

**Sole Parents and Transition back to the Workforce:  
Catered for or not?**

Masters by Research

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## Abstract

This study researched the impact of changes in welfare legislation in Australia that have occurred since July 2006 relative to people receiving government financial assistance or payments via Centrelink (Harding, Vu, Percival & Beer 2005). The reasons for legislative change are broadly discussed narrowing down to the issues these changes raise for single parents and for organisations. The research gathered the views of parents with dependents including sole parents concentrating on the challenges they face and the support they require in their transition back into the workforce. Sole parents are recipients of welfare to aid them in maintaining a household with dependent children and thus are affected by Welfare-to-Work legislation and Mutual Obligations requirements. The key area investigated was whether organisations are implementing work life balance and family friendly work practices that particularly address the needs of sole parents.

A mixed methods research methodology was applied. Although largely a qualitative research approach was adopted, there is also a quantitative component of the research that was confined to frequencies and descriptive statistics. The participants comprised of employees with no dependent children, coupled parents, single parents (separated into two groups: lone parents and sole parents) and Human Resource managers. Additionally, the websites of the Business Council of Australia member organisations, the largest organisations in Australia, were studied to identify the extent to which major corporations in Australia provided access to information on flexible work arrangements and general work conditions on their websites.

This research strengthens the reality that changes in welfare legislation have had an impact on all categories of welfare recipients who are now returning to the workforce, sole parents. Findings suggest that organisations and their Human Resource managers need to be fully aware of this situation and of resultant changes in the profile of potential job applicants. These potential and current employees enter or seek paid work with needs that at times vary from those of the workforce in general. Those organisations that recognise this potential employment opportunity have incorporated work/life balance and family friendly work practices that they felt were suitable and accepted within the workplace culture. These may not always go far enough for the group this research focused on. With some thought and consideration organisations should be able to implement flexible work practices that enable a smoother transition into the workforce for sole parents, benefiting both organisations and their employees.

## Master by Research Declaration

"I, Simone Barnard, declare that the Masters by Research thesis entitled Sole Parents and Transition back to the Workforce: Catered for or not? is no more than 60,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

Signature



Date 31.05.12

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## Definition of Terms

Term	Definition
Dependent Child	A dependent child is defined as all children in the household aged fifteen years or younger, of a child in the household who is aged sixteen – twenty four years and is a fulltime student (Probert & Murphy 2001 p.26).
Employment Pathway Plan	Explains what you need to do to get a job or improve your employment prospects and what assistance you will be offered. It is a legal document that replaces any previous agreement (for example Activity Agreements) and starts from the date you sign it (Centrelink 2010).
Lone parent	A single parent who chooses to return to fulltime work and thus no longer qualify for any Parenting Payments (the minimum adult fulltime wage in Australia would take them beyond eligibility).
Mutual Obligation	Mutual obligations for sole parents consist of: working a minimum of fifteen hours a week; studying fulltime (minimum of eighteen contact hours a week; or a combination of both employment and part-time study continue to receive at least partial Parenting Payments (Centrelink 2006).
New Start Allowance	Financial support while you are looking for work. You need to enter into and sign an Employment Pathway Plan when you start to receive New start Allowance. This outlines activities you agree to undertake while you are looking for work to give you the best chance of getting a job (Centrelink 2010).
Primary Carer	Parent who takes on the major child care responsibilities.
Single parent	A sole/lone parent is “a woman or man who has no spouse or partner usually present in the household but who forms a parent-child relationship with at least one dependent child usually resident in the household” (Probert & Murphy 2001 p.26).
Sole parent	A single parent that is required to meet mutual obligations in order to receive parenting payments (Centrelink 2006).
Welfare to Work(2006)	The legislation introduced by the Howard Government, ‘Welfare to Work 2006’ (Centrelink 2006), requires sole parents to meet mutual obligations in order to receive Parenting Payments when their youngest turns six.

## Index of Abbreviations

BCA	Business Council of Australia
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunities
FFWB	Family Friendly Work Bundles
FFWP	Family Friendly Work Practices
FWA	Flexible Work Arrangements
HR	Human Resource
MO	Mutual Obligations
VCOSS	Victorian Council of Social Services
WLB	Work/life Balance
WTW	Welfare to Work

## Publications Arising from this Thesis

Cliffe, S, 2009, 'Sole Parents and the Transition back into the Workforce: Catered for or not?' paper presented at the School of Management and Information Systems Research Student Seminar, City Queens Campus, Melbourne, 22 July.

Cliffe, S, Lloyd-Walker, B & Sims, R, 2009, 'Mutual Obligations and Organisations' FFWDs: Do they support attraction and retention of Parents?' paper presented at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Australia and New Zealand Academy of Management Conference, Melbourne, Australia, 2-4 December.

## Chapter 1: Research Format

### 1.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 gives an outline of the thesis including the aims, background and research question. A brief description of the methodology and justification of the research is provided as well as the purpose of this research.

### 1.2 Background to Research

The legislation introduced by the Howard Government, 'Welfare to Work 2006' (WTW) (Centrelink 2006), requires all welfare recipients to meet mutual obligations (MO). This requirement of meeting MOs that are determined by Centrelink is for all people who receive any type of government payment (Centrelink 2006). The shape, or form of these 'obligations' varies according to recipient group. Specifically, in relation to the group being investigated and reported on in this thesis, sole parents are required to meet MO in order to receive Parenting Payments when their youngest turns six (Perry 2008). The legislation effectively breaks single parents into two groups. MO for *sole* parents consist of: working a minimum of fifteen hours a week; studying fulltime (minimum of eighteen contact hours a week); or a combination of both employment and part-time study to continue to receive at least partial Parenting Payments (Centrelink 2006; Perry 2008) whereas *lone* parents are those single parents who choose to return to fulltime work and thus no longer qualify for any Parenting Payments (the minimum adult fulltime wage in Australia would take them beyond eligibility). Because lone parents do not qualify for welfare payments, they are not subject to MO requirements. Sole parents therefore are legally required to be working, studying fulltime or actively seeking work when their youngest child reaches the age of six otherwise they run the risk of having their payments stopped (Walter 2001; Cohen & Single 2001). Sole parents are then required to enter an Employment Pathway Plan when their youngest child turns eight (Centrelink 2010). This agreement has similar conditions to MO but is monitored by Centrelink and an Employment Services Provider (Job Access 2010).

This research concentrates on the impact that MO and Employment Pathway Plans, which are both part of the WTW legislation, have on sole parents entering the workforce. These welfare requirements have created additional stress on sole parents, as they must cope with parenting alone while finding and maintaining paid work. Additionally, when meeting these requirements sole parents have less choice in terms of job selection, education and parenting style. Sole parents are also very carefully monitored by Centrelink and/or an Employment Services Provider and any deviation from their welfare agreements can lead to welfare payments ceasing. The coercive nature of welfare legislation increases the work/family conflict that these parents now experience. This research also takes into consideration whether organisations are aware of this social and demographic change and therefore provide Work/Life Balance (WLB) and Family Friendly Work Practices (FFWP), programs designed to assist single parents and especially sole parents with their transition into the workforce. Retention of this group of potential and existing employees can be supported by organisations that have adopted Work Life Balance WLB/FFWP within their workplace culture. This research further investigated whether or not WLB/FFWP is an important issue by organisations trying to keep talented staff in an era of a skills shortage.

This research investigated whether the human resource (HR) policies and practices in organisations assist sole and lone parents to better balance work and homelife (Gray & Tuddball 2004; Gray and Stanton 2002). With separation and divorce rates continuing to rise, more families are headed by a single parent (Walter 2001). Organisations need to be aware of this social and demographic change so they may adjust job designs and offer hours of work to cater for single parents' requirements (Carless & Wintle 2007; Gray & Stanton 2002). All carers, but especially primary carers, returning to work are faced with many challenges. In particular, increasing numbers of sole and lone parents are returning to work (ABS 2007) as a result of current legislation, and will confront additional challenges as they strive to work and parent alone (van Acker & Ferrier 2005; Papalexandris & Kramar 1997).

The challenges parents, especially single parents, face in balancing work and family make it important that organisations adopt formal WLB/FFWP that incorporate elements that sole and lone parents would value in order to reconcile work and caring for children (Gray & Tuddball 2004). Otherwise, inflexible work arrangements will cause these quality employees to leave their positions

due to the restrictions caring for children places on maintaining employment (Walter 2001; Borrill & Kidd 1994). It will be necessary for organisations dealing with skills shortages to attract a diverse range of applicants including skilled single parents to fill these vacant positions and bridge the gaps within companies. Walter states (2001), and statistics confirm (ABS 2007), that increasingly families are now headed by a single parent; most commonly a female. Sole parents are single parents who receive welfare support and are now confronted with the added pressure of the requirement to enter the workforce. Those organisations that create WLB/FFWP programs that will ease work/family conflict (Hayes, Western, Qu & Gray 2010) will find it easier to attract and retain skilled employees (Rau & Hyland 2002). This in turn would not only benefit the organisation by having more loyal, satisfied employees and hence decreased turnover, but it would also benefit the employee (Beauregard & Henry 2009). By reconciling work/family demands the health and well being of parents and children would also be improved thus reducing mental illness and positively contributing to society (Allan, Loudon & Peetz 2007; Pocock 2005). Incorporating sophisticated WLB/FFWP can provide an avenue for organisations to enhance innovation and creativity by encouraging workforce diversity and achieving a competitive advantage (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Francis & Lingard 2004).

### 1.3 *Definitions*

It is important to provide at this stage brief definitions of three inter-related terms used throughout this thesis:

*Work/life balance* includes flexible working practices that assist in reducing the conflict between work and non-work life for all employees. WLB programs are designed to 'improve the balance between paid work and unpaid domestic work' (Fleetwood 2007). WLB programs help to balance work and non-work life for all workers; those with children or elder care responsibilities, and those without dependents.

*Family friendly work practices* refer to a range of offerings by organisations that provide increased flexibility and, in doing so, support WLB. A wide range of elements may be included in an organisation's FFWP offerings, indeed as many as 30 to 40 different programs may be

implemented to enable flexible work arrangements that will result in the work environment being viewed as 'family-friendly' and thus supportive of work/life balance (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran 2006). The components of FFWP might include new ways of arranging and performing jobs, supported by technology (mobile phones, internet connections and email, and laptop computers), such as telecommuting. FFWP may also include carer's leave, and childcare on site or nearby. The major difference between the two types of programs offered to create a flexible workplace, WLB and FFWP, is therefore that FFWP are designed with the demands of carers in mind whereas the focus of WLB is not on working and caring but on balancing work and non-work life in general.

*Flexible Work Arrangements*(FWA) include flexible working schedules enabling employees to negotiate when and where they complete their work commitments, rather than requiring strict adherence to company enforced start and finish times or location, for instance (Haddock, Zimmerman, Ziemba & Lyness 2006; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran 2006; Thornwaite 2004). Components of WLB and FFWP programs combine to create a flexible work environment.

#### **1.4 Research Aims**

The aim of this project is to learn if organisations' policies and practices address the needs of sole parents. All primary carers returning to work are faced with many challenges. In particular, increasing numbers of sole and lone parents are returning to work (ABS 2007) and as a result of current legislation will confront additional challenges as they strive to work and parent alone. This research will investigate whether there are HR policies and practices in organisations to assist all parents to better balance work and home life but in particular will concentrate on addressing, as stated in the thesis title, whether organisations policies and practices address the needs of needs of sole parents.

The definition of single parent for this research is "a woman or man who has no spouse or partner usually present in the household but who forms a parent-child relationship with at least one dependent child usually resident in the household. A dependent child is defined as all children in the household aged fifteen years or younger, of a child in the household who is aged sixteen –

twenty four years and is a fulltime student" (Probert & Murphy 2001 p.26). Children of single parents may spend some time with the non-resident parent however, as with dual career couples with children; one parent may be defined as the *primary* carer as they take on the major child care responsibilities. As a result of this legislation (WTW 2006), organisations will be likely to receive an increase in the number of applicants from sole parents needing to meet their mutual obligations and may wish to respond by employing these parents. The focus of the Government is to have sole parents enter the workforce and hence reduce the dependency on welfare payments (Collins & Gray 2006). This trend coupled with the existing skills shortages may cause companies to reassess their conditions of employment. Most primary carers returning to work have had experience in the workplace and will bring to the organisation that experience and maturity. Changes in the administration of the legislation in 2009 have not altered the requirement that recipients of parenting payments return to work when their youngest child turns six. What has changed is the terminology, instead of abiding by the agreed mutual obligations; parents now are required to enter into an Employment Pathway Plan. From then once the youngest child turns eight; parents receiving parenting payments will cross over to the New Start Allowance (Carney 2006). This Allowance also has specific requirements to be met in order for the recipient to continue receiving government assistance. Under this program parents also have to fulfil an activity test that is covered by an Employment Pathway Plan (Centrelink 2010).

Many organisations, especially as part of their 'employer of choice' or 'best employer' policies, have in recent times implemented a range of programs providing WLB/FFWP that have the potential to benefit both male and female workers; parents and non-parents. In theory HR has highlighted the concept that people are a valuable asset, and that diversity leads to a more knowledgeable and creative workforce (Dessler, Griffiths & Lloyd-Walker 2007; Lingard & Francis 2006). By investigating the range of policies in existence, those implemented since WTW legislation was introduced, and considering these within a climate of skills shortages, this research will endeavour to discover whether theory has crossed over into practice to provide a work environment that attracts and supports retention of parents, especially sole parents.

## 1.5 *Related Research*

A review was conducted of WLB/FFWP that currently exists in organisations that are members of the Business Council of Australia (BCA). These organisations' WLB/FFWP were examined in order to determine if these programs assist employees with no dependants and parents to balance work and family life. Research being conducted at Deakin University explores this issue from the social and financial impact of returning to work from welfare for single parents and their children (Cook 2008; Robinson 2008). The perspective of this thesis is to remain with the narrow focus of sole parents but investigate the availability of WLB/FFWP within organisations to not only assist all employees with work/life balance but to identify if this group of sole parents are catered for in the workplace when combining work and dependent children by having available to them WLB/FFWP that are suited to their needs. Other academics such as Charlesworth (2007), Pocock (2007), Lingard and Francis (2006, 2005, 2004), Francis, Lingard and Gibson (2006), concentrate their research on WLB/FFWP in general or within certain industries.

## 1.6 *Purpose of this Research*

This research will identify which elements of WLB/FFWP best attract and retain sole and lone parents, in particular those required to return to the workforce when their youngest dependent child turns six (Centrelink 2006) and those who are in full time employment with dependent children. The overarching research question for this research is: What is the role of WLB/FFWP in attracting and retaining sole and lone parents?

In particular, when distinguishing between two specific single parent groups:

1. What role do WLB/FFWP policies play in attracting sole parents and assisting in the retention of those who must comply with new MO requirements?
2. What role do WLB/FFWP policies play in attracting lone parents and assisting in the retention of those in this group by reducing work-family conflict?

Sub-questions this research will seek to answer include:

3. What policies, programs and procedures have been implemented in participant organisations to assist sole and lone parents to manage their work and childcare responsibilities?
4. Why have these policies come into existence?
5. Do organisations monitor or evaluate existing WLB/FFWP?
6. Are the available WLB/FFWP assisting to retain employees from this pool of experienced workers?

### **1.7 *The Academic and Practical Benefits of the Research***

The benefits of the research for academia and practice are the examination of current WLB/FFWP and the investigation of how sole and lone parents consider them. Identification and documentation of FFWP in major and other organisations in Australia provides evidence of current practices designed to support work/life balance. By contrasting current offerings against offerings desired by sole parents conclusions may be drawn as to whether the needs of these potential employees are being catered for. The results of this comparison demonstrate the importance that organisations should be placing on creating WLB/FFWP that will attract and retain sole parents as they enter the workforce with special needs.

This research examined whether organisations offered conditions of work that would attract and retain single parents, with a focus on sole parents. It examined if those organisations implementing WLB/FFWP experienced an increase in attraction, decrease in turnover, along with an increase in productivity since implementation of those policies.

The aim of this research was to determine whether WLB/FFWP are available to all employees or whether sole and lone parents in order to cope with work and family needs are predominately being employed in lower level, non-career part-time or casual roles.

## 1.8 *Research Methodology*

The nature of this research is a mixed methods approach to answer the research question. This approach has been chosen due to the nature of the topic which is to capture what sole parents require to enable them to return to work, options currently available in the workplace, and how sole parents interpret the challenges and conflict that arise combining home and work/life. A hypothesis free orientation was adopted (Burns 2000) with the empirical framework based on the views of single parents, both lone and sole parents, and preferences for WLB/FFWP in their social context. This was achieved by asking a range of participants, including both partnered and single parents, to identify the WLB/FFWP they require to balance their home and work life. Results obtained by using this method will help organisations to understand events from the viewpoint of parents, and especially sole parents (Burns 2000), possibly adding merit to the policies implemented in organisations to support work/life balance.

Qualitative research brings about social reality, and will provide an understanding of the social interactions from the perspective of sole parents and managers implementing FFWP (Burns 2000). This approach allows the outcomes to highlight variations. Existing WLB/FFWP may appear to benefit parents but sole parents may identify subtle changes in practices/policies that make WLB/FFWP more appropriate for all employees, those with no dependent children (referred to throughout the thesis as 'no dependents'), and coupled and single parents.

As this research deals with people, that is, those with no dependents, parents of dependent children and HR managers in organisations, an ethnographic focus was applied and influenced the qualitative approach, describing their activities and patterns in reducing work/life conflict (Bryman 2001; Burns 2000). In order to improve the validity of this research triangulation was achieved using two forms of data collection (Burns 2000). These two forms were: semi structured interviews (qualitative), and viewing and ranking of a sample of 10 job advertisements and a completion of a questionnaire based on the literature review (quantitative). Participants were encouraged to comment informally also on issues relating to balancing home and work life that were raised as a result of the ranking exercise and completion of the questionnaire (qualitative). Secondary data

was also gathered on WLB/FFWP offered as detailed on the websites of BCA member organisations and assessed against a checklist developed from the literature (both quantitative and qualitative).

Semi structured interviews conducted face-to-face with single parents, ranking of job advertisements and questionnaires completed by these participants were used to determine those elements of WLB/FFWP identified within the literature to see which best address their needs. For coupled parents and participants with no dependents, the ranking of job advertisements and completion of questionnaires occurred via email. These two participant groups were also asked to provide short answers to those questions asked of single parents that were relevant to them. BCA member organisation websites were researched to learn if Australia's major corporations were offering the WLB/FFWP employees desired, especially those required by those returning to the workforce to meet their MO (see Appendices B, C, D).

Semi structured interviews were conducted with HR managers to gather information on WLB/FFWP and related policies that are currently in operation and being implemented in their organisation (see Appendix E).

Data gathered has been analysed and are presented in graphic form to enable preferences of employees with no dependants, coupled parents, lone parents and sole parents to be compared against WLB/FFWP offerings of participants' current employers, for those who were employed, to determine the extent to which they extend to meet the specific needs of all participant groups but especially those of sole parents. This analysis was also designed to identify the extent to which the needs of participants with no dependants, coupled parents and single parents are currently being met by organisations and whether BCA member organisation WLB/FFWP detailed on their websites match the preferences of participants.

## 1.9 *Overview of the Thesis*

The following overview provides a brief summary of the chapters in this research:

### Chapter 1

Research format: Is the introduction providing a summary of the research, succinctly detailing the key points maintained within the scope of the research.

### Chapter 2

Literature Review: Is the theoretical background and explores a review of the literature available on the topic, including background to research, social change, demographic change, legislation (Mutual Obligations and Employment Pathway Plan), skills shortages, attraction and retention, employer of choice, work/life balance, family friendly work practices, employee rewards, workplace culture and environment, support of sole parents, reluctant workforce participants, choice for sole parents, and after school care.

### Chapter 3

Approach and Methodology: Discusses the methodology used, the conceptual framework, methods of analysis, ethics approval, research participants, data collection, data analysis, research limitations and conclusion.

### Chapter 4

Results: Details the results from the semi structured interviews, electronic interviews, the completed ranking Job Advertisements form and a questionnaire.

### Chapter 5

Discussion: Identifying the viewpoints of all participants within this research. Comparing and contrasting what organisations' are offering in terms of WLB/FFWP and seeing if that matches with the needs and desires of all participant groups. Focussing on what special requirements sole parents need to be attracted and assisted to remain in the workforce.

### Chapter 6

Conclusion and Implications: Summarises the findings from the discussion chapter and how these findings are supported by the results presented in chapter 5. It also highlights areas of similarities and identifies gaps within the range of WLB/FFWP organisations are implementing, the elements of WLB/FFWP being offered, and what sole parents specifically require.

This research will go beyond current knowledge in relation to WLB/FFWP to identify those elements that single parents value most. These are the selection of individual elements that comprise WLB/FFWP within organisations that single parents, particularly sole parents, require to reconcile work/life conflict. In doing so, it will extend the current knowledge in relation to WLB/FFWP in general industry and thereby better identify ways organisations might attract sole parents, a pool of experienced workers, by using relevant WLB/FFWP then retain those sole parents thus alleviating problems associated with skills shortages.

The significance of this research is that organisations will be able to use the findings of this research to develop WLB/FFWP which appeal to a group of, usually experienced, job candidates not previously targeted but now required in an era of knowledge and skill shortage by demonstrating through these policies how their workplace enables all employees to balance their work and outside-work responsibilities. It will also assist sole parents to meet their obligations under the new legislation by identifying appropriate FFWP, that go beyond WLB, and that organisations can offer them. This would enable sole parents to better reconcile the demands of parenthood and work, by being aware of the flexible work options companies offer.

This research also identified those elements of current WLB/FFWP that are of least value to sole and lone parents, enabling organisations to specifically design their WLB/FFWB related to areas of skill shortage to increase their ability to attract and retain this target group of potential skilled employees.

### **1.10 Limitations**

Most research has some limitations. For this thesis trying to obtain 2010 statistics from a reliable source such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) was difficult. The most recent material from the ABS regarding rates of employment and sole parents returning to work is based on 2006 results. This means that changes as a result of the implementation of the WTW are not yet fully evident. Further data collection regarding this information will occur over the next few years out of the time frame for this research. This made demonstrating the impact that WTW legislation by

providing statistical evidence difficult. Further limitations regarding research methods are discussed in Chapter 3.

### **1.11 Conclusion**

This chapter has laid the foundations for this thesis. It introduced the research problem and research questions. The research was justified, the methodology briefly described, the thesis chapters were outlined and the limitations were given.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter will consider changes in legislation that have occurred from July 2006 to the end of 2010 relative to people receiving government financial assistance or payments via Centrelink (Harding, Vu, Percival & Beer 2005). Social and demographic change has led to changes in the composition of Australian society and workplaces. It is not uncommon for legislation to be enacted as a response to changes in the environment. In this chapter the reasons for legislative change will broadly be discussed narrowing down to the impact these changes have on single parents and organisations. This chapter will consider important views relative to the topic of sole parents and their transition back into the workforce. It focuses on the issue that sole parents are recipients of welfare to aid them in maintaining a household with dependent children and thus, like other welfare recipients, are affected by WTW legislation and MO requirements. This literature review will cover: social and demographic change; legislation and its impact on sole parents; organisations' policies and practices in relation to attraction and retention, workplace culture and environment and the whether these policies support choice for sole parents. As company websites play a large role in attraction and retention of employees today, website design principles are then discussed and the suitability of organisations' websites and policies and this chapter concludes by considering the suitability of current HR practices in catering for the return of sole parents to the workplace.

### 2.2 Social Change

Today traditional family structures no longer are what they once were. There are now many variations to what constitutes a family (Drago, Pirretti & Scutella 2009; ABS 2008a; Funder 1995). There has been a gradual shift away from the traditional model of 'male breadwinner/female homemaker'. The increase in the number of women entering the workforce and in one-parent families shows a change in the primary social unit (Campbell & Charlesworth 2005). Statistics from the Census data have shown that during the time frame 1986 to 2006 the workforce participation rate of women aged 15 years and older in Australia has risen from 48% to 58%. At the same time,

male workforce participation rates have dropped slightly (4%) from 1986 to 2006 (ABS 2008a). This is shown in the Figure 2.1 (below).

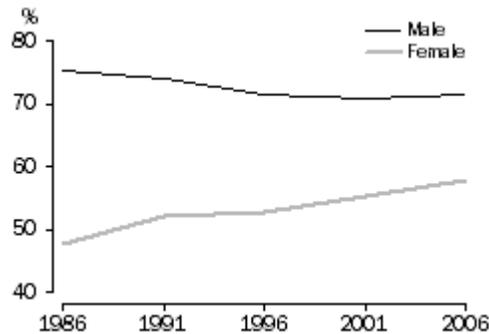


Figure 2.1: Labour Force Participation Rates (a) For Men and Women  
(Source: ABS 1986-2006 Censuses of Population and Housing 2008a, p. 2)

Census data on participation rates for coupled parents and lone or sole mothers show that as children reach school age (5-9 years), workforce participation rates increase markedly for all parents, including lone and sole mothers with a slower increase for these single parents, similar to that of two parent families, after children reach the ages of 10-14. As would be expected, the participation rate continues with only a small further increase as children approach and enter adulthood (15-24) years (ABS 2008b). This can be seen in Figure 2.2:

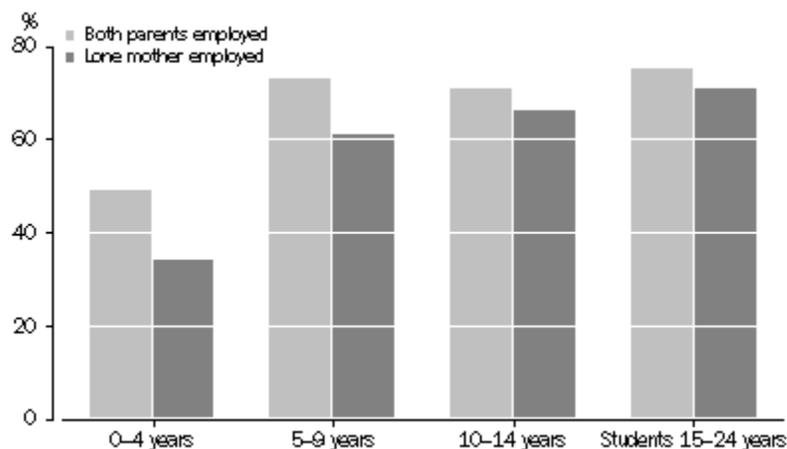


Figure 2.2: Families with Dependant Children  
(Source: ABS Employment Status of Parents 2008b, p. 4).

Whereas in this research terms 'lone' or 'sole' parent are used to distinguish between a single parent receiving parenting payments (sole) and one who is not (lone), the term 'lone mother,' as used by the ABS may refer to sole or lone mothers (Census Dictionary 2006). Sole parents are overwhelmingly represented by women and are accordingly reported as sole or lone mothers (Department for Communities 2007) in ABS reports. Indeed, 84% of the 640,000 lone parent families with dependents in June 2011 were single mothers (ABS 2011). Because Figure 2.2 relates to lone, or sole, mother participation rates prior to the impact of the WTW legislation and MO requirements, the effect of legislative changes will not be evident. What it does tell us, though, is that even before new MO requirements were introduced approximately 35% of single mothers (lone mothers) were employed, at least part time.

What can be seen from Figure 2.3 is that the traditional model of 'male breadwinner/female homemaker' predominated in 1983. Being in a "single-income" coupled family represented the majority in 1983. By 2009 the trend had changed to one full time employed parent and one part-time employed parent. This shows the changing view of both parents taking on 'breadwinner' responsibilities, but there remains some questioning as to whether both parents in these dual-income families take on board the caring responsibilities and an equal share in the housework. Shared childcare between coupled parents can provide a support system that allows primary carers to participate in paid employment (Hayes et al. 2010).

As can be seen from Figure 2.3, the number of coupled families with dependent children where both are participating in the workforce and did so by combining a full time position with a part time position has increased (Hayes et al. 2010). However research would confirm that men in Australia still do not contribute equally to household activities, including childcare, even when both partners are working the same or similar hours. Pocock (2005b, p. 32) found that 'the unchanging normative male worker archetype dominates institutions of work and care' despite the fact that female workforce participation rates for those in the childbearing and child-raising age group continues to increase. Women are changing but workplaces and their male partners are not changing as quickly. The situation in Australia contrasts sharply with changes that have taken place in Scandinavian countries. As in Australia, female participation in the workplace, politics and society in general has increased over the last 30 years in Sweden and Norway. Fifty per cent of women with children

under the age of seven years in Sweden and Norway are also likely to work part time (as in Australia), however sharing of the care of home and children responsibilities comes much closer to equal in Sweden than it does in Norway. Bernhardt, Noack and Lyngstad (2008) attribute this difference in household workload to the longer history of gender equality in Sweden than has been the case in Norway.

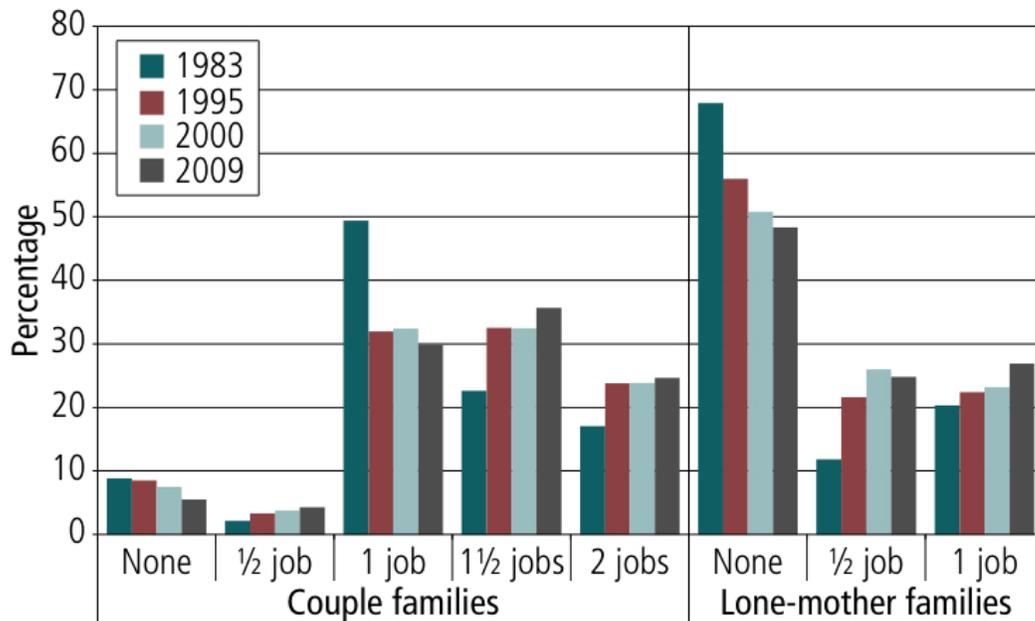


Figure 2.3: Number of jobs among families with dependant children, 1983-2009

Source: (Hayes, Western, Qu & Gray 2010)

Sullivan and Coltrane (2008) looked back over the last 30 years and found that there has been a move in the US to male partners contributing more equally to housework and childcare when both partners are working. Sullivan and Coltrane (2008) point out that this change has not taken place as quickly as the rate of workforce participation by females and especially by mothers, but that it is occurring. However the increase found, despite representing a doubling in men's contribution to work in the home, has only brought their contribution up 30% of the total work required to manage a home and family. A larger study conducted in the UK, US and Germany (Gershuny, Bittman & Brice, 2005) found that there was some adjustment of household workload linked to female workplace participation. This change resulted in the workload shares becoming more equal between dual career couples; there did, though, remain a considerable gap between the hours of

housework performed by females and males, even when employment status (job title and income) were similar or the same (Gershuny et al. 2005).

The percentage of lone mothers (ABS definition – includes both lone and sole mothers) not employed has decreased from almost 70% in 1983 to less than 50% in 2009. This decrease shows that factors, including changes in welfare assistance, have resulted in more lone mothers entering the workforce. Figure 2.3 does provide an indication of how the changes to WTW, in particular MO, may have impacted on lone-mother families. During the period 2000 to 2009 there was a slight decrease in lone parent families with a part time (half-time) job and an increase in those where the lone parent held a full time position. The extent to which the changes to legislation contributed to this are not clear as the figures cover both the six years leading up to the change and the three years post introduction of the new MO conditions. However others have found that the introduction of WTW legislation and MO requirements is supported by the increase in both part- and full-time employment (Hayes et al. 2010). Not obvious from the graph in Figure 2.3 is the work/life conflict and the stresses of trying to reconcile paid employment and carer responsibilities. Despite the increase of women in the workforce, mothers remain responsible for the majority of childcare and household chores (Sawer 2006). Increased workforce participation by both coupled and lone female parents is likely to lead to increased work/life conflict.

Figures 2.2 and 2.3 show a change in the number of lone mothers entering the workforce. Smith (2006b) attributes possible employment limitations for this group as a result of changes in WTW legalisation. The difficulties that arise for this group trying to meet all their MO requirements and carer responsibilities reduce the likelihood of them remaining employed. Lone mothers require additional assistance from organisations as they attempt to parent alone and maintain paid work supported by the implementation of suitable workplace policies, including WLB/FFWP, that make available to them flexible work arrangements that will enable them to meet their MO and family needs.

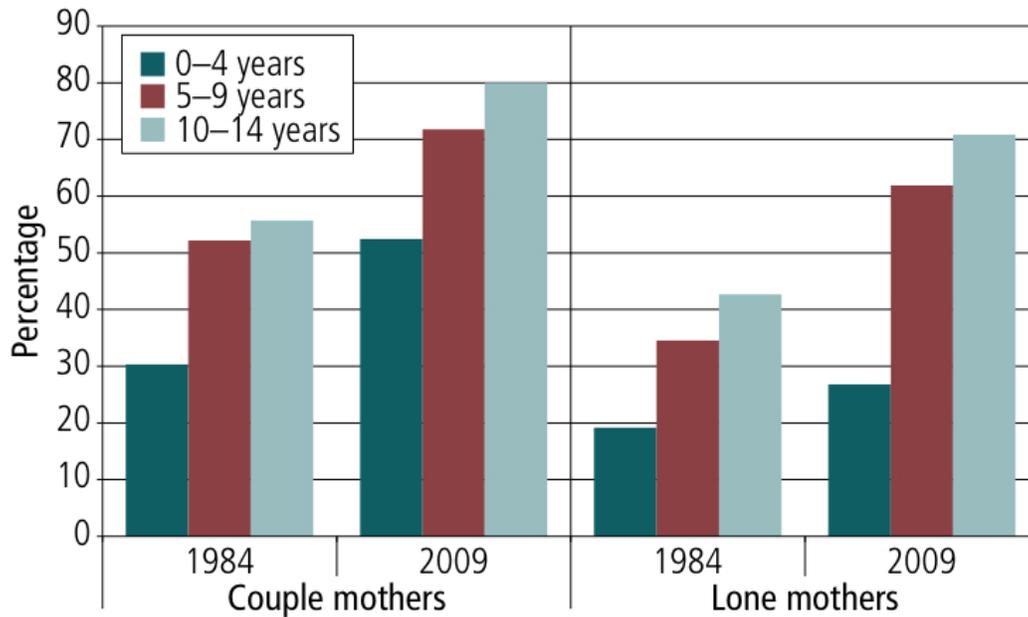


Figure 2.4: Employment rates of couple and lone mothers, by age of youngest child

Source: (Hayes, Western, Qu & Gray 2010)

Generally mothers continue to be the primary carers; this is the case for coupled mothers and especially for single mothers after relationship breakdowns, so the age of their children is an important consideration regarding workforce participation rates. As can be seen from Figure 2.4 (above), employment rates for both mother groups increases as the youngest child becomes older. What Figure 2.4 also highlights is that lone mothers on the whole have lower employment rates compared to coupled mothers. The main issue here is that lone mothers do not always have a support network to assist them with childcare when attempting to enter the labour market (Hayes et al. 2010).

### 2.3 Demographic Change

Closely related to social change, demographic change has impacted society and the workplace. Labour force participation rates have been of interest to Australian governments, especially when considering recipients of welfare payments (Harding, Vu, Percival & Beer 2005b). The structure of 'Parenting Payments Single' for sole parents prior to 2006 raised concerns that this type of

payment promoted long term dependency on welfare and discouraged participation in the labour force and society (Lunn 2008; Harding et al. 2005b). This lower labour force rate amongst welfare recipients and especially sole parents could have a possible consequence of affecting their retirement investments. As a result of this view, the Australian government has focussed on policies that promote self-reliance through employment (Harding et al. 2005b). In addition to this, the emergence of skills shortages and an ageing population combine to make economic growth difficult to achieve

The focus of academics and organisations on developing flexible work arrangements through the introduction of WLB/FFWP is the result of a logical consequence of social and demographic change; that change being an increase in workplace diversity in general, the increased participation of women in the workforce, the ageing population, and a rise in single parent families (Poelmans, Kalliath & Brough 2008).

Demographic change has occurred across a range of areas, resulting in greatly increased workforce diversity compared with the Australian workplace of 50 years ago. Not only has the workforce participation rate for females both with and without children increased in Australia, we have also seen a marked increase in the range of cultural backgrounds from which employees come. Indeed Leveson, Joiner and Bakalis (2009) state that Australia has one of the most culturally diverse workforces in the world. Cultural diversity 'can be defined as differences such as language, religion, dress and moral codes' (Leveson, et al. 2009, p. 377) and includes political background, race, age, sexual orientation, gender, marital status and disability (Armstrong, Flood Guthrie, Lui, Maccurtan & Mkamwa 2010; Lumandi 2008). Dickens, Mitchell and Cregan (2009, p. 4) point out that this can require of organisations consideration of how 'religious observances such as requirements for days off to attend services or ceremonies' and related flexible working requests will be equitably handled.

Dickens et al. (2009) state that good practice in diversity management would include flexible work practices to accommodate religious and other reasonable employee requests (e.g. prayer rooms). Likewise, good diversity management practices will include consideration of special needs of people with physical or intellectual disabilities. In Australia, people with disabilities are being

encouraged to enter the workforce (ASCC 2007) in the belief that this will reduce the level of social marginalisation experienced by this group and the economic disadvantage they have suffered (Dempsey & Ford 2009). With approximately 68,370 people with a disability employed in Australia in 2005 (Dempsey & Ford 2009), before the introduction of the new requirements under WTW legislation, an increasing number of organisations now also need to find ways to cater for the needs of this group of employees. For this reason, WLB/FFWP and other flexible work practices may focus on parents, but these policies also have the potential to support the needs of other groups in the workplace that come under the domain of diversity management.

According to Poelmans et al. (2008), "Massive integration of women in the labour market and the greying of the population have resulted in both men and women of the 'sandwich generation' to be increasingly squeezed in between professional and caring responsibilities for children and elderly parents" (p.2). As well as the increase in cultural diversity, people with disabilities and the aging of the workforce, increased female participation in the workplace combines with the increase in dual earner couples and single parents to bring about a profound change 'in the demographic make up of the workforce' (Nasuridin & Hsia 2008, p. 18).

Demographic and social change has seen the traditional male breadwinner/female homemaker model alter significantly. As more single parents with dependent children seek employment the establishment of a more diverse workforce with the need for more diverse forms of paid work has emerged (Campbell & Charlesworth 2005).

A range of workplace policies designed to address social and demographic change are discussed in section 2.7, Organisations' Responses to Social, Demographic and Legislative Change.

## **2.4 Welfare and Legislative Change**

The move from welfare to work around the world has been supported by comments such as 'breaking the welfare dependency cycle' or 'breaking the joblessness cycle' in the belief that this will result in a better life for the former welfare recipients and their dependants. Legislation designed to move welfare recipients back into the workforce has been introduced in a large number

of developed countries around the world. Dean, Bonvin, Vielle and Farvaque (2005, p.4) described this, in the European context, as 'the transition from ... the golden age' of welfare to the age of the 'active social state'. Moss (2006, p.87) described changes to welfare as indicating that governments now hold the attitude that entitlement to unemployment benefits is not automatic but 'conditional upon fulfilling an ever-increasing range of obligations'. These requirements placed on welfare recipients usually include completing training or education, or accepting work at even the minimum wage rate. Peck and Theodore (2001) saw this change to work-orientated welfare reform (termed workfare) as having begun in the United States and having been enthusiastically adopted in the United Kingdom. In New Zealand, government policy has largely focused on increasing the labour force participant rate of parents by providing government support for working families (Ravenswood 2008). Overall the belief around the world has been that increases in welfare payments led governments to consider ways of reducing this growing expense item. However re-training efforts do also attract a considerable cost (Huber, Lechner, Wunsch & Walter 2009). The cost-benefit analysis has considered reduced welfare dependency and the associated reduction in welfare payments balanced against training and other costs incurred in supporting welfare recipients back into the workforce. The belief that the user should pay has become over the last twenty years a driving ideology for current Australian Government social policy.

Demographic and social change has resulted in more parents entering the workforce and the Labor Government has included in the Fair Work Act introduced in 2009 provisions to better support families. This Act has brought about a new bargaining system and National Employment Standards that are designed to assist low-income earners and parents in their efforts to achieve a work/life balance. Under the Fair Work Act, as part of the ten National Employment Standards, is the right for employees to request flexible work arrangements and extended unpaid parental leave, or the right for employees to request an additional twelve months of unpaid parental leave (Baird & Williamson 2008; Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission 2008).

## **2.5 Welfare to Work Legislation**

In Australia, the Federal Government introduced the WTW legislation justifying it as a way of moving people dependent on welfare payments into paid work. The success of this policy was to

be measured by a reduction in the number of welfare recipients and an increase in the rate of workforce participation (Karvelas 2008; McInnes 2007; Grahame 2006; Budd & Mumford 2005; Bahnisch 2004; Schooneveldt 2002). The desire of governments that WTW legislation would assist in reducing their welfare payments expenses may well have been achieved in Australia. Brown (2009) states that since the introduction of new MO requirements under WTW legislation in 2006 there had been a reduction of approximately 20% in the number of people on Parenting Payments by 2009.

It was predicted that with the introduction of WTW (1<sup>st</sup> July 2006) legislation by the Federal Government significant changes in relation to financial assistance policies for welfare recipients, including the group this research is focusing on - sole parents - and people with disabilities and all families in poverty (Cameron 2006; Harding, Vu & Percival 2005) would occur. These changes for welfare recipients now require them to participate in activities with a focus on entering the workforce as soon as possible (Smith 2006b).

Two different schemes exist in relation to sole parents receiving welfare payments. Those sole parents who were receiving 'Parenting Payment Single' before 1 July 2006 continue to receive their payments and are subjected to the pension income test (Centrelink 2006). This income test is more generous than the allowance income test that affects those sole parents that commence receiving welfare payments after 1 July 2006. Sole parents who became welfare recipients from 1 July 2006 will automatically be transferred to 'New Start Allowance' and agree to find employment of at least 15 hours a week as soon as their youngest child turns six. The 'New Start Allowance' is based on a lower payment rate compared to 'Parenting Payment Single' and has a stricter income test. "As a result, many sole parents will be facing large falls in income when their youngest child turns six and, for those whose youngest child is already aged six to 15 years, the returns from paid work will be much lower than currently" (Harding et al. 2005b p.197). Statistics provided by the Census data have shown that between the years 1996 and 2006 the participation rate of sole mothers with children in the age range of 0–14 years rose from 50% to 59% (ABS 2008a). The impending legislation may have been a factor influencing sole parents to re-enter the workforce. The coercive nature of this welfare scheme directs sole parents to find any type of job regardless of pay, interest, held skills or career progression (Smith 2006b).

Prior to the 2006 changes to WTW there was a requirement for sole parents to undertake MO but this did not occur until their youngest child turned 13 years of age. The change in the WTW legislation has created a tightening of the requirements for all welfare recipients with dependent children, including sole parents, now when their youngest dependent child turns six MO and activity requirements commence (Lunn 2008). When the sole parent's youngest dependent child becomes eight years of age, the payments and requirements come under the rulings of New Start Allowance, which incorporates the Employment Pathway Plan (Karvelas 2008; Grahame 2006; Bahnisch 2004; Schooneveldt 2002). These enforced agreements by the Government place pressure on sole parents to find work and fulfil their primary carer responsibilities (Baker & Tippin 2002). The current requirements are that welfare recipients find work themselves, or that they accept offers of suitable work orchestrated through Centrelink for which earnings maybe at the minimum rate of pay. Some exemptions exist. Welfare recipients will not have to take a position that requires travel time of more than sixty minutes or where the travel cost is greater than ten per cent of their gross income (Smith 2006b).

The underlying philosophy of WTW legislation is that those receiving welfare payments will give something back to society in exchange for this financial support (Schooneveldt 2003). Australia's welfare system is categorised as a form of liberalism. This regime of liberalism operates in many other Anglo countries such as the United States of America (USA), Canada and the United Kingdom (Patulny 2005). Welfare reforms based on these liberal ideologies incorporate stricter and more stringent activity requirements for all welfare recipients where payments will be terminated for not meeting these set activity requirements under MO or an Employment Pathway Plan (Chase-Lansdale, Moffitt, Lohman, Cherlin, Coley, Pittman, Roff & Vortruba-Drzal 2003). Such requirements will impact all welfare recipients, especially sole parents.

## **2.6     *Impact of WTW on Sole Parents***

Changes in requirements related to welfare payments affect all welfare recipients. Gray and Collins (2007) found that the combination of WTW and Work Choices legislation in Australia impacted women negatively in general. The legislation combined to result in an increase in casualisation of the workforce, an increase in working hours and greater uncertainty of hours of work. They

concluded that 'the raft of legislation' could 'be seen to entrench marginalisation of women in the workplace' (p.137). As stated in section 2.4, the new Fair Work Act does provide some protections for families but the aim of welfare reforms around the world has been to reduce dependence on welfare and increase workforce participation. Overall the effect of a range of changes in legislation over recent years has been to require those receiving welfare payments to meet new and more stringent requirements (Moss 2006). All welfare recipients have new requirements to meet if they wish to continue to receive welfare payments.

As already stated, MO and Employment Pathway Plans are designed to encourage welfare recipients to increase their labour market participation by linking welfare activity requirements to some measure of hours worked (Karvelas 2008; McInnes 2007; Grahame 2006; Budd & Mumford 2005; Bahnisch 2004; Schooneveldt 2002). This governmental outlook has been met with opposition. The WTW legislation was viewed as pushing both single parents and people with disabilities further in to poverty (Catholic Welfare Australia 2005), requiring them to gain any work they can or to pursue any studies that fit in with their caring responsibilities. This may not be in the best interest of the individual or the people that they care for.

Some primary carers returning to work are faced with many challenges. In particular increasing numbers of both sole and lone parents are returning to work (ABS 2007) and as a result of the WTW legislation (Centrelink 2006), will confront additional challenges as they strive to work and parent alone (van Acker & Ferrier 2005; Papalexandris & Kramar 1997). For sole parents this group will experience even greater conflict trying to fulfil a working role and a parental role, causing more stress and less satisfaction with life (Duxbury & Higgins 2001). The requirements of the legislation in turn place pressure on sole parents to find employment that allows them to combine dependent children and work. Lack of success in a sole parent's search for work will be supplemented by the government assisting in locating a position for the sole parent. Such a position may not suit the family in relation to work hours, geographic location, or the work available may be at a lower level and thus will not advance the sole parent's career (Carney 2006). At the same time, this position may limit the parent's ability to access education to upgrade their qualifications in order to improve their future career prospects (Bierema 2001). According to the

legislation, a position paying the minimum rate of \$15.00 an hour is the only requirement (Fair Work Ombudsman 2010).

Cameron (2006) states that being pushed into employment as quickly as possible places welfare recipients under pressure to make life-changing decisions in a short time frame. Decision making under these circumstances creates stress and a higher chance of welfare recipients placing themselves and the people they care for into situations that are not desirable or manageable. Despite the risk this places on 'the parenting capacities of the more fragile groups within the sole parent population' (Cox & Priest 2007, p. 19), the legislation has been enacted and recipients of Parenting Payments whose children all are over the age of six are now subject to the relevant MO requirements.

Welfare recipients are not entitled to be 'too fussy or selective' in accepting a job if they wish to be financially assisted by the Government (Sawer 2006). This also applies to finding courses or methods of study. Courses selected may be influenced by convenience in order to satisfy MO. For sole parents, factors to consider would be time limits, days courses are offered, whether on line delivery is provided and how these fit in with caring responsibilities. Therefore the course undertaken may not be a choice of interest, skill strength or lead to career advancement. It would be a decision made to meet MO in order to receive welfare payments.

Along with the issue of vulnerability is the added difficulty of meeting MO in particular areas of the state or country; anywhere where job growth is slow. There are strong economic arguments to encourage all Governments, especially the State Governments, to invest in strategies that target these welfare recipients who now have to deal with additional barriers to employment (VCOSS 2007).

Research by Cox and Priest (2007, p. 2) conducted six months after implementation of the new MO under WTW led them to conclude that for "sole parents the capacity for good parenting may conflict with the basic assumption of the Welfare to Work program being that all recipients' families will accrue benefits through their workforce participation and presumed increased income." Balancing sole parenting with even part-time work may, this suggests, diminish the quality of parenting whilst attempting to deliver benefits to families.

Single parents seek jobs that support parenting responsibilities and enable them to combine paid work around parenting demands (Hand & Hughes 2004). Gray and Collins' (2007) research indicates that this brings with it the risk of marginalisation within the workplace leading to career disadvantage lasting beyond the years in which single parents need to work part-time, take career breaks or accept casual work arrangements to meet their parenting responsibilities.

The introduction of WTW legislation directly impacts sole parents and this in turn results in a change in workforce participation that will be observed by organisations. A response to the WTW legislation will be an increase in a diverse range of former welfare recipients, in particular sole parents, searching for employment that caters for their needs (VCOSS 2007). Organisations will now need to consider employing a group of people they may not previously have thought of as a potential source of reliable employees. Business enterprises and government policy makers need to acknowledge that there are barriers sole parents must overcome in order to be able to enter the labour market (VCOSS 2007).

The McClure report (Moss 2006), an Australian government commissioned report, placed the responsibility for providing welfare and access to participation in education and work under MO on governments, business and the community. The report states 'that the obligations of government and business are no less important than those of the individual' (Moss 2006, p. 99). Under the legislation welfare recipients have obligations but The McClure Report makes it clear that organisations and the government also have obligations. Organisations have an obligation to society to be socially responsible, to be 'good corporate citizens' and consider the needs of all employees, including those returning to work to meet their MO.

Changes in Welfare payments and conditions under WTW have impacted all welfare recipients. The focus of this thesis is on its impact on sole parents. An increase in family stress is more likely for sole parents and their children. WTW legislation has a negative impact on the rights of sole parents to care for their children how they want to without risking a reduction in or removal of their income support (Groth 2007). These parents and children are most vulnerable and their vulnerability is increased as a result of MO and Employment Pathway Plan agreements and

compliance regimes (Radich 2005). This is of particular concern when this group has been identified as 'at risk' (Butterworth, Fairweather, Anstey and Windsor (2006). Issues relating to the impact of the legislation specifically on sole parents are now discussed.

### ***2.6.1 Reluctant Workforce Participants?***

Work/family conflict can be high for sole parents making them appear to be reluctant workforce participants. Sole parents may be less likely to occupy a paid position than coupled parents due to the possible difference in childcare support and the demands of being a single parent.

Single parents' workforce participation rates tend to be lower than that of married parents (ABS 2003). This difference is perceived as a negative reflection on single parents inferring that they do not wish to find employment. But in most cases these parents were once married. The change in employment levels is more likely due to a dramatic alteration in their home lives as now they have full responsibility for raising their children alone (Walter 2001; Borrill & Kidd 1994). This negative outlook is supported by the underlying message that comes through Government policy.

As children grow their demands and needs change; this has a direct relationship to changes in sole parents' working life experiences. That is, work/family conflict is not static and the pressures of reconciling work and family life alter over time (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Haar 2007; Thornthwaite 2004). Single parents are aware that their family responsibilities alter during the parenting cycle and that they therefore require organisations to be flexible enough through sophisticated FFWP to respond to these changes. Indeed, the main area of concern for sole primary carers of pre-school and school-aged children is work flexibility. Unforeseen problems such as sickness, or when vaccinations are required, short periods of leave from 1-2 hours to several days may be required. In these circumstances parents, especially sole and lone parents, value flexible work arrangements.

The support systems required to balance home and work life are different for coupled parents to those required by single parents. Most single parents do not have the same assistance or fall back mechanisms that some coupled parents would automatically have access to; for instance, coupled parents will usually have two sets of grandparents on whom they might call for assistance. The

juggling of family and work responsibilities to try and reduce work/life conflict places more pressure on single parents (Burgess, Henderson & Strachan 2007a). Sole parents require work conditions that enable them to work and meet their carer responsibilities.

### **2.6.2 Work/Life Conflict**

Work/life conflict relates to any inter role conflict where participation in the workplace interferes with family roles. O'Driscoll, Brough and Kalliath (2006, p.2) state that 'conflict or interference between the two domains is increasingly likely for many individuals, as they endeavour to strike a balance between their work and family commitments.' Work/life conflict is an issue for all workers, but reducing that conflict presents different and greater challenges for sole parents.

Darcy and McCarthy (2007) state that research has shown that high job involvement by employees leads to higher levels of conflict and stress, resulting in role overload as primary carers try to devote their time to being an effective worker and parent. Job involvement is likely to rise as the individual advances in their position. When a job demands greater time commitment this often leads to an increase in work/family conflict. This occurs at all parenting stages, but especially when children are very young (Darcy & McCarthy 2007). Work/family conflict is compounded for single parents as they try and balance both their work and parenting roles; they want to perform in the workplace but know that they also must meet their family obligations.

Craig and Mullan (2011) compared the time devoted to child caring by lone and partnered mothers in Australia, the United States and in France and Denmark. The research found that lone mothers in Australia devote a very similar amount of time to childcare to that which partnered mothers in Australia do (Craig & Mullan 2011). Reconciling the demands of work, housework and childcare when sole parents endeavour to take care of their children's physical needs and spend the same amount of time with their children reading to them and talking with them as do partnered parents will be demanding. The sole parent must do all caring and housework, without even minimal assistance from a partner. Single parents therefore experience higher stress and conflict because these parents tackle the problem of desiring work success without feeling that they are neglecting their dependent children. Primary carers, especially those with younger children, find more conflict

between job involvement and family life because their children at this stage require higher levels of care than older children who have increased independence. Research has shown that parents with older children may have higher job involvement and less work family conflict, but still require a supportive working environment with WLB/FFWP (Darcy & McCarthy 2007). The same need applies in relation to job stress; as parents take on more demanding roles, usually accompanied by greater time demands, even as their children grow older the combination of parenting and a demanding work role is likely to increase stress levels. The importance of recognising and acknowledging work/life balance for sole and lone parents by incorporating their preference for certain FFWP elements is heightened by the increasing number of these parents creating a presence in the labour market (Thornwaite 2004).

Single parents require more and different support to that desired by coupled parents if they are to move from being sole parents to become lone parents by participating in the workforce. The special needs of sole parents may lead them to enter lower paid or casual, non-career path positions that do not give them access to WLB/FFWP. Together with this issue sole parents are more likely to accept out of normal hours positions such as shift work to ease work/family conflict. Working shift work or having weekend jobs allows sole parents to better manage the care of their children by relying on the family and friends. This arrangement places further pressures on sole parents as they try to fulfil welfare requirements, parenting and the discomfort of having to involve other adults in their childcare challenges (Hughes & Gray 2005).

Darcy and McCarthy (2007) found that work/family conflict for primary carers of children aged between 6 and 13 years of age increased as their desire to become more involved in their job rose. However as children became more independent single parents had more useable time and energy (Thornthwaite 2004), but each stage of the parenting cycle brings forward a new set of challenges to single parents. Their children now attend school and are more independent. The single parent may desire to increase their job involvement but their older children (6–13 years) still require parental care outside school hours. This continues to highlight the importance of FFWP for single parents with dependent children (Darcy & McCarthy 2007), as work/life reconciliation still remains an important priority and standard WLB elements may not provide the level of support required.

The McClure report made it clear that government and business also have obligations. Organisations' responses should consider equity and fairness both in flexible work offerings and the procedures and processes that guide access to the use of WLB/FFWP elements, as these aspects are important for sole parents (Moss 2006). Government has an obligation to ensure that the services provided by their departments to implement the WTW legislation consider the needs of each welfare recipient and support them to achieve the desired goal of workforce participation. This would mean for sole parents that their dependants' needs are also considered.

Organisations through their Human Resource Departments and the policies they develop, can implement policies and programs to support workplace flexibility and WLB for all staff, but to meet their obligations they especially need to consider WLB/FFWP which best support sole parents returning to work. In doing so, they may also meet the needs of their diverse workforce, be viewed as socially responsible employers, and build their employer image (Harrington & Ladge 2009). A range of policies and practices to achieve this aim are now discussed, Organisations need to take this into consideration when performing their workforce planning and developing policy in relation to WLB/FFWP. These and other workplace policies to support flexibility are explored in section 2.8.1

## ***2.7 Organisations' Responses to Social, Demographic and Legislative Change***

In addition to the increased diversity of today's workplace (sections 2.2 and 2.3), changes in the work environment over the last decade include issues such as globalisation of competition, the advancement of technological innovation and changes in the nature of work, all of which place more time pressures on employees. These factors have begun to have an effect on the quality of home and community life (Guest 2002). Together with these organisational and work changes there has been an increase in the workforce participation rates of women; alterations in the structure of the family; longer travel times to and from work as cities grow, and a difference in employees' expectations. Additionally, with the growing number of single parent families entering the workforce as a result of WTW legislation, work/life reconciliation is for this group much more difficult to achieve (Guest 2002). These changes have created greater time demands on individuals to meet social, family and work needs. This has forced businesses and policy makers to reassess ways of helping employees to balance all these roles.

For many single parents, returning to work is not the issue. Sole and lone parents require an income to support and maintain family life because welfare payments are not always a sufficient amount of financial support. The concern is finding a job that caters for the special needs of sole and lone parents. Sole and lone parents need to find organisations that have a supportive culture towards incorporating family friendly policies and offer programs that sole and lone parents will find beneficial within the policies designed to balance work and non-work life that companies promote (Carless & Wintle 2007). Ensuring that equal employment opportunity legislation is followed will not be enough alone to meet the needs of these employees.

### ***2.7.1 Formal and Informal Programs to Support Workplace Flexibility***

Two types of programs may be implemented within organisations to assist in creating a flexible and family friendly workplace. Formal programs include Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) initiatives and reporting to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA), as required by law. These have been found to have a limited effect on family friendly arrangements (Holcomb 2007; Pocock 2005; Rutherford 1999). Equal employment opportunity legislation does

help to protect staff in the workplace from direct discrimination and managers in organisations understand and accept this. From this legislation managers are aware of the consequences that arise out of acts of discrimination and unfair dismissal. EEO increases the awareness that all employees must be treated with respect and fairness but this does not guarantee for single parents a balance between work and family life (van Acker & Ferrier 2005). Indeed, "Work and family reconciliation is not generally or universally addressed in industrial agreements" (Burgess et al. 2007b, p 5). Past formal mechanisms, such as Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs), did not always achieve a balance or promote a balance between work and carer responsibilities for employees. This is due to the fact they establish the minimum requirements and no more.

Formal policies in relation to leave entitlements, flexible working hours and other arrangements that go beyond the law are established by most organisations. Employees become aware of these through accessing HR information from the organisation's intranet and, hopefully, a part of the induction process. Indeed, most changes that occur in the workplace to try and improve a primary carer's working life are informal negotiations at the discretion of management (Burgess et al. 2007a; Burgess et al. 2007b; Tait 2007; Thornthwaite 2004; Gray & Stanton 2002; Borrill & Kidd 1994). These may cover a broad range of initiatives incorporated into the employment conditions and tend to vary across industries and organisations. Where policies detailing employees' rights in relation to these flexible work offerings exist they may be formal programs however whereas EEO initiatives are available to all employees, flexible work arrangements are commonly negotiated between the employee and the immediate supervisor (Burgess et al. 2007a; Gray & Stanton 2002). The policy makes them available but use of any element of the FWA has to be agreed. The line manager will therefore 'play a pivotal role in translating FFWP policies into practice and in ensuring there are appropriate checks and balances in the management of such practices' (Maxwell 2005, p.179). This can lead to real or perceived inequity in relation to ensuring awareness of WLB/FFWP or in negotiating the use of offerings (Hall & Liddicoat 2005).

Organisations that have more elaborate programs offer these on a voluntary basis and gaining the benefit from these offerings is dependent on the primary carer being able to bargain for a better reconciliation between work/life and home life (Burgess et al. 2007b; Holcomb 2007; Gray & Collins

2006; Charlesworth 2005; Thornthwaite 2004; Borrill & Kidd 1994). Policies and practices relating to work/family balance are not mandatory to construct and report under EEO.

Changes in society over the last 30 years, especially the increase in dual income families resulting in larger numbers of females in the workforce coupled with the increase in single parents (who are most commonly mothers) in the workplace, have led to changes in organisations. Amongst these changes has been the introduction of a range of programs to enable employees to better balance their work and non-work lives. Broadly these are termed 'flexible work arrangements' and it is the components of formal and informal WLB/FFWP within organisations that support the creation of a flexible workplace and, if well communicated, lead to a workplace culture that removes the fear of 'negative career consequences or stigmatisation' (Lloyd-Walker, Lingard & Walker, 2008, p. 321) when making use of these policies.

A range of researchers (Wintle 2007; Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Lingard & Francis 2005; Wise & Bond 2003, and Lewis 2001) have suggested that companies need to develop work/life balance initiatives that reflect the changing trends of modern day life. HR managers are able to encourage and create a positive environment that can assist in easing work family conflict. These changes will contribute to an improved employer image and can assist in creating a distinctive image (or employer brand) of the organisation as an employer (Wilden, Gudergan & Lings 2010) and thus support improved recruitment success and employee commitment and retention. Importantly, appropriately designed FWA will assist sole parents to both work and care for their children.

## **2.8 Flexible Work Arrangements**

When flexibility in the workplace is discussed it covers a wide range of programs that might be implemented in the workplace. Work/life balance has been described as 'adjusting working patterns ... [r]egardless of age, race or gender,' so 'everyone can find a rhythm to help them combine work with their other responsibilities or aspirations' ([www.dti.gov.uk/work-lifebalance/what](http://www.dti.gov.uk/work-lifebalance/what)) and is also defined, along with FFWP, in Chapter 1. Effectively WLB/FFWP initiatives combine to form flexible work arrangements as FWA have been described as encompassing part-time work and a range of flexible leave options (Albion 2004), telecommuting and flexible start and finish times (Hashiguchi

2010) and short periods of time off to attend family events or religious ceremonies (Dickens et al. 2009). Indeed, Beauregard and Henry (2009) state that organisations' responses to work-life conflict include WLB practices that are also known as family-friendly policies. One distinction may be that WLB initiatives are viewed as being designed to assist all employees to better balance work and non-work life whereas FFWP policies are specifically designed to assist those with carer responsibilities to better meet both their family and work commitments (Applebaum, Bailey, Berg & Kalleberg 2009).

When combined, WLB and FFWP ensure flexible work arrangements that address 'the interface between work, family and personal life' (Kossek, Lewis & Hammer 2010, p.4). FWA can be found to have a positive impact on all employees, but this is especially so for single parents within the workforce. Flexible work schedules have been associated with an increase in job satisfaction. Single parents using flexible work schedules experienced greater work/family balance, thereby reducing stress and improving productivity and the desire to remain with the organisation (Haar 2007). For sole parents, FWA will therefore be very important. A range of WLB/FFWP offerings that support the creation of a flexible workplace are now discussed.

### ***2.8.1 Creating a Flexible Workplace***

Family friendly arrangements can be divided into three broad categories:

- (a) Access to special leave and absences while still remaining an employee.
- (b) Access to part-time work.
- (c) Flexible work schedules. (Burgess et al. 2007b)

Liddicoat (2003) details WLB/FFWP initiatives that fit Burgess et al.'s (2007b) categories: Flexible short periods of leave, for example to attend school events, and parental leave with gradual phase back from leave. To this could be additional annual leave (with reduced pay) such as the 48/52 leave option where employees can take an additional four weeks leave per year but will sacrifice four weeks pay to do so (Albion 2004). This flexibility through short periods of leave (perhaps just an hour to half a day) would also address Dickens et al.'s (2009) suggestion that organisations need to consider leave to accommodate religious observance.

Job sharing; part-time work and compressed work weeks, and flexible work schedules that enable employees to choose their start and finish times within agreed parameters to enable required hours to be worked to fit with family needs; compressed work weeks; telecommuting where work is completed usually at the employee's home instead of the office or a combination of office and working from home.

In addition, Liddicoat (2003) lists on-site or near-site childcare facilities (perhaps with an employer subsidy), after-school and school holiday care; elder or dependent care.

More than 10 years ago, Secret (2000) broke what he termed WLB components, but which include elements that directly relate to carer responsibilities or FFWP, into four categories:

- Alternative work arrangements offered including flexible work schedules that include flexitime and working from home (telecommuting).
- Paid leave benefits such as maternity/paternity leave, carer leave and time off for family emergencies.
- Help with paying for childcare or providing on-site childcare, and
- Mental health benefits covering employee assistance schemes that provide counselling or workshops to manage stress.

Secret's (2000) fourth category - (d) above - highlights the need to support employees to balance their work and non-work lives. All parents require some support from employers to enable them to address the challenges they confront when returning to the workforce. It is not surprising that single parents experience more challenges to the company's support and understanding when they try to balance their work and family priorities. It is this group that is more likely to face problems if flexible work arrangements are not an option within their immediate workplace (Wise 2003). Policy instruments such as flexi time, or flexible work arrangements/schedules, which constitute a variation to the hours of work for a standard fulltime position, are often very innovative in design and structure of jobs. This type of arrangement can vary amongst employees as it is dependent upon the type of work performed, what is available to employees and the effect it has on the organisation (NSW Government 2010; ABS 2009; Careermums 2009).

Strategic workforce planning requires HR managers who are aware of social and demographic change and who acknowledge that their company's policies and practices will need to consider diversity, equal opportunity and the issues of an ageing workforce. This research concentrates on the change in household composition and related legislation resulting in an increase in sole parents re-entering the workforce. To assist sole parents who are entering the workforce due to the changes in welfare legislation, HR practitioners will need to review their policies in relation to work/life balance and flexible work arrangements. If organisations do not consider all employee groups and ignore sole parents they will contribute to the difficulties these parents experience in finding suitable paid employment whilst losing a source of potential job applicants (Poelmans et al. 2008; Burgess et al. 2007b; Darcy & McCarthy 2007).

### **2.8.2 *New Work Arrangements***

Compared with the workplace of the past, where most if not all employees worked fixed, fulltime hours, today's workplace includes a range different work arrangements. Flexible work arrangements, or schedules, include a compressed working week or having rostered days off; these all fall under types of flexible, or alternative, work arrangements. A *compressed working* week may mean that an employee works nine days in a fortnight instead of ten. This will require that the employee work longer hours on set days from e.g. 8.00 am to 7.00 pm for four days instead of five (Careermums 2009; Lingard et al. 2007). Fulltime hours are still worked, but they are spread over fewer days. This approach was found to benefit both the organisation and employees working on the construction of a dam within an alliance project in Queensland (Lingard et al. 2007). The introduction of alternative work schedules was found to result in improved satisfaction and work-life balance for the Queensland construction employees on the alliance project without hindering the project's cost and time performance.

*Rostered days off* (RDO) are often linked to a particular industry, for instance the construction and retail industries in Australia. Here, slightly longer hours are worked usually for 3 weeks and 4 days accruing sufficient time credit for employees to have one day off per month (Lingard et al. 2007).

For single parents, and especially sole parents, working longer days may not be appropriate when trying to reduce work/family conflict. The workforce on the Queensland dam alliance project (Lingard et al. 2007) was predominately male and therefore less likely to contain primary carers. For those with carer responsibilities, working longer hours could clash with school drop offs and pick ups even from after school care when working extended hours as day care and after school care are normally only available until 6.00 pm. Additionally, some difficulties have been found in ensuring all tasks are covered when part-time workers are employed in environments where RDOs form part of the work scheduling (Walsh 2007).

*Part-Time and Casual Work* are common employment forms in Australia. *Part-time work* constitutes working 1–34 hours a week, or less than 35 hours a week (NSW Government 2010; Careermums 2009; ABS 2008a). Part-time work may offer the same level of security as full-time work, with the same number and spread of hours being worked each week. This is permanent part-time work and benefits such as holiday and other leave, at the normal weekly pro rata rate, are accrued as for full-time employees. Part-time employment may, on occasions, be achieved through job sharing or working during school hours. School hours are most commonly from 9:00am to 3:00pm but can vary from school to school (Wheelock & Jones 2002). However some hold a negative view of part-time work and consider it to have the potential to damage career progress (Beauregard & Henry 2009; Thornwaite 2004) or to demonstrate lack of commitment to the job and career advancement (Kossek et al. 2010). As can be seen by the following extract, Eleanor and Kay are placed in part-time positions that will have the effect of limiting their career opportunities due to their carer requirements.

*Eleanor:* It's putting me into a role there and saying 'Right that's the best we can do for you. If you're wanting part-time work we can't offer you promotion'.

*Kay:* You are limited in what you can do in your career part-time. It's a little frustrating when you've been in a position of authority, having to come back without that position. It's difficult. You can't really look forward, being part-time, because there are not as many openings for you" (Borrill & Kidd 1994 p.3).

A rise in the number of part-time positions has occurred in the service industries and these positions have been filled mainly by women, as the majority of primary carers still today tend to be female and reduced hours enable them to balance work and family (Roxburgh 2002; Austen & Birch 2000). The tendency for women to work in administrative, secretarial or support services roles is based on the requirement for fewer hours (Lingard & Francis 2004). Sole parents affected by the WTW legislation's MO requirements are more commonly women (Roxburgh 2002; Austen & Birch 2000).

A part-time position may be created through job sharing. *Job sharing* is where one fulltime position is shared between two people (NSW Government 2010; Careermums 2009; Tiney 2004). This may be termed 'job splitting,' where responsibilities of one fulltime position are divided and tasks allocated between two people (Careermums 2009). As with part-time work in general, this arrangement can enable single parents to continue to work and fulfil their parenting role.

As mentioned earlier, the significant change in divorce rates has meant that single parents will need to remain in the workforce for a longer time based on their financial requirements. This social change will require organisations to increase their offerings of a range of flexible work arrangements (Cohorts 2004), including job sharing. Sole parents may, though, find that as with other part time work arrangements, making use of job sharing opportunities could lead to them being given less responsibility, roles and projects of lower status and reduced opportunities for promotion (McDonald, Bradley & Brown 2009). McDonald et al. (2009) concluded that this outcome was likely based on research conducted within a State government agency in Australia.

Interestingly, however, a Norwegian study of males and part-time work found that the men did not have difficulty finding suitable part-time jobs and that even after several years spent in part-time roles they did not suffer negative career effects (Bjørnholt 2010). This would indicate that assumptions made by others regarding male and female career aspirations may still have an impact.

*Casual work* is often believed to mean 'bad conditions of work such as employment insecurity, irregular hours, intermittent employment, low wages and an absence of standard employment benefits' (Burgess, Campbell & May 2008, p. 162). In Australia casual employment has been considered work that denies employees the rights and conditions generally available to workers

(Burgess, et al. 2008). It is these different work conditions that distinguish casual work, or the casualisation of employment in Australia, from other employment forms including part-time work. Part-time work is continuing employment of less than the standard full time hours or work. Casual work has been described as 'precarious employment' because, although it may at times involve working as many hours in one week as a full time worker, no assurance of continuity is provided (Brennan 2007). Casual workers are not covered by unfair dismissal provisions, notice of termination of employment or a range of benefits accrued by other workers such as a range of leaves: sick leave, holiday, carers or long-service leave (Burgess et al. 2008; Brennan 2007). To compensate for this loss of benefits, casual workers are normally paid a "loading", usually somewhere 'between 15% and 25% of the hourly wage rate' permanent workers receive (Burgess et al. 2008, p. 163). As with part-time work, casual workers are mainly young people (students who wish to balance work and study) or women (who wish to balance work and caring for a family) (ABS catalogues 6.32 and 6.33, 2004 in ABS 2006 Year Book Australia).

With an increase in labour supply coming from a growth in the number of working mothers – partnered and single - and sole parents re-entering the workforce to meet their mutual obligations, there has been an increase in part-time and casual work. In fact, Australia has one of the highest rates within the OECD countries of casualisation in the workforce with almost two million workers employed on a casual basis in 2003; 31% of women in the workforce were employed as casual workers (Gray & Collins 2007). Indeed Bryant and King (2007) quote Pocock as having identified that in Australia women make up the largest proportion of casual workers. This form of non-standard working arrangements has allowed single parents to better combine the care of children and paid work (Hosking & Western 2008) whilst also providing flexibility for employers. However it has the potential to further marginalise casual, and usually female, workers confining them to lower pay, making them ineligible for holiday pay and other benefits, and reducing their overall career prospects (McDonald, Guthrie, Bradley & Shakespeare-Finch 2005).

There are considerable barriers to re-entry into the workforce for women who have been out of the workforce for some time (Carr 2006). Even with more women participating in some form of study, the difficulty of achieving work/life balance forces them to consider casual and, therefore usually, lower level positions (Bacik & Drew 2006). The positions that single parents are most likely to fill

are at the lower classification levels within a company and these are often offered as casual work. In order for sole parents to fulfil all the requirements placed on them through Centrelink and to meet their carer responsibilities, lower level positions can appear to be the quickest and easiest way to satisfy these conflicting demands. With the majority of the occupational groupings sole parents enter having a higher frequency of casual employment (Cohorts 2004), for example retail work, casual employment may be accepted by these parents in an attempt to satisfy MO. The flexibility such employment arrangements provide employers with (Gray & Collins 2007) can adversely affect casual employees' income security.

The nature of casual positions is that employers have the power to offer hours of work only when required. Casual work involves employment where the days on which work is available and the hours of work can vary greatly so casual workers may find the number of hours offered varies from week to week and the hours of or days on which work is offered may also change. These changes may lead to a sole parent no longer meeting their MO, or Employment Pathway Plan, or being asked to work at times when childcare is not available (Holcomb 2007; van Acker & Ferrier 2005; McInnes 2005; Hand & Hughes 2004; Merkers 2003; Bierema 2001).

Parents, especially sole parents, are likely to choose casual employment as it can enable them to be available for their children during school holidays or to attend school events or to work when family or friends can assist with childcare. However this type of employment brings with it the possibility of last minute requests to work (Bryant & King 2007) and pressure to accept those hours if more work is desired in the future. Casual work does not offer security, or continuing employment as does full-time and permanent part-time work and the increased hourly rate paid is expected to compensate for the lack of a range of rights and benefits. To meet MO, a sole parent will need to maintain a minimum number of hours of work each week. It may, therefore, not prove a good choice long term.

Despite the loading designed to compensate for reduced benefits, fluctuations in the amount of work offered may lead to casual workers receiving lower levels of pay, irregular hours and greater job insecurity (Holcomb 2007; Brennan 2007; van Acker & Ferrier 2005; McInnes 2005; Hand & Hughes 2004; Merkers 2003; Bierema 2001). This type of uncertain employment makes

maintaining Centrelink requirements very difficult to meet adding to the anxiety and strain of being a sole parent with dependent children and trying to meet all MO or the Employment Pathway Plan in order to continue receiving family payments to financially support a household. This is the group of potential employees most likely to be seeking work to meet their obligations under WTW. They may have work experience, but their career will have been interrupted (Reitman & Schneer 2005). They will not find working fulltime easy to manage, as they lack the support systems and sharing of responsibilities that exist in dual career families.

The higher hourly rate may compensate for lack of benefits, but casual work also does not usually include training beyond the development of basic skills to perform the casual role. Hence, career advancement is not usually available for casual workers, including those in female-dominated areas of employment (Batch, Barnard & Windsor 2009). Many sole parents find themselves in casual roles both because it may be the only work that they can find. Government statistics (Litzky & Greenhaus 2007) have shown that single parents tend to find it more difficult to progress to higher-level positions of leadership than their counterparts who do not have carer responsibilities. In fact Litzky and Greenhaus (2007, p. 653) found that all women returning to the workforce after an interruption to their career experienced difficulties, in particular they were not 'seriously considered for promotion'. As a result, the forced choice of casual work may adversely affect the sole parent's career and income level throughout their working life.

*Leave Schemes* form part of flexible work arrangements and include the *48/52 leave scheme* option where the employee can elect to take an additional four weeks annual leave in return for a pro rata reduction in salary (sometimes referred to as pay averaging). Other options, such as 50/52 or 46/52 may also be negotiated in workplaces where additional unpaid leave schemes operate. A study based in the Queensland Public Service found that flexible work options, such as the 48/52 leave scheme, flexible hours and part-time employment found that the desire to achieve work/life balance led to uptake of these flexible work arrangements (Waters & Bardoel 2006; Albion 2004). The 48/52-leave arrangement is less likely to apply to part time workers, though it is possible to negotiate this. Again, the level of appointment may mean that the employee, especially the sole parent, is not in a position where they can easily access or negotiate such flexibility.

Providing a *career break* is another flexible work option where an employee is granted leave of absence for an extended span of time on either a fulltime or part-time basis that is usually unpaid and may last for up to twelve months. Although a career break could provide the opportunity to pursue further studies or training to develop new skills and thus support career advancement, the option of taking a career break would not enable sole parents to meet all their MO or Employment Pathway Plans (Careermums 2009).

*Maternity Leave, Parental Leave and Carers Leave* are legal entitlements in Australia. All workers in Australia who are a primary care giver have for several years been entitled to 12 months unpaid leave. *Parental leave (or maternity leave)*, on the birth or adoption of a child is now funded (for those eligible) through the Federal government under the Paid Parental Leave Scheme for Working Parents, which commenced on 1 January 2011. This Scheme provides 18 weeks leave paid at the National Minimum Wage rate (Fair Work Ombudsman 2010). Many organisations were already providing paid leave, and were required to retain this on the introduction of the new legislation. Generally these offerings ranged from providing 1 week up to 1 year of paid leave. For longer periods of leave, normally only 1–8 weeks are paid at the full rate, with the rate of pay reducing to around 50% for the duration of the leave. The EOWA reported that in 2009 54.9% of organisations with 100 or more employees provided paid maternity leave (EOWA 2011). Organisations were also reported as providing a shorter period of paid *paternity leave* for the non-primary carer parent, although the frequency was not reported.

*Carer's leave* is an entitlement to time off to provide care or support for members of the employee's 'immediate family' (Chapman 2009). The Australian Council of Trade Unions identified carer's leave as one of three important components of workplace policies to balance work and family life (Burgess, et al. 2007b). The right to carer's leave was part of the minimum conditions established in the Workplace Relations Act 1996 and remains a right. Personal/Carer's leave is one of the Minimum Employment Conditions within the Fair Work Act 2009. The cap of 10 days maximum (Lucev 2009) was removed and now the number of days of paid carer's leave may vary (above 10) across organisations. Carer's and sick leave are sometimes combined providing a total number of days that can be taken each year (Burgess, et al. 2007b).

*Flexible Start and Finish Times and Short Periods of Leave* are an important component of a flexible workplace. Flexibility such as changes to start and finish times, or allowing employees to take short periods of time off, can be very cost effective ways of creating a more attractive workplace, especially for parents (Applebaum et al. 2009). Leave from 1 hour to a full day may also be available to enable employees to attend, for instance, a school meeting, to pick a sick child up from school, or for religious ceremonies or celebrations. Enabling staff to start work, say, any time after 7.00 am and leave from 3.00 pm onwards can assist parents. However this is of greatest benefit to partnered, not sole, parents as it allows one parent to start early and be able to leave in time to pick children up from school whilst the other parent takes the children to school and works later.

*Telecommuting* was defined by Gajendran and Harrison (2007, p.1525) as 'an alternative work arrangement in which employees perform tasks elsewhere that are normally done in a primary or central workplace, for at least some portion of their work schedule, using electronic media to interact with others inside and outside the organization'. Telecommuting can also be known as the practice of working remotely (ABS 2010; NSW Government 2010; Careermums 2009) or working from home using technology to support communication with the workplace. Changes in job design may include telecommuting, providing flexible start and finish times and permanent part time work (Thornwaite 2004). Carr (2006) found that many workers, but especially women, would remain with an organisation that offered telecommuting. Telecommuting is being offered by organisations around the world. Staff in Jamaican libraries expressed an interest in working from home at least two days a week and stated the benefits for them of telecommuting as reduced travel time and closeness to young children (Carr 2006). This led to telecommuting supporting increased productivity and decreased staff turnover' in Jamaican libraries. Children still need to be cared for. Telecommuting may save travel time, but for sole parents, with no one else to care for their children, telecommuting may not eliminate the need for childcare.

*Childcare: Day Care and After School Care* are a vital support for both dual career families and single parents. Recent changes to childcare registration requirements in Australia have resulted in the cost of childcare increasing. Hobday (2011) stated on the ABC News and on the ABC News website that childcare was set to rise by \$13 to \$25 a day. Although sole parents are likely to be

eligible for a rebate, if they wish to improve their career prospects, move to a higher level and earn more some of the benefits of this will be eroded by a reduction in the rebate (Tait 2007).

Because return to work is required when the youngest child turns 6 (or at least by the time they are 8), full day care may not be a pressing issue for sole parents. But sole parents and their children are affected by the WTW legislation and MO requirements that must be met. Sole parents are likely to have to use before and after school care and school holiday care arrangements (Liddicoat 2003). These services may be required by all parents but are a greater pressure for sole parents whose four weeks annual leave is insufficient to cover, for instance, school holidays. Partnered parents can usually at least share some of the holiday care whereas child care during school holidays is also likely to present additional problems for sole parents who do not have the type of relationship with their child/ren's other parent that would enable them to share this responsibility. Sole parents are likely, therefore, to have to make use of before and after school care, arrange care for sick children and care during school holidays without being financially disadvantaged. Some schools do offer holiday programs but all these childcare services still come at a cost, which sometimes sole parents cannot afford (Radich 2005).

By taking into consideration the continuing issue of childcare, even for children attending school, organisations that extend their WLB to include specific FFWP to cater for single parents changing needs will have greatest success in attracting and retaining this pool of potential employees (Burgess et al. 2007a; Holcomb 2007).

*Employee Assistance Programs* constitute a service provided by many employers these days to assist any employee in coping with life. An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) will usually incorporate access to counselling services from outside the organisation to assist with addressing a range of pressures on individual employees including financial management (Golan and Bamberger 2009); substance abuse and gambling issues (Jacobson, Jones & Bowers 2011); relationships (Pollack, Austin & Grisso 2010), or balancing family and work. Csiernik (2005) found that most EAPs were designed to provide services to meet individual employee needs and that although EAPs may fall under the umbrella of 'health and wellbeing' Csiernik's research revealed that their intention did not appear to be to enhance overall wellness in the workplace. Such

programs need to be adapted to the needs of each organisation by the increasing number of organisations implementing EAPs with the aim of reducing workplace stress by, for instance, providing counselling after 'critical incidents in the workplace' (Shakespeare-Finch & Scully 2004, p. 72). Counselling may be provided to assist in managing stress or depression (Arthur 2005), personal relationships, to provide assistance with financial planning or to address an addiction (Bhagat, Steverson & Segovis 2007). They have been found to assist in ensuring a healthy workforce and thus to retain valued employees whilst improving employee performance and reducing absenteeism (Bhagat, et al. 2007). As sole parents have been identified as a group 'at risk,' EAP services may be able to provide much needed support for this group.

Secret (2000) recommended that the full range of WLB/FFWP to support a flexible workplace include mental health benefits. This could include employee assistance programs that provide counselling or workshops to manage stress, financial planning advice or parenting programs. There are also strong corporate social responsibilities reasons for offering such programs. With most current workplaces being incredibly family unfriendly carers face tensions (Probert reported in Howe & Pidwell 2004) and at their worst these tensions can lead to hopelessness, demoralisation and suicidal behaviour (Butterworth, et al. 2006). Butterworth et al. (2006, p. 653) identified lone parents in Australia as being one of three groups of welfare recipients 'that report the greatest level of material and social disadvantage'. Lone mothers, unemployed and disability payment groups rated higher on all psychological measures – hopelessness, worthlessness, lack of life satisfaction, having considered or attempted suicide or feeling demoralised - in Butterworth et al.'s (2006) research findings. Sole parents and other members of today's diverse workforce are likely to require the additional support of these programs in order to readjust to work life and to manage their work and non-work lives.

## **2.9     *Creating a Culture of Acceptance***

Research has indicated a notable increase in the number of organisations developing WLB/FFWP, but this has not always been met with the reciprocal increase in the use of these practices. An organisation's culture and the understandings and points of view of managers and colleagues can act as barriers to the utilisation of WLB/FFWP by all employees, especially parents. Flexible work

arrangements are developed by HR but, largely, implemented by line management. The extent to which the workplace environment is perceived to be flexible, enabling parents to meet both their work and family commitments, will depend on the way in which this implementation process is handled. Flexible work arrangements do not automatically promote a positive interrelationship between work and family demands but they demonstrate an attempt to increase the recognition that a conflict does exist and that balance is necessary between these two roles (Burgess et al. 2007a; Pocock 2005). Research has highlighted that just because companies have WLB/FFWP in place does not mean that both employer and employee will enjoy the potential benefits they offer. It has been found that there are a significant number of barriers that need to be overcome for single parents to actually use these policies, indeed Broers and Saunders (2002 p.1) state that "For work-life balance policies to work well, organisations need to attend to the possible barriers to policy access prevalent in their workplace".

Strongly held informal cultural views can negatively affect the use of any formal WLB/FFWP implemented in an organisation, resulting in increased stress due to reduced work/life reconciliation (Darcy & McCarthy 2007). Women have been found to make greater use of the flexible work options than do men and the lack of involvement in the workplace as a result of missing work events leading to a feeling of reduced commitment did deter a few employees. Overall, the desire for WLB outweighed these possible barriers to take up of flexible work options (Albion 2004). The possible negative outcomes of using FWA were outweighed by the great need to use a range of offerings that would enable women to balance their work and carer responsibilities.

Appropriate FFWP elements to assist WLB of single parents may be available, but the culture is such that making use of these offerings may adversely affect career progress or result in co-worker resentment. This situation largely arises when management has not effectively communicated the reasons for and conditions applied to use of FFWP, or those elements of the total FWA offered that are only used by those with carer responsibilities. Not recognising the need for the elements because they are not currently required by them, colleagues who believe a co-worker is being permitted to leave early while not receiving a pro rata pay reduction will resent what they perceive to be inequitable treatment.

A supportive organisational culture can be the main element in the effectiveness of work/life policies (Wise & Bond 2003). In their study of organisational policies and practices, Burgess et al. (2007b) found effective HR managers in general saw work and family balance programs to be part-time work, gradual return from maternity leave whereby employees slowly return to normal hours of work, and which may include job share arrangements and flexible start and finishing times and the ability to take short periods of leave with little notice (Careermums 2009; Burgess et al. 2007b; Papalexandris & Kramar 1997). Burgess et al.'s study (2007b) found that organisations had formal policies that included details of carer's leave, part-time work and job sharing provisions, changed work arrangements during pregnancy and breast feeding facilities, a requirement under law where employers are legally obliged to reasonably accommodate breastfeeding mothers such as providing a private, clean and hygienic space which is suitable signed and lockable, with appropriate seating and a table or bench to equipment, access to a refrigerator and a microwave; and a receptacle for rubbish and nappy disposal ([qld.gov.au/breastfeeding-work-policy](http://qld.gov.au/breastfeeding-work-policy)), written into Human Resource manuals, staff handbooks and on company's intranets (Lewis 2001). Any flexible work arrangements to ease the tension and create a balance between work and home life were informally worked out with managers and the single parent concerned (Burgess et al. 2007b; Cohorts 2004; Broers & Saunders 2002). Access to WLB/FFWP material and the feasibility of being able to use the practices within the workplace still depends largely on the understanding and viewpoint towards WLB/FFWP of the HR manager and of the line managers who negotiate use with their subordinates. Both WLB and FFWP incorporated within organisations do fall under the umbrella of 'equal employment opportunity', but how these policies and practices are fostered in the workplace determines their value and benefits to both employees and employers. The underlining theme of these policies and practices is to create some kind of balance between work and family (Burgess et al. 2007b; Edgar 2005).

### **2.9.1 Implementation of WLB/FFWP**

As the implementation of WLB/FFWP is influenced by individual HR managers but implemented by Line managers, a wide variation exists amongst organisations and within organisations and so depending on the attitude of each manager to the special needs of single parents the conflict of work/life balance may be reconciled or increased (Burgess et al. 2007b). The terms WLB and FFWP can be interpreted by organisations as an entitlement or as an implied favour, thereby not acknowledging the nature and complexity of working with a dependent family (Lewis 2001). Nevertheless, organisations need to be aware of the political pressures the WTW and MO impose on potential or current employees and how equal employment opportunities ideologies combine with skills shortages to recognise that FFWP have a place within the workplace (Lewis 2001).

Managerial and colleague support has an influence on work family conflict for sole and lone parents (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Burgess et al. 2007a; Haar 2007; Thornthwaite 2004; Cohen & Single 2001; McCracken 2000; Borrill & Kidd 1994). The more support from fellow workers the greater the likelihood of less work/family conflict being felt amongst sole and lone parents. Kossek et al. 2010) found that the use of flexible work schedules by peers made use of these arrangements by managers more likely. This led them to suggest that 'by encouraging more managers to take the lead' and make use of flexible work arrangements the social barriers to their use would be reduced and cultural change would be supported Kossek et al. 2010 p. 41). A supportive work culture assists with the acceptance and execution of FFWP thereby promoting the ability, commitment and value of single parents (MacDermid et al. 2001). The articles demonstrate that twelve or more years have passed since the importance of a supportive work culture, one that would send the message that making use of flexible work arrangements did not indicate lack of commitment, was reported.

In order for single parents to feel comfortable using the available FFWP effective implementation is necessary. This takes into consideration how the policies are communicated; the amount of education and training applied, and the workplace culture (Broers & Saunders 2002). In order for organisations to be able to gain the full potential of both WLB and family friendly workplace policies

and receive the return on investment made from developing, benchmarking and implementing them, employers of choice are very aware that line managers must be adequately informed of the contents of these FFWP. They need to be knowledgeable on what they are and how they are to be used (Wise & Bond 2003) for employees will be required to discuss and agree use of WLB/FFWP offerings with their direct supervisor.

As workplace culture is not simplistic by nature but encompasses norms, expectations regarding working hours and perceived indicators of job commitment, single parents can find meeting these expectations incompatible with working part-time, fulfilling domestic commitments and out of work time demands (Borrill & Kidd 1994). According to Borrill and Kidd (1994), research has revealed that on the surface organisational policies and practices encourage a positive supportive culture towards single parents but there can lie underneath a counter culture working against WLB/FFWP being implemented and utilised by staff. What needs to occur with employers of choice is that single parents working part-time are not perceived to be disinterested in a career path or profession. Part-time managers who are sole parents must attend to all sections of their lives, especially that of their carer responsibilities. Employers of choice are therefore required to establish mechanisms that help avoid any disadvantages of being a part-time manager, such as work isolation, lack of career development and not being assigned challenging tasks (MacDermid et al. 2001). Cultural workplace acceptance of WLB/FFWP reinforces beliefs of compatibility between paid work, good parenting, employment opportunities and access to childcare (Hand & Hughes 2004). As stated by Wise and Bond (2003), morale and motivation can be improved and stress and absenteeism reduced by the creation of a supportive culture. The support and understanding of management and surrounding employees helps reduce workplace stress for single parents (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Hand & Hughes 2004).

### ***2.9.2 Workplace Culture and Effectiveness of WLB/FFWP***

Workplace culture has a significant influence on the effectiveness of WLB/FFWP in an organisation. Depending on the culture of the company WLB/FFWP will either be viewed as favourable and positive programs or a hostile and negative view may be taken of them. The impact of WLB/FFWP for employees will be determined by this culture and working environment (Poelmans, Kalliath &

Brough 2008; Lewis 2003). Top level management commitment is a prerequisite for achieving acceptance and organisational cultural change that views WLB/FFWP as a natural condition of employment for all staff (Poelmans et al. 2008). This commitment creates an atmosphere that supports and accepts WLB/FFWP as the norm within the workplace, thereby improving the effectiveness of WLB/FFWP and encouraging those that have special work needs to use them.

If managers value aspects of the culture that assume that long hours of face time in the workplace signifies commitment and productivity, WLB/FFWP will be more difficult to successfully implement and execute. In many top managerial levels and professional positions the view that long office hours should not need to be modified to accommodate family needs is considered to strengthen employee career paths (Poelmans et al. 2008).

In order for organisations to enhance innovation and creativity to achieve a competitive advantage through the use of sophisticated WLB/FFWP, the positive influence of managers and colleagues in translating family friendly work policies into practice needs to be considered a normal component of the organisation's work culture (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Francis & Lingard 2004). Managerial discretion and collegial attitudes shape the interpretation of FFWP offerings, especially if employees perceive these work benefits to be favours rather than entitlements (Darcy & McCarthy 2007). When employees believe that use of WLB/FFWP offerings is being granted as a favour or that it constitutes 'special treatment' of another employee, feelings of inequity will adversely impact the workplace culture.

Introducing appropriate work/family initiatives along with training and clear communication by managers and colleagues can create a supportive culture, one accepting of work/life balance concepts. In this environment colleagues properly understand that shorter working hours also receive a reduced amount of pay (Lewis 2001). Attitudes of managers and the workplace culture in general can 'create barriers to the implementation of WLB' (De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott & Pettit 2005, p. 98). With clearly established WLB/FFWP, higher level employees in key positions can demonstrate acceptability and act as role models by requesting part-time or reduced work hours to balance their lives, thereby encouraging greater use of these policies across the organisation. This would have the potential to bring about culture change by employees seeing that staff at all levels

view FFWP/WLB as important and FWA as the norm. It is only when this occurs that FWA will no longer be viewed as an impediment to career progression (De Cieri et al. 2005, p. 98).

### **2.9.3 Career Advancement**

Workplace culture can influence commitment, loyalty and retention of employees and it can have an impact on the level of support that is provided for career development. For employees to have a career path, development processes are required to encourage and promote this. These employee development practices would need to incorporate the varying numbers of hours worked especially single parents but in particular sole parents to maintain equity, acknowledge the skills and abilities of this group of employees and therefore retain them (Poelmans et al. 2008).

Under the Howard Government employment incomes had increased, not always spilling over to low income earners (Karvelas 2008; van Acker & Ferrier 2005; Bierema 2001), the category to which most sole parents belong. Researchers such as Spivey (2005) and MacDermid, Lee, Buck and Williams (2001) have found that women are more likely than men to have time out of the workforce. After returning to work from a career interruption earning power of these women may be reduced, often as a result of loss of contacts, decreased confidence and eroded skills. As a consequence, this group may remain in the lower income-earning group. They will have missed out on development opportunities whilst out of the workforce and if returning to a lower status role, or a part-time or casual positions, will be less likely to be viewed as 'on a career path'. Consequently they may not be informed of development opportunities or may not be able to attend as programs may be offered outside work hours when they do not have childcare.

Continuous professional development (CPD) is a requirement for maintaining employment or advancing careers across a range of jobs. In the predominately female workforce within nursing where CPD is necessary for employment and advancement (Gould, Drey & Berridge 2007) opportunities to participate in development activities, or to obtain study leave, were limited for certain groups. This is especially so for part-time staff and those working mainly or exclusively night shifts, along with those approaching retirement. These groups experienced disadvantage in accessing CPD (Gould et al. 2007).

Single parents, if working part-time or night shifts when family members can provide childcare might find advancement in their employment limited because they cannot participate in the necessary development to advance their career. Study leave provided by companies is more commonly available to fulltime than part-time employees and allows the individual to be absent from work to engage in a course of study. Undertaking study combined with paid work and carer responsibilities can be very challenging for sole parents. Under MO, study is recognised as an activity but it may be difficult to access childcare that suits courses taken and the money necessary to do so. With Employment Pathway Plans time for study is not recognised and so adds to the pressures of meeting welfare requirements and combining paid work with childcare (Cameron 2006).

McDonald, Brown and Bradley (2005) found that the new protean career model was more common for women than for men, with the traditional career relying on length of service, geographic mobility and a general upward climb of the corporate ladder still being dominant in some organisations. This is a path that women find more difficult to follow and for sole parents it would present considerable conflict with their sole parenting role. The protean career path is one managed, or driven, by the individual and which, along with success according to the individual's personal desires and achievements in which they may take pride (not necessarily promotion or increased income) being important components, family happiness is a consideration (Hall 1996 in McDonald, Brown & Bradley 2005). Single parents may be viewed as following a protean career path when in reality they have had to pursue a non-traditional career path in order to perform their carer role, not by choice.

The importance of recognising parental issues has over the last twenty years led to more organisations offering WLB/FFWP and the numbers of employees' using what these policies offer has increased (Gray & Tuddball 2004). Despite this increase, qualitative research has shown that staff members can be reluctant to use WLB/FFWP such as taking parental leave and/or flexible work arrangements reducing hours of work, if they fear it will limit their chances of promotion or professional recognition in their careers (Gray & Tuddball 2004; Patrickson & Hartmann 2001).

Work cultures can have the underlying understanding that long work hours mean employee commitment which generally has been easier for men to understand and agree to because they

face fewer challenges from outside work responsibilities than do women. The division of labour supports that men are able to devote their time to work and women are to take on the managing of the home and family (Lingard, Brown, Bradley, Bailey & Townsend 2007; Drew & Murtagh 2005; Rutherford 1999). Those women who are ambitious and pursue a career or profession are expected to take on the same behaviours as their male counterparts. What has been found is that working women are challenging these expectations by negotiating alternative work arrangements and flexible work schedules in order to gain some control of their work and life demands (Wise & Bond 2003; MacDermid et al. 2001; Rutherford 1999).

Unfortunately the desire for alternative work schedules only compounds the issue of career development or advancement for primary carer parents, usually females, because they cannot demonstrate their commitment in the same way as their fulltime and commonly male colleagues (Drew & Murtagh 2005; Wise & Bond 2003). Part-time work, for example, has often been found to constrain career prospects and promotion (Gatrell 2007) and Straub (2007) found that making use of WLB offerings in general could negatively impact women's career advancement. Access to professional development and on-the-job training was found to be limited for part-time workers (Walsh 2007), negatively impacting career advancement. This has increased the need for organisations to consider providing work environments that meet the needs of welfare recipients who are returning to the workplace because adapting to the new workplace may involve out of normal hours of training or work participation (State Services Authority 2005). Caring for their children will make this extremely difficult for sole parents to do. The need for and use of FWA does influence the type of positions sole parents will accept. More sole parents take up positions within organisations that promote FWA as this may assist sole parents to meet their MO and family responsibilities (Hughes & Gray 2005).

## **2.10 The Business Case for FWA**

Many claim that creating a flexible work environment through well designed and well-implemented WLB/FFWP makes good business sense because it benefits employees and, as a result, those employees will be more productive, more committed and thus stay with the organisation reducing absenteeism, turnover, and as a result, recruitment and training costs whilst increasing productivity

(Wang & Walumbwa 2007; Bevan, Dench, Tamkin & Cummings 1999). WLB/FFWP offer organisations an avenue for a more productive and committed workforce and for individuals the ability to better reconcile work and family obligations (Lee 2001). The availability of WLB/FFWP has been related to positive work outcomes as employees feel that they are being treated favourably and reciprocate in return with increased commitment, job satisfaction and the ability to better manage work/life and home life (Beauregard & Henry 2009). However Ravenswood (2008) points out that the business case rationale places responsibility on the individual to manage their family and work responsibilities. Ravenswood (2008, p. 42) suggests in relation to family friendly workplaces in New Zealand, that 'in order for working families to have real choice in how they balance their responsibilities, systems and institutions of work must change'.

A parent's status can change rapidly from being in a coupled relationship to that of a single parent (Burgess et al. 2007a; Walter 2001; Campbell & Moen 1992). As this has become a growing trend, organisations need to be aware of this and the pressures it can place on employees (Carless & Wintle 2007). The origins of the term 'psychological contract' can be traced back to Fox's (1974) writings that clearly identified the need to move (2007). This knowledge and employee suggestions should influence FFWP elements, if the needs of single parents are to be addressed.

### ***2.10.1 The Psychological contract***

The origins of the term 'psychological contract' can be traced back to Fox's (1974) writings that clearly identified the need to move from a low to a high trust employment relationship. The psychological contract relates to the beliefs an individual employee holds concerning the terms and conditions of the unwritten agreement between them and their employing organisation (Rousseau 1996); it relates to the employment relationship and an employee's belief in non-legislated and usually undocumented mutual obligations between them and their employer (Rousseau & Tijoriwala 1998). Guest (2004 p. 545) stresses that the 'primary focus of the psychological contract is therefore the employment relationship at the individual level between the employer and employee'. Based on this unwritten contract, employees expect to be treated by their employers in a manner that recognises and appreciates the demands of their non-work life, including family responsibilities, and which provides fulfilling work and a safe environment. Organisations in return also have

unwritten expectations that employees will be loyal, committed and productive. Therefore psychological contract fulfilment influences employee performance (Cullinane & Dundon 2006; Sturges et al. 2005) as well as job attitudes.

In this exchange agreement the employee believes that the company has agreed to certain inducements (extrinsic and intrinsic benefits) in return for work contributions or labour (DeVos & Meganck 2009; Hughes & Rog 2008). But employees, at different stages of life, value different things. Changes in job attitudes and employee performance vary amongst younger and older workers as their view on psychological contract fulfilment or breach promotes different behaviours and acceptance (Bal, De Lange, Jansen & Van Der Velde 2008).

The key feature of effective psychological contracting is the understanding that each party has the power to negotiate equally (Borrill & Kidd 1994). The ideology of sharing and negotiating work expectations and goals between employees and employers can be considered to be a 'psychological contract.' It is the process of tying together the working relationship to ensure that the organisation operates efficiently and effectively (Sturges, Conway, Guest & Liefoghe 2005; Borrill & Kidd 1994). Flexible work hours or the ability to leave work at an agreed time if breached may represent, in the employee's mind, a breach of the psychological contract, especially for those that highly value work/life balance (De Vos & Meganck 2007).

The implication of the growing trend for single parents to be employed is that it has the potential to lead to the dissatisfaction associated with role overload and job-family spill over for these single parents. High levels of work/life conflict thus undermine the employee psychological contract creating further imbalance that can pose a threat to employee performance, and lead to reduced levels of commitment and loyalty. Employee performance, engagement and motivation are essential for high performing work systems (Thornwaite 2004) and well designed and implemented HR policies and practices can ensure that the psychological contract is not undermined and that quality staff are retained.

### ***2.10.2 Employee Value Proposition***

Strategic HR managers must realise that a “one size fits all” approach to family friendly policies and practices will not alone achieve the desired end result of retaining high quality staff (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Borrill & Kidd 1994). Research has revealed a tendency for HR managers and staff in their departments to introduce policies and practices across a range of areas that are not always highly valued by employees (De Vos & Meganck 2007). Understanding which inducements employees’ value is important, thus understanding the employee value proposition (EVP) is necessary when developing WLB/FFWP that will achieve the aim of satisfying employees by providing them with elements that they value. The EVP has been described as the employee’s understanding of ‘what’s in it for them’ in terms of what they will receive from the organisation in return for their labour (Hughes & Rog 2008). Incorporating work conditions including rewards, development and career advancement opportunities, management style and organisational philosophy that today’s employees’ desire will assist in attracting and retaining talent (Hughes & Rog 2008). This, therefore, forms the basis of the employer brand that an organisation creates to ensure they attract high performers who will fit the organisation’s culture. As a result of skills shortages, organisations now have the driving force to introduce work-life policies to boost their employer brand by creating a desirable public image (Wise & Bond 2003). Rau and Hyland (2002) found that those requiring flexible work arrangements to meet their family commitments were more attracted to organisations that were depicted as offering flexitime arrangements, for instance. An important component of the organisation’s employer brand is their EVP. Both the employer brand and EVP require continual refinement to ensure that they appeal to all quality, potential employees and current employees the organisation wishes to retain (Morton 2005).

### ***2.10.3 Skills Shortages***

Despite the recent Global Financial Crisis, in Australia there have continued to be areas of skills shortage have the potential to affect our national productivity. Bryant and King (2007), in a government report, highlighted a range of skills shortages particularly affecting rural areas; however employment in rural areas varies greatly across the country and can lead to considerable

stress for sole parents who must meet their MO. Skills shortages can also impact particular industries or professions. For instance, Blismas and Wakefield (2009) found that skills shortages coupled with lack of specialised knowledge were the greatest issues facing parts of the construction industry in Australia. With the impact of WTW legislation more single parents are looking to enter the workforce. Organisations dealing with skills shortages may find that skilled single parents could fill these vacant positions and thus bridge their skills gaps. The investment in WLB/FFWP will assist companies to attract and retain skilled employees, including those currently receiving welfare payments, (Carlson, Grzywacz & Kacmar 2009) to bridge the gap the skills shortages has exposed (Slattery 2008; Boyles 2008; Johnston & Tomazin 2008). This highlights the importance of organisations adopting FFWP that incorporate elements that sole and lone parents would value in order to reconcile work and caring for children.

Organisations would benefit by retaining quality staff in a time of skills shortages (Thorntwaite 2004; Lewis 2001; McCracken 2000). Anecdotally, what has emerged from the current skills shortages is that school leavers and graduates are lacking the necessary skills to contribute at the desired level in the workplace (Johnston & Tomazin 2008; Slattery 2008), highlighting that it is likely that single parents may have greater suitability, as a result of experience and knowledge gained from working in the past and have the appropriate attitude to fill these gaps in the marketplace. Single parents, both sole and lone, are likely to have the literacy, numeracy and customer service skills that organisations are seeking in order to gain a competitive advantage (Slattery 2008; Boyles 2008; Johnston & Tomazin 2008). Therefore, incorporating WLB/FFWP and investing in single parents demonstrates a commitment to greater social responsibility by recognising that some WLB/FFWP in particular are necessary (Gray & Collins 2006) to attract and retain this attractive group of potential employees. These changes in society's understanding of work/life conflict would enable single parents to enter the workforce with less stress and more confidence in their ability to meet their family needs and their work requirements. The Government could also support formal WLB/FFWP by assisting organisations with the design and implementation of these policies within the workplace (Gray & Stanton 2002) thus creating a more equitable working environment for all employees, in particular single parents while providing benefits for employers. Many organisations, especially as part of their 'employer of choice' or 'best employer' policies, have in recent times implemented family-friendly work practices which have the

potential to benefit both male and female workers. This has highlighted the concept that in today's workplace people are a valuable asset, and that diversity leads to a more knowledgeable and creative workforce (Lingard & Francis 2005).

Skills shortages have increased the requirement to recruit and retain employees with family commitments. Thomson and Aspinwall (2009) predicted that demographic shifts brought about by the retirement of Baby Boomers would require organisations to consider the needs of Generations X and Y workers. In particular, their study, based in the USA, found that childcare was the most commonly sought work/life benefit of Generations X and Y employees. For those returning to work in Australia in order to meet MO, before and after school care could be expected to be more important as this requirement begins when the youngest child turns 6 and thus will be attending school. Adopting WLB/FFWP as part of the company's culture will assist in avoiding stress and absenteeism associated with work and family demands for single parents (Francis & Lingard 2004; Lewis 2001). Coupled with this is the availability of resources and requirements of business that determines the range of WLB/FFWP that can be offered (Burgess et al. 2007b). It is important therefore for organisations to be aware of their strategic direction and business requirements before introducing work/life policies so that conflict is avoided when single parents request their usage. The inability of organisations to create a family friendly work environment via flexible work arrangements has shown that resource pressures is the dominant explanation for companies having difficulty incorporating them into their working environment (Wise & Bond 2003). For many single parents having access to flexible work arrangements as part of the FFWP offered is vital to supporting their successful participation in the workforce (Cohorts 2004).

According to Poelmans et al. (2008), initially WLB/FFWP was measured by the number of policies that organisations had available. This also gave rise to WLB/FFWP incorporating definitions of measurement that were easily blurred or fuzzy thereby allowing more scope for managerial manipulation (Campbell & Charlesworth 2003). So what appears on the surface as family friendly may be in a direct clash between family and paid employment. One such possible FFWP, telecommuting which often includes the provision of a laptop and internet connection can actually increase hours of work and impinge on family life (Campbell & Charlesworth 2003). This highlights the need for a clear understanding of the meaning of WLB/FFWP terms that must be confirmed by

all, those that create the policies and those who use them. Words are a powerful tool that can hide assumptions or promote a healthy diverse working environment (Poelmans et al. 2008).

There are times when well-intentioned support and policies by top-level managers in organisations are undermined by line managers who hold different views of the way in which WLB/FFWP should be applied in their area of the organisation. This can then influence or create a negative or hostile atmosphere towards employees that use the available WLB/FFWP (Lewis 2003). Even when employees are fully aware of what WLB/FFWP the organisation offers there still can be a reluctance to use them. Employees are less likely to take on board any WLB/FFWP if they are likely to be perceived as less committed to their job. Based on this perception career minded employees will not want to be classed as not committed to the organisation as they fear it will affect their promotional opportunities. Hence, using the provisions of work/life balance programs can have a negative impact on career progression. This can be reinforced by the organisation's culture (Beauregard & Henry 2009; Crooker, Smith & Tabak 2002).

Forward thinking HR managers can consider themselves as change agents providing their pool of talented single parents with solutions to reduce family/work conflict and meet the demands of the business (Burgess et al. 2007a). Organisations that offer FWA are maintaining a productive workforce by tapping into the store of knowledge sole and lone parents can provide (Burgess et al. 2007a; Tait 2007).

A labour shortage can influence HR managers to develop and support the implementation of flexible work programs in organisations. Sole and lone parents are looking for organisations that will cater for their needs to have a better balance and less anxiety when combining work and carer's responsibilities (Burgess et al. 2007a; Tait 2007). Labour market demands can provide a catalyst to promote WLB/FFWP in order to attract and retain skilled single parents. It is understood that varying economic climates can alter what companies are able to offer (Burgess et al. 2007a).

#### ***2.10.4 Attraction, Motivation and Retention***

Claiming 'employer of choice' or 'best employer' status can attract, emotionally engage and retain talented staff (Vaijayanthi & Shreenivasan 2011; Joo & Mclean 2006). Employers of choice use

both tangible and intangible rewards to attract, recruit, engage and retain talented and productive employees (Branham 2005). These employers take care not to leave the workings of WLB/FFWP to chance by establishing the complete support of all managers (Wise & Bond 2003). Employers of choice use their understanding of the EVP and the psychological contract to shape then communicate the rewards and benefits that an employee would experience while working for that organisation (Brady 2010). They first work at becoming and then at creating an image to communicate their employer brand to convey the message that their organisation is a 'great place to work' (Sullivan 2004). This consideration allows the organisation to stand out from other companies within the industry, by actively promoting their employer brand (Edwards 2010; Hughes & Rog 2008; Gowan 2004). Competing in era of an aging population and skills shortages, attraction of talented staff is important to business growth and success (Brady 2010; Gowan 2004). In relation to attracting and retaining single parents and in particular sole parents, WLB/FFWP are important issues.

The possible implications of organisations predicting the value to all groups of employees of certain WLB/FFWP elements without gaining an understanding from the variety of people (including the different categories of parents) that would use and benefit from WLB/FFWP is that their WLB/FFWP may not provide the work/life reconciliation sought by some groups of employees. These employees will not value the offerings. This will increase the chance of the organisation losing money by investing in elements employees don't value. Elements that are not valued will not attract, motivate or retain employees in the same way that desired elements would. Not including elements employees would value could increase turnover because skilled employees may view the organisation's WLB/FFWP as not suitable for or usable by them, especially if they are parents (Babbie 2007). Existing WLB/FFWP may appear to benefit work/life reconciliation for parents, but lone and sole parents may identify subtle changes in practices/policies that will also make WLB/FFWP more appropriate for all employees; those without dependents or coupled parents. This is an important consideration because single parents have different requirements to their coupled counterparts in order to achieve work/life balance but many of these subtle changes may, at certain times, be attractive to other employees and thus valued, leading to increased motivation and retention (Darcy and McCarthy 2007).

Many organisations look upon FFWP and WLB as tools to retain valued employees. Research has shown that parents in particular find WLB/FFWP offerings attractive (Beauregard & Henry 2009; Baird & Williamson 2008; Darcy & McCarthy 2007). Therefore employers who adopt these policies experience greater attraction and retention success as a result of offering part-time hours. This assists single parents in managing their carer responsibilities (Wise & Bond 2003).

Work/life balance and family friendly workplace policies have the potential to attract, emotionally engage and retain employees whose high levels of commitment and satisfaction make them more productive workers. Employees who feel that their workplace improves their work/life balance will feel more satisfied within themselves such as being 'happier social citizens, parents, carers and more productive workers' (Pocock 2005 p.202). This will motivate employees to work longer and more productively thus increasing their contribution to work and to the community along with maintaining better health as the stress to reconcile home and work/life is reduced (Pocock 2005). Poor work/life balance can create the opposite of incorporating effective WLB/FFWP: negative physical and mental health, burnout, lower productivity and hence profitability, less commitment to the organisation and thus an increase in turnover. This also leads to additional pressure placed on family life and deterioration in family relationships (Ten Brummelhuis & van der Lippe 2010; Lingard & Francis 2006; Pocock 2005). For single parents work/life conflict can have an even greater negative impact and, as a consequence, for organisations this can affect retention rates and their bottom line (Crooker et al. 2002; Duxbury & Higgins 2001).

### **2.10.5 The Role of HR and Line Managers**

In order to create a culture of acceptance and thus support achievement of the business goals for FWA, both HR and Line managers have a role to play. HR managers have the ability to bring about a positive contribution to easing work family conflict (Beauregard & Henry 2009) and in doing so improve the organisation's image as an employer (Wilden et al., 2010). Greenhouse and Powell (2006) refer to work-family enrichment. They define this 'as the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role' (Greenhouse & Powell 2006, p. 73). Using Greenhouse and Powell's theoretical model, McNall, Masuda and Nicklin (2010, p. 61) tested the relationship between flexible work arrangements (in particular flexitime and compressed work week) 'and work-to-family enrichment' and the relationship 'between work-to-family enrichment and' job satisfaction and turnover intention. When FWA led to employees experiencing greater work to home enrichment, increased job satisfaction and reduced turnover intentions were found. Liddicoat (2003) outlined the benefits for organisations of implementing and ensuring access to desirable WLB/FFWP elements. These benefits include reduced turnover and increased return from family leave, reduced absenteeism, improved employee morale and greater recruitment and retention success. Reduced turnover in turn reduces recruitment costs, retains knowledge and reduces the need for induction and training. This would indicate that ensuring that WLB/FFWP elements meet the needs of employees makes good business sense.

When designing WLB/FFWP, HR Managers must consider the interrelationships between work and family (Gray & Tuddball 2004), otherwise inflexible workforce plans will cause these quality employees to leave their positions due to the restrictions caring for children places on maintaining employment and the pressure that comes with trying to juggle work and home life (Walter 2001; Borrill & Kidd 1994).

HR professionals are encouraged to recognise that by assisting employees, especially single parents, to reconcile family and work demands they will reduce the likelihood of increased employee turnover, stress, and at the same time raise job satisfaction and productivity (Baird & Williamson 2008; Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Carless & Wintle 2007; Burgess et al. 2007a; Broers & Saunders 2002; Lewis 2001; McCracken 2000; Papalexandris & Kramar 1997). The introduction of

WLB/FFWP is voluntary at this stage but employers need to look upon this change in work practices as being in the best interests of the company as well as staff in terms of benefits and costs that these considerations can bring (Gray & Tuddball 2004). Creating a good work/life balance for employees and their organisations will assist with the recruitment (Carless & Wintle 2007) of talented staff, increase retention and productivity, and hence profitability. De Vos and Meganck (2009, p. 55) state that HR managers need to investigate the importance of particular retaining factors 'for different segments of employees in their organization'. Investigating the needs of parents, and particularly those of sole parents, could help organisations to better cater for the needs of this group. This contribution towards work/life reconciliation allows companies to recoup a return of the investment placed into their employees (Pocock 2005; Rutherford 1999). Policy awareness is a major prerequisite for all managers, along with that having some detailed knowledge of the company's work/life programs. Efforts need to be made to ensure that all higher level staff are able to communicate WLB/FFWP and be in a position to be able to adequately and equitably implement them (Wise & Bond 2003). If Line managers are not equipped to advise and promote WLB/FFWP, the time and resources invested in the strategic focus of work/life policies will be wasted and the goal of using WLB/FFWP as a mechanism for attraction and retention of skilled employees will not be achieved.

#### ***2.10.6 Why WLB/FFWP Programs Make Good Business Sense***

The literature has demonstrated that by understanding the employee's perspective of the psychological contract and gaining insight in to the EVP organisations can be better prepared to address skill shortages through increased attraction, recruitment and retention success. This can be achieved by creating a culture in which access to WLB/FFWP is understood and administered appropriately by all those who supervise staff, increasing motivation and productivity.

Responding to changes in the environment can make good business sense, however, assuming that those with children are the only employees who will want to balance their work and outside work lives would ignore the needs of a large number of employees. Thus, ensuring that the range WLB/FFWP programs offered in the organisation address the needs of all employees, whilst recognising that some elements might not appeal to all employees, is important. Indeed, doing so

can benefit the organisation as flexible work arrangements contribute to improved applicant attraction, support efforts to motivate staff and have been found to assist employee retention (Carless & Wintle 2007; Beauregard & Henry 2009; McNall et al. 2010).

Bond, Galinsky and Swanberg (1998) put forward a model of causal pathways that connect work with personal life. Their model suggests that the characteristics of an employee's life combine with characteristics of the job and workplace to contribute to personal wellbeing and to improved job performance and satisfaction. For the employer this means improved engagement through increased commitment to an employer who enables their employees to balance work and life (Bond et al. 1998).

All parents, but especially sole parents, require flexible work offerings that meet their needs; those which they value for the way in which they assist them to balance parenting and work. Handling several things at once between work and family life becomes more of an issue for single parents; organisations need to remain competitive by considering this matter important enough to be included (Burgess et al. 2007b). Policies to support FWA are limited in most companies but the tension that exists for single parents to combine work and family life is clearly evident and if ignored will result in negative consequences for the workplace (Burgess et al. 2007a).

Increasing rates of separation and divorce have resulted in more families being headed by a single parent (McInnes 2005; Walter 2001). Organisations need to be aware of this demographic change and adjust job designs and hours of work to cater for single parents' requirements (Carless & Wintle 2007; Gray & Stanton 2002). Work/life policies can also be viewed and exhibited as a method of promoting workplace diversity and establishing equal opportunities by creating employment and career choices to employees that are unable to work traditional hours. This outlook assists in maintaining workplace equality (Wise & Bond 2003).

In order to boost productivity within the Australian economy, organisations are required to remain globally competitive by improving their attractiveness by incorporating innovative HR practices as a competitive advantage (BCA 2008). A method to improve attractiveness of companies is to incorporate and implement WLB/FFWP. HR policies and practices are required to be flexible and

respond to demographic and social change (Darcy & McCarthy 2007). This includes ways to enable employees to better manage paid work and parenting commitments. WLB/FFWP will assist employees to develop a healthier work relationship (Thorntwaite 2004). The Fair Work Act does allow employees the right to request flexible working arrangements until their youngest child turns five years of age (Warrick 2010), but the Fair Work Act does not cater for parents with older dependent children. Employers will be able to refuse a request for flexible working hours on the basis of reasonable business grounds (Wells 2010).

Work/family conflict amongst sole primary carers varies according to the age of the child/children and the number of children. As primary carers move through their parental life stages, their work/family balance will alter too. That is why there is a strategic advantage for organisations that effectively address the need to change work/family arrangements in their organisations. If this is taken into consideration, then organisations can help avoid costly failure of their current family friendly policies and programs (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Gray & Stanton 2002; McCracken 2000). What HR managers need to keep in mind is that parents, especially single parents experience differences in carer demands as their children become older and the surrounding influences that impact work family conflict do not remain static but alter with time as children grow (Darcy & McCarthy 2007). Organisations that continue with the "one size fits all" approach increase the risk of failure to meet the special requirements of single parents as well as incurring a significant waste of financial and human resources (Darcy & McCarthy 2007).

There are workplace productivity and social reasons for the implementation of WLB/FFWP to create flexible work environments. The pressure of combining carer needs and work demands causes great stress as one impinges on the other (Lingard & Francis 2005). The time and energy expended at home can affect performance at work. Also, issues or pressures at work may be brought back home impacting on family life. The outcome of this work/life conflict can often be referred to as burnout. It can result in emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment and a general distrust of workplace policy (Lingard & Francis 2005). This type of role conflict between work and family can lead to mutually incompatible domains (Lingard & Francis 2005; Lingard et al. 2007). Lack of assistance or understanding by employers makes it difficult for employees, especially single parents, to be fully productive members of staff (Lingard & Francis 2005). A more

accommodating workplace can have beneficial effects on single parents trying to juggle both work and family commitments (Burgess et al. 2007a, Carless & Wintle 2007, Burgess et al. 2007b).

Butterworth et al. (2006) have noted that sole parents are one of the groups in society where increased levels of depression have been identified and in extreme cases this has even led to suicide attempts. Taking actions to reduce these possible negative outcomes to the pressures that welfare recipients are placed under in meeting their MO is socially responsible. At the same time it will ensure that employees have greater balance in their lives and thus are able to be more productive (Lingard et al. 2007) when at work and will lead to increased commitment that in turn reduces worker replacements (McNall et al. 2010; Beauregard & Henry 2009; Forsyth & Polzer-DeBruyne 2007) and the cost burden of repeated recruitment and training of new staff. Organisations need to explore alternative ways of providing employees with choices to balance work/life commitments with flexible work arrangements, child and dependent care leave and family/parental leave to assist single parents to meet the needs of their dependent children (De Cieriet al. 2005; van Acker & Ferrier 2005). The Federal Government has recently introduced an initiative to assist working parents. Paid parental leave of 18 weeks at the Federal Minimum Wage came in to operation on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2011 and is available to all eligible employees (Family Assistance Office 2011; <http://www.familyassist.gov.au>; NSW Government 2010). This communicates to employers, and society in general, that considering the needs of all employees and assisting them to balance their work and family lives is of great national importance. Along with the provisions contained in the Fair Work Act to enable parents to phase back into work, this demonstrates a commitment by the Federal government to support working parents.

The aim of work/life balance is to be able to coordinate and maintain a healthy equilibrium between work and non-work life. For sole parents, WLB initiatives that could be termed 'family friendly' have the potential to create an improved relationship between carer responsibilities and work commitments, to ensure that primary carers are able to fulfil their roles as parent and employee. Achieving this balance has been ranked by management intuitions to be a number one personnel challenge (Darcy & McCarthy 2007). In highly competitive employment conditions, attracting and retaining talented key employees is quite a challenge for organisations. Companies therefore

require a greater awareness of the concerns employees face when balancing work and home life (Darcy & McCarthy 2007).

Ensuring that the range of elements included WLB/FFWP address the needs of all parent employee groups is important. Not doing so can lead to an increase in absenteeism and turnover, as well as a decrease in loyalty, motivation and productivity and loss of knowledge for the organisation (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Haar 2007; Gray & Collins 2006; Gray & Stanton 2002; Cohen & Single 2001). Other writers, such as Wintle (2007), Darcy and McCarthy (2007), Lingard and Francis (2005), Wise and Bond (2003) and Lewis (2001) have suggested that companies need to develop work/life balance initiatives that reflect the changing trends of modern day life.

### **2.11 *WLB/FFWP and Parents or WLB/FFWP for Sole Parents***

It is important to retain skilled and knowledgeable employees by managing workplace diversity, as organisations are composed of different people with differing working requirements such as sole parents. Being aware of the need to retain quality employees and the actions taken to make the organisation more attractive to single parents, especially sole parents through the development of WLB/FFWP programs would, over time, be considered the norm (Lingard & Francis 2005; Lewis 2001).

Single parents seek jobs that support parenting responsibilities and enable them to combine paid work around parenting demands (Hand & Hughes 2004). Gray and Collins' (2007) research would indicate that this brings with it the risk of marginalisation within the workplace leading to career disadvantage lasting beyond the years in which single parents need to work part-time, take career breaks or accept casual work arrangements to meet their parenting responsibilities. Organisations incorporating WLB/FFWP may assist parents, especially sole parents, to have an increased choice of positions that they could apply for and maintain while meeting carer responsibilities, work commitments and MO (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; De Cieri et al. 2005).

Sole parents need to be able to overcome obstacles around family commitments; educational challenges that may require time off work to attend classes, and appropriate employment in order

to meet their MO or Employment Pathway Plan which may be eased by more organisations including WLB/FFWP within their workplace (Burgess et al. 2007a).

Sole parents are required to achieve the balance of employment and carer responsibilities without the same childcare support coupled parents have (Hughes & Gray 2005); they do not have a partner with whom they can equally share before and after school or childcare responsibilities. A greater need for non-parental care can have an impact on the number of hours, times or days of the week sole parents can engage in paid work (Hughes & Gray 2005). The issue of carer responsibilities highlights the need for flexible work hours and leave arrangements to be offered by organisations allowing sole parents to deal with unpredictable events such as family sickness (Hughes & Gray 2005).

## **2.12 Website Design and Employer Branding**

Organisations' websites have become a source of information for a range of interested people including customers, suppliers, shareholders as well as employees. In relation to attraction and engagement of skilled staff, organisations' websites are used to convey an employer brand (Quesenberry & Garland 2003; Oh et al. 2007; Burgess et al. 2007) that will attract the type of employee being sought. Indeed, Cober, Brown, Levy, Cober and Keeping (2003, p. 159) state that the web sites of organisations 'have become the primary source of information for job seekers'. Mescher, Benschop and Dorewaard (2010, p. 22) saw the internet as providing a new corporate communication tool enabling organisations to communicate with an intricate network of stakeholders with whom they have or desire to have a relationship, including 'their workforce, investors, competitors, customers, suppliers, government officials, etc.'. Therefore quality and content of the website have become a tool for attracting and retaining employees (Webmaster 2009).

The design, layout and content of websites can be used as a public relations and a recruitment and selection tool that can target desired potential employees through careful consideration of what it is that particular groups of applicants might desire of the organisation (Oh et al. 2007; Nielson 2003;

Quesenberry & Garland 2003). This in turn would encourage these particular applicant groups to apply, become a member of staff and remain with the organisation.

A *Search Engine* is a program that retrieves information from a database that is relevant to the query of the user (Stibel 2006). Irrelevant information called up through search engines or found on the company website links detracts and loses viewers (Oh, Fiorito, Cho & Hofacker 2007; Nielson 2003; Quesenberry & Garland 2003), who in this case are potential or current employees. The BCA member organisations' websites were assessed to determine whether from visiting the website to gather information single parents could learn if the organisation was attractive to work for and make decisions about how well the WLB/FFWP offered would fit their family situation (Oh et al. 2007; Nielson 2003; Quesenberry & Garland 2003).

Aspects of website design which will assist organisations in communicating their suitability as an employer of parents, especially single parents and those sole parents requiring work to meet MO are discussed below.

### **2.12.1 Effective Websites**

Organisations now use their websites to communicate with their customers, suppliers, employees, potential employees and the general public (Mescher et al. 2010). An increasing awareness of the ability of a well-designed website to inform visitors has led to the corporate image of organisations being conveyed on their home page; one component of this is the organisation's image as an employer communicated by their employer brand (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Wilden, et al., 2010). Employer branding originates from marketing and is now used to convey to the public an image of the organisation as an employer (Lievens, Van Hove & Anseel 2007). Accordingly, the design of an organisation's website and the manner in which information may be gained from it, including the ease with which people can navigate their way around the site, can be extremely important for attracting quality employees.

Competing for quality employees in a global market place is vital for organisational success, thus employer branding now has an important role to play in attracting and retaining talented staff

(Berthon, Ewing & Hah 2005). To be effective, an employer brand must be well targeted. Additionally, as it is also used to retain employees, an employer brand cannot mislead. It must truthfully and clearly inform but not over promise on what an organisation can offer its employees to ensure credibility and consistency between statements made and employees' experiences (Wilden, et al., 2010). The most common way in which an employer brand is now communicated to the wider community is via the Internet. Organisations use their websites to inform visitors including information on jobs available and the organisation's approach to managing their people. The way an organisation presents employment information on their website and the quality of that website will, therefore, be important.

Results of Cober, Brown and Levy's (2004) research provide a framework for assessing the quality of a website. Included in the factors they identified was the provision of information on work/life balance programs that would support employees in managing their work and family commitments. Information on workforce diversity, beyond common statements related to compliance with EEO requirements, was also a feature of many sites they visited. Beyond these items, highly relevant to this research, they noted that information on internships, career fairs and campus visits for graduate recruitment and employee testimonials, profiles of successful employees and details of the organisation's service and involvement were commonly included (Cober et al. 2004). However, whereas their earlier study (2000) revealed that 37% of Fortune 100 companies provided details of career fairs and campus visits, only 9% provided details of WLB offerings, the least common of all the factors found in Cober et al.'s (2004) research. Their second study, conducted in 2002 and again concentrating on Fortune 100 "best companies," found that 50% of these organisations provided information on WLB, 58% provided information on workplace diversity beyond EEO compliance and 65% contained pictures of people from different backgrounds. Employee development opportunities were included on 66% of the websites in this study with information regarding the organisation's culture, goals, values and general working environment being most common (92%) (Cober et al. 2004). The increase in the number of organisations providing information in just a two-year period perhaps indicates the speed with which websites have become a vital tool in attraction and recruitment.

Different aspects of the website design can make it attractive and interesting to the viewer.

For both potential and current employees, showing examples of staff using WLB/FFWP demonstrates to those searching the website that WLB/FFWP are used within that organisation. This would influence those seeking employment and who require these programs to find the organisation more attractive because it conveys the message that using these offerings is an accepted part of the organisation's culture. Parents, single parents and especially sole parents would consider these types of organisations in a positive manner (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; McCracken 2000).

Other areas that contribute to website design include the ease of finding relevant information and the search facility. The number of clicks to locate information should be less than four (Nielsen 2003) and the number of links should be kept to a minimum to avoid causing confusion and so the website maintains the viewer's attention in order to capture the attractiveness of the organisation. For potential and current employees wanting to access information on WLB/FFWP this assists parents with making a decision to apply for a position and remain with the organisation (Gustafsson & Rieloff 2009; Webmaster 2009).

To further increase the ease of finding information a good search facility is of benefit to the organisation and viewers seeking information on WLB/FFWP policies and practices. For organisations, good website design incorporates terms that would be familiar to viewers and not ambiguous allowing parents, single parents, in particular sole parents, to gather material that would assist them to make a decision regarding employment and whether they would be able to juggle home life and work/life (Gehrke & Turban 1999).

Along with the ease of obtaining relevant material the visual display can enhance the attractiveness of the website by using a font size that is easy to read (Arvind 2009; Nielsen 2002). Additionally, the way the information is presented, including colour (background and font) used is important. For Western cultures black text on a white background is a preferred layout (Archee & Gurney 2007). Using colours appropriate for the culture from which the viewers come, having real life images that attract the attention of the users by providing material and information that is cheerful and has a pleasing appearance (Arvind 2009; Henderson, Giese & Cote 2004) will sustain the interest of the viewer. Detailed and relevant information provided for parents would attract them and using colour,

visual displays and carefully designed screens would make it easier for the viewer to understand the content (Nielsen 2007; Gehrke & Turban 1999). For instance, this would be achieved by presenting information using dot points or by providing descriptive paragraphs as each of these formats has advantages and disadvantages (Henderson, Cote, Leong & Schmitt 2003; Nielsen 2003) in relation to conveying what WLB/FFWP the organisation can offer to parents, single parents and especially sole parents.

Employer branding projected through effective website design can enhance the organisation making it attractive and informative for viewers (Gustafsson & Rieloff 2009; Nielsen 2003; Gehrke & Turban 1999). The 'viewers' being focused on in this research are parents, single parents and in particular sole parents who would be better informed and able to make decisions on whether an organisation would provide the employment conditions they require to balance work and caring responsibilities if clear and relevant WLB/FFWP information was available on the website.

Effective websites have become an important tool for attracting quality applicants. The attraction of skilled employees is an important issue for organisations, especially as there is an increasingly competitive recruitment market. Competing for those skills that are highly sought after creates challenges for companies striving to attract and retain quality employees (Abbott & De Cieri 2008). The attractiveness of an organisation can be enhanced if the firm is recognised as promoting WLB/FFWP. For instance, Rau and Hyland (2002) found that those with role conflicts – work-to-family, family-to-work or work-to-school conflict – were most likely to find flexible work arrangements attractive. These offerings can create the image and perception of holding the status of being a good place to work. Thus the implementation of WLB/FFWP can prove to be an effective strategy for employee retention (Abbott & De Cieri 2008). Detailing these on the organisation's website will assist in communicating their availability to current staff thus aiding retention and in creating the desired company image for attraction of quality applications.

Organisations are becoming more aware of the advantages of bringing WLB/FFWP into the workplace that include reducing absenteeism and turnover, and increasing productivity (Budd & Mumford 2005). Other outcomes for the company can be improved loyalty, commitment and job

satisfaction for the employee that in turn positively influences employee engagement (Parkes & Langford 2008).

Approaches to attraction and retention include becoming an employer of choice, implementing WLB/FFWP, creating an employer brand to communicate the value proposition to potential employees, now commonly via their website, and designing employee reward schemes that include elements that talented employees desire.

### **2.13 Choice for Sole Parents**

Sole parents, due to their personal circumstances, are faced with limited choices but WLB/FFWP can assist to balance out work/life conflict. Having elements within WLB/FFWP that truly address the unique needs of sole parents is vital for the individuals themselves and the organisation that wishes to motivate and retain them.

The nature of MO and the signing of a contract with agreement between the sole parent and the welfare representative is not always one of choice (Schooneveldt 2003). MO and an Employment Pathway Plan is a requirement that must be met in order to continue to obtain financial assistance. Sole parents are required by law to enter this agreement if they wish to receive any payments. What this contract specifies is that if the agreed activities are not fulfilled, payments will cease. It is of no concern to the Government if stopping these payments affects lifestyle or the ability to feed their children (Schooneveldt 2003). Choice is removed from the type of positions sole parents can apply for and the time for these parents to be able to seek and find employment that promotes a career or is of interest to them. This MO or Employment Pathway Plan agreement takes away the choice of how these sole parents wish to raise their children. They have no option to be a stay at home parent. These welfare reforms increase parental stress, enforce parenting styles that involve moving children into low-quality childcare or unsupervised arrangements while the parent works (Chase-Lansdale et al. 2003).

## 2.14 Conclusion

This chapter has considered changes in welfare legislation that have occurred since July 2006 in relation to people receiving government financial assistance or payments from Centrelink. In this chapter the broader issues of all welfare recipients having to meet MO or Employment Pathway Plan requirements were identified narrowing the focus to the impact on sole parents with dependent children. The literature gathered supports the claim that many organisations are implementing WLB/FFWP in order to reduce work/family conflict (Ten Brummelhuis & van der Lippe 2010; Beauregard & Henry 2009; Poelmans et al. 2008; Burgess et al. 2007a, Carless & Wintle 2007). The need for reduced work/family conflict is especially strong for parents with dependent children or for those providing elder or other care. However the needs of every employee or every parent employee requirements are not the same. Organisations need to be aware that as a result of changes in welfare law more sole parents are seeking employment. With this increase of sole parents wishing to, or being required to, enter the workforce there is a need for WLB/FFWP to cater for the special needs these parents have in order to meet their MO requirements or Employment Pathway Plans by returning to work.

To enable sole parents to make choices that truly support their return to work, and the total care and development of their children, requires that social equity principles be the backbone of the WLB/FFWP policies that organisations use to cater for sole parents transition back into the workforce.

Moving forward to the research questions and research design in Chapter 3, a summary is provided below of the common WLB/FFWP terms discussed in section 2.8.2 as they provide foundation for this study.

**Table 2.1: Summary of Common WLB/FFWP**

WLB/FFWP	Explanation
FWA: Flexible Work Arrangements	Encompassing part-time work and a range of flexible leave options, telecommuting and flexible start and finish times.
Career break	Leave of absence for an extended span of time on either a fulltime or part-time basis that is usually unpaid and may last for up to twelve months.
Carer's leave	To time off to provide care or support for members of the employee's 'immediate family'.
Casual work	Intermittent employment.
Childcare	Day Care and After School Care.
Compressed work weeks	Employee works nine days in a fortnight instead of ten. This will require that the employee work longer hours on set days from e.g. 8.00 am to 7.00 pm for four days instead of five
Flexible start and finishing times	Changes to start and finish times, or allowing employees to take short periods of time off.
Job sharing	Where one fulltime position is shared between two people.
Parental leave (or Maternity leave)	18 weeks leave paid.
Part-time work	Constitutes working 1–34 hours a week, or less than 35 hours a week.
Rostered days off (RDO)	Slightly longer hours are worked usually for 3 weeks and 4 days accruing sufficient time credit for employees to have one day off per month.
Telecommuting	Work is completed usually at the employee's home instead of the office or a combination of office and working from home.
48/52 leave scheme	Employees can elect to take an additional four weeks annual leave in return for a pro rata reduction in salary (sometimes referred to as pay averaging).

## Chapter 3: Approach and Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to describe the methodological approach adopted for this research and the methods used to investigate how organisations have responded to social and legislative changes by catering for sole parents through WLB/FFWP and their transition into the workforce. This chapter will provide an overview and justification of a mixed methods approach in the context of the research question(s). It will also discuss an overview of the research design and explain and justify each of the design elements of the methodology.

### 3.2 Research Methodology

A mixed methods research approach was taken to answer the research questions: What is the role of WLB/FFWP in attracting and retaining sole and lone parents?

1. What role do WLB/FFWP policies play in attracting sole parents and assisting in the retention of those who must comply with new MO requirements?
2. What role do WLB/FFWP policies play in attracting lone parents and assisting in the retention of those in this group by reducing work-family conflict?
3. What policies, programs and procedures have been implemented in participant organisations to assist sole and lone parents to manage their work and childcare responsibilities?
4. Why have these policies come into existence?
5. Do organisations monitor or evaluate existing WLB/FFWP?
6. Are the available WLB/FFWP assisting to retain employees from this pool of experienced workers?

These questions were designed to investigate the role WLB/FFWP play in attracting and retaining parents, particularly sole parents, in the workforce. This approach was chosen due to the nature of the question requiring qualitative and quantitative material or responses. For this research, the quantitative component of the research was confined to frequencies and descriptive statistics; it did not involve the use of sophisticated statistical analytical methods or the use of support programs

such as SPSS. A mixed methods approach gives the researcher a better opportunity to learn the most about the phenomenon of interest. The mixing of methods can apply to both the data collection and analysis. This provides a clearer understanding of the research issues by making it possible for the researcher to test and build theory. It also holds value by giving the researcher the ability to draw better and more accurate inferences providing a clearer picture of the research issues as it functions within the specific social context (Weathington, Cunningham & Pittenger 2010). The nature of mixed methods allows for the qualitative data to be supported by the quantitative measurements (Bryman & Bell 2007) giving more strength to the validity and reliability of the chosen research methods.

When considering any type of human inquiry within social sciences it is important to consider the difference between prediction of events and understanding through personal experience (Babbie 2007). A narrative (qualitative) style was adopted as a way to record and understand the social reality of the participants. Using a more narrative style may not provide quick, easy answers but does allow for alternative options on complex issues. Adopting qualitative methods assists to capture and understand employees' and parents' descriptions and meanings of work/life balance within their social realm (Weathington et al. 2010; Burns 2000). Narrative research brings forward how people experience and organise their story into meaningful units allowing their voice to be heard that may otherwise go unnoticed and be misunderstood (Moen 2006).

By further applying ethnographic research to the qualitative methodology, the researcher sought to better understand the meanings and significances of situations and personal behaviours/reactions of the sample population. As this research deals with people that are employees, parents and HR managers in organisations, an ethnographic focus influenced the qualitative approach, describing their activities and patterns in reducing work/life conflict (Bryman 2001; Burns 2000). Incorporating an ethnographical approach to this research aimed to give rise to a more focused view on detailed and accurate descriptions rather than explanations (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009; Babbie 2007; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe 1991). In order to improve the validity of this research, triangulation was applied by using two or more forms of data collection (Burns 2000). Using a triangulated approach reduces the limitations of using only one data collection method by cross checking of the research findings (Bryman & Bell 2007).

### 3.3 *Research Design*

An overview of the research design is provided in Figure 3.1. It can be seen from Figure 3.1 that the research design incorporated a number of different phases, beginning with a literature review, analysis of BCA member organisation websites, development of data gathering instruments including a semi structured interview format, questionnaire and example job advertisements for ranking by participants. These instruments were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data.

A hypothesis-free orientation was adopted (Burns 2000) with the empirical framework based on the views of employees, parents, HR managers and their rankings of WLB/FFWP elements within their social context. This type of orientation allows for unexpected and non-traditional views to be discovered. Using this aspect of qualitative analysis permits for a greater understanding of work/life reconciliation, because things can be very different to how they appear on the surface (Burns 2000). Using a job advertisement form and a questionnaire (quantitative) in conjunction with semi-structured interviews (qualitative) allows for triangulation and completeness to occur (Weathington et al. 2010). Triangulation gives the opportunity to verify and/or corroborate findings from both qualitative and quantitative instruments that have been used (Weathington et al. 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009). Having a combination of instruments and using various methods increases the completeness by allowing for a more comprehensive examination of the areas of interest better than one method used alone.

As stated, the methodology adopted for this research was a mixed methods approach (Creswell 1994) enabling a better understanding of the concepts being explored by combining the data gathering methods at phases of the research process, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Some basic statistical analyses were performed on the data gathered, with the remainder of the research conducted being qualitative in nature. Burns (1994, p. 125) stated that 'a research design is ... a plan or strategy' that enables the research questions to be answered. The research design chosen contained the following phases: i. Observation, then as detailed in Figure 3.1 (below), ii. Initial information gathering; iii. Formulation of theory and development of a conceptual framework; iv. Development the research questions; v. Formal (or secondary) data

gathering; vi. Data analysis and vii. Conclusions and recommendations. Thus, the research followed an established process, similar to that recommended by many, including Creswell (2003), Sekaran (2003), Burns (1994) and Bryman (1992).

### **3.3.1 Phases of the Research**

#### ***i. Observation***

From personal experience and interaction within my social network, I recognised that changes in WTW legislation were leading to changes in sole parents' lives and that this, in turn, led to changes in the profile of job candidates and thus of employees across organisations. Commentary in newspapers, on websites, TV and radio also confirmed that this was an area requiring research. From this, the thesis title: *Sole Parents and Transition back to the Workforce: Catered for or not?* and the question which heads up Figure 3.1 (below): 'What is the role of WLB/FFWP in attracting and retaining sole parents?' were developed.

#### ***ii. Initial (Secondary) Information Gathering***

As Figure 3.1 (below) shows, initial information gathering involved consulting secondary sources. This secondary data, or initial data, was collected first as this came from print material already published. The secondary data gathering involved three main sources: consulting refereed literature, government publications related to the WTW Act, and articles written by non-government social service provider organisations. This provided the background information to support the construction of interview questions for the semi structured interviews and a questionnaire used during the formal, or primary, data gathering stage (described below) and the selection of 10 job advertisements for ranking by participants. Additionally, information gathered from the literature on good website design guided evaluation of BCA member websites. Performing the secondary data gathering before commencing primary data collection provided evidence of elements considered to be popular within WLB/FFWP according to the literature and those that organisations had in operation as revealed through the website search. This provided the platform for primary data gathering, development of the interview schedule, and collection of the job advertisements for

ranking by participants (Appendix B) according to the extent to which they appealed to them and would encourage them to apply for the position.

### *Literature Review*

The review of the literature provided the theoretical base for this research. Literature was found by using Google, Google Scholar which provides access to a broad range of electronic databases (such as Business Source Complete, EBSCO Hosts, Emerald, JSTOR, SAGE journals and Springer Link) searching for WLB/FFWP terms such as 'work/life balance', 'family flexible work practices', 'flexible work arrangements', 'single parents' and 'diversity' from 2008 - 2010.

A review of the literature provides information on what has been previously discovered, learned or changed in the area of interest (Babbie 2007). The key concepts were searched for by exploring terms or phrases that were associated with WLB/FFWP, single parents, sole parents, Centrelink etc. (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009), for example 'welfare recipients', 'mutual obligations', 'employment pathway plans', 'flexible work arrangements', 'diversity', and 'childcare'. The overall research question required an understanding of the WLB/FFWP that were available and attractive to lone and particularly sole parents to remain in the workforce. Thus the literature review was designed to focus on background and terminology, existing evidence of WLB/FFWP implemented by organisations, the impact of WTW legislation, attraction and retaining of skilled employees via WLB/FFWP and the extent to which sole parents are supported to return to work. More specifically, the aim of the literature review was to gather information in order to determine the role of WLB/FFWP in attracting and retaining single parents with an emphasis on sole parents within this group. This information was then combined with and contrasted against details gathered of the WLB/FFWP available on the websites of large employers.

The literature review was conducted by performing online searches by entering key words relating to WLB/FFWP. This yielded many entries so time was then spent sifting and sorting through to find relevant information of value (Babbie 2007) by accessing and reading through the articles highlighting WLB/FFWP terms and policies. Using articles dated from 1992 to 2010 allowed for progression or changes to be identified in the development of WLB/FFWP, and for the impact of

changes to family structure and of the introduction of Welfare to Work legislation on single parents and their entry into the workforce to be included.

The information found in the literature review enabled categories of popular WLB/FFWP to be developed and applied as an analytical tool when using a qualitative research approach (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

#### *Government and Non-government social service providers*

Government websites were searched to locate publications on current and changing legislation and this provided a vast range of articles, reports and books from a variety of sources both refereed and non-refereed.

#### *Website and Newspaper Searches*

In order to gather information on WLB/FFWP in practice in Australia, organisations' websites and job advertisements in the print media and on recruitment websites were viewed.

BCA member organisations were selected for the website search because these companies represent Australia's leading organisations with an overall total of one million employees. This identified a strong representation of working environments and acted as a reliable source for trends, policies and practices within current large corporations (BCA 2008). At the time of the research, there were 107 members of the BCA, however not all organisations provided details of their WLB/FFWP on their website. Details from the website search of the BCA companies provided a means for comparison with the WLB/FFWP information found in the literature review. This procedure was designed to examine what popular WLB/FFWP major organisations in Australia were using to assist to retain employees, especially single parents. Evidence from the literature of those WLB/FFWP being successfully used by organisations to attract and retain employees was compared against the WLB/FFWP of the largest organisations in Australia.

The website research identified the policies, programs and procedures that were available to assist single parents, in particular sole parents, to manage their work and childcare responsibilities at those BCA organisations that provided details on their websites.

Internet job sites were also investigated. The online job providers as promoted by Job Access (2010) are Career One and Seek. Seek was chosen for this research because they are advertised as Australia's number one jobs, employment, career and recruitment site (Nielsen/Netratings 2009). The Seek job search accounts were set up based on the same WLB/FFWP criteria for the newspaper advertisements (see below). A total of 10 job advertisements was selected, 6 job advertisements were from seek.com and four from newspaper advertisements. It was judged that because participants were advised in the Information for Participants documentation required under ethics approval that their interview and completion of all activities would take no more than one hour, 10 job advertisements was judged to be the maximum that could be completed in this time.

In addition to recruitment agency websites, it was recognised from the literature review and personal experience that job advertisements in newspapers and on company websites could provide a further source of information on WLB/FFWP offered by organisations, however that employers may or may not include details of their WLB/FFWP elements in job advertisements was acknowledged. Where details are included, they provide additional evidence of WLB/FFWP being offered by Australian organisations, not only BCA member organisations, for comparison with those recommended in the literature.

Based on the elements discussed in the literature review and mentioned on websites, a sample of 10 job advertisements was selected; nine were taken from the Seek website and one from the Leader suburban newspaper in Melbourne. The job advertisements were chosen from these sources because all interview participants were from Melbourne. The job advertisements were selected based on the WLB/FFWP terms used in the wording of the advertisements. Terms used to search for suitable advertisements, based on the literature review, were 'flexible work arrangements', 'job share,' 'part-time,' 'school hours,' 'working from home' (telecommuting) and 'a supportive culture.'

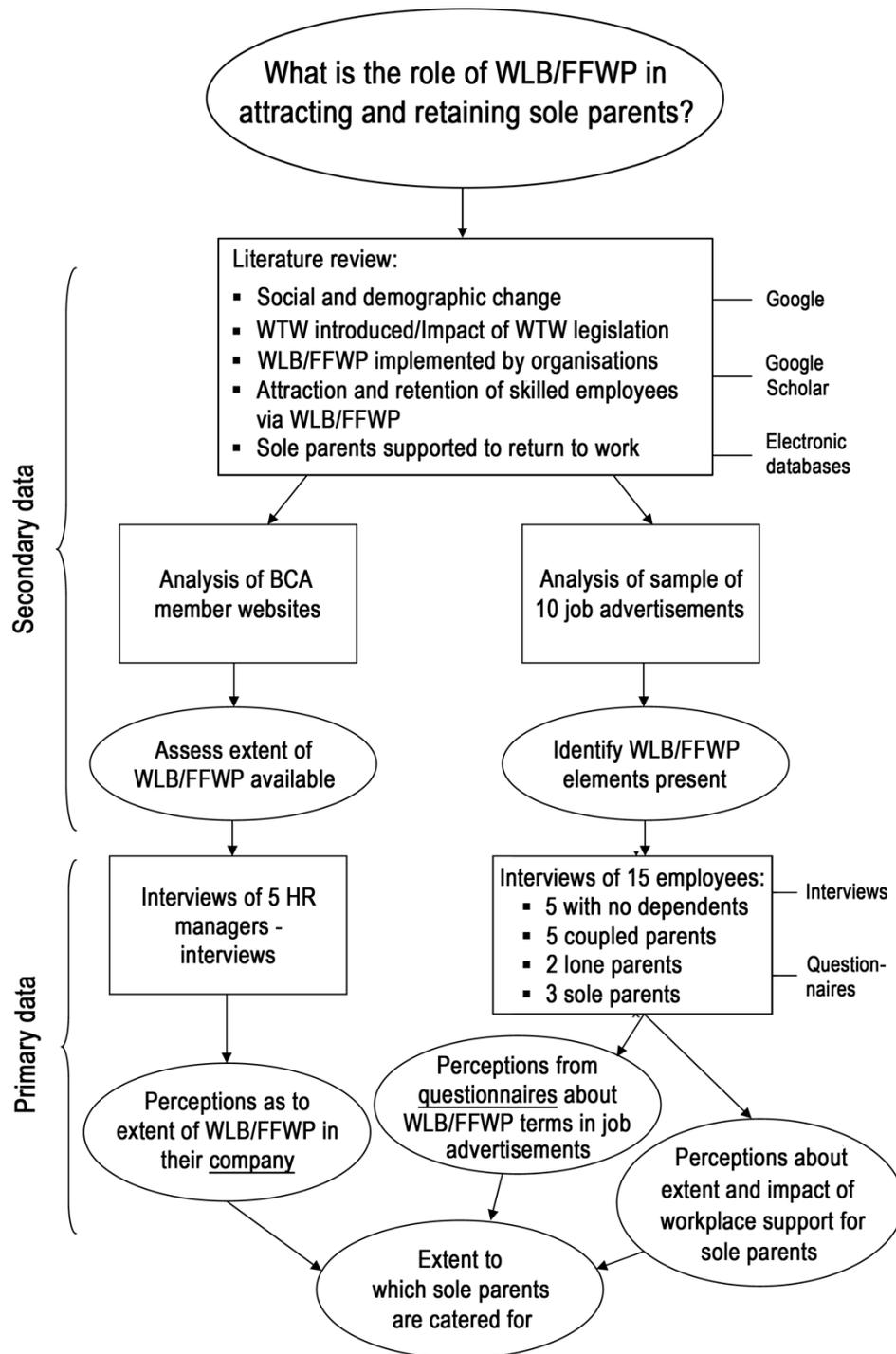


Figure 3.1: The Research Design

### iii. Theory development and conceptual framework

From the expanded understanding gained of the situation from the literature and other secondary sources, the issues relating to the situation were identified and their interconnectedness recognised ensuring that the overall research question would be answered if the conceptual framework developed drove the research design. The conceptual framework that emerged on completion of stage 3 (Figure 3.2) described the issues to be investigated to answer the question: *What is the role of WLB/FFWP in attracting and retaining sole parents?* and the sub-research questions, thus guiding the design of the research. As a result of changes to WTW legislation and altered MO, sole parents will need to locate work that fits with their caring responsibilities. Organisations will receive applications for vacant positions from sole parents and will need to have appropriate policies and practices in place to attract and retain these employees. Only when sole parents can locate suitable positions and remain in them because they are able to meet both their caring and work responsibilities will the new WTW/MO requirements be met.

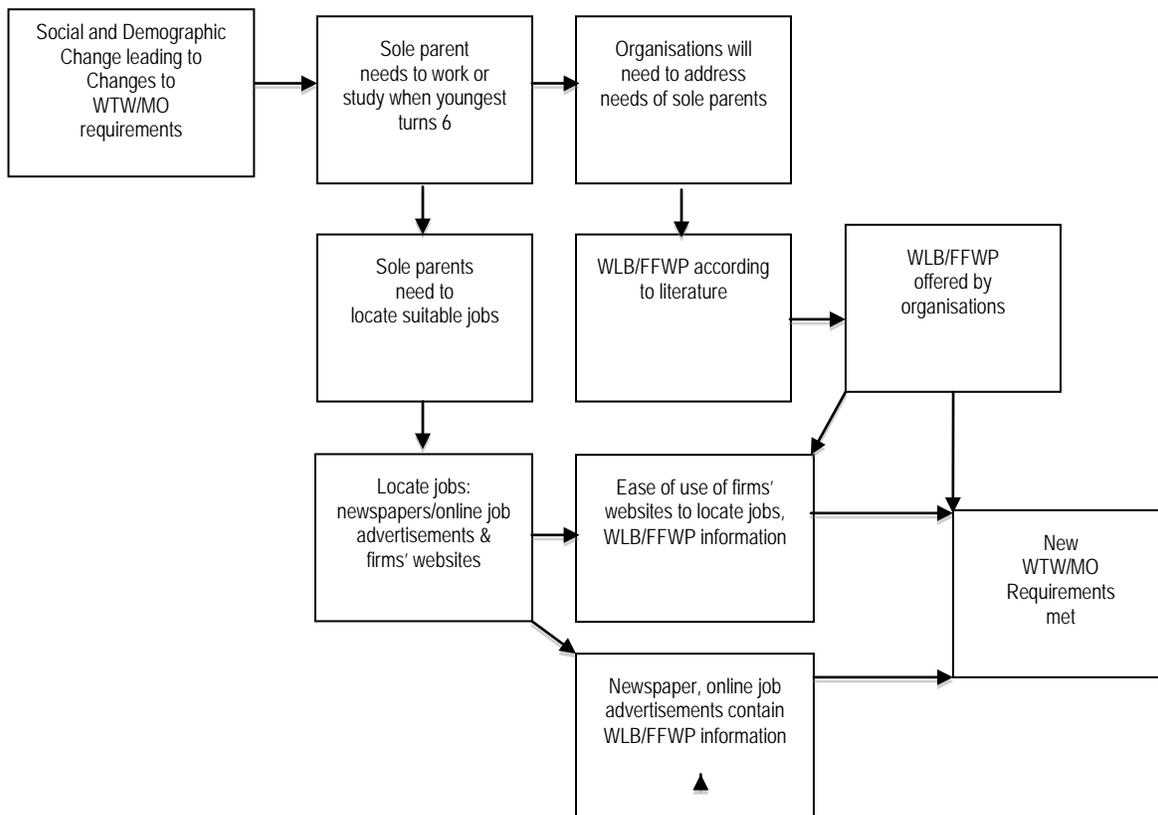


Figure 3.2 The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provided the basis for developing supporting research questions, deciding suitable data gathering methods and design of data gathering instruments.

#### *iv. Development of the Research Questions*

The secondary data provided the theoretical base for the research and the conceptual framework to guide the research process. From this the research questions were fully developed, as detailed in Chapter 1, section 1.5, to explore the role of WLB/FFWP in reducing work-family conflict and thus attracting and retaining sole parents, who must comply with new MO requirements, and lone parents. The conceptual framework revealed that information would need to be gathered on the policies, programs and procedures implemented in organisations to support all parents – sole parents in particular – in managing their work and family responsibilities and reveal reasons why these policies had been developed. Information on whether organisations monitored and evaluated their WLB/FFWP offerings and used and their contribution to retention of single employees was also required, as this would indicate whether organisations were catering for the transition of sole parents back in to the workforce. If organisations' WLB/FFWP offerings did match the needs of sole parents, they would be assisting sole parents to meet their MO.

The full research design was now clear so the instruments required to gather the required information were developed, based on the literature. Ethics approval was sought and gained (see Appendix F) and the instruments trialled prior to commencing the next stage of the research, primary data gathering.

#### *v. Formal (Primary) Data Gathering*

Having established from the literature review, the BCA member organisations' website analysis and the analysis of job advertisements the nature and extent of WLB/FFWP, the next step was to compare those findings with the desires of participants and details provided by five HR managers of WLB/FFWP policies within their respective organisation.

## Data gathering

Data was gathered from the following participant groups:

**Table 3.1: Research Participants**

Participants	Gender, Employment status and details	Code	Total
No dependents	F, employed, administrative role, FT F, employed, managerial role, FT F, employed, medical practitioner, FT F, employed, administrative role, FT F, employed, managerial role, FT	ND1 ND2 ND3 ND4 ND5	5
Coupled Parents	F, employed, teacher, FT F, employed, administrative role, PT F, employed, medical practitioner, FT F, employed, teacher's aide, PT F, employed, medical practitioner, PT	CP1 CP2 CP3 CP4 CP5	5
Single Parents Lone parents Sole Parents	M, employed, administrative role, FT (HR1) M, employed, administrative role, FT (HR2) F, employed, child care worker, PT F, unemployed M, employed, administrative role, PT	LP1 LP2 SP1 SP2 SP3	5
HR Managers	F, BCA organisation – utility provider (LP1) F, BCA organisation – banking & finance (LP2) F, BCA organisation – banking & finance F, large (>170 FT, 2,000 causal) non-BCA – sport & entertainment M, EOC, large tertiary education institution	HR1 HR2 HR3 HR4 HR5	5

## Legend

F	Female	E	Employed
M	Male	UE	Unemployed
ND	No dependents	CP	Coupled parent (with dependents)
LP	Lone parent (with dependents)	SP	Sole parent (with dependents)
HR	Human resource manager	EOC	Employer of Choice
BCA	Business Council of Australia	FT	Full time

Table 3.1 (above) provides details of the research participants. The total participant group was designed to provide equal numbers of participants with no dependents, coupled with dependents

and single with dependents (LP and SP). A sole parent who enters the workforce may be classified as a lone parent, once their income level exceeds that at which family payments may be received. Likewise, a lone parent who leaves the workforce and no longer has an income may qualify for family payments thus become a sole parent. Indeed, the status of some single parent participants has altered since the research data was gathered. For this reason, lone and sole parents have been grouped together as those working full time (at the time the data was gathered) would have been acutely aware of the WLB/FFWP they would require to enable them to remain in the workforce. This provides an excellent indication of what is required to cater for sole parents returning to the workforce.

A snowball sampling method was used to recruit participants (Bouma & Ling 2006). This technique is beneficial because only interested suitable participants will be interviewed therefore saving time trying to find viable candidates. For the HR manager participants, two managers were contacted as a result of having interviewed parent participants who worked for the organisation at which that HR manager worked (Table 3.1 - LP1 and LP2). The first two HR managers recommended two more HR managers, and the fifth HR manager was approached because their organisation was listed as an Employer of Choice. The sample size of five HR managers was determined to be sufficient, when combined with the information obtained from the website search providing details of WLB/FFWP offered in more than 40 organisations, to provide a reliable indication of WLB/FFWP offerings in Australian organisations.

A summary is provided below of the sources of data collection indicating what method was used as well as the groups of participants this information was gathered from.

## The data gathering instruments

Table 3.2: Summary of Sources of Data

Data Collection Method/Tool	Source of Data
Face to Face Interview	HR Managers
	Single parents: Lone and Sole
Data Gathered via Email	Participants with no dependents
	Coupled parents
Ranking of Job Advertisements	Participants with no dependents
	Coupled parents
	Single parents: Lone and Sole
Questionnaire	Participants with no dependents
	Coupled parents
	Single parents: Lone and Sole
Literature Review	Review of relevant publications, print media and electronic including journal articles, relevant government and not-profit organisation publications and other articles: Refereed and non-referred.
Website analysis	Content of BCA member organisation websites.

Information was gathered from employees, those with no dependents and those who were parents, on the WLB/FFWP they desired and required to remain in the workforce. Interviews and a questionnaire were completed by fifteen participants consisting of five participants with no children still dependent on them, five coupled parents, and five single parents (two lone parents and three sole parents). This was designed to gain an understanding of perceptions about the importance of WLB/FFWP in relation to their ability to work and to enable comparisons between the four sub groups of participants. The aim was to obtain the viewpoints of parents who require and welcome WLB/FFWP within organisations to reduce work/life conflict thereby assisting organisations to retain from this pool of experienced workers. A questionnaire listing popular elements of WLB/FFWP, as identified from the refereed literature, was provided to parent participants for their ranking and to gather comments as to the effectiveness of WLB/FFWP in the workplace. This was designed to highlight what WLB/FFWP parents, especially single parents, found attractive in order for them to be effective staff members and remain with the organisations in which they were employed. Employee participants were also asked to rate job advertisements from recruitment websites and newspapers according to the attractiveness of the WLB/FFWP elements mentioned.

Interviews were conducted with participant groups and data was gathered via email as detailed below commencing with HR manager interviews followed by single parent interviews. Details of how similar data were also gathered from participants with no dependent children and coupled parents for comparison with single parents' interview data is then provided. The data gathered by the questionnaire and ranking sheet, are then discussed.

### *Face-to-Face Interviews*

Interview participants were selected to ensure that the viewpoints of employees using or requiring WLB/FFWP were compared and contrasted with the WLB/FFWP elements that organisations were offering at that time. Five HR managers and five single parents (2 lone parents and 3 sole parents) were interviewed. The single parent category was further divided to learn if the needs of sole parents so that they could fulfil their parenting role, reduce work pressures and meet Centrelink obligations differed from the other parent groups: lone and coupled.

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for further information regarding WLB/FFWP to be gathered as volunteered by participants in addition to direct answers to the interview questions. This opens up new dimensions that may not have been considered (Easterby-Smith et al. 1991). These semi-structured interviews support the qualitative method approach as they are based on narratives. This allowed for the life experiences and dialogic interactions between work and home life and the establishment of balance with the two to be explored. Narrative research brings forward how people experience and organise their story into meaningful units allowing their voice to be heard that may otherwise go unnoticed and be misunderstood (Moen 2006).

Face-to-face interviews were used for HR managers and single parents because this method encourages a two-way dialogue between the researcher and the participant (Weathington et al. 2010). For participants with no dependents and coupled parent, information kits were forwarded by email along with the questions asked of single parents at interview. The kit contained the information sheet and consent form approved by the Victoria University, Faculty of Business and Law Ethics Committee and ten advertisements (see Appendix B), the interview questions (see Appendix C) and related ranking of WLB/FFWP (see Appendix D). Each emailed kit was followed up by a phone call and email was used if required to ensure that questions had been correctly interpreted.

Face-to-face interviews were tape-recorded, with the approval of the interviewee as indicated on the signed consent form, and written notes were also taken during all interviews. Taping the interviews provided the opportunity to transcribe the answers provided and not to rely on memory alone. The written notes were additional support material, often providing further explanation of the taped content or enabling checking if taped responses were not totally clear. This was done to eliminate any possibility of misunderstanding the viewpoints of the participants. The content of the transcripts and handwritten notes was then analysed to identify themes and trends within the data.

Semi structured interviews were conducted with five single parents, two lone parents in full time employment and three sole parents who must meet their mutual obligations. This procedure of face-to-face interviews eliminates the possibility of interview participants avoiding or missing questions and enables the interviewer can make sure that the participants understand the questions being asked (Weathington et al. 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009). All single parents

were asked the same open-ended questions to maintain consistency and have a common point of comparison (Dessler et al. 2007) (see Appendix C for single parent interview questions). These interview questions were constructed based on the literature review and designed to answer the research question and sub research questions. The single parent interviews were conducted at a location nominated by the participant and where privacy was maintained. The set of questions asked of sole and lone parents were slightly different. Lone parents were also asked about WLB/FFWP in their place of work to learn the WLB/FFWP elements they found effective and which existing WLB/FFWP they did not use. Sole parents had additional questions regarding MO as well as questions relating to WLB/FFWP. Because sole parents have to make certain when seeking employment that they are fulfilling their MO the interview questions were designed to see how easily this was achieved. The questions for this group were designed to identify what WLB/FFWP would assist sole parents to combine their welfare requirements, work commitments and carer responsibilities.

- *HR Managers*

The HR managers were interviewed to provide information on the range of WLB/FFWP offered in their organisations and how they perceived these offerings were being incorporated into employee work arrangements and accepted within their workplace culture. The intention of the interviews was to gather information about WLB/FFWP within organisations in order that this could be compared with practices as indicated on BCA organisation websites and in job advertisements. HR manager interviews were designed to gather information on the existence, monitoring and evaluation of WLB/FFWP and how these policies and practices assisted in attracting and retaining single parents. A total of five HR managers were approached to participate in this research and all agreed to take part. In order to gather information both from the user (employee) and organisation (HR manager/policy and program developer) perspectives, employee participants were asked to provide the name and contact details of the HR manager in their organisation. The contact details for two HR managers at BCA organisations were provided by two lone parents interviewed for this research (LP 1 and 2). One of these parents also provided the contact details for another HR manager from another BCA organisation that the lone parent had worked for in the past. Thus three of the HR managers interviewed were employed by BCA member organisations and their

organisation's website would therefore have been assessed as part of this research. In line with the snowball approach, one of the interviewed BCA HR managers provided details of an HR contact within a large organisation, but not one of the largest organisations in Australia and therefore not listed on the BCA website. This HR manager also agreed to participate in the interview for this research. This provided input from a non-BCA organisation ensuring that information on WLB/FFWP offered and tracking of their use was obtained from a broad range of sources. The remaining HR manager was chosen because they were from an organisation that was listed as an Employer of Choice for Women. As this organisation had won an award as "Employer of Choice", the researcher approached them and requested their participation in this research to which they agreed. This organisation was chosen because companies who have won this award are known to incorporate, and should be reasonably expected to take pride in having, WLB/FFWP programs which have been implemented within their place of work (Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) 2010). To win this award organisations nominate themselves and the EOWA recognise, award and promote those companies that successfully attract and retain skilled staff. The three large organisations that took part in this research were chosen to contrast the perception of WLB/FFWP from the HR managers' point of view with that of the single parent employed in that same organisation. Of the two medium sized corporations one was an employer of choice thereby more likely to have effective WLB/FFWP established and the other corporation had great variation in the type of positions available. Choosing large to medium sized organisations increased the opportunity of these companies incorporating WLB/FFWP within their workplace.

Using this group of HR managers provided an avenue to highlight which components of WLB/FFWP they believed to be successful in attracting and retaining staff. This information was then compared to the preferences of each group of employees and parents. HR managers coming from different sized companies provided a point of comparison regarding the choice, design and implementation of WLB/FFWP.

Questions asked of the HR managers concentrated on learning what their organisations were offering employees in terms of WLB/FFWP. The interviews were conducted at the work locations of these HR managers. Interviews were conducted using a semi structured interview format (Appendix E). Using this interview approach allows the interviewee to bring forward their

understanding of the topic whilst ensuring that all areas are covered by gaining answers to the guiding questions (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009). The questions asked were based on the material found in the literature review and information gathered in parent Interviews (See Appendix E Interview Questions HR Manager). Further emails and phone calls were used to clarify the questions if required. Using these backup methods allowed for further clarification when writing up the interview information.

- *Single Parents: Lone and Sole*

Five single parents were approached to participate in this research selected from those the researcher had met, for instance when attending Centrelink meetings, and all agreed to participate. Of these five single parent participants, four were employed for more than 15 hours per week and one was not. Two of the employed single parents worked for companies listed on the BCA website and two worked for small to medium sized enterprises. Having parents employed by BCA organisations allowed for a direct comparison of the WLB/FFWP shown on the websites, those discussed with the relevant BCA organisation HR manager at their interview and with the WLB/FFWP these parents, and in particular the sole parents, found attractive and necessary for them to remain employed within those organisations. These single parent participants, employed by different sized organisations, were chosen to learn of WLB/FFWP offered and to enable comparison according to whether the participant was a lone or sole parent (whether they had to meet MO).

#### *Data Gathered via Email*

Participants with no dependents and coupled parents provided responses to the same questions but by keying responses in to a modified version of the semi structured interview format provided and returned via email. Different groups of parents were included to highlight the elements parents– partnered and single – required in terms of WLB/FFWP in order to achieve some type of resolution between paid work and dependent children. Participants with no dependents were included to provide a comparison with the responses of parents.

- *Participants with No dependents*

Five people currently employed and who had no dependents (children under the age of 18) were approached to participate in this research. Three of these people were employed by a large hospital in Melbourne, as hospitals are in an industry that recognises and incorporates WLB/FFWP, and two were from the researcher's social network. These two participants were chosen because they were interested in using WLB/FFWP offered by their organisation. The literature does concentrate on the benefits of policies and programs offering WLB/FFWP for parents, however restricting offerings to any one group of employees could be viewed as inequitable and research has demonstrated that flexible work arrangements are desired by most employees.

The five participants with no dependents responded by return email. This allowed for a quick turn around time for responses from participants (Skipper 2007). Participants with no dependents were included to gain responses from a range of people employed within organisations and in order that their preferences in relation to WLB/FFWP elements could be compared with those from parents with dependent children. The participants without dependents were selected to represent the diversity that exists within the workplace. The inclusion of this group allowed for a comparison on what WLB/FFWP these participants required or desired to maintain a healthy balance between work and home life and those desired by participants with dependent children. This enabled similarities or differences between all categories of participants interviewed to be identified.

- *Coupled parents*

Five coupled parents were approached to take part in this research and all agreed to participate. All coupled parent participants were engaged in some form of paid employment and had dependent children. This group of parents were included in the participant sample to learn of the WLB/FFWP they required as parents in partnered relationships in order to identify whether their needs varied from those of single parents.

The semi-structured interview content was used for single parents and provided as an attachment to an email (with the kit). Coupled parents were contacted and asked if they understood the

questions or had any queries in relation to them. Participants were then asked to key in brief responses and their written responses were returned by email, the same process as that used for the group with no dependants. Five employed coupled parents with dependent children responded by return email. These coupled parents were chosen to provide data for comparison with single parents' responses in relation to the value they placed on WLB/FFWP required to enable them to remain in employment.

### *Ranking of Job Advertisements*

All employees, those with no dependents, coupled parents, lone parents and sole parents, were asked to browse through the sample of 10 job advertisements that was provided and identify any of those positions that they found attractive and would consider applying for by completing a table which incorporated set questions relating to the 10 job advertisements as shown in Appendix B. Doing this enabled the perceptions of single parents, especially sole parents, in relation to the special requirements they had which could be addressed through the incorporation of certain WLB/FFWP elements that organisations offer to be gathered. From participants' responses comparisons could be made between the WLB/FFWP included in job advertisements and the perceptions of sole parents enabling those that would best cater for their needs to be identified

### *Questionnaire*

The participants without dependents were also asked to complete a questionnaire in order to provide further information on their preferences for WLB/FFWP elements identified in the interviews. A questionnaire designed to rank the elements of FFWP was developed from the literature review and BCA member websites and answered by the participants with no dependents and parent participants. This questionnaire listed the most common WLB/FFWP elements that were found in the literature and on the websites of BCA member organisations, according to the membership list that was last updated on 3rd December 2009. All participants were asked to rate these common WLB/FFWP elements on a scale of 1–5 (See Appendix D), where 1 represented strongly disagree to 5 that represented strongly agree. This rating of WLB/FFWP elements is based on the Likert scale which allows participants to categorise their responses using terms such as “strongly agree”,

“agree”, “disagree” or “strongly disagree”. Likert scales provide a measurement of value by the respondents for WLB/FFWP elements (Weathington et al. 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009; Babbie 2007) enabling perceptions of interest in each element to be obtained. The questionnaire identified which individual WLB/FFWP elements were more important to the different groups and which WLB/FFWP elements each group felt they needed which may attract them or keep them in the workforce.

#### *vi. Data analysis*

Data collected was analysed, commencing with the literature review to provide background knowledge regarding current and popular WLB/FFWP being offered and/or implemented by organisations. This was followed by the analysis of the BCA member websites to identify WLB/FFWP offered and evaluate website design. The content of transcripts from parent and HR manager interviews was analysed and themes and categories identified, frequencies were established from the responses provided to the questionnaires and ranking sheets.

- Literature Review

Articles gathered by the online search on WLB/FFWP were read and common elements were grouped together. The grouping of WLB/FFWP allowed for the frequency of each element of WLB/FFWP to be calculated therefore showing which elements were popular as well as the WLB/FFWP organisations were offering. This yielded many entries on which time was spent sifting and sorting through to find relevant information of value (Babbie 2007) by accessing and reading through the articles highlighting WLB/FFWP terms and policies. Usable material dated from 1992 to 2012. This allowed for progression or changes to be identified in the development of WLB/FFWP, changes to family structure and the impact of Welfare to Work has had on single parents and their entry into the workforce.

The grouping of popular WLB/FFWP elements found in the literature review was then used to generate a list of these WLB/FFWP elements. This list was then used to decide the key words to conduct the BCA website search (Appendix A, Table A.1) and to support development of the

interview questions and questionnaire of popular WLB/FFWP that could be applied as an analytical tool when using a qualitative research approach (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

- *Analysis of BCA Member Organisation Websites*

The list of member companies on the BCA website as updated on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2009 was used. From the background knowledge gained on WLB/FFWP in the literature review, website measurements were used to analyse the data collected, allowing for validity and reliability of data gathered from the company websites (Bryman & Bell 2007; Bouma & Ling 2006). An analysis of the websites of BCA members was conducted to identify whether their websites detailed WLB/FFWP offered by their organisations and to examine the extent of WLB/FFWP elements featured on the websites. The analysis of these websites identified whether and, if so, how organisations used WLB/FFWP as a tool for attraction and retention of skilled staff, especially single parents. Websites were assessed based on two aspects: technical quality of the website design, and the number of WLB/FFWP elements mentioned and the extent of information provided on these. Websites were then compared in terms of the range of website characteristics identified in the literature and discussed in Chapter 2. The characteristics were derived from the literature on website attributes including Bryman and Bell (2007) and Bouma and Ling (2006) and the WLB/FFWP elements that would constitute good practice (Nielsen 2003; Gustafsson & Rieloff 2009). The website attributes identified by the literature review were used to measure accessibility, font size used and ease of reading information provided on the screen and overall visual appeal; number of photos and their content; ease of locating information; whether or not a search facility was provided and, if so, its effectiveness (see Appendix A). WLB/FFWP offerings were assessed based on the number of elements listed or discussed on the website and the amount of detailed information provided. The website assessment instrument used (Appendix A) listed WLB/FFWP elements 'Part-time', 'Job share', Flexible start and finish and 'Family leave' and contained a rating scale that was applied that measured the number and quality of WLB/FFWP (Lingard & Francis 2005) and level of detail provided. These elements were selected because the literature confirms that providing a range of WLB/FFWP elements and informing potential and current employees of these provides an indication of the importance organisations place on WLB/FFWP in attracting and retaining skilled staff (Gustafsson & Rieloff 2009).

A numerical rating was determined for each organisation by allocating points for the number of elements mentioned and the quality and clarity of the explanation of these elements (see Appendix A, Table A.1: Rating of Website Quality). Points were also allocated based on whether photographs were used and, if so, whether these demonstrated that senior members of staff and both genders were encouraged to use the WLB/FFWP offered (Appendix A, Table A.2: Rating Website WLB/FFWP Information and Table A.3: Rating of Staff Pictures Provided on Website). The measurement applied for rating the effectiveness of example(s) provided involved using a numerical value to maintain objectivity when determining the level of effort organisations put into their websites to attract and retain employees, especially single parents. These ratings were then used to group the organisations into four categories. An organisation rated 'A' was assessed to have an excellent level of detail, using photographs demonstrating use of WLB/FFWP by both genders and senior, middle and lower level staff, resulting in a score range of 31 - 40. A 'B' rating would indicate a great amount of detail and receive a score ranging between 21 and 30. A 'C' rating would require an average amount of detail and receive a numerical value between 11 - 20, and to obtain a 'D' rating an organisation would have provided a poor level of detail resulting in a low grading receiving a numerical value between 0 - 10.

The technical website design quality (Quesenberry & Garland 2003) was assessed using characteristics identified in the literature. Characteristics such as number of clicks from home page, effectiveness of search facility and quality of information were rated on a scale of 0 - 4 (see Appendix A, Table A.1). Where 0 represented no characteristics and 4 was displayed excellent characteristics. With the characteristic of font size this was determined by viewing each webpage of the BCA member organisations in order to determine the most frequent font size used. This was compared to the recommended font size found in Chapter 2 literature review.

Analysing websites of BCA member companies allowed for a cross sectional research approach (Bryman & Bell 2007). This approach to analysis identifies variation and similarities (Bryman & Bell 2007) between items, in this instance between information on the websites and the information gathered from the literature review. It allowed for comparison of the WLB/FFWP offered by BCA member organisations and those recommended in the literature. It enabled the elements detailed on BCA organisation websites to be listed and tallied providing the number of occurrences (Table

4.6). In order to identify WLB/FFWP elements, each organisation's website was viewed to locate any WLB/FFWP information displayed. Identification occurred by attempting to locate the WLB/FFWP elements found in the literature review using an instrument developed as shown in Appendix A.

## Website design

Website design is important in relation to holding the interest of the viewer in order to find the relevant information to their query. Ease of finding WLB/FFWP, search facility effectiveness and font size can assist in achieving the outcome of informing viewers (Gustafsson & Rieloff 2009).

- *Ease of finding WLB/FFWP information*

The ease with which WLB/FFWP information could be located on each website was measured by counting the number of clicks from the organisation's home webpage to the required WLB/FFWP information. Research has established that three clicks or less is preferable (Nielsen 2003). The number of clicks was counted and recorded for each BCA organisation member's website on which WLB/FFWP information was located. Organisation websites were grouped according to the number of clicks and the average was then calculated. Those with fewer clicks than the average established via the literature review could then be rated as providing greater ease of access than those requiring more than the average number of clicks to access the desired information.

- *Search facility effectiveness*

In assessing the effectiveness of each organisation's search facility the first consideration was whether the website had a search engine provision as this is an extremely important tool for accessing specific information quickly and easily (Gustafsson & Rieloff 2009). The second issue considered was deciding which words should be used to determine the search engine effectiveness. The literature review provided the commonly used terms relating to WLB/FFWP and by identifying frequencies from the literature a list of terms was generated and these terms were

keyed in to measure the effectiveness of the search facility. Search words 'Part-time', 'Job share', 'Flexible start and finish' and 'Family leave' as identified in the literature were used. This search was performed to gauge how easy it was to find relevant information that would convey an image of the organisation such that it would be attractive to potential employees, especially single parents.

- *Font size*

Measurement of font size was designed to assess the ease of reading the material on the website based on the size of the font used. This was achieved by copying a paragraph from the information on the website into Word and reading the font size in the tool bar. The processes of recording and the analysis of data were conducted to objectively reflect and report the gathered information from the sources. The approach to data analysis for each of the data collection methods will be explained and justified in turn.

- *Ranking of Job Advertisements*

All job advertisements were analysed to determine the extent to which they use WLB/FFWP information to attract applicants. A search for advertisements containing certain words ('Part-time', 'Job share', 'Flexible start and finish' and 'Family leave' that would attract employees and parents to the organisation were grouped according to like terms or common themes. The ranking responses of participants were added to determine the attractiveness of each job. A table was designed to record the rankings provided by the participants to compare rankings between the different groups of participants (see Table 4.7 & 4.8).

- *Interviews*

From the tape recordings of the interviews and written notes first responses were grouped together according to the research question(s). After the interviews were conducted the audiotapes were listened to many times and transcribed and compared with the interview written notes. Each

transcript was checked to group like responses and common themes amongst the differing categories of research participants.

For the emailed kits, the returned emails were read and the answers were grouped and analysed using the same procedure as the semi structured interviews.

- *Questionnaire*

From the questionnaire responses and their ratings of the WLB/FFWP elements identified by each participant, were placed into a table (see Appendix D, Table D.1). This enabled comparison of the research participant groups and what they found to be the most popular to least popular WLB/FFWP by having an associated numerical value from the rating scale of 1-5.

### *vii. Conclusions and Recommendations*

Finally, conclusions are made based on interpretation of the results of the data analysis and recommendations are made.

### **3.4 Limitations**

This research was confined to metropolitan Melbourne, Australia. Larger numbers of sole parents facing difficulty in locating suitable work may be found in rural towns and smaller cities.

Having a small sample size may reduce the diversity in the selection of participants and hence limit the generalisability of the findings (Bryman & Bell 2007; Bouma & Ling 2006; Easterby-Smith et al. 1991). However for this research the size of the participant pool was balanced by making every effort to obtain participants from each of the groups – no dependents, coupled parents, and single parents - rather than to gain large number from any one group. This resulted in equal-sized groups of five for all four participant groups, including HR managers.

Gathering of responses to similar questions to those asked of single parents at interview by sending questions via email to the coupled and no dependent participant groups limited the depth and quality of data gathered from these groups. Follow up telephone calls and emails were used to clarify responses, similar to that which would occur in a face-to-face interview, or to request additional detail where required.

There is the potential for biased interpretation by the researcher given the researcher's sole and critical role in the data collection and analysis. Narrative research relies on personal understandings and experiences and it may be difficult for the researcher to not be influenced or be affected by the responses given in the interviews (Lieblich et al. 1998). Steps taken to minimise this bias included the taping of interviews where participants agreed to this and direct transcription of the content. Content analysis of the transcripts then led to the identification of common responses and themes. Participants' ratings of WLB/FFWP elements identified in the literature as desirable and ranking WLB/FFWP elements suggested in job advertisements and participants' indication of whether they would be encouraged by the benefits offered to apply for the job provided further data to contrast with the content of interview transcripts.

### **3.5 Confidentiality and Privacy**

As the focus is on WLB/FFWP and how these policies and the organisations that offer them assist single parents in the workforce, it is important to maintain anonymity and to ensure confidentiality of all participants and relevant organisations. For this reason codes were used for all participants to ensure confidentiality and these are detailed in Table 3.1.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter described the methodological approach adopted to investigate the research questions and the methods executed. Information was presented describing the secondary data that justified the data collection and analysis techniques and limitations were outlined.

This chapter discussed the research methodology and the stages of the research. It covered theory development and the conceptual framework that led to the development of the research questions, the formal data collection, data analysis and conclusions. Chapter 4 will provide the results and cover the following areas: Participants and research background; Analysis of BCA member websites; details of WLB/family friendly work elements; rating of the attractiveness of job advertisements and completion of the questionnaire.

## Chapter 4: Results

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presents the results of the analysis of primary and secondary data collected for this research. The primary data was gathered from the participants as detailed in Table 3.1. The participants completed a Job Advertisement Ratings Form and a Questionnaire; single parents and HR managers undertook semi-structured interviews. Primary data collection for coupled parents and participants with no dependent children involved forwarding related forms via email, providing advice and clarification via phone if required, and return of completed forms via email. . Different sets of questions were asked of the HR managers to those asked of other participants. For those without dependents and coupled parents, those questions relating to mutual obligations that could only apply to single parents were not asked.

The gathering of secondary data included a literature review and a review of the websites of the 107 largest organisations in Australia, as listed on the BCA website. The content of these websites was examined to assess whether information on flexible work arrangements was available on the website and, if so, the type and amount of information organisations provided about what they offered their employees in terms of WLB/FFWP. How well this information was presented on their websites to inform prospective employees was also assessed, measured against established principles of 'good website design' (as discussed in Section 2.12).

As identified in Chapter 3, five participants without dependents, five coupled parents, five single parents, and five HR managers participated in this research. Of the five single parents, three were sole parents and two were lone parents. All coupled parents were employed and had dependent children. The HR managers came from a range of industries covering large to medium enterprises. The focus was on what WLB/FFWP sole parents required to reconcile work and family life and what WLB/FFWP organisations offered.

This chapter provides details of the information gathered on WLB/FFWP offered by BCA member organisations as shown on their websites, and ends by providing results of information gathered from participants with no dependents, parents and HR managers.

#### **4.2 Analysis of BCA Member Websites**

For the analysis of the websites of BCA member organisations, the two areas focused on were (1) WLB and FFWP or those components of WLB/FFWP that contribute to creating a flexible workplace, and (2) the ease of using the website to access and read information. The aim of this exercise was to determine how many of the largest organisations in Australia provided information on WLB/FFWP on their websites and which of these companies were ensuring this information was easily accessed from their website. It is technical aspects of a website that enable users to access the information it contains. These technical aspects assist, or hinder, locating the range of WLB/FFWP elements offered by BCA organisations. The elements, outlined in the literature review (sections 2.8 – 2.8.2), were identified as contributing to achieving a website that would provide information of greatest assistance to job applicants and especially sole parents, in deciding whether an organisation offered workplace conditions that would best enable them to balance work and family life. Therefore, in searching for these elements, the accessibility of information and usability of each organisation's website was also assessed. Sections 4.3.2 to 4.3.7 of this chapter report findings in relation to website quality.

The Business Council of Australia website was entered and from their home page the BCA membership list was accessed. From the membership page, all member organisations' websites were accessible by clicking on the member name. The BCA states that their 'membership is made up of the CEOs of 100 of Australia's top companies, representing a range of industry sectors' (Business Council of Australia, Membership statement, [www.bca.com.au/content/100822.aspx](http://www.bca.com.au/content/100822.aspx)) thus providing an excellent source of information on WLB/FFWP offerings in Australia. Although 100 CEOs are stated as the membership of the BCA, 107 member organisations were listed on their website in December 2009 when this research was conducted and all 107 websites were accessed in this manner from the website list.

Website content and ease of use was measured using the criteria established through the literature review. The search facility was used (where available) and the following words or phrases were keyed in, until relevant WLB/FFWP information was located: 'Part-time', 'Job share', 'Flexible start and finish', and 'Family leave' (Appendix A, Table A.1).

Where no search facility was obvious on the home page, the general search mechanism of using 'control f' was attempted, or another relevant Tab or heading (Career, Benefits and Rewards etc.). Following recommended website design principles, those sites on which relevant information was located in three clicks or less were rated 'A' or 'B', those where the search had to continue beyond the recommended number of clicks were rated C (4 clicks) or D (5 clicks). After five clicks a search was abandoned. This also ensured that time to attempt locating information using the range of words listed above was limited.

From the BCA member organisations' websites searched 43 websites were found to contain at least one reference to WLB/FFWP. The remaining 64 websites contained no mention of WLB/FFWP when searched using the key words: 'Part-time', 'Job share', 'Flexible start and finish', and 'Family leave' (Appendix A, Table A.1). It should be noted that this was information available from each organisation's Internet site; the degree of WLB/FFWP information that may have been available on the company's intranet could not be accessed. The objective of this research was to determine the level of information available to non-employees, those job seekers who specifically required WLB/FFWP information but who would not have access to the company's intranet. It is acknowledged that organisations found not to provide WLB/FFWP on their websites in a form accessible by members of the public may offer an extensive range of flexible work arrangements, but the aim of this research was to learn whether this information could assist especially sole parents returning to work, a group who would only be able to access information at the internet level. Additionally, effectively a limit to the time taken, usually a result of the number of clicks required to access information, was established because the value of information which is difficult to access and which many visitors would not persevere in order to locate is negligible.

As part of the analysis of BCA member websites, companies were rated and placed into category groups based on the website criteria established through the literature review (Appendix A). Details

of these ratings and category groups for the 43 organisations whose websites did contain WLB/FFWP information are provided in Table 4.3. The remaining 64 organisations were categorised as not offering WLB/FFWP for application decision-making. Findings of this categorisation process are shown in Table 4.4, below. As can be seen, areas considered in the research conducted on the BCA member organisations' websites were: examples of staff using WLB/FFWP, ease of finding information, search facility, font size and use of colour and graphics to attract and retain the attention of viewers (see Appendix A).

### **4.3 *Elements and Attributes Used to Assess Websites***

A range of WLB/FFWP elements, as outlined in the literature review (sections 2.8 – 2.8.2) were identified as contributing to achieving a website that would provide information of greatest assistance to job applicants and especially sole parents, in deciding whether an organisation offered workplace conditions that would best enable them to balance work and family life.

These elements resulted in the following words and phrases being used to establish whether a website provided WLB/FFWP information and then the extent to which the information was provided and the quality of that information.

### **4.4 *Ease of Finding Information***

Of the BCA organisation websites assessed, for those with WLB/FFWP information (43 websites) it took an average three clicks to locate this information. Overall, across the 43 websites, the range was from 1 to 5 clicks to reach the desired information. Nielsen (2003) recommended three clicks maximum to locate information on websites; visitors to the site are likely to lose interest if it takes longer. Twenty two organisations included in this research had related FWA/WLB or FFWP information accessible on their website within the recommended three clicks from their home page.

#### 4.4.1 Search Facility

Lower rating companies which fell in the 'D' category (Table 4.4), were in the rating range of 0 – 10. These companies did not offer users of the website a search option and therefore reduced the effectiveness of the company's website. The effectiveness of the search facility was rated by typing in words that through the literature review were established as indicating that one or more elements of WLB/FFWP were offered by the particular organisation (Appendix A, Table A.1). Words used were 'Part-time', 'Job share', 'Flexible start and finish' and 'Family leave'.

A summary of the effectiveness of the BCA organisation websites (see Table 4.1) in conveying their WLB/FFWP policies showed that a large number (64%) of companies did not include a specific section on employee work conditions that provided information and examples of how parents could combine work and home life.

**Table 4.1: Summary of BCA website Findings**

Attribute	
Company websites that contained WLB/FFWP information (accessible within 5 clicks)	43
Companies using examples of staff	8
Search engine - ease of accessing WLB/FFWP information	22
Companies providing 'easy' displays	11
Companies with no WLB/FFWP Information	64

#### 4.4.2 Examples of Staff using WLB/FFWP

Designing websites using examples of staff who make use of WLB/FFWP offerings represent to the viewers of the website, both potential and current staff members, that use of existing WLB/FFWP can benefit employees from all levels of the organisation, whilst conveying the view that having employees make use of the offerings benefits the organisation. The number of BCA member

organisation websites providing examples of staff using WLB/FFWP was 18 of the 107 websites searched.

#### 4.4.3 Font Size

Font size was used to measure the level of ease of reading the material on the website based on the size of the font as established in the literature review. There was a variety of font sizes used across those BCA member companies' websites that contained WLB/FFWP information. The smallest size used was 7 and the largest size was 12 (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Font Sizes Used

Font Size	N=43
7	1
7.5	5
8	6
8.5	6
9	6
9.5	2
10	1
10.5	1
11	2
12	13

\*Results refer to font size on the websites of the 43 organisations that provided WLB/FFWP information.

#### **4.4.4 Dot Points**

Of the 43 websites investigated in detail, 26 company websites used dot points and these sites did not contain as much detail on WLB/FFWP as the remaining 17 BCA member company websites that used descriptive sentences. Companies in the 'D' category within the rating range of 1 – 10 had limited to no information regarding WLB/FFWP.

#### **4.4.5 Colour/Graphics**

The BCA member websites that had appropriate graphics and used colour to attract their viewers' attention were those of the three companies rated between 31 and 40 and thus belonging to the 'A' category.

### **4.5 Company Category Descriptors**

The 43 BCA member companies that contained any accessible reference to flexible work arrangements were then categorised into groups by rating them using the categories described in Table 4.3. The categories were based on information obtained through the literature review and described in Section 2.12.1. Companies' websites were rated from 'D' for those containing poor quality descriptions of offerings and few WLB/FFWP elements on a website which was not easy to navigate, to 'A' for excellent quality descriptions, a range of WLB/FFWP elements offered and a website that was easy to navigate - based on the factors discussed above. This categorisation is, therefore, based on a range of aspects of a company's website making it informative for viewers seeking WLB/FFWP information.

Using the category descriptors in Table 4.3, organisations' websites were rated by the researcher. This was done in order to measure the effectiveness of websites and the quality of the information contained on them for those companies that offered WLB/FFWP (43 of the 107 originally searched).

Results of the rating process are shown in Table 4.4, which follows Table 4.3, and the rating range was calculated by using the table outlined in Appendix A. From this a numerical value was determined. The rating range was divided into numerical segments in groupings of five. Each numerical rating corresponded to a category matching the descriptions of that particular group.

Table 4.3 Category Descriptions

Category	Descriptions
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quality of WLB/FFWP descriptions was excellent as the information contained details that would attract/retain and motivate parents. The descriptions contained at least three of the most popular recommended elements of WLB/FFWP.</li> <li>• All companies in this category provided examples of employees and executives with some companies providing videos of staff using and achieving the desired balance between home life and work/life. These companies, which were rated 'excellent,' had pictures that demonstrated the importance of the organisation placed on diversity (e.g. mixed gender, race, age groups, etc.). These staff examples are likely to promote diversity and flexibility within the workplace.</li> <li>• Finding information for this category of organisations was relatively easy. All companies received a 'excellent rating demonstrating that only two to three clicks from home was required to find relevant information.</li> </ul>
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent descriptions of WLB programs/FFWP providing a minimum of three of the most highly recommended elements for attraction/retention and motivation of parents and providing good/clear details.</li> <li>• Descriptions, but no examples were given to further highlight the usage of these programs. A maximum of 2 pictures were provided, but a diverse range of staff was not represented in these.</li> <li>• Finding information for this category of organisations was relatively easy. All companies received a 'good' rating demonstrating that the user was required to use only three clicks from home to find relevant information.</li> </ul>
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average standard of description of WLB programs/FFWP providing two or more elements as recommended in the literature and providing some details.</li> <li>• Those companies receiving a rating of poor provided only one picture with a person of unknown level of appointment.</li> <li>• The search facility was average to good in terms of locating WLB/FFWP as information could be accessed with only three clicks from the website home page.</li> </ul>
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor description of WLB/FFWP resulting in only one to two elements listed.</li> <li>• No examples were provided of any employees or executives using WLB/FFWP programs.</li> <li>• Information was difficult to locate, determined by the number of clicks it took (four or more links would constitute poor) from the home page to whatever relevant information could be found.</li> </ul>

Table 4.4 Category Frequencies

Category	Rating Range	N = 43
A	36 – 40	2
A	31 – 35	1
B	26 – 30	5
B	21 – 25	3
C	16 - 20	4
C	11 - 15	9
D	6 - 10	15
D	0 - 5	4

Table 4.4 shows that only three of the 43 websites that contained WLB/FFWP information provided relevant and detailed information on a website that also made accessing the information easy; they were rated excellent using the 'rating website quality' instrument (see Appendix A).

#### 4.5.1 Explanation of Summary Results

##### *Search Engine Quality*

Explaining the results in Table 4.4 above, most organisations rated as belonging to category 'D' either had no search engine or a very poor search mechanism that resulted in an ineffective search facility and did not lead the website viewer to useful information. In this instance, no benefit or increased knowledge or understanding was gained upon which an informed decision could be made by parents (Gehrke & Turban 1999).

The majority of companies in the 'C' category grouping provided an average search facility. This resulted in quality information being somewhat difficult to access by the viewer and therefore proved to be an ineffective search facility. Search facilities providing limited WLB/FFWP information did not display information that would assist companies to attract single parents. Using the rating system explained in Section 4.4, only one company received a 'good' rating (category). A website

that enables information to be accessed within two clicks from home is a good search facility (Gustafsson & Rieloff 2009). The quality of detail provided by an effective search engine would allow all users, particularly single parents, to have a clearer understanding of what the company offered in terms of WLB/FFWP. The search facility was quite effective when keywords were typed in (Gustafsson & Rieloff 2009).

Organisations in category 'B' of search facility for the company website received an excellent rating. These organisations provided excellent quality information, great detail, and their websites were easy to read. These search facilities were excellent as information access was quick, providing resource material and employer branding (Nielsen 2007; Gehrke & Turban 1999). Parents viewing these sites would find these companies attractive to work for. Most of these organisations had won awards for 'employer of choice'. Twenty-one companies had websites with easy access to WLB/FFWP information by providing good company search engines. According to Gehrke and Turban (1999) having easy access to information is an important quality in effective search engines. As already mentioned, only three of these organisations also provided quality information displayed in a way that made it easy to read.

### *WLB/FFWP Information Quality*

Companies in categories C and D that received a score of 21 – 40 displayed information on WLB/FFWP. The number of companies in this group was 11 of the listed BCA companies. These company websites used appropriate colours well (Archee & Gurney 2007), displayed real life images and conveyed a cheerful and pleasing appearance (Arvind 2009; Henderson, Giese & Cote 2004).

### *Examples of Staff*

Eighteen companies provided examples of CEOs or executives using WLB/FFWP as part of their working life showing support to parents. This demonstrates to the viewer that senior members of staff encourage the use of WLB/FFWP by being able to incorporate these policies into their own career (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; McCracken 2000). Providing examples of upper level employees

making use of policies that support work/life balance promotes the understanding that WLB/FFWP are a part of the normal workplace culture. In particular, this approach demonstrates to potential and current employees that making use of WLB/FFWP will not adversely impact their career progression.

### Font Size

Font size varied greatly. The smallest was a font size of 7 to the largest being a font size of 12. The websites with a size 12 font were easier to read. But on the websites of the organisations that rated most highly, information was displayed in a smaller font size than 12. The reason these organisations' websites still rated highly, despite using a smaller than recommended font size, was that they had more detailed descriptive sentences and so needed to consider space to provide all relevant information onto their websites (Nielson 2003). Thirteen companies used a 12 point font, indicating that the advice provided by researchers on font size and readability (Oh et al. 2007) was being heeded by organisations.

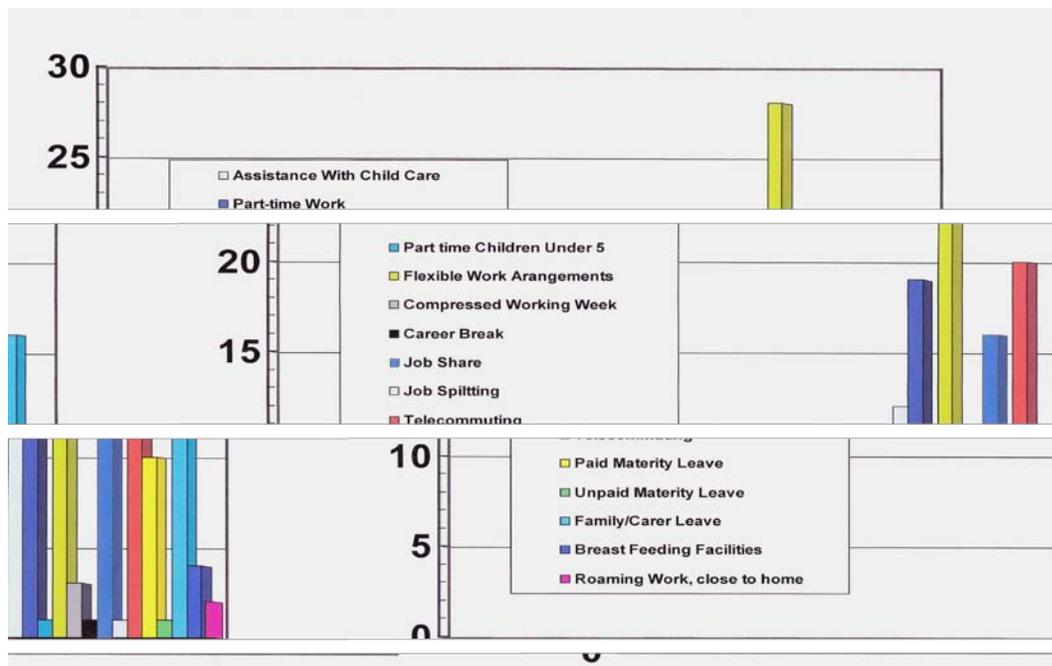


Figure 4.1: Frequencies of WLB/FFWP Elements offered by BCA Organisations

In addition to the WLB/FFWP detailed on their sites, 28 of the 43 organisations provided information on their Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

#### ***4.5.2 Type and Frequencies of WLB/FFWP***

The graph above (Figure 4.1) shows the type and frequency of WLB/FFWP elements available as shown on the websites of the 43BCA member companies found to contain any reference to WLB/FFWP. Figure 4.1 shows the WLB/FFWP that are offered by BCA member companies and the frequency with which they appeared on their websites, based on information gathered against the criteria outlined in section 4.3. The most frequently offered element was flexible work arrangements followed by telecommuting and part-time work; another form of part-time work - job share - and family/carer leave were also frequently mentioned on company websites.

#### ***4.6 Attractiveness of Jobs Based on WLB/FFWP Information Provided***

Three tables are provided detailing participant responses in relation to 10 job advertisements containing WLB/FFWP. The numerical values shown in Table 4.5 below were determined by asking research participants to indicate whether or not they would apply for and one or more of the ten listed advertised positions (Q. P5). These advertisements are provided in Appendix G and the WLB/FFWP terms included in each of the advertisements are summarised in Table 4.6. Table 4.7 details which participants indicated that the WLB/FFWP in an advertisement would encourage them to apply for that job. Participants were tasked to respond assuming they were qualified to perform the role and that the geographic location would suit them. The following subsections will outline these results with regards to the specific participant groups.

What can be seen in Table 4.6 is that all positions offered part time employment (stated as 'part time,' 'job share' or 'school hours' which constitute less than 35 hours per week). Single parents' strongest preference was for the jobs in advertisements 1, 4 and 6. With jobs 2, 3, 8 and 10 also being highly rated as desirable based on the content of the advertisements; no discernable pattern is evident which can be linked to WLB/FFWP elements in the advertisements. The remaining advertisements, 5, 7 and 9 also offer part-time employment and two mention school hours. To

further explore preferences, participants were also asked questions (see Appendix B) in an effort to obtain greater insight in to the needs of particularly single parents. Responses to these interview questions are presented along with the results of participants' indications of whether the WLB/FFWP elements in job advertisements would influence their decision to apply for a job.

To gather data on a broader range of WLB/FFWP elements, using the most common WLB/FFWP offered by organisations according to the literature, preferences were further investigated and results of ranking of these elements follow discussions related to the job advertisements terms, commencing at section 4.6 and detailed in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.5 Summary of Attractiveness of WLB/FFWP in Job Advertisements**

Single Parents (5)									
No.	No Dependents		Coupled Parents		Lone Parents		Sole Parents		Single Parents N=5
	N = 5	Total	N = 5	Total	N = 2	Total	N = 3	Total	
1	1,5	2	2	1	1,2	2	1,2,3	3	5
2	0	0	2,3,5	3	1,2	2	2,3	2	4
3	2,3,4,5	4	1,2,5	3	1	1	1,2,3	3	4
4	0	0	1,2,3,5	4	1,2	2	1,2,3	3	5
5	2,3,5	4	1,3,5	3	2	1	1,2	2	3
6	1,2,4,5	4	0	0	1,2	2	1,2,3	3	5
7	0	0	3	1	2	1	1,2	2	3
8	2	1	3,5	2	1	1	1,2,3	3	4
9	1,4	2	2,5	2	2	1	0	0	1
10	2,5	2	1,2,3,5	4	2	1	1,2,3	3	4

**Table 4.6 Summary of WLB/FFWP offered in Job Advertisements**

No.	WLB/FFWP Mentioned
1	Part-time, flexibility, occasionally work from home, times negotiable
2	Part-time, WLB
3	Job share, WLB, FWA
4	Part-time, WLB,
5	Flexibility to work within school hours (part time), flexible start and finish
6	Part-time, work around school hours
7	Part-time, flexibility
8	Part-time, flexible - work within school hours
9	Part-time, school hours
10	Part-time, FWA, working from home

**Table 4.7 Desirable WLB/FFWP Elements in Job Advertisements**

Job No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
WLB/FFWP										
Part-time work	ND1,4,5 SP1,2,3	ND2,3,5 LP1,2 SP2,3		CP2,3, 5 LP1,2 SP1,2	ND2,4,5 SP1,3	ND1,2,4 CP5 LP1 SP2,3	CP3 LP2 SP1	ND2 CP3,5	ND1,4 CP2,5	ND2,5 CP3,5 SP2,3
Flexible start & finish	CP2 LP1,2	CP2	ND5 CP2		CP1,3,5 LP2 SP1			LP2	LP2	CP1,2,3
Telecommuting/work from home	ND1 LP1,2 SP2									ND2 CP5 LP2 SP1,2
Job share			ND2,4 CP1,5 LP1 SP1,2,3			ND1,2,4 CP5 LP1 SP1,3				
Work school hours		CP3		CP5	ND2,4,5 CP1,3,5 SP1	ND1,5 LP1 SP1,2	CP3 SP1,2	LP1 SP1,2	CP2	ND5

## Summary of Findings in Table 4.7

*Part time* work was sought by all ND participants, three of the five coupled parents, and all single parents.

*Flexible start and finish times* were desired by only one ND, four CPs (not CP4), and only two single parents (1LP and 1SP).

*Telecommuting or working from home* attracted two NDs, one CP, and three single parents (1LP and 2SP).

*Job Sharing* was attractive to three NDs, 2 CPs, and four single parents (1LP and 3 SP)

Working during school hours received interest from all participant groups, not only those with children, indeed it was most popular with those without dependents: four NDs (all but ND4), three CPs, and three single parents (1LP and 2 SP) would be attracted to a position offering these hours of work.

### 4.6.1 No dependents

Measurement of the attractiveness of the WLB/FFWP elements in the job advertisements provided was based on the key word relating to WLB/FFWP used in the advertisement. As can be seen by Table 4.6, job advertisement numbers 3, 5 and 6 used descriptive WLB/FFWP terms such as 'flexibility' or 'part-time' that were attractive to participants with no dependent children. When questioned during the interview about their preferences, in addition to being asked to indicate whether they would apply for any of the advertised jobs based on WLB/FFWP, participants admitted that the type of work and factors other than WLB/FFWP influenced their decision. ND1 provided the following explanation for not wanting to apply for a particular job, but still indicated that they had found some terms attractive:

Job 2: "Uninteresting work with accountants" but offered "Good hours"

Job 3: "WorkCover – doesn't appeal" but "flexible working hours" were attractive. (ND1)

No job advertisement mentioned 'compressed work week,' however ND1 added when interviewed "... if possible I would prefer to work longer days, i.e. 10 hours if it meant a day or two off."

The desire for work free days was also expressed by ND2, "... Ideally I would like one work free day." This participant expressed an interest in applying for jobs 6, 8 and 10 because they did allow for a work free day each week. Job share and the flexibility to decide when the part time hours of 20-30 hours per week were worked was attractive to this participant, but fewer hours per week (e.g. 16) would not provide sufficient financial reward for them. ND2 said they would be more committed to and more inclined to remain with an employer that offered suitable WLB/FFWP and stated that: "Although job satisfaction is important, getting the WLB correct is also equally as important to me."

The desire to have a work free day influenced the choice of the type of positions that these two ND participants would apply for. There was importance placed on the number of hours worked but not so much on the spread of hours worked as long as there was one or more week days off to allow more free time and/or longer weekends (ND1,2).

Another participant without dependent children, ND3, mentioned the need for "more hours to support myself financially" and stated in relation to Job 5: "The job wouldn't suit my lifestyle of a single person supporting themselves" and responded in relation to Job 7 "I would prefer more hours" and to Jobs 8, 9 and 10: "Not enough hours". They did though seek "good work/life balance" and wanted to work in a "supportive team environment".

This theme of longer hours and fewer days continued for ND 4: "... would rather longer hours and less days" and the desire for more hours for this participant with no dependents was also evident however this participant did find the ability to choose the hours they worked attractive in both Jobs 3 and 5. They also found the words "friendly office" and "friendly small ... firm" attractive.

ND5 found most attractive those jobs that described the environment as "dynamic," offered "varied work activities," the "opportunity to use initiative" or described a "supportive team environment". This participant had one adult child and was planning to retire in six to eight years. They found part-time work and the "option to work from home" attractive and acknowledged that family friendly elements, such as working during school hours, would be of benefit to others. This participant would "be more committed to an employer who appreciates the importance of work/life balance and

had family friendly work practices ... available" and would be more likely to seek work with such an employer.

Overall, participants with no dependent children made similar selections to those with children, with one noticeable difference; three participants with no dependents indicated an interest in working a compressed week. They preferred more hours on fewer days, and sufficient hours to maintain a home on a single income.

Participants with no dependents found that flexibility in regards to being able to negotiate working hours and taking on dynamic, interesting positions was a major consideration for them to remain employed. When asked what they would require at the moment and if they would be more committed to an employer that offered suitable (to them) WLB/FFWP, participants with no dependents responded:

"Top of my list is the job must be interesting, challenging, and employer must have honesty, integrity and sense of humour," (ND1)

"... work/life balance is increasingly becoming important and I am fortunate to be able to work flexible hours ... I would definitely be more committed to an employer that appreciates the importance of WLB and had family friendly work practices available when I needed them ... have had a major impact on my choice of employment." (ND5)

#### **4.6.2 *Coupled Parents***

The attractiveness of the WLB/FFWP elements was based around the related key terms. Coupled parents found the terms 'part-time,' 'family friendly,' flexible work arrangements' and 'school hours' made the jobs sufficiently attractive to encourage them to apply. Job advertisement numbers 4 and 10 were most likely to stimulate coupled parents to apply for the job. Coupled parents were clear about what they desired in a job.

"5 days is not flexible enough prefer less days, more hours" (CP1)

"flexible working hours, duties sound boring" (CP2)

“don’t like job share – normally have to cover each other’s holidays etc” (CP4)

CP1 stated that they desired:

“Flexibility, the ability to negotiate working hours and change these easily as the need arises. Having access to family and carers leave .... [and the] ability to work from home as required”

This, they stated, would make them more committed to an employer “especially while the children need me! And I still need to be there for them.” Likewise, CP2 found the term ‘flexibility’ attractive as well as the ability to negotiate hours and to have autonomy in their role.

CP3 stated they would “definitely” be more committed to an employer that offered WLB/FFWP which they sought and indicated that, in addition to part time work, the terms ‘family friendly,’ ‘flexibility,’ ‘balancing work and family’ and ‘friendly, suitable for parent’ attractive. Whereas participants with no dependents often sought more hours to support their single life style, CP4 sought fewer hours. CP4 sought family friendly work practices such as part time work, working during school hours and found having family leave available attractive however they stated: “I wouldn’t stay in a job I hated, or with a horrible boss because they were ‘family friendly’ “. CP 5 also found that beyond the availability of part time work, preferably during school hours, the terms ‘family friendly,’ ‘parent returning to workforce,’ ‘balance of family,’ ‘flexibility,’ ‘job share,’ and ‘may be able to work from home’ particularly attractive to them.

Both the rankings of coupled parents and their comments during interview supported the view that they believed that companies should implement WLB/FFWP within their workplace. This was especially important to coupled parents when their children were young and still required a parental presence at home. Couples viewed the WLB/FFWP offered in the organisation as stated in the job advertisements was a real offer that was useable and an accepted practice within the work culture. Compared to participants with no dependents, coupled parents sought shorter working hours.

#### **4.6.3 Single Parents: Lone and Sole Parents**

For Lone parents, wording describing parental support influenced the value and attractiveness of the job. For the two Lone parents, the attractiveness of the job advertisements was based around

the terms 'negotiable hours,' 'FFWP,' 'work/life balance,' and 'school hours' which made the jobs attractive enough to create interest for them to apply. LP1 also identified having a 'supportive culture' as important for them and LP2 identified 'working from home' and 'FWA' as elements they desired. The results displayed in Table 4.5 show that these two parents were both attracted to Job numbers 1, 2, 4 and 6. The positions detailed in these advertisements offered parental support and understanding regarding carer responsibilities.

Neither of these two parents was attracted to their current work positions by the WLB/FFWP offered by their organisation. Neither of the Lone parents identified childcare as having been important in influencing them to work for their current employer. They generally were satisfied with their type of employment but were both a little concerned with management's changing views in relation to FFWP and the ability of line managers to influence the use and acceptance of WLB/FFWP within their working environment.

LP1 expressed concern that WLB/FFWP be promoted to help balance work and children in a manner that made them "more than lip service ... real, usable, accepted". LP1 found that line managers did play a part in the uptake of available WLB/FFWP that the organisation offered. How the line manager considered WLB/FFWP had the effect on determining whether or not FWA were accepted and implemented.

"In the context of being family friendly. ...but there have been management changes just recently so I, there's a difference ... as yet unspoken feeling in the workplace. Yes but I am concerned that there will be more emphasis placed on ...change in management emphasis away from being family friendly" (LP1).

Both Lone parents worked for larger organisations (BCA 1 & 2) and found that the WLB/FFWP elements mentioned in the job advertisements matched those available in their current organisation. These companies had good policies with the lone parents having no problems making WLB/FFWP arrangements in their workplace.

Lone parent (1), who worked for a non-BCA organisation (utility provider), found that managers were more able to use WLB/FFWP than were lower-level staff. Lower level staff had more red tape to deal with. They had to apply in advance for FFWP consideration and there was always a time lag for a decision to be made.

Two Sole parents (SP1 & 3) had quite young dependent children when they commenced their current work role. The attractiveness the positions these sole parents successfully sought was that they were part-time and within school hours. These positions incorporated work flexibility and the availability of childcare on the work premises. SP1 worked at a childcare centre and viewed as important that her child could also attend the centre. As a result of workplace arrangements that allowed them to meet family obligations these sole parents (SP1 & 3) were satisfied with their job and very happy to stay with their current employers.

Sole parents desired flexible work arrangements. They especially wanted to be able to work during school hours and to work reduced hours (not full time). This suggests they found school hours a more suitable way to accommodate their working and parental roles.

For *sole parents*, the attractiveness of the elements mentioned in job advertisements based around the key terms or wording relating to WLB/FFWP was concentrated on the terms that indicated shorter working days or weeks, 5 (SP1, 2) or 6 (SP2) hours a day, two days per week (SP1, 2); job share (SP1, 2); working from home (SP2), and school hours (SP1, 2). These terms made the jobs attractive enough to create interest for them to apply. Sole parents were very aware of the number of hours of work stated in the advertised positions. SP1 stated that they desired “hours of work that allow for all school pick ups” because they required time to take children to and collect them from school. SP3 stated that 3.30 pm was “too late – after school [care] needed” and SP2 found advertisement 8 attractive because it provided “hours to cope with school pick up and drop off.” This would suggest that positions that used the term ‘school hours’ did not always make clear whether that allowed parents to perform the school run and be at work on time. Having work hours to fit with caring responsibilities, or childcare to cover work hours was an important factor for sole parents in locating a suitable job.

“ ... very significant, because it had to fit in with my life style: hence my children” (SP1).

" ... start and finish times that suit school hours. Able to leave in cases of emergencies" (SP3).  
The issue of locating a job to fit with their family responsibilities could therefore limit sole parent's choice of job. This led to them choosing part-time jobs, especially those worked during school hours. One participant (SP1) worked at a childcare centre, hence was able to have her child minded at her place of work. SP1 addressed her need to fulfil her carer role, but at the same time was working in a low paying role which offered very little career advancement.

" ... very, because it gave me the flexibility to either bring her or leave her with alternative care" (SP1).

"It offered part-time work, flexibility and I could bring my daughter with me" (SP1).

"Part-time work, they would have to be the hours that I could take the kids to school and pick them up" (SP2).

"Start and finish times that suit school hours" (SP3).

#### Summary of Job Advertisement Findings

Coupled parents were as likely to want to work school hours as were single parents. Although there were differences in the job advertisements and the WLB/FFWP indicated in them that attracted participants to a role, it is interesting to note that four coupled parents indicated they would find a position offering work during school hours attractive whereas only two single parents (LP1 and SP2) were attracted to a job offering school hours. Additionally, four of the participants with no dependents also found these reduced hours of work attractive, with only ND3 not expressing an interest in a job offering work during school hours.

#### 4.7 Rating of WLB/FFWP elements

It was recognised that factors other than the WLB/FFWP elements in the job advertisements may have influenced participants' responses, although the accompanying interview was designed to assist in controlling for this. The range of WLB/FFWP elements detailed in the literature (see Chapter 2) was broad, including elements not contained in the advertisements. For this reason participants were asked to rank 16 WLB/FFWP most commonly discussed in the literature to identify those which are most desired, distinguishing between the needs of parents and those without dependents. The results of research respondents' ratings of these WLB/FFWP elements are shown in Table 4.8 below. Participants were asked to rate the WLB/FFWP elements, identified from the literature, from 1 (least attractive) to 5 (most attractive).

In Table 4.8 the elements are shown broken into WLB and FFWP, as detailed in chapter 2.8.2, according to those offerings that would only be of value to someone with children and those that could be attractive to all employees. The shaded rows contain elements of most importance to parents. Additionally, parents may be the most common users of family/carer leave; however this leave may also be important for those caring for a partner, parent, grandchild or sick friend. For this reason it has not been isolated as a FFWP element.

What is immediately obvious in Table 4.8 is that single parents did not view part-time work for those with children under 5 important. The group this research is focusing on are required to return to work when their children are older, but may remain eligible for family payments until their children are of school age. Childcare was of slightly greater importance to single parents than couples and, of course, not relevant for those without dependent children. No distinction was made between full day care and before and after school care in the questionnaire. Some parents had earlier commented, during the interviews in relation to the WLB/FFWP elements (school hours or similar) in the job advertisements, on the need to start and leave work in time to drop off and pick up their children (SP1, 2). SP3 pointed out that 5 minutes of after school care would be charged the same as a full after school care session.

Table 4.8 Summary of Ratings of Most common WLB/FFWP from the Literature

WLB/FFWP Elements	Rating				
	No dependents (5)	Couples (5)	Lone (2)	Sole (3)	Average Single (5)
Child Care	1,1,1,1,1 (1.0)*	2,1,4,3,1 (2.2)*	1,4 (2.5)*	3,1,5 (3.0)*	2.8
Part-time Work	3,5,3,1,1 (2.6)	5,5,5,5,5 (5.0)	3,5 (4.0)	3,5,5 (4.3)	4.2
* Part-time Work - children under 5	1,1,1,1,1(1.0)	5,0,5,1,1 (2.4)	1,1(1.0)	0,1,0 (0.3)	0.6
Flexible Work Arrangements	3,5,5,1,2 (3.0)	5,3,5,3,5 (4.2)	5,5 (5.0)	4,5,5 (4.7)	4.8
Compressed Working Week	4,2,3,5,1 (3.0)	5,2,5,5,3 (4.0)	4,4(4.0)	5,3,5 (4.3)	4.2
Career Break	1,3,2,4,3 (3.0)	3,1,5,3,1 (2.6)	2,1(1.5)	2,3,4 (3)	2.4
Job Share	3,2,1,3,1 (2.0)	3,1,3,1,3 (2.2)	1,1(1.0)	2,4,4 (3.3)	2.4
Job Splitting	2,2,1,2,1 (1.6)	3,2,3,1,3 (2.4)	1,1(1.0)	2,5,3 (3.3)	2.4
Paid Maternity Leave	1,1,1,2,3 (1.6)	2,1,1,4,1 (1.8)	1,0 (0.5)	2,2,0(1.3)	1
Unpaid Maternity Leave	1,1,1,1,1 (1.0)	5,1,1,4,1 (2.4)	1,0 (0.5)	2,1,0 (1.0)	0.8
Family/Carer Leave	3,4,5,3,5 (4.0)	5,5,5,5,5 (5.0)	5,5 (5.0)	5,5,5 (5.0)	5
Breast Feeding Facilities	1,1,1,1,1 (1.0)	1,1,1,2,1 (1.2)	1,0 (0.5)	0,1,0 (0.3)	0.4
Casual Work, close to home	4,4,3,5,2 (3.6)	1,1,3,4,1 (2.0)	1,3 (2.0)	2,5,4 (3.7)	3
Telecommuting	3,5,5,4,2 (3.8)	4,1,5,1,3 (2.8)	5,3 (4.0)	1,3,4 (3)	3.2

\*Note: Figures shown in brackets are the average for each group/element.

The questionnaire used to gather the results shown in Table 4.8 used a scale of 1 – 5, where 1 = the least important WLB/FFWP element and 5 = the most important WLB/FFWP element.

The shaded elements represent those that could be labelled 'FFWP' as only those with children would make use of these elements. However, it is acknowledged that some of those with no dependents may wish to make use of these elements in the future. The remaining are WLB elements. These could be of interest to any employee.

Single parents also indicated low levels of interest in maternity leave and breastfeeding facilities. Single parents' greatest needs were flexible work arrangements and family/carer leave. The high score for 'compressed working week' (4.2) for single parents does not appear to fit with their preference, both in relation to the job advertisements and in the scores they allocated to the elements identified from the literature, for part time work (also 4.2). However SP2 indicated a preference for part time work during school hours and for those hours to be over 2 to 4 days and SP3 stated a preference for part-time work but with an "ability to work longer hours when can." SP2's comment that they would "... like to do about 10 ... hours a week and ... probably ... do them in two days" suggests that they had not considered the minimum hours required to meet mutual obligations and that they may have to re-consider their preferences in the future. Also they were compressing part-time, not full time hours.

The effect of age of child and attractiveness of WLB/FFWP elements is an important factor in this research. To learn which elements will best cater for sole parents' return to work when their youngest child turns 6, in order to meet MO requirements, any differences in preferences may indicate an element of particular importance in supporting the transition back to work for these parents. Sole parents (SP1 and 3, see section 4.5.3) found childcare to be a major concern and an influence on where and when they could work. They looked at positions that offered FWA so that they could meet their childcare commitments as well as working part time. They found this to be an easier more affordable option.

Sole parents (SP1 and 3) had the additional pressure of satisfying their MO or Employment Pathway Plans. These parents were in lower level positions and were employed in jobs that

allowed them to better meet all their requirements including their carer responsibilities rather than being in paid employment due to personal interest, skills held or career progression.

#### **4.7.1 No dependents**

Results reveal that participants with no dependents preferred WLB elements rather than FFWP, although their rating of maternity leave and provision of breastfeeding facilities was marginally higher than the rating given by single parents. During the interview, participants were asked to contrast the WLB/FFWP within their place of employment against the range of WLB/FFWP listed from the literature (Table 4.8) that would best suit their circumstances. Whereas all participants with children rated 'family/carers leave' as their strongest preference (average 5), though still desired by those with no dependents, it was slightly less strongly desired (average 4). The next preference for NDs was for, telecommuting (3.8) and casual work, close to home (3.6). These employees were happy with the WLB/FFWP offered by their current employer. What these employees considered important was having interesting, dynamic positions. Despite the fact that their preference for a compressed working week was lower than for the other two groups of participants, they did express during the interview a desire to work longer hours that would allow them to take one or more week days off.

#### **4.7.2 Coupled Parents**

All coupled parent participants were also asked to contrast the WLB/FFWP within their place of employment that would best suit their circumstances to the WLB/FFWP elements from the job advertisements. Coupled parents (CP1, 2, 3 & 5) found that flexible work arrangements which allowed them to alter their start and finishing times along with part-time work, family/carers leave and compressed work week would aid them to balance of work and home life. These coupled parents (CP 1, 2, 3 & 5) were happy with their current employment. What these organisations offered do not determine their reason to work. The two most sought after WLB/FFWP elements for this group were part-time work (5) and family/carers leave (5) (Table 4.8).

### 4.7.3 *Single Parents*

Lone and sole parents were asked to rate the individual family friendly work elements according to the value they held for that parent. This rating was to determine what single parents might require to enable them to participate in the workforce with dependant children.

The four single parents who were currently working were asked to contrast the WLB/FFWP within their place of employment that would best suit their circumstances to the WLB/FFWP elements in the Questionnaire. Not all of the WLB/FFWP elements selected by lone parents (see Table 4.8) were present in their current positions. Lone parents found that flexible work arrangements that allowed them to alter their start and finishing times part-time work and telecommuting would aid their balance of work and home life. Telecommuting was desired by these parents, but at interview they advised that they felt it did not always work and its availability was influenced by their immediate supervisor. The policies relating to WLB/FFWP within these organisations were quite adequate, but these Lone parents felt that the individual WLB/FFWP elements were not always useable (LP1). What these organisations offered did not determine their return to work.

Sole parents were also asked to contrast the WLBFFWP of their organisations to the WLB/FFWP elements in the Questionnaire to identify if these WLB/FFWP elements would further improve the balance between their work and home life. One sole parent (SP1) felt that the WLB/FFWP policies at their organisation were open and applied to all employees of the organisation, and that there was no requirement for improvement on what was offered. Another sole parent (SP3) was not aware of what WLB/FFWP were offered by their employer. This parent felt that flexible work arrangements that wouldn't affect a person's career were desirable.

"Also, starting and finishing times that suited school hours and being able to leave on short notice in cases of emergencies would ease work family conflict if incorporated in their place of work"(SP3).

All three sole parent participants viewed the availability of WLB/FFWP to be very significant in their decision to return to work. SP1 and 3 found it trying to cover childcare arrangements and work within school hours especially difficult.

Overall, the WLB/FFWP single parents most desired were family/carer leave, followed by flexible work arrangements.

#### **4.8 HR Manager Interview Responses**

Interview responses from the HR manager participants revealed that single parents are not a defined category in relation to WLB/FFWP. All HR managers advised that in their organisation's WLB/FFWP are directed towards all employees within the organisation. This is in line with principles of fairness and equity. No HR manager participant was aware of the implications of the introduction of mutual obligations for sole parents receiving government support and the need for these parents to be working a minimum of fifteen hours a week once their youngest child turns 6.

"...we don't specifically focus on single parents ... our focus is about providing ... WLB, just generally" (HR1).

"... we have heaps of policies and programs but I'm not sure that any of them are specifically targeted to single parents" (HR3).

"... not specific, but we have a working from home policy. That would incorporate, you know, parents, but it is not designed specifically for parents" (HR4).

HR managers 1, 3 and 4 indicated that policies that would suit single parents were in place but that they conducted their activities in their organisations in accordance with equal opportunity and did not confine offerings to any particular group of employees. They did not distinguish 'between couples or single parents' (HR5).

Policies, programs and procedures that had been implemented ranged from telecommuting, flexible work arrangements, childcare and school holiday programs to different types of carers leave arrangements. Legislation played a part in these FFWP coming in to existence, along with the importance of employer branding (HR2, HR5).HR2 and HR5 explained that employer branding

assisted the retention of staff and that incorporating WLB/FFWP made their organisation more attractive. Maintaining and encouraging diversity within the workplace and becoming an employer of choice was considered to be a social responsibility and an avenue to compete with larger, progressive organisations.

HR1 indicated that the reason they offered a range of WLB/FFWP programs was in order to meet employee value proposition (EVP) expectations and support their employer brand.

"... around our employee value proposition ... our brand in the marketplace ... we applied for employer of choice"

Any particular requirements by single parents were negotiated and dealt with by the line manager. These policies were implemented for a variety of reasons. When asked if employees could request to move to part time employment to assist with managing home and work commitments, for instance following a relationship breakdown when adjusting to single life, HR1 commented:

"... we hope that an employee would come and tell us ... we do that quite a bit ... employees who come and say they are experiencing maybe depression. Then we're happy to have them working part time. It actually works better for us as well because usually before that discussion there will be some really high absenteeism and we don't know when they're going to be in and when they're not ...if [they] need certain days [it] is better for everybody so we will always accommodate."

HR manager 1 went on to explain that the discussion would be "... with the immediate supervisor" and that the change could be arranged "very quickly, it's just a matter of telling payroll the new hours". The large BCA-listed organisation at which HR1 worked had systems in place to assist all employees, but some arrangements, such as the ability to quickly change to part-time employment, could be of great assistance to single parents. In relation to the response to special needs in the event of a recent relationship breakdown, HR1 also went on to explain that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offered 'free counselling that would be offered in that type of situation'.

If there is a dispute over FWA, line managers, employees and HR managers negotiate and trial base different options.

"Flexible work arrangements are organised informally for the parent. This is negotiated with their line manager or immediate supervisor" (HR4).

These organisations felt that line managers who were uncomfortable with WLB/FFWP required more training and guidance to increase their understanding. With the assistance of well informed HR managers line managers can learn how these FWA can be incorporated within the workplace.

"Awareness, education of line managers and culture lead to satisfied workers, leading to being an Employer of Choice and line managers as being role models within the workplace. Our statistics show good retention" (HR5).

Issues in relation to implementation are addressed in this organisation through training. HR 1 went on to explain that in 2006

"we had found that ... managers were very reluctant to offer part-time work. They were quite fearful of what that meant ..." "... we had to encourage managers to trial part-time arrangements for people returning from maternity leave ..." since then "... there has been much more acceptance of part time, in particular for employees returning from maternity leave ... we ran some training ... diversity, flexible work options. ... We took them through the forms and explained their obligations ...I think it has almost got to the point where they are fearful of saying 'no'." (HR1)

Organisations that are employers of choice (HR5) or those trying to gain the title (HR2) it was found from this research have a genuine interest and concern for the wellbeing of their employees. Here WLB/FFWP are seen as a normal condition of employment. Therefore a request for flexible working hours is something that can be arranged.

"The benefits of WLB/FFWP were a form of attraction and retention of employees. This increased employee loyalty and commitment as their intention to stay came through the staff satisfaction surveys" (HR5).

Flexible working arrangements have become part of the workplace in HR1's organisation however there was a suggestion that senior staff were able to more easily make use of this.

“We do have working from home ... a lot of people with family responsibilities have a working from home arrangement that’s either permanent or some have a flexible one ... a lot of people, a lot of senior people know they can just say they are not coming in for the day as they are working from home.”

Staff surveys every two years and ongoing feedback from employees keep these organisations up to date with their employees’ requests for initiative that will reduce work/family conflict (HR1, HR2, HR3 & HR5). The value or attractiveness of elements of WLB/FFWP for employees is determined via these surveys and focus groups. The collection of data from these avenues allows for the generation of reports for these organisations to compare their WLB/FFWP to industry standards. From these sources of information elements of WLB/FFWP can be altered, removed or included.

Three of the five organisations (HR1, HR2, and HR4) had no formal monitoring or evaluation mechanisms in place for existing WLB/FFWP; therefore in these organisations no statistics were available to indicate the most to the least frequently used elements within existing WLB/FFWP. The only form of control over employee usage of WLB/FFWP for HR2 was with the line managers as they held the information and records regarding what employees were doing in their immediate area in the workplace. Occasionally cycle reviews of work practices or staff engagement surveys approximately two to three years apart (HR1, HR2, HR3, HR5) would take place influenced by any changes in legislation or business strategy. The three organisations (HR1, HR2, and HR5) that were employers of choice and had received accredited awards were involved in reporting annually to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA). These organisations were very enthusiastic and passionate about maintaining this status. Despite having these reporting channels in place, the HR managers also expressed difficulty in keeping accurate records on the use of WLB/FFWP in their workplace. Line managers here had the best knowledge of what WLB/FFWP were of benefit to parents in the workforce and how these catered to individual circumstances. The cycle reviews also took place as these organisations (HR1, HR2, HR3, and HR4) wanted to ensure that they remained up to date with any changes in the industry and within their own place of work.

From feedback, it was learned that childcare availability had become an issue, especially in relation to enabling employees to return from maternity leave. HR1 state that:

"we did look in to a contract to offer childcare on site ... recently ... we sent up a childcare information portal ..." which provides "recommended childcare centres in the area." Lack of childcare has been 'one of the reasons people don't come back from maternity leave ... too hard to childcare.' Employee performance is not tracked other than in the same way as usual. If "they didn't get their work done that would be a problem," just "the same as if they didn't do their work here."

A belief in the need to retain a range of programs available to meet the needs of all employees was evident from HR1's comment that:

"... there are some things that we offer that we don't have happen very often like adoption leave. But we ... still maintain it."(HR1)

#### **4.9 Conclusions**

The information gathered from the websites of the BCA member organisations demonstrated the effort organisations place in making their websites attractive and informative to current and potential employees. Highlighting what WLB/FFWP these companies have implemented which would draw attention from single parents trying to reduce work/life conflict. The literature review in Chapter Two set the platform for comparison of the content of BCA member organisations' websites against website quality measures and the WLB/FFWP recommended in the literature, and it guided the development of the semi structured interview format. From the details of WLB/FFWP in the literature review the job advertisements rating form and questionnaire were designed to determine what best practice is for parents and for organisations. These instruments were designed to enable consideration of whether these WLB/FFWP have been designed on a stereotypic definition of parents, excluding lone and sole parents. The job advertisements and an accompany in grating form and questionnaire were designed to determine the appropriateness of FFWP currently offered by companies. The operational definition of 'suitability of existing WLB/FFWP is determined by the scores allocated according to responses provided on the questionnaire (Bouma & Ling 2006). A high score indicates a desirable element or practice, a low

score indicates that the WLB/FFWP do not achieve what the research participants expected these policies to do. These key finding will be discussed in light of the available literature in the next chapter, Discussion and Conclusions.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

### 5.1 *Introduction*

Chapter 5 examines whether the research question has been answered. The aim of this research was to identify whether organisations cater for their employees by implementing WLB/FFWP to attract and retain skilled staff, particularly sole parents transitioning back to work. This research attempted to identify any gaps or differences between what WLB/FFWP organisations offered and what employees found valuable and useable. This research focussed on sole parents and their need to enter the workforce due to WTW legislation and whether the WLB/FFWP offered assisted this group of parents to reduce work/family conflict.

Chapter 5 considers the implications of the research findings and whether the research themes were supported or challenged and puts forward recommendations for future research avenues. Suggestions are made as to how the findings of this research can be used to assist or make organisations more aware of attracting and retaining a diverse workforce whereby sole parents are considered a valuable pool of skilled human resources.

### 5.2 *Research Questions*

The overarching research question addressed the role of WLB/FFWP offered by organisations as a means of attracting and retaining single parents. For this research single parents consisted of both lone and sole parents. A sole parent who works sufficient hours will lose their family payment and thus become a lone parent. Likewise, a lone parent, with children under 5, who leaves work may become eligible for family payments and, as a sole parent, have MO requirements. All single parents would be aware of the possibility of being required to meet MO. Further sub questions were asked to investigate what current WLB/FFWP organisations did implement, reasons for these policies being created and what effect they had on the organisation's ability to attract job applicants and retain existing employees.

What role do WLB/FFWP play in attracting single parents and assisting in the retention of those who must comply with new MO requirements?

Sub-questions this research sought to answer will include:

What WLB/FFWP policies, programs and procedures have been implemented in Australian organisations to assist single parents to manage their work and childcare responsibilities?

Why have these policies come into existence?

Do organisations monitor or evaluate existing WLB/FFWP?

Are the available WLB/FFWP assisting to retain employees from this pool of experienced workers (single parents)?

The key conclusions relate to the two research questions and four sub research questions and are outlined in the following sections.

### **5.3 *Single Parents***

For single parents, family/carer leave, FWA and part-time work were the important WLB/FFWP elements (see Tables 4.5, 4.7 & 4.8). For sole parents the role of WLB/FFWP may be limited by their need to locate a job under pressure to meet MO, but when able to choose their profession the role of WLB/FFWP could alter (see Table 4.8) (Sawer 2006).

### **5.4 *Attraction and Retention of Single Parents***

This research identified that lone parents were generally satisfied with their flexible work arrangements in their current role but were still concerned that the ability to make use of WLB/FFWP offering was still at the discretion of line managers. This is in line with the findings of others that making use of programs offered is commonly negotiated with immediate supervisors (Burgess et al. 2007a; Gray & Stanton 2002) and that managers are able to influence the usage and acceptance of WLB/FFWP within their working environment. The attitude and beliefs of line managers creates the work culture (Maxwell 2005; Hall & Liddicoat 2005). Findings from this

research are consistent with the view that an organisation's work culture together with the understandings and viewpoints of managers and colleagues can act as a barrier for parents to use WLB/FFWP (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Thornwaite 2004; Wise 2003). Therefore a supportive culture established via managers and colleagues can be the main element of effective, successful work/life policies (Research Questions 1 & 2).

The concerns about and expressed need for a positive workplace culture to support use of WLB/FFWP is consistent with research that found that organisations that offered flexible work schedules and/or flexi time have found this to have a positive impact on parents in the workforce (Haar 2007). This, in turn, increases job satisfaction, improves productivity and reduces family/work conflict (Lingard & Francis 2005; Lewis 2001).

"yeah, flexible start and finish times where I'm currently at ... I think that the policy is pretty good" (LP1).

"Yes, because there would be a mutual understanding as to your other priorities" (SP1).

LP2 worked for a large company (HR2) and felt that his organisation's WLB/FFWP constituted good policy. This organisation (HR2) had good policies and a supportive culture. There was evidence that the larger BCA corporations (HR1 & HR2) spent time creating informative easy to use company websites (Section 4.4). This signifies that these organisations (HR1 & HR2) are taking time and making the effort to attract and retain a diverse workforce, including parents. This type of good practice makes these corporations more attractive to single parents as it demonstrates that WLB/FFWP are considered to be a normal part of their working environment (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Carless & Wintle 2007; Lingard & Francis 2005; Lewis 2001).

Single parents working for large organisations (HR3), especially those that were employers of choice (HR5) or trying to gain the title of 'employer of choice' (HR2) offered a good range of WLB/FFWP. The biggest concern for single parents was being able to make use of those policies without damaging their career prospects.

"... we've got all of the touchy, feely parts of our HR policy but it's always the application that's where it all, you know, succeeds or fails" (LP1).

"FWA that wouldn't affect one's career" (SP3).

The extent to which corporate and line managers create an encouraging culture towards WLB/FFWP depends on supportive leadership and managers acting as role models. Top level management commitment is a prerequisite for achieving WLB/FFWP acceptance but to maintain equity all WLB/FFWP must be available to all staff within the organisation (Poelmans et al. 2008; Lewis 2003). Extending the opportunity to all employees improves morale, motivation and can reduce stress and absenteeism (Wise & Bond 2003). What is evident is that lone parents, despite not having to satisfy MO, are still faced with challenges due to their carer responsibilities. How their work/life conflict is reduced is determined by their immediate workplace culture and the support and acceptance of FFWP within the entire Corporation impacted by their direct supervisor.

This research confirmed that sole parents must find employment that allows them to satisfy their MO and their carer demands. These parents are attracted to positions that are part-time and within school hours. Assistance with childcare by organisations provides some relief for sole parents to reduce work/family conflict. The trade off is often lower pay and fewer career opportunities in order to meet family care commitments (see Section 4.7.3).

For sole parents WLB have more importance than FFWP (Table 4.8). Maternity leave and breastfeeding facilities are not concerns for them in their current situation. Sole parents that could not locate work that fitted with school hours or with any informal care they could access via family and friends were faced with the challenge of having to use paid childcare and this impacts the number of hours, times of the day, or days of the week sole parents can work (Hughes & Gray 2005).

"... very important, but cost of care must be taken into consideration. After school care rebate, cost still up front, cost of care not justified" (SP3).

If organisations implement flexible work hours it will increase their attractiveness to all employees. Tables 4.7 and 4.8 show a preference by all participants for flexible work hours, but single parents demonstrated the strongest preference for this WLB element (Table 4.8). An organisation that offers flexible work hours, therefore, also provides a work environment that will promote employment conditions that single parents will be comfortable in. Due to the pressure of finding employment quickly, sole parents do not always find jobs in organisations that promote WLB/FFWP and find themselves in casual positions that have more work flexibility and shorter working hours, but have fewer benefits, job security and the opportunity to take up WLB/FFWP (Holcomb 2007; Burgess et al. 2007b; McInnes 2005; Gray & Tuddball 2004).

"Limited work opportunities, no WLB/FFWP that are known. Managers not as understanding ... [of having to] leave in an emergency, start 9:00am, [means] school drop off 8:45 am, finish 3:00 pm for 3:30 pm pick up" (SP3).

The findings of this research highlight that WLB/FFWP need to be pliable enough to cater for the special needs of sole parents. Promoting WLB/FFWP in job advertisements and on company websites may seem appealing by the terms used but still may not accommodate sole parents. Terms such as 'school hours' and stating '9:00 am – 3:30 pm' could be unrealistic for sole parents who are required to drop off and collect their children from a school that is a distance from their place of work (Section 4.7.3) when they have no partner to share this task with. Job advertisements need to be clearly worded so that single parents, who don't have a partner to assist with school drop off and pick up, can quickly identify whether a particular job would enable them to combine paid work and the needs of their dependent children.

Labour market demands and skills shortages can act as a catalyst to promote WLB/FFWP in order to attract and retain sole parents (Burgess et al. 2007a; Tait 2007). Managers when designing WLB/FFWP must carefully consider the complexities for parents of combining paid work with carer responsibilities (Gray & Tuddball 2004) and especially those who don't have a partner to share these responsibilities with. Inflexible work arrangements could cause employees to leave their positions due to the restrictions that childcare places on maintaining employment (Walter 2001; Borrill & Kidd 1994).

Viewing WLB/FFWP of those BCA companies whose websites contained this information provided a snapshot of elements currently available in large Australian organisations. Further information was gathered from the HR manager participants, providing insight into WLB/FFWP offerings by smaller organisations. The most common WLB/FFWP offered by large Australian organisations were found to be flexible work arrangements, telecommuting, part-time work including job share, and family and carers leave (Figure 4.1 and section 4.6.2).

This research identified that WLB/FFWP policies have been developed partly in response to legislation but also because of their importance to employer branding. HR managers explained that creating a good public image assisted organisations (HR2 & HR5) with retention of staff and that they improved the attractiveness of the organisation as an employer by incorporating WLB/FFWP. This philosophy also maintained and encouraged diversity within the workplace as becoming or aiming to become an employer of choice was considered to be a social responsibility and a way of competing with progressive organisations (Section 4.9).

“Employer of choice assists with employer branding and employee retention” (HR2).

“Employer of choice: employer branding leads to attraction, recruitment and selection and retention” (HR5).

Despite WLB/FFWP improving the image and reputation of an organisation monitoring or evaluating mechanisms in place for existing WLB/FFWP are not compulsory and therefore not all companies carry out this process (HR4) (Section 4.9). Keeping track of and changing policies according to what this monitoring reveals does not always occur. This can lessen the importance of having these policies and practices in place, especially if employees concerns are not considered (Section 4.9). Effectively an organisation’s offerings may not meet the needs of their employees because the organisation has not monitored use, used feedback via engagement surveys, and changed offerings accordingly. HR managers have been found to design programs that address turnover, but do not necessarily support employee retention (De Vos & Meganck 2009); employee-preferred WLB elements can improve retention.

## 5.5 *Impact of Changes to WTW legislation on WLB/FFWP policy development*

Organisations involved in this research were unaware of changes in welfare legislation and their impact on those recipients receiving government financial support (Centrelink 2010), in relation to MO requirements or Employment Pathway Plans (see Section 4.9). Being aware of the needs of this group of potential employees could support the development of WLB/FFWP better designed to cater for single parents especially sole parents. At the same time this would result in a new group of potential employees for organisations; an important issue in times of skills shortages.

As not all employees have the same carer responsibilities a blanket approach towards WLB/FFWP treating every staff member as the same is not adequate (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Gray & Tuddball 2004). Organisations in this research focused their WLB/FFWP on new mothers returning to work and considered that to be meeting their obligations toward parents attempting to balance work and parenting responsibilities (Research Questions 3, 4 & 6). The issues of relationship breakdown and the resultant dissolving of the family unit have created a new demographic. The reality that parents' carer responsibilities can change quickly as a result of couples going their separate ways was not a part of WLB/FFWP design and implementation within the organisations in this research. HR1 did indicate that their managers are trained to be responsive in these situations and that systems can quickly adapt, for instance, to changes in employment status from full time to part time. Additionally, 18 BCA organisations provided details of their Employee Assistance Program on their website. The ease with which those confronting a relationship breakdown could access these services would be important. Any requests for FWA or to return to part-time work from maternity leave are viewed as a short-term work alternative, and it is assumed that the parents involved would not remain working in is capacity for a long period of time (HR4).

"Some interim and temporary flexible arrangements. I imagine the purpose, would I guess the overall goal would be to get them back into their same position" (HR4).

Single parents and in particular sole parents might be the only parent and income provider for many years. For single parents, especially sole parents with older dependent children, those 6 – 16 years of age, information gathered from the interviews with all HR managers did not reveal any

permanently tailored WLB/FFWP or FWA that would assist them to cope with their carer needs, hold a responsible and challenging job and have a career path (Research Questions 3, 5 & 6).

An MO requirement is that sole parents return to work their youngest child turns six. Childcare needs outside school hours will have to be met but by the time a child is at secondary school they may be capable of taking themselves to and from school, but still require supervision once home. Recognising these changing needs over time through allowing changes to flexible work arranged would create a strategic and competitive advantage in attracting and retaining single parents (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Gray & Stanton 2002; McCracken 2000). Such an approach to flexible WLB/FFWP as a fundamental understanding across the organisation, and backed up by established policies and not left up to the discretion of line manager, would promote an image of an organisation that views people as valuable assets and diversity as leading to a knowledgeable and creative workforce (Lingard & Francis 2005).

The management of diversity is an important issue in the workplace and the justification behind WTW legislation is that the best way to improve life style, self esteem and to be activity participating in society is to engage in employment. WTW legislation is designed to encourage people off welfare and into paid work, improve living standards and self-reliance through workforce participation (Gray & Collins 2006). Contradicting this rationale for reform is the lack of ability for welfare recipients, focussing on sole parents to improve their situation. Sole parents receiving 'Parenting Payment Single' are allowed to enrol in long-term studies as an acceptable activity under MO, but parents in this situation had much younger children making it difficult for serious study (Gould et al. 2007; Cameron 2006; Hughes & Gray 2005). Parents with children 8 years and older receiving 'New Start Allowance' payments with children 8 years and older still faced obstacles to study and therefore reduce life time benefits. Another major issue for sole parents wanting to undertake tertiary studies is the accumulation of HECS debt (Dept for Communities Office for Women's Policy year; McInnes 2007). Sole parents have additional challenges that make them less likely to work full time. This leads to a decrease in income, career prospects, ability to improve career via education, superannuation and dealing with childcare costs and availability (Carney 2007; Lingard et al. 2007; Drew & Murtagh 2005; Spivey 2005). This all has the potential for sole parents to be a future burden on society.

## 5.6 *Monitoring or Evaluating Existing WLB/FFWP*

As organisations are not currently held accountable, most programs establish the minimum requirements and no more. The inclusion of WLB/FFWP does not automatically promote a positive interrelationship between work and family demands for employees (Burgess et al. 2007a; Pocock 2005). Research by Broers & Saunders (2002) has found that because organisations have WLB/FFWP in place the potential benefits may not happen for both employer and employee.

As formal reporting is not compulsory any particular working requirements by single parents are negotiated and dealt with by line managers. WLB/FFWP requests by single parents are approved or disapproved at the discretion of their line manager thus creating a degree of uncertainty for single parents. There is no guarantee that such requests will be granted; it comes down to the view that each employee's line manager holds of the right of employees to make use of the policies implemented in the organisation. This has the potential to add to their work/life conflict and to create feelings of inequity across the organisation. Line managers therefore also need to have knowledge of which WLB/FFWP single parents seek and require to balance paid work and carer responsibilities. This information is what should be reported to HR managers when considering attracting and retaining single parents especially sole parents with MO requirements. There is no legislation in place to ensure that WLB/FFWP are monitored or evaluated on a regular basis (Section 4.5), however EOWA reporting by organisations on initiatives that support equal employment opportunity do require, in compilation of their reports, that organisations to consider their offerings. The introduction of the Fair Work Act also has the potential to increase the awareness of all supervisors and managers of the need to consider the needs of each employee so that their work/life balance requirements may be met.

Despite an increase in awareness of WLB/FFWP by managers and organisations there are still companies are advertising WLB/FFWP on their websites or in newspapers, sole parents may falsely be attracted to positions that do not allow them to balance employment, MO requirements and their carer responsibilities. In some cases as there is no mandatory reporting or checking organisations can get away with not fulfilling what they promise in their employer branding, making it difficult for sole parents to remain in the workforce (Research Questions 1,2 & 6).

## 5.7 *WLB/FFWP Available within Organisations*

Another key finding in this research is that while organisations do incorporate WLB/FFWP that are available to all employees, the 'one size fits all' approach does not allow for the current diversity within the workplace and the variation of needs that this brings (Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Borrill & Kidd 1994). What employees value, rather than what HR managers or line managers value, needs to guide development and administration of WLB/FFWP (De Vos & Meganck 2009).

In this research all parents (coupled, lone and sole) required flexible work arrangements and were happy in their place of employment when they were able to negotiate flexibility to change work hours as the need arise due to family commitments (Sections 4.8.2, 4.8.3 & 4.8.4).

Organisations that are able to meet the needs of their employees who are parents through policies and practices that enable them to balance work and family responsibilities will better maintain a productive workforce and will be able to tap into the store of knowledge that these employees can provide (Burgess et al. 2007a; Tait 2007).

While WLB/FFWP exists in the chosen organisations lone parents still faced barriers that made them reluctant to use available WLB/FFWP (Section 4.9). Gray & Tuddball (2004) and Patrickson & Hartmann (2001) have found that single parents can be reluctant to use WLB/FFWP such as taking parental leave, FWA or reducing hours if they fear it will limit their chances of promotion or professional recognition in their careers. Especially if the underlying work culture values that long work hours means employee commitment (Lingard et al. 2007).

The results from this research have shown that some of the single parents involved in this research held lower level positions (SP1 & SP3) and that some were not aware of WLB/FFWP available in their employing company. SP3 was unaware of the WLB/FFWP offered by his organisation. He felt that additional WLB/FFWP elements such as FWA were needed at the moment for him to remain in his current position. SP3 also felt that his managers were not as understanding when he asked to leave early to collect his children. These managers did not look upon these requests in a favourable light.

As stated in Section 4.7.3, access to WLB/FFWP was not always equal or easy (LP1). This research further identified the gap in policy awareness is an important issue for all managers wanting to promote a fair and equitable workplace (Wise 2003). As organisations increasingly developed and implement WLB/FFWP the uptake of employees using these policies will require managers to act as role models communicating clearly too all the availability of WLB/FFWP in order to support and promote workplace acceptance (Poelmans et al. 2008; Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Haar 2007; Thornthwaite 2004). The extent to which a workplace culture is supportive for all employees to have equal access to WLB/FFWP is reinforced via top level management commitment right through to line managers (Research Questions 4 & 6).

Despite formal programs being incorporated in some legislation e.g. EEO and having bodies that represent the best interests of women (EOWA) there has been a limited effect on promoting family friendly arrangements (Holcomb 2007; Pocock 2005; Rutherford 1999). Most changes that occur in the workplace are left to the discretion of line managers, and these are informal negotiations that can be subject to change, thus creating an unstable working environment which can add to the stresses of single parents especially sole parents. This is only compounded if the workplace culture holds a negative view towards WLB/FFWP and a positive outlook to long working hours and time spent in the office (Burgess et al. 2007a; Burgess et al. 2007b; Tait 2007; Thornwaite 2004; Gray & Stanton 2002; Borrill & Kidd 1994).

The research results support the claim that the coercive nature of MO and Employment Pathway Plans combined with the informal, subjective approach toward WLB/FFWP for all employees, but especially parents, makes it quite difficult for single parents and especially sole parents to achieve a balance between home life and work/life as well as maintaining paid employment. The underlying philosophy of WTW may appear forward thinking and empowering to move single parents into the workforce but in reality single parents and in particular sole parents have limited choices stemming from their personal situations to finding paid work irrespective of personal interest, skills held or views on family care (Poelmans et al. 2008; Beauregard & Henry 2009; Darcy & McCarthy 2007; Groth 2007; Smith 2006; Chase-Lansdale et al. 2003).

Organisations that consider WLB/FFWP as a retention tool create a work culture supportive of diversity incorporating single parents (Baird & Williamson 2008; Beauregard & Henry 2009; Darcy & McCarthy 2007). The Corporations involved in this research who were employers of choice were enthusiastic and passionate about holding this title, but here again it was the choice of the organisation to do so. There is no government requirement to stipulate the implemented or execution of WLB/FFWP in organisations (Research Questions 1, 2& 5).

What this research revealed is that organisations that were employers of choice took the time to listen to the needs of their staff, including parents. They achieved this via engagement surveys which were conducted on a regular basis as well as by taking on board individual requests. Any challenges were met head on resulting with frequent discussions and consultations with line managers until a resolution was reached. This often involved additional training for line managers showing them how FWA can work, how they can, promote diversity and increase productivity. Employer of choice organisations also recognised that parenting demands do change over time and so adjusted their policies accordingly. These companies focussed on attracting and especially retaining talented employees. Many parents: without dependents, coupled or single, fit this description.

### **5.8     *Implications for Theory***

This research has supported the reality that welfare is part of our society and how it is handled determines the effect on peoples' lives. The rationale behind the WTW legislation is to break the welfare cycle and have a productive society, with low unemployment rates. Part of having more people in the workforce is to combat the skills shortages as well as to generate economic prosperity. Some welfare recipients have never worked and their children have experienced a life where no parent is working therefore seeing this as a normal occurrence in their lives. One of the drivers of the WTW legislation was the desire to break this cycle of unemployment, or of viewing unemployment as a normal state. Other welfare recipients covered by WTW and MO requirements may not have worked as a result of having a disability or for other reasons. The sample population for this research had all worked in the past or were currently part of the workforce yet they still faced many challenges combining paid work and family responsibilities. Results of this research

further strengthen the viewpoint that there is an existing gap between the ideologies of WTW legislation and the realities of what welfare recipients must endure to abide by the requirements of this legislation. Welfare recipients, especially sole parents, can sometimes have out-dated skills. If these parents have taken time out of the workforce to care for and raise children returning to work can be quite difficult and overwhelming. The underlying belief is that caring for and raising children is not classified as a recognised job. This unpaid role is necessary work but society views these parents as being jobless (McInnes 2007).

Being 'jobless' now requires sole parents to fulfil MO or an Employment Pathway Plan, determined by the age of their youngest child. As a result, more welfare recipients with special needs are moving into mainstream employment. The WTW legislation also places restrictions on the ability of welfare recipients to participate in education that would update their skills. This is happening at a time when Australia is experiencing a skills shortage. Results of this research support claims of the continuing difficulty that sole parents face today in meeting their MO.

HR managers within organisations have the ability to determine, develop and administer WLB/FFWP programs that have the potential to assist in catering for the needs of sole parents returning to work. Skills shortages are creating a climate where attracting and retaining talented employees is difficult. School leavers do not always have the necessary qualifications creating a gap that needs to be filled for organisations. HR managers perhaps should consider sole parents who may be more skilled, committed and better suited to these advertised positions where skills are in short supply. Some sole parents may require training, but as a potential pool of candidates, sole parents may be closer to being able to fill existing gaps in desired skills than school leavers. Taking on board sole parents could bridge the gap in areas of skills shortages thereby encouraging change in the current thinking of HR managers.

This research strengthens the reality that changes in legislation such as WTW which drives a category of potential employees into the workforce, such as sole parents, requires organisations and HR managers to be fully aware of impact this creates. These potential and current employees enter or seek paid work with special needs. Organisations could recognise the employment potential of this group by catering for their needs through incorporating WLB/FFWP that are better

suited to the needs of sole parents and which are accepted within workplace culture. With some thought and consideration organisations should be able to create WLB/FFWP that would enable a smooth transition into the workforce for sole parents, just as many organisations have done for mothers returning from maternity leave though this has been supported by recent legislation. In the same way that allowing new mothers to return to work part time has benefited both organisations and employees so might similar adjustments for sole parents benefit organisations, sole parent employees, and their children. This research revealed differences in preferences across employee groups. It also revealed similarities demonstrating that implementing a range of WLB/FFWP can have a positive impact on the total workforce. Using this and similar research to support planning, HR managers can ensure that they develop policies and programs that will attract a broad and diverse range of workers to their organisations and which will support retention of those who fit the organisational culture and who can perform their job role competently.

### **5.9 Further Areas to Related Research**

Further research in relation to this topic could explore ways of increasing the likelihood of organisations offering WLB/FFWP specific for sole parents to achieve work/life balance. This research has contributed to the discussion of WTW legislation, MO and Employment Pathway Plans. It has focussed on welfare recipients and the challenges they face. This research raised the issue of whether the removal of the coercive nature of MO and Employment Pathway Plans could decrease the stress levels and alleviate possible mental health concerns of sole parents and their dependent children. This link could benefit from further research.

This research has found that WLB/FFWP that had been implemented within organisations did assist to create a better balance between home life and work/life. Recent legislation in relation to paid family leave, the right to one year's unpaid leave, and the right to part time work on return from maternity leave signal a move to bring about a change in attitude. A possible area for future research may be to investigate possible areas of legalisation to ensure that organisations are required to include more elements of WLB/FFWP that would assist all parents but particularly support sole parents' return to work, where feasible. Legislation that requires organisations to undertake monitoring, evaluation and reporting to ensure correct implementation of WLB/FFWP has begun. Legislation that makes organisations accountable for providing a working environment

that assists parents to maintain employment and fulfil carer demands would result in the needs of sole parents being catered for.

The main group of welfare recipients focused on for this research was sole parents and it has been shown that their work experience is largely dependent on their immediate line managers and their opinions regarding WLB/FFWP. This thesis can provide a foundation for further research in this area to guide organisations in the development of policies and practices. Research into ways in which organisations could be made more aware of changes in the external environment, so that they might consider the impact of these changes in their organisation would also be beneficial.

### *5.9.1 Recommendations for Catering for Sole Parents*

*Recommendations include:*

#### Government

- Recognising the increase in stress and work/life conflict.
- Setting up a case management approach through Centrelink whereby one key person deals with the one sole parent.
- Providing more support by increasing the time allowed to find suitable work.
- Recognising skills and abilities of the sole parent job seeker and providing assistance to find employment in those fields.
- Allowing level of weekly pay to satisfy MO requirements and not only base this on a set number of hours of work.
- Providing funds for refresher courses in areas of interest or expertise for workforce re entry.

## Organisations

- Focus on work/life balance making it a priority to ensure requirements of sole parents are a consideration in the design of these policies.
- Provide refresher courses in order to re introduce sole parents back into the workforce.
- Where not currently available, ensure programs and systems within the organisation are designed to support sole parents with dependent children when unplanned home issues arise.

## Sole Parents

- Require and need to seek out support from Government and organisations to ease the stress of parenting and work that their changed status brings.
- Will gain a better knowledge of and acceptance of MO and carer responsibilities due to clearer direction and assistance by Government institutions.
- Knowledge of available options so they may pursue a career path and care for their children.
- Awareness of support frameworks for sole parents to reduce stress and work/life conflict and thus avoid becoming a burden on society or lead to a breakdown in the family unit.

An overview of the people affected, the approaches that can be applied to achieve desirable strategies, and the results can be seen in Figure 6.1 below. The government enacts legislation and this is enforced via the responsible body, in this instance Centrelink, to ensure that the changes in MO as a result of the WTW 2006 Act are implemented and met by welfare recipients. Where parents have dependents, carer responsibilities exist. Trying to meet the requirements of WTW legislation creates additional work/life conflict for these parents. WLB/FFWP or FWA become increasingly important as they can have a positive effect of sole parents who are required to balance home life and work life. The ability for sole parents to work and parent effectively has an impact on society and organisations. Various responses can be taken by both organisations and sole parents to result in good business practices and a better transition into the workforce for this group of welfare recipients. Overall it creates a more inclusive and equal society for all.

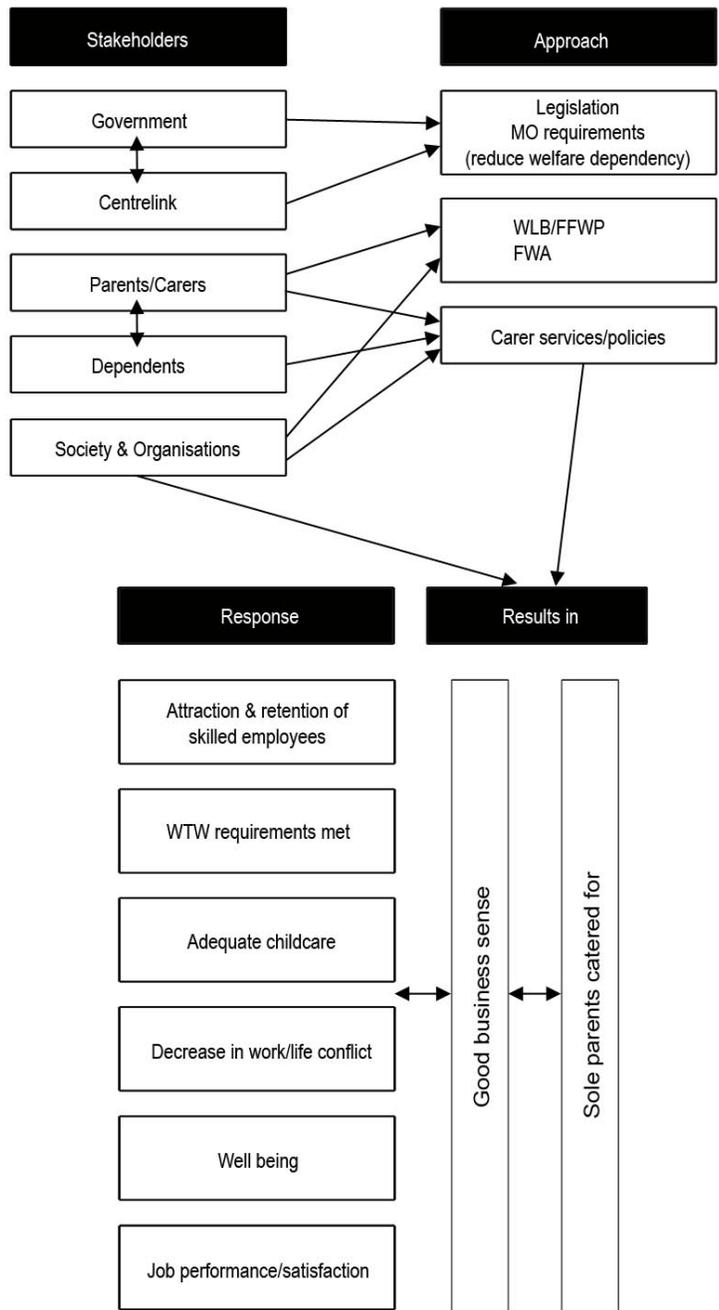


Figure 5.1 Balance of work/life for sole parents

## 5.10 Summary

This research was designed to see if what organisations offered and whether these existing WLB/FFWP catered for single parents' especially sole parents to reconcile home life and work/life and their requirements brought on by changes in WTW.

This research gathered information from literature, BCA member organisation websites, and HR managers. Three groups of participants ranked a sample of job advertisements for WLB/FFWP content attractiveness; interviews were conducted with and questionnaires completed by single parents and data was gathered from coupled parents and those without dependent children to learn the of the perspective on participants in relation to WLB/FFWP that would cater for their needs in relation to juggling employment and home responsibilities.

What this means for employers is that WLB/FFWP is an important aspect for attracting and retaining skilled staff. Incorporating WLB/FFWP reduces work/life conflict and improves loyalty and commitment towards an organisation. By tapping into this pool of knowledge found in sole parents it provides these parents with a greater choice of employment which allows them to also care for their dependent children and can assist organisations to bridge the skills gap.

As diversity within our workforce is on the increase and an asset for organisations to tap into (Beauregard & Henry 2009; Baird & Williamson 2008; Darcy & McCarthy 2007), it makes good business sense to incorporate WLB/FFWP. Managing diversity involves not only sole parents but also people with disabilities. Australia still is amongst the lowest rate of countries in the world employing people with disabilities (Beauregard & Henry 2009).

Government and organisations need to take on social responsibility to assist sole parents to re enter and remain in the workforce. Thereby incorporating research to determine levels of risk focusing on stress and increases in work/life conflict. The additional pressures placed on sole parents to combine carer responsibilities and MO requirements along with financial concerns can lead to detrimental outcomes for families and society (Butterworth et al. 2006).

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## Appendix A: Tables showing rating scales used

Table A .1 Rating of Website Quality

Website Characteristic	Measure of Website Accessibility of WLB/FFWP	Rating				
		No 0	Poor 1	Average 2	Good 3	Excellent 4
Work/life Balance (WLB):						
Detail of provided information	No. of words of Descriptions					
Level of usage of WLB elements	Examples of workers					
	Examples of Executives					
Family Friendly Work Practices (FFWP):						
Detail of provided information	No. of words of Descriptions					
Level of usage of FFWP elements	Examples of workers					
	Examples of Executives					
Ease of finding information	No. of clicks from home Page					
Search facility						
Use of FFWP terms Part-time Job share Flexible start & finish Family leave, e.g., 48/5	Effectiveness of search Facility					
Ease of understanding terms and Working conditions	Quality of information					

The numerical ratings for each of the website characteristics in Table A.1 were determined based on the elements rated as shown in Table A .2 and A .3.

Table A.2: Rating Website WLB/FFWP Information

Rating	Description
0	nothing mentioned
1	1-2 elements listed but no details provided
2	includes 2 or more elements recommended in the literature and provides some detail
3	more than 3 recommended elements with good/clear details
4	= more than 3 of the most highly recommended elements for attraction/retention/motivation of parents and provides good/clear details

Table A .3: Rating of Staff Pictures Provided on Website

Rating	Description
0	none
1	picture of a person
2	picture of person and some details
3	picture of more than one person and some details
4	picture/details promoting group diversity amongst workforce

## Appendix B: Job Advertisements

(The three questions below were printed for the ND and CP interview kits.)

Please look at the 10 advertisements provided and identify any that you find attractive/would consider applying for *if you are/were qualified to do so?* Yes No (If no, is it due to financial reasons?)

Job Advert.	Yes/No	Why	Attractive Term	Apply for job? Y/N (reason)
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

For each advertisement complete the above form where applicable by answering the following questions. Don't worry about the type of job or qualifications required, the focus is on family friendly workplace elements that you would find attractive in order to decide if you would apply for this position being part of a couple with dependent children.

1. What do you find attractive about this job? (*This looks at conditions of employment*).
2. What draws your attention to the advertisement? (*This question looks at key terms or wording related to family friendly work practices.*)
3. Would you apply for this position?

## Appendix C: Interview Questions for ND and CP Participants

Q. 4 What elements within family friendly work practices (FFWP) generally offered by organisations would you need at the moment to be able to enter the workforce?

Q. 5 Do you believe that you would be more committed to an employer that offered you suitable FFWP; more inclined to remain in their employment?

Q. 6 Please rate these FFWP in order of value to you? (Scale 1 (lowest) – 5 (highest)). Please enter your ratings in the attached form. See Appendix D for summary rating of FFWP elements.

Thank you so much for your time and assistance.

Simone

## Appendix C: Questions for Single Parents

(Question 1 for single parents was to complete the 10 Job Advertisements table in Appendix B). Not Q.s 2,3,8,9,11,12,13,14,15,16 & 19).

**Q. 2 (LP,SP)** Contrast the FFWPs offered by your current employer against those that would best suit your current circumstances. How well do they match? (Are you aware of what FFWP are offered by your organisation?)

(Ask further questions as required to clearly identify those elements of the FFWP which best suit the interviewee and those that they desire but which are not present.)

**Q. 3 (LP,SP)** What FFWPs would you like to see incorporated at your place of work? Why?

Please rate these FFWPs in order of value to you? (Scale 1 (lowest) - 5 (highest)). I have a table generated from BCA website findings.

**Q. 4 (LP,SP)** How significant are/were the availability of FFWP in your decision to return to work?

**Q. 5 (LP,SP)** What draws your attention to the advertisement? (This question looks at key terms or wording relating to FFWP.)

**Q.6 (LP,SP)** Would you apply for this position? (This question looks at what specific need the sole parent must have fulfilled so that they can enter the workforce and meet mutual obligations.)

**Q. 7 (LP, SP)** What do you find attractive about this job? (This question looks at conditions of employment.)

**Q. 8 (LP,SP)** Do you think your employer/all employers should promote FFWPs to help balance work and children?

**Q. 9 (LP,SP)** What additional elements within FFWPs offered by your employer do you need at the moment to be able to remain in the workforce? (Some FFWPs are offered to certain employees based on their position and ranking in the organisation).What elements within FFWPs generally offered by organisations would you need at the moment to be able to enter the workforce?

**Q. 10 (LP,SP)** When did you commence work in your current role? How old was your youngest child at the time?

**Q. 11 (SP)** Does working in your current position require you to also meet mutual obligations requirements?

**Q. 12 (LP,SP)** What attracted you to this position?

**Q. 13 (LP,SP)** Are you satisfied with this type of employment? (If yes, go to the next question. If no, then why are you not satisfied with your current employment?) Possible side questions: Are you happy with your current job/employer? Do you plan to stay? What, if anything, would entice you to apply for a job with another employer?

**Q. 14 (LP,SP)** How important is child care in relation to choosing to work for your current employer?

**Q. 15 (LP,SP)** What form of child care do you currently use? Why?

**Q. 16 (LP,SP)** How easy was this child care to arrange?

**Q. 17 (LP,SP)** Do you believe that you would be more committed to an employer that offered you suitable FFWP; more inclined to remain in their employment?

**Q. 18 (LP,SP)** Would you leave your current employer for an organisation that offered less money but better family/ work support?

**Q. 19 (LP,SP)** Have changes been made to the FFWPs offered at your organisation? If yes, in your view, has this improved the range of FFWPs made available for you? (Draw out whether economic downturn has resulted in organisations cutting back on FFWPs?)

## Appendix D: Summary Rating of FFWP Elements

Table D.1

(Completed by all non-HR manager Participants)

Assistance with Child Care		Job Splitting (sharing)	
Part-time Work		Paid Maternity Leave	
Part-time Work with Children under 5		Unpaid Maternity Leave	
Flexible Work Arrangements		Family/Carer Leave	
Compressed Working Week		Breast Feeding Facilities	
Career Break		Casual work, near to home	
Job Share		Telecommuting	

The rating used for this questionnaire was a scale of 1 – 5. Where 1 = the lowest value and 5 = the highest value

## Appendix E: Interview Questions HR Managers

Q.1 What policies, programs and procedures have been implemented in your organisation to assist single parents with WLB?

Q.2 Why have these policies come into existence? (Prompt if required.)

- Government reports?
- Skill shortage?
- Employer branding?
- Legislation (EEO, Mutual Obligation)
- Retention of quality staff

Q.3 Does your organisation monitor or evaluate existing FFWP? (If yes, ask how?)

Q.4 I would like to ask some questions about records your organisation keeps on the use of the various elements within the FFWP:

Are statistics kept which would indicate the most to least frequently used element of your FFWP?

If yes:

ask if you could see those records – learn what is the most commonly used element through to the least often used, and

ask if those records showing levels of use are used to evaluate the effectiveness of their policy on FFWP, and

has this evaluation led to changes in offerings over time ... if so ...

what changes have been made and why?

Q.5 Are policies altered according to employee usage? (Explore whether supervisors aid or inhibit use in areas of the organisation. If this does not come out of monitoring and evaluation discussion).

Q.6 Why did your organisation decide to develop a policy in relation FFWP?

Q.7 What benefits do you believe your organisation has experienced by offering FFWP?

Can you provide some examples, please?

**Q.8** Have the components of your FFWP being influenced through employee suggestions?

Can you provide an example or two, please?

**Q.9** If an employee wished to, for instance, alter their work hours from full to part time, or required to use other FFWP how long would it take to negotiate this?

**Q.10** How do you determine the value or attractiveness of a FFWP element within the bundle?

## Appendix F: Ethics Approval



**VICTORIA  
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**A NEW  
SCHOOL OF  
THOUGHT**

**From:** Lauren Donley  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 13 October 2009 12:44 PM  
**To:** Beverley LloydWalker; Robert Sims  
**Cc:** Simone.cliffe@live.edu.au  
**Subject:** Ethics notification - HRETH 09/131

Dear Beverley and Rob,

Thankyou for submitting your amendments for ethical approval of the project entitled:

**HRETH 09/131 Sole Parents and the Transition back into the Workforce: Catered for or not?**

The Chair of the Business & Law Human Research Ethics Committee reviewed all submitted documents and resolved to **approve** the application without further amendment. As detailed in the attached memo, the project is approved from 13th October 2009 to 11th March 2010.

Best of luck with the research.

Kind regards,

Lauren Donley  
Ethics Officer  
Office for Research  
Victoria University  
Phone 61 3 9919 4781  
Fax 61 3 9919 5515  
Email [Lauren.Donley@vu.edu.au](mailto:Lauren.Donley@vu.edu.au)  
Web <http://research.vu.edu.au/>



**VICTORIA  
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Job Advertisement 1.

Print Job Details

Page 1 of 2



Listed 27 Jul 2008

Professional Services

## Executive Assistant - Part time hours

- Varied and interesting role
- Autonomy and flexibility
- Dynamic and forward thinking firm

Pricewaterhouse Coopers is the number one Professional Services firm and we pride ourselves on our vision, values and the ability to provide an exceptional service to a vast network of clients. We are a firm full of energy, challenge, innovation and opportunities. Our people connect their thinking, experience and solutions to enhance value for our clients.

We currently have a unique opportunity for a highly organised and proactive person to join the Human Capital (HC) group within PwC. Working with an HC Leader within the Asia Pacific Cluster, you will provide Melbourne based support in this varied role. Some of your responsibilities will include:

- Extensive travel coordination
- Responding to last minute requests and changes
- Doing complex expenses
- Following up on outgoing invoices
- Event and material coordination
- Project management
- Building strong relationships and networks across the globe
- And much more...

The successful person will carry a positive and proactive personality and be able to work autonomously. You will have strong organisational skills and be highly flexible.

You will be expected to work approximately 5 hours a day (times negotiable), 5 days per week. The opportunity will be available to you to occasionally work from home.

For further information please contact Felicity Cupitt on 8603 3350 or apply via the link below.

Email: Please click the 'Apply Now' button below.

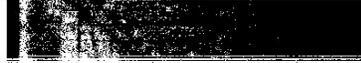
be who you want to be

<http://seek.com.au/users/apply/ViewJobAdPrintFriendly.aspx?jobID=13410815>

23/07/2008



Listed 23 Oct 2009



## Reception / Administration

- Part-time hours providing great work/life balance.
- Toorak Village location, shops & easy transport.
- Friendly small accounting firm.

### YOUR ROLE

Would suit parent returning to the workforce. You will report directly to either of two accountants and will be the sole administration support for our small firm. Your role will involve working part-time 6 hours, 3 days per week. Your duties will include:

- Answering phones
- Meeting & greeting clients
- Mail & word processing
- Banking
- Filing & archiving
- Maintaining kitchen area
- General administration tasks

### ARE YOU THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THE JOB?

- Some form of previous admin experience
  - Good grasp of Microsoft Office suite (Word, Excel etc.)
  - High attention to detail
  - ability to prioritise & work autonomously
  - Initiative and common sense
  - A pleasant, friendly demeanour
  - Professional presentation
- 
- Previous experience with MYOB Accountants Office and ASIC / Corporate Compliance would be advantageous but is not essential as training will be provided.

### OUR FIRM

PR Partners Accounting is a small accounting firm in Toorak Village with a friendly & relaxed office atmosphere.

**People wishing to apply please email your resume to  
Amber: [amber@prpa.com.au](mailto:amber@prpa.com.au)**

PR Partners Accounting.  
Amber: [amber@prpa.com.au](mailto:amber@prpa.com.au)



<http://www.seek.com.au/users/apply/ViewJobAdPrintFriendly.aspx?jobID=16218091>

10/26/2009

Job Advertisement 3.

Brimbank Leader June 17, 2008

 Ph: 9875 8

+

**Positions Vacant**

**LEGAL ASSISTANT - SUNSHINE**

- Job share available
- Return to work in a supportive team environment

Maurice Blackburn's professional, hard working employees come from a variety of backgrounds and are passionate about achieving results for our clients. Working in a leading plaintiff law firm, this role represents a good work/life balance in a busy fast paced environment. Maurice Blackburn is an equal opportunity employer and respects and values diversity. We would welcome applicants' flexible working arrangements in this role.

An opportunity has arisen for an experienced WorkCover legal assistant to join our suburban practice in Sunshine. You will support a busy lawyer, providing quality administrative and legal assistance as well as exceptional client liaison. This position will suit a legal assistant with 1+ years experience in the area of WorkCover or Personal Injury law.

Your responsibilities will include answering and managing incoming calls, diary management, liaising with clients (both internal and external), preparation of documents and briefs, billings file management and administrative support.

**Key selection criteria**

- Excellent verbal and written communication skills, including customer service skills
- Ability to liaise with internal and external clients
- Excellent organisational and time management skills
- Proficiency with the Microsoft Office suite

All enquiries and applications should be directed to Melinda Caulley, Human Resources Consultant:  
E [mcaulley@mauriceblackburn.com.au](mailto:mcaulley@mauriceblackburn.com.au)  
T (03) 9605 2838

**Maurice Blackburn**  
Lawyers  
Since 1919

[www.mauriceblackburn.com.au](http://www.mauriceblackburn.com.au) **just results**



Listed 27 Jun 2008



Whitehorse Community  
Health Service

## Accounts Payable and Administration

Are you looking for a genuine opportunity to Balance Work and Family?  
Part Time Position  
2 days per week

Whitehorse Community Health Service has created a new position due to the continuing growth of its clients and services. The position reports directly to the Manager, Corporate Services. The position has a variety of responsibilities and tasks which include accounts payable, invoicing debtors, and assisting the Corporate Services Manager with the administration of fleet and site management.

The successful applicant will be a member of the productive Corporate Services team and will be working closely with the Finance Officer.

To be successful in this role you will have previously worked in a similar capacity and have experience with accounts payable. You will have strong attention to detail, good computer skills, the ability to meet deadlines, and can demonstrate effective interpersonal skills. Experience using KCS/IBA Health software is advantageous, but is not mandatory. Previous experience in community health or a not for profit organisation is desirable.

Salary is in accordance with the Health and Allied Services, Administrative Officers Award, Admin Officer Grade 3 \$27.08p/h and includes generous salary packaging.

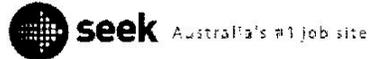
A position description, information for intending applicants and an application form are available on our website [www.wchs.org.au](http://www.wchs.org.au) or by emailing [hr@wchs.org.au](mailto:hr@wchs.org.au).

The closing date for applications is 5.00pm Friday, 27th June 2008.

Email: Please click the 'Apply Now' button below.

<http://seek.com.au/users/apply/ViewJobAdPrintFriendly.aspx?jobID=13163541>

28/06/2008



Listed 22 Oct 2009

[www.jobinschool.com.au](http://www.jobinschool.com.au)

## Family Friendly Business Development Executive

- Balance the Kids, The Hubby, The Household & Your Need for Flexible Working Conditions
- Earn a Great Hourly rate, Km Allowance + Expenses
- 20 to 30 hrs per week - you choose
- Work for an organisation that employs hundreds of people just like you

If the idea of securing a job that uses your skills and experience in fashion or gift ware sales, whilst meeting your personal, family and household needs, sounds like an unrealistic expectation, we can definitely help.

In this great role, you will achieve an absolute work life balance as we let you decide the hours and days you work to truly manage everything important in your life.

A new opportunity exists for a dynamic, motivated individual who is looking to become part of an expanding team, representing an established importer and wholesaler of garment & fashion accessories. Your ultimate objective will be to develop new business and manage existing clients throughout Melbourne.

Ideally you will be young at heart, funky, driven, have the ability to work independently and have excellent presentation and communication skills. Prior experience in sales and business development would be a real advantage, as would experience in the fashion or gift ware industry.

This exciting new role offers the flexibility to work within school hours 20-25 hours per week to suit your timetable. You will be remunerated within an excellent hourly base and travel allowance where you are rewarded for every single minute you work.

If this sounds like you please apply. Send your application through now as this is definitely not an opportunity to be missed.

Current drivers license and own vehicle are essential.

Ronny Howard

<http://www.seek.com.au/users/apply/ViewJobAdPrintFriendly.aspx?jobID=16047548>

10/26/2009



Job Search Executive 100K+ Jobs My Account & JobMail Tools & Resources

### Job Details

Advertiser contact details are not to be used for unsolicited commercial emails.

**SAVE SELECTED** 0 jobs selected

1

Job 1 of 1	Listed 15 Jan 2009
<b>Work Type:</b> Part Time	<b>Sub-Classification:</b> PA/Executive Assistant
<b>Area:</b> Melbourne - Inner	<b>Advertiser:</b> Corporate Value Associates



## Part-time Executive Assistant

4 Days per week (job share);  
Dynamic role with lots of variety;  
Global Professional Services Organisation;  
Support three members of our leadership team.

Corporate Value Associates is seeking a dynamic Executive Assistant to support three Partners with business development and practice management responsibilities. This is a part-time position, 4 days per week, reduced hours – can be worked around school hours.

Your day will include:

- Diary management and organising somewhat complex travel arrangements (both domestic and international);
- Assisting with various business development activities, including activity tracking and calling prospective clients to request meetings;
- Performing a range of office management and general administrative duties, including organising social events

<http://seek.com.au/users/apply/index.aspx?Sequence=79&PageNumber=1&JobID=14...> 19/01/2009

and activities, liaising with suppliers (stationery, catering, couriers, general office suppliers), answering phones etc;

- Performing a range of HR administrative duties covering recruitment, training and development, policies and procedures, OH&S, and other human resource related matters;
- Producing and editing complex PowerPoint, Excel and Word documents.

You will have proven executive support experience, ideally within a management consulting or other professional services environment. You will possess exceptional interpersonal skills, highly developed organisational skills, fantastic attention to detail, advanced MS Office (Word, PowerPoint and Excel) skills, and have the ability to work in a truly dynamic, international environment.

With a CBD location and a team of dedicated colleagues, we provide a great work environment. We offer professional mentoring and training, the opportunity to develop, and a competitive salary including base salary, bonuses and superannuation.

Corporate Value Associates is an international strategy consulting firm, with sixteen offices internationally, and operational in Australia since 1992. We service large and blue-chip clients by applying proprietary problem-solving approaches to complex business problems; helping our clients to create shareholder value. We work in small teams with an atmosphere of continual challenge and creativity, and still succeed in the important task of having fun.

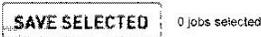
If you are interested in this position, please send your resume with covering letter to [recruitaustralia@corporate-value.com](mailto:recruitaustralia@corporate-value.com) quoting "Executive Assistant" or click the Apply Now button below.

[recruitaustralia@corporate-value.com](mailto:recruitaustralia@corporate-value.com)  
 Email: Please click the 'Apply Now' button below.

Email: Please click the 'Apply Now' button below.

Only people with the right to work in Australia may apply for this position.  
**For advice on obtaining an Australian visa visit LIVE IN australia.com.**

Protect Yourself. Don't provide bank or credit card details when applying for a job.

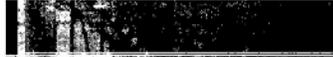


We've put on a **new face** and would love your **feedback** - what do  
[About SEEK](#) [Contact Us](#) [Work for SEEK](#) [Privacy & Terms](#)

<http://seek.com.au/users/apply/index.aspx?Sequence=79&PageNumber=1&JobID=14...> 19/01/2009



Listed 15 Jun 2009



## Administrative Assistant

- Part-time 16 hours per week
- 9:30am to 2pm, Monday – Thursday
- CDB Location

This role would suit someone looking to re-enter the workforce and has prior administration or reception experience. These part-time hours will give the ideal candidate the flexibility to meet your family or other commitments outside of work. You will join a friendly and down to earth team within the financial services sector

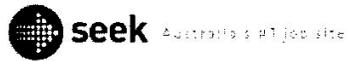
The role will initially include answering phones, mail, scanning, basic administration and general housekeeping – so you will need to be happy to turn your hand to just about anything from typing to tidying up, with a possibility to increase your hours over the longer term as your circumstances allow and you learn more.

You will be reporting directly to the Office Manager and assisting also with tasks delegated as and when they arise.

Key traits you will need are reliability, willingness, attention to detail, good communication skills and a friendly helpful disposition.

If this opportunity suits your circumstances please forward your resume to [info@kingfishergroup.com.au](mailto:info@kingfishergroup.com.au)

Email. Please click the 'Apply Now' button below.



Listed 28 May 2009



CLARK MORRIS & ASSOCIATES PTY LTD  
HUMAN RESOURCE CONSULTANTS  
MEN 15-11-2017-176

## RECEPTIONIST/ADMINISTRATION

### Small & Friendly Office!

- 10am – 3pm, 3-4 days/week (Negotiable)
- St Kilda Road Location
- \$21/ hour + super

Terrific opportunity for a bright and capable person to join a small, friendly and professional office in the Human Resources industry. This role will suit someone wanting to work flexible hours with a variety of responsibilities. Would suit a parent with school age children.

Role will start on a contract basis with potential to become permanent part-time.

Key duties will include;

- Reception duties – including answering phones and greeting clients
- Typing reports and general correspondence
- Maintenance and development of basic spreadsheets
- Processing of simple payroll
- Some basic bookkeeping
- Maintenance of Database
- Other general administration tasks

You are proficient with Word, Excel and Outlook and ideally have some understanding of Databases – such as Access. Your style is one of being well organised, methodical, self motivated, attention to detail and a focus on quality service.

A covering letter tailored to the key requirements of this role should accompany your application.

Please forward applications in Word format (not Vista) to Kate Mathieson.  
Email: Please click the 'Apply Now' button below.

Level 1, 499 St. Kilda Road, Melbourne, Vic. 3004  
Tel: (03) 9820 3700 Fax (03) 9820 3744



Listed 20 Jul 2009



## Part Time (School Hours) Administration Officer

- Work for a National RTO from our local, Frankston Office
- Part Time Hours (9.00am-3.30pm, Mon-Fri) to suit your lifestyle
- Generous remuneration

Privately owned, The Pragmatic Group is a diverse and progressive business incorporating a National RTO, a quality restaurant and events centre and a recognised National HR Advisory Service.

Due to the continued growth of Pragmatic Training, we presently require the services of two Part Time Administration Officers to join our ever expanding team (9.00am-3.30pm, Mon-Fri).

Based in our Frankston Office, you will become an integral part of the Trainer Support Unit, providing valuable administrative assistance across our scope of training courses which includes the Business, Children's Services, Hospitality and Aged Care Industry Sectors.

To be successful in this role you will ideally have 2(+) years experience in a similar role and a strong understanding of Microsoft Office. You will possess highly developed communication skills allowing you to liaise with a broad range of industry professionals and be motivated to further your career in a challenging and fast paced environment.

Remuneration incorporating a base salary and

<http://seek.com.au/users/apply/ViewJobAdPrintFriendly.aspx?jobID=15713424>

7/23/2009



Listed 29 Oct 2009



## Precedents Lawyer PART TIME

- Flexible Working Arrangements
- Senior Associate Level - Corporate and M&A Experience

Our client is a leading mid tier firm with a reputation for having a progressive and dynamic culture.

A position has now arisen for a senior lawyer with excellent drafting skills and experience within the **Corporate and M&A** field.

This is a **part-time** role, **3 days per week**. The successful candidate can elect to work **either** in the Melbourne or Sydney office. **Working from home** is also very much an option.

The firm has an established precedents department and in this case, you will work closely with the corporate practice group in areas including precedents, training and knowledge management.

If you would like to discuss this role further, please do not hesitate to contact Tim Fogarty on (03) 8610 8400.

Please contact Tim Fogarty on 03 8610 8400 or email him at [timfogarty@taylorroot.com.au](mailto:timfogarty@taylorroot.com.au) quoting TF642057S. For a full review of all our roles, please go to [www.taylorroot.com.au](http://www.taylorroot.com.au).  
Email: Please click the 'Apply Now' button below.



[www.taylorroot.com.au](http://www.taylorroot.com.au)

The SR Group - Brewer Morris - Carter Murray - Frazer Jones - Taylor Root  
Offices in London - Manchester - Birmingham - Leeds - Edinburgh - Dubai - Hong Kong - Sydney - Melbourne

<http://seek.com.au/users/apply/ViewJobAdPrintFriendly.aspx?jobID=16244831>

10/30/2009