

Experiences of Career and Family from a Working Mothers Perspective

Naomi McGrath 1603808

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts degree (Social Science Specialization) at DBS School of Arts, Dublin.

Supervisor: Dr Niall Hanlon
Head of Department: Dr Bernadette Quinn

April 2014
Department of Social Science
DBS School of Arts

Table of Contents

<u>Contents</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Abstract</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Introduction</u>	<u>4</u>
The History of Women in the Family	
Women in the World of Work & Education	
Equality of Caring and Traditional Sex Roles	
Gender Divide	
Feminists Perspective	
Choice	
Conclusion	
<u>Methodology</u>	<u>17</u>
Apparatus	
Participants	
Research Design	
Ethical Considerations	
<u>Findings</u>	<u>21</u>
<u>Discussion</u>	<u>32</u>
Limitations	
Conclusion	
<u>References</u>	<u>40</u>
<u>Appendix-copy of consent form</u>	<u>42</u>
Copy of Consent Form	
Interview Schedule	

Acknowledgements

Foremost, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my research supervisor, Dr Niall Hanlon for his continued support and advice throughout the research process. I would also like to thank Dr Annette Jorgensen for her assistance. My sincere thanks are also extended to the participants who gave of their valuable time to assist me in this research. And finally, thank you to my family for all their support.

Abstract

The research strived to gain a deeper and better understanding of women's perception's and experiences as mothers and professionals from their point of view. The research was qualitative in nature and the data was gathered using a series of semi structured interviews. Six purposively selected participants were interviewed and the gathered data was examined using thematic analysis. A series of themes was extracted and discussed. The findings exposed the complexity of women's experiences as mothers and career professionals. The literature reviewed displayed that there is significant research being done on women in the work force and the provision of fair maternity rights. However, more work is needed to explore the personal effects combining work and motherhood has on women themselves. The report found that women may find themselves having to choose between advancing in their careers and taking a conscious step away to raise young children. The research also reflected that women often automatically and instinctively take on the main caring roles, bowing to the set gender norms and often sacrificing their own advancement. The current social and policy provisions that are in place in Ireland require much more Governmental focus on the provision of childcare in relation to maternity and paternity benefits. The continued closing of the gender pay gap and genuine recognition of women's role in society is required.

Introduction

Currently in Ireland today there are approximately 975,000 women in the labour force (European Commission, 2013). The European Commission also reports that of these women over 500,000 of them also have children and have a dual role, encompassing the paid work and a caring role. Since the economic down turn took hold a shift has occurred in the labour market. The employment rate of men in Ireland has plummeted from 75% in pre-recession to 63.3% in 2011. While women's participation in the labour market has dropped slightly it was not at as a dramatic rate as our male contingent. From 2009, participation had dropped from approximately 60% to 56%. In 2011, 46.7% of those in employment were women (Central Statistics Office, 2011).

There has been much work done in Ireland over a number of decades to ensure women are more actively included in the work force. This shift from women being seen as only wives and mothers began to take effect with the abolition of the marriage bar in 1973, after the establishment of the Commission of the Status of Women in 1970. The commission's term of reference included the task of making recommendations on the steps necessary to ensure the participation of women on equal terms and conditions with men on the political, social, cultural and economic life of the country (Considine & Dukelow, 2009, p.52). While there has been an extensive effort to create balance between men and women, much research has been done suggesting that inequality and a gender divide still exists today for women in the working environment (Connolly, 2013). This research will aim to explore how professional women in their experiences perceive becoming a mother has affected their career and family choices.

History of Women in the Family

The Irish Family has undergone many significant changes in the past fifty years. O'Sullivan in her work on Gender and Work in Ireland suggest that the Irish work force has been revolutionised over the past 25 years with married women entering the work force in much larger numbers than seen previously. Women began to move away from the traditional roles and began taking up paid work, this trend began in the mid-1980's, escalated sharply during the Celtic Tiger boom period (1995-2005) and is currently experiencing a period of retrenchment (O'Sullivan, 2012).

However, this has been a slow process in Irish development. Ireland has had many external influences, such as foreign rule and the strong influence of the Catholic Church on family life. Hamilton posits that "in the period from 1920's to 1970's, women were persistently represented as marginal in the workforce. Repeated government reports and policy documents, as well as more popular writing, declared that women's work did not demand skill or strength, it required the exercise of feminine characteristics such as dexterity and maternal qualities" (O'Connor & Wright, 2013). This assumption of the nature of female work in all likelihood for most women was inaccurate. Women's labour was often very physical and tiresome household duties. (Considine, 2009, p. 34). O'Sullivan argues that Connells theory on the structural components on gender inequality is a good fit for the Irish model. With the Irish constitution specifically highlighting and framing women's roles within the family. In article 41.2, the state recognises a women's role in the home as support to the state as a whole. This pigeon holing of women did not begin to change until the first steps began with The Irish Women's Movement and the second wave of feminism (Considine, 2009, p.53). "In the early 1970's the Irish Women's Liberation Movement campaigned for women to be granted the same rights and opportunities as men, including the removal of the Marriage Bar which forced married women out of paid employment, and the introduction of

equal pay” (O’Sullivan, 2012). O’Sullivan further asserts that there are other factors also at play, a decline in the power of the Catholic Church, improved education for women, decrease in fertility rates and an increase in the cost of mortgages, which in turn created an increased demand for labour and a need for the inclusion of more women in the work force.

Women in the World of Work & Education

It is only in relatively recent years that married women in Ireland have en masse found themselves in the paid labour environment. Historically, the role of women in Ireland was clearly defined by State and Church as the homemaker and primary carer (Considine and Dukelow, 2009, p. 28). Jacinta Byrne-Doran in her work on Working Mothers in Ireland makes reference to the fact that the Irish Constitution itself, in Article 41 places the woman and mother at the centre of the family, referring to the traditional family. Her suggestion is that while the nature of the Irish family has changed in contemporary society “the wording of Article 41 of the Irish Constitution still implies an obligation on women who are mothers to adhere to the socially constructed role of the stay-at-home-mother, and to be responsible for the private sphere of home and family life, including child care and housework” (Byrne-Doran, 2012).

As mentioned 46.7% of people currently in employment are women. A recent report from the Central Statistics Office on Men and Women in Ireland has found that women tend to be more highly educated than their male counterparts (Central Statistics Office, 2011). Women have a much lower dropout rate from education in comparison to men. “The school leavers rate among women aged 18-24 in 2010 was 8.4%, which was much lower than the male rate of 12.6%. Women are more likely to have a third level qualification, with over half (53%) of women aged 25-34 having a third-level qualification compared with nearly four out

of ten men (39%) in this age group (Central Statistics Office, 2011). Improved education for women and an increased labour need in Ireland meant that more women than previously seen entered the work force or in some cases continued on with their education. In some cases this saw women delaying getting married in their early 20's and having children at a later age (Russell, et al, 2009). An upturn in the Irish economic situation, more influence from Europe and a shift away from religion began to change Irish society and families.

While Irish women have succeeded in becoming more educated this is not reflected in their rates of pay and job opportunities. There have been significant improvements in closing the gap in pay between men and women; however, there is more work to be done. Before the inclusion of Ireland in the EEC women earned as little as 47% of male earnings, this gradually changed. "In 2009, men in Ireland had an average income of €34, 317 while the average for women was €25, 103, or 73.1 per cent of a man's income. By 2011, when the figures are adjusted to take account of the average hours spent in paid employment, women's average hourly income was about 94 per cent (European Commission, 2013).

Equality of Caring & Traditional Sex Roles

"Despite their increased participation rate in the workforce, women are still underrepresented in top management positions" (O'Connor and Wright, 2013). There are a number of factors that impact on women's progression to the top positions. O'Connor and Wright in their study on Female Career Progression and Maternity leave suggests that even though there have been advancements in maternity and parental leave, with parental leave now applying to both men and women this has not served to close the gap in expected caring duties, to bring more balance between mothers and fathers. "As outlined in Focus Consultancy (2008), the fact that parental leave is unpaid, results in the gendered pattern of

parental childcare provision remaining largely unchanged. Women continue to be the predominant care givers and the policy system reinforces the father's lack of involvement in the rearing of children" (O'Connor and Wright, 2013). Since the 1st March 2007 women are entitled to 26 weeks maternity leave and a further 16 weeks unpaid maternity leave. In the developed economies and EU region there has been a gradual shift towards longer maternity leave. Paternity leave however is "not stipulated by international convention. Periods of paternity leave are much shorter than for maternity leave" (O'Connor and Wright, 2013). Also, currently in Ireland there is no legal entitlement to paternity leave, it is given to fathers only at the discretion of their employers.

This level of imbalance in the statutory rights given to men and women surrounding maternity leave and paternity leave serves to remove choice from the equation. Women are more likely to have to take a step back from their paid roles to continue with the primary care of children, leaving the door open for men to increase their involvement and thus progress more quickly not just to higher paid positions but to more senior levels within the work place. The continuation of the traditional sex roles to a degree with in Irish society can in itself create a level of prejudice or a predisposition to regard a certain group in a certain way; this often becomes the justification for discriminatory behaviour (Kornblum & Julian, 2010, p258). The perception can often be that the traditional roles set down for women are somehow inferior to those carried out by men. This belief can in turn sow the seeds for family and work place inequality. "The prevailing division of labour between the sexes has led to men and women assuming unequal positions in terms of power, prestige and wealth" (Giddens, 2009, p614).

Gender Divide

“Gender concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females. Gender is linked to socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity” (Giddens, 2009, p601). Giddens in his chapter on Sexuality and Gender outlines the meaning of one’s gender. Gender refers to how individuals are perceived in a social capacity and the traits of male or femaleness that creates peoples gender identities. “Sociologist who study gender relations call attention to persisting patterns of male dominance throughout the institutions of modern society” (Kornblum, 2010, p 266). These patterns of male dominance may lead to women having unequal access to opportunities’ in their lives that in turn affect the potential they have to progress. (Kornblum, 2010, p 266). There are a number of schools of thought on how gender is constructed. Is it purely a biological function or are men and women’s genders heavily dependent on socialisation, or is it a combination of both. There are obvious arguments to support the biological differences between men and women. “Some authors hold that aspects of human biology ranging from hormones to chromosomes to brain size to genetics, are responsible for innate differences in behaviour between men and women” (Giddens, 2009, p601). However the biological view on its own does not take into account the role that social interactions play in how human behaviour is formed. Giddens continues in this chapter to discuss the gender socialisation. This is explained as the learning of gender roles with the help of social agencies such as the family and the media. It stresses the difference between sex and gender, i.e. a child is born with their sex but their gender is formed.

The suggestion is that boys are socialised to be the dominant, provider and displays of what is considered to be maleness are rewarded. On the other hand, girls are expected to be the gentle care giver with the assumption these traits will serve a women well when she becomes a mother. While, many female traits are gender specific learned

behaviours, Walker and Ching-Yu in their study on Maternal Empathy found that mothers display a natural empathy to their children. The suggestion is that this inbuilt empathy is subject to external stressors, but as its simplest it helps mothers connect with and protect their offspring (Walker & Ching-Yu, 2007). However, the learned behaviours surrounding gender defines in many cases not only who has primary care for offspring but also the types of jobs or careers men and women decide to pursue. It is commonly understood that women have a much higher tendency to seek out careers in caring professions such as nursing or childcare jobs as well as office or administrative positions. While the male cohort steer more towards construction, sciences or IT related roles.

The 2011 government study on Men and Women in Ireland found that “most workers in the Health and Education sectors are women while most workers in Agriculture, Construction and Transport are men” (Central Statistics Office, 2011). The same report found that of both men and women working in Ireland in 2011, nearly a quarter of women (23.7%) were in professional occupations and just over a fifth (20.9%) in administrative and secretarial occupations. Nearly a quarter of men (24.7%) in employment in 2011 were in skilled trade occupations while 15% were employed in professional occupations. While these figures show that there are a very high proportion of women working in a professional capacity, this study goes on to show that of those in the work force in 2011 only 44.9% of women held positions such as managers, directors or senior officials as opposed to men who held 93.1% of similar positions. The report determined that that the sectors with the most gender-balanced workforces in Ireland in 2010 were administrative and support services, wholesale and retail trade and financial, insurance and real estate activities. It found that Ireland is more or less on a par with the EU in relation to the percentage of women employed in each economic sector, with the exception of agriculture, forestry and fishing where only 11% of employees in Ireland were women compared with a much greater number of 37.2% in

the EU. This continues to demonstrate that Ireland and Irish society while it has modernised massively in the past few decades still has inclinations toward the more traditional atypical gender roles. As previously mentioned Connell's work on gender inequality found that "in much of the industrialised world men still have much greater access than women to cultural prestige, political authority, corporate power, individual wealth, and material comforts" (Kornblum, 2010, p266).

Feminist Perspective

The patterns above do seem to display a contradictory point of view to the aspiration and hopes of women who found themselves involved in the feminist struggles of the past, such as the suffrage movements. Feminism did help to highlight and give a voice to women who often accepted their "role" in the family unit without question and fitted into the traditional gender norm. From a liberal feminist perspective it is argued that women's experiences have improved. Feminism has helped to point out the burden that can be placed on women to be the homemaker, career, cleaner and wife and has helped to build a more balanced environment within families. However, while the feminist movements have made the world more aware of "woman's issues" inequality within families and work places still exist. There are a number of forms of feminism from liberal feminism, Marxist feminism to radical feminism all with contrasting and sometimes opposing views of the deeply imbedded social processes that impact on gender inequality. Betty Friedan and her work on the "Feminine Mystique" in the 1960's brought about a resurgence in the feminist movement bringing with it widespread social change (Kornblum, 2010, p282). Progress in the women's right movement has been made across the world, however as noted above there are still extensive inequalities existing for women in today's society.

The National Women's Council Ireland and the NWCI Strategic Plan 2013-2015 continues to push women's rights in all forums. In 2011 the National Women's Council made a submission to the human rights and equality commission to further highlight the inequalities facing women in Ireland. "The priority issues for women's equality and human rights are focused around the following issues, the low levels of women in key decision making arenas. The impact of care responsibilities on women's participation in society and the impact the recession and austerity cuts on women and the women's sector" (National Women's Council of Ireland, 2011). The same report stresses that the NWCI are "particularly concerned with the lack of understanding regarding women's inequality within a wider equality and human rights agenda. The suggestion is that further research is needed in order to fully understand the depth of discrimination against and oppression of women in Irish society.

A Fawcett Society report by Dr. Katerine Rake and Abigail Rotheroe on women and the recession suggests that the work and advancements that have taken place in the labour market will be negatively impacted in light of the current economic recession. (Rake and Rotheroe, 2009) The Rake and Rotheroe study found that a number of factors create a situation where women are more negatively impacted by a recession than their male counterparts. Women are less financially secure than men at all stages of life. They are more vulnerable to domestic violence and more often than not take on the main caring role within the family unit. The cost of childcare and access to state benefits also plays a part in this complex balancing act. (Rake & Rotheroe, 2009). Rake's United Kingdom based study also highlights the issues women have in relation to maternity leave and job security and the over dependence on their employers sense of good will. The same report found that in the UK before the recession began, at least 30,000 women a year were losing their job simply because they were pregnant or on maternity leave. The recession will only heighten this fear

among women, which begs the question, do women really have a choice when it comes to work and family life balance. The current literature would suggest otherwise.

Choice

Are women really afforded a “choice” when it comes to work and family? Hoobler, Wayne & Lemon in their work on Bosses Perceptions of Family Work Conflict and Women’s Promotability made findings that suggest that women do experience more family-work conflict than men. “It could be that women are more likely to request informal accommodations for family life, or are more likely to talk about family considerations at work than are men, both possibilities having the unintended effect of making family demands more salient to their managers” (Hoobler, Wayne & Lemon, 2009). The suggestion being that women are being blocked from continued upward mobility due to the inherent need for them to take the lion’s share of the caring and family considerations. This cultural, societal or indeed self-imposed role distorts employer’s perceptions of female employees and their ability to balance both worlds. In order for women to actually have more choice Hoobler’s research aimed to educate managers on the balance between male and female perceptions on work life balance and to shake the belief that women are less promotable, poorer performers.

“As Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) stated, the women’s movements of the 60’s and 70’s in the United States brought revolutionary change in terms of women’s upward progression in organisations, but the bias supporting the glass ceiling today are much more subtle, multifaceted, and deeply imbedded than they were then. Today women encounter bias so rooted in systems that they may not even be noticed until they are eradicated” (Hoobler, 2009).

Jacinta Byrne-Doran further asserts that women who choose to be dedicated to their careers only account for 20% of women's preferences. "The remaining 60% of women fall into the category of 'adaptive' women who attempt to combine work and home commitments in their relationship with the labour market (Hakim, 2000). Blair-Loy (2006) considers motherhood through the prism of competing devotions. Based on qualitative interviews with working mothers, she identifies the ideologies around being 'a good mother' and 'a good worker' with the competing nature of these ideologies accounting for tension and distress in working mothers. The premise of competing devotions is also evident in the work of Hays (1996), who, in *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996), highlights the constraining power of 'good mother' premises in her thesis on intensive mothering" (Byrne-Doran, 2012). This study concluded that working mothers in Ireland will continue to challenge the socially constructed ideas of women's place and position in society, while negotiating the "webs of obligation and competing ideologies".

As mentioned there is a question mark over the idea of choice, do women really have a choice when it comes to career and child rearing. However, it could be easy to overlook the experiences of fathers within the family and their level of choice. As noted previously the gender roles remain clear within Ireland, these perceptions of roles continue to assert men as the breadwinner and provider. This gender paradigm does mean that men will work outside the home more than women, in turn meaning they will have less contact with their young children (Drew and Daverth, 2007). Drew and Daverth and their study on Work Life Balance and the experience of mothers and fathers did find however that it is the case that "despite the increasing participation and adaptability on the part of dual working mothers, there was little progress towards dual roles for fathers" (Drew and Daverth, 2007). The findings showed however that there was little desire amongst men for this to change.

Their choice may be to adhere to the gendered role of breadwinner as long as the mother will accept her gendered role as main caregiver (Drew and Daverth, 2007).

Conclusions of Literature Reviewed

Gender inequality and work place inequalities while it is better in Ireland than in many other countries is still an issue that needs much further research and highlighting. O'Connor and Wright in their work on Female Career Progression and Maternity Leave worked on their study to highlight the gender pay gaps in organisation as well as the lack of females in executive level positions in Ireland. This they assert is because of motherhood and the perceptions surrounding motherhood. Their most significant finding was that women's careers are impacted by having children because of their primary role in care giving and in turn women consciously decided to limit their career progression to focus on family commitments (O'Connor & Wright, 2013).

Jacinta Byrne-Doran's study on Working Mothers in Ireland attempted to identify themes pertaining to the lived experiences of working mothers in Ireland (Byrne-Doran, 2012). The main area of research here was on the balance that women require in their lives. "Working mothers were found to partake in daily reflective processes in addressing the demands of their work and home lives where communication with the support of partners was fundamental to their experience of balance" (Byrne-Doran, 2012). The findings of this study show that current social changes have impacted on the structure of the traditional family life and with a growing dependence on women to remain and maintain in the work force more stay at home fathers are emerging to further challenge gender roles.

There has been extensive research done in the CSO's 2011 study on Men and Women in Ireland again found that there continues to be socially constructed gender roles with in the labour force that both men and women adhere too. The study served to display that men do still have more opportunities for better pay and working conditions.

The National Women's Council in their Strategic Plan 2013-2015 continue to raise awareness of the many areas that lead to inequality for women and help to advise on the many contemporary levels of gender inequality. Rake and Rotheroe's study on women in the recession aim to remind us that the great work done to ensure women are included in the work force may be undid due to cuts to benefits and supports provided during the recession. This study helps to bring to the forefront the negative impact the recession may have on women and their decision around work and family.

Hoobler, Wayne and Lemon looked at the perceptions that bosses have on female employees and their ability in the work force. Their study did expose that women experience with the glass ceiling and person-job-fit and whether women's promotability is hampered by their bosses' perceptions that women experience greater family life conflict than men (Hoobler, 2009). It is clear from the literature reviewed that there are still perceptions and biases that continue to impact on women in society. The aim of the current study is to explore from the perspective of professional women how they perceive becoming mothers has affected their career. The aim is to build on the current suite of work and ensure that a deeper view of women's own experiences are recorded.

Methodology

The researcher's primary goal was to explore from women's personal perspectives how they perceive becoming a mother has affected them in their career and family life. In order to ensure appropriate data collection one to one interviews were carried out with participants. A qualitative design was adopted to ensure as much freedom of discussion as possible in order to assist the researcher in gathering women's feelings and perceptions of working and motherhood. "The qualitative research focuses on the perceptions and experiences of people and the way they make sense of their lives which means that researchers are interested in understanding both how things occur and why (Creswell, 2002, p.198). A quantitative approach to this study would not have served to provide the researcher with appropriately in-depth information due its statistical nature. "As the term suggests, quantitative methods try to measure social phenomena and will use mathematical models and, often, statistical analysis to explain them" (Giddens, 2009, p. 49).

Research Design

The proposed overall approach is data-led and qualitative in nature. To carry out a qualitative study semi-structured interviews will be used as the main approach with 6 female participants. A purposive sampling method was adopted this ensured that all participants are suitable to address the interview questions. The qualitative interview schedule of 12-16 questions was devised to address the general research question appropriately. Interviews will be conducted in a conversational style to allow the participants to volunteer as much information as possible. Each interview will be 40mins to 1hr in duration and all interviews are to be recorded on Dictaphone. Each participant should be briefed on the research topic prior to commencement of the interview. A pilot interview will be conducted in order to test the validity and flow of the questions. This approach provides the researcher

with the opportunity to explore in depth women's own perceptions of how motherhood has impacted on career.

In order to gain access to the required participants an initial email briefly explaining the proposed research project was sent to each person. This was followed up by a detailed email outlining the aim of the study and requesting their participation. Each participant along with the explanation of the study received a consent form and details of whom they should contact if they have further questions. On receipt of the participant's replies, interviews were set up and conducted at their convenience, in a suitably private environment.

Participants

An interview schedule, of in-depth semi structured interview was set up with the required research sample consisting of 6 women, all of whom are employed in professional careers. Each interview was carried out on one to one bases within the allotted time of 40 minutes to 1hour. A purposive sampling method was adopted in choosing participants. "Purposive sampling is described as a random selection of sampling units within the segment of the population with the most information on the characteristic of interest (Guarte & Barrios, 2006).The chosen participants are at varying levels within their careers, ranging from entry level to senior management positions. Participants were selected based on their participation in the work force as well as the fact they have at least one child. All participants are between the age of 28 and 60 years old allowing for a cross generational view of women's experiences of motherhood and working outside the home.

The chosen sample is all women who each have at least one child; all participants have also been in the work force in varying careers for a number of years. Each participant has a clear understanding of working as a professional as well as being a mother. Participant 1 is one of the mature participants; she works at a senior director level within education and has two grown up sons. Participant 2 falls in to the same age bracket as P1, she works as qualified accountant and also has two sons at college age. Participant 3 falls in the 30-35 age range and is currently working full time in the insurance industry, she has two small children. Participant 4 is under 30 with one small child and works as personal assistant. Participant 5 is also working full time in the medical field and is the mother to two small girls. Participant 6 is also working full time she has two adult children.

Apparatus

An interview schedule of 6 semi structured interviews was arranged with the willing participants. In order to accurately record each interview a Dictaphone was used. Each of the interviews was transcribed verbatim and the data was captured in QSR NVIVO 10 software. NVIVO 10 was used to sort the gathered data allowing the researcher to accurately analyse the gathered data thematically.

Ethical Considerations

The research could be of a sensitive nature for participants as it addresses family and work place situations, with this in mind the participants privacy and confidentiality is crucial and should be maintained. Consent forms were issued to participants prior to the commencement of interviews for completion. Participant's interviews are identifiable to the researcher by using P1, P2 and so on. No personal identifiable information will be printed in the completed research study. All data gathered is stored in a password protected folder or USB drive. As the topic addresses issues that may have affected or may in the future affect

one or more of the participant's choices in relation to family or job progression this may cause minimal levels of upset to participants. A detailed explanation of the topic was given to each participant before interviews took place. An information sheet explaining the study was issued to each participant along with the consent form. On completion of the interviews participants were given the opportunity to ask any question they had. Each participant was made aware of her right to withdraw from the interview process at any point.

Data Analysis

The most suitable method of analysis for the chosen area is thematic analysis; hence a qualitative data led thematic analysis method was adopted. QSR Nvivo 10 was used to sort, code and analyse themes. Thematic analysis “offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data” (Braun & Clark, 2012).

Findings

The primary focus of the research study was to explore and understand better the participant's experiences of motherhood and the impact that has had on their career and family choices. In order to gather this information, six in-depth, semi structured interviews were carried out. A thematic analysis of the data gathered revealed six main themes, Professional Success, Maternity Rights, Gender and Career Choice, Empathy, Love and Caring and Choice.

Professional Success

The theme of personal and professional success ran through each of the participants interviews. The research clearly showed that the idea of achieving professional success does not cease once women become mothers,

Of course everyone would like professional success in some way. If I am happy within my job, that's what professional success means to me, I haven't achieved it yet. I am content in my job, but I am not happy being content. I need a challenge. I wouldn't consider my job the ultimate goal, there is something better I can achieve and hopefully will in the future.

There was also across the research an emphasise put on the importance of recognition from employers surrounding the effort and work that women put into their careers and how they are rewarded for that. Participant 3 stressed the importance of personal fulfilment and recognition as an individual in combination with employer recognition,

Absolutely, being happy is very important but I also feel that recognition from your peers and your managers is extremely important. Obviously, I feel success; a part of it would be getting paid well enough so that you feel

that you are valued for your work, the hours that you put in. But also that you feel fulfilled as a person, I think, as an individual.

A subtheme that emerged during the course of the interviews was that each participant felt it was necessary to continue to challenge themselves in the work environment because it gave a sense of enjoyment and satisfaction. Participant 1 believes that pushing and challenging one's self is the road to professional success,

I like challenges, so professional success is getting things across the line, finding new mountains to climb, being on a blank page a lot of the time and making that work somehow. That's success to me.

The idea of a mother's promotability within the working world was also exposed as a theme. Surprisingly, the participants did not feel that having children stopped them being sought out for promotion by their employers. Indeed the main theme that emerged was that if you are willing to put the time in to your role, through extra hours or education, you are likely to progress up the ladder,

It's all about the time and the effort that you have to be shown to put in. I should probably mention that at the moment there is a big emphasis in our organisation on education so I think if you just follow managements leave and do what you are told in a way, I think you will get rewarded for it, like I am continuing to study, but there is definitely an element of putting in the hours and showing drive and effort. Being a bit pro-active yourself then you can reach your goals and probably get where you want.

Maternity Rights

The issues surrounding maternity rights and paid leave became a theme throughout the research. All six participants had strong opinions on the provision of maternity leave. It did emerge that the participants felt that the availability or lack of availability did not impact on their decisions to start a family,

Well, it didn't to be honest with you. It never was a question whether I would or I wouldn't have children because of maternity benefits. I knew when I was having my children maternity benefits, it's way back now, they weren't particularly great. I think it was twelve weeks fully paid and four weeks at our own expense. The organisation I was with at the time didn't give support, you just got your social welfare and that was that. So, it wasn't influencing me at all. It didn't come into my equation at all.

However, the younger mothers, did feel that while the availability of maternity benefits did not determine whether they had children or not, the presence of it did have a significant financial impact on them and ensured they could spend more time away from work with their new born,

Our maternity package is quite good, I think it is generally a little bit better than the market average. So, I think that obviously it was a contributing factor but if I had been on the bare minimum I think I probably would have had children anyway, we would have probably made ends meet and I am just happy that we could do it with a little bit of a cushion, you know and be as comfortable as we have been.

A subtheme that evolved through the course of the interviews was the difference in experiences between the three more mature mothers and the three younger mothers in relation to maternity leave and employment conditions. Participants 1 and 6 in particular experienced tough working environments on returning to the work place,

Well, in my day which is over 30 years ago you just did it. You just got on with it. You didn't think about maternity benefits because maternity benefits were so insignificant that it made no difference, I was back in work after six weeks that was particularly traumatising.

Participant 1

But I was only back in the job two months before they terminated my contract but they had to take me back to terminate me. So, they couldn't formally let me go in the middle of maternity so I was brought back. There was no clear picture of returning long term to work after maternity; it was only short term stuff because I knew I would come back short-term.

Gender and Career Choices

The idea of gender and the choice of careers that the participants pursued became an obvious theme within the research. The research found that the women did not overall have the perception that their gender had influenced them in the type of careers they chose,

No, I came from a family of five and I was the middle one of the five and I have been told that I was always the one that just plodded along and did what was to be done and I would very much say that when I was at my Leaving Cert. stage I didn't know I wanted to do.

Participant 6 further backed up this view,

No. I just took a job as most people did in the 70's and 80's. You took a job, you were glad to have a job. You didn't have a choice really, you were just so grateful that you had a job and that was it basically.

However there was an underlying subtheme that became obvious through the course of the interviews. While the participants initial reaction was that their gender had not influenced their choice of career in anyway, it did appear that most decision they made early in their career's was a result of parents directing them in a desired way,

My mother decided I made a good bread soda so that's why she put me into catering. Which I was happy enough to go ahead and do. I have often thought myself well wow what would it have been like to be a fighter pilot or what would it have been like to be in the army or in the elite forces.

Participant 1 further asserts that the women's decisions may have had more social influence than they themselves were aware of,

I don't know, I don't actually. It's hard to be clear around that. I wanted to do medicine. In the classroom in any conversations or career guidance, not that we had much, but what did people want to do, all the hands went up for teaching, mine never did, nursing, mine never did. You know I was interested in brain surgery, I wanted to know how the brain works. You know, that's what I wanted to do or join the army. They were the two passions in my life when I was a kid. So, I didn't really have a particular career path that I was following and ended up being in education.

Another area of importance that emerged was the environment that the women are currently working in and the level of male dominance that they have experienced in their roles. Participant 2 is a qualified accountant and within her experience there is still an element of male superiority in the profession,

There are times yes I do feel that particularly. I think accountancy is quite a male dominated profession. The profession at senior management or even at department director level, quite a good amount of them are male, not to say that there aren't female partners or whatever, but I just feel that in a group, when we get together, any net-working, you do find that there is a greater emphasis, or not even emphasis, there is a greater number of men at these events than you find at the female events.

Participant 1 has also expressed that her working environment was at times a male dominated one and this impacted on how she experienced becoming pregnant and expressing herself as a mother,

I was working for about eleven years in a very male orientate environment and you certainly did not promote your motherhood and that was a major consideration for me. I was concerned about my job security when I got pregnant.

Empathy

A strong theme that was exposed and reoccurring throughout the research was the increased presence of empathy and the personal emotional change that the women experienced when they became mothers. Each participant expressed that they felt “different”

after the birth of their first born; their perception was that they had more understanding and for those around them, particularly for other parents they worked with,

Well the views have changed, you know if you had somebody working for you and they weren't cutting it or they were struggling with something or if they went home and said I been let go or if the jobs not working out, that was more of what influenced me. The other end of things, more empathy.

It emerged to be a something that the women were glad to have developed, the suggestion is the belief in their increased empathy has made them better managers and more well-rounded in their views on people,

It was quite remarkable how I say it in myself. You know, in the small stuff, if somebody was getting reprimanded about something, Oh you just wanted to take them away or even if I had to reprimand somebody. You were kind of going oh my God, somebody's son, somebody's daughter, he's going to go home and tell Mammy whatever. Definitely my empathy changed.

Participant 3 further backed up the growth of these feelings of empathy for others,

Definitely, I have a much bigger understanding of people that have to 'phone in sick or take holidays because they caught their kids bugs or they have sick kids at home and also more acknowledging that you have to be somewhat more flexible. I mean there are a lot of practical things that need to be considered when you have children and I don't think you realise how much that is when you don't.

The research found that the participants increased level of empathy did not only restrict itself to the work place, however Participant 6 points out that having children changed her world view,

Oh absolutely, of the world in general and I think it made me less hard to an extent, because you know everybody is human.

Love and Caring

The theme of love and caring responsibilities was one that was consistent throughout the interview schedule. The research found that each of the six participants found that there was an expectation that they would take the main caring role in relation to the children, even when both parents were working,

I was the one when they were sick. I have always worked, I have never stayed at home, I was never a stay at home mother. If they were sick I would stay at home with them. I actually at one stage brought them to work when they were sick.

The common theme was that women are the ones who are expected to take time of work to look after children, that it is just expected that the mother is more able to remove herself from the work environment,

My experience has been yes that they do. My experience of watching friends in relationships with children, they will be the ones that will work out how they are going to manage to take that day off work in order to look after the sick child. That conversation will never come up or never would the woman ask the man to take the day off. In all of my experience, my husband certainly never volunteered to take time off. You know, he waited

for me to do it. Women get creative in how they manage and the men are quite happy to let them at it.

It also emerged that the participants felt that societal influences were the main reason that women hold the main responsibility for the love and caring role. There was a running theme that it was expected of them as women to be caring while it was expected of the men to be the breadwinner. Making the societal expectation multifaceted,

I think it's fairly expected of women from society. I know there are now the stay at home fathers. I admire them, I think they are terrific. But there is always that association, oh he couldn't make the cut, he didn't have the job, he didn't have the job that was able to support the two of them, her job was better. It's an image from society that needs to be broken down to be perfectly honest with you.

The theme of instinct was also consistent across the research. The participants expressed that taking on the main caring role was influenced by society; however, each expressed an innate instinct to care,

I am not sure. No, I mean I did it because it was always just instinct within me but we never had a discussion.

Participant 5 also reinforced the theme, with her view on men's participation in the daily caring tasks,

Yes, definitely. Women are the main careers in the family. You cook you clean, now men do do the same but you would have to tell the man what to put on the kids what to put on for dinner. You have to tell them, they don't have it inbuilt in them.

Choice

The idea of choice was a consistent theme across the research. It is complex but the participants expressed that due to many reasons, such as finances and biological reasons they were both the ones who had to stay away from their careers for extended periods but were also expected to return to work because of tough financial situations,

No, not to the same extent. Obviously this is a biological issue. Men can't have children and it also comes down to maternity benefits. Like, I am Swedish, there is a completely different set of rules that exist over there where you can share the maternity benefits between the mother and father, which you can't do here. My partner got two days paternity leave when our children were born, which I think is bad. It's also a matter of income. The men are generally on a higher salary and even if my partner was entitled to paternity leave, I think we couldn't afford for him to be off because we would suffer financially.

Participant 6 further emphasises that women's own desires and wants become second to that of their children and choice maybe again removed as care and duty become more important,

Yes of course your priorities change. The children have to come first and what happens in a situation like that is you come last. They have to come first, you don't have a choice. I mean, they are young, they are vulnerable, they need you so you sublimate your own desires and wishes to make things right for them.

A sub theme that emerged was that the participants felt that as their children grew up, their own choices became easier. They could begin to make choices for themselves and their careers as their children became less dependent,

I think things happened and I kind of let them happen. Certainly when I moved to study accounting that was, I think the first time that I took a really big view and went okay really what do I want to do here? That was for me.

A further sub theme was that of guilt. The participants expressed that as working mothers there was a level of guilt and regret for the time they did not get to spend with their children when they were young because they were not afforded the choice,

I think sometimes I wonder should I have been at home a little bit more for them. I sometimes regret that I passed them for Billy to Jack to be minded after school.

Participant 1 also expressed feelings of guilt and regret,

I would say as honestly as I can I would regret the time that I spent away from them when I was working. The choices that I made in my previous role impacted significantly on them because I was gone from very early morning to late at night and they were young. While, I gradually changed that there was two solid years of that. I lost out and yes there is a feeling of loss.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to gain an insight in to lives of professional working mothers and to explore more deeply how they perceive becoming a mother has impacted on their career and family choices. The research was carried out with women who have combined having a family and working. The run of six semi structured interviews exposed the topic to be complex and broad. This was due to the nature of the subject matter and the individual experiences of the participant's both in the work and family sphere.

The continued importance of women's roles within both the family and work environment and where they perceived their place lays in theses environments was significant. As the research suggests the participants acknowledged that professional success was markedly more difficult for women who have small children. However, participant 6 emphasises the importance of challenging oneself professionally to ensure goals are met. This idea was supported by participant 1, both women saw the need to continue to push forward with challenges in their careers in order to feel a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment. It emerged that feelings of professional success were closely tied to the recognition the women received from employers and peers, as well as how this recognition is reflected in rates of pay.

Participant 3 explains the importance of continued participation in education as crucial to how women are perceived within their roles. Their willingness to continue to work hard and learn should increase the chances of promotion. Referring to the literature review in chapter one, women in the world of work and education, the Central Statistics findings that women tend to be more highly educated than their male counterparts highlights the need for women both before and after children to progress with their education to ensure they are

staying relevant in the market place. Each participant felt that if the woman makes the choice to progress in her career through dedicated hard work that promotion is possible and is not necessarily blocked to them.

The disparity in the levels of maternity leave versus paternity leave in Ireland was explored by O'Connor and Wright, 2013 in their work on female career progression and maternity leave which appeared in the literature review. Participant 3 raised the issue that in her experience men are paid a better salary than women. Hence in her case it was a natural decision that she would take maternity leave, even if her partner had the opportunity to take more than two days paternity leave, it would not be financially possible. Each of the participants is clear on their stance in relation to maternity leave. If there was no provision of maternity cover for mothers, this would not enter the equation or affect their decision to have children. The participants whose families are grown up had a very different experience to the younger career mothers. Participant 6 speaks about the lack of maternity provision being so bad that you could not depend on it. Participant 6 was expected to return to work, six weeks after her first child. The suggestion being that this was a very negative experience for a new mother, not necessarily from a financial perspective but from an emotional perspective. To be separated from her child so early left a negative feeling.

Participant 1 further asserted the level of insecurity women who became pregnant in the 70's and 80's felt. She spoke about being let go from her position because she became a mother and the sense of knowing that her career progression was unclear because of this. Thankfully the younger mothers described a different experience, suggesting that the laws and protection of women surrounding maternity have improved. Participants 3, 4 and 5 all had good maternity cover and as such were in a position to spend as much as 10 months with their new babies, allowing them to build a bond but also allowing them to feel ready to return to work after their leave with the goal of working hard to reintegrate into the work force.

The concept that gender influences our life experiences was a central issue amongst the participants and also within the body of the literature reviewed. As explored in the literature review, Giddens outlines the meaning of one's gender. The research found that gender is still a very present factor in the world we live in, it may be so socially inbuilt in us however, that it is not initially apparent that it affects life choices. The women expressed that their choices of career were not affected by their gender initially, however it was later described how, their parents and teachers had guided the women towards certain female typical careers.

Participant 2 described how she started her career in catering because her mother felt she was good in the kitchen. Under this guidance participant 2 fell into a career that she later left in pursuit of a career in Accountancy that she now feels satisfies her career desires. Participant 1 reaffirmed that socialisation played a role in her career choices. The influence of her parents and teachers guided her to a female dominated role in teaching and away from her desired career in brain surgery. The subtle socialisation of them on to an acceptable female career path only became clear to the participants as they talked through their career history, highlighting the influence gender had on their lives.

A further significant theme that was present for all participants was the idea of empathy. The interviews found that each of the six participants experienced increased levels of empathy once they became mothers. This had an impact in both their personal and professional lives. Referring to the literature review and Walker and Ching-Yu's study on maternal empathy and their findings that maternal empathy is important to ensure that the mother is successfully protecting her offspring. Participants 1, 2, 3 and 6 all explained how their view of the world had changed since becoming mothers, they all felt they had more understanding and care for others, not solely for their own children. This also translated into

the work place, giving them a more balanced view of their staff and their personal situations. This increased empathy in turn improved their ability to be a boss and manager.

Love and caring responsibilities were also dominant throughout the research. The idea that women take on the main careering role within their families regardless of their labour market activity was a central issue. As mentioned previously due to unequal maternity, paternity rights as well as rates of pay between the sexes, women are more likely to become the main carer in early childhood. O'Connor and Wright as referenced in the literature review suggest that women continue to be prominent care givers because policy reinforces the father's lack of involvement with bringing up children. Participant 2 strongly emphasised this view, she was responsible for taking time off to mind her children and was even required to bring her sick children to work one day.

The common theme among the women was that it was expected of them to be the main carer. For the more mature mothers it was a socially driven decision. Their perception was that it was more socially acceptable for them to take the foot off the pedal in relation to their careers and dedicate time to the family. There was also a perception that it was not as acceptable for their partners and spouses to do the same. There was a suggestion that this would de-masculinise them in the eyes of their peers, making it hard for them to progress up the career ladder. Participant 1 described how there is never a conversation between husband and wife on the division of caring and loving roles, the women is expected to step into this role and for most of the women interviewed, they did this naturally and without question.

For the younger mothers there were other consideration, there was less of a concern about their partner's masculinity and external perceptions and more of a concern around financial issues. The idea that a woman should work and raise children at the same time was clear. The younger mothers experienced similar assumptions that they would take

on the caring duties. However, they had a slightly different perspective; they placed greater importance on the balance between work and family. Financially there was an undertone that the women wanted to stay and feel financially dependent from their partners.

The notion of instinct also emerged. While all six participants felt that they were socially expected to be dominant in loving and caring they also felt that there was a level of instinct too. Participant 5 outlined how she takes on duties because men have to be directed to do them, it is not inbuilt in them as it is in women. Participant 1 also suggests that there is an innate instinct to care within women.

The question of Choice was a common theme for all participants. Hobler, Wayne and Lemon in their work on Bosses Perceptions of Family Work Conflict suggested that women find themselves dealing with family work conflict in many of the choice they make. Choice is a multi-layered, complex concept but the women expressed from their perspective that choice did not enter the equation. Their understanding was that when they became mothers life no longer was about them and their personal desires and more about the choices that they make to benefit their children and family unit.

Participant 6 explained how her priorities changed when she realised how vulnerable and dependant her children were. For participant 6 her only choice was to return to work six weeks after her first child to ensure financial security. Her understanding is that her choice to stay at home was removed by circumstance. The literature cited the work of Byrne-Doran asserting the idea that the majority of working mothers become adaptive. They are required to adapt to life in order to combine children and the work force.

Participant 3 expressed a view that biology naturally removes a certain amount of choice, men cannot bare children hence they are biologically removed from having to make the same choices as women. The same argument as previously mentioned in relation to

paternity and maternity rights arises. Social policy is to this day in Ireland set up to mean that mothers are the only choice when it comes to early childcare, unless fathers leave paid employment fully. The question remains for the participants what is choice. When a woman chooses to have children, she is choosing to understand that life will be different and loving, providing and caring may fall heavily on her shoulders. She is also making the choice between developing her career and committing to children. As the participants expressed, you can make the choice to leave your children in childcare and put in extra hours, effectively working your way back up the corporate ladder in your chosen career field. But the question will arise are these women choosing career over family. There appears to be no straightforward answer and each woman makes their own personal choices that reflect her own goals at this stage in life.

The research demonstrates that the participants felt significant levels of guilt and regret for the time they did not spend with their children when they were young. Both Participant 1 and 2 expressed concerns that their need to make the choice to return to work quickly may have impacted on their children. These feelings are so significant that the women experienced feelings of loss. A common thread through the interviews was that the women felt their choices became easier as their children got older. When the children became less dependent there was more time for them to make their own choices. Some of the participants did make the choices they wanted for their careers and others with smaller children are planning to make those choices when the time is right.

Choice, gender, maternity rights and family circumstances all play a role in how the women perceived how becoming a mother has impacted on their choices and opportunities within their families and careers.

Limitations

It is necessary to address the limitations of this study, the most obvious and significant limitation is the small size of the project. Due to time constraints it was not possible to access a larger sample to participate in this study. The small sample size only allowed a glimpse into the lives of working mothers and as such can create a difficulty in truly assessing what female perception's and experiences have been in relation to career and motherhood. The size of the sample also only allowed for a small cross section of professions to be used which may also affect the findings of the research and leaving possible gaps.

Further recommendations for future research carried out in this area would be to use a more large scale sample size, ensuring that a wide range of women from varying professions were used. This would assist in gaining a more in depth view of the issues affecting women in the context of work and family. During the study of the current literature on this area there appeared to be extensive work done on maternity rights and pay gap issues, the literature was less extensive in relation to women's own experiences in this realm. The area may benefit from more extensive qualitative research. It was also noted that the research is lacking in relation to paternity rights and fathers experiences, more work in this area may serve to highlight the need for more consideration for the family unit as a whole.

Conclusion

Despite the limitation of the study the selected participants expressed their views and feelings in an informed way, giving the researcher an insight into their experiences. The contribution that women make in the labour force is incredibly important in the society we live in and as the participants found the more societal and governmental support available to families the less arduous women's choices become. It is at this time that more work needs to be done to narrow the pay gap between men and women and to address the issues of

discrimination surrounding the lack of paternity leave in Ireland. There is a considerable amount of work to be done in addressing the traditional gender roles; however the participants did show that this may be changing very slowly. The research suggests that while men and women are now in a position to compete in the market place there still remains a deeply ingrained set of social practices and norms that we are expected to adhere to.

References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol 2: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 57-71). Washington, DC US: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/13620-004
- Byrne-Doran, J. (2012). A Qualitative Study of Working Mothers in Ireland: An Exploration of 'Lived Experiences'. *International Journal Of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 6(11), 101-113.
- Central Statistics Office [CSO] (2011). Men and Women in Ireland. Retrieved December 1, 2013, from <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/otherreleases/2011/Women%20and%20Men%20in%20Ireland%202011.pdf>
- Connolly, A. (2013). Illegally Blonde: no girly girls in the workplace. Retrieved February 1, 2014 from <http://www.edition.ie/features/illegally-blonde-no-girly-girls-in-the-workplace-5082>
- Considine, M., & Dukelow, F. (2009). *Irish Social Policy A critical introduction*. Dublin: Gill & McMillian.
- Creswell, J.W. (2002). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. London: Sage Publications
- Drew, E., Daverth, G. (2007). Negotiating Work Life Balance: The Experience of Fathers and Mothers in Ireland. Retrieved: February 7, 2014, from <https://tcd.academia.edu/EileenDrew>
- European Commission (2013). The EU and Irish Women. Retrieved December 1, 2013, from http://ec.europa.eu/ireland/ireland_in_the_eu/impact_of_eu_on_irish_women/index_en.htm
- Giddens, A. (2009). *Sociology 6th Edition*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Guarte, J., & Barrios, E. (2006). Estimation Under Purposive Sampling. *Communications In Statistics: Simulation & Computation*, 35(2), 277-284. doi:10.1080/03610910600591610
- Hoobler, J. M., Wayne, S. J., & Lemmon, G. (2009). Bosses' Perceptions of Family-Work Conflict and Women's Promotability: Glass Ceiling Effects. *Academy Of Management Journal*, 52(5), 939-957
- Kornblum, W., & Julian, J. (2010). *Social Problems*. New Jersey: Pearson.
- National Women's Council of Ireland [NWC] (2011). NWC Strategic Plan 2013-2015. Retrieved December 10, 2013, from http://www.nwci.ie/?/learn/publication/leading_the_change_for_womens_equality1

O'Connor, C., & Wright, A. (2013). Female Career Progression & Maternity Leave: An Irish Exploration. *Business & Economic Research (BER)*, 3(1), 322-343. doi:10.5296/ber.v3i1.3536

O'Sullivan, S. (2012). Onwards and Upwards? Gender and Work in Ireland. *Sociology Compass*, 6(5), 376-388.

Rake, K. (2009). *Are Women Bearing the Burden of the Recession*. Retrieved December 11, 2013, from <http://www.mbsportal.bl.uk/secure/subjareas/hrmemployrelat/fawcettsociety/138407burden09.pdf>

Russell, H., McGinnity, F., Callan, T., Keane, C. (2009). A women's place, female participation in the Irish jobs market. Retrieved December 12, 2013 from <http://www.equality.ie/Files/A%20Womans%20Place%20-%20Female%20Participation%20in%20the%20Irish%20Labour%20Market.pdf>

Walker, L. O., & Ching-Yu, C. (2007). Maternal Empathy, Self-Confidence, and Stress as Antecedents of Preschool Children's Behavior Problems. *Journal For Specialists In Pediatric Nursing*, 12(2), 93-104. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6155.2005.00098.x



Professional Women's Perceptions of Motherhood and Career

My name is Naomi McGrath and I am conducting research that explores how motherhood has affected professional women's careers in their experiences.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves an interview that will take roughly 40 minutes. Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part. If you do take part and any of the questions do raise difficult feelings, you do not have to answer that question, and/or continue with the interview.

Participation is confidential. If, after the interview has been completed, you wish to have your interview removed from the study this can be accommodated up until the research study is published. The interview, and all associated documentation, will be securely stored and stored on a password protected computer.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the interview that you are consenting to participate in the study.

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact Naomi McGrath (Naomi.mcgrath@gmail.com) or Niall Hanlon (niall.hanlon@dbs.ie)

Thank you for participating in this study.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thesis Interview questions

General

1. Are you married, or co-habiting?
2. How many children do you currently have?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your job?
4. Tell me a bit about what it was like returning to work after your child/children?

Work and Aspirations

5. What does professional success mean to you? Do you feel you have or can achieve it?
6. Can you tell me what you like and dislike about work?
7. Do you think that having children influences your opportunity for promotion?
8. How has access or lack of access to maternity benefits affected your choice to have children?
9. Do you think that women have to make a decision between having children and pursuing their career? If so, how has that impacted on you and your career?
10. Once you became a mother, have you been actively encouraged to seek promotion or progress in your career?
11. Has your view of work altered since you became a mother?
12. What would you change about your work if you could? What do you think would make it easier?

Gender

13. In your experience has your gender influenced your choice of career?
14. Do you think that fathers feel pressure to decide between family and career?
15. Did age or fertility concerns affect your choices to have children? If so how?

Family

16. Do you believe that there is an expectation within the family that women will take the main role in caring for children? If so, how has this affected you?
17. How would you describe the division in household duties between you and your partner/spouse?
18. How do you manage to balance your role as a mother with your role in work?
19. Is there anything further you would like to add?