

The Influence of Work-Life Balance, Perceived Flexibility and Maternity Benefits Towards the Retention of Working Mothers in Kuala Lumpur

Joanne Sequerah, Jugindar Singh Kartar Singh

Abstract: *The present study examined the influence of work-life balance, perceived flexibility and maternity benefits towards the retention of working mothers. This was a quantitative research and using a survey method. Data was collected from a sample of 112 working mothers using a self-administered questionnaire. The AMOS software developed for analyzing the Structure Equation Modeling (SEM) and SPSS was used. The findings revealed that women who perceived their organizations offered flexible work hours reported higher levels to remain with the organization. The findings revealed that maternity benefits have a significant impact towards retention. However, the results revealed that work-life balance had an insignificant relationship towards the retention of working mothers. The findings supported the results from some earlier studies and bring out several new ideas such as the importance of offering flexible working hours. The findings have significantly contributed to the advancement of knowledge in the retention of working mothers. As for practical implication, the significant and positive impact of flexibility and maternity benefits suggests the importance of these factors in retention of working mothers. It is recommended that organizations implement policies to support flexible working hours and provide maternity benefits. The paper's primary contribution is finding that flexible working hours and maternity benefits have a significant impact on retention of working mothers.*

Keywords: *Work-life Balance, Maternity benefits, Job retention, flexibility, working mothers. The results of this study will add to the current body of knowledge as well as assist in creating foundational solutions to ensure successful retention of working mothers.*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to data from the World Bank, Malaysia has the lowest ranking among the main Southeast Asian nations when it comes to female participation in the labor force, at 49 percent, (Star Online 2017). That is even though the country's public universities produced 80 percent more female graduates than males in Year 2016. Studies cited by the International Monetary Fund have shown that raising the participation of women to the same levels of males has the potential to boost gross domestic product and raise productivity that could help get Malaysia out of its middle-income trap (Star Online, 2017). According to a study conducted by employment solutions website Monster.com, some 57% of Malaysian mothers surveyed agreed that having children affected their career goals and opportunities (Foo, 2017).

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According to the survey, the biggest challenges that women face at work, the top responses include how women were perceived by colleagues and clients (41%), a lack of opportunity for career advancement (40%) and trying to balance the demands of work and family (37%) (Foo, 2017). Another study by Talent Corp-ACCA saw Malaysia as one of the countries where women leave their job and do not return to the workforce. The survey entitled "Retaining Women in the Workplace" indicated that "93% of those surveyed want to return to the workplace but around 63% found it difficult to do so" (Toh and Jaafar, 2017). Based on a paper presented at the World Economic Forum, it was reported that women shoulder most of the burden of housework and family care, even if they work as many employed hours as their partner (Bruce-Lockhart, 2018). The research also found that stay-at-home mothers are half as likely to be asked in for an interview as a woman who was employed but made redundant (Bruce-Lockhart, 2018).

Based on research, there are several factors that influence the job retention of working mothers. In-depth interviews by the researchers revealed that Malaysian women with young children did not trust helpers at daycare centers or live-in maids to provide the best care (StarOnline, 2017). Raising maternity leave for women in the private sector to 90 days, matching what those in the civil service already get is one of the proposed solution. However, in Malaysia, the public sector offers better working conditions than the private sector (Noor and Mohd, 2015). In addition, supporting female talent is an effort that extends beyond maternity benefits and will allow employers to retain this valuable talent pool (Foo, 2017). Li Za (2012) further stated that to retain female talent, a company would do well to implement flexible working hours and have family-friendly facilities, such as nursing rooms and childcare centers, at the workplace. According to a study conducted by employment solutions website Monster.com., most Malaysian women agreed that flexible working was an option open to them, with 54% agreeing and 19% disagreeing with the statement (Foo, 2017). Allowing flexible hours and work mobility might prove to be a win-win situation for both employer and employee, especially in areas where talent is scarce (Goh, 2012). Such flexibility, creates a win-win situation for all. With flexible hours and schedules, women tend to be more efficient, productive and creative because they are free from worry or stress (Goh, 2012). Another problem faced by women is work-life conflict and results from past studies indicate that household responsibilities and workplace environment



are strongly correlated to women work-life conflict. Work-life balance refers to time divided between work-life and non-work-life and it needs to be achieved by minimizing the conflict between responsibilities in work and non-work domains by balancing the multiple roles and tasks (Kumarasamy, Pangil, and Isa, 2015). In other words, a person who experiences lower work-family conflict can be concluded as work-life balance.

Therefore, focusing more on attracting and recruiting female talent, employers must invest in retaining women to reach their full potential (Foo, 2017). Another issue is talent retention programs that can bring significant savings to a company. The cost of employee turnover is high as it costs PricewaterhouseCoopers around \$120,000 every time someone leaves the company (CNN Money, 2015). Malaysia needs to focus on retaining women in the workplace to address the relatively low level of female participation in the labor force (Toh and Jaafar, 2017). There is a need for a clear framework on how to retain women in the workforce, providing among others more flexibility and longer maternity leave for them and a higher level of women participation in the labor force will boost the country's economy (Toh and Jaafar, 2017). However, role of perceived flexibility, work-life balance and maternity benefits in influencing retention of working mothers in Malaysia has not empirically tested. In addition, most studies regarding retention of working mothers are emerging in a Western context and there is a dearth of research on the job retention of working mothers holding executive level positions in Kuala Lumpur. This paper adopts the position that there is a need to examine different factors that influence retention of working mothers. Findings of the study are expected to help human resource managers and policy-makers in the Malaysia to design and implement more effective retention strategies for working mothers in Kuala Lumpur.

A. Job Retention of working mothers

Employee retention is becoming much important to organizations and there are several different definitions of job retention (Mita et al., 2014; Bidisha and Mukulesh, 2013). Johnson (2000) defined retention as "the ability to hold onto those employees you want to keep, for longer than your competitors". According to Huang et al. (2006), employee-retention is concerned with the intention of employees to stay loyal to their organization. Similarly, Bidisha and Mukulesh (2013) stated that employee retention is related to keeping or encouraging employees to remain in an organization for a maximum period. Employee retention was also defined as a technique that is utilized by organizations to retain an effective workforce and simultaneously meet operational requirements (Mita et al., 2014). According to Bidisha and Mukulesh (2013), retention also refers to a process to encourage employees to remain with the organization for a longer period or until the completion of a specific project. Based on the various definitions, retention is mainly concerned with keeping employees for a longer period.

The transition back to work can be hard for new parents, with the first six months being a critical time for retention (CNN Money, 2015). In previous researches, several factors associated with employee retention have

been identified. According Ghapanchi and Aurum (2011), factors that influence employee retention encompasses remuneration and benefits, fair and equal treatment, organizational culture and training opportunities. Eight retention factors namely management, conducive environment, autonomy, compensation, crafted workload, and work-life balance, social support and development opportunities were identified by Christeen (2014). Other factors to improve retention of employees were relationship with colleagues and socialization (Allen and Shanock, 2013) and management style and leadership (Andrews and Wan, 2009). A study by Ghosh et al. (2013) showed that normative commitment, affective commitment and goal clarity were the best predictors of employees' intention to stay or leave the organization. Dutta (2004) also recommended several strategies for improving retention of employees that encompasses work-life balance, management-employee relations, rewarding high performers and developing a learning and knowledge-sharing environment. Several other factors that determine the retention of women employees include increased autonomy, increased social support, and enjoyment of job, kinship responsibility, life balance issues and role conflict (Goodman et al., 2010). Work life policies that refer to prioritizing work over family or family over work were found to be important factor to improve retention of women (Thompson et al., 2005). In addition, flexible work scheduling for female employees can result in a good balance between their families and work (Noor and Maad, 2009). Blomme et al., (2010) found that for women, promotion opportunities and work-family balance were related to turnover intentions.

B. Flexibility

Currently, there are several variations in the conceptualization and approaches to flexible working hours. The simplest type of flexible working hours is the ability to switch shifts between workmates and a traditional example is flexi-time with self-determined start- and end-times of work, with core time when presence is required (Costa et al., 2004). According to Hill et al. (2008), workplace flexibility is the ability of workers to make choices influencing when, where, and for how long they engage in work-related tasks. This definition of flexibility emphasizes the importance of both the opportunity structure for flexibility in the organization and the choice of individual workers to use such workplace flexibility (Hill et al., 2008). Hill et al., (2004) further stated that flexibility is a mutual sense of trust and respect between employer and employee, a supportive workplace culture, and an optimal sense of control over one's job and working conditions. Flexibility can be viewed from organizational perspective and worker perspective. According to Costa et al. (2004), individual-oriented flexibility of working hours provides more autonomy regarding starting and ending times as well as breaks and days off. Company-oriented flexibility is exemplified by the negotiated right to determine a moderate extension (or reduction) of the working week,

without overtime pay or reduced wages, respectively (Costa, et al., 2004). Perceived flexibility can be measured when an employee is able to meet their work, personal and family commitments (Casey and Grzywacz, 2008).

Flexible working is gaining more prominence because increasing financial benefits is considered as an unsustainable strategy in employee retention and firms have begun to consider flexible working as an alternative tool (Idris, 2014). As stated by Silim and Stirling (2014), flexible working hours can remove the barriers that are preventing women from entering the workforce or leaving the workforce. As stated by Bond et al. (2002), the availability of flexible working options is more in demand today because there are more dual earner couples. Flexibility at work has been positively linked to employee retention (Richman et al, 2008). A study by Idris (2014), found positive effects of five types of flexible working practices namely flex time, job sharing, flex leave, flex career and flex place on retention. The study by Idris (2014) showed that although, flex time was affirmed as an important contributor to employee retention of employees but not all types of flexible practice have received the same level of acceptance. The results of a study by Russel et al. (2014) showed that while part-time work and flexi time tend to reduce work pressure and work–life conflict, working from home is associated with greater levels of both work pressure and work–life conflict. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between perceived flexibility and work–life conflict. Although workplace flexibility is used by both men and women, women value this option more than men (Catalyst, 2001). A study by Skinner, and Pocock, (2011) revealed that women were twice as likely as men to have sought flexibility. Another study by Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) found that women’s responsibilities towards their families were not perceived as barriers hindering their retention and career progress. Therefore, there are some inconsistencies in the research findings related to the role of flexibility in the workplace towards women’s career and retention. Based on the past research findings discussed above and logically extending them, the following hypothesis was formulated for testing in the present study.

H1. Perceived flexibility exerts a positive influence on retention of working mothers.

C. Maternity Benefits

Paid maternity leave is a significant benefit for employees, where there is no federal mandate for paid time off for new parents. However, only 12% of companies offer paid maternity leave, according to the Society for Human Resource Management (CNN Money 2015). Child care is another benefit but there is a lot of debate among employers on the adoption of this benefit. According to SHRM, only 1% of its members allow babies to come to work and 26% permit workers to bring children to work in an emergency. In addition, the cost of child care can make it financially unpractical for a parent to return to work (CNN Money, 2015). In Malaysia, various statutory provisions relate to pregnancy and maternity protection at the workplace (Bhatt, 2015). In Malaysia, the Employment Act 1955 (Malaysia, Act 265) (Part IX of the Employment Act), deals with

maternity leave, maternity allowance, the eligibility criteria, the notice requirements, protection from dismissal and other related provisions (Bhatt, 2015). In Malaysia, Employment Act 1955 stipulates that women are entitled for 60 consecutive days of paid leave and applies to the first 5 children if the applicant is employed at the company for at least 90 days prior to the commencement of leave (Bhatt, 2015).

According to Milkovich and Newman (2008), employee benefits are part of the total compensation package and other than compensation paid for the time worked plus other payments and benefits provided by the employers in whole or in part. These benefits can be in the form of monetary or non-monetary benefits. Milkovich and Newman (2008) also indicated that by providing employee with benefits, it will assist companies to retain their employees. The benefits encompass maternity protection that includes the prevention of exposure to health and safety hazards during and after pregnancy, entitlement to paid maternity leave and breastfeeding breaks, maternal and child health care, protection against discrimination in employment and occupation and a guaranteed right to return to the job after maternity leave (Addati, et al., 2015). Findings in a study by Avendano et al. (2015) suggested that a more generous maternity leave during the birth of a first child is associated with lowering depression. According to Jou et al. (2017), paid maternity leave significantly predicts lower odds of maternal and infant re-hospitalization and higher odds of doing well with exercise and stress management. Another study by Hewitt et al., (2017) observed better mental and physical health among mothers after the introduction of paid parental leave, although the effects were small. The study by Hewitt et al., (2017) also found that mothers on permanent contracts and in managerial or professional occupations also had significantly better mental and physical health due to post-paid parental. Based on the past research findings discussed above and logically extending them, the following hypothesis was formulated for testing in the present study.

H2. Maternity Benefits exerts a positive influence on retention of working mothers.

D. Work-life balance

There is a lot of debate among scholars on what is work- life balance. According to Kumarasamy, Pangil, & Isa (2015), work life balance is concerned with minimizing the conflict between work related and non-work-related domains by balancing the multiple roles and tasks. According to Estes and Michael (2005), a work-life balance practice involves being able to support our dependents, having a flexible working options and the company allowing family or personal leave to be taken by their employees. In addition, Galea et al, (2014) stated that work-life balance refers to when a company offers employment to their employees and the same time allow family time through its human resource management policies and practices.

According to Greenhaus and Allen (2011), feelings of balance is an employee's sense of effectiveness and satisfaction from multiple life roles. Work-life balance can be viewed from the employee or the organization viewpoint. As stated by Lockwood (2003), work-life balance from the employee viewpoint refers to the dilemma of managing work obligations and personal/family responsibilities. Work-life balance from the employer viewpoint refers to the challenge of creating a supportive company culture where employees can focus on their jobs while at work (Lockwood, 2003). Based on past research, work life balance has become an important factor and is critical that managers regularly monitor the levels of work-life balance being experienced by staff (Deery and Jago, 2015). Several organizations agree on the importance of work-family balance and implement work-life balance policies (Sivatte et al., 2015). Hyman et al. (2003) stressed that emotional exhaustion increased among the employees due to interventions of work demands into the personal life. Lockwood (2003) stated that work-life programs have the potential to significantly improve employee morale, reduce absenteeism, and retain organizational knowledge. Researchers also agree that providing work life balance to employees helps organizations improve retention rate of employees (Karatepe 2013). The key findings emerging from this examination of the literature by Deery, and Jago, (2015) showed that work life balance appears to have become one of the key variables when addressing issues of employee management and retention. Another research by Akila (2012) also found that work-life balance had great influence on employee retention. In a study by Suifan et al. (2016), it was revealed that the informal work-life balance practices (manager support and job autonomy) had the most significant effect and are the determinants of turnover intentions. However, the findings of a study Cegarra-Leiva (2012) showed that the existence of a work life balance culture rather than the availability of work-life balance practices offered by the company is the main determinant of job satisfaction. Lucia-Casademunt et al. (2015) also stated that national cultures may influence people's need for work-life balance. According to Noor and Mohd (2015), work-life balance policies and initiatives in Malaysia, has a long way to go in terms of making these policies available to most employees. Based on the past research findings discussed above, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H3. Work-life balance exerts a positive influence on retention of working mothers.

II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

This research is based on positivism philosophy and a positivist adopts the philosophical stance of the natural scientist (Saunders et al., 2012). This study is based on deductive approach which involved developing a theory and hypotheses. This was a cross-sectional survey research that used a survey method. A survey strategy was used as this strategy is commonly used strategy in business research and usually associated with the deductive approach (Saunders et al., 2012). A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect primary data as this is an efficient way of collecting

responses from many people (Saunders et al. 2012). This is a quantitative study where quantitative analysis technique that range from providing simple descriptive of the variables involved, to establishing statistical relationships among variables through complex statistical modelling were used (Saunders et al., 2012). The emphasis here was on studying to explain the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The reliability of a measure is established by testing for both consistency and stability and this was based on Cronbach's alpha. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test how well the measured variables represent the number of constructs (Awang, 2012). Data analysis was based on descriptive and inferential statistics that were generated using SPSS and SEM AMOS tools.

A. Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The population for this study were working mothers who hold executive level positions in organizations Kuala Lumpur. Non-probability sampling method was used because non-probability sampling is relatively cheaper and is used when sampling frame is not available (Saunders et al. 2012). The convenience sampling technique was used. Hair et al. (2006) suggests that the minimum sample size is 100 when considering models containing five or fewer constructs, each with more than three items; 150 when models contain seven or fewer constructs. It is generally regarded that 100 is the practical minimum size for using SEM (Hair et al., 2006). For structural equation modelling using AMOS, sample size should be at least five times the number of indicators (Pallant, 2010). For this study, the agreed sample size was at least 100 respondents.

B. Instrumentation

The self-administered questionnaires were administered directly by hand and collected later (Saunders et al., 2012). The questionnaire consists of two sections. The first section is on four demographic variables (gender, age, number of children and qualification) were included. This second section measures the independent variables that are work-life balance, perceived flexibility and maternity benefits. The fixed alternative questions required the respondents to choose the best answer based on a five-point Likert-type scale. The pilot study using 30 respondents was used to test the instrument. The purpose of the pilot was to refine the questionnaire (Saunders et al., 2012). Based on the pilot testing, ambiguous, unclear and confusing questions were reviewed and rectified accordingly.

C. Data Collection

Self-administered questionnaires were distributed directly to working mothers in several organizations in Kuala Lumpur. The working mothers were to respond to the items by indicating their level of agreement using a five-point Likert scale. A qualifying question was included to ascertain that the respondents qualified for the survey. After one month, only 55 responses were collected. The data collection was extended by another month. A total of 120 questionnaires were received. A total of 8 questionnaires were removed due to omissions or errors and only 112 questionnaires were usable.

D. Data Analyses

The completed questionnaires were edited and coded for statistical analysis. As stated by Sekaran (2003), in data analysis there were three objectives: getting a feel for the data, testing the goodness of data, and testing the hypotheses developed for the research. The feel for the data gave preliminary ideas of how good the scales were, how well the coding and entering of data have been done, and so on (Sekaran, 2003). Descriptive frequency statistics was used to present quantitative data and assess the trend of demographic data. The AMOS software developed for analysing the Structure Equation Modelling (SEM) and SPSS were used to test present the model in a causal path diagram to show the hypothesized relationships among constructs of interest. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) which employs a set of measures to achieve the model fit was utilized (Hair et al., 2006). The CFA method was chosen because of its ability to assess the validity, unidimensionality, and reliability of a latent construct (Hair et al., 2006). SEM is an efficient method to perform CFA for measurement models, analyse the causal relationships in a structural model, and test the hypotheses for mediators (Awang, 2012). SEM is an efficient method to perform analyses of the causal relationships in a structural model and tests the hypotheses (Awang, 2012). Using Amos Graphic interface, the structural model was created to test causal effects. The two sets of text output namely the standardized regression weights and the regression weights were examined.

III. RESULTS

All the respondents were females who hold executive level positions in organizations. The respondents age included 6% (n=7) between the age range of 20 to 30 years, 46% (n=52) between the age range of 31 to 40 years, 38% (n=42) between the age range of 41 to 50 years and 10 (n=11) above the age of 50 years. A total of 28% (n=31) had 1 child, 38% (n=43) had 2 children, 23% (n= 26 had 3 children and the rest had 4 or more children. In terms of qualification, there 5 Phd holders, 45 were degree holders, 37 people with Masters, and 22 people had either a Diploma/Certificate.

A. Reliability

Reliability is the extent to which a variable is consistent in what it is intended to measure (Hair et al., 2006). The Cronbach alpha coefficient calculated using SPSS software for the dependent variable was 0.927 and 0.717, 0.925 and 0.769 for maternity benefits, perceived flexibility and work-life balance. The Cronbach alpha value was above 0.7 is acceptable (Pallant, 2010). Pilot testing was done, and this provided with some idea of the questionnaire’s face validity (Saunders et al., 2012). For face validity, experts were asked to comment on the representativeness and suitability of the questions (Saunders et al., 2012).

B. Descriptive Statistics

Based on the Results in Table 1, the values for skewness is between the ranges of -.427 to .618 and the values for kurtosis are between the ranges of .141 to -1.032. Therefore, the values of skewness and kurtosis values are within +1 and -1 standard deviations from its mean (Hair et al., 2006). The mean of all the variables is above 3.4 and the standard deviation is low.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Stats	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Stats	Std. Error	Kurtosis Stats	Std. Error
Retention	2.00	5.00	3.8378	.67837	-.427	.228	-.427	.453
Flexibility	1.67	5.00	3.5804	.93748	-.161	.228	-1.032	.453
Maternity Benefits	1.80	5.00	3.4125	.71043	.136	.228	-.502	.453
Work-life Balance	2.67	4.83	3.5848	.47299	.618	.228	.141	.453

In Table 2, the regression weights indicate the estimate of beta coefficient which measures the effects of every exogenous construct on the endogenous construct. The path coefficient of Perceived Flexibility to Retention is 0.42 and the effect is significant (p<0.05). Thus, the hypothesis H1 is supported. The path coefficient of Maternity Benefits to

retention is 0.33 and the effect is significant (p<0.05). Thus, the hypothesis H2 is supported. The path coefficient of Work-life to retention is very low and the effects is not significant (p>0.05). Thus, the hypothesis H3 is not supported.

Table 2: The Regression Path Coefficients between the constructs and its significance

Hypothesis Statement for Path Analysis	Estimate	P	Significance	Result of Hypothesis
H1. Perceived Flexibility exerts a positive influence on Retention.	.419	***	Significant	Supported
H2. Maternity Benefits exert a positive influence on retention	.333	.002	Significant	Supported
H3. Work-life balance exert a positive influence on retention	.102	.212	Not Significant	Not Supported



Evaluating the fitness of the measurement model

In SEM, the Fitness Indexes reflect how fit is the model to the data (Hair et al., 2006). The three model fit categories are Absolute Fit, Incremental Fit, and Parsimonious Fit (Awang, 2012). The measures include Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Comparative Fit

Index (CFI). The results shown in Table 3 indicates that the model adequately fits the data and the indices indicates a good fit to the model (CFI=.9068, RMSEA=.08). A RMSEA value of 0.8 indicates that only the model has not explained 8% of the variance in the data (Awang, 2012)

Table 3: Categories of model fit, level of acceptance and Index Values

Name of Category	Name of Index	Level of Acceptance	Actual Index Value	Accepted
1. Absolute Fit	RMSEA	RMSEA<0.08	.084	Level achieved
2. Incremental Fit	CFI	CFI>0.09	.906	Level achieved
3. Parsimonious Fit	Chi-Square/ df	Chi-Square/ df < 3.0	2.025	Level achieved

Final structural model with standardized path coefficients

The factor loading for each item in a measurement model to measure the latent constructs are shown in Figure 1 below. Two constructs with factor loading less than .05 were deleted. Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) suggest using

more stringent cut-offs going from 0.32 (poor), 0.45 (fair), 0.55 (good), 0.63 (very good) or 0.71 (excellent). The entire items are having a factor loading of close to 0.5 and as such the fitness indexes for that measurement model are achieved.

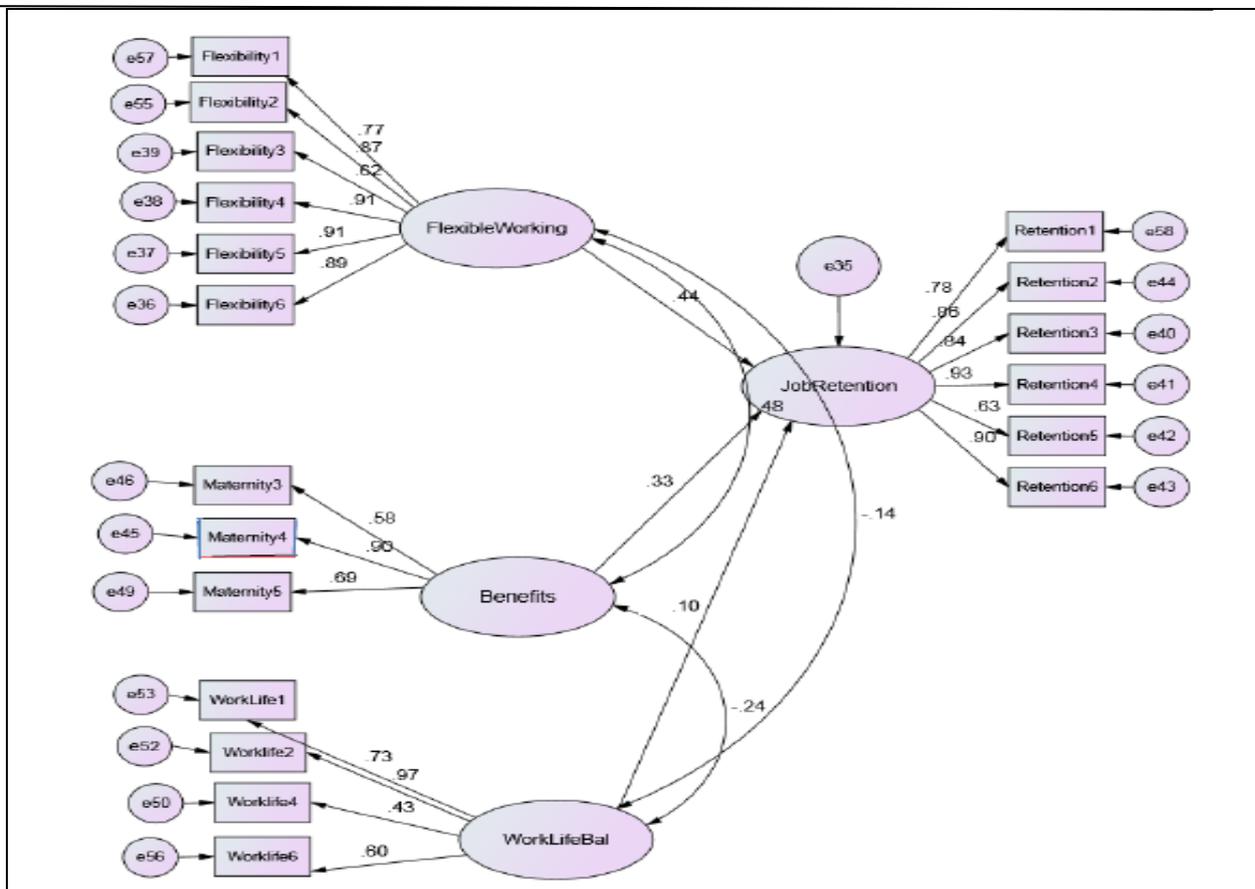


Figure 1: Final structural model with standardized path coefficients

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, perceived flexibility was hypothesized to influence retention of working mothers' behavior. The results of this study supported the hypothesis ($\beta_1 = 0.42, p < 0.01$). The results of this study are consistent with several prior studies (Idris, 2014; Russel et al., 2009). Furthermore, the study by Skinner, and Pocock, (2011) revealed that women were twice as likely as men to have sought flexibility. As stated by Casey and Grzywacz, (2008), perceived flexibility can be measured when an employee is

able to meet their work, personal and family commitments. This study also revealed that perceived flexibility is the key determinant of retention of working mothers. This can be a win-win situation for both employers and employees especially in areas where talent is scarce. Moreover, through flexibility working mothers can be more efficient, productive and creative because they are free from worry or stress.

It can be concluded that challenges faced by mothers in the workplace are the impetus behind calls for flexible jobs. However, flexible working arrangements can be beneficial to organizations from improving staff retention productivity, attraction and reducing absenteeism. Therefore, organizations should implement strategies that truly look at how to adapt to hiring flexibly and implement policies to support flexibility.

In this study, maternity benefits were hypothesized to exert an influence on retention of working mothers. The results supported the hypothesis ($\beta_2 = 0.33$, $p < 0.05$) and were consistent with past studies (Milkovich and Newman, 2008; Addati, 2015). Milkovich and Newman, (2008) found that by providing employee with benefits, it will assist companies to retain their employees. Provision of maternity benefits can further improve mental and physical health among mothers after the introduction of paid parental leave (Hewitt et al., 2017). A more generous maternity leave during the birth of a first child can be associated with lowering depression (Avendano, 2015). Improved health can be associated with better retention and lower absenteeism. In Malaysia, organizations should comply with the maternity benefits stipulated in the Employment Act.

In this study, work-life balance was hypothesized to exert a positive influence on retention of working mothers. The results did not support the hypothesis ($\beta_3 = 0.102$, $p > 0.212$) and deviated from past studies by Akila (2012), Sufian et al. (2016) and Karatepe, (2013). This may be due to organization work culture. Studies have shown that the way work-life balance is experienced by employees differs based on the cultural group to which the employees belong (Lucia-Casademunt, 2015). Due to differences in cultural values, the same human resources practices may have a different influence on the employees (Lucia-Casademunt, 2015). Furthermore, as explained by Noor and Mohd (2015), work-life balance policies and initiatives in Malaysia, has a long way to go in terms of making these policies available to most employees. The strong cultural norms regarding the roles of men and women are reflected within an organization's work culture with negative repercussions to those who tend to avail themselves of these work-life policies and practices (Noor and Mohd, 2015). Therefore, it is important for organizations to implement an organization's culture that is ready to support work-life programs.

The findings will also provide theoretical and practical implications for policymakers, organizations and institutions to facilitate and support retention of working mothers with the intention of improving productivity and retention of talent. This research showed that the main predictor is retention of working mothers is perceived flexibility. This research also revealed that maternity benefits are an important factor to be considered for the retention of working mothers. Therefore, employers should take measures to implement internal policies to support flexible work arrangements and maternity benefits. Allowing flexible hours and work mobility might prove to be a win-win situation for both employer and employee, especially in areas where talent is scarce. Such flexibility also creates a win-win situation between organizations and employees. With flexible hours and schedules, women can be more

efficient, productive and creative because they are free from worry or stress. Provision of maternity benefits can also create a win-win situation because past studies have observed better mental and physical health among mothers after the introduction of paid parental leave.

The findings of this study also have implications to Malaysian policymakers and lawmakers. Organizations need to implement policies to support the retention of working mothers. In Malaysia, the uptake or use of these policies has been found to be related to an organization's work culture. Thus, an organizational culture must be supportive and should not make working mothers to feel undervalued or marginalized. In addition, the organization policies, should not focus solely on work-family issues and omit other kinds of non-work factors like community involvement and leisure activities. The government also plays a critical role in implement the Employment Act 1955 which is the principal source of pregnancy and maternity rights for working women in Malaysia. The government need to investigate the limitations and issues women face arising from pregnancy and maternity that need to be addressed in the workplace.

Despite the significant findings of this study, there are some limitations. Firstly, in the present study only selected factors were considered to study the predictors that influence on retention of women behaviour. This study population were working mothers in Kuala Lumpur and it could be argued that the results cannot be generalized due to differences in cultures in other states. There are other moderators and mediators such as age of mothers that were not examined and should be examined in future studies. The data for this study was collected via a self-reported questionnaire that could be susceptible to bias. This study was carried out in Kuala Lumpur and the sample size of 112 respondents may not be sufficient generalise the results. These limitations of this study provide directions for future research. For future studies, a more in-depth research on factors that affect retention of working mothers should be undertaken. This study only covered executive level employees and in future should be extended to other employees. Furthermore, this study could be extended to include more dependent variables such as employee experience, perceived organizational support, productivity and performance. Future research should incorporate the factors such as culture, age differences, ethnic differences and religiosity to have a better understanding of the factors that influence retention of working mothers. A mixed method approach is which can be either an explanatory sequential approach or an exploratory sequential approach is recommended to obtain and more in-depth information. Demographics such as education level and income could be further investigated to test the differences towards retention of working mothers.

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