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Across Time: The Experiences of Work/Life Balance Among Mothers in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Dublin District.

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Table Of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	Page 3
Abstract.....	Page 4
Introduction.....	Page 5
Methods.....	Page 13
Research Design	
Semi-Structured Interviews	
Participants	
Procedure	
Ethics	
Findings.....	Page 16
Discussion.....	Page 30
Summary	
Routine and Responsibility	
Decision to Work	
Childcare	
Government Supports	
Limitations and Recommendations.....	Page 36
Conclusion.....	Page 36
References.....	Page 38
Appendix.....	Page 41

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Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to explore the experiences of women, within an Irish context, in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown who participated or currently participate within the labour force and had children. Seven semi-structured interviews were used in order to collect the data. Firstly discussing the experiences with Group A, three women who experienced the work-life balance during the 1980's, and contrasting them to Group B, women who are currently experiencing the WLB. How do their experiences compare or contrast some thirty years later. The purposes of the interviews were to explore participants' perceptions of the work life balance in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown. In conducting thematic analysis on the dataset, the researcher identified five themes; routine, responsibility, decision to work, childcare and Government supports. In summary, there are a complex web of variants that impact on a mother's experience of WLB. Currently in Ireland, according to Group B, financial implications and childcare impact their WLB. It was suggested that the socioeconomic status (SES) of the women does not directly correlate to having more choice.

Key Words; Work/life balance, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Childcare and Socioeconomic Sataus.

Across Time: The Experiences of Work/Life Balance Among Mothers in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Dublin District.

Introduction

This study will explore the experiences of mothers, from Dun Laoighre-Rathdown, and work/life balance. Work/life balance (WLB) is best described by Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper, & Sparrow (2013, p301) ‘The term work–life balance...encompass the manner in which parents of dependent children balance responsibilities and commitments to paid work and parenthood’. Women’s participation within the labour force has increased. For women who have children and work what are their experiences of WLB. The Women’s Liberation Movement was a catalyst to empower women continuing a career while having a family. These changes have posed new challenges for families such as the division of tasks in the home, childcare and paid labour.

Impact of Feminism

Prior to The Women’s Liberation Movement in the late 1960’s in America, married women’s daily tasks could be summarised by making beds, food shopping, caring for the house and children. The media discussed topics about ‘How to catch a man and keep him,’ ‘How to bake,’ and discussed how becoming a wife and mother was ultimate goal and complete fulfilment. The media portrayed women who wanted careers, further education and political rights as not ‘truly feminine.’ It is argued by Friedan (1963, p.15-17) that this was closely correlated to the increase in marriage rates among younger women, increased birth rate and the reduction in women’s educational achievements. Friedan (1963, p.24), who held that there was more to fulfilment than wife’ mother identity believed that education was key as it allowed women to engage in individual identity. She held that which gave them more than what she

argued was a wife or mother identity. Some state that *The Feminine Mystique* was a driving force for women, who had an interest in education, with regard to liberation politically, professionally and personally. Friedan spoke with girls attending college, the girls who were not in a hurry to settle down and get married were more likely to have mother who had her own interests outside of the home. With more women availing of education there was an increase in the number of women in the labour force. This impacted on domestic life.

The Second Shift

The Women's Liberation Movement during the 1960' and 1970's had a large impact on the increase of women entering into the labour force. Hochschild (1989, p.258) outlines that in 1950, 23% of married women with children under six worked outside the home, by 1986 this figure rose to 54%. This resulted in dual-earner couples being in both paid employment and maintaining a home and family life. Hochschild coined this WLB the 'The Second Shift'. Hochschild (1989, p.260) held that the increase of women in the labour force is a 'basic revolution of our time'. This impacted on women's mother identity. Mothers felt they were always switched on to the needs of their family and doubted themselves as good mothers when they were away from their children in work. Another dimension within the research was the perceptions women had of each other. Whether one is a 'working mum' or a 'stay-at-home mum' caused internal conflict for the individual or external conflict between the mother's and the choice they have made (Hochschild, 1989, p.261). Hochschild's research into families found that women struggled greater than men with work/life conflict. This research found that both mothers and fathers agreed that the 'second shift' was predominantly more the mother's issue. Women's choice and power had increased. Hochschild's research concluded that balancing a career,

marriage and children caused conflict in the division of housework, childcare and within the workforce (Hochschild 1989, p.7).

Participation in the Labour Force

According to Russell, McGinnity, Callan & Keane (2009) there was a 6.4% increase from 1998 to 2007 of women in Ireland participating in the labour force with children under the age of five. This was in contrast to a decrease of .2% for men during this time. There as a 12% increase, over the same time period, for women who had children between five and twelve years old. Currently in Ireland 32% of women work part-time compared to 7% of men (O'Sullivan, 2012, p.384). These statistics highlight that there is a disparity between men and women's participation within the labour force. It is also indicated that there is a difference in participation in the labour force between women depending on the age bracket their children fall into.

Women who have children under the age of five are less likely to participate in the workforce. This suggests the gender division of labour as women are taking the responsibility for the caring role. The 'male breadwinner' model is still found to be important to men, this can result in men not sharing the home life and responsibilities even if the women is out working too. The research has shown that majority view of women is to work full-time but while caring for young children the ideal would be to work part-time. Part-time employees are usually in the low-paid bracket, working part-time can be considered a commitment to family rather than work. The norm in Irish society still seems to be the mother retaining the caring role for the children in the family (O'Sullivan, 2012).

Supporting WLB

Drew and Humbert (2012) conducted research on entrepreneurial parents in Ireland and their work life balance. Their research showed that mothers had a disproportionate share of caring and domestic work, experienced greater conflict between work and domestic spheres and tended to do more flexible hours to accommodate their domestic duties compared to fathers. Fathers worked much longer hours and tended to have more fluid career trajectories. To support both men and women with the work life balance it is argued that there needs to be policy change. Policies in childcare provision, equal access to parental leave and more flexible working arrangements would support a better work and family life. Daly and Clavero's (2002, p.127) found that women who were in a stable job prior to giving birth to their children were statistically more likely to return to the workforce. The discourse used around policies is important. Rather than focusing on policies supporting mothers to work, the policy terminology could be altered to support women and men in the workforce to have a better WLB.

Daly & Clavero (2002) analyse family policy in Ireland focusing on the 1990's. At this time in Ireland the historical dominance of the traditional 'male breadwinner' family model (the male had the responsibility to provide for the family financially) was changing. Families were becoming more diversified. Women's employment rates were on the increase. Between 1988 and 1998 they increased by 60% alone (Daly & Clavero, 2002, p.14). This coupled with the increase in dual-earner couples (both women and men in paid labour) creates a policy challenge to assist in balancing women's family responsibilities against financial employment.

In Ireland women are entitled to twenty six weeks paid maternity leave and a further sixteen weeks unpaid maternity leave. Fathers are not currently entitled to any paternal leave as they are not recognised in employment law. The Parental Leave Act 1998 European Union

(Parental Leave) Regulations entitle both mothers and fathers to take fourteen weeks unpaid leave to care for children under the age of eight years old. This was amended in 2013 and increased to eighteen weeks unpaid leave (Citizensinformation.ie, 2014). This may evidence that Irish policy postulates that women should be the only ones to receive paid leave while caring for a child.

UK Childcare & Policies

Gatrell (2005, p.28-29) focused on what changes would benefit participants with work life balance and how future innovative policies could impact this. It was highlighted that it was important for their children to have continuity of care, good quality care and affordable childcare. Paternal leave was the most favoured option. Mothers stated that this would strengthen the bond between fathers and their children, claimed it would be a positive benefit to all in the family and would give more options to mothers and their employment status. Currently in the UK fathers have little or no paid or unpaid leave in order to care for children aside from two week paternity leave when their children are born. Most leave is at the discretion of the employers and women are in the majority for availing of parental leave. Gatrell (2005) argues that these laws make it less enticing for employers to employ females of child bearing age.

Childcare

Historically childcare in Ireland was seen as a private matter. However during the 1990's this changed and policies started to be implemented due to labour shortages and economic development. Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programmes were introduced to supplement childcare for the low-income and social welfare dependant families

(Citizensinformation.ie, 2014). The Early Childcare and Education Scheme was introduced in 2010 this entitles all children, between the age of three years two months and four years seven months, to free pre-school hours during the school year calendar, 95% participation rate was recorded. (Citizensinformation.ie, 2014). In Ireland unless you reside in an area that provides a CCS programme, which has a capped cost and is funded by the government, childcare is funded privately. According to O'Sullivan (2012, p.383) the cost of childcare in Ireland is estimated to be one of the highest in Europe. This can have a direct impact on a family and their choice around WLB as the cost of childcare is a considerable undertaking. The financial cost to childcare particularly for younger children who are not old enough to be in The Early Childcare and Education Scheme could be a contributing factor to why women with children under the age of 5 years are less likely to participate in the work force (Russell, McGinnity, Callan & Keane, 2009).

Financial Impact

Weighing up the benefits and implications of work and family life can cause conflict. A study done in the US (Hennessy, 2009) with women of low socio-economic status (SES) reported that the welfare reforms that are in place as forcing them into paid labour. The majority of participants claimed that the reforms that are in place remove their right to choose to work or not. The majority of participants were in favour of the ideal of the 'male breadwinner' model. They held that if a man could provide financially a mother should stay at home. The participants that were in paid employment stated that it was due to financial constraints and the 'stigma' attached to receiving welfare and reported high levels of emotional cost by not being with their children. These women felt at a disadvantage in comparison to more financially advantaged

women stating they had less choice surrounding their work/family preferences. In their opinion women who choose to work outside of the home who do not financially need to do so, are not good mothers. The study showed that participants believed it was the morally superior choice to stay at home to be with your children or at the very least limit your labour force availability. One participant argued that she felt the right to being a mother has been lost and something that she feels women need to fight for (Hennessy, 2009).

In Ireland socio-economic status takes into consideration income, education occupation and health status. The central statistics office (CSO, 2011) released data that divided the population into one of seven social class groups. These groups were ranked by occupation. Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown had the highest proportion, 54%, in classification 1(Professional worker) and 2 (managerial and technical). This cohort had the lowest unemployment rate, 11.2%, and with regard to health rated themselves the highest in Ireland. These findings support that Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown have high levels of socio-economic status (CSO, 2011).

'Mommy Wars'

Zimmerman, Aberle, Krafchick & Harvey (2008, p.205) argue that there is a socially constructed phenomenon known as the 'Mommy Wars' that focuses on the working mother versus the stay at home mother. Mommy wars is about who the better mother is, the working mother or the stay at home mother, and in turn what is the effect on the children. However it was found that the most influential factors that contributed to a child's social and emotional development are income, depression and a mother's ability to perceive a child's wants and needs on an emotional level and respond accordingly. The review of the literature showed that the impact on a child when their mother is in the labour force either had no influence at all or was a

positive influence. The research showed that the children of stay at home mothers and working mothers perceived the same amount of quality time spent with their mothers. Working mothers reported higher levels of well-being and the research found them to be more researcheritative. In a dual-earner couples, it was argued the gender roles were not as specific and this resulted in children doing better in school and friendships, having higher self-esteem and better future relationships (Zimmerman, Aberle, Krafchick & Harvey, 2008, p211).

Conclusion

Work life balance is something that is very relevant at present as there has been a large increase in women and mothers in the labour force, and dual-earner couple households. The Women's Liberation Movement was a catalyst to empower women continuing a career while having a family. These changes have posed new challenges for families such as the division of tasks in the home, childcare and paid labour. Women have even faced opposition from other women, warring over who is the better mother, the stay-at-home or the working mother. Consistency of care and paid paternal leave or shared parental leave when a child is born were discussed in the context of supporting the mother within the labour force, her WLB and the child and father bond.

Research has focused on low socioeconomic status cohorts. There is a lack of research on other social cohorts. The aim of this research paper is to explore these WLB experiences of women in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown. As the literature suggests a change across time on the many dimensions as discussed, two groups will be analysed. Group A, three women who experienced the work/life balance during the 1980's, will be contrasted with Group B, women who are currently experiencing the WLB. What are the experiences of work/life balance among

mothers in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown? Their experiences will be analysed using thematic analysis.

Methods

Research Design

This paper attempts to bring understanding of the discussed topic to an Irish context in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown district, a high socioeconomic status cohort. For the purpose of answering this research question, it was deemed that a qualitative approach was most appropriate. This was selected as the level of depth needed to answer the research question would not have been attained using a quantitative approach. The qualitative approach supports the collection of the participants' point of view on their experience of WLB. According to Neuman (2014, p.205) 'As we gather data, we are simultaneously reflecting on it and generating new ideas. The new ideas provide direction and suggest new ways to measure. In turn, the new ways to measure and shape how we will collect additional data. In short, we bridge ideas with data in an ongoing, interactive process'.

Data collection

Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher. According to Burns (1997), an interview is a verbal interchange in which an interviewer tries to elicit information, beliefs or opinions from another person. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the participant's, who live in the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown area, experience of the work life balance. Hence, the interview schedule was developed by the researcher based on the literature review

(see appendix A). The interviewer used open-ended questions, allowed for silences and used probing questions to maximise the data collected.

Participants

Seven female mothers who work were recruited by use of snow-ball sampling to participate in this research paper. This process was started December 2014 and finished by February, 2015. The participants were split into two different groups. This was in order to compare the women's experiences in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown from thirty years ago to the present day. Group A consisted of three participants that have grown children now and worked and had a family during the 1980's. All members of Group A report that they were married at this time. Two participants in the group had two children. The third participant in Group A had three children. Group B consisted of four participants who currently have a young child/children and are in employment. Three members of group B report that they are cohabiting with their partners. One member of the group is married. One participant in this group has one child, two participants of Group B have two children and one participant has three children.

Ethics

A proposal was submitted to and approved by the ethics committee of Dublin Business School prior to commencing the research. Ethical consideration is important throughout the research process. First of all informed consent is necessary. These guidelines were adhered to by informing all participants as to the nature of the research prior to any interview commencing. Participants were informed that their names would be changed to protect their identity when transcribing and reporting the data findings. All names that are in this study are pseudonyms.

Experiences of WLB Among Mothers in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown

Once participants were happy to proceed they were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B). For confidentiality all data was stored on a password protected computer file. Immediately after the interviews were transcribed all data on the dictaphone was erased.

Procedure

The researcher contacted all participants individually and facilitated them in their choice of location for the interview to take place. They were conducted either in the participants' home or the participants' place of work. The type of room was held constant across interview, i.e. they were conducted in a quiet room with just the interviewer and the participant present. The interviews lasted from forty five minutes to an hour and a half. Group B has four participants as two of the interviews were conducted in their place of work and the participants only had a short window of time before their lunch break as they had family commitments during their lunch breaks. The interviews were recorded using a dictaphone, transcribed and thematic analysis was conducted by the researcher using the software Envivo10 as a tool. Validity and rigour were achieved by following Braun & Clarke (2006) 6-phase guide to performing thematic analysis.

Findings

In conducting thematic analysis on the dataset as per the method set out by Braun and Clarke (2013), the researcher identified five themes; routine, responsibility, decision to work, childcare and Government supports. Table 1.0 illustrates these themes. Supporting quotations are also presented from both Group A and Group B.

Table 1.0 Generated themes with supporting quotations.

Themes	Sample quotes
Routine	<p>‘I would get them up and dressed, give them their breakfast and organise their lunch. I might do some light housework...would drop them to the childminders on the way to work’ (Sara – Group A).</p> <p>‘I...get up at 6.30/7am and get everything ready, mine and Chloe’s clothes, iron Kevin’s shirt... drop him to the Luas...then I would either have to drop Chloe to my mums or crèche and then go to work’ (Laura – Group B).</p>
Responsibility	<p>‘If one of us did have to take the day off it would have been me without a doubt’ (Catherine - Group A).</p> <p>‘The responsibility to look after him that would fall on me. I think it naturally falls on the woman’ (Erika – Group B).</p>
Decision to work	<p>‘I always knew I was going to go back to work. It was a personal choice really’ (Kate- Group A).</p> <p>‘I came back three weeks early. I came back early for financial reasons, I was struggling money wise’ (Laura – Group B).</p>
Childcare	<p>‘...the logistics of it would have been incredibly difficult and I think I would have struggled to find a child minder too’ (Sara – Group A).</p> <p>‘So for the two of them it was about €1,700 a month</p>

	[Crèche]...It's a mortgage...' (Aoife – Group B).
Government Support	'...maternity leave that can be spread evenly between couples is crucial... in terms of gender equality within the work place' (Sara – Group A).
	'Like even the Children's Allowance...€130 per child...what are you going to do with that' (Joyce – Group B)

Routine

It was interesting to analyse the three women from that were interviewed who have adult children, Catherine, Kate and Sara (Group A), and what their experiences were as working mothers during the 1980's. All three participants reported similar morning routines which involved them, as mothers, in charge of the children and the home. During their lunch breaks they used their time for themselves.

I would get them up and dressed, give them their breakfast and organise their lunch. I might do some light housework. We would be out the door by 8am and I would drop them to the childminders on the way to work (Sara – Group A).

The researcher found that comparing the participants' experiences of morning routine in the 1980's to what it is like now in 2015 with the participants' from Group B (Joyce, Erika, Laura and Aoife) constitutes this as a theme. Three out of four of the participants describe their morning routine exactly the same as Group A. They were responsible for getting their child or children up, dressed, fed and out to a childminder or school.

I would get up at 6.30/7 and get everything ready, mine and Chloe's clothes, iron Kevin's shirt...I used to have to drop him to the Luas...then I would either have to drop Chloe to my mum or crèche and then go to work (Laura – Group B).

The deviant case that further supports the constitution of this theme was Aoife who described her family's morning routine as a joint task carried out between herself and her husband. Unlike the other participants, Aoife's husband did the morning school run. All of Group B report that on more than one occasion they have used their lunch break in work to pick up a child or get bits and pieces for the house.

In the evening time Group A would all finish work and all of them had the responsibility of collecting their children from the childminder. The preparation of dinner was the women's responsibility the majority of the time. Some thirty years later, all of the participants in Group B describe a similar routine as Group A. Sara (Group A) recalls after the bedtime routine and general housework she might still have to complete some work she had brought home with her from the office.

I would finish work at 17.30, collect the kids on the way home, get home cook the dinner while they were doing their homework and doing some housework...we would have an hour playing with the kids before we would do bedtime. Then it would be back to house work or work we had brought home with us (Sara – Group A).

A similar situation was reported for women in Group B.

We [her and her two children] go home, start the dinner, make the lunches for the next day, do homework...I have to drive out to Tallaght for 18.15 to collect my

partner...trying to get everything done so that the kids can have dinner before we go and collect him...get back home I am cleaning up the house, washing clothes or bathing the kids but then I also have to bring the kids to their activities, he doesn't do anything (Joyce – Group B).

One significant difference in the evening routine of Group B was that extra-curricular activities were now included in the routine. To incorporate activities for the children Aoife stated that some evenings her husband does not get to eat dinner when he comes in the door from work and instead has to pick up a child and go straight to the activity.

Responsibility

The researcher identified that responsibility for the children and domestic chores lay with all of the participants in Group A and three of the four participants from Group B. Six out of the seven participants reported that although they do not remember having to take many sick days, if the childminder was sick the responsibility to take time off work would fall on them not their husbands.

If one of us did have to take the day off it would have been me without a doubt. I would have made all the arrangements with the kids that was always up to me. Even if there had to be a day taken off for injections or anything again that would be me (Catherine - Group A).

With regard to who the responsibility lay with for domestic chores (cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping and household accounts), one of the participants in Group A said she was solely responsible. The two remaining participants felt their situation was evenly divided between them and their husbands. Sara (Group A) described her situation as equally divided between her and

Experiences of WLB Among Mothers in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown

her husband but on further analysis of the division of labour in the home she said she was solely responsible for the cooking, even if she was working abroad she would cook up the dinners before she left. When looking at the other general household chores Sara states;

Everything else would have been divided out, the household duties would have been 60/40 on me, oh maybe 70/30 on me. It was predominantly me (Sara – Group A).

With Catherine it was some eleven years later after their second child, which her husband stayed home to care for, that she noticed the duties became evenly divided after he realised how much work went into staying at home. However to date she says it is her who notices jobs that need doing and she would need to tell him what needs to be done.

Three of the participants in Group B described themselves as being solely responsible for the division of labour within the home.

I do all the housework. With regards to the kids the responsibility completely falls on me. Looking after the bills in the house that is all down to me aswell (Joyce – Group B).

The deviant case was Aoife (Group B) she stated that her situation is evenly divided at home with her husband with housework and looking after the children.

In Group A participants report they were responsible for dropping the kids to school/childminder or picking them up at the end of the day. Three out of four of the women in Group B described the same experience. Laura (Group B) described that her partner's new job and the long hours, that are expected to be put in, has an effect on their family life.

He gets up at 6.30 in the morning and works in town, me and Chloe are still asleep when he goes out to work. The only day he would collect Chloe without me would be a Monday because I am in until 20.00. All of the others days I do it because he is gone before us and not home until 18.00 (Laura – Group B).

Erika (Group B) describes how her partners work impacted their family life during the economic downturn

They were expected to work twice as hard and they weren't paid overtime for a good couple of years....It ate into our time together as a family and we weren't even able to earn more money, you had to give your time and that was it.

If something happened, during the working day, with the children the participants in Group A all stated that they would be the first point of contact.

If something cropped up for the kids during the day without a shadow of a doubt the responsibility fell on me (Sara – Group A).

Three out of the four participants in Group B agreed that they would be the first point of contact if anything happened with the children.

The responsibility to look after him that would fall on me. I think it naturally falls on the woman I wouldn't even dream of ringing my partner and saying it to him [laughs]. He is not in a job that would support it. I suppose if your employed [meaning women] your employer knows that you are a mother so they maybe

have some expectation that something might pop up but there is definitely no expectation on a man to ever go home and do anything like that (Erika – Group B).

Decision to Work

Group A (Women with grown children) participants all reported that their decision to work and juggle a family was a choice and not due to financial necessity. The mothers they knew who juggled family and work were also reported to do so by choice rather than a financial need.

‘I always knew I was going to go back to work. It was a personal choice really
(Kate - Group A).

All of the participants in Group A were similar in that they all wanted to be out working and none of them expressed an interest in working anything less than full-time.

I think it is important for children to see parents working and break down those gender specific roles that are perceived out there (Catherine – Group A).

When Group A reflected on their feelings around going back to work, the researcher identified the following;

I had actually given up work after Brian but then after about a year and a half I just could not stay at home any longer, I had to go back to work, for myself
(Catherine – Group A).

...to keep me challenged and adult company. Being surrounded by the mothers at the school gate I just had nothing in common with them, nothing in common (Sara – Group A).

All the women in Group B (Women with young children now) felt they had no choice in returning to work, they all had to for financial reasons. They did express a wish to have a choice about returning to work. It was identified that if participants had a choice ideally they would like to work part-time or not at all.

I came back for money, I had to keep the payments up on my mortgage,...I was trying to stay on top of everything...If I had my choice I would have liked to be a stay at home mum or at least worked part-time...I have had no choice but to work full-time (Joyce – Group B).

Two out of the four participants in Group B had to return early from the scheduled maternity leave for financial reasons. The researcher identified that this did not impact Group A.

Yes for just under 6 months, [maternity leave] I came back three weeks early. I came back early for financial reasons, I was struggling money wise (Laura – Group B).

Group B reflected on their feelings around going back to work;

I am definitely a busy person, if I was at home I would probably be telling the grass how to go [laughs] so I just need to be kept busy in my mind and I don't think I would be able to do that at home (Erika, Group B).

When I was on maternity leave I remember by the end feeling ready to go back to work. I need routine and adult conversation (Laura, Group B).

All of Group B stated that the ideal balance would be to work part-time. Three out of four participants in Group B stated that their mortgage or rent has had a direct impact on the hours they have had to work.

We moved here in the boom where in hindsight if we had stayed where we were I could have afforded to be a stay at home mum. The mortgage would have been less than it is now, we bought before the hike and we didn't have this massive mortgage hanging over us, but hindsight is 20/20. When we had kids yes we'd love for me not to have to work but currently that is not an option (Aoife – Group B).

The researcher identified that for participants, finding a job that facilitates a work life balance is something that the participants are conscious of. Aoife (Group B) changed jobs in order to be closer to home and spend less time commuting and more time at home with the children. She is now located in a satellite office nearer to her home where most of the employees have the same WLB ethos. Laura (Group B) was reflecting on returning to work full-time and the difficulty around that decision;

I do like to work, I am not too happy about having to go back full-time. I will be gone before she is awake and by the time I will get home it will almost be her bed-time. Financially we need more money (Laura – Group B).

Sara (Group A) worked full-time before and after her first two children but after her third reduced her hours to be at home more in the evenings. In order to juggle the WLB Sara states, Experiences of WLB Among Mothers in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown

Since I worked full time and had a family I would not have relished spacing their age gap any further apart...The idea of having a big spread [in age] just wouldn't have worked (Sara – Group A).

Kate (Group B) stated that for her, choosing to go back to work was not out of financial necessity but out of financial independence and not having to rely on anybody else. She described a friend who after having a third child gave up work, as it was not financially viable to work and pay the cost of childcare for three children, and the effect of not working had on her;

I know a girl...had a third child... no choice but to give up work...That time she was off she became quite unwell with her mental health because of being at home all of the time, but they had no choice (Kate – Group A).

Erika (Group B) reflected on her friends around her who are stay at home mums and describes them as being a little bit down. She grew up with these women and remembers them as strong and confident prior to starting their families and giving up their job.

I find the girls that stay at home have lost their confidence a little bit and have lost themselves a little bit. They don't seem completely happy being at home...they are a little bit down in the dumps and these would have been girls that would have worked up until having their families (Erika – Group B).

On the other side she said she has friends who work full-time and she describes them as being under the most pressure and that she notices their children having more behavioural problems and that this could be because they are being minded in crèches for most of their week.

Juggling work and family life can mean there are times in the day you miss out on with your children;

you never get the early year's back...if you didn't get him in the first hour he came out of school you've missed the time to talk to him...that is what kills me now sometimes...So that is the elements I am missing when I'm out working (Aoife – Group B).

The above findings support the constitution of the theme titled by the researcher 'decision to work'.

Childcare

Childcare arrangements were noted by the researcher to be a variable of interest in the WLB context. If something cropped up during the day with the home or children all of the participants in Group A said they were the first point of contact. Two of the participants recall having to work late, on more than one occasion, and their children had to spend the night in the childminders house. The researcher identified that participants in Group A did not consider the cost of childcare impacting on their decision to go back to work. Sara (Group A) did consider family planning with regard to WLB and planned her children closer in age.

...the logistics of it would have been incredibly difficult and I think I would have struggled to find a child minder too (Sara – Group A).

The research identified differences in this theme for participants in Group B. For two out of the four participants, paid for their childcare and it was still financially beneficial to work. For the

other two participants, they did not have to pay for their childcare and said that if they did it would not be worth their while financially to work.

All of the participants in Group A had family, friends or people recommended to them that cared for their children while they worked. They attribute having that type of childcare as being more flexible to their family's needs. In Group B, childcare was more varied to include family members, childminder or crèche. Joyce said her parents minding her two children and she states

This was never something I have had to do [consider childcare costs]. I don't think I would have been able to afford to pay childcare, it wouldn't have been worth my while going to work. If I had to I would have either had to of given up work or worked part-time (Joyce – Group B).

The difficulty of managing childcare during the school holidays was highlighted by the researcher to impact of the participants WLB. One participant stated that she and her husband sit down in January and develop a rota for the year of how they will divide their holiday days to care for the children so that they get some holiday or break from the childcare regime.

Government Supports

All of the participants in Group A (Women with grown children) and three out of four in Group B (Women with young children now) attributed the support of their families or childminder in caring for their children in order for them to be able to work full-time.

With regard to the cost of childcare Sara mentioned tax incentives by the government but at the same time highlighted how that would not have benefited her situation.

We paid Madeline off the books, in cash, so we never made any claims or looked into tax relief on the childcare costs (Sara – Group A).

Only one member of Group B attributed the joint responsibility herself and her husband take for the children and the home to support them both in working full-time. Three out of the four participants in Group B have availed of commercial childcare since they have had their children but would rather rely on family, friends or a childminder that comes into the home as it is more financially beneficial.

So for the two of them it was about €1,700 a month [Crèche]...It's a mortgage...With the current childminder it's less hours but they are all different hours so it works out about €154 a week for the three days and she gives them dinner so it's a massive difference (Aoife – Group B).

In order to support families Sara (Group A) discussed leave from work to care for children should be more like the Nordic countries where it is decided between the couple how they wish to divide it and in turn this would make the work place more gender equal.

I think with regard to introducing maternity leave that can be spread evenly between couples is crucial, just crucial if we are going to get any equality...There is no doubt in an interview situation...the employer will go for the man. So until we get leave that can be divided between the couple, and the division of the leave is decided by the couple and the employer has to facilitate it, I think this would help right what is still a wrong in terms of gender equality within the work place (Sara – Group A).

During a discussion with Aoife (Group B) and how she organises the timetable at home for the year around their job and school she said that she would take a certain amount of parental leave days as her holiday days are not enough. She explained that her husband has never used a parental leave day.

Children's Allowance was noted by four out of the seven participants. Three of the participants said that it was a good payment and that they used it for various things and that it was not put away in savings for the children in later life.

Yes I had the Children's Allowance, I used to keep the money for going back to school or Christmas presents. I would not pick it up every month I would leave it as a way of saving (Kate – Group A).

Joyce felt that the amount was insignificant in supporting her children

Like even the Children's Allowance that just disappears, where does that go, it is not like it is anything substantial? €130 per child, per month what are you going to do with that (Joyce – Group B).

Laura and Joyce (Group B) discussed their opinions on stay at home mothers who are in receipt of welfare support. Describing what they see these women getting of the state with regards to rent allowance, back to school allowances and a weekly income. They compare these women's lifestyles to theirs and feel that these women have a better quality of life as they are at home all day, seem to afford to go out socialising when they want and have a holiday abroad every year.

When they are sitting at home and don't have to anything...same as what I have but I have to work a 40 hour week. I would have had more kids but it wouldn't

have been fair on my mam minding more and would I have been able to afford it financially? You see them having 3/4 kids, pushing lovely new prams, getting the back to school allowance some of them even have free travel, medical cards. As a working mum I have gotten no supports but these women have the same lifestyle as me paid for by the State...I actually don't even like to think about it. It is very disheartening (Joyce – Group B).

If I could stay at home and not depend on the Government then that is what I would do. I think women who are getting pregnant to get houses or rent allowance, shame on them, I wouldn't like to be like them (Laura – Group B).

Discussion

This study aimed to attain the experiences of WLB for women in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown who participated within the labour force and had children. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted. Firstly discussing the experiences with Group A, three women who experienced the work-life balance during the 1980's, and secondly Group B, women who are currently experiencing the WLB. The researcher analysed this data using thematic analysis. Five themes were identified by the researcher: routine, responsibility, decision to work, childcare and Government support. These findings are discussed below.

Routine and Responsibility

Experiences of WLB Among Mothers in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown

In Group A and Group B six out of the seven participants were fully responsible for the morning and evening routines in their household. Bedtime routine was mentioned by the majority of the participants as a shared task between mum and dad. The deviant case was Aoife (Group B) and her husband who divided the routines. Her husband was responsible for the morning routine to allow her to go to work early and she was responsible for the evening routine and he would stay in work later. Group B are currently raising their families and the majority describe their routines, some thirty years later, the same as Group A's. One out of three in Group A was responsible for all of domestic chores. The remaining two participants, Catherine and Sara, described the division of chores more evenly. However on further reflection Sara realised she did seventy percent of the domestic chores. Catherine was referring to more recently in her marriage, after her husband remained home with one of the children, he realised the extent of domestic work that was done and this in turn created a more equal division of domestic tasks. In Group B three out of the four participants described having the majority share of domestic work and did not give any example of a domestic task their partners would carry out.

Six out of the seven participants said they would be the first point of contact for anything to do with the children and if one of the children was unwell it would be their responsibility to take time off from work. Hochschild's (1989) research on 'The Second Shift' concluded that both mothers and fathers agreed that the responsibility was predominantly the mothers. Mother's felt that even if they were not with their families they had to be in tune with their family's needs. The findings of this paper support this. Group A would have been raising their families in the same time period as Hochschild's research and therefore the similarities to her findings are consistent.

O'Sullivan (2012) concluded the male breadwinner model is still of importance to men in Ireland and could suggest why their still remains an unfair division of both routine in the domestic work and the responsibility for the immediate and daily care of the children. The implications of this findings may be that an unfair division in childcare and domestic chores is impacting the workplace. Social norms and attitudes that were present, before the second shift, where women were responsible for the home and children are still evident. Attitudes need to change, in what is considered currently a more individualistic society, as support for men and WLB is more evident than it is for women and WLB.

Decision to work

The decision to work differed between Group A and Group B. All of the participants in Group A went back to work full-time before their children were five years old. Different reasons were cited for returning to work. Two participants reported that they had always intended on returning to work. Another participant stated that staying at home full-time wouldn't have been an option as she perceived her work life as separate and as important outside her life as a mum and wife. Group B all returned to work after their maternity leave, two of the participants even before their maternity leave was over. They cited having no choice in the decision due to financial constraints. Hennessy's (2009) research with mothers of low SES assumed women with higher SES would have a choice financially whether they returned to work or not. CSO (2011) statistics for Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown suggest that it is an area with high SES. According to the views of participants in Hennessy's (2009) research, all of my participants should have a choice to work as they are from a high SES group. Both groups differed in their circumstances to choose. Group A stated having a choice. However, for financial reasons all of the participants in

Group B felt they had no choice. Zimmerman, Aberle, Krafchick & Harvey (2008) found that there were more influential factors on a child's social and emotional well-being than whether their mothers worked or not. Their research found that the negative impact on the child of a working mother, was little to none and that it could even have a positive impact. Working mothers were found to have higher levels of well-being and this impacted on their daughters academic achievement, career success and social outcomes more positively than daughters of stay at home mother's.

Aside from financial implications, the findings of this paper highlight a novel, emotional cost. Participants from both groups spoke about an emotional cost around WLB. Emotional costs on the mother and child, varied from leaving before children awoke and returning only at their bed time to never getting the early years back and missing talking to their children during the day. Two participants discussed friends of theirs who are stay at home mothers and how they perceive these women have been impacted emotionally. They are described by the participants as having 'lost some of their confidence', lost a little bit of themselves and being a bit down on a regular basis.

The impact of depression, income and ability to recognise a child's wants and needs (Zimmerman, Aberle, Krafchick & Harvey, 2008) has a greater social and emotional cost on a child. This would suggest that a parent's emotional well-being, regardless of their employment status, is the most important variable on the emotional cost to the child. The implications of these findings would suggest that a person or families SES is not directly related to them having more choice around WLB and returning to work.

Childcare

In Group A all of the participants described themselves as the main care providers for their children. Three out of the four participants in Group B stated the same. This emphasises that some thirty years later, the majority of the care labour is still being carried out by the women. Aoife (Group B) was the deviant case, supporting the heterogeneity and constitution of this theme who shared this responsibility with her husband. All of the women in this study returned to work before their children were eighteen months old. As per research by Russell, McGinnity, Callan and Keane (2009), 60.2% of women with children under the age of five were in paid employment in 2007. In 2012, 32% of women were in part-time employment. In the same year only 7% men of men worked part-time (O'Sullivan, 2012). O'Sullivan's (2012) found from the research that majority view of women is to work full-time but while caring for young children the ideal would be to work part-time. This could be postulated that women taking on the majority of the caring responsibility role impacts on their labour force participation.

Regarding the cost of childcare Group A all availed of non-commercial (family and friends) childcare and did not note the cost of childcare impacting their decisions. On the other hand Group B all drew attention to the cost of childcare, Aoife made similarities to it resembling the cost of a mortgage, and Laura and Joyce stating they wouldn't be able to work full-time if they had to pay out for childcare. Childcare in Ireland is predominantly funded privately. The childcare costs in Ireland are described as one of the highest in Europe (O'Sullivan, 2012, p.383). Aoife discussed using parental leave on top of her holiday days in order to cover the childcare while the children were not in school. None of the other participants, in Group B discussed them or their partners availing of parental leave. Gatrell (2005, p.28-29) outlines that fathers have little or no paid or unpaid leave and that women are in the majority when availing of

parental leave. It is argued that this can make it less enticing for employers to hire women of child bearing age.

The implications of this may be that the cost of childcare can inhibit choice around WLB. The gender specific roles that are still evident thirty years on could be argued as having a knock on effect within the labour market for women of child bearing age. These implications are more than just policy as Sara (Group A) highlighted that the gender specific roles will take time to change but in order for that process to start policies have to change.

Government Supports

Group A and Group B highlighted the only support they received from the Government was Children's Allowance. Group A viewed this payment in a positive light and attributed it to helping out with Christmas and when the kids were going back to school. Three out of four in Group B were indifferent on the payment, Joyce dismissed it as being minuscule so it made no impact on their lives.

Maternity leave or parental leave (Citizensinformation.ie, 2014) as an entitlement provided for by the Government was suggested needs more scope. Sara emphasised that it should be done to the couple how the leave is used and not just for the mother to avail of. In time Sara stated that this would have a positive impact on the labour force regarding equal employment opportunities.

Laura and Joyce were ambivalent towards the social welfare supports that some families are in receipt of. They felt it was disheartening to go out every week and work full-time to provide for their families and see some families in receipt of social welfare benefits having the same or better lifestyle than what they have. This would emphasise the 'Mommy Wars'

(Zimmerman, Aberle, Krafchick & Harvey 2008, p.205) and how this concept is socially constructed.

The implications for this is to consider the impact the socially constructed concept of ‘Mommy Wars’ could have on Irish society. The Government supports that are in place are more focused on the mother and not the family this can impact the caring role within the family and the labour market if the leave entitlements are not more equally divided.

Limitations and Recommendations

The researcher notes that a larger sample of participants would add greater depth to the study. A suggestion for future research is to build on the current study and conduct a larger scale research piece to include fathers and single mothers to attain their experiences of WLB. This could have particular implications to support policy change in Ireland. Based on the findings of

the current paper the researcher suggests interviewing the children of the participants of Group A (as they are now adults) with the aim of gaining more insight to their experiences of the WLB and dual-earner couple households.

Conclusion

From conducting this study, the researcher holds there are a complex web of variables that impact on a mother's experience of WLB. Analysing women's experiences of WLB during the 1980's and the experiences of women today show that there are some similarities. The gender specific roles that are still prevalent with the perceived unfair division of child care and domestic chores impact on work/life balance. Government policies have changed in this time span, extended maternity leave and the introduction of parental leave, however they still remain mother centred rather than family focused. During the 1980's Group A had family members or friends minding their children. The implications of childcare did not impact on their decision to return to work. Two out of the four in Group B have the unpaid support of family members and state they could not work without this support. The remaining two participants depend on paid childcare. Group B emphasised the cost of childcare was an important consideration for them when returning to work. The researcher holds that the most significant change was the financial aspect to their decisions. It was suggested that the SES of the women does not directly correlate to having more choice. During the 1980's the women felt they had a choice to work. This is in contrast to the women in Group B who stated that they do not have a choice, for financial reasons they have to work. It could be postulated that Ireland is becoming a more individualistic

society. However, this individualistic society supports WLB for males with women struggling to attain a fair balance.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Experiences of WLB Among Mothers in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown

Guidance Questions:

- 1) Are you married/co-habiting/single?
- 2) How many children do you have and what age are they?
- 3) Did you take maternity leave? How long for?
- 4) Do/did you work full or part time?
- 5) What are your childcare arrangements?
- 6) Cost of childcare?
- 7) Outside of your immediate family do you have support? Example friends/family?
- 8) Explain your typical day?
 - How is housework divided at home
 - How is childcare divided at home
- 9) Could you talk more about your choice to juggle work and family?
- 10) Can you think of any supports from the government that help or hinder your choices?
- 11) Do you have an opinion on mothers who work different to you or do not work at all?
- 12) Do you think that the gender roles have changed from when you were growing up in your family to how your family is set up now, some 30 years later?
- 13) Is there anything that you would change about your current situation or for women who are juggling work and family?
- 14) Economic down-turn and effect on your family? (brought up by Doreen earlier so I re-visited it)
- 15) In your opinion what do you think makes a good mother?

Appendix B

Consent Form



Across Time: The Experiences of Work/Life Balance Among Mothers in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Dublin District.

Experiences of WLB Among Mothers in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown

My name is Aoife O'Neill and I am conducting research that explores your experiences of juggling working and caring for your family.

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

Aoife O'Neill (aoifec_oneill@yahoo.ie)

Thank you for participating in this study.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____