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The pros and cons of employer-sponsored egg freezing



**Ruth Hogan**

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When Sheryl Sandberg announced the introduction of sponsored egg freezing at Facebook in 2014, some criticised the move as a ploy to drive women to delay motherhood until it suited the business.

But a recent study by Monash University in Australia signals a change in attitudes, with almost half of 656 Victorian women surveyed believing it appropriate to offer egg freezing as an employee benefit.

Facebook and Apple paved the way and today around one in five large US companies offer female employees financial support to access egg freezing, with experts predicting Australia could soon follow suit.

Molly Johnston, a postdoctoral researcher, assistant lecturer and lead author of the Monash study, said that while some survey participants believed employer-sponsored egg freezing gave women more reproductive and career options, others were concerned about putting this power in employers' hands.

“Some people thought that family and workplace should remain separate because the employers have a conflict of interest in that they're motivated to keep women in the workforce, and by offering egg freezing perhaps they could be pressuring women to stay in the workforce and delay having children to avoid paying maternity leave or organising a flexible work arrangement,” Johnston told *Inside Retail*.

“There are concerns about putting pressure on women to make that decision, but conversely, if they don't decide to freeze their eggs, some feel there could be negative repercussions associated with that such as being overlooked for a promotion, for example.”

Of those surveyed, 27 per cent said it would be inappropriate for employers to pay for egg freezing, and nearly a third (31 per cent) were unsure. Older participants and those employed part-time were significantly less supportive of the idea.

Some felt that if employers offer generous parental leave and family support policies there wouldn't be a need to delay motherhood, however, Johnson notes that will only help some.

“There is obviously significant room to improve family-friendly policies, but that's only going to help the people who have children. For those who don't have a partner at that point in their life or are unable to have children because they don't want to be a single parent, having access to parental leave isn't

helpful to them, whereas having access to egg freezing might be something that is more appealing and may help them have children later on.”

‘A win-win’

Some women considered employer-sponsored egg freezing could be a win-win for employers and employees but Johnston suggests the government could regulate the conditions in which it is offered.

“There is an opportunity to help women overcome financial barriers, increase their reproductive options and reduce the pressure experienced by women to choose between having a career and having children,” she said.

“Women need to understand the benefits, risks and limitations of egg freezing, feel no pressure to take up the offer, and if they do, it shouldn’t have any negative impact on and is accompanied by other family-friendly work policies.”

Karen Gately, an HR specialist and founder of Corporate Dojo, told *Inside Retail* that employer-sponsored egg freezing could be included under a broader category of supporting the health and well being of people.

“It doesn’t have to be a standalone program ... if we just have a health and wellbeing benefit that people can draw on if they have special needs it gets away from that idea that it’s just for one particular gender,” Gately told *Inside Retail*, saying this could extend to IVF programs,

While there are no obligations on employers to provide such assistance, Gately believes helping team members through life challenges sends a strong message about values and is likely to benefit the company in the long run.

“Employers are more likely to earn the respect but also emotional investment from their people in being part of your team if we are being generous. If we are demonstrating that we actually care about you as a human, we will support you where we can, then people are more likely to be engaged and are likely to stay,” she said.

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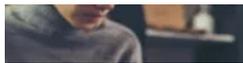
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