INNOVATIVE FAMILY-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES OF ENTERPRISES – RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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Purpose: Identify and classify innovative family-friendly activities implemented in enterprises.

Design/methodology/approach: The research was based on qualitative analysis, utilizing the MAXQDA software for coding and hierarchizing the collected data. The research sample included 140 medium and large enterprises. The analysis was preceded by a critical review of the literature to present the evolution of concepts related to family-friendly practices.

Findings: The study identifies seven main categories of family-friendly activities implemented by enterprises, including flexible work arrangements, medical benefits, salary security, childcare support, and non-wage benefits. These initiatives reflect a growing recognition of the importance of family values and employee well-being in the workplace. The findings suggest that while there is significant interest in family-friendly practices among medium and large enterprises, the process of implementing these initiatives is often chaotic and intuitive.

Research limitations/implications: Potential areas for further research should be oriented toward creating formal intervention strategies that promote family-friendly values in the workplace at the individual, group, and organizational levels. The study did not take into account the sectoral diversity of the survey sample analyzed, which may lead to the exclusion of important characteristics and needs specific to a particular industry.

Practical implications: The research provides valuable information on trends in the topic of family-friendly policies to HR practitioners and managers. Family-friendly working conditions contribute significantly to sustainable and successful economic development, while it is important to harmonize the wishes of employees with the operational requirements of the organization.

Social implications: Balancing work and family roles should be considered from the perspective of authentic leadership, emphasizing concern for employee well-being as an ethical issue and an element of employer brand value formation. It is possible to further apply the research results obtained as a starting point in the creation of transparent, formal, and tailored family-friendly policies in companies.

Originality/value: What is new in the paper? State the value of the paper and to whom it is addressed.

Keywords: enterprise family-friendly policy, pro-family policies, family-friendly workplace, person-work environment fit, work-family conflict.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The increasing dynamics of changes occurring almost in all areas of life, as is the case nowadays, intensify the importance of the practical utility of conducted scientific research in the field of management. Constructing research questions relating to any kind of work-life relationship without rejecting classical paradigms can lead to inconsistent research results to the current needs of the business environment. Therefore, there should be an attempt at continuous identification of employee needs, with all their complexity and diversity.

Introducing an interdisciplinary approach allowed for a holistic view of the theoretical complexity of the issues addressed.

Issues related to balancing work and family roles are gaining more attention in the scientific environment and are a challenge for modern enterprises. The COVID-19 pandemic period has fostered increased interest in this topic, during which the option of remote work or flexible working hours frequently emerged as a pivotal factor in employer decision to change their workplace.

A decade ago, attention was drawn to the complexity and multi-level nature of the work and family relationship, as well as the potential impact of organizational family-friendly policies (FFPs) on employee behaviors at work (Kelly et al., 2008; Beauregard, Henry, 2009). Many studies at that time focused on the occupational situation of working single parents, dual-earner couples, and, fragmentarily, adults who are employed while also providing care for elderly or disabled family members (Neal, Hammer, 2007). Work-family conflict was indicated as a source of stress and even a strong factor influencing the labor market, employee health, and family functioning (Greenhause, Allen, Spector, 2006; Grzywacz, Bass, 2003), including decisions related to parenthood (Gornick, Meyers, 2003; Stone, 2007). Since then, the nature of family life has undergone drastic changes, and enterprises are making efforts to adapt their strategies to meet the new expectations of employees related to family life. An increased demand for innovation in solutions stimulates the ongoing transformation of work methods and accelerates automation and digitization. Simultaneously, there is a high demand for skilled workers whose requirements regarding the work environment are increasing (Antal, Sodexo, 2023).

The aim of the theoretical and cognitive part is to systematize knowledge on family-friendly policies of enterprises, with particular emphasis on the potential benefits of their application. The aim of the empirical part of the article is to identify and classify innovative family-friendly activities implemented in enterprises. The research problem is formulated: What family-friendly activities have been implemented in enterprises in Poland? The formulated objectives formed the basis for the choice of research methods. Qualitative research, consisting of content analysis, was conducted on a group of 140 companies operating in Poland. The introduction of an interdisciplinary approach allowed for a holistic view of the theoretical complexity of the issues involved.

2. Organizational family-friendly policies

Organizational family-friendly policies (FFP) encompass a range of organizational practices and benefits designed to help employees harmonize their work responsibilities with family commitments. (Lee, Hong, 2011; Masterson et al., 2021). These policies most commonly include flexible forms and organization of work (Lewis, 1997; Beigi, Shirmohammadi, Stewart, 2018), projects supporting parents in childcare, offering social benefits, various forms of leave and days off, as well as other entitlements aimed at supporting employees in coping with the challenges of family life (Grag, Agrawal, 2020). Research suggests that implementing family-friendly policies in organizations can have a positive impact on broader productivity growth through:

- achieving a balance between work and private life (Ronda et al., 2016),
- preventing job burnout (Troger, 2019)
- increase creativity and productivity (Troger, 2019),
- employee attachment to the organization and reducing turnover (Garg, Agrawal, 2020),
- provide support to secure continuity and efficiency and possibly strengthen the human capital formation process (Michalski, 2022),
- increasing job satisfaction (Sanchez et al., 2018; Yadav, Sharma, 2021).

FFP are also analyzed in terms of their impact on organizational outcomes, engaging employees by minimizing the conflict between both roles (Hammer et al., 2005, p. 801). Nevertheless, these associations are confined to researchers' concerns, as definitive confirmation of these correlations has yet to be achieved. Moreover, the conceptualization of balance, defined as the absence of role conflict, has faced criticism due to the variable, individual levels of engagement in each role, which may not inherently lead to balance (Hirschi, Schockle, Zacher, 2018). Other studies indicate that potential role conflict is a significant concept in shaping family-oriented management concepts, but it is not applicable to those focused on achieving balance between these roles (Wayne et al., 2017).

FFP is also perceived to promote gender diversity and equality in the workplace (Łapniewska, 2014), contributing to the formation of an inclusive and supportive organizational culture (Bae, Skaggs, 2017). Offering a comprehensive FFP in the workplace can yield positive effects not only for the direct recipients but also for employees who are not their beneficiaries. This is attributed to the message conveyed to employees, which is interpreted as a sign of care for members of the organization (Grover, Crooker, 1995; Yadav, Sharma, 2021).

It is important to emphasize that the effective implementation of FFP necessitates aligning the organizational culture and revising the employer's value system. This shift entails challenging traditional work models and embracing a more supportive and favorable approach (Leung, Kam-wah, 2012). FFP is not a universal solution and may require many negotiations leading to agreements on defining boundaries between work and family life to effectively meet

the diverse needs of employees (Khol, Effendi, 2021). Furthermore, it is necessary to separate FFP from other workplace practices to better understand its specific impact on employee perceptions and experiences and to monitor the effectiveness of these programs.

The presented critical literature review points to the interdisciplinary approach and theoretical complexity of the organizational family-friendly policy construct. Moreover, it extends beyond legally regulated solutions outlined in the Labor Code, which may pose challenges for HR departments and entire organizations. However, the growing interest in this topic underscores the increasing need to systematize knowledge and discern potential practical implications.

A state-of-the-art literature review (SotA) enables the identification of a contemporary perspective on the analyzed phenomenon and provides directions for future research (Erin, Barry, 2022, p. 284). Drawing upon the SotA literature review, the author conducted an analysis of the evolution of interest in family-friendly practices by querying the Scopus database using the search strategy ("family friendly" OR "profamily" OR "work-family" OR "family-work"), restricting the search to English-language articles published within the last decade (2013-2023). The examination of scholarly publications within the Scopus database yielded 1722 relevant publications. Figure 1 illustrates key statistics pertaining to the evolution of interest in family-friendly practices in scholarly publications.
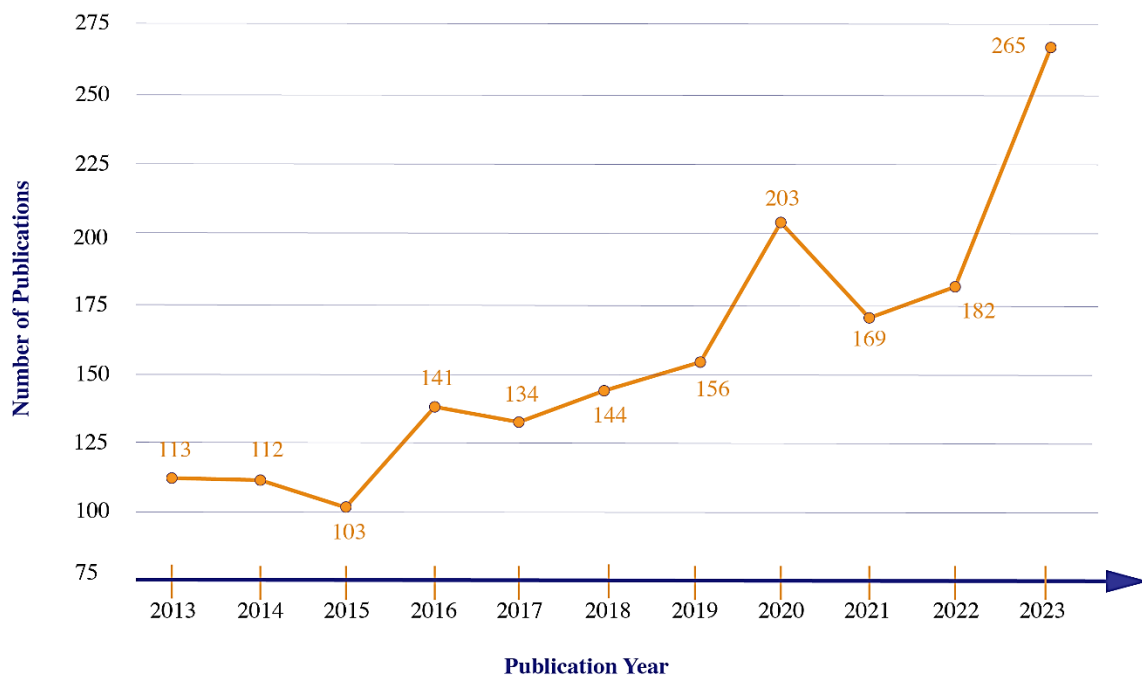

Figure 1. The number of scientific publications containing the keywords "family friendly", "profamily", and "work-family" in the Scopus database from 2013 to 2023.

Source: own compilation based on Scopus data (www.scopus.com, January 24, 2024).

Majority of the chosen publications are related to business, management and accounting (51.8%), with social sciences (19%), psychology (13.4%), economics (6.3%), and decision-making (3.4%) (www.scopus.com, January 24, 2024). The increasing interest highlights the

potential practical significance of the research and could help fill existing gaps in the literature of management science.

As the presentation and analysis of various approaches and definitions are not the primary focus of this study, Table 1 presents only a select few definitions that the author believes accurately capture the key elements of organizational FFPs.

Table 1.
Overview of Selected Definitions of Family-Friendly Organizational Policies

Author	Definition
C. Masterson, K. Sugiyama, J. Ladge (2021)	"A formal organizational policy that includes services, benefits, and perks designed to reduce work-family conflict for employees and/or support their family roles outside of the workplace"
S.J. Lambert, H. Gray (2002)	"A package of practices through which an organization promotes its caring and positive image and, as a result, can become more attractive to potential employees"
N.K. Frye, J.K. Breaugh (2004)	„Practices that support and integrate employees' work and family roles"

Source: own work based on literature review.

The cited definitions indicate a set of factors that constitute the conditions for comprehensive organizational solutions within FFP:

- Formal: provisions regarding family-friendly actions should be described in internal documents regulating the scope of services, benefits, and allowances, specifying their sources of funding, beneficiaries, and implementation procedures.
- Image-related: recognition of family values as part of a strategy focused on shaping the employer's brand image as a good place to work, communicated externally and internally within the organization.
- Integrative: family-friendly practices perceived as important tools for achieving equal opportunities and creating a supportive organizational culture, as well as promoting a non-discriminatory workplace for women and men.
- Systemic: should be the result of long-term decisions made at the strategic level of the organization.

3. Research methods

The premise for using qualitative research is the inadequately developed or lacking theory concerning the phenomenon under investigation. The aim is to capture the experiences of the researched subjects, categorize them, and interpret them (Graebner et al., 2012). Due to the flexible nature of qualitative research, it requires presenting the context of the analyzed phenomena for better understanding and analysis of the results.

The research questions were formulated according to the PO (population-outcome) model, the assumptions of which focus on descriptive estimative parameters (Lenart-Gansiniec, 2021). Such formulated research questions will direct the analysis towards examining the current shape of pro-family policy in Polish enterprises and identifying specific family-related actions undertaken by these organizations.

The study focuses on answering research questions through the application of qualitative methods, involving content analysis using the MAXQDA software. The first phase of the research process schema (Figure 3) involves a critical analysis of the subject literature, encompassing the essence of family-friendly organizational practices.
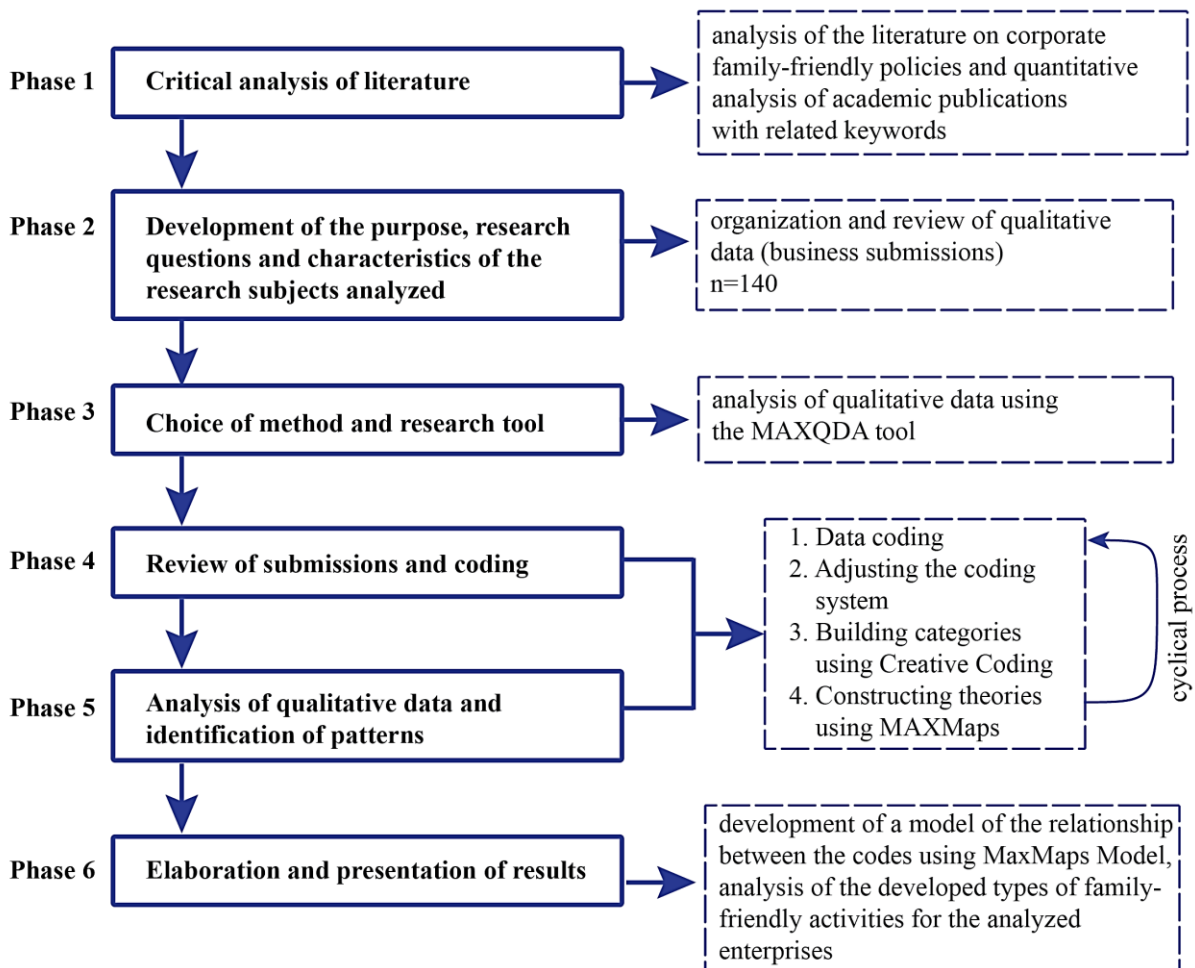

Figure 2. Research Process Schema.

Source: own elaboration.

In the next phase, the qualitative data (company submissions) were organized and reviewed, describing actions in five competition categories: implemented solutions regarding work mode and schedule, achievements in employment, new forms of communication with employees, solutions regarding remuneration, and implemented ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) solutions. To identify actions with a pro-family character or those clearly intended to support employees in reconciling their work and family roles, a qualitative analysis was

conducted using the MAXQDA tool. In an analysis based on grounded theory, the author examines the data by carefully reviewing the text, coding emerging themes using custom keywords or phrases, hierarchically grouping codes, and categorizing concepts by identifying relationships between them (phase 4 and 5). This process can be repeated multiple times until certainty is achieved regarding the completeness of the applied codes. The categories (codes and subcodes) created in this process, as well as the definition of existing connections between them, may form the basis for developing a new theory (maxqda.com, February 1, 2024).

The study covered 140 companies, all of which participated in the first edition of the "Pracodawca Rzeczpospolitej" competition organized by the newspaper "Rzeczpospolita" (rp.pl, January 31, 2024). The study was conducted from September to October 2023.
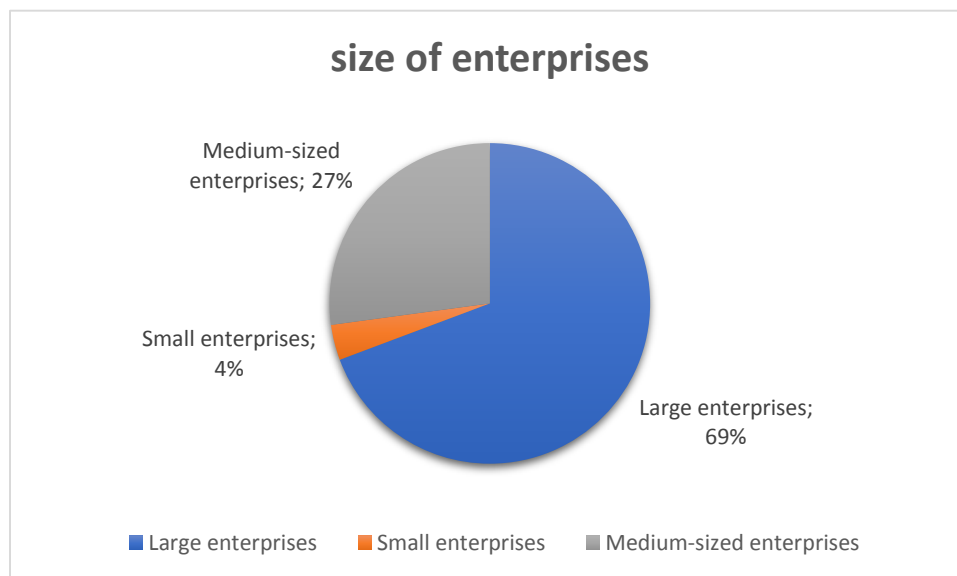

Figure 3. Structure of analyzed companies by employment size.

Source: Own elaboration.

The vast majority of entities were large (69%) and medium-sized (27%) enterprises (Fig. 3), which, given their characteristics (diversity of staff, high level of formalization, financial complexity, more frequent exposure to public opinion), provides an opportunity to comprehensively design an effective family-friendly programs.

4. Results

Qualitative research covers a wide range of research types. Supporting the process of qualitative data analysis with computer software is a relatively new area of method development. The author conducted a computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data, using the MAXQDA tool. The main functionality of the program is the ability to assign a code (category) to a selected part of the data. Thanks to coding, it is possible to further manage the data by,

among other things, carrying out quantitative text analysis, links between codes or visualization of results. The organization of the code system consists in their grouping and hierarchization (creation categories of groups or codes and sub-codes). It is also optional to assign weights to individual codes and to add comments both for an individual code and for the entire analyzed passage or source (Kuckartz, 2019). The program can also support the process of ongoing mixed methods research. However, this functionality requires a detailed definition of the source data by means of specifying different types of variables. In the process of analyzing qualitative data, 319 text fragments were marked, which were descriptions of individual family-friendly activities implemented by the group of analyzed enterprises. On average, there were 2.27 implemented family-friendly activities per enterprise. The phase involving analysis of the text, as suggested by the software's authors, was repeated twice, which gave the opportunity to modify the created codes and sub-codes, their names, and in the case of significant similarities - to combine several codes into one. This yielded 7 main categories of family-friendly activities implemented by companies, which are shown in Figure 4.
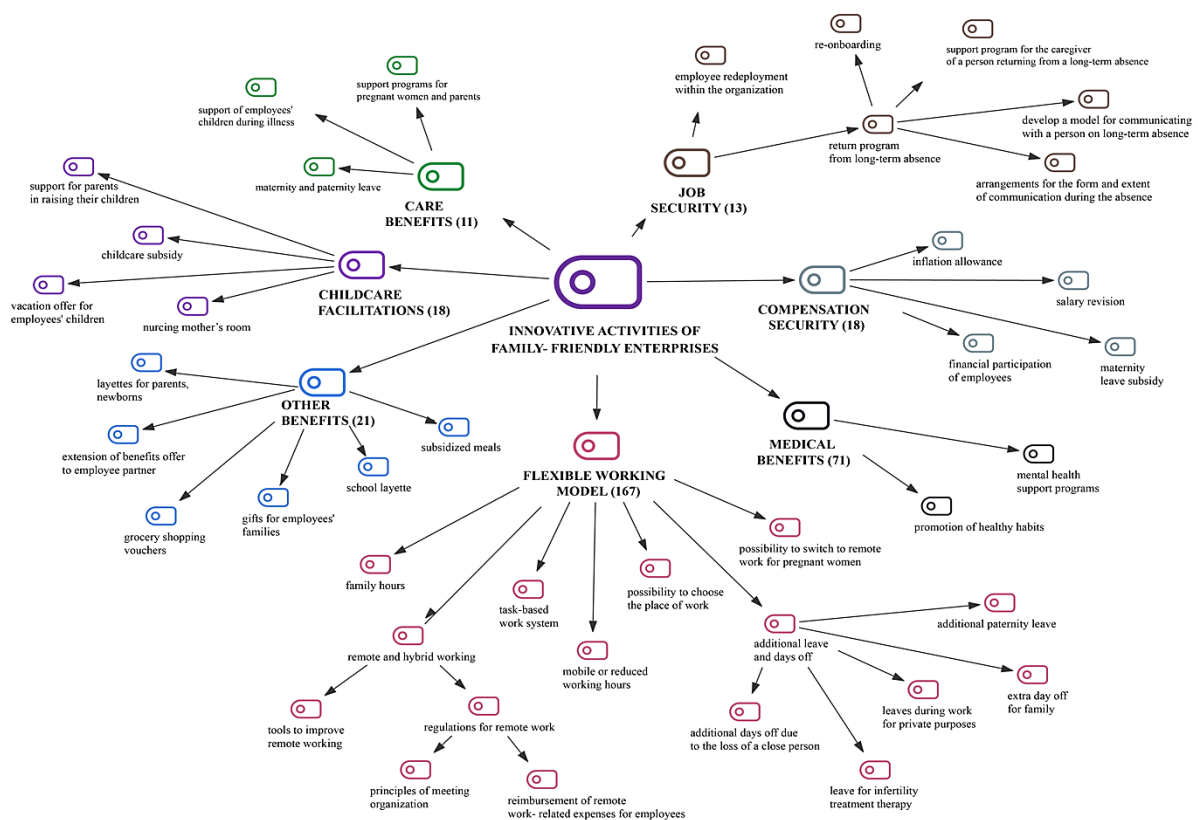

Figure 4: Model of relationships (MaxMaps Model) between codes indicating types of family-friendly activities in the analyzed enterprises.

Source: own development using MAXQDA program.

The largest group were practices oriented toward making the work model more flexible. Within this category, employers most often offered employees the possibility of remote or hybrid work, as well as flexible working hours. The availability of these solutions depended on

the nature of the tasks performed, while emphasizing that the introduction of such initiatives was aimed at facilitating harmonization between the various professional and personal commitments of employees.

Responding to the needs of employees, the bank decided to introduce the possibility of remote and hybrid work. Employees, as far as the specifics of the position allow, themselves choose in which mode they want to work - fully remote, hybrid or stationery.

Mobile working hours give parents more freedom to organize their work during the day. The company, on the other hand, gains more motivated employees who are satisfied with their work and perform their duties better.

The second most common was the group of medical benefits. A common feature of the solutions in this category was the coverage of medical benefits, including mental health support programs, not only for the company's employees, but also for their family members:

Every employee regardless of grade level is covered by a very broad medical package along with his or her entire family, no matter how large.

Employees are entitled to 2 days of additional paid leave if they lose a child through miscarriage. This leave is granted to both female employees who have lost a child in such a situation, and to employees whose spouse or partner has had a miscarriage.

Within the categories related to building a sense of stability and security, most companies have revitalized salaries and expanded programs to support the return of employees after long-term absences and those aimed at reducing employee turnover:

Any such person choosing to take parental leave is guaranteed 100 percent of base pay. Therefore, regardless of the decision of which parent takes such leave, he or she will receive full pay.

Defined the rules for onboarding employees again depending on the length of absence, consisting of, among other things: inviting the returning employee to lunch, presenting the changes in the team and the company, reviewing salaries and introducing the principle of "soft landing", i.e. the possibility of lowering KPIs, reducing FTEs, working remotely altogether, verifying competencies, completing subject knowledge, visiting IT to verify accesses and handing the necessary equipment for work, assigning Buddies up to 3 months.

Within the category of childcare benefits and childcare support programs, there were solutions to expand the scope of mandatory benefits under labor laws regarding the length of parental leave or days off for childcare. Innovative measures in this area were implemented by 9 companies, which decided to offer educational support offerings on raising children and training on building family ties. The specific nature, due to the high sensitivity of the aspects addressed, requires high qualifications of HR departments and organizational maturity:

Thematic webinars during Diversity Days on the rights of both parents and legal changes related to the WLB directive, as well as business competencies that fathers can develop while caring for and building a relationship with their children.

Within the framework of the Home Academy of the Future, mini-lectures were conducted for parents to inspire them to wisely support their child in developing self-esteem.

The launch of the Parents Academy webinar series with female experts in response to the needs, challenges faced by parents.

Summarizing the sets of innovative family-friendly activities of enterprises, it was also observed that:

- 30% of medium and large enterprises recognize family values and promote family-friendly solutions in the workplace, incorporating them into employer brand archetypes and elements of organizational culture;
- 1 in 6 medium- and large-sized companies extend the availability of benefits to employee family members;
- 1 in 3 organizations that offer remote or hybrid work have developed regulations for working away from the office, in which they set out, among other things, rules for arranging meetings and a system for reimbursing expenses resulting from remote work (most often in the form of a lump sum);
- 6% of large and medium-sized companies have joined the "two hours for the family" campaign popularized by the Humanites Foundation, under which an employee can limit work time in favor of spending it with family and friends (2godzinydlarodziny.pl., 5.02.2024).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The author presents a contemporary approach to family-friendly practices in companies, identifying potential theoretical and empirical values that are currently fragmented. The interdisciplinary perspective of the qualitative analyses allows the results to be interpreted at multiple levels and relating to different stakeholder groups. Qualitative research was conducted through content analysis using MAXQDA software. The categories of activities undertaken as part of the organization's family-friendly policy were developed in accordance with the methodology of grounded theory and based on the analysis of the literature. The results of the qualitative data analysis indicate that there is significant interest in family-friendly practices among medium and large enterprises. However, the process of implementing solutions aimed at supporting employees in balancing work and family challenges is chaotic and intuitive. Few companies indicated that surveys had been conducted prior to the implementation of support programs (7%), which may result in a low level of usefulness of these solutions and, in extreme cases, lead to a sense of injustice among employees who are not naturally the beneficiaries of these solutions. Similar research conclusions were obtained by Guedes et al. (2023), who, in a study devoted to the impact of FFPs on organizational performance, indicated

that such a possibility exists, while highlighting the research limitations in the form of the growing (but still small) number of companies offering family-friendly benefit packages and the low awareness of those companies that have introduced family-friendly solutions based on intuitive assumptions. Which proves that there is a research gap and, more importantly, a practical need to structure approaches to family-friendly practices in enterprises.

Family-friendly activities taken by companies focused mainly on 7 areas: flexible work arrangements, medical benefit offerings, salary security, childcare support, non-wage benefits and care benefits. The research provides valuable information on trends in the topic of family-friendly policies to HR practitioners, managers, and researchers. Potential areas for further research should be oriented toward creating formal intervention strategies that promote family-friendly values in the workplace at the individual, group, and organizational levels. Above all, balancing work and family roles should be considered from the perspective of authentic leadership, emphasizing concern for employee well-being as an ethical issue and an element of employer brand value formation. It is possible to further apply the research results obtained as a starting point in the creation of transparent, formal, and tailored family-friendly policies in companies.

Research indicates that the implementation of family-friendly policies in an organization can have beneficial practical implications. Family-friendly working conditions contribute significantly to sustainable and successful economic development, while it is important to harmonize the wishes of employees with the operational requirements of the organization (Kearney, 2010).

However, it is worth noting that the survey has some methodological limitations, such as the limited scope of sampling, which may affect the overall representativeness of the results obtained. Despite the diligence and reliability of the research process, there are aspects that should be paid attention to when implementing the research results in business practice, among others, the size of the enterprise or the employment structure.

The study also does not consider the sectoral differences of the research sample analyzed, which may lead to the omission of important specificities and needs related to the sector of activity. Theoretical limitations should also be considered, which, due to the ambiguity of the terminology used in the context of the issue under study, may not guarantee precision in the classification and interpretation of results.

Due to the qualitative nature of the research presented, the conclusions need to be confirmed by conducting quantitative research. Potential further directions for empirical research, inspired by the presented results, could include assessing the impact of family-friendly activities on organizational performance. It would also be valuable to conduct surveys on a group of employees to identify the impact of these activities on their organizational behaviors.

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