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FAMILY-FRIENDLY EMPLOYMENT POLICIES: WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT?

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HONORS THESIS

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Family-friendly employment policies are “programs or policies designed to help accommodate the needs of today’s diverse workforce” (Allen, 2001, p. 414). Families have become more diverse in their makeup: there are more single parents, same-sex couples, and a strong increase in the number of dual-earner couples (Wisensale, 2001). All of these are characteristics of the changing family, which creates the need for altered family-friendly employment policies.

As thoroughly described by Wisensale (2001), the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is the only national employment policy, and in a country of small businesses, it does not accommodate many of its citizens by only addressing the needs of companies with fifty or more employees. FMLA provides leave for the employee, an employee’s child, spouse, and elderly parent. While many people associate FMLA with the birth of a child, “nearly a third of FMLA leaves are taken to care for family members other than infants” (Gornick & Meyers, 2003, p. 115). Many of the researchers viewed the changing family as a way for women to enter the workforce, rather than fathers becoming more domestic. Under the FMLA, women are not the only employees who are eligible to use these benefits, and “in two-parent families, fathers are now expected to be more involved with their children, and workplaces are expected to accommodate those efforts” (Brady & Elms, 2005, p. 251). As families are changing, it is important for employers and employees to understand how they can both accommodate for and benefit from the policies and benefits that are available.

Many researchers consider family-friendly policies to be important for various reasons, particularly because of the need for employees to balance work and family obligations. Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness (1999), for example, define family-friendly benefits as

“services that enable employees to better manage the interface between work and family” (p. 395). Despite the reason for using such policies, it is important to ask what future and current employees want, for it is their policy to use. Brady and Elms (2005) make a valid point by stating that “public opinion clearly does not always determine the actions of political leaders, [but] it can influence the direction and speed of changes in public policy” (p. 242). Agreeing with such opinions in terms of both government and employer provided policies and benefits, it is important to ask how individuals view specific policies, so that the changing policies can best accommodate the public.

Learning what policies and benefits are most important to employees is the first step to changing workplace policies so they can accommodate employees and their families. Parker and Allen (2001) focus on workplace characteristics as an important variable by questioning employees about their place of work, and the comparison between males and females. One result of their study is that, “females were more supportive of work/family benefits... [and] viewed work/family benefits more fair than males” (p. 464). Relative to the support of women, Baird and Reynolds (2004) also compared men and women, specifically finding that women are “four times more likely than men to be aware of family leave policies” (p. 340). There is a general finding in studies of work and family benefits that women are more supportive and aware of family-friendly policies than men.

These results suggest that men in general are not as concerned about the time off for the family as women are, thus maintaining their less domestic role as the breadwinning father. This gender gap is encouraged by “many top executives [who] continue to expect their male employees to be loyal to the firm” (Wisensale, 2001, p. 89). Contrary to the studies that find this gender gap, Brady and Elms (2005) conclude that men and women equally think it is important

for a parent to leave for the care of a new baby, yet without specifying if the leave includes birth, adoption, and foster care.

While most college students are not parents when they are surveyed, there is some literature on the new generation and their views on family-friendly policies. Moen and Roehling (2005) found that the younger generation of men are more in favor of women working than are older generations. However, they still consider the caring of children to be a woman's job. Moen and Roehling (2005) continue to address a slowly changing stereotypes of women, yet men still maintain the traditional idea that it is not their job to stay home with the children. As a result, employed women are still the ones who are, and will be, making job and career sacrifices for their children.

In terms of who should be providing benefits, the difference in opinions between employer and government provisions of policies and benefits is not mentioned often within the literature on family-friendly policies. Brady and Elms (2005) do address this issue by simply asking the sample's opinion on government providing specific benefits. However, other research mainly focuses on what can be done to improve the family-friendliness without actually questioning how people think these policies should be implemented.

When researchers question policies or benefits they usually focus on specific forms of family-friendly policy or benefits that they consider important. Because of the variation in definitions of benefits, the researchers who describe each benefit instead of simply using terms like "flextime" and "telecommuting" are more useful. For example, instead of asking a question about flextime, Pitt-Catsouphes and Googins (2005) phrase the question to ask about the sample's opinions on "periodically changing starting and quitting times" (p.230), making a difference in the response characteristics of the survey. Thompson et al. (1999) discuss such

benefits in detail as a part of their measures, though they do not adequately describe the benefits within the survey, expecting respondents to understand the dimensions of each benefit. For example, one particular question asked if “employees who use flextime are less likely to advance their careers than those who do not use flextime”. An example of a better questionnaire is the one by Covin and Brush (1993), who managed to briefly describe the benefit being surveyed, so that respondents will have the same definition of the specific benefits. Brady and Elms (2005) bring up the need to describe the terms of leave policy, and the difference it can make, particularly referring to time. The example they give asks about general leave, as opposed to adding a specific amount of twelve weeks off. Their results show a significant difference in the answers associated with these questions.

Although the work and family literature is an excellent basis for the understanding of family-friendly employment policies, and the reactions people have toward these policies, there is little literature specifically addressing what people themselves want from their workplace policies and how they want this accomplished. This study will describe how my research is aimed at filling this gap in the literature.

METHODS

The design of this study was a survey questionnaire. This form of research was most appropriate because of its ability to question a large number of students and alumni about their opinions related to family-friendly employment policies. The use of quantitative data from the questionnaire establishes the sample's level of support for policies and benefits, while also determining the kind of policies and benefits people want.

Sample

Two generations were sampled: fourth year students at the University of Connecticut, representing the next generation of employees, and members of the University of Connecticut Alumni Association who graduated between the years 1970 and 1978, representing the Baby Boom generation. After obtaining IRB approval from the University of Connecticut, the fourth year students were contacted through the Senior Year Experience email list server at the University of Connecticut. These students were sent a link through email in which they could access the online survey. A random sample of 100 men and 100 women was drawn from the full list of members from the University of Connecticut Alumni Association who graduated between 1970 and 1978. These 200 members of the University of Connecticut Alumni Association were invited to participate in the survey through a mailing which contained the website link.

The final sample consisted of 503 students (151 males and 352 females) and 51 alumni (27 males and 22 females). Of the student sample, the majority identified themselves as white (89.8%). Their futures after graduation were mostly dedicated to graduate school (38.4%) or a full-time job (37.8%); while some were continuing programs that lasted more than four years, as well as students obtaining their Bachelor of General Studies. Most students were not married

(61.3%) and many identified as not married and in a committed relationship (27.2%). A significant number of students do not have children (92.7%), but plan on having or adopting children in the future (83.5%).

Of the alumni represented in this sample, virtually all identified themselves as white (98%). For their current job status, the majority are employed full-time (60.8%), and some are retired (13.7%). The majority of alumni are married (84%) and have children (90.2%), and none of them (0%) plan on having or adopting children in the future.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument for this research was an online questionnaire. Both students and alumni received virtually the same questionnaire, with some slightly different demographic questions, addressing their current work status and levels of education (see questions 1-9 in the Appendix). The questionnaire consisted of four main sections asking students and alumni what they believe should be provided by employers; what should be mandated by the government; what they have used or would have used if available to them; and what they believe they will use in the future. The questionnaire concluded with a quiz on the Family and Medical Leave Act to get a better idea of what students and alumni know about rights employees have under the Family and Medical Leave Act.

Each of these four sections asked virtually the same questions to determine any parallel or unparallel views on each topic. The questions were based on the survey by Brady and Elms (2005) in which they ask, “Do you think the government should require companies to allow up to six months unpaid leave for parents to spend time with their newborn or newly adopted children, or is this something that should be left up to the individual employer?” (p. 259). The questions

were also based on the survey by Colvin and Brush (1993) in which they compared students with a particular group of human resource professions. Questions were not directly taken from this survey, but the format of the questions was a good basis for asking if employers or government *should* provide benefits. Questions were also based on the policies and programs addressed by Pitt-Catsoupes and Googins (2005), particularly their use of flexible work arrangements.

The questionnaire began with demographic questions, followed by parallel sections concerning employers and government providing benefits (see Appendix). These questions were asked on a five point Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 2=somewhat agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=somewhat disagree, and 5=strongly disagree). Both of the aforementioned sections concluded with questions where participants checked all that applied. The section on what they have or would have used if available was set up in a “check all that apply” format. The next section of what the sample believes they will use in the future was set up on a three point Likert scale (1=very likely, 2=somewhat likely, and 3=not at all likely). The next section asked what students and alumni are worried about for the future, based on a four point Likert scale (1=very worried, 2=somewhat worried, 3=a little worried, and 4=not at all worried). The concluding section of the questionnaire was a quiz on the Family and Medical Leave Act, which was adapted from a quiz on Monster.com by Caldwell (n.d.). There was also a place at the end for participants to comment on the survey.

Analysis

The analysis of the data was based on description statistics to describe the responses for the sample as a whole, as well as the four groups within the sample (male students, female students, male alumni, and female alumni). The generations were analyzed with the alumni

representing the Baby Boom generation, and the students representing the generation about to enter the workforce. The comparison between males and females was also considered during analysis. Frequency distributions were used to analyze the data.

FINDINGS

The following findings are based on three major topic areas: employer-provided leave after birth and adoption, sick leave, and the choice of employer or government provided benefits. There is much more data from the survey that was not analyzed. For the purpose of this thesis, the aforementioned topics areas are focused on because they are central to understanding what people want in terms of family-friendly employment policies and benefits.

Employer-Provided Leave after Birth and Adoption

There was very little opposition to employees taking a leave from work after the birth of a child. When asking about six months leave for mothers and fathers after the birth of a child, male alumni were most likely to disagree, but the overwhelming majority was supportive (51.85% strongly agree, 25.93% somewhat agree). The majority of the sample was supportive of a father having six months leave after the birth of a child, though the support was not as strong as the support for a mother taking six-months leave. Compared to the distribution of responses to the question about a six month leave for mothers after a birth, there was a sizable increase in the number of people who responded “neither agree nor disagree” when asked whether employers should give fathers six months leave after the birth of a child (See Table 1.1).

When asking about six months leave after the adoption of the child, there is less support than for leave after the birth of a child (see Table 1.2). However, the majority of the sample agrees with having this leave available. In terms of fathers having six months leave after the adoption of a child, the support decreases, with the alumni males least supportive of the four groups.

Table 1.1 Support for Employer-Provided Unspecified Length of Leave After Birth

Support (Likert Scale 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Somewhat Agree, 3=Neither Agree or Disagree, 4= Somewhat Agree, 5=Strongly Disagree)

		Male Students	Female Students	Male Alumni	Female Alumni
Mother's Leave	1	82.67%	91.76%	77.78%	81.82%
	2	15.33%	7.10%	14.81%	18.18%
	3	0.00%	0.85%	0.00%	0.00%
	4	1.33%	0.28%	7.41%	0.00%
	5	0.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Father's Leave	1	43.62%	73.79%	44.44%	68.18%
	2	29.53%	19.66%	25.93%	18.18%
	3	18.79%	3.99%	22.22%	13.64%
	4	5.37%	1.99%	3.70%	0.00%
	5	2.68%	0.57%	3.70%	0.00%

Table 1.2 Support for Employer-Provided Six Months Leave After Adoption

Support (Likert Scale 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Somewhat Agree, 3=Neither Agree or Disagree, 4= Somewhat Agree, 5=Strongly Disagree)

		Male Students	Female Students	Male Alumni	Female Alumni
Mother's Leave	1	34.90%	58.81%	40.74%	38.10%
	2	41.61%	32.10%	37.04%	47.62%
	3	12.08%	5.40%	0.00%	9.52%
	4	8.72%	2.27%	14.81%	4.76%
	5	2.68%	1.42%	7.41%	0.00%
Father's Leave	1	18.67%	46.44%	18.52%	28.57%
	2	39.33%	38.18%	25.93%	38.10%
	3	26.67%	8.83%	22.22%	23.81%
	4	10.00%	5.13%	22.22%	9.52%
	5	5.33%	1.42%	11.11%	0.00%

An interesting finding is the difference in support when asking if mothers or fathers should have time off and the ability to return to their occupational position after the birth or adoption of a child, as opposed to a specific timeframe of six months (see question 11 in the Appendix). Similar to the responses to six months leave, there was a shift in the level of acceptance when asking about adoption and the use of leave by a father. The level of strong

support for mothers taking an unspecified period of leave after a birth is higher than the level of support for a six month leave (see Table 1.3). The level of support decreases for leaves for fathers, though with an overwhelming amount of support (strongly and somewhat agree) of at least 70% for all groups. For the whole sample, the level of strong support is much higher for leaves of an unspecified length than for leaves specifying six months leave for a father.

Table 1.3 Support for Employer-Provided Unspecified Length of Leave After Birth

Support (Likert Scale 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Somewhat Agree, 3=Neither Agree or Disagree, 4= Somewhat Agree, 5=Strongly Disagree)

		Male Students	Female Students	Male Alumni	Female Alumni
Mother's Leave	1	82.67%	91.76%	77.78%	81.82%
	2	15.33%	7.10%	14.81%	18.18%
	3	0.00%	0.85%	0.00%	0.00%
	4	1.33%	0.28%	7.41%	0.00%
	5	0.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Father's Leave	1	43.62%	73.79%	44.44%	68.18%
	2	29.53%	19.66%	25.93%	18.18%
	3	18.79%	3.99%	22.22%	13.64%
	4	5.37%	1.99%	3.70%	0.00%
	5	2.68%	0.57%	3.70%	0.00%

When asking about an unspecified time of leave of a mother for the adoption of a child, the women were most supportive (96.31% of female students and 95.45% of female alumni), but men were still very supportive of this benefit (80.67% of male students and 88.89% of male alumni). In terms of a father's leave after the adoption of a child, there is another increase in the amount of support from six months leave. There is also less opposition, especially by male alumni (see Table 1.4). Both female students and alumni were most supportive at 65.63% and 68.18% respectively.

Table 1.4 Support for Employer-Provided Unspecified Length of Leave After Adoption

Support (Likert Scale 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Somewhat Agree, 3=Neither Agree or Disagree, 4= Somewhat Agree, 5=Strongly Disagree)

		<i>Male Students</i>	<i>Female Students</i>	<i>Male Alumni</i>	<i>Female Alumni</i>
Mother's Leave	1	43.33%	73.86%	62.96%	72.73%
	2	37.33%	22.44%	25.93%	22.73%
	3	13.33%	1.99%	11.11%	4.55%
	4	4.00%	1.70%	0.00%	0.00%
	5	2.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Father's Leave	1	28.00%	65.63%	37.04%	68.18%
	2	36.00%	25.28%	25.93%	13.64%
	3	23.33%	5.11%	25.93%	18.18%
	4	8.00%	3.41%	7.41%	0.00%
	5	4.67%	0.57%	3.70%	0.00%

Sick Leave

The form of sick leave that is supported overwhelmingly by the sample is a pre-determined amount of sick days for the employee alone (see Table 1.5). Over 65% of each group strongly agrees with the availability of sick days for employees. There is little opposition to the provision of employee sick days, though 18.52% of alumni males disagreed, which is a higher percentage than the students and female alumni. In terms of leave for the birth or adoption of a child, female students were consistently most supportive; the sick days results have shifted so that female alumni, rather than female students, are now most supportive for all four types of sick leave.

The shift in agreement with leave for a child's sickness is interesting because there is over 50% support (strongly and somewhat agree) in each group, though less of the sample strongly agrees with the provision of sick days for a child's illness than for employee sick days (see Table 1.5). The males were least supportive for sick days for a child, with 11.33% of male students and 25.93% of male alumni disagreeing. Male students also had the highest level of stating that they neither agree nor disagree at 17.33%.

Table 1.5 Support for Employer-Provided Sick Leave

Support (Likert Scale 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Somewhat Agree, 3=Neither Agree or Disagree, 4= Somewhat Agree, 5=Strongly Disagree)

Leave in Case of Sickness of Employee

	Male Student	Female Student	Male Alumni	Female Alumni
1	70.00%	69.32%	66.67%	86.36%
2	19.33%	19.32%	14.81%	9.09%
3	6.00%	5.11%	0.00%	0.00%
4	1.33%	3.69%	11.11%	4.55%
5	3.33%	2.56%	7.41%	0.00%

Leave in Case of Sickness of Child

1	29.33%	48.86%	37.04%	59.09%
2	42.00%	34.94%	25.93%	36.36%
3	17.33%	8.24%	11.11%	0.00%
4	8.00%	4.55%	11.11%	4.55%
5	3.33%	3.41%	14.81%	0.00%

Leave in Case of Sickness of Partner

1	16.00%	28.41%	29.63%	54.55%
2	32.00%	36.36%	29.63%	22.73%
3	26.00%	19.32%	11.11%	18.18%
4	18.67%	11.08%	18.52%	4.55%
5	7.33%	4.83%	11.11%	0.00%

Leave in Case of Sickness of Elderly Family Member

1	19.33%	32.95%	22.22%	63.64%
2	43.33%	43.47%	33.33%	22.73%
3	24.00%	13.64%	18.52%	9.09%
4	8.67%	6.82%	18.52%	4.55%
5	4.67%	3.13%	7.41%	0.00%

The support decreases for employee sick days to care for a sick elderly family member. Most supportive again, 86.37% of female alumni support this type of sick days benefit, and female students are closely behind them with 76.42% support. Males increase their responses of neither agree nor disagree to 24% for male students and 18.52% for male alumni. Though the support of males is at least 50%, the level of support has decreased so that only 19.33% of male students and 22.22% of male alumni *strongly* agree with the provision of sick days for an elderly

family member, compared to 32.9% of female students and 63.64% of female alumni who strongly agreed.

The least supported form of sick leave is that for a sick partner. Female alumni were most supportive at 77.24%, and male students were least supportive at 48%. The support decreases for all four groups, with female alumni particularly increasing their level of neither agree nor disagree to 18.18%. This is a large increase from the 9.09% indicating that they neither agree nor disagree with sick leave for an elderly family member (see Table 9).

The Choice of Employer or Government Provided Benefits

On every question and across all four groups, respondents were more supportive of employer-provided benefits than of government-provided benefits. Consistent throughout the survey, female students were most supportive and male alumni were least supportive for both employer and government provided benefits. The comments by students and alumni at the end of the survey in favor of employer provisions generally stated that employers should provide specific benefits such as, “medical insurance,” “personal time off,” and “child day care.” In favor of government provisions, someone believed that “employers should not be the ones paying for child-care, the government is.” More support was for the “Federal Government [to] mandate employers to pay the employee 100% of their pay after the birth of a child for the mother.”

On the other hand, most negative comments were directed toward the “government not [interfering] too heavily with the private sector.” Others expressed the need for the government to provide specific benefits, specifically “[thinking] that the government should not be overly involved in requiring benefits UNLESS we are talking about the working poor or poverty level

workers.” While not everyone had comments to make about their prospective on benefits, those who did comment had strong opinions on what should or should not be provided.

DISCUSSION

The findings show the varying levels of support for family-friendly employment policies and benefits. The following discussion is based on the three major topic areas introduced within the findings: employer-provided leave after birth and adoption, sick leave, and the choice of employer or government provided benefits. The findings were different among the four subgroups (male students, female students, male alumni, and female alumni) and below I will discuss the implications of these findings.

Employer-Provided Leave after Birth and Adoption

As shown within the findings, there is overwhelming support for parental leave. This support applied to many forms of leave. There was support for both birth and adoption, though there was a higher level of support for the birth of a child. The sample also greatly supported a mother's and father's leave, with a mother's leave having the most support. In terms of the six months leave, as opposed to the unspecified period of leave, most of the sample was less supportive of the six months leave. Six months was probably seen as too much time off from the workplace, even though developmentally six months is not enough to help with the nurturing of a child. This brings in the study by Brady and Elms (2005) who found that the difference between twelve weeks and an unspecified amount of leave time made a difference in their results.

While the findings show that there was strong support across generation and gender, male alumni were the least supportive of the four groups. This is important to note because of the high status many alumni males hold within our patriarchal society. They are the ones who are most likely to hold powerful positions, yet they are not supportive of many benefits and policies that would greatly benefit employees.

The results of parental leave after the birth or adoption of a child, whether six months or an unspecified time, show changing gender norms. The male alumni may be the least supportive of the four groups, though their high levels of support show how the Baby Boom generation has helped to change the dynamics of men and women in the workplace. The support of policies and benefits seem to indicate that it has become acceptable for a woman to be employed before, during, and after the birth or adoption of a child. However, the increased support for a mother, rather than a father, being able to take leave after the adoption of a child seems to indicate that there are high expectations for a woman to be the primary caregiver of children. The high support of leave seems to indicate that, while mothers are still more likely to be expected to care for the children, the norm of the father breadwinner may be expanding to include the father as nurturer and caregiver.

Apart from female students, all groups increased their responses in the “neither agree nor disagree” category in response to father leave, while also moving from “strongly agree” to “somewhat agree” (shown in Table 1.5). This shift would seem to indicate more ambivalence about father leave than about mother leave. This question may have challenged unconscious gender norms about the division of labor within the family that they, especially the alumni, grew up with. These gender norms within the household assume the father is the breadwinner and the mother is a homemaker, even if she was employed. The alumni were also in the workforce before the Family and Medical leave was passed, therefore possibly maintaining their views on a more traditional working family.

The American workforce is fighting between the idea of the ideal worker and a family-friendly society. The ideal worker “works at least forty hours a week year round... [and is] framed around the traditional life pattern of men, [and] excludes most mothers of childbearing

age” (Williams, 2000, p. 2). The ideal worker focuses on the individual, not allowing time or energy to care for others, particularly addressing children, and has become the goal of working Americans, sacrificing families for personal success and fulfillment. On the other hand, the family-friendly society allows workers to be employed, and heavily involved within their family. The family-friendly society does not necessarily hold success in the hands of money, but rather the value of family. This family-friendly society would allow both men and women to work and be caregivers.

Male alumni typically fit into this concept of the ideal worker as they are affected more by parental leave as managers and supervisors, rather than as caregivers within the family, while the female alumni are the one's who are assumed to be the caregivers. Students, on the other hand, are about to enter the workforce where dual-earning couples is the norm, and often necessary. Male students are often assumed to be the breadwinner, though female students are becoming more invested in their careers and maintaining their jobs, and may not accept a backseat in their careers to raise a family. The family-friendly society would be more accepting of males and females having the time to care for the family, with little, if any, consequences. This family-friendly society would look past the necessity of maternal care of a child after birth, but rather support the development of a child after birth and adoption, and the need for a family to bond.

Sick Leave

The sick leave findings clearly show the high levels of support for personal sick days. These sick days reflect the ideal worker, who does not necessarily have time to care for others.

High individualism is reflected in these findings because of the need for personal sick days, and lesser support for sick days to care for family members.

The generational differences are also shown through the results of sick leave benefits, particularly between female students and alumni. Results throughout the survey consistently show female students as the group most supportive of benefits. However, in the case of sick leave, female alumni were most supportive, indicating the different responsibilities that face students and alumni. While female students may be more concerned with having sick leave for themselves, and possibly caring for a child in the future, they have not necessarily considered the possibility of caring for an elderly parent or partner as much as female alumni.

While the male alumni were very supportive of sick days for the elderly, their responses seem to show that they do not necessarily consider caring for an elderly parent to be their responsibility. These findings are consistent with the findings for leave after birth. Caregiving has become more acceptable for both genders, but is often considered to be more accepted for female employees to sacrifice their jobs for time off to care for family members.

Though these sick leave findings may be a valid representation of the sample, there may have been some factors that affected the responses of the sample. One is that there was no definition of “sick leave” proposed within the questionnaire. While each employer has its own definition of what categorizes as sick leave, this definition could have meant anything from the sniffles to cancer. I believe this clarification may have resulted in different levels of support. Also, I believe that the term “partner” might have been misunderstood by some participants. While it was meant to incorporate heterosexual, homosexual, and domestic partners, the term partner, as opposed to spouse, may have been assumed to only incorporate homosexual partners.

Whether or not these affect the results, they are factors that should be considered in future research.

The Choice of Employer or Government Provided Benefits

The difference in opinions between employer and government provisions consistently shows a decrease in the support for government over employer provisions. This decrease in support is by all four groups. The entire sample did not agree with the necessity of employer provided benefits, though there was a significantly higher level of support for employer provided benefits.

There may be a few reasons for the shift in opinions, though one factor may be their political stance. While this survey did not question the political stance of individuals, it would have been interesting to look at how it could have affected the sample's results. Conservatives are traditionally less supportive of government provisions and national policies that involve the family, and therefore I believe it would have altered the results of what they believe should be provided by the government, as opposed to employers.

However, despite political stance, individualism may play an important role in the options of the sample, and whether or not they want someone else deciding their rights as an employee. This may especially be the case for male alumni who have not necessarily needed time off to care for family members, solely maintaining their breadwinning role and leaving the childcare to their wives or other caregivers. They may also believe that since they were able to be successful employees without these benefits, these additional benefits may not be necessary for others.

The individualism that shapes American society is one of the biggest issues of family policy that separate the United States from European countries that have considerably progressed further in government support of the individual. These very different models, with the help of taxes, have been able to provide national health insurance and paid family leave. Employment policies and benefits is a national concern because of how it affects the individual. This sample, however, seems to be comfortable with individual decisions, rather than an employer or the government determining what may be provided in terms of policies and benefits.

Shown within the Family and Medical Leave Act quiz, a lot of the sample does not understand what is already available to many Americans through government policy. Reinforcing this focus on the individual, the sample possibly only knows or cares about what will benefit each individual. The lack of knowledge by students and alumni was surprising, particularly with alumni who were most likely in the workforce when the Family and Medical Leave Act was passed in 1993. In the comments section of the survey, one student wrote:

This survey really got me thinking of my future of parental care, especially with graduation coming up. People should not only be concerned with obtaining a good full-time job, but a job that offers good benefits for them and their prospective/future family. People need to start thinking about their future and get out of the college mind-frame. It's sad to say but, it's time to grow up!

While this does not address alumni, it does address how some students are feeling at this time in their lives, particularly not thinking about their futures, despite their upcoming graduation and entrance into the workforce.

CONCLUSION

The question that needs to be answered is what do people want from family-friendly employment policies? Students and alumni are contradictory in the policies and benefits they want. For parental leave they seem to be very supportive. On the other hand, in terms of sick leave they seem to want policies and benefits that will benefit them as individuals, without necessarily considering the need to support or care for other family members.

The goal of this research was to start to understand what people believe are important policies and benefits for their present, past, and future employment situations. Employees do not necessarily look too far ahead to their possible future responsibilities (such as caring for an elderly family member, partner, or in the case of students a child). It is important to try and understand why people do not know about their personal rights, particularly under the Family and Medical Leave Act.

I would have liked to look into the results from the Family and Medical Leave Act quiz further. It would be interesting to see why these people do not know about the policy available. Some thoughts as to why the majority of the sample did not answer the questions correctly could have to do with whether it does not affect them, they do not have time to take leave, or if they were not well informed about the policies available.

Paid sick days should be addressed in future research. While it is clear that this sample supports the use of unpaid leave, paid leave is the next step to improving the Family and Medical Leave Act, especially with the necessity of dual-earner couples to support many families. One comment made by a participant was that he or she thought “it’d be great to have Mom and Dad home with their new baby. [Her] concern [was], who’s making money during this unpaid leave??” This is very important, as not all employees in America, especially those without a

college education, can afford to take unpaid leave. By including some form of paid leave, like California has done, more people could benefit from the Family and Medical Leave Act.

For future research, it will be important to consider the current, past, or future occupations of the sample. Different workplaces have varying policies and benefits available, as well as unspoken views on family matters. It will also be important to consider the size of a workplace. If an individual is working for a large corporation, his or her leave may not heavily affect the status of the workplace. However, in a company of fewer than fifty employees, it is much more difficult for employers to let an employee take leave. Understanding the situation of employees and the needs they may have, it will be easier to conclude what benefits or policies should be considered by employers or the government so that employees can not only be happier, but better workers.

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APPENDIX

1. What is your undergraduate major?

Agriculture	1
Business	2
Engineering	3
HDFS	4
CLAS	6
Sciences	7
Education	8
Medical	9
Pharmacy	10
Kinesiology	12
Continuing Studies	12
Not Specified	13
Textile	14
Library Sciences	15

Year

4th year student	1
alumni	2

What is your highest level of education?

Undergraduate Degree	1
Some graduate school	2
MA or MS degree	3
Professional Degree (MBA, MFT, MSW, MD,etc)	4
Doctoral Degree	5

2. What do you plan to do after you graduate from the University of Connecticut?

Graduate School	1
Travel	2
Full-Time Job	3
Don't know yet	4
Other (please specify)	5

3. What is your current job status? (check all that apply)

Employed Full-Time	1
Employed Part-Time	2
Self-employed	3
Unemployed	4
Retired	5
Student	6
Other (please specify)	7

4. What is your current marital status?

Not married	1
Not married and in a committed relationship	2
Married	3
Separated/divorced	4
Widowed	5
Other (please specify)	6

