

Working Hour and Intention to Have Children in Hong Kong Full-Time Workers

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Abstract

This study investigated the working hour, work-life balance and intention to have children of full-time workers in a place without Standard Working Hour legislation and with very low birth rate, Hong Kong. Method used a questionnaire survey with 200 below 35, married, full-time workers. Results showed these workers had longer working hour (49.3 hours/week) than many other places in the World (40 hours/week). Most participants (around 70 percent) reported prolonged fatigue level, sleepiness and extreme tiredness and did not have time staying with their partner and family. The mean intention to have children score was 2.045 out of 5. Correlation analysis was performed between working hour and intention to have children. There exist an inverse relationship between working hour and intention to have children ($r = -0.779$). A plotting of the working hour against intention to have children showed some linear relationship between the working hour and intention to have children. Therefore, in general the workers with longer working hour were having lower intention to have children. To conclude, workers in Hong Kong, without Standard Working Hour legislation, had long working hours, poor work-life balance and low intention to have children.

Keywords: Working hour, Intention to have children, Full-time workers

1. Introduction

1.1 Structure of the Paper

This paper comprised Introduction, Methodology, Results, Discussions and Conclusion.

1.2 The Theoretical Foundation of the Study

Long working hour results in a poor work-life balance, with ill effects such as exhaustion, stress, unwilling to work, a great likelihood of changing jobs, no time for exercise, depression, insomnia, disharmony, poor diet and health problems like increased risk of cancer (Chung et al., 2009). Long working hour affects the health of employee, make them have no time to take care of their families, especially their children. It may also produce negative effect on husband-wife relationship (Behar, 2001), parent-child relationship (Fursman, 2009), pregnancy planning (Moss, 2009), ease of getting pregnancy (Tuntiseranee et al., 1998) and increase risk of abortion (Hatch et al., 1997). All these factors may interact and decrease pregnancy and decrease birth rate (Young, 2016). This birth rate reduction can have significant impact on places with problem of ageing population like Hong Kong, coupled with increase in life expectancy due to improvements in medicine and sanitation, (HKSAR Government, 2013), as it will create demographic challenges in reduction in workforce and increase in pressure on welfare and health services. The workforce and welfare are directly related as the declining size of workforce means the remaining working population has to increasingly bear the public finances burden such as tax (HKSAR Government, 2013). Moreover, the declining size of workforce may decrease productivity and economic growth and create problems in employment and labor supply (HKSAR Government, 2013). Therefore the possible causes of low birth rate, like the long working hour and intention to have children, are highly needed to be investigated, especially in Hong Kong.

1.3 Previous Studies Related to Areas of Study

Hong Kong is a place where the birth rate is low and the working hour is long and there is no Standard Working Hour legislation. Full-time employees in Hong Kong work on average 49 hours per week. This is much higher than that in many other countries having the maximum law-defined 40-hour work-week (Chung et al., 2009; Labor Department, the Government of HKSAR, 2012). In addition, Hong Kong is one of the places with the lowest birth rate in the World.

According to the statistics from Food and Health Bureau, the Government of HKSAR (2015), the crude birth rate (number of live births per 1000 population) of Hong Kong in 2013 was 7.9, which was lower than that in other places with low birth rate such as Japan (8.2), Singapore (9.3) and, Taiwan (8.5) and much lower than those in Western countries like United States (13.0), (Food and Health Bureau, the Government of HKSAR, 2015). Recently Young (2016) reported there was an association between long working hour and intention to have children in Hong Kong workers in Long Working Hour Sectors. These subjects have very long working hours (52 hours per week).

1.4 Conceptual Framework that Depicts the Relations among the Variables Being Measured

This study is focus on the conditions of working hour and intention to have children on general full-time workers in Hong Kong.

Research Aim: to investigate the condition and relationship between working hour, work-life balance and intention to have children in full-time workers in Hong Kong.

Working Hypothesis: There is a relationship between working hour and intention to have children in full-time workers in Hong Kong.

Hypothesis H: The working hour is inversely related to intention to have children.

2. Methodology

The study was performed using a cross-sectional questionnaire survey. 200 below forty, married full-time workers in different locations in Hong Kong were randomly selected using convenient sampling and invited to answer the questionnaire in a voluntary and anonymous basis. People at and above 40 would probably have low intention to have children and therefore excluded from study. No release of personal information would be possible. This allowed the participants to be more willing to disclose their information. The questionnaire was modified from Chung and coworkers (2009) study on work-life balance and working hour conditions in the Hong Kong general population and combined with an item enquiring for intention to have children. No personal identifiers were collected.

In more detail, the following areas were included in the questionnaire: working hour duration (item one); problem encountered because of disturbed work-life balance (Productivity and work quality has reduced dramatically due to long working hours, Prolonged fatigue level, sleepiness and extreme tiredness, I get physically sick easily and frequently due to heavy workload, I do not have any private time for recreation activities or sports at all, My work has affected my relationship with my friends, I don't have time staying with my partner and family, I feel stressed out, depressed and exhausted after work, Work pressure creates insomnia and poor diet, I become accident-prone, item two); intention to have children, a scale from one to five (low intention to high intention) (item three). The questionnaire were short to improve compliance of participants to complete the questionnaire.

Participants were asked individually face to face on each item and the responses were recorded on the questionnaire sheet in front of the participants so as to make sure the participants were answering the questions properly and the participants knew the correct answers were recorded.

Sample size determination: It was targeted to obtain a sample size of 200 participants, which was comparable to similar work-life balance study (Young, 2016).

The data were entered to an Excel (Microsoft Office v.2010, U.S.A.) file for further data analyses. Correlation analyses were performed between working hour and intention to have children using InStat (v.3, U.S.A.).

3. Results

The number of questionnaires completed were 200 and the responses were analyzed and presented below:

3.1 Working Hours

The average working hour per week of subjects was 49.3 hours. Around half (48 percent) subjects worked between 41 – 50 hours and around 40 percent worked between 51 – 60 hours (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of the 'working hour'

Working hour per week	Number (%)	N [†] =200
< 30	2 (1%)	
31- 40	13 (6.5%)	
41- 50	96 (48%)	
51- 60	85 (42.5%)	
61- 70	3 (1.5%)	
71- 80	0 (0%)	
> 80	1 (0.5%)	

[†]N=Total number of Subjects

3.2 Problems Caused by Disturbed Work-Life Balance

Around 70 percent of the subjects reported prolonged fatigue level, sleepiness and extreme tiredness; around 70 percent reported did not have time staying with their partners and/or family (Table 2).

Table 2. Problems caused by a disturbed work-life balance (Chung et al., 2009)

Problem types:	Number (%)	N [†] =200
Dramatic reduction of Productivity and/or work quality.	115 (57.5%)	
Fatigue, sleepiness, extreme tiredness.	141 (70.5%)	
Easy physically sick.	44 (22%)	
No recreation activities or sports.	72 (36%)	
Adversely affected friends' relationship.	102 (51%)	
No time with partner and/or family.	140 (70%)	
Stressed out, depressed and/or exhausted.	108 (54%)	
Insomnia and/or poor diet	122 (61%)	
Accident-prone	55 (27.5%)	

[†]N=Total number of Subject

3.3 Intention to Have Children

The highest score of the scale was five and it meant highest intention to have children; the lowest score of the scale was one and it meant lowest intention to have children. The mean score was 2.045 (Table 3). 41 percent selected score two, 99.5 percent selected score one to three, only 0.5 percent selected score four and none selected score five.

Table 3. Intention to have children

Intention (1: lowest, 5: highest)	Number (%)	N [†] =200
1	57 (27.5%)	
2	82 (41%)	
3	56 (28%)	
4	5 (2.5%)	
5	0 (0%)	

[†]N=Total number of Subject

3.4 Association between Working Hour and Intention to Have Children

To test for hypothesis H: The association between working hour and intention to have children, the working hour was related to the intention to have children, the responses of item one were correlated with the responses of item three using correlation analysis. The Spearman $r = -0.779$ (no Gaussian assumptions). 95 percent confidence interval: -0.8299 to -0.7163 . A negative value of r showed an inverse relationship. Statistic test showed that two-tailed P value is < 0.0001 , r was significantly different than zero. A plotting of the working hour against intention to have children was shown on (Figure 1). Some linear relationship between the working hour and intention to have children could be found.

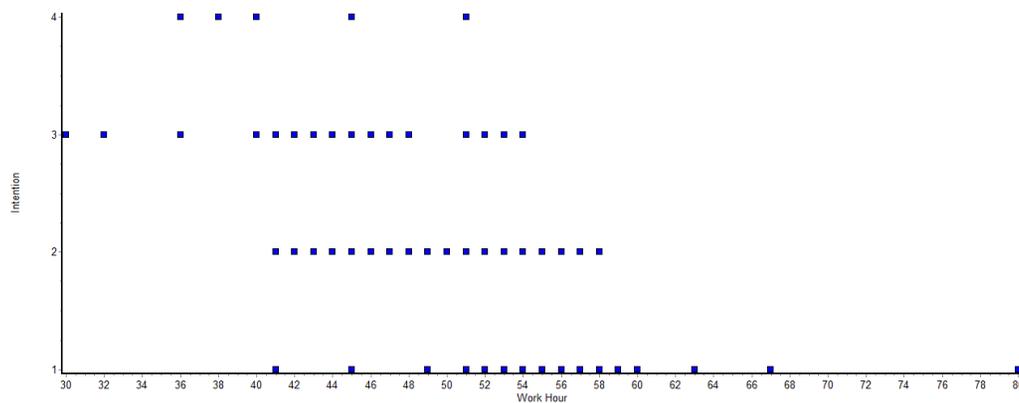


Figure 1. A plot of working hour against intention to have children

4. Discussion

This is the first study selected Hong Kong as an example of a place with very low birth rate and without standard working hour legislation to investigate the full-time workers' working hour and intention to have children condition. The result showed the average working hour of full-time workers in Hong Kong was around 49.3 hours per week. This result was consistent with other studies which was 49 hours per week (Chung et al., 2010; Labor Department, the Government of HKSAR, 2013) and was significantly longer than other places with standard working hour legislation where the working hour per week was only 40 per week (Ghosheh, 2013).

For the problems caused by disturbed work-life balance (Table 2), around 70 percent of full-time workers reported fatigue, sleepiness and extreme tiredness; around 70 percent reported did not have time staying with their partners and/or family. It showed that a high percentage of Hong Kong full-time workers were adversely affected by the long working hour which in turn caused disturbed work-life balance in terms of prolonged fatigue level, sleepiness and extreme tiredness, and did not have time staying with their partners and/or family. All these factors could contribute to low intention to have children (Young, 2016). When compared with the recent study concerning the intention to have children of Long Working Hour Sectors in Hong Kong which had a longer working hour (Young, 2016), more percentage (77.5 percent) of the Long Working Hour Sectors subjects reported fatigue, sleepiness and extreme tiredness; similar amount of Long Working Hour Sectors subjects (68 percent) reported did not have time staying with their partners and/or family.

About their intention to have children, the mean score was 2.045 out of 5; it showed that the Hong Kong full-time workers in general had low intention to have children. This could be expected as many of them had long working hour, poor work-life balance and did not have time to stay with their family. When compared with the study concerning the intention to have children of Long Working Hour Sectors (Young, 2016), similar intention to have children was obtained. The mean score for Long Working Hour Sectors was also 2.045 but the pattern of choice was different as there were slightly less people choosing the lowest intention option (Table 3).

This is also the first study to work on the correlation between working hour and intention to have children in Hong Kong full-time workers. Correlation analysis between working hour and intention to have children showed some inverse relationship between them ($r=-0.779$), that is, long working hour was associated with poor intention to have children. This association was strong although the plots scattered as there were many variations within the populations and existence of many confounding factors. The result supported hypothesis H. When compared with the study concerning the intention to have children of Long Working Hour Sectors (Young, 2016), slightly stronger correlation was found among them, ($r=-0.7845$).

Limitations of the study: This study, being a cross-sectional study, only showed associations, it did not prove the cause and effect relationship between long working hour and intention to have children. Further longitudinal studies which have randomized control design are needed to show the cause and effect relationship. Further studies on different areas around the world, as well as on different industries will also be needed to see whether the working hour and intention to have children condition are similar.

Added value of the paper: This study provided the scientific evidence that in an area without standard working hour legislation, the working hour was long, the work-life balance was poor, the intention to have children was low. This scientific evidence can be useful for the policy making on the working hour issue.

5. Conclusions

Full-time workers in Hong Kong, a place with no Standard Working Hour legislation, had long working hours, poor work-life balance and low intention to have children.

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