Motherhood in contemporary Ireland – experiences and motivations of having first child during global economic crisis.

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

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April 2011
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my thesis supervisor Annette Jorgensen for her guidance and assistance throughout the process of doing this research project. I would also like to thank the thesis participants, without whom; I could not have completed this project.

In addition, I wish to thank my family, friends and fellow students for their encouragement and support and in particular my mother and sister, who has always been a tower of strength to me.
ABSTRACT

The aim of the below study was to explore and examine motivations and experiences of motherhood in Ireland in the face of global economic crisis. Ireland is exceptional country in EU with the highest birth rate. The 2008 we saw baby boom in Ireland, while year before Irish economy was one of the worst affected by global economic crisis worldwide. Past studies and researches suggests that unemployment and a decline in economic prosperity are likely, based on past trends, to lead people to delay having children, rather than opposite. Thus the main research questions were as following: what is/are the reason(s) of baby boom in Ireland which started after economic crisis in 2007? How/if the economic crisis had an impact on decision making or is it only a coincidence? What kind of emotions and experience accompany with motherhood?

A qualitative methodology was employed using a semi-structured interview. Four participants were interviewed, three were from Malahide and one from Tallaght area, all were females who had a child between years 2007-2011, and were at age of early thirties.

After deep analysis the four key themes emerged: economic factor not directly affecting people decision to have a baby, psycho-social factor (mainly peer group pressure) impacting decision, motherhood experience (as a huge life change, happiness and learning experience) and the mothers’ professional career situation (women disadvantaged/discriminated against, need of sacrifice).

The main limitation of this study was the small sample and limited data, due to the difficulty of finding women willing to spare 30 min of their busy lives on interview. Further research would need to be done in order to illustrate better Irish baby boom phenomenon. Also
because the sample was very specific, future research would benefit if sample would represent people from different social class, backgrounds, environment etc. Also it is important to remember that, in decision making process fathers have very important role, as women are not making decision on their own, therefore future research could take fathers into consideration.
INTRODUCTION

“Ireland saw baby boom in 2008”, “Ireland's birth rate the highest in the EU”, “2008 was baby boom year”, “Baby boom puts us on top of birth rate league” – these are only few newspaper headlines from December 2010 just after The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) has published Perinatal Statistics Report which indicated that there was a 5% increase in the number of births between 2007 and 2008.

Demographics

There were 75,587 births in Ireland in all that year and the birth rate in that period was of 17 per 1,000 inhabitants - the highest in Europe those twelve months. (CSO, 2010; retrieved from website: http://www.cso.ie/statistics/bthsdthsmarriages.htm)

This sharp and meaningful increase in birth rate was referred as baby boom. There is no information available yet for 2010 however despite slight decrease in 2009; Republic had still the highest rate of children per 1000 inhabitants in whole Europe, which were 16.8 while the EU average was 10.7.

At the same time from 2007 Ireland had to face one of the worst economic recessions in its history, the collapse of Celtic Tiger was unexpected by majority of people who almost from day to day have been told by their employers that they are jobless.
Despite this fact however Ireland is still leading European country with the highest birth rate. The aim of this study is to examine and attempt to explain this phenomenon by looking at individuals experiences. Thus the main research questions are as following: what is/are the reason(s) of baby boom in Ireland which started after economic crisis in 2007? How/if the economic crisis had an impact on decision making or is it only a coincidence? What kind of emotions and experience accompany with motherhood? The main purpose of this research is to find out if there is any and what kind of connection between baby boom and economic crisis. As based on the past trends, unemployment and a decline in economic prosperity are likely to delay having children rather than opposite.

**Defining motherhood**

Motherhood is a central issue for humanity since each one of us is born to a mother (Bates et al.,2005: 239) When we think about child immediately we picture mother, traditionally the role of bearing a child was associate with mother, and work and breadwinner with father- men. Common perception of motherhood is still the same and still connect with natural instincts which women have and which motivate them to have a child, however it’s been argued that “maternal instincts do not really exist; instead humans have innate predispositions for complex and varied behaviors. Mothering, even the desire to mother, does not exist in all women who give birth and often does exist in women who do not. (Bates et al.,2005:.240) In the mentioned book authors make an argument that the stereotypical view of motherhood which comes naturally to women can have no biological
verification, however the society perceptions on this may affect women’s feelings and attitudes.

Similar argument has been made by Taylor and Taylor (2003) in their book they presented results of informal conversations with their friends, colleagues and strangers, about the value of children, and the reasons why people decide to have or not have a child. They point the fact that there is deeply held assumption that parenting is the norm therefore non-parenting must be some sort of pathological foundation. (Taylor&Taylor, 2003:34) That means that the views of parenting, and the roles which we play, depending on our gender is very much socially constructed and it will vary between cultures, societies etc.

In less developed countries, people may consciously set out to have as many children as possible, both to increase the family labour force and to mitigate against high rates of infant mortality. In modern Western culture there is considerable resistance to the idea of applying cost-benefit analysis to a decision with such momentous personal and emotional consequences (Taylor&Taylor, 2003:35)

Motherhood experience

In contemporary literature very often the subject of ‘motherhood’ goes hand in hand with ‘sacrifice’ which women have to make. None emphasize how beautiful motherhood can be, how family can fulfill life with love and joy, how child can bring more happiness to marriage. (Taylor&Taylor, 2003:58-59)
In Irish society in particular it is visible as the image of a passive, self-sacrificing mother has strong roots in Irish Catholicism, linked with as image of Mary as a women who obeyed without question and who devoted her life to the service of her son and God. Consequently the image of motherhood was idealized as well as importance of family life and the need of women to make sacrifices for greater good. (O’Connor, 2001:87)

Motherhood is very often used as synonymous of womanhood, which certainly affects women perception of themselves and their roles and place in the world.

However as argued by Oakley (1981) “maternal love is not an instant product”. The bond that unites a mother and child is not an instinct it is more process which happen in the early months and it takes time to develop. The reason for that is that women have to develop skills of how to look after their baby, how to hold it, how to feed it, how to stop from crying, it is not natural, like automatic consequence of giving birth.

She explains further that motherhood is something which women learn to do, learn to be. She compares this to new recipe or new job, which takes time to get used to. She explains that biologically having a baby turns women to be a mother, however in social sense she becomes a mother a little bit later when she begins to care for child, when other people seen her as a mother and finally when she starts to thinks of herself as a mother. It is similar to every other job, the only difference is that for mothers are what women suppose to be. (Oakley, 1981:249)
Factors impacting decision about motherhood

Economic factor

Michael Murphy, professor of demography at the London School of Economics, indicated in the article for Irish Times few important factors that influence people’s decisions of having a child. These are: healthcare, childcare, birth control and cash. “As most people are less well off in a recession and less certain about their future finances, one would expect bad economic times to depress birth rates, as women put off getting pregnant.” ([Wayman](http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/weekend/2010/0911/1224278611521.html), Sep 11, 2010; retrieved from website: http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/weekend/2010/0911/1224278611521.html)

Similarly Jane Gray, senior lecturer in sociology at NUI Maynooth, stated that unemployment and a decline in economic prosperity are likely, based on past trends, to lead people to delay having children, rather than opposite. ([Wayman](http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/weekend/2010/0911/1224278611521.html), Sep 11, 2010; retrieved from website: http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/weekend/2010/0911/1224278611521.html)

2008 baby boom is still very recent phenomenon and therefore not many researches had been done, therefore literature is quite limited on this topic, however in the past there were attempts to explain this type of sociological phenomenon in different parts of the world.
Macunovich (2000) attempted to explain the reasons behind Baby Boom in Post World War US and then the sudden baby bust – high decrease in child birth.

Social Scientists suggested a complex mixture of economic, social and psychological factors. The majority of it occurred through a sharp decline in the proportion of women choosing remain childless. At the same time for many older women these were births postponed during the Depression and World War II. Additionally women resign from staying in labour force in order to stay at home and start families. The exhilaration and optimism after the War seemed too combined with a general feeling of affluence in a booming post war economy.

However this positive relationship between income and fertility didn’t last long and didn’t explain why suddenly fertility failed in early 1960s causing ‘baby bust’.

Economists were trying to come up with unified theory and they focus on three factors:

✓ Male income
✓ The female wage
✓ Material aspiration (desired standard of living)

They assumed that fertility will tend to rise as male income rises, but fall when material aspirations increase and when female wage rise. The female wage is assumed to represent the value of time foregone in the labor market in favor of childbearing: the ‘opportunity cost’ or ‘price’ of women’s time spend in childcare and hence a significant element in the cost of rising children.

One school of economic thought suggest that baby boom on 1950s was caused by rising male income and falling women’s wages (as women were displaced from wartime jobs),
while in the later decades falling male incomes and rising female wages generated the baby bust.

Neal et al (1989), examined 600 couples at early stage of marriage. In this study researchers concentrate on utility model of fertility decision making which suggests that people choice implies weighting of costs and benefits, advantage and disadvantage and relative value of children. Therefore decision to have a child or additional child is based on evaluation of the costs and benefits of children and the potential reward value of childbearing. It’s been found that modern young people at that time (1989) placed a greater emphasis than their parents generation on personal freedom, rational choice and hedonistic values, which as a result cause the decreasing number of child birth.

In Ireland in 2003 Crisis Pregnancy Agency completed research on “Economic factors affecting women’s decision making in crisis pregnancy situations”. First and foremost it is evident from the research conducted that “a set of factors, broadly constructed as ‘economic’ result in many women perceiving their pregnancies as crisis”. (2003) Research also unveiled that there has been a gradual increase in age of mothers giving birth for the first time over the last twenty years – this is now 27 years versus 25 in early 1970s. These suggest that many women delaying childbirth, either until childrearing becomes more affordable – for women who are in employment or women working in the home- or other life goals have been achieved. In 1992 the number of births to single mothers comprised 13.56% of all births and currently accounts for 31%. Households made up of couples (married or cohabiting) with no children are now the fastest growing type of family household. The rise of nearly 35% from 1996- 2006 was seen.
What is interesting that from three main choices: have the baby, place the baby for adoption, have an abortion, a vast majority of respondents in the ICCP study indicated that parenthood/live birth would be the most likely option for women who have experienced crisis pregnancy (it was the outcome for 76% of all women surveyed). This suggest that despite concerns about the financial implications of a crisis pregnancy, the majority of women still chose to parent (75%). This however may be more complex issue as it is important to note that abortion is still illegal in Ireland, and the society is still influence by Catholic Church doctrine.

*Psycho – social factor*

One of the biggest research done recently in Ireland on the topic related to motherhood and family was performed in cooperation of Family Support Agency and ESRI and UCD. The report which they published in 2010 called “Family Figures: Family dynamics and family types in Ireland 1986-2006” gives a very detailed analysis of changing family patterns during this twenty years period. The results were based on Census Data which for the first time were made available fully. In the chapter 5 of his report we find a detail analysis on fertility and the main findings are as follows:

Most women now delay having children beyond 30 years of age with the majority now having two or three. Over one in six women now have no children at age 45.

The higher women educational attainment the longer she is likely to delay having children and the fewer children she is likely to have. Fertilities rates also vary by region, nationality and ethnicity. (ESRI,2010; retrieved from website: http://www.esri.ie/health_information/nprs/nprs_reports/NPRS_AR_2008.pdf)
On the contrary O’Connor (2001:91) will argue that being a female in Irish society is very closely tied up with the bearing of children, and this is closely linked to Catholic Church influence as for “bishops only mothers are real women”. For many women especially involved in the religion, this perception of being women could affect their decision of becoming a mother.

**Cultural factor**

European Values Studies 1990 and 2000 suggest that Irish people place a very high value on family. In the 1990 Survey (N= 1000) family was ranked as ‘very important’ over 90% (Hilliard, 2007: 131). Then ten years later in 1999/2000 (N=1012) nine out of ten Irish respondents again rated family as ‘very important’ – according to Fahey et al. (2005) report.

Traditionally women are the ones who are primarily seen as the full time carers and the ones who are guardians of hearth and home. The Irish Constitution in Article 41 defines role of women and their duty as “In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.” Women therefore are brought up in the atmosphere that their primary duty is to be mother and bear children, and that this role will make them happy and fulfilled their lives.
Mothers and career life

Since feminism movement women started becoming more and more independent from men. They started entering labour market and try to progress professional career of their own. That surely also affect the decision whether or not to have a child. Taylor & Taylor (year: 46) conclude that because children nowadays are matter of choice, thanks to contraceptives, abortion, more and more couples decide to remain childless as children are not really needed. In particular from women perspective they can be even seen only as obstacles in pursuing their career. “It is, generally agreed among experts that there is strong link between women’s decisions to remain childless and their eagerness to pursue careers of their own”.

The opposite arguments has been made by Sylvia Ann Hewlett in her book “Baby Hunger” (2002) in which she presented the outcomes of the interviews which she had with high achieving women in US, most of which were childless. According to her research nearly half of all highly educated, high earning women are childless. She makes a clear statement: “the more successful the women the less likely it is that she will have a baby. For men the opposite is true: the more professional success and status a man enjoys, the more likely it is that he will be married with children.” Although 33% of high achieving women are childless at age 40, and this figure rises to 42% in Corporate America, Hewlett argues “The vast majority of these women did not choose to be childless. Looking back to their 20ties only 14% said they definitely had not wanted children” (Hewlett, 2002: 92)
Sylvia also address the issue of inequality in labor force, the amount of work and commitment which women has to made to be able achieve the same goal as men. She also emphasizes the reality of women who choose to make career and who have to make dreadful decision between family and work as it is almost impossible to have it all.

She presents the problem of discriminating women who have children, how the promotion and career growth opportunities will be taken off them if they choose to have family. Women in her interviews very often woke up when it was too late to have children and even though they had great career, money, all material goods, they did not have what they lack most, warmth and piece of family life. Also in terms of responsibility in taking care of child for example only 9% of husbands take time off from work when child is sick, while the figure is 51% for their high-achieving wives, which consequently will affect women’s career.

In terms of Irish society, with rapid economic growth, women participation in paid employment has substantially changed between 1971 and 1996. We observe women growth by 212,000 as compared with growth of 23,000 in male employment. This increase is usually linked with women higher education levels; a declining birth rate; a rising level of individualization; capitalism demand for cheap labour force and Irish women’s willingness to provide that kind of labour. (O’Connor, 2001:36)

It is difficult for Irish women to achieve the high level jobs while being a mother. In the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), Irish women expressed their unhappiness with their current position whereby they are unable to achieve desired balance between employment and care responsibilities. (Barry, 2008: 174). At the same time numbers of
studies have shown that in Ireland even today, women in senior posts in the civil service, in banking, in the academy and in accountancy were more likely to be single and less likely to have children than their male counterparts. (O’Connor, 2001:236) This therefore puts women between major life choices, either to be a wife and a mother, or go up to the ladder of professional achievements.
METHODOLOGY

The experiences and motivations for motherhood in Ireland during global economic crisis is qualitative descriptive analysis, data led piece of research. The qualitative approach was taken due to the fact that this is recent phenomenon and most of researches on that subject were done using quantitative methods.

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)

As Richie explains in his book Qualitative research practice: a guide for social science students and researchers: “qualitative research is a naturalistic, interpretative approach concerned with understanding the meanings which people attach to phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values etc.) within their social worlds” (Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 3) He explains further: “the qualitative methods are used to address the research questions that require explanations or better understanding of social phenomena and their contexts” (Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 3)

The research adopts descriptive approach in order to find more information about the experiences, motivations and decisions making processes regarding parenting and having a child during the economic crisis.
Participants

This research was based on freely given informed consent of Irish mothers who have had their first child between years 2007-2011 and were at the age of early thirties. Initially access to participants was to be gained by distributing information letter to managers of three crèches who looks after early born children were three of my friends are working. However I have not received any response. Therefore I have started to approach women in person when they were picking up their children from day care, and briefly explaining what research is about and what would be involved if they decide to participate. This method was not successful as well as women very often explained that they are too busy to find time to meet me in addition to their daily routines. After realizing that I will not be able to convince women this way, I have decided to use snowball sampling, by asking my friends if they know any women who had recently children and are around thirty years of age. Then when I met with them at the end of interview I was asking them if they know any other women who recently had first child and after consultation they were providing me with their contact details. A total of 9 women agreed to participate in this study, but 3 of them cancelled interviews in the last minute, and 2 others were rolled out as they did not fit required criteria (one of them was 39 years old and the other had first baby in 1997) hence only 4 of them were purposely chosen for the interview sample that provided the raw data for this research.

All of participants were from Dublin, three from Malahide area, and one from Tallaght. The participants were married and age from 31 to 34 which enabled me to do a cohort study. Two women have two children age one and three, one had three months old little boy and one was pregnant at the time having already two years old boy. The highest level of
education completed by women was bachelor degree, this was the case for all women from Malahide, while woman from Tallaght completed diploma only. The average yearly household income was 93K, the highest of 120K for family in Malahide and the lowest of 50K for family in Tallaght. All women describe themselves as Roman Catholic, but in most cases not practising.

Procedure

The primary source of data for this study was face to face in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted in March 2011 by one female interviewer and lasted from seventeen to thirty two minutes. The interviews can be considered as semi structured because they were guided by a set of topics to be addressed. Questions were generally open-ended with follow-up probes designed to direct participant’s attention to the major area of interest (Berg, 2009, p. 105). Corresponding to the research question, the interviews were designed mostly to generate description of experiences, motivations and feelings of first time mothers in contemporary Irish society. Why and how they decided to have children, what children brought into their lives, how their lives changed and if they regret it?

Data Analysis

All four interviews were recorded using the Olympus Dictaphone. The interviews were later transcribed into World document. In the transcripts participant’s names and those of their children or husbands have not been used. A qualitative content analysis
process was applied to the research data, oriented towards summarizing the informational contents of the data.

The analysis was performed in few stages using the NVivo software. After familiarising with the data relevant parts of the text were coded by creating the free nodes. The next stage was the reviewing of the existing nodes and make sure they all make sense and are relevant to the text coded, also any duplicates which appeared were merged into one relevant node. This also enabled to create the initial ideas of the patterns within the text which could be potential themes. The notes were made to make sure that nothing will be missed in the later stage of the analysis. After reviewing all nodes again the deeper analysis was performed of which the aim was to find a relationship between the free nodes. Once that completed the Tree nodes were created as a result of the logical connection made. During that stage it was possible to identify patterns within the text and the main themes which will be described in more detail in the results section.
RESULTS

Four main themes emerged from the performed interviews: economic factor not affecting peoples decision to have a child, psycho-social factor (mainly peer group pressure) impacting decision, motherhood experience (as a huge life change, happiness and learning experience) and the mothers professional career situation (women disadvantaged/discriminated against, need of sacrifice).

Economic factor

All families were in some way were affected by economic crisis however not to extend which would stop them from having children. This is opposite to an argument which was made by different sociologists. In most cases the wages has been cut, but luckily all of them manage to keep their jobs safe.

“ehm, yes, but not as much as lots of other people, we both still have our jobs, both had decrease in income, especially my husband, but he still has his job, eee, so there was an impact financially, but it didn’t stop us from paying our bills or meeting our mortgage or anything like that, so, ehm” (Interview 3)

However financial crisis mostly affected household in Tallaght, were the husband’s wages were decreased few times, while wife is not working and mind child at home.

“Yeah, big time, I mean (husband’s name) had his wage cut couple times, you know, he is in the job nearly four years and instead of getting raises every year, he’s never had a rise , instead wages just gone down, yeah, it’s getting tough , definitely I’m not bringing anything at all, so, yeah, big time it’s affected us, I mean we’re lucky our mortgage went down after we moved in but , you know that could go shoot up any time so , we kinda would be apprehensive about that, but we don’t have as much money as we’d like and that’s sacrifice I suppose you make when we , one of you stay at home, but “ (Interview 4)
Women express that finance was not something they would be concerned with or worried about when deciding to have children as otherwise they would never decide to have one, but what was sticking is the way child takes over and bring such a piece into their lives that they do not feel concerned about the world outside as they have their own little baby who they need to mind, and make sure grew up in peaceful and healthy environment, and they would make sure it will happen.

“my husband works in banking, so it’s always in the media, and there was lot going on around the time (child name) was born, but somehow, because we are having baby, I just didn’t care a bit about it.”(Interview 1)

But at the same time they admit that they feel so relaxed about it because they have secure job and they do not really have to worry about the money. It has been the case again to all women living in Malahide area while for woman in Tallaght, the experience of economy collapsing was somehow different, to the extent that it changed her perception of family.

“I did always said I wanted a big family but now I don’t (laugh) my two is enough I think, you know, it’s just such a hard work, so” (Interview 4)

In the decision making process the life stage and conditions were very important. For all women from Malahide, finishing college, then career progression and getting married was very important before they have decided to have a child. It was kind of the next step in their lives which they progressed.
“yeah, you could say we didn’t rush into it... Yeah, you know, we were married full year, over a year before I was pregnant, ehm, and before that, we’ve done a good bit, well we went to Australia together for a year and my husband has done more travelling than I, he’s done a lot, so, that was kind of important I suppose, but no, definitely we wouldn’t have children before we decided to get married so, that was kind of it” (Interview 1)

“I guess it was more career, money and you know buying house and get ourselves financially secure, go on holidays and you know, I was much more money driven before, definitely” (Interview 3)

This is similar to the results of the research done by Neal et al (1989) where he presented that couples, at the early stage of marriage, before decide to have a child, they will weight cost and benefit to see if they are ready for that major move in their lives.

The situation was slightly different again for mother from Tallaght, due to the fact that she got pregnant while was engaged, and that she was not really career driven person and she was working as office administrator. Nevertheless, she was engaged, both she and her fiancé had jobs at the time, and they bought the house, that suggest then that regardless if pregnancy was planned or not, the financial stability still matters even though as shown above they say that nor really.

“no, we were engaged, we got our house and then I ended up pregnant, so it wasn’t planned but it was still, brilliant, brilliant surprise, you know(...)” (Interview 4)

Regardless that it was not planned pregnancy she was very happy when she found out that she is expecting a baby. Even though the financial situation of that family was not the best as her fiancé/husband had his wage cut few times after economic crash, it seems that she never seen her pregnancy as crisis, which happens to many women who have unplanned pregnancy. That also suggests that if women have support network it is easier for her to manage this kind of surprises.
Psycho-social factor

Women when asked about the reasons to have children usually said it was right time to do it. All of them were at early thirties and they were aware that biological clock is ticking and due to the fact that they did not knew how long it will take to conceive it was better start sooner, and luckily all of them did not have any major problems and soon after decision women got pregnant and gave birth to healthy children.

Surprisingly the peer group pressure seem to play very important role in the decision making process, two mothers openly pointed out this reason by saying that what motivate them to think about having a child were friends who were having babied, this fact encourage and make them want children as well.

“: I suppose it depends, I mean, there is about two out of group of fifteen of my friends that are not married, so I suppose it’s kind of natural flow that happened, and the ones that aren’t married are not in the serious relationships so, yeah, we just seem all be in relationships and we got married and I think as well it’s like that when one person gets married then the idea kind of, people get influenced” (Interview 2)

“(…) ehm certainly I my twenties I didn’t wanted to have children, you know, and then early thirties I started, yeah, and my friends started to have kids and I thought ohh, you know, would be nice, when they all have children, like one of my sister had kids, and I thought “oh, should be nice” (Interview 3)
Three women started think about having a children at early thirties, however one of them always wanted to have children and get married, and she always had strong maternal instinct which motivate her to have children shortly after got married.

“having children was always a big thing for me, like if I imagine someone who didn’t want to have children I would definitely not married him, ehm I suppose having children was a big thing for me, ehm and then my career was as well, you know like, being a teacher was a really important as well, I suppose at different times in your life” (Interview 2)

For all three women from Malahide getting education and progressing career was also very important prior to settling down and start a family. All of them finished college, got third level education, the lowest was the degree level, they travel a little bit, enjoy their social life, progressing career, and then after all these goals were accomplished with more or less success there was time to have a baby. It suggest therefore that the upper class women perception of themselves concentrate primarily in terms of the life challenges and decision of having a baby is therefore postponed until almost very last minute. They wanted to make sure they have secure career, workplace, etc. Work is important for them as it is part of their identity and who they are.

“you know, and I’m still speech language therapist, you know, I think, I’ll work again, maybe not just out of need but it’s part of who I am as well” (Interview 1)

Motherhood experience

For all women motherhood experience accompany by huge range of emotions. The most common and very often express was happiness and amazing feeling. Regardless if pregnancy was planned or not, women were very happy when find out that they are going
to have a baby, and they receive huge support from their partners. Even though for women from Tallagh area, financially she and her husband had difficult situation, still unexpected pregnancy was not perceived as crisis, which suggested report from Crisis Pregnancy Agency.

“Ehm, I don’t know, like it’s just amazing how you feeling when you have children” (Interview 3)

“first of all: really, really happy, and happiest ever been in my life” (Interview 1)

“ehm, I was , I can’t say that I felt sad or upset or anything, I was delighted, it wasn’t the time that I kind of had plan to get married first like some people do, ehm and maybe in year or two after while we be married to have a child, but when I found out , I was “well, there you go”, this is the time, so and the more I got into it, was just brilliant,” (Interview 4)

Women enjoy time with children and find it at times very funny, especially when they observe children development, first steps, first words etc.

Nevertheless at the same time being a mother is at times very difficult experience which was described as overwhelming, especially when women cannot meet their basic physical needs, even going to toilet or to shower is challenging as they have to make sure that their child is in safe place, and while they are away there is no even slightest danger that something could happen to their little ones.

“but in the beginning I found it very overwhelming, it like, you know, when he was new born and I put him in the basket and say all right I go and have a shower and then he might wake up and I am like ohh, can I just get the shower? And something like that, so yeah, it’s a big shock to the system but you know, you get used to and yeah”

However regardless it is still amazing experience and they could not compare to anything else in life as it is the best they ever felt and although challenging at times is very rewarding.
“finding the experience is great, it’s brilliant, it’s absolutely brilliant, it’s all rewarding and, you know, we are very lucky that we’ve happy, healthy child, so I love him, I can’t complain.” (Interview 5)

All women agreed that having a child was a huge life change for them and their partner especially in terms of priorities. Child is on the first place, and everything what women do is for the best of their child. They constantly keep thinking about someone else then themselves, making sure that child is fed, changed etc.

“I just thought, just combination of lack of sleep and complete change of priorities and someone so needy, very worrying, kept worrying about little things as well” (Interview 1)

“just being responsible for every little thing, you know like, you have to make sure they are changed, they sleep, they’re fed and then any little thing that you do wrong can affect them, you know, just try not to kill them when bringing home” (interview 4)

Although all of interviewed women were very active since they have a child they feel they are much busier and being a mother is very hard work, they describe this often as 24h 7 days a week, job as they cannot simply leave child whenever they want and do something else. They are constantly responsible for someone, and they need to make sure that this little being is well looked after.

Motherhood is experience which totally changed women perception of life and make them enjoy it much more.

“I enjoy my life lot more, I appreciate the quiet times, but I appreciate having fun with him and all that kind of stuff” (Interview 4)

While three women adjust their lives completely towards children, for one of them situation
is different, as she did not want children to take over her and her husband life altogether. They both consciously make a huge effort to still have married life, enjoy themselves, to make sure that children are not the only thing which connects and keep them together.

“(…)I think we’ve made a big effort not to let children completely take over our lives, which I’m happy about, cause we still have life together, like you know, it’s like really nice, and we still have friends, a lot of friends and good social life, and I’m really happy about that (laugh). I don’t think I would be able to survive without my out life (Interview 2)”

All women agreed that although they were delighted to have children, it took a while to get used to that fact, the consciousness that there is someone there all the time looking for their attention, someone who they need to remember to take care of, and the inability to do things whenever they want. This change in life was major for all of them as most of them had very busy social life. As Oakley (1981) suggested it takes time before women learn the new role, new job, which is motherhood, but all women after a while, agreed that they are the happiest even been.

On the other hand women were very reluctant in answering what if they missed anything from time before. Usually they answer that nothing really, that this period is brilliant and they would not change anything. However two admitted that they miss their own space, time for themselves, when they are left alone, and can look after themselves. Women kind of feel they do not have time to rest as all the time they do something, if not washing, dishes, cooking, then playing with baby, feeding, going for a walk.

“Probably like, you know ehm, my own space, I guess, it’s all what I miss, probably its most accurate because you know there is always somebody looking for my attention now, you know that kind of way, even at night time, you know. Somebody climbing beside the bed , so I do miss my own space a little bit I suppose, that’s what I miss most. (Interview 3)”
Children brought a lot to life of these women; they somehow change it and make it better.

Mostly women by their children influence changed their life view, and open them to completely new world, which they did not know before,

“So it was a life change, it’s good, it’s a good experience, ehm kids are great, ehm its opened us to whole new world of different people, you know ehm and different things like, before on a Saturday we would sleep into late and we get up and make dinner, but now we get up like seven o’clock and by time everybody else is like you know ready for lunch, we’ve done a days activities so you know it’s different that way, it’s been different but it’s been good, yeah, no I’m really enjoying it, yeah” (Interview 3)

Having a child brought such a happiness and calmness into their lives that even in the atmosphere of economic recession, and huge uncertainty women still managed to stay calm and fully enjoy time with their children.

“I suppose people talk about that a lot, ehm, my husband works in banking, so it’s always in the media, and there was lot going on around the time Fin was born, but somehow, because we are having baby, I just didn’t care a bit about it(...)” (Interview 1)

Especially for one woman having a child was associated with fulfilled, completed life. She was happy in her life but her perception of womanhood is strongly connected with having a husband and child, even more with having a child. Even though she had great job, career, she was travelling and had great social life, without a child her life would not really had sense. That shows strong connection between Irish women perception of their role in society and what brings happiness to their life. Without children they would miss something, they would not feel like real women. (O’Connor, 2001)

She also mentioned that she feels blessed, which after asked if that is connected with her religious affiliations she told me that it’s more like an expression. That shows that even though Catholic faith is not practised regularly by people, the strong Church influence is still
seen in culture and people’s perception.

“hmm, ehm, it’s very important to me, ehm, I feel privileged that I’m able to have a child, ehm, feel blessed, it’s, I don’t think I’d feel complete, that my life was complete, despite doing lots of things work wise and career wise and travel wise, if I haven’t have a baby” (Interview 1)

**Mothers and employment**

All three women after having a first child wanted to go back to work, however after they gave birth to the second child they reflected more deeply and they admitted that if they could they would prefer to stay at home with their babies. The change in perception was most clearly seen for women who were very career driven before having a child.

All women were working full-time before having a child and they were very much career driven, except the women from Tallaght, as she would not describe herself as career driven type, and she was working in admin therefore nothing really extraordinary. After maternity leave all women wanted to go back to work but after doing so they felt a little bit guilty when leaving their baby in crèche or having nanny to mind them. Hence slowly the idea of putting aside their career was developing in their mind and after having a second baby they decided to do so. All three women from Malahide can afford it, and again women from Tallaght had financial concerns, and even though she would love to stay with child, her husband work situation may force her to go back to work, or even emigrate to Australia.

On the other side for one woman, the job is part of her identity, who she is, and it is important for her to continue work as she would not like to loose it:
“but I think I am still me as well as being mother, you know, and I’m still speech language therapist, you know, I think, I’ll work again, maybe not just out of need but it’s part of who I am as well” (Interview 1)

As it was suggested by Barry (2008), women pointed out that being full-time mother is not perceived as work, and they felt is not appreciated and in a way is not fair that all care responsibility falls under women, and it is been assumed that women have to do it all. They explained that being a mother requires good time management, creativity, full of energy, patience and all these skills are valued in any other professions. They also expressed disappointment in peoples reaction when they say they are full time mothers.

“I think people don’t realize the amount of work that you do and that’s what, if you say, if someone asks you oh, what do you do? And you go I’m full time mother, then they go ohh..!, you know and then they don’t know what else to say, you know cause they would go that, oh that must been interesting or whatever, whereas if I said Oh I got a big financial job, they would think oh, yeah, conversation might start from there” (Interview 4)

These expected women roles perceptions which women expressed on the interviews, and which are clearly defined in Irish Constitution, shows how women are influenced by social and cultural factors.

Women openly said that they feel disadvantaged and that point was also made by Barry (2008) and Hawlett (2002), in terms of professional career progression, women have to make choice, as they cannot be both, the best at their work, and great mothers. They need to sacrifice one or the other.

“(…)at the end of the day, you know ehm, you have to make decision what do you want in your life, because you can’t do everything, so you either have to be you know brilliant mother or brilliant at work, it’s very hard to be both, beside, well you can, but you’d be racked” (Interview 3)

Women in general did not complain or felt sad, but they presented their consciousness that
they are in some way discriminated and the gender inequality exists. At the same time it is important for them to create the same home atmosphere for their children as they had in their own houses, where mother was present and available to talk, or simply just be for them. They want to make sure that despite this world craziness their children never miss their parents as they believed it is crucial for child to have parents present.
DISCUSSION

From the analysis of the data four main themes emerged, these are: economic factor not directly affecting people decision to have a baby, psycho-social factor (mainly peer group pressure) impacting decision, motherhood experience (as a huge life change, happiness and learning experience) and the mothers professional career situation (women disadvantaged/discriminated against, need of sacrifice).

In contrast to suggestions in the literature and common perception, economic factor tend to not be the reason which would stop people from having a children. However it is important to note that all interviewed women, in particular women from Malahide area, had good income and their financial situation was not drastically affected by economic crash and all had their life well settled before decision was made. All couples from thre were travelling, enjoy their social life, progress career, got good education and after all these goals were accomplished they decided to have a child. There seem to be tendency that women from upper middle class are not concern about the income and financial stability because they have it.

For all women being a mother is the best experience in their lives and they feel that they would miss something if they did not have a child. Motherhood fulfill their lives, but it also suggests that the common Catholic perception of womanhood, which si fully expressed and experienced only in motherhood, is still very common among Irish women, even though they do not describe themselves as religious, unconsciously they are affected by this, maybe not so much in the religion per se but as a part of an Irish culture.
Motherhood accompany by two extreme and very strong feelings as women, on one side, described themselves as very happy, the happiest ever been, but on the other, the hardest thing they ever had to do.

Apart from one women, three shared the same feelings, that regardless how well prepared you think you are you are completely unprepared to be a mother and mind the child.

Being a mother is very demanding and hard work, but also a huge life change and change in priorities. What all women shared was the idea of huge shift in their way of thinking from little things like if baby is fed, changed etc. It took a while for women to realize what it means for them to be a mum. It was brilliant but very difficult experience, as they somehow acquired new identity.

This exceptional women, who from the beginning felt very relaxed and did not really need to take time to get used to might be associated with her character and temper, as during interview she made strong impression that she is never sad, she is very positive and open minded person with ‘can do’ attitude, not careless but ‘take it easy’ type of personality.

The decision making process was quite rational as couple firstly travelled, enjoy themselves, bought the house, get education, progress in career, get financially stable and after being well settled and secure they decided that the only thing which they miss is baby.

I have asked randomly among my friends and work colleagues why they think so many people decide to have a child these days, 90% people answered “cause there is nothing on TV”. This seems to be common perception of majority, and it might be partially true, that when people do not have job, or work less, they start to have time for other things, and because they do not have money to spend, they stay at home.
On the other side however it is important to remember that many of couples postponed their decision of having a child, as well as in Ireland many of the foreign nationals have more and more children. Therefore there is a huge accumulation of different groups who are able and willing, to have children, among them are: young people, who like always, in every society have children, (teenage pregnancies, unexpected pregnancies, as a result of rape etc.) then the bulk of people who postponed the decision to after thirties and also huge amount of immigrants who came to Ireland at the time of Celtic Tiger and get well settled and start the family here.

Another reason which was quite surprising to discover was, the peer group pressure, which apparently was never taken into consideration in the past but in this study it was very strong factor for interviewed women, except the one from Tallaght whose pregnancy was unplanned. Hence, when they were observing other couples having a baby, suddenly it made them want children as well. That shows the psychological mechanism in women, unconsciously they all see themselves in the role of mothers, but nowadays it is difficult to make decision as there are so many other opportunities out there, like career, travelling etc. However, once they see that someone else can do that, and they are very happy, then apparently it encourages them as well, and we witness the domino effect, especially if there are many people around us at the similar life stage.

Also all women, despite the fact they are very happy with their lives, children and family, expressed awareness of the reality, that they are career wise, at the lost position due to their gender. They feel the pressure which society put on women to be carers and child minders and consequently to sacrifice their career. Because there is so much work involved with children it is impossible to do both, progressing up in the ladder and be amazing and
caring mother and wife. Women have to make this choice either to have family or to be high achievers in their workplace; they simply cannot have it both in contrast to men.

Due to the small sample and limited data, further research would need to be done in order to illustrate better Irish baby boom phenomenon. Also because the sample was very specific, future research would benefit if would take more varied sample, which would represent people from different social class, backgrounds, environment etc. Also only women were interviewed, but it is important to remember that, in decision making process fathers have very important role, as women are not making decision on their own.

Due to the fact that peer group pressure was never taken into consideration in terms of factor which could explain the baby booms, I think it would be interesting take a closer look into this aspect of couples motivations to have children and possibly explore it more as in the age of huge marketing, advertising and media shaping out thought we are very easily influenced by what others people have what we do not.
REFERENCES:


## APPENDIX 1

### Motherhood experiences in Contemporary Ireland.

<p>| Interview 1 |
|------------------|-------------|
| <strong>1. What is your age?</strong> | 32 |
| <strong>2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?</strong> | Primary Degree |
| <strong>3. What is your occupation?</strong> | Speech language therapist |
| <strong>4. What is your own yearly income?</strong> | € 50,000 before tax |
| <strong>5. What is your total household income, including all earners in your household?</strong> | € 120,000 before tax |
| <strong>6. What is your current marital status?</strong> | Married |
| <strong>7. What is your religious affiliation?</strong> | Roman Catholic |
| <strong>8. What is your race?</strong> | Irish |
| <strong>9. What is your area of living?</strong> | Malahide |
| <strong>10. What is your city of birth?</strong> | Dublin |
| <strong>11. How many sisters and brothers do you have?</strong> | 3 brothers |</p>
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<td><strong>Interview 2</strong></td>
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## Motherhood experiences in Contemporary Ireland.

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<td><strong>Interview 4</strong></td>
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APPENDIX 2

Motherhood experiences in Contemporary Ireland

My name is Kinga Tarent and I am conducting research that explores experiences of first time mothers in contemporary Ireland.

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

Kinga Tarent (ktarent86@yahoo.fr)

Annette Jorgensen (Annette.jorgensen@dbs.ie)

Thank you for participating in this study.

Participant Signature: ____________________________    Date: __________________
APPENDIX 3

Dr. Annette Jorgensen,
Research Coordinator,
Social Science Programme,
Dublin Business School.

9th Feb 2011.

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Re: Permission to conduct a research study.

Kinga Tarent is enrolled as a final year social science student at Dublin Business School. DBS social science students are required to complete an independent research project during their final year of study. Kinga’s final year research project aims to examine the experiences of mothers of young children during the current economic crisis.

All research conducted by final year students is done for the purpose of meeting course requirements. All results obtained are strictly confidential, and to be used for assessment of the researching student’s qualifications for receipt of a BA in Social Science. Kinga is requesting written permission, as soon as possible, to approach parents of children in your creche to collect research data.

Please feel free to address any questions regarding this research to Dr. Annette Jorgensen, Research Coordinator, Social Science Programme, Dublin Business School. Kinga (Email: ktarent86@yahoo.fr) can also provide further details about how she will conduct her research study. Thank you for your time.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Annette Jorgensen
Email: annette.jorgensen@dbs.ie