studies cited in these publications was also conducted. In addition, we reviewed relevant studies identified by existing reviews of Australian and New Zealand research (e.g. Bardoel et al. 2008).

The search produced 1926 papers that were considered for inclusion in the review. After removing duplicates and studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria, we identified a total of 16 Australian or New Zealand studies of the general workforce, supplemented by 7 international studies (Table 1). In addition, we identified 10 studies that were specific to the public sector, and 17 to health and social services (Table 2).

While the focus of this review is on work-related policies and practices, it is important to acknowledge that other factors such as life stage can have a significant impact on work-life interaction. Most studies included in the current review either do not provide a substantive analysis of life stage, or deliberately focus on workers with dependent children who are most likely to experience work-life pressures and tensions. The small literature that directly addresses work-life interaction across the life stages is worth a brief review.

Younger workers often place a high priority on their social life as they navigate towards long-term relationships. As Moen (2011, 6) observes: 'high performance jobs that leave young adults no time to date or search for partners are also a work-family issue', as are demanding jobs that discourage couples from having children. In the early stages of family formation, and for workers with school aged children, work and family demands tend to be at their peak (Erickson, Martinengo and Hill 2010). For mid-career and older workers, work-life pressures may not decrease but rather change focus, with many combining parenting of teenage children with elder care (the 'sandwich generation') (Beutell and Wittig-Berman 2008; Dilworth and Kingsbury 2005). Many workers from the Baby Boomer and older generations prefer to transition into retirement via part-time work and 'downshifting' into lower pressure, more flexible jobs (Erickson et al. 2010; Hutchens and Dentinger 2003). A failure to address the work-life needs and preferences of older workers is likely to speed up their transition to retirement (Raymo and Sweeney 2006).

In reality, there are likely to be similarities and differences in work-life needs across the life course. As Moen, Kelly and Huang (2008) observe, regardless of life stage/family circumstances, jobs high in demands and low in control are associated with high work-life conflict. Erickson et al. (2010) found that workers across different life stages from family formation to 'empty nesters' benefitted from flexibility in different ways; flexibility reduced work-family conflict and strain for parents of young children, and increased older workers' capacity to achieve a better fit between work and other life commitments and interests.

What policies and practices make a difference?

In this section we give an overview of the evidence on flexible work practices, working hours, leave, and access to childcare from 23 studies on the general workforce. Of these, 21 report quantitative methods, 1 qualitative (Brough et al. 2009), and 1 mixed- methods (survey data with a qualitative element; Renda et al. 2009). Table 1 gives a brief summary of the characteristics and outcomes of each study reviewed, except where indicated.

Methodological issues raised by the evidence base

In the process of conducting the review, we observed a number of methodological issues with the current evidence base. These issues are common to both the Australian/New Zealand literature and the international literature. Perhaps the issue of most concern is the data collection methodology used in the majority of studies. The most common methodology is cross-sectional survey-based studies. In both local and international research, longitudinal studies and experimental organisational interventions are rare. In their systematic review of work-life research in Australian and New Zealand from 2004-2007, Bardoel and colleagues (2008) observed that only 6 out of 63 studies used longitudinal data, the remainder were cross-sectional. In their more recent review Brough and O'Driscoll (2010, 280) observed that research evaluating organisational interventions addressing work-life balance is 'extremely sparse'. Similar limitations with regard to the absence of experimental or quasi-experimental designs have been observed in the international work-life literature (Kelly et al. 2008; Chang, McDonald and Burton 2010). A major weakness of Australian and New Zealand studies is the lack of methodological rigour in establishing causal relationships between work factors and work-life outcomes, which may be due to the limited use of intervention or longitudinal research designs; the international studies selected for inclusion use mainly these methodologies, as indicated below.

The majority of studies use survey-based measurement. Whilst a range of measures have been used to assess work-life outcomes, there are two common themes: time pressure and emotional strain. These are well-established dimensions of work-life conflict. The majority of studies, however, are solely focused on these negative impacts of work on non-work domains. Very few measures have been developed and used in research to evaluate positive effects (work-life facilitation). Carlson and Grzywacz (2008) argue that this measurement bias results in an unbalanced view on the interaction between work and non-work domains, where the benefits of work are somewhat under-acknowledged in the work-life literature.

Finally, the participants in the majority of work-life studies are professionals in above-average income categories. Very few studies are conducted with diverse populations, particularly those in low paid occupations such as manual labour. Further, most studies focus on child care providers, with little attention paid to those providing care to older or disabled family members (Chang et al. 2010). It may be the case that unique work-life challenges are experienced by these groups – for example insufficient or unreliable paid work hours, or unexpected family emergencies – that would require different work-life policies and supports than those required by parents working in professional white-collar occupations. Clearly, including more diverse samples of employees in work-life studies is a priority for future research.

Flexibility

Four studies of the general workforce that assessed the use of flexible work practices observed an association with reduced work-life interference (Alexander and Baxter 2005; Skinner and Pocock 2008; Hayman 2009; Skinner and Pocock 2011a). The evidence on the impact of specific flexibility practices is mixed. Flexible time scheduling (e.g., change start and finish times) is consistently associated with reduced work-life interference (Alexander and Baxter 2005; Skinner and Pocock 2008; Hayman 2009). One study found no work-life benefit from the use of flexi-place (job share) arrangements (Hayman 2009), whereas another study by the same author observed a positive effect (Hayman 2010). One study found contrary results. Brough et al.'s (2005) study used a combined measure of work resources that included flexible work arrangements (the most frequently used resource). Greater use of these resources was associated with greater satisfaction with family life, but was not related

to work-family conflict. In a study of New Zealand managers, perceptions of supervisor and organisational support for family-responsive policies, including flextime, were also related to a reduction in work-family conflict (O'Driscoll et al. 2003).

As noted previously, there is very little published research on organisational interventions to address work-life interaction. In an earlier review, Brough and O'Driscoll (2010) identified only nine studies published from 1987 onwards. They emphasised that worker input and control over changes to work arrangements (such as the scheduling of work) is crucial to the success of such interventions, and that alternative work scheduling may not be preferred or suitable for all workers, depending on their work and personal circumstances. A Cochrane Collaboration systematic review of flexibility interventions reached a similar conclusion – that flexibility is beneficial when it involves an increase in workers' control over work scheduling, such as self-rostering shift-work (Joyce et al. 2010).

We identified three papers that describe an organisational intervention and include measurement of work-life outcomes (Kelly et al. 2011; Moen et al. 2011a; 2011b). The papers describe different aspects of a single intervention: an organisational change program in 'Best Buy' headquarters in the U.S. This program introduced changes to work practices, supervision styles, and organisational culture. The focus of the 'Results Only Work Environment' (ROWE) was on the achievement of work tasks/goals/deliverables, with workers given complete control over where and when they did their work (as long as it got done effectively). Analyses indicate that this increased schedule control is responsible for the positive outcomes observed as a result of the intervention, specifically reduced work-family conflict, lower turnover, and improved health.

Working hours

All 10 New Zealand and Australian studies that considered working hours found that longer work hours were associated with higher work-life interference (Gray et al. 2004; Alexander and Baxter 2005; Brough et al. 2005; Hosking and Western 2008; Macky and Boxall 2008; Skinner and Pocock 2008; Losoncz and Bortolotto 2009; Peetz et al. 2011; Skinner and Pocock 2011a; Brown 2012). However, it should be noted that a cut-off point has not been defined for the length of work hours representing an unacceptable level of risk for health, wellbeing and safety. Much depends on the context within which those hours are worked, including factors such as the physical and mental intensity of the work, level of autonomy or control, scheduling of work, and worker characteristics. As a guide, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines more than 48 hours as 'very long' (Boulin et al. 2006), and the EU's Working Time Directive (European Parliament 2003) places an upper limit on weekly working hours of 48 hours, including overtime.

There are some indications from the research literature about levels of working hours that are most likely to contribute to work-life interference. In a study of Australian fathers, Gray et al. (2004) found that men working longer than 40 hours had higher work-family strains. Two Australian studies have observed that prolonged long hours sustained over two years (Brown 2012, 41+ hours) or 12 months (Peetz et al. 2011, 45+ hours) were associated with poorer work-life outcomes. Others have observed that full-time hours are associated with worse work-life outcomes (Hosking and Western 2008; Skinner and Pocock 2011a), and that an organisational culture that expects long hours is also associated with worse work-life balance (Macky and Boxall 2008; Peetz et al. 2011). In sum, Australian and New Zealand research indicates that work hours over around 40-41 per week are likely to negatively impact on work-life outcomes.

In a large longitudinal study of risk factors for work-family conflict conducted in the Netherlands, extended hours in the form of overtime and commuting to work were predictive of work-family conflict for female workers. This was not the case for men, who were more at

risk from the effects of irregular shift-work hours. Baseline overtime work and commuting time were related to higher work-home interference in both part-time and full-time workers (Jansen et al. 2003; 2004).

Leave

Two Australian qualitative studies observe that access to flexible work arrangements and paid family leave are important for parents' capacity to manage paid work and family responsibilities (Brough et al. 2009; Renda et al. 2009). In a study of parents' transition back to paid work after the birth of a child, Brough, O'Driscoll and Biggs (2009) observed that parents with little or no access to paid parental leave (at the time of the study, prior to recent legislative changes) were more likely to return to work due to financial pressures. They also reported a range of negative outcomes on their personal health and wellbeing (including child attachment) and in the work sphere (reduced satisfaction and commitment). Some fathers reported difficulty accessing parental or recreational leave, and this was perceived to affect father-child attachment and also increase pressure for their partners as the primary caregivers. Similar to other research, the importance of organisational culture was emphasised. Parents who had experienced a lack of support on return to their workplace (e.g. contract and pay issues, lower quality job role, lack of opportunities) reported considering moving to a more family friendly employer (Brough et al. 2009).

With regard to recreation leave, a nationally representative survey of working Australians observed clear links between lack of uptake of full recreational leave entitlements and higher work-life interference for women and parents, with the strongest association observed for working mothers (Skinner and Pocock 2013a).

Childcare

The current review found limited research on the implications of childcare for work-life outcomes. Australian studies using qualitative interviews to canvass mothers' views emphasise the importance of childcare for both women's employment participation and their work-life balance (Renda et al. 2009, Table 1; see also Table 2 for Baines 2011 and Nowak et al. 2013). Two US (survey) studies of university employees investigated the relationship between childcare use and work-family outcomes. Payne et al. (2012) observed that employees with pre-school aged children who had access to high quality and convenient childcare had lower family-to-work conflict, and this in turn was associated with lower turnover intentions and increased worker wellbeing. Morrissey and Warner (2011) found that over 70 percent of workers using an employer-provided scheme to reduce childcare costs agreed that this arrangement reduced their work-family stress, and had a positive impact on their intention to continue working at the university (Table 1).

Industry studies: Work-life outcomes in unique industrial contexts

The discussion so far has focused primarily on research conducted at a general workforce level, and including a range of industries and occupations. Here we focus on two specific industries to examine work-life issues and outcomes in the public sector in general and the health/health social services sector in particular. Health and social services was chosen as the second industry as it contains a large proportion of government employees, and has also been subject to a sufficient number of studies to support a review. A brief summary of the characteristics and outcomes of all 27 industry-specific studies can be found in Table 2.

Public sector

Ten Australian and New Zealand studies were identified, comprising five cross-sectional organisational surveys (Donnelly et al. 2012; Haar 2004; Lindorff 2011; McCrae et al. 2011; Smith and Gardner 2007) and three qualitative studies (Baehler and Bryson 2009; McDonald et al. 2007; 2009) and two mixed-methods case studies comprising quantitative surveys and interviews (Colley 2010; Todd and Binns 2013) on national, state and local government employees (Table 2).

Many public sector organisations have comprehensive work-life policies that extend beyond those available in other sectors. Such benefits are often argued to be a key to recruitment, especially in areas where parallel private sector remuneration may be higher. On the other hand, studies commonly observe a significant gap between policy and practice in the public sector. In more recent times the increasing emphasis at state and federal levels of extracting an 'efficiency dividend' from the public service is likely to present further challenges to the development and uptake of work-life policies in this sector. As described earlier, there is clear evidence that reducing work-life conflict has a positive impact on the organisational outcomes (such as performance and productivity) that efficiency dividends aim to address.

What must be acknowledged and understood is that these effects of work-life balance initiatives operate over the longer term, and via substantive but indirect pathways such as reduced absenteeism and turnover, and more highly motivated and engaged workers. In this context it is worth considering a large Australian study (N = 78,587) of workers from 58 organisations in the public, private and NGO sectors. Clear associations were observed between longer work hours (40+ per week) and both absenteeism and reduced performance effectiveness. As Holden et al. (2010, 288) conclude: 'employers striving to increase productivity by expecting employees to work long hours may not increase performance at all as the employees work less effectively and absenteeism increases.' Clearly, initiatives that support good quality jobs, including reasonable working hours, and workers' health and wellbeing, do produce gains in productivity and performance that are sustainable long term.

Studies in the present review show that work-life policies such as flexibility, carers leave and part-time work are highly valued by employees and have a positive impact on work-life outcomes, job satisfaction and retention (Haar 2004; Donnelly et al. 2012; Todd and Binns 2013). However, uptake of flexible work practices is often thwarted by extensive workloads in this sector. For example, in their survey of female public servants, Donnelly et al. (2012) observed that whilst the majority of workers reported control over timing of holidays and breaks, most lacked control over the amount of work or overtime hours, leading to negative work-life outcomes. Workload was also observed to be the strongest predictor of work-life interference in McCrea et al.'s (2011) survey of Queensland government employees.

The importance of organisational culture, often expressed in terms of managerial attitudes and behaviours, is also emphasised in studies of public sector workers. McCrea et al. (2011) observed that participative management styles that increased workers' opportunities for input and influence were associated with improved job quality, which in turn reduced work-life interference. Managerial support also emerged as a key predictor of uptake of work-life balance initiatives and reduced work-family conflict in Smith and Gardner's (2007) survey of New Zealand government employees within a departmental business unit.

In a mixed-method research project involving case studies of four public sector agencies in Western Australia, Todd and Binns (2013) observed a substantial divide between policy and practice, with significant variation in employees' perceptions of accessibility and support across agencies. The majority of survey respondents indicated they were either uncomfortable or neutral about using work-life balance policies, including flexi-time and reduced schedules, due to differences in the attitudes of individual managers and ongoing workforce issues such

as staff shortages. Access to part-time work and flexible scheduling was also perceived to conflict with operational and workload requirements, particularly in regard to employees involved in frontline service provision. Long hours and physical presence was expected of managers, providing a barrier to the use of work-life initiatives. This pattern was echoed by Lindorff (2011), who observed that executive-level public servants were least satisfied with the organisational support for work-life balance, and by McDonald et al. (2007), whose interviews with flexible workers suggested that working flexibly and achieving senior positions and career advancement were not compatible. Flexibility at work also tended to be gender-specific, intended for women with childcare responsibilities (McDonald et al. 2007; Todd and Binns 2013).

Other studies suggest that workers in the public sector face a unique set of demands. Baehler and Bryson's (2009) study of New Zealand government policy analysts and advisors identify these stressors as 'extreme workloads' combining urgency and volume with technically difficult work; managing large amounts of information; having little control over the content or prioritisation of rapidly-changing policy agendas; chronic shortages of skilled staff; and cultural pressures to over-perform. Long hours and overtime done during traditional leisure time (evenings, weekends) were common consequences of such work pressures.

McDonald, Bradley and Brown (2009) further observe that a reduction to part-time hours is often associated with diminished job quality in this sector. Specifically, assignment of roles and projects with less responsibility (hence less opportunity for skill development and career advancement), less access to promotion opportunities and senior positions, and work intensification as workloads were not adjusted appropriately to match reduced hours. Part-time workers also reported low levels of management support for these working arrangements and mixed reactions from coworkers. Colley's (2010) case studies in the Queensland public sector further observe that access to, and experiences of, part-time work were mixed. Those that had a positive experience identified this as a strong factor in their job retention. In contrast, others reported significant negative effects on career development and other opportunities when working part-time. Awareness of, and access to, telecommuting was also poor.

Health and social services

Seventeen studies were identified in the health and social services sector. Six of these were from international research, including longitudinal and intervention studies (Barnett and Garies 2002; Barnett et al. 2008; Bailyn et al. 2007; Mauno 2010; Nabe-Neilson et al. 2011; Pryce et al. 2006), and one study was an international comparison of Australia and Canada (Baines 2011). Seven of these studies were qualitative (Baines 2011; Lindsay et al. 2009; Maher et al. 2010; Skinner et al. 2011b; 2013b; Soma et al. 2012; West et al. 2012) and three had mixed-method approaches (Bailyn et al. 2007; Nowark et al. 2013; Pryce et al. 2011) (Table 2).

In the highly feminised health and human services workforce, it is not surprising that a common theme in the literature was the management of paid work alongside childcare. In a qualitative study of not-for-profit community social services in Victoria, managing care responsibilities was a key issue for both mothers caring for their own children, and grandmothers providing care for grandchildren (Baines 2011). Workers' capacity to engage in paid work and provide childcare was significantly impeded by the expectation of unpaid overtime, discouragement of time in lieu and few opportunities for part-time hours for non-managerial and frontline service positions. These factors were linked with high rates of turnover and a reluctance of women to return to work after maternity leave (Baines 2011). Such experiences of work-life conflict were also associated with intention to continue nursing

in a large study of nurses in hospitals across four Australian states (Shacklock and Brunetto 2011). Nowak et al. (2013) conclude that provision of onsite childcare facilities may overcome some of the substantial work-care challenges preventing female health professionals in Western Australia from returning to work after maternity leave. Skinner et al.'s (2011b; 2013b) study of Australian nurses and midwives also observed childcare to be a major source of work-life strain, along with high workload, a lack of access to leave (due to staff shortages) and a lack of input on work schedules.

The opportunities and challenges for managing work and care in the context of shiftwork is also a common theme in studies of health professionals. Shiftwork is observed to both support and impede workers' capacity to manage work and care (Maher et al. 2010; Nowak et al. 2013; West et al. 2012). Lindsay et al. (2009) and Skinner et al. (2011b) note that shiftwork can enable nurses to effectively coordinate care and domestic work with their partners, with casual shiftwork offering the greatest capacity to choose suitable shift schedules. A series of US studies of doctors and nurses observed that the degree of fit between actual and preferred work schedules was a strong and consistent predictor of work-life conflict and psychological distress, and a stronger predictor than simple length of work hours (Barnett and Gareis 2002; Barnett et al. 2008). Consistent with this, Pisarki et al. (2008) observed that greater control over work environment, including shift allocations, was associated with reduced work-life conflict in Australian nurses.

International studies have evaluated self-rostering as one method of increasing health workers' access to work schedules that fit with their preferences, yielding mixed results. Perucci et al. (2007) provide evidence that such interventions improve nurses' satisfaction with their shift schedules and their work in general, which impacts positively on work-life balance and wellbeing. In addition, Pryce, Alberston, and Nielson (2006) found that an open-rota system in which Danish nurses self-scheduled their work and rest periods had significant benefits for job satisfaction, work-life balance and team cohesion. However, self-rostering can be challenging to organise successfully. Bailyn et al.'s (2007) self-scheduling intervention with nurses was stopped after two months due to difficulties with application. Other evaluations of self-rostering have observed little beneficial impact on work-related or wellbeing outcomes (Nabe-Nielsen et al. 2011). Bailyn et al. (2007) suggest that self-rostering may have a better chance of success if conducted using small groups to enable greater communication, and an equal focus on both the preferences of employee and specific staffing requirements across shifts.

Other approaches to improving work schedule fit, such as sensitive and responsive supervision, may be more likely to have a positive effect on work-life outcomes. In a longitudinal study of Finnish health care workers, Mauno et al. (2010) observed that perceived manager support of workers' work-family balance predicted lower levels of work-family conflict two years subsequently. However, the same study also found that perceptions of an unsupportive work-family culture (negative career consequences of using work-family benefits, and high organisational time demands) had no effect on experiences of work-life conflict. This finding needs to be interpreted with care, as the authors note that in Finland there are strong statutory entitlements to work-family benefits, such as flexible work and paid parental leave – hence Finnish employees may not experience strong barriers to accessing these resources. Pisarki et al. (2008) and Nowak et al. (2013) similarly highlight the common experience of a significant gap between formal policies designed to support work-family balance in the healthcare sector, and the reality of unsupportive management decisions that block access to these arrangements.

A number of studies also emphasised the lack of capacity to take recreational and other types of leave when wanted or needed, impacting negatively on work-life outcomes. This was the case for nurses (Skinner et al. 2013b), GPs (Shrestha and Joyce 2011), and orthodontists

(Soma et al. 2012) in the current review. Nabe-Neilson et al.'s (2011) study of Dutch health care employees also highlights the role of work stress in influencing outcomes, reporting that cognitive (e.g. high need for precision), emotional (e.g. exposure to aggression and trauma) and physical stressors (e.g. difficult lifting) predicted work-home conflict one year subsequently.

General discussion

The preceding discussion offers a review of current research related to work-life policies and practices, with the aim of informing future initiatives to improve work-life experiences for Australian workers. In line with previous reviews, this article found that the uptake of flexible working practices, reduced working hours, access to suitable childcare, and appropriate leave, is generally associated with positive work-life outcomes. However, robust evidence is sparse in areas, particularly in regard to intervention and evaluation work.

The review also sought to shed light on work-life issues and outcomes for workers in two specific industries typically categorised by high demand/long hours cultures. While flexible work arrangements are clearly valued by public sector employees, the reviewed literature demonstrated how access and uptake of family-friendly policies were easily thwarted by demanding work environments, pressures and staff shortages. Further, there is evidence that flexible work practices within full-time hours (e.g. flexible start and finish times, time off during the work day to attend to family commitments) are also beneficial.

Moving to the health sector, the reviewed studies again highlight the importance of supportive management in ensuring access to flexible or part-time arrangements. For shift workers, scheduling shifts with flexibility and sensitivity to personal needs and preferences is a key factor in determining whether shift work impedes or supports work-life balance. Whilst there is clearly a need for shift workers to have some degree of input over their schedules, the evidence is mixed with regard to feasibility and the most effective application of self-rostering systems. Negotiations and arrangements around working hours need to be tailored, as much as possible, to individual workers' circumstances. The capacity to manage paid work and care responsibilities is a recurring theme across health professionals and is a central issue for workforce sustainability. Given the chronic health workforce shortages, meeting health professionals' work-life balance needs is clearly a win-win for individuals and the sector.

This review has highlighted the complex mix of factors that impact on work-life outcomes, including the broad context that defines an industry sector, and the more nuanced context of specific organisational cultures. State and federal legislation also play an important role. The four policy areas reviewed in this paper (flexibility, working hours, leave and childcare) are key areas of industrial relations legislation. The nature and extent to which legislation impacts on the work-life interaction of individual workers or groups (e.g. women, fathers, older workers) is a matter of ongoing debate in the Australian and international literature. There are many factors that augment or diminish the impact of government legislation on the work-life balance of its citizens, including prevailing economic conditions and socio-cultural values (Pocock, Charlesworth and Chapman 2013). Nevertheless, legislation that provides workers with rights and entitlements to access essential resources, such as paid parental leave, flexible work arrangements and good quality childcare, has been shown to positively impact fundamental aspects of gender equality that underpin work-life balance. These include women's participation in paid work and capacity to combine paid employment with care-giving, and men's participation in the care of their children (Hegewisch and Gornick 2011).

Further, Baird (2011) argues that legislative change such as that introduced by the *Fair Work A*ct (2009) also impacts on social norms related to work and employment, reflected for example in the emphasis on employee-centered flexible work practices by organisations identifying as 'best practice' or an 'employer of choice'. As the current review highlights, employees' perceptions of their work-life balance is likely to be more strongly influenced by more proximal factors, such as organisational culture. The current review, along with recent developments in work-life theory and practice, has further highlighted the risk that policies to improve work-life interaction may have the opposite effect. For example, flexible work practices can lead to an intensification of work if workloads are not adjusted accordingly. This issue is of particular concern given that workload or work intensity is identified as one of the most consistent predictors of work-life conflict (e.g. Macky and Boxall 2008, Skinner and Pocock 2008, Peetz et al. 2011). This research indicates that work-family policies and practices that change working arrangements, such as flexibility and work hours, should be developed and implemented in combination with assessments and realistic adjustments to workload. It is also noteworthy that the industry studies emphasise workload and expectations of long hours as significant impediments to the uptake and/or beneficial impact of flexible work arrangements.

Additionally, the use of family-friendly provisions such as regular leave entitlements, flexibility and part-time work may inadvertently indicate less career commitment, reducing the likelihood of career progression (e.g. Hosking and Western 2008). While part-time work is likely to reduce general experiences of work-life conflict, it is also widely observed that part-time hours often involve work that is lower paid and less secure, involving less autonomy and skill discretion (Bardoel et al. 2007; McDonald et al. 2009). Hence, reduced hours may improve work-life outcomes, but other important aspects of job quality, opportunity and financial security are substantially reduced. A comprehensive policy approach to part-time and reduced hours work would include measures to ensure good quality part-time work that does not disadvantage employees on these important outcomes.

However, the factor that has demonstrated the strongest and most consistent impact on work-life outcomes – including job satisfaction, burnout and work-family conflict – is organisational culture. This finding is in line with a number of previous reviews including Brough and O'Driscoll, who observe: 'without a genuinely supportive culture, the gap between policy and practice can be striking' (2010. 292). A work culture that supports and assists with managing work-life balance signals to the employee that their employer cares for their wellbeing, leading to positive outcomes for the employee and the organisation through increased loyalty, effort and productivity (see Beauregard and Henry 2009). McDonald and colleagues (2007) identified five key dimensions of workplace culture in relation to work-life issues: manager support; organisational time expectations; career consequences; gendered perceptions of policy use, and co-worker support. These core dimensions of culture concur with observations from other research in the current review. As frequently demonstrated throughout the literature, policies are likely to have little impact on work-life outcomes in the absence of a congruent and supportive organisational culture. This is indicated by a number of studies showing that the availability of work-life policies in the workplace does not necessarily lead to their use (e.g. O'Driscoll et al. 2003).

With regard to practical strategies for changing organisational culture, the current literature heavily emphasises the central role of managers and supervisors. They have the power to create organisational cultures that either support or impede workers' willingness and capacity to use work-life policies such as flexible work practices (e.g. O'Driscoll et al. 2003; Haar 2004; Smith and Gardner 2007). Supervisors who have a creative approach to work-family management; role model good work-life practices, and offer practical and emotional support are likely to contribute to a family-friendly work culture (Hammer et al. 2009).

McCrea et al. (2011) reported that participative management (including employee participation in problem solving and work design to achieve organisational goals) improved key aspects of job quality, which in turn reduced experiences of work-life interference (see Table 2). Such strategies that can be easily incorporated into day-to-day operations are likely to yield considerable benefit to both the individual and organisation.

Although this review has addressed various dimensions of the modern workplace, we have not addressed one of the most pervasive aspects of 21st century work: new technologies such as smartphones and other devices that enable 24/7 accessibility of work and of colleagues and clients. The impact of technology on work-life interaction was not the focus of studies included in this review. However, the broader research literature on work has explored the notion of these new communication technologies as a 'double edged sword' that enables flexibility and autonomy, and also contributes to feelings of work overload and intrusion into non-work time (Barley, Meyerson and Grodal 2011; Duxbury and Smart 2011; Gregg 2011; Pocock and Skinner 2011). The intersection between organisational culture, flexible work practices and work-life interaction has been identified as a priority area for future research on work-life balance (Duxbury and Smart 2011).

Conclusion

In addition to identifying practices that have the potential to improve work-life facilitation, the current review has considered what makes policy effective in practice, including the notion of potentially negative consequences. Such consequences include reduced employment participation of women, reduced career opportunities for flexible or part-time workers, and reduced access to preferred roles, tasks and opportunities that both use workers' full range of skills, and provide opportunity for development and advancement. Whether framed as unintended consequences or overt discrimination, it is crucial to recognise that work-life policies will only be effective to the extent that workers do not experience economic, social or career penalties with policy use.

Fundamental to a supportive and successful work-life culture is recognition and respect for the responsibilities and commitments of all employees outside work. In this context, assumptions and expectations around gender and care are central. In their recent review, Pocock et al. (2013) highlight strong undercurrents of traditional values, observing that the gender culture in Australia has proven particularly resilient, with contradictory norms that support women's increased employment participation, yet insist that mothers' primary responsibilities are to their families. This norm can be described as the expectation and cultural assumption that workers are willing and able to prioritise work over other life activities and commitments such as care for children or elders.

For work-life policies to be truly effective they must be accepted and integrated into the mainstream for all workers – not simply as a special consideration for working mothers. Multifaceted policy approaches are needed that set the foundation for change. More inclusive employment regulation, better quality part-time work and a greater policy focus on men's uptake of flexible work are likely to alleviate some of the burdens and causes of work-life conflict across industries – alongside cultural shifts in workplace gender norms.

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Table 1 Characteristics and outcomes of included studies in the general workforce

Study	Sample (n)	Methodology / context	Predictors (quant) / Research question (qual)	Outcome measures	Findings
Alexander and Baxter (2005)	Australian mothers and fathers of children aged between 3 months and 5 years. (n = 10,090 wave 1)	• Cross-sectional analysis • LSAC Wave 1 (household interviews) • Nationally representative sample	Work hours (length and fit with preference) Flexibility (change start and finish times if needed)	Work-family strain	• Strain increases with: longer hours, preference to work fewer hours (stronger predictor than absolute hours) • Strain decreases with greater flexibility • Fathers have higher work-family strain when unadjusted for work hours and other factors. No gender difference when scores are adjusted
Brough, O'Driscoll, and Kalliath (2005)	Male and female employees from 23 large NZ organisations; members of NZ Institute of Management (T1 n = 618; T1 and T2 = 398)	• Longitudinal analysis (3 month interval) • Convenience sample (60% response rate)	Frequency of use of workplace resources (crèche, flexible work hours, family-friendly policies, job sharing, assistance child/elder care, family insurance/savings plan, general support to meet family needs	Work-family conflict Family satisfaction	• Work-family conflict increased with longer work hours • Use of work resources (T1) increased family satisfaction (T2) • No relationship work resources and work-family conflict • No gender differences in work-family conflict • Parents have higher work-family conflict than those without dependent children
Brough, O'Driscoll and Biggs (2009)	41 NZ and 40 Australian parents (male and female) who had returned to work within 1 year of child's birth	• Qualitative semi-structured interviews • Iterative thematic analysis	Perceived effects of parental leave provisions, organisational and family support and job changes on experiences of work-family balance on parents returning to work after birth of a child	N/A	• Limited or no access to paid parental leave led to premature return to work resulting in adverse consequences (personal health, child attachment, breast feeding / low job commitment and high turnover intention). • Major determinants of work-family balance: Access to paid parental leave, adequate leave duration and organisational support
Brown (2012)	Male and female Australian employees	• HILDA Waves 1 and 2 • Nationally representative sample	Sustained long work hours (work for long hours for two consecutive time periods over two years) Long hours = 41+ hours per week, on average, over two year period	Work-life balance (satisfaction with capacity to balance work and non-work commitments)	• Sustained long hours associated with reduced work-life balance
Gray, Qu, Stanton, and Weston (2004)	Australian employed fathers working full-time (35+ hours) (n = 1479)	• Cross-sectional analysis • HILDA Wave 1 • Nationally representative sample	Work hours (length satisfaction with, and preferred number)	Work-family strains and gains	• Fathers working more than 40 hours stronger work-family strains than fathers working 35 – 40 hours
Hayman (2009)	Male and female administrative employees from an Australian University (n = 710)	• Cross-sectional analysis • Organisational survey, convenience sample, (60% response rate)	Perceived usability of flexible work practices	Work-life balance (work interference in personal life, work/personal life enhancement)	• Work-life balance worsens with longer hours • Workers on flexi-time had better work-life balance than workers on fixed hours • Flexi-place and job share work schedules were not associated with improved work-life balance • Perceived usability of flexible work arrangements is associated with better work-life balance • Parents report higher work-life interference than those without dependent children

Study	Sample (n)	Methodology / context	Predictors (quant) / Research question (qual)	Outcome measures	Findings
Hayman (2010)	Male and female administrative employees from an Australian University (n = 336)	• Cross-sectional analysis • Organisational survey, convenience sample (response rate not reported)	Work role overload, flexible work schedule (flexitime, flexiplace)	• Work-life balance (work interference personal life, work/personal life enhancement • Job stress, job satisfaction	• Flexi-time associated with better work-life balance, reduced work overload and stress, increased job satisfaction • Flexi-place associated with better work-life balance and increased job satisfaction, but not related to role overload or job stress
Hosking and Western (2008)	Male and female parents or guardians in Australian households (n = 2312)	• Cross-sectional analysis • HILDA Wave 1 • Nationally representative sample	Work hours (weekly, daily), workplace culture, work autonomy, job stress	Work-family strain	• Part-time work, higher work autonomy and more supportive workplace culture associated with less work-family conflict • Longer weekly hours among part-time mothers and full-time fathers are associated with higher levels of work–family conflict. • No gender difference in work-family conflict with controls for job and household characteristics • Parents of young children have higher work-family conflict (amongst full-time workers)
Jansen, Kant, Kristensen and Nijhuis (2003)	Dutch male and female working population (n = 9655)	• Longitudinal cohort study, results reported at one year • 79% response rate	• Work characteristics (psychological work demands, decision latitude, social support, work conflicts, job insecurity, work hours flex/overtime/ commute) • Demands and support at home	Work-family conflict	• Men: psychological/physical/ emotional job demands, job insecurity, decision latitude, coworker and supervisor social support • Women: overtime work, commuting time, physical demands
Jansen, et al. (2004)	Dutch male and female working population (n = 6947)	• Longitudinal cohort study, results reported at 8 months • 71% response rate	Work time arrangements	Work-home interference	• Full-time workers: hours, lack of compensation for overtime, increase in hours, unpredictable schedule, commuting time, not able to take day off when wanted • Part-time workers: frequent overtime, commuting time
Kelly, Moen and Tranby (2011)	US employees at white-collar organisation (n = 608; Intervention n = 302; Control n = 306)	• Results-Only-Work-Environment (ROWE) workplace intervention: quasi-experimental design with nonequivalent control group • 2 web-based surveys at baseline (1 month prior to ROWE) and 6 months posttest	ROWE content: Employee and manager training, Flexible work practices made the norm for workers and managers- access for all employees regardless of gender, Change culture and practices so that employees 'do what they want, as long as work gets done', Increased worker schedule control	Work-family conflict	• Reduction in work-family conflict, improvement in work-family fit • Increase in schedule control provided by ROWE is responsible or improved work-family outcomes
Losoncz and Bortolotto (2009)	Females in paid work with parenting responsibilities for any children aged 17 years or less (n = 1,238)	• Cross-sectional analysis • HILDA Wave 5 • Nationally representative sample	Variables used to generate clusters, defined as homogenous groups across set of characteristics: Work hours (length and fit with preference), flexible work arrangements (access and use), job control, work overload, work-family gains and strains	Work-family relationships /tensions	• Six clusters identified representing different groups of Australian mothers • Two clusters of mothers successful at managing work and family responsibilities defined by low paid and unpaid work hours and low work stress • Two clusters of mothers with most strained work-family relationship defined by long work hours, high work overload and lack of support from others • Mothers with highest work-family tensions also report worst outcomes on physical and mental health measures

Study	Sample (n)	Methodology / context	Predictors (quant) / Research question (qual)	Outcome measures	Findings
Macky and Boxall (2008)	Male and female New Zealand employees (permanent contract, 30+ hours per week) (n = 775)	• Cross-sectional analysis • Computer-assisted telephone interviews • Nationally representative sample (34.2% response rate)	Work overload, organisational time demands (cultural expectations long hours)	Work-life imbalance	• Work-life imbalance worsened with longer hours, higher work overload and greater time demands • Perceptions of work overload / time demands stronger predictor of work-life imbalance than length of hours
Moen, Kelly and Hill (2011a)	US employees at white-collar organisation (n = 608; Intervention n = 302; Control n = 306)	• Results-Only-Work-Environment (ROWE) workplace intervention (see Kelly, Moen and Tranby, 2011)	(see Kelly, Moen and Tranby, 2011)	Turnover intentions / rates 8 months after ROWE intervention	• ROWE participants had lower turnover intentions and actual turnover
Moen, Kelly, Tranby and Hunag (2011b)	US employees at white-collar organisation (n = 608; Intervention n = 302; Control n = 306)	• Results-Only-Work-Environment (ROWE) workplace intervention (see Kelly, Moen and Tranby, 2011)	(see Kelly, Moen and Tranby, 2011)	Work-life conflict / schedule control	• Increase in schedule control and decreased work-life conflict resulted in improved health outcomes (increase in sleep hours, decreases in emotional exhaustion and psychological distress, increase in self-report health)
Morrissey and Warner (2011)	US female and male university employees with dependent children (N = 776) 40% response rate	• Organisational survey evaluating an employee-sponsored childcare voucher program	N/A	Satisfaction with childcare Work-life balance	• Families with preschool children, White families, and those using paid home-based care were more satisfied with childcare arrangements than those with school-age children, minority ethnic families or those using after school care • 47% using program reported benefits to WLB
O'Driscoll et al. (2003)	Male and female New Zealand managers (n = 355)	• Cross sectional analysis • Convenience sample across variety of industries, recruitment via professional association	Supervisor and organisational support for work-life balance (separate measures), availability and usage of organisational family-responsive policies (flex-time, compressed work schedule, telecommuting, child-care, part-time work, information/referral services, paid leave for maternity, paternity and elder care)	Work-family conflict	• Work-family conflict decreased with higher perceptions of supervisor and organisational support • Work-family conflict reduced with the usage of organisational family policies, but not related to availability of organisational benefits per se
Payne, Cook and Diaz (2012)	US female and male university employees with under school age children (N = 316) 35% response rate	• Organisational survey	• Job satisfaction • Wellbeing • Childcare related absenteeism • Turnover intentions	• Family interfering with work (FIW) • Childcare satisfaction	• Time-based FIW explained the relationship between childcare satisfaction (caregiver convenience dimension) and both turnover intentions and absenteeism • Strain-based FIW mediated childcare satisfaction (caregiver attentiveness dimension) on wellbeing

Study	Sample (n)	Methodology / context	Predictors (quant) / Research question (qual)	Outcome measures	Findings
Peetz, Muurlink, Townsend, Allan, and Fox (2011)	Male and female Australian employees (n = 2002)	• Convenience sample Organisational survey of 15 organisations across variety of industries	• Work hours, change in work hours over past 12 months • Work pressure index (work overload, overtime, inadequate breaks) • Unsupportive culture (expectations of long hours and pressure to work harder) • Close managerial supervision/control • Spouse perceptions of participant's work	Satisfaction with work-life balance	• Dissatisfaction with WLB / deteriorating home relationships more likely with longer hours (45+), increase in hours over the past 12 months, higher work pressure, unsupportive culture and higher managerial supervision/control • High work pressure associated with: decreased satisfaction with WLB over past year, reduced time spent family/personal activities, higher interference with social life, fatigue outside of work, spouse perceptions of poor WLB • Work pressure stronger predictor of work-life dissatisfaction than hours worked per se • Women more dissatisfied with WLB than men when working part-time, no gender difference for full-time
Renda, Baxter and Alexander (2009)	LSAC Survey respondents, Australian mothers of children aged 15-29 months only (n = 3,189)	• Mixed-methods: quantitative survey data from 2005 Parental Leave in Australia Survey (Wave 1.5 of LSAC) with qualitative open-ended responses	N/A survey to determine what work-family policies would help after the birth of a child	N/A	• Mothers who returned to work full-time were more likely to say that work-family policies (access to PT work/leave options/breast feeding facilities/quality childcare) would help • Affordable childcare was perceived the most useful policy for all mothers regardless of paid work status
Skinner and Pocock (2008)	Male and female Australian employees working full-time (n = 887)	• Cross sectional analysis • AWALI 2007 • Nationally representative sample	Work overload, work hours (length and fit with preference), control over work time scheduling	Work-life conflict	• Workload strongest predictor of higher work-life conflict • Work-life conflict also increased with longer hours, poorer fit of hours to preference and lower control over work time scheduling • Work hours fit was a significant predictor of work–life conflict only for women
Skinner and Pocock (2011a)	Male and female Australian employees (n = 887)	• Cross sectional analysis • AWALI 2009 • Nationally representative sample	Work hours (length, fit with preferences), use of flexible work arrangements	Work-life conflict	• Work-life conflict increases with longer hours, and when working longer hours than preferred • Work-life conflict is lower for employees who had a flexibility request fully granted, compared to either partially granted or refused • Women have higher work-life conflict than men, when working comparable hours • Work hours have strongest association with work-life conflict for women
Skinner and Pocock (2013a)	Male and female Australian employees (n = 1528)	• Cross sectional analysis • AWALI 2010 • Nationally representative sample	Uptake of paid leave	Work-life conflict	• Not taking full paid recreational leave entitlement (4 weeks) associated with higher work-life conflict • Pattern only observed for women (no association with work-life conflict for men) and for parents. Strongest association observed for mothers

Notes
NS: non-significant.
LSAC: Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.
HILDA: Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia project.

Table 2 Characteristics and outcomes of included industry-specific studies

Study	Sample (n)	Methodology and context	Predictors (quant) / Research question (qual)	Outcome measures	Findings
Public Sector					
Baehler and Bryson (2009)	Policy managers and senior advisors in the NZ State Service (n = 24)	• Qualitative semi-structured interviews and one focus group	Sources of occupational stress and wellbeing	N/A	• Workload demands combined with role proliferation and complexity (multi-tasking) and pressure to over-perform influenced experiences of stress
Colley (2010)	Employees in predominantly white-collar roles in Australian public sector workforce (n > 1000)	• Mixed-methods case study: organisational web-based quantitative surveys with qualitative open-ended responses	Employee awareness of work-life balance options and perceptions about access to flexible work arrangements	N/A	• Employees had reasonably high awareness of flexible working arrangements but experienced barriers to access due to lack of opportunity and inequalities
Donnelly, Proctor-Thomson and Plimmer (2012)	Female NZ public servants (n = 7292)	• Cross sectional analysis • Survey of members of the New Zealand Public Service Association (21.9% response rate)	Work schedule autonomy	Uptake of flexible work arrangements Work-life fit Turnover intention	• Workers with better work-life fit more likely to report greater autonomy in setting work schedule, intention to stay/apply for higher level position • Most common barriers preventing access to flexible work arrangements were time pressure/workload, not wanting to burden colleagues, anxiety about future employment • >70% of workers report autonomy over when taking holidays, work breaks and ordering of tasks. < 30% workers report control over working additional hours or workload. • 52% work longer than contracted hours, majority without financial compensation (84%), and 44% without access to time in lieu
Haar (2004)	New Zealand local government employees (n = 100)	• Cross-sectional analysis • Organisational survey, convenience sample (48.5% response rate)	Work-family conflict	Turnover intention	• Work-family conflict predicted turnover intention • Perceived work-family support did not buffer (moderate) this association
Lindorff (2011)	Australian public service employees (n = 5472)	• Cross-sectional analysis • Organisational survey (2008), • Convenience sample (response rate not reported)	Organisational level, gender	Work-life balance (WLB) Job satisfaction	• Executive level employees less satisfied with support for WLB • Women more satisfied with WLB support than men • WLB support predicts job satisfaction for employees at all levels
McCrea, Boreham, and Ferguson (2011)	Queensland government employees (n = 2990)	• Cross-sectional analysis • Survey of Queensland Public Sector Union members • Convenience sample (17% response rate)	Participative management, flexibility, meaningful work, workload, work uncertainty	Work-life interference (WLI)	• WLI increased with longer hours, higher workload, less flexibility, more uncertainty and less work meaningfulness and participative management practices. Workload strongest predictor of WLI. • Participative management reduces WLI via beneficial effects on work uncertainty, workload, flexibility and meaningful work.

Study	Sample (n)	Methodology and context	Predictors (quant) / Research question (qual)	Outcome measures	Findings
McDonald, Pini and Bradley (2007)	Employees using flexible work practices in Australian local government organisation (n = 22)	• Qualitative semi-structured interviews	The impact of work-life culture on employees using flexible work practices	N/A	• Manager / co-worker support, time expectations, career consequences, and gendered perceptions of policy use were found to influence cultural barriers preventing the effective use of work-life policies
McDonald, Bradley and Brown (2009)	Full-time employees in Australian local government organisation (n = 40)	• Qualitative semi-structured interviews	Full-time workers' understandings and assumptions about part-time work and job quality	N/A	• Concerns revealed about the quality of part-time work: reduced responsibility, lack of opportunity, increased work intensity and less support. Disproportionately affects women who balance work and care
Smith and Gardner (2007)	New Zealand government employees (business division of one department) (n = 153)	• Cross-sectional analysis • Organisational survey, • Convenience sample (50% response rate)	Managerial, supervisory and co-worker support, time demands, perceived career damage from using WLB initiatives,	Use of WLB initiatives (e.g., flextime, carers leave, job sharing, part-time work, telecommuting) Work-family conflict	• Work-family conflict increased with lower managerial support and higher time demands, and decreased with greater use of WLB initiatives • More WLB initiatives used by employees who were: women, younger, aware of initiatives and supported by their managers
Todd and Binns (2013)	Employees at four WA public sector agencies Survey (n = 522) Interviews (n = 120)	• Mixed-methods case studies: quantitative organisational survey and interviews	N/A Implementation of work-life balance policies in four WA public sector agencies	N/A	• Employee requests to access WLB policies are perceived as in conflict with operational goals for many managers, acting as a barrier to uptake
Health Sector					
Baines (2011)	Females in the non-profit sector in Australia and Canada (n = 63)	• Qualitative semi-structured interviews • Grounded Theory analysis	Strategies employed by women in the non-profit social services sector to balance work-family demands and implications of these	N/A	• Australia: high staff turnover after children, grandparents provide childcare • Social entitlements / support may have unanticipated outcomes in marginalising women
Barnett and Gareis (2002)	US female married, full-time and reduced hours physicians (n = 98)	• Quantitative surveys using paper and pencil and structured interview methods	Work hours Low-schedule household tasks	Marital-role quality	• Physicians who worked reduced hours and performed more low-schedule household tasks had lower marital-role quality than those working more hours and engaging in fewer household tasks
Barnett, Gareis and Brennan (2008)	US dual-earner families (children aged 8-14), mother registered nurse on day or evening shifts (n = 55)	• Quantitative surveys using paper and pencil and structured interview methods	Work variables (work shift, work hours)	Work family conflict Psychological distress Marital-role quality	• Wives' work variables (particularly evening shifts and long hours) predicted their own work-family conflict and showed a trend to also predict husbands' work-family conflict.
Bailyn, Collins and Song (2007)	US registered nurses on one floor of hospital unit (n = 70 in unit)	• Mixed-methods: quantitative surveys with qualitative open-ended responses, objective measures of number of change requests /sick calls and manager time spent scheduling	N/A Evaluation of 1 year pilot intervention on self –scheduling and assess values and difficulties in implementation	N/A	• Nurses felt they had better control of their time and could give better patient care, change requests decreased. But nurses did not adhere to the rules of the program so it did not continue

Study	Sample (n)	Methodology and context	Predictors (quant) / Research question (qual)	Outcome measures	Findings
Lindsay, Maher and Bardoel (2009)	Australian nursing families with at least one child under 12 (n = 20)	• Qualitative semi-structured interviews • Grounded Theory analysis	How nursing families manage the relationship between paid work and care	N/A	• Most families followed male full-time / female part-time / casual model to enable family life. Womens' (but not mens') employment situations change to fit in with family
Maher, Lindsay and Bardoel (2010)	Australian nursing families with at least one child under 12 (n = 20)	• Qualitative semi-structured interviews • Grounded Theory analysis	Using 'family time economies' framework to capture information on management and coordination of shiftwork and care responsibilities	N/A	• Nurses and families use available flexibility to ensure time for family care, competed with desire for unstructured family time
Mauno (2010)	Finnish health care workers (n = 409)	• 2 year longitudinal panel study • Organisational survey (response rate T1 46%, T2 66%)	Work-family culture	Wellbeing (work-family conflict, work engagement, job exhaustion)	• Work family culture contains negative (work-family barriers) and positive (work-family support) facets. Work –family support showed a lagged effect on work-family conflict over time
Nabe-Neilson, Garde and Diderichsen (2011)	Dutch elder care workers (n = 309)	• Quasi-experimental intervention, 1- year follow-up, using surveys and health measurements. • Comparison of 3 groups: (1) computerised self-scheduling, (2) attending course on flexiblility, (3) group discussions of work-time influence	Work-time and work-time influence	Health and well-being	• Employees in the computerised self-scheduling group became increasingly involved in self-rostering, but increased work-time influence did not lead to better health and wellbeing
Nowark, Naude and Thomas (2013)	Australian female health professionals on maternity leave	• Mixed-methods: quantitative surveys with qualitative open-ended responses	How responsibilities for childcare are managed in families at the time of return to work after maternity leave	N/A	• Half expected family members to provide childcare, 15% formal arrangements. Dissonance was experienced between policy and practice at management level, employer-centred flexibility often disrupted care arrangements
Pisarki et al (2008)	Nurses employed in an Australian hospital (n = 530)	• Cross sectional analysis • Organisational survey • Convenience sample (36% response rate)	Work-life conflict, supervisor and collegiate support, team identity and climate, control over work environment (including shift allocations)	Psychological and physical health	• Supervisor support increased perceived control over work environment • Work-life conflict declined with greater control over work environment • Higher work-life conflict predicted decreased physical and mental health
Pryce, Albertson and Nielsen (2011)	Danish nurses in psychiatric hospital (n = 177)	• Intervention, survey data at baseline and 20 month follow-up • Intervention: open-rota system • Control: design own rest schedule	Evaluate the impact of open-rota system	Health, work-life balance, job satisfaction	• Intervention group more satisfied with work hours, less likely to swap shifts, had significant increases in work-life balance, job satisfaction, social support and community spirit compared with controls
Shacklock and Brunetto (2011)	Nurses employed in seven Australian hospitals across four states (n = 900)	• Cross sectional analysis • Organisational survey • Convenience sample (36% response rate)	Quality of supervisor relationship, work-family conflict, autonomy, work attachment, flexible work arrangements, interpersonal relationships at work, importance of working	Intention to continue nursing	• Work-family conflict had weak but statistically significant association with intention to continue • Attachment to work strongest predictor of intention to continue

Study	Sample (n)	Methodology and context	Predictors (quant) / Research question (qual)	Outcome measures	Findings
Shrestha and Joyce (2011)	Australian GPs providing clinical services (n = 3906)	• Cross sectional analysis • Population survey • Convenience sample (17.6% response rate)	Gender, generation, work hours, workload, time pressure	Balance between personal and professional commitments, intention to quit and reduce/increase hours	• Female GPs report worse balance when controlling for difference in work hours • Baby Boomers report longest hours and worse balance • Work-life balance worse with longer hours, unpredictable hours and difficulties taking time off when wanted. • Work-life balance associated with intention to reduce hours, but not intention to quit medical practice
Skinner, van Dijk, Elton and Auer (2011b)	Australian nursing and midwifery employees Study 1 (n = 24) Study 2 (n = 25)	• Qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus group	Workplace factors impacting on retention, wellbeing and work-life interaction	N/A	• Nursing provided meaning and satisfaction, but potential for high levels of work-life conflict and negative spillover of stress into non-work-life was evident (workload, scheduling, childcare)
Skinner, Elton, Auer and Pocock (2013b)	Australian health professionals (n = 105)	• Qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus groups	Managing work-life interaction across the life course for healthcare workers	N/A	• Link between unresponsive policies and worker withdrawal / turnover. Workers have different needs at different times of life. Flexibility and reduced hours are useful and valued by all
Soma, Thomson, Morgaine and Harding (2012)	NZ orthodontics (n = 19)	• Qualitative semi-structured interviews • Grounded Theory analysis	Working lives and work-life balance in orthodontists	N/A	• Lack of capacity to take time off, injuries common due to repetitive tasks. Family life is commonly affected by demands of work
West, Mapedzahama, Ahern and Rudge (2012)	Australian female mid-life registered nurses Survey respondents (n = 1433) Interviewees (n = 13)	• Qualitative content analysis of open-ended survey items and semi-structured interviews	Advantages and disadvantages of shiftwork	N/A	• Shiftwork is used to facilitate manageable work-life negotiations, self-care and physical presence for children • Developing and maintaining shiftwork tolerance important