

Study examines benefits, effects of family-friendly workplace policies

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A happy worker is a productive worker. That adage may be true, according to a new study from The University of Texas at Dallas.

Two UT Dallas public affairs researchers found that family-friendly policies are beneficial for increasing productivity of employees in public organizations, and the authors said the finding likely lends itself to job satisfaction and commitment.

The study, published in the *Public Personnel Management*, investigated the effects of family-friendly human resources policies in public organizations. Using the Korea Workplace Panel Survey data from 2005 to 2009, the study sampled 158 public organizations in South Korea.

Kwang Bin Bae, public affairs doctoral candidate and lead author of the study, said he learned about family-friendly policies in Dr. Doug Goodman's Advanced Capital in Research and Theory class. Bae also has a personal connection to the topic.

"I was interested in family-friendly policies because my mother is a working mom," said Bae, who grew up in Seoul, South Korea. "She has to balance her job in the workplace and raising a family. I think getting help from the family-friendly policies would benefit families as well as society."

South Korea has experienced a significant increase in female employees over the past 50 years. These workers, however, have remained

economically inactive as a result of a male-centered workplace, cultural barriers, societal pressures and gender inequality, according to the report. Many women quit their jobs to focus on child care.

The South Korean government encourages efforts to promote family-friendly policies to help employees balance responsibilities at work and at home. After the government revised its labor laws, many organizations began to adopt these types of policies.

The study used a bundle of family-friendly policies stipulated by law, including maternity leave, child care leave, on-site [child care](#), restriction of night duties and restriction of overtime work.

Researchers investigated the relationship between family-friendly policies and organizational performance, voluntary turnover rate and labor productivity. They found:

- Family-friendly policies have significant effects on increasing productivity.
- The number of family-friendly policies does not seem to decrease turnover rates.
- Unionization is related to decreased turnover rate and increased productivity.
- An increased proportion of female workers is related to higher turnover rates.

Goodman, associate professor of public affairs and director of the master in [public affairs](#) program, co-authored the paper. He said he was surprised by the lack of effect on turnover rates.

"One of the things we haven't been able to figure out yet is do these organizations have a high number of family-friendly policies because they employ a high percentage of women—and are trying to stave

turnover—and the effects have not caught up yet," Goodman said, "or do these organizations have such a high percentage of females employed that the turnover rate is going to always be high, just because the women outnumber the men, no matter the number of family-friendly policies?"

The authors said further exploration is needed to assess the relative strength of each family-friendly [policy](#). They also want to study the effects in other cultures.

"Because of the hierarchy culture in South Korea, many people hesitate to utilize family-friendly policies because of cultural reasons, including the attitudes toward female workers," Bae said. "Female workers who wish to use these policies are concerned about discrimination such as promotion or evaluation. Furthermore, female workers may find it difficult to assert their privileges in a hierarchical work environment."

More information: "The Influence of Family-Friendly Policies on Turnover and Performance in South Korea." *Public Personnel Management* 0091026014536055, first published on June 11, 2014 [DOI: 10.1177/0091026014536055](https://doi.org/10.1177/0091026014536055)

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