

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

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.

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.

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Method

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'. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher. The interviews were recorded using a dictaphone, transcribed and thematic analysis was conducted by the researcher using the software Envivo10 as a tool.

Results

In conducting thematic analysis on the dataset the researcher identified five themes; routine, responsibility, decision to work, childcare and Government supports.

Routine – What are the women's experiences of their daily routines with WLB.

Responsibility – How was the responsibility perceived by the women in caring for the child/children and domestic tasks.

Decision to Work – The researcher identified a financial and emotional impact on the women's experiences of WLB.

Childcare – The cost of childcare and the perceived gender specific roles that the women identified in this research paper impacted on the WLB.

Government Supports – Although policies have increased maternity leave they still remain mother centred rather than family focused.



Discussion:

The researcher holds there are a complex web of variants that impact on a mother's experience of WLB. Collecting the experiences from women juggling WLB during the 1980's, comparing and contrasting them, to the experiences of women today there were a lot of similarities. The gender specific roles that are still prevalent, unfair division of child care and domestic chores and the impact that it can have on the workplace. Government policies have changed however they still remain mother centred rather than family focused. 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.

References

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