

Life satisfaction among Parents and Non-Parents.

Natalie Peavoy

1647308

National College of Ireland

BA (Hons) Psychology

Supervisor: Michael Cleary Gaffney,

Submission: March 2021

Declaration form

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland
 Research Students Declaration Form
 (Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Niall Páras

Student Number: 16147308

Degree for which thesis is submitted: Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Psychology

Title of Thesis: Life Satisfaction among Priests and non-priests

Date: 06/02/2021

Material submitted for award

A. I declare that this work submitted has been composed by myself.



B. I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.



C. I agree to my thesis being deposited in the NCI Library online open access repository NORMA.



D. *Either* *I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

Or *I declare that the following material contained in the thesis formed part of a submission for the award of

(State the award and the awarding body and list the material below)



Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank all eight participants for their time, honesty, and contribution to this study. Unknowingly to yourselves you have made this research enjoyable and insightful for me personally, whilst also contributing to psychological research and making my final year project possible, thank you so much I am truly incredibly grateful.

To my family in particular Cheryl for all your help, the Flood family, my friends, and work colleagues, thank you so much for your understanding, support, and courage and for helping me throughout the ups and downs of this project, uniquely you have all contributed to this in your own way by supporting me and I am incredibly grateful and lucky to have had you all during this time.

To the staff at NCI in particular my supervisor Michael Cleary Gaffney and David Mothersill, thank you for giving me the confidence that was required to tackle such an important project. I am grateful for your guidance and knowledge.

Finally, to my absolute rock my fiancé Ciaran. I don't know where to start with thanking you. I am so grateful for your encouragement every single day throughout this project, you have been by my side throughout every part of it, thank you so much Ciaran for everything.

Abstract

The main aim of this study was to investigate how parents and non-parents evaluate their life satisfaction. The study was conducted from a qualitative analysis approach which consisted of eight Female participants, four of which were parents and four of which were non-parents. The study also investigated the societal pressures on parental status. Four key themes were identified which were the following, overall security, self-fulfilment, social expectations, and education. Life satisfaction appeared to be consistent in all participants which showed slightly different results from previous studies, however all participants experienced an extraordinary amount of social pressure which was consistent with previous research. This study is important to an Irish population due to housing and financial support provided, the gender pay gap, equality, and infertility. The conclusion that can be draw from this study is that life satisfaction appears to be consistent in both parents and non-parents, however Ireland appears to show much pressure within society on parental status, with non-parents feeling much social pressure to become parents and parents feeling pressure to have a certain number of children, gender of children, and age range of children.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	Pages 6-14
Parent and Non-parent literature review,	
Current study aims,	
Methods sections.....	Pages 15-18
Participants,	
Materials,	
Design,	
Procedure,	
Results.....	Pages 19-33
Overall Security,	
Self-fulfilment,	
Social expectations,	
Education,	
Discussion.....	Pages 34-41
Conclusion,	
References.....	Pages 42-44
Appendix.....	Pages 45-67
Interview questions,	
Interview schedule,	
Information sheet,	
Debriefing,	
Facebook post for advertising,	
Code words from interviews,	
Mind Maps,	
Samples from transcribed interviews,	

Introduction

There were 59,796 childbirths in Ireland in 2019, the average age of first-time mothers was 31.3 years of age, 37,024 of these births were to married couples with 640 of the births within a civil partnership and the remaining births to parents outside marriage or a civil partnership, (CSO.2020). Children are assists to society and are the future generation which is why human reproduction is vital, without reproduction life would not continue, (Lesthaeghe, 1980). Some people chose to become parents for reasons such as wanting to extend and grow family, to feel the intense love parents often report they feel for their children, for companionship or to fulfil a need or want, (Corbett, 2018). The want to achieve parenthood can often be attributed to the focusing illusion phenomenon which is a concept where one is slightly mislead about a situation and tends to focus on the positive or exciting aspects of the situation and neglect the thoughts and ideas of the negative or challenging aspects, (Schkade & Kahneman, 1998). It has also been suggested that people chose to have children as they believe that it offers a diverse range of emotional rewards, (Schoen, Kim, Nathanson, Fields, & Astone, 1997). Some people feel that they should have children for social acceptance and often feel pressured to reproduce, (Stanley et al. 2003).

Life satisfaction is best described as one's own evaluation of their quality of life by judging it on their life as a whole rather than particular parts of their life, (Diner,1984). Life satisfaction and happiness can be commonly mistaking as the same thing, (Gilbert, 2009). Happiness is considered more of a positive emotion in a particular time, and life satisfaction is more a stable long-term feeling in life, (Gilbert, 2009). Longitudinal research has consistently appeared to show evidence that life satisfaction is associated with better overall physical and psychological health, (Siahpush, Spittal, & Singh, 2008)

There are different reasons why people do not become parents, some people decide not to reproduce, while others are affected by infertility or personal circumstances. The

decision on whether to become a parent or not can depend on multiple factors, it is considered that some people will choose not to become parents for reasons such as economic decline, greater opportunity for self-fulfilment, (Blackstone & Stewart, 2012), feeling unsuited to the role as a parent or unwilling to make a lifelong commitment (Gillespie, 2003). Many people wish to become parents but fail to conceive. Infertility is the inability to become pregnant naturally after a prolonged period of trying to conceive. Infertility can occur in both Males and Females and can be caused by numerous factors such as hormonal imbalances, general health issues, mental health issues, environmental factors, age, poor diet or sometimes infertility can be unexplained, (Rowe et al.,1993). It is estimated that roughly every 1 in 6 couples in Ireland will experience fertility issues, (Allison, 2011). Some people fail to find a romantic partner to reproduce with, in this situation and in infertility cases some people can often feel that the choice has been made for them, (Stanley, Edwards, & Hatch, 2003). Qualitative and quantitative research have consistently found negative psychological effects on people who fail to become parents, (Greil, 1997). The most common negative effects that research have found on non-parents is lowered self-esteem, and feeling of shame, (Greil, 1997). Studies have appeared to suggest that non-parents find some difficulties in socialising with friends who are parents and often feel excluded from events because they are not parents, (Balen, & Bos,2009). Further qualitative studies have expanded on this area of research and through interviewing non-parent participants they have found that non-parents reported occasionally feeling disrespected, isolation and exclusion because they are not parents, (Bos, Balen, & Visser, 2005).

Much of the research carried out on psychological differences between parents and non-parents usually show mixed results for both parents and non-parents, (Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky 2014). According to Hansen 2012, they suggest that parenthood is one of life's greatest joys and further suggesting that parents have more life satisfaction than non-

parents. In contrast to this, much more research has continuously showed evidence to support the theory that that non-parents show higher levels of life satisfaction to parents as they report lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression to parents as parents appear to have relatively less leisure time, Sleep disturbance, Strained partner relationships, and financial strain due to costs of food, medical care and schooling for their children, (Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky 2014)

Parent and non-parent studies are slightly complex and possibly show mixed results because of other situations participants might be in. An example can be seen in research that found all parents who took part in a study had experienced increased social integration, but the single mothers experienced reduced self-efficacy and experienced higher levels of depression, this research could be due to the fact that the participant is single rather than been a single parent, (Nomaguchi and Milkie, 2003) however, further research has showed that some parents who were in relationship and had reported receiving little support from their partner due to different reasons such as their partner working long hours, appeared to show higher levels of depression which could be as a result of the pressures of raising a child with little or no support, (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, Papp, & Dukewich, 2002). This is an example of how participants from the same group (parents) found significant differences in self-efficacy and depression. Some empirical research suggests that parents of younger children show lower levels of satisfaction to parents of older children and can often show lower levels of satisfaction to non-parents, (Pollmann-Schult, 2014). This research would seem to suggest that differences in circumstances for example how many children and ages of children a person has can depend on their level of satisfaction. Along with the mixed and complex findings of parent and non-parent studies, culture can also be an influence on how we perceive the lives of parents and non-parents (Stanley et al., 2003).

Beliefs, perceptions, and pressures can vary between people on parenthood and childlessness and is usually driven by society (Stanley et al., 2003). It is also important to note that some people choose to have children solely for social acceptance or pressure in a cultural setting, for example African American mothers are viewed more favourably than childfree mothers according to a study conducted, (Vinson et al, 2010). This study consisted of 224 women from a southwestern American state using a Likert scale from 1 to 7 for 10 traits, it gave an outline of a married couple with successful careers, shared hobbies and very satisfied in life. The only difference between the couples was that one couple were parents and the other couple were not parents. Although the study appears to indicate that mothers are viewed more favourably than childfree women it could be criticized because of selection bias. The sample consisted of 224 women who were undergraduate students and receiving course credits for participation in this study, the study could possibly show different results where no reward was given. In Germany however it is understood that non-parents are more socially accepted than in United states, this could suggest that people residing in Germany feel less pressure to become parents rather than in the United states, (Dykstra & Hagestad, 2007).

As there has been no research conducted on parents and non-parents in Ireland, the previous research in this area is reliant on studies carried out mostly in the United states and some parts of Europe. Research has showed that Life satisfaction between countries can be heavily influenced by living conditions such as countries with better job prospects tend to report higher life satisfaction than countries where employment is low which appear to show lower life satisfaction, (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017). Life satisfaction promotes better overall health and can reduce mortality rates in long term health conditions, (Siahpush, Spittal, & Singh, 2008). Parent and non-parent studies have been conducted in the past, life satisfaction has not been researched in parents and non-parents living in Ireland. Research has suggested that general experiences of well-being and happiness does differ in parents and

non-parents but for many different reasons, one common theme appears to be the financial/housing situations that parents, and non-parents tend to be in. Most countries where these studies were conducted did not offer financial/housing state support to parents which might show different results. In Ireland as housing benefits, rent schemes and social welfare payments are provided to people who require such support. The parents could possibly report a different evaluation on life satisfaction because of living arrangements in Ireland, (Aassve, Goisis & Sironi, 2012). We know from research that other factors can impact life satisfaction with regards to parents and non-parents, these factors can include material status, age and gender, (Hansen, 2012). This could however be argued that these other factors are down to personality traits and how one evaluates their life rather than their material status, age, or gender, (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006). Research also suggests that employment can be a contributing factor to life satisfaction on parental status, Research found that working mothers experience lower mental health than unemployed childless adults (Simon, 1998). Further research could be carried out in this area to look at reasons why employment might impact life satisfaction on parents and non-parents. A bigger gap in this literature is life satisfaction among parents and non-parents living in Ireland. This research in Ireland could show more accurate findings because previous research appears to continuously show financial/housing situations as an important contribution to life satisfaction but much of this research was conducted in Countries that did not offer financial/housing state support to parents, therefore a study of this nature in Ireland might show different results in a county that offers such support as the parents would likely report a different evaluation on life satisfaction because of their living arrangements, (Aassve, Goisis & Sironi, 2012). Studies for example in the United States appear to consistently show parents live fewer satisfying lives compared to non-parents which was mostly as a result of housing, a non-parent was under less pressure for housing because of different reasons such as staying at the parental home for

longer or better job options as they had no children and were more flexible with employment. Ireland also offers statutory maternity leave for a duration of 42 weeks with payment for 26 weeks, although employers are not obliged by law to pay women during this absence the state will provide payment during this time, (Pronzato, 2009). The US does not offer a national statutory paid maternity, (Waldfogel,1998).

The current study,

Previous research appeared to suggest that other countries found parents to be less satisfied in life particularly in the United states and findings summarised that this is due to lack of housing/financial support. Findings could show different results within an Irish population due to the financial/housing state support provided to parents in Ireland and could also show a difference in an Irish population as the state provides paid maternity leave of 26 weeks, the United states does not provide state maternity pay. The current study will address an Irish population from a qualitative approach using semi structured style interviews. To date a study of this nature has not be conducted in a qualitative approach within an Irish context. A qualitative approach was chosen due to the nature of the study, both life satisfaction is subjective and involves various parts of our lives therefore interviewing participants and allowing them to speak in detail about personal experiences would appear to have a more meaningful way to summaries the findings as it can explain why people possibly report satisfaction in one area of their lives and not the other. These findings could not be achieved from a quantitative approach as numbers cannot explain experience in the fine detail this study aims to achieve. The study will consist of eight female participates, four of which will be parents and the remaining four will be non-parents. The parents will be asked twelve questions and the non-parents will be asked nine questions. All participants will be asked about work, personal life, and society, they will also be asked if they experienced inclusions

or exclusions within society due to their parental status, some questions would differ depending on whether the participant is a parent or a non-parent.

This study aims to investigate how parents and non-parents evaluate their life satisfaction by asking questions about various components of their lives to investigate if the findings in an Irish population are consistent or differ with previous research in this area. The study will look for themes and patterns in each interview to try to conclude the findings. This study is particularly important to the Irish population for two reasons which is infertility and financial situations. 1 in 6 couples in Ireland will experience fertility struggles, if the findings of this research are consistent with previous research an intervention could be considered for people dealing with the psychological distress of infertility to help them to achieve a more satisfying life in areas of their personal life that might be less satisfying due to infertility. The research could show different results to the previous findings within the Irish population due to financial reasons. Although the state will provide housing and financial supports not every person will qualify for such state support however, the real issue is the continuous rent and mortgage rates that are increasing, Parents who are in full time employment could possibly feel the least satisfied due to the financial struggle of having children and paying rent or a mortgage. If the findings from the current study suggest this, it could be considered that an initiative from the state could help to support parents in full time employment. The expectation would not be to financially support all parents in full time employment, however, to cap the parents in full time employment, an example could be if a parent is in full time employment earning less than 30 thousand euros per year and had more than one child, perhaps the state could offer some benefit that could financially support the parent.

This study might also be beneficial in Ireland now as women are being paid more than they had been paid previously. It was reported by eurostat that women were earning less money than men. In 2007 the results showed a 17.3% pay gap between women and men in

Ireland, in 2017 the results showed a 14.4% pay gap and in 2020 it showed a 4.7% pay gap. As previous research suggested some women choose not to have children purely based on finance. If the gender gap decreases and women continue to see a rise in wage this could lead to more women choosing to become parents, Eurostat (2020). This study might also be beneficial in the opposite way due to the infertility rate in Ireland, (Allison, 2011). One round of IVF treatment can cost between €4,100-€5,000 with no government financial support yet. This could lead to more people failing to become parents. In 2014 an OECD study found that Irish women have the third-highest rate of childlessness in the developed world, which was 18.4 per cent, OECD (2014).

The second aim is to investigate societal pressures on parental status. If the findings suggest that there are societal pressures on parental status it could be suggested that the population are not properly educated on infertility and unplanned pregnancies or do not respect personal choices or personal circumstances. If the findings suggest that the population appear to be uneducated on infertility and unplanned pregnancies a campaign could be considered for better understanding of lifestyle situations, the concerns for parental status could likely go above social pressure but could also be considered in job opportunities or more concerning healthcare. The aim of this study is important to an Irish population for the same reasons as the first aim which is fertility, financial and personal circumstances, or choice. It is often that fertility and financial circumstance are beyond our control which means we sometimes do not choose the paths in life that we find ourselves in, particularly whether we have children or not, how many children we have and at what stage of our lives we have children. Parental pressure can lead to social isolation which can later result in loneliness, (Stack,1998). Societal pressures on parental status from a qualitative approach have also not been researched in an Irish population but have been in various parts of the world with findings appearing to suggest that there is much societal pressure on parental status, the

research further suggests that this is a direct result of society and societal norms. (Stanley et al., 2003). A study investigating societal pressures on parental status could appear to show less pressure and more acceptance on parental status as the Republic of Ireland was the first country in the world to approve same sex marriage and its constitutional protection. The vote showed 62 percent on the population in favour of same sex marriage and 38 percent of population against same sex marriage, (Tobin, 2015). This referendum was considered a drastic change in Irish society and classified Ireland as a country showing equality and acceptance. This research could show differences to other parts of the world where this research was conducted as it could be considered that most of the Irish population would appear to be more accepting of a less traditional family.

Overall, the study will question if there are differences and/or similarities in life satisfaction among parents and non-parents' perspectives and is there societal pressures on parental status. In 2017 Eurostat reported a decline in women returning to the workforce in Ireland after having children. It was reported that 71% percent of women return to work after having one child, however in that same year it was reported that 85% of men with one child were employed. The report also found that 56% of women return to work after having their third child with 85% of men remaining in the workforce after their third child was born. It is estimated that women chose to stay home for mostly financial reasons, such as the high childcare costs which can be estimated at €174 to €228 per week, Eurostat (2017). It could also be further suggested that the gender pay gap would play a role in deciding which parent should decline returning to the workforce, with the mother staying at home and the father continuing to stay in employment appearing to be more of a feasible option, Eurostat (2020). This study selected Female participants only because women in Ireland appear to spend more time with their children in a general setting than fathers due to their employment circumstances.

Method section

Participants,

The Participants were recruited using the Purposive sampling approach and recruited through Facebook. The sample size was eight females (N8) four parents and four non-parents, within these eight participants there were four participants who were in employment and four participants who were unemployed at the time of the study. All participants were Irish and were aged between 25-50 years old, with the average age of 33 years. Three of the parent participants had 2 children and 1 of the parent participants had 1 child. The participants were not required to have biological children. The exclusion was any persons from a vulnerable group for the wellbeing of the individual. The employment status of the participants is relevant as the project was inspired by previous parent and non-parent studies conducted surrounding work status and housing support. The inclusion criteria had been broken two into two categories.

Category A

Four parents, two who are employed and two who are unemployed. The parent participants will be classified as Category A and will contain two sections, A1 which is the parents in employment and A2 which is the parents who are unemployed.

Category B

Four non-parents, two who are employed and two who are unemployed, Category B is the non-parent participants, B1 is the non-parents in employment, and B2 is the non-parents who are unemployed.

Materials,

The study required the use of a laptop which was firstly used to post the advertisement

online, create and send the information sheet, time of interview and debriefing sheet. A consent form was not used due to the Coronavirus pandemic however, all participants gave full consent through email. The interviews and transcribing were all carried out by Microsoft teams, all the research, typing and securing of private data were all completed with the same laptop, no other materials were used for this study. The parent participant group were asked the following questions,

Do you work?

Are you in a relationship?

Do you have children?

How many children do you have?

What are your children's ages?

What gender are your children?

How old were you having your first and last child?

What factors were considered when you decided to have children?

Has your life changed since having children?

Do you think your life is more satisfying since having children?

Did you ever feel pressure within society to have children?

Do you feel included or excluded from things because you have children?

The non-parent participant group were asked the following set of questions,

Do you work?

Are you in a relationship?

Do you plan to have children?

If so, how many children would you like to have?

If not, what are the factors surrounding why you plan to not have children?

Do you think your life would change if you did have children?

Do you think your life is satisfying without children?

Do you feel pressure within society to have children?

Do you feel included or excluded from things because you have don't have children?

Design,

The study examined life satisfaction among parents and non-parents while also examining social pressure towards parental status. This research was conducted through the Inductive thematic analysis approach, this approach allowed the identification of common themes and patterns in the interviews to be correctly analysed and interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It also allowed the participants to discuss experiences and opinions freely which cannot be achieved through a quantitative design. It must be declared that the researcher was influenced by a friend who was suffering from Polycystic ovary syndrome, with this in mind the interviews were heavily scrutinized to avoid data bias. Participants were giving a semi structured style interview to allow for the questions to be asked on what life satisfaction means to them and their experiences and opinions towards parental status within society.

Procedure,

Ethical consideration was considered upon conducting this research and full approval was granted by the National college of Ireland. The wellbeing and security of the participants was a priority of this study. The participants were giving identity numbers and were placed under a category to protect their identity and they were advised to skip any questions which could be upsetting, no participant had become emotional or distressed in anyway during the study, however, all participants were giving support lines in the debriefing stage, (Appendix

D). A pilot test was first conducted to check Microsoft Teams was set up to record and transcribe the interviews. The function to arrange and invite participants for interviews was also tested. The pilot study used 9 questions and lasted roughly 27 minutes. Due to the current Coronavirus pandemic consent was obtained via email. The study was advertised on Facebook, (Appendix F), participants who expressed interest were then emailed an information sheet (Appendix C), when the participants confirmed that they were still interested in the study they were asked to reply through email giving consent of participation of the study, the recording of the interview and for their email address and transcribe of the interview to be held until after the study was graded. The participants were also asked to advise of a date and time that suited them to complete the interview. When the participants replied with the dates and times that suited them for the interview, the interview was scheduled into the calendar on Microsoft teams, the participants then received an invite to attend the meeting by clicking the join option on Microsoft teams. They participants were not required to have a Microsoft teams account or app as they could access this through the desktop version which brought the participant straight to the interview. When the participants joined the interview, they were reminded not to use names and places that could easily identify them, they were also advised that if they were uncomfortable with any questions they could skip past the question or end the interview at any stage. Participants were asked between 9-12 questions, (Appendix A). When the interview was completed the participants were thanked for their contribution and a debriefing email was sent to them, (Appendix D). The interview was uploaded to Microsoft stream where transcribing was completed for analysis to proceed.

Results

Four key themes were identified among participants in the study. Two key themes were identified for life satisfaction: overall security, and self-fulfilment. With regards to overall security, the following sub-themes were identified: financial stability, housing stability and employment stability. The second theme identified for life satisfaction was self-fulfilment, which had three sub-themes: personal achievements, spontaneity, and quality time. With regards to parental status pressures in society, two key themes were identified: social expectations and education. The theme of social expectations had five sub-themes: gender norms, age, relationship status, the number of children a parent has, and the gender of the children a parent has. The theme Education identified two sub-headings which were health campaigns and ignorance. In total 51 codes were identified which formed the themes and subthemes. Life satisfaction appeared to be high in parents and non-parents as all participants appeared to embrace the different aspects of each of their lives. All participants experienced social pressure. All of the non-parent participants reported feeling pressure to have children and all of the parent participants reported feeling pressure to have either more children and/or children of a certain gender.

The participants will be identified in categories, A1 is the parents in employment, A2 is the parents who are unemployed, B1 is the non-parents in employment, and B2 is the non-parents who are unemployed.

Overall Security,

Overall security was a theme which appeared for all participants as contributing to life satisfaction, with subthemes Financial security, housing stability, and employment stability. All participants seem to suggest that overall security played a major role in life satisfaction. All participants appeared to be satisfied with their overall security in life despite their

parental status,

“I had to make sure that myself and my partner, were financially stable
and had a home before we had the kids,
then we were satisfied.” (Participant 4, A2)

“I didn’t fully enjoy been a parent the first time around
because money was tight, and I didn’t have a home
of my own’, so no I wasn’t satisfied but I am now.” (Participant 2, A1)

“It wasn’t as I planned but it turned out to be the best thing ever, we got a mortgage
Got married and were able to relax then.” (Participant 3, A2)

“Now I have more to give my kids, I have a career.” (Participant 2, A1)

“I’m lucky that I was able to go back to work part time,
lots of people have to work full time and then you're
considering childcare its hard.” (Participant 1, A1)

“If I didn’t have a job I wouldn’t be satisfied, it pays my bills it pays for my hobbies it pays for all the things that satisfy me.” (Participant 5, B1)

“Having a mortgage and been married is satisfying.” (Participant 7, B2)

“We have our home and enjoy our jobs.” (Participant, 6, B1)

It however became apparent that some of non-parents who plan to have children in the future appeared to show apprehension for the future with regards to financial and housing stability although the findings did not seem to suggest that the non-parents were less satisfied than the parents because of their concerns for the future. An example of the apprehensiveness in the non-parents can be seen in the following quotes.

“I think a bit of financial stability would probably take a little bit of worry away from me because I would know that I’m comfortable so that the child could be comfortable.” (Participant 8, B2)

“We want to secure a home before we bring a baby into the mix.” (Participant 7, B2)

I worry about, things like will I be spending enough time with the child if I have to work full time to get the money to pay the mortgage and will the child be getting the care and the one to one time that they need. (Participant 8, B2).

Self-fulfilment,

All participants spoke about fulfilling aspects of their life, all participants reflected on personal achievements, the non-parents commonly mentioned spontaneity, and the parents frequently mentioned quality time, all which they expressed as one of the two being a direct factor to life satisfaction. The following quotes are from a parent and non-parent expressing examples of personal achievements that they had identified as satisfactory in their lives.

“They are our greatest achievements I’m seeing them succeed in life and be happy in life and just the little things, you say yeah, OK, I I’m content because their content.” (Participant 4, A2)

“I have worked a lot, so much because I don’t have kids I have worked really hard.”
(Participant 5, B1)

All non-parents expressed spontaneity when discussing satisfying aspects of their lives, they usually followed up comments about spontaneity in comparison to having children. All non-parents expressed the fear of losing spontaneity in their lives if they became parents however, none of the non-parents fear the loss of spontaneity enough to decide against becoming parents.

“We can go here, there anywhere and not worry about it.” (Participant 8, B2)

“I couldn't just book a Holiday at the drop of a hat.” (Participant 5, B1)

“I have freedom I can be spontaneous, and I have to say I am enjoying it right now.”

(Participant 7, B2)

“For me It's so easy to be spontaneous and I like my life that way.” (Participant 6, B1)

Some of the parent participants expressed missing spontaneity and expressed that since having children their lives had to become much more structured.

“It's harder to go anywhere, you have to plan everything,
I wish I had gone out more, I wish I had of seen
my friends more, when I didn't have kids.” (Participant 1, A1)

Although the parent participants appeared to lack spontaneity in their lives, this appeared to be counterbalanced by quality time spent with family.

‘I think having a child brings out the child in
you as well when you are going on day
trips and doing childlike things
especially if you are lucky enough to have had a
good childhood, it gives you a reminder of things you did
as a child’, (Participant 3, A2)

“We do a lot and I love that; day trips out and Movie nights in.” (Participant 4, A1)

“All of my brothers and sisters have children, we get together and do everything with
the kids, I live for that.” (Participant 2, A1)

Social expectations,

All eight participants expressed enormous social pressure on parental status. All non-parents expressed feeling pressure to become parents and all parent participants expressed feeling pressured to either have more children, have children in a particular order or to have a child of a particular gender. All non-parent participants commonly spoke throughout the interviews about how they have been continuously asked when they will have children. The participants also phrased some comments that have been made to them at social gatherings. The non-parent participants emphasised that these questions and comments were asked by family and friends in a caring fashion, but all participants received these questions and comments negatively with some participants expressing deep hurt.

“I dread a friend been pregnant, I dread Mother’s Day, It’s all just so painful and cruel when you cant have that simple thing you are supposed to have and been asked these questions is just as hard.” (Participant 6, B1)

“People are asking questions that sometimes aren't so easy to answer.”

(Participant 8, B2)

The non-parents particularly felt pressure when they were in a relatively stable romantic relationship and when they approached late 20s and early 30s. One participant expressed how she felt that these questions and comments are theories that are built into society and directed at women.

“I think there’s an expectation within society as a female that I will have kids.”

(Participant 7, B1)

The same participant went on to express how she was unsure if she wanted to become a parent but felt that this was something she was required to do in life.

“When you’re the only woman that doesn’t have kids You’re kind of like
I better get on board.” (Participant 7, B1)

“There's too much pressure
on women these days to have kids and just too much pressure on
women to give an answer as to why they do not have kids.” (Participant 4, A2)

An example of the pressure some participants feel to achieve parenthood while in a stable relationship can be seen in the following quotes,

“Are you having children or when you’re going to have a baby?”

“As a woman in a relationship for as long as I have been in.

We get asked these kinds of questions.” (Participant 8, B2)

“There wasn’t too much pressure a few years ago but

as soon as we got married people would ask

when is the babies coming?” (Participant 7, B2)

“I remember coming back for my honeymoon and people saying

to me well any honeymoon baby and I had just miscarried.” (Participant 3, A2)

Most of the participants felt that women were only on the receiving end of such questions and comments however, not all participants felt this way, one participant recalled a situation involving pressure felt by a male co worker

“There is a man that I work with, he had his first child recently at 40 and for 5 years

leading up to it, it was constantly the topic of talk, he was always asked would he

have children and when?” (Participant 2, A1)

Some of the non-parent participants expressed that they were often reminded of their age and ‘biological clock’ when speaking about children,

“Oh times ticking when are you two going to have babies?” (Participant 6, B1)

“Surely at this stage your looking to have kids.” (Participant 8, B2)

The parent participants expressed pressure within society to have a certain number of children, to have children in a particular age range and gender, one participant summed up the social expectations she feels she has failed to achieve as a mother with two daughters and no sons.

“There is the expectation that people and society
put on you, not only to have healthy children
and afford them but to have a gentleman’s family,
a boy and a girl.” (Participant 3, A2)

The same participant expressed comments and questions she received before she gave birth to her second daughter, which illustrates that she felt social pressure when she had her first child.

“You would want to give her brother a sister. You know she’s four now.” (Participant 3, A2)

“God love her she’s an only child.” (Participant 3, A2)

Another participant who also has two daughters and no sons recalled almost identical comments and questions she received,

“The gender of the baby is another thing, I have two girls and I remember having my second and many people said to me, you have to go for your boy.” (Participant 3, A2)

“You have your first baby; you then get asked when are you having your second baby cause it’s like oh you can’t leave that first baby on their own. You need to have another baby.” (Participant 2, A1)

All parents confessed to feeling uncomfortable about been asked these questions with some parents further suggesting more emotional pain and feeling negative towards themselves.

“I felt like I had failed as a woman and a mother for not giving my child a sibling, id wonder what’s wrong my body.” (Participant 3, A2)

Parents also explained the pressure that they felt within society to have a certain number of children,

“God love her she’s an only child.” (Participant 3, A2)

“It’s like, hang on a minute stop shaming me into thinking I need to have a certain number of kids.” (Participant 4, A2)

“I find people asking quite a lot, would you like a second one or would you go again?”

(Participant 1, A1)

Education,

Although all participants expressed feeling discomfort and upset about receiving questions and comments regarding parental status, all eight participants did emphasise that there was no malice intended in these questions or comments, rather more an ignorance or misunderstanding of personal circumstances. Infertility, miscarriages, unplanned pregnancy, and financial situations were mentioned in almost all interviews as being reasons for the participants own circumstances surrounding parental status. When recalling experiences of receiving questions or comments about parental status participants appeared to make sense of why people ask these questions and the general themes that emerged was ignorance and lack of education such as health campaigns. Some participants spoke about situations that they themselves or somebody they knew were in regarding multiple personal circumstances, infertility in particular and stated that sometimes people are ignorant to these situations such as infertility because they simply have not experienced it or do not know somebody who has experienced it.

“I think if people were struggling with fertility,

They would never dream of saying it to another woman because they

Would be so aware of what they are going through.” (Participant 7, B2)

“I think the more educated you are on infertility, the more you probably stop asking those direct questions.” (Participant 6, B1)

“How do I expect them to help or be sympathetic when I was not willing to tell them.” (Participant 3, A2)

Other participants were under the impression that some people were simply ignorant or oblivious towards personal situations in a general setting regardless of their own personal experiences or people around them,

“I don't even think they realize they're doing it.” (Participant 5, B1)

“What might seem like a little harmful joke to a big group of people could really hurt somebody.” (Participant 8, B2)

“I'm not saying its rude. I am saying you don't need to go there.” (Participant 4, A2)

“People think you have a money tree out the back and can do what you like.”

Participant 7, A1)

The general solution that all participants suggested was more media awareness around infertility, miscarriage, stillbirths, and general respect of the privacy of people's personal lives. All participants spoke about been familiar with health campaigns and Television adverts on infertility and IVF treatment however, all participants felt that much more information and awareness was required for other aspects of parental status. One participant expressed that campaigns appear to be one-sided and emphasise on successful outcomes rather than unsuccessful outcomes.

“More and more ads on TV are showing fertility struggles and unplanned pregnancy, but there still needs to be more.” (Participant 2, A1)

“There are pages on social media for awareness on these types of things, but you need to go look for these pages, something needs to be designed to get the attention of everybody.” (Participant 3, A2)

“It's well and good putting all these campaigns out, but we need to see two ends of the story.” (Participant 6, B1)

Discussion

The study investigated the lives of parents and non-parents living in Ireland, two aspects were examined, life satisfaction and societal pressures on parental status. The two themes that were identified for life satisfaction was overall security which had three sub-themes, financial stability, housing stability and employment stability. The second theme was self-fulfilment which had three sub-themes personal achievements, spontaneity, and quality time. Upon closing examining all themes and sub themes it appeared that finance was the core to most themes and sub-themes that emerged. All participants despite their parental status emphasized the importance of simply having somewhere to live and money to eat and pay bills. Almost all participants had expressed hardship they had experienced in their past with regards to financial and housing situations. It became evidently clear that the participants were unsatisfied at the time of their lives purely because of financial and housing situations, all participants made comparisons on their lives now expressing that they are much more financially stable and are in better living situations now. After all participants made it clear that finance and housing situations were at the core of life satisfaction, they each elaborated on what this means to them in a broader sense. Employment stability then became a common theme that emerged at roughly the same point of most of the participants interviews. All of the non-parent participants regardless of whether or not they were in employment at the time of the study appeared to speak slightly more about the importance of employment stability than the parent participants. They further explained that having a stable job attributed to their life satisfaction as it gave them reassurance that they could simply pay bills, have a home, gave them a sense of purpose as they viewed it was a personal achievement and allowed them to live a lifestyle which involved leisure time and spontaneity. Personal achievement and spontaneity were subthemes which happened to be identified in self-fulfilment. Some but not all parent participants spoke about the importance of

employment stability. The parents who spoke about employment stability spoke about a time when they were unemployed and felt unsatisfied in life as they could not provide their children with the things that they wanted in life. It was apparent that the parents who spoke about employment stability and life satisfaction only spoke about the 'wants' for their children that were lacking when they unemployed rather than the 'needs', in short this would seem to suggest that parents in Ireland possibly feel slightly more secure when it comes to financial means to cover the basic things in life such as food, home and essential requirements for their children, although the non-parent participants did also speak about employment stability and life satisfaction contributing to their 'wants' such as leisure life, there was still a strong emphasis of the concerns of being in an unstable employment situation or being unemployed with regards to their basic needs such as living arrangements. Although Ireland offers social welfare to people living in Ireland who are unemployed it is only in extreme cases a non-parent in Ireland will be offered housing support by the government, however parents will receive housing support without an extreme situation.

Self-fulfilment and the three sub-themes personal achievements, spontaneity, and quality time were closely examined across all interviews. All participants spoke about personal achievements contributing to their life satisfaction, personal achievements varied between participants, some achievements mentioned were weight loss journeys, job promotions, getting married, learning how to drive a car, overcoming illness, educational achievement and becoming a parent or being a good parent. Spontaneity was mentioned by all participants but only attributed to life satisfaction by the non-parents however, quality time too was mentioned by all participants but only attributed to life satisfaction by the parents. Spontaneity and quality time appeared to counterbalance.

Two key themes were identified for societal pressures on parental status, and they were social expectations and education. Five sub-themes were found for social expectations

which were gender norms, age, relationship status, the number of children a parent has, and the gender of the children a parent has. The results showed that all participants reported experiencing an enormous amount of pressure to either have children if they were a non-parent or to have more children, children of a certain gender and in a particular age-range if they were parents. The only time participants recalled not feeling pressure on parental status was in two occasions the first when they were under the age of 25 and the second was when they were single. All participants received comments and questions about their parental status and expressed feelings of pressure, anger, embarrassment, discomfort, and sadness after been asked questions or receiving comments regarding their parental status. It became apparent that the non-parents appeared to be worse impacted by these questions and comments, the non-parents expressed more deep emotions and confessed to feeling dread of their own birthday, Mother's Day and even Christmas. All participants expressed that they would become stressed when a family event or social gathering would take place, all participants commonly reported receiving such questions and comments mostly at social gatherings. All participants did however express that these comments and questions were not done in malice and were usually by family and friends, but it was continuously suggested by participants that the people who were asking questions and making comments were simply unaware of personal situations. This lead on to the last theme that was found which was Education and it identified two sub-themes which were health campaigns and ignorance. All participants without hesitation concluded that people were simply uneducated or ignorant to personal circumstance surrounding parental status. One participant said that she was not affected by infertility but had a friend who was, this made her become mindful of asking such questions. All participants suggested that campaigns outlining different situations regarding parental status would be influential and felt that lack of such campaigns was the main reason why people were uneducated in parental status circumstances. A non-parent participant expressed

that she was unsure if she wanted to become a parent and candidly expressed this to her grandmother to whom could not comprehend why a woman would choose not to have children. It could be suggested that such ignorance could be partly due to generations, another non-parent participant stated the most pressure she felt to become a parent came from her grandmother to whom also could not understand why she at the age of 32 had not become a mother. Ignorance did also seem to come from financially stable family members or friends who appeared to have more control of their parental status.

Much of the research conducted in parents and non-parents was conducted in a quantitative analysis form and showed either parents or non-parents to be more satisfied than the other and where most qualitative analysis was carried out in this area most research suggested that non-parents were more satisfied in life. Research that suggested parents were more satisfied in life suggested that it was because they had more meaning and fulfilment in life to non-parents and research that suggested that non-parents were more satisfied in life suggested that this is because non-parents tend to have more stable living and financial lives. In contrast to this, the current study appeared to detect life satisfaction in all participants with no indication that non-parents were living a less meaningful fulfilling life and that parents were not unsatisfied with their living or financial situations. It could be suggested as previously predicted that parents in Ireland will show satisfaction in housing situations more than any study that was conducted in the United States due to the housing state support provided to parents in Ireland. Hansen, (2012) suggested that parents were less satisfied because of the financial stress of raising children, relationship strain and lack of leisure life. In the current study the researcher did ask the participants if they were in a relationship and did give the option for participants to speak about relationships, all participants that were in relationships credited their partners for their support in their parental roles with some participants saying that their relationship stayed the same or got better, no participant spoke

about negative changes in relationships due to parental status, it must be noted however that participants were not asked directly about their relationships in detail. Parents did speak about leisure life often which appeared to suggest no lack of leisure life however, participants were not asked directly about leisure life. Due to the lack of qualitative research conducted in this area the decision was made to take a qualitative approach on this area with the hope to draw conclusions from experiences and viewpoints of participants. Unlike previous research this study appeared to be transparent from the onset. In agreement with Helliwell, Layard & Sachs, (2017) they suggested that life satisfaction will vary between countries and usually ties with the level of employment. This study would appear to suggest same as employment appeared to be at the forefront (whether the participant or their partner were in employment) and was the foundation of a secure lifestyle which participants classified as a major role in life satisfaction. Knoester & Eggebeen, (2006) suggested that life satisfaction means different things to different people, this was also apparent in the current study, although there were common themes that emerged it was observed when the true meaning of life satisfaction was expressed it showed different perspectives for each of the participants. An example in this study was noticed in all non-parents who reported the satisfaction of being spontaneous, but it was different aspects of being spontaneous that they found satisfying, one participant expressed that being spontaneous was satisfying because she could simply be spontaneous, another participant said being spontaneous is satisfying because she loves an adventure.

Greil, (1997) suggested that non-parents find it harder to socialise and often feel excluded by friends if they do not have children. The current study did not appear to find a feeling of exclusion by non-parents. All participants were asked specifically in interviews if they ever felt inclusion or exclusion because of their parental status to which all participants said they had not, however some participants did express feeling slight discomfort if they were the youngest of their group to become a parent, or the only person in a group not to have

children but expressed that they were not made feel this way by anybody. Research by Bos, Balen, & Visser, (2005) suggested that non-parents often reported feeling disrespected because of their parental status which was consistent in the current study but differed as all participants parents and non-parents reported feeling disrespected because of their parent status. Based on the honest and powerful interviews giving by the non-parent participants the current study would be in strong agreement with Stanley et al., (2003) who suggested that some people might feel pressure to reproduce for social acceptance.

Overall, the study suggests that life satisfaction in parents and non-parents does not appear to differ however if housing and financial support were not provided to parents the results could likely be similar with previous findings showing more parents living unsatisfying lives. The study also appeared to suggest that Ireland requires more campaigns about infertility and non-traditional family structures. All women expressed negative emotional distress on the receiving end of comments and questions about their parental status with some expressing relief for lack of social gatherings during the Coronavirus pandemic, this is concerning as it could lead people to become permanently socially isolated due to fear of undesirable social interactions.

Spontaneity and quality time which involved activities that were not possible during the restrictions came up frequently in participants interviews. It must be advised that this study was conducted during the coronavirus lockdown, the interviews were conducted during level 5 restrictions which was the highest level of restrictions. It could be possible that participants were missing spontaneity and certain aspects of quality time from their lives, which lead to participants frequently speaking about Spontaneity and quality time. The interviews were also conducted through Microsoft teams without the use of a camera to protect identity, it is possible that the participants could have possibly withheld information due to feeling lack of interpersonal interaction.

Two further studies of this nature could be conducted which could possibly show differences. The first study could be replicated with only one difference which would be timing. As this study was conducted under level 5 coronavirus restrictions it could possibly show different results when all restrictions are lifted. Spontaneous and quality time which were two themes found in this study were mentioned on several occasions by all participants, it is possible that different themes would emerge from interviews as it might be considered that participants were missing Spontaneous and quality time from their lives. It could be further considered that participants view on life satisfaction were slightly inaccurate due to this novel time. It could however be considered that this was a good time to conduct a study of this nature as it allowed the participants to accurately reflect on life satisfaction. The second study could be conducted using only males. 85% of men remain in employment after becoming a father which is much higher than 56% of woman returning to work, Eurostat (2017). The current study focused on women as it appeared that women spend more time with their children in a general setting than fathers due to employment circumstances. This study could show differences in males and could ask the question if males spend less time with their children does this impact their life satisfaction and does life satisfaction differ or is it similar to males who are not Fathers. It could also show different findings for societal pressures on parental status, seven out of eight participants said that they felt there was little or no pressure on men with regards to Parental status, a study could be conducted to investigate if it is just women who feel pressure withing society on parental status.

The current study raised a broader question regarding societal pressure, occasionally participants mentioned that they felt pressure within society regarding romantic relationships, and employment. An example of the pressures that some participants reported feeling was for participants who were in long term relationship but not engaged or married would often be asked if they had considered marriage, participants who still lived with parents reported been

asked when they would move out of their family home. Participants expressed that they were uncomfortable with these questions and felt pressured within society to live lifestyles in particular circumstances. It could be considered that societal pressures go beyond parental status.

Conclusion,

Life satisfaction appeared to be present in both parents and non-parents, however societal pressures on parental status appeared to be high in Ireland. The current study showed different findings for previous studies on life satisfaction among parents and non-parents but showed consistent findings with previous research on societal pressures. The study appeared to demonstrate the negative effects on a broader scale of lack of housing and financial stability, it also demonstrated the negative effects that people feel regarding parental status within society.

References

- Aassve, A., Goisis, A., & Sironi, M. (2012). Happiness and childbearing across Europe. *Social indicators research*, 108(1), 65-86.
- Allison, J. (2011). Conceiving silence: Infertility as discursive contradiction in Ireland. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 25(1), 1-21.
- Blackstone, A., & Stewart, M. D. (2012). Choosing to be childfree: Research on the decision not to parent. *Sociology Compass*, 6(9), 718-727.
- Bos, H., van Balen, F., & Visser, A. (2005). Social and Cultural Factors in Infertility and Childlessness.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Corbett, L. (2018). Other than Mother: The Impact of Voluntary Childlessness on Meaning in Life, and the Potential for Positive Childfree Living. *International Journal of Existential Positive Psychology*, 7(2), 20.
- CSO,2020 <https://www.cso.ie/en/index.html>
- Cummings, E. M., Goeke-Morey, M. C., Papp, L. M., & Dukewich, T. L. (2002). Children's responses to mothers' and fathers' emotionality and tactics in marital conflict in the home. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 16(4), 478.
- Diener, E. D., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of personality assessment*, 49(1), 71-75.
- Dykstra, P. A., & Hagestad, G. O. (2007). Roads less taken: Developing nuanced view of older adults without children. *Journal of Family Issues*, 28, 1275–1310. doi:10.1177/0192513X07303822 Eurostat,2020 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>
- Eurostat, 2017 Home - Eurostat (europa.eu)
- Eurostat, 2020 Home - Eurostat (eu <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostatropa.eu>)
- Gilbert, R., Widom, C. S., Browne, K., Fergusson, D., Webb, E., & Janson, S. (2009). Burden and consequences of child maltreatment in high-income countries. *The lancet*, 373(9657), 68-81.

Gillespie, R. (2003). Childfree and feminine: Understanding the gender identity of voluntarily childless women. *Gender & Society*, 17(1), 122-136.

Greil, A. L. (1997). Infertility and psychological distress: a critical review of the literature. *Social science & medicine*, 45(11), 1679-1704.

Hansen, T. (2012). Parenthood and happiness: A review of folk theories versus empirical evidence. *Social Indicators Research*, 108(1), 29-64.

Helliwell, J. F., Huang, H., & Wang, S. (2017). The social foundations of world happiness. *World happiness report*, 8.

Keizer, R., Dykstra, P. A., & Poortman, A.-R. (2010). Life outcomes of childless men and fathers. *European Sociological Review*, 26, 1–15. doi:10.1093/esr/jcn080 Knudsen, K., & Wærnes

Knoester, C., & Eggebeen, D. J. (2006). The effects of the transition to parenthood and subsequent children on men's well-being and social participation. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27(11), 1532-1560.

Lesthaeghe, R. (1980). On the social control of human reproduction. *Population and Development Review*, 527-548.

Nelson, S. K., Kushlev, K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2014). The pains and pleasures of parenting: When, why, and how is parenthood associated with more or less well-being?. *Psychological bulletin*, 140(3), 846.

Nomaguchi, K. M., & Milkie, M. A. (2003). Costs and rewards of children: The effects of becoming a parent on adults' lives. *Journal of marriage and family*, 65(2), 356-374.

OECD, 2014 <https://www.oecd.org/ireland/>

Pavot, W., & Diener, E. (2008). The satisfaction with life scale and the emerging construct of life satisfaction. *The journal of positive psychology*, 3(2), 137-152.

Pollmann-Schult, M. (2014). Parenthood and life satisfaction: Why don't children make people happy?. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(2), 319-336.

Pronzato, C. D. (2009). Return to work after childbirth: Does parental leave matter in Europe?. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 7(4), 341-360.

Rowe, P. J., Comhaire, F. H., Hargreave, T. B., Mellows, H. J., & World Health Organization. (1993). WHO manual for the standardized investigation and diagnosis of the infertile couple. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press

Schkade, D. A., & Kahneman, D. (1998). Does living in California make people happy? A focusing illusion in judgments of life satisfaction. *Psychological science*, 9(5), 340-346.

Schoen, R., Kim, Y. J., Nathanson, C. A., Fields, J., & Astone, N. M. (1997). Why do Americans want children? *Population and Development Review*, 23, 333–358.
doi:10.2307/2137548

Siahpush, M., Spittal, M., & Singh, G. K. (2008). Happiness and life satisfaction prospectively predict self-rated health, physical health, and the presence of limiting, long-term health conditions. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 23(1), 18-26.

Simon, C. J. (1998). Human capital and metropolitan employment growth. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 43(2), 223-243.

Stack, S. (1998). Marriage, family and loneliness: A cross-national study. *Sociological perspectives*, 41(2), 415-432.

Stanley, K., Edwards, L., & Hatch, B. (2003). The family report 2003: Choosing happiness? London: Institute for Public Policy Research doi:10.2307/2137548

Tobin, B. (2015) ““ First comes Love, then comes Marriage ...” : allaying reservations surrounding marriage equality and same-sex parenting in Ireland’, *Irish Journal of Family Law* 18(1), 9.

Twenge, J. M., Campbell, W. K., & Foster, C. A. (2003). Parenthood and marital satisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65, 574–583.
doi:10.1111/j.1741- 3737.2003.00574.

Van Balen, F., & Bos, H. M. (2009). The social and cultural consequences of being childless in poor-resource areas. *Facts, views & vision in ObGyn*, 1(2), 106.

Vinson, C., Mollen, D., & Smith, N. G. (2010). Perceptions of childfree women: The role of perceivers' and targets' ethnicity. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 20(5), 426-432.

Waldfogel, J. (1998). Understanding the " family gap" in pay for women with children. *Journal of economic Perspectives*, 12(1), 137-156.

Appendices

Appendix A, Interview questions,

Questions for the parent participants,

Do you work?
 Are you in a relationship?
 Do you have children?
 How many children do you have?
 What are your children's ages?
 What gender are your children?
 How old were you having your first and last child?
 What factors were considered when you decided to have children?
 Has your life changed since having children?
 Do you think your life is more satisfying since having children?
 Did you ever feel pressure within society to have children?
 Do you feel included or excluded from things because you have children?

.....

Questions for the non-parent participants,

Do you work?
 Are you in a relationship?
 Do you plan to have children?
 If so, how many children would you like to have?
 If not, what are the factors surrounding why you plan to not have children?
 Do you think your life would change if you did have children?
 Do you think your life is satisfying without children?
 Do you feel pressure within society to have children?
 Do you feel included or excluded from things because you don't have children?

Appendix B, Interview schedule,

Opening – I will start by introducing myself and advise the participant not to disclose names or places. I will advise the participants that the meeting will be recorded and ask if they consent to this (this will have already been given by the participant). I will remind them that all information given will be fully confidential and that they can withdraw from the interview at any stage. I will also remind the participant that the duration of the interview will be roughly 40 minutes and they are free to stop for a break at any stage should they require one.

Main Body- The participants will be asked between 9-12 questions (9 for the non-parent participants and 12 for the parent participants) and there will be enough time to allow the participants to discuss the answers in detail.

Closing- I will close the interview by thanking participants for their time and contribution and I will list some contact details should the participant require them. The details I will provide the participants with will be my name and contact number, my supervisors name and a list of help organisations that the participants might require such as the Samaritans, RESOLVE, MABS, post-natal depression, national infertility support group and Bereavement Ireland, more organisations could potentially be included, this will depend on the type of issues that might arise during the interviews.

Appendix C, Information sheet,

My name is Natalie Peavoy, I am an undergraduate psychology student at the school of Business, National college of Ireland. I would like to invite you to take part in a study that will aim to investigate differences/similarities in life satisfaction and attitudes towards parental status within society. The participants will be asked between 9-12 questions, (9 for the non-parent participants and 12 for the parent participants), the interview will take roughly 40 minutes and you are free to stop for a break should you require one. All interviews will be recorded, and your information and identity will be kept fully confidential throughout the entire study. The participant can withdraw from the study at any stage up until the study is submitted, if the participant withdraws from the study their information will be removed immediately and the participant will not be asked for an explanation as to why they chose to withdraw from the study. This study is non-invasive and does not hold any risks. The first aim of this study is to achieve a more accurate understanding of life satisfaction among parent and non-parents in Ireland. This study aims to identify areas that people feel less satisfied in and could contribute to further research in these areas with the aim to improve life satisfaction for both parents and non-parents. The study will also investigate attitudes towards parental status to gain a better insight into how educated society might be towards infertility and personal choices surrounding parenting. Similar studies on parents and non-parents have been carried out in other parts of the world however, such studies have not been carried out

within Ireland. It is possible that a study of this nature in Ireland could show different results due to government financial and housing support for parents and perceptions towards parents and non-parents within an Irish cultural society. Participants will be emailed a study identity number which will be used to identify the participant throughout the entire study to protect the identity of the participant. There is a dedicated Gmail address which has been created for this study. An encrypted password protected file will hold participants data along with the signed consent forms. This protected file will be password protected and will only be accessed by myself the researcher. The interviews will also be stored securely to the same laptop, participants will be advised before all recordings of interviews that they must not use any names or specific places throughout the interview and that they must use their study identity number at the beginning of the interview. All participant data will be protected throughout the entire study. If you have any further questions you can contact me at parentsandnonparentsstudy@gmail.com.

Appendix D, Debriefing,

Hi xx,

Thank you for taking part in the parents and non-parents' study.

Your time and honesty is greatly appreciated.

Quotes from your interview might be used in the study but will remain completely anonymous.

Your data will be stored securely up until the project is graded and will then be disposed.

The Facebook page for the study will also be deleted.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or would like to withdraw your information from this study, please let me know before 01/03/2021 by emailing parentsandnonparentsstudy@gmail.com.

Please see below a list of helpful resources should you require them,

Samaritans (01) 6710071

RESOLVE, the national infertility association can be contacted via email info@resolve.org.

MABS 0761072000

Natal Depression Ireland helpline who can be contacted by phone on 0214922083 or emailed at support@pnd.ie

Bereavement support line on 1800 80 70 77 available from 10am to 1pm, Monday to Friday

Kind Regards,

Natalie.

Appendix E, Facebook post advertising the study,



Nat Study

27 January at 22:32 · 🧑



Life satisfaction among Parents and non-parents' study,

I am a part time Psychology student in my final year looking for parents and non-parents to take part in a study investigating life satisfaction in the form of an interview through Microsoft teams.

The participants will be asked between 9-12 questions, (9 for the non-parent participants and 12 for the parent participants), the interview will take roughly 40 minutes and you are free to stop for a break should you require one.

All interviews will be recorded, and your information and identity will be kept fully confidential throughout the entire study.

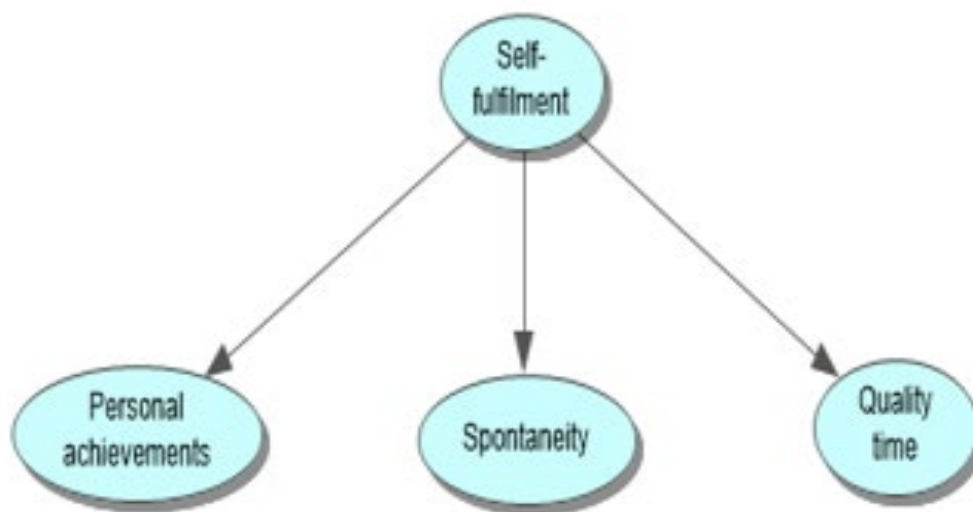
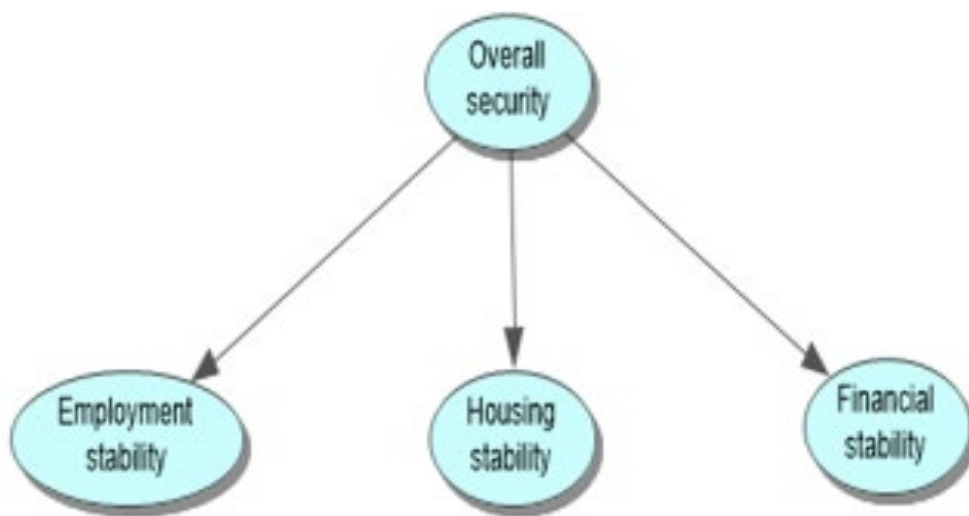
If you are interested in more information about this study, please email Natalie at parentsandnonparentsstudy@gmail.com.

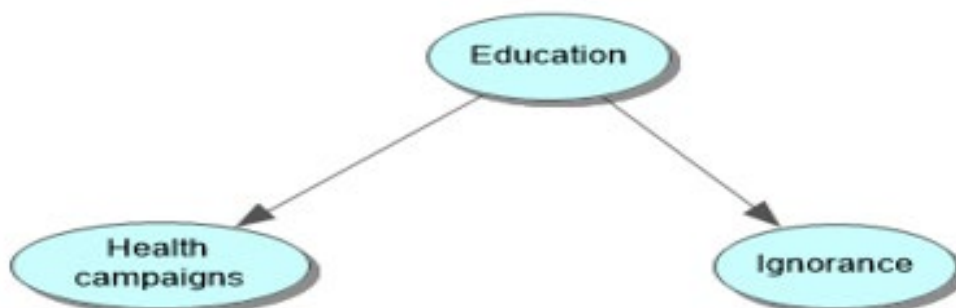
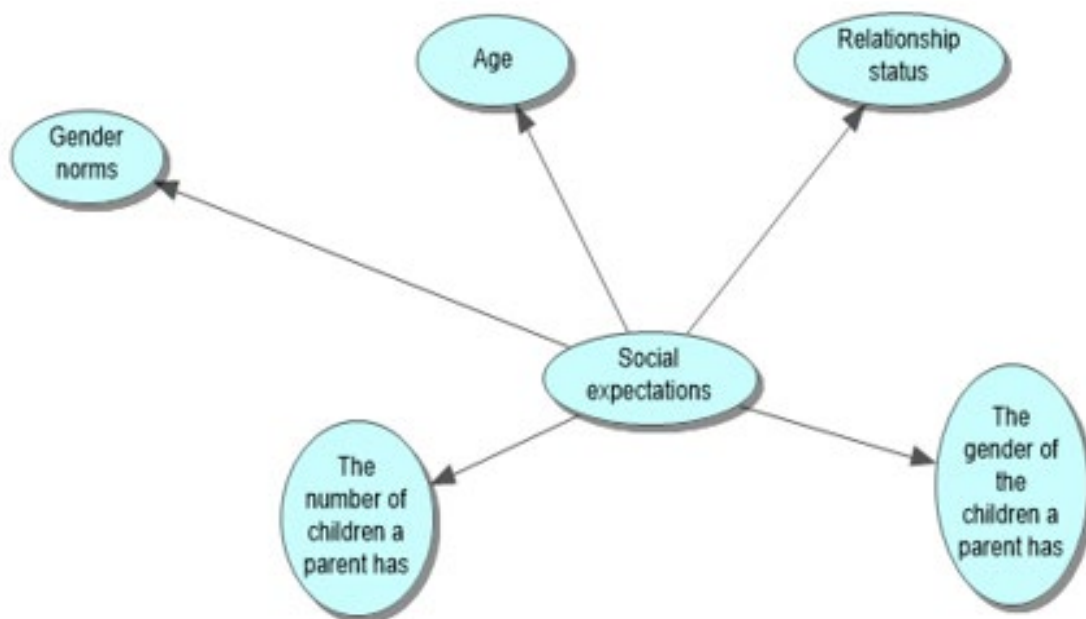
Thank you 😊

Appendix F, code words from interviews,

51 Code words

Wages, finance, money, afford, paid, living, Home, house, mortgage, rent, career, work, job, employment, employed, gender, woman, man, women, men, boys, girls, age, young, old, boyfriend, husband, married, relationships, society, people, events, gatherings, spontaneous, spontaneity, freedom, achievement, proud, campaign, IVF, infertility, fertility, ignorance, uneducated, media, malice, nastiness, generation, child, children, invited.

Appendix G, Mind Maps,



Appendix H, Samples from transcribed interviews,

1

- Researcher) OK, and what factors were considered when you were
- 01:25
- deciding to have kids? Participant So basically, I had to make sure
- 01:28
- myself and my partner, were financially stable
- 01:31
- and had a home before we had the kids,
- 01:36
- then we were satisfied We had. Everything kind of, you know, there's no.
- 01:39
- right and wrong ways of doing it, but the way we

2

If I could go back, id of waited until I was more finically stable

02:12

you have kids young, you're still learning yourself here.

02:15

Now I have more to give my kids, I have a career

02:56

I didn't fully enjoy been a parent the first time around

02:59

Because money was tight and I didn't have a home of my

03:02

Own, so no I wasn't satisfied but I am now

3

03:03

my image of my life, it wasn't really as planned

03:07

but it turned out to be the best thing ever, we got a mortgage

03:11

Got married and were able to relax then

03:14

4

them? Then later when you have children, it's a bit different

02:08

If I could go back, id of waited until I was more finically stable

02:12

you have kids young, you're still learning yourself here.

02:15

Now I have more to give my kids, I have a career

02:56

5

if I was to have another child id like a lot of things

02:02

To be different a solid relationship my own home and more

02:06

money. I live at home with my parents so

02:11

like having you know my own space and stuff like that like

02:15

my own house would come into would be something I consider

02:20

an.

02:21

I suppose like work is well, like I, I'm lucky that I was

02:25

able to go back to work part time, lots of people have to work full time

02:30

and then you're considering childcare its hard

6

I want I think yeah at the moment I'm quite satisfied

02:56

with my life without kids and I know that if.

03:00

A kid entered my life. I wouldn't be able to do those

03:04

things so freely you know what I mean like I kind of

03:09

think my life at the moment it is extremely satisfying. I'm

03:12

getting a lot out of it, maybe if I didn't have a job I wouldnt

03:17

Be satisfied it pays my bills it pays for my hobbies it pays

03:20

for all the things that satisfy me.

7

it's a big change for women. Researcher And do you think that

06:02

your life is satisfying without children? So as it is now? Yeah,

06:06

I mean like to me having a mortgage and been married is satisfying

06:10

8

You can be satisfied in your life with loads of this like for example

03:37

We have our home and enjoy our jobs

03:40

straightforward as like texting and saying oh we should go out tonight

9

worrier as well. So I do worry about a lot of things in my life

10:17

already and I can only imagine if I had a little life that I

10:21

had to be responsible for a whole other person that I had to

10:26

be responsible for. I feel like I would worry even more, but.

10:30

I think a bit of financial stability would probably take a

10:33

little bit of worry away from me because I would know

10:36

That I'm comfortable so that the

10:39

child could be comfortable, and it might sound far fetched, but

10:42

10

I think. You know, like I said, once I have accomplished

09:25

everything in my life, I will look at kids but first things first

09:28

We want to secure a home before we bring a child into the mix

09:32

11

Yes, my life would definitely change. So

15:10

for example something that I would kind of think about was

15:13

Work if I got a job and I had a child at the time, which I do

15:18

would hope to have have a job. But you know, when I worry can I

15:22

Have a job and manage to raise children I worry

15:25

about, things like will I be spending enough time with

15:28

the child if I have to work full time to get the money to pay

15:33

the mortgage and you will the child be getting the care and the

15:36

one to one time that they need.

12

- your life is more satisfying? Since having children, participant yes.
- 04:36
- 100 percent 100% because basically their happiness and the
- 04:39
- way they are says to us that we've
- 04:43
- done a good job or we are doing a good job. you know
- 04:48
- what I mean. So definitely, yeah 100% Researcher so. It's like you get a
- 04:53
- sense of pride by looking at how happy your children are and
- 04:57
- that's kind of because you have created the happiness for them.
- 05:01
- Participant Yeah. So basically, They are our greatest achievements so I'm see
- 05:05
- them succeed in life and be happy in life and just the little things, you say .
- 05:10
- Yeah, OK, I I'm. I'm content because their content

13

I think that I wouldn't have the freedom that I would have that I

03:25

Would have to leave my job which I worked so hard to get

03:29

I have worked a lot, so much because I don't have kids I have worked

03:30

Really hard and that was something I was proud of

14

get. A babysitter you know, short notice and

11:38

you know all their plans that they walk around the

11:41

children. You know where?

11:44

Just to say, let's get over here. Let's go, you know, we, we

11:48

can go here there anywhere and we don't have to worry it

15

03:35

I can plan Holidays at the drop of a hat. As I said, I don't

03:40

have to worry. The only the only worries I have. The only thing I

03:44

have to look after it would be at the moment is my cats

03:49

16

I have freedom I can be spontaneous, and I have to say I am enjoying it right now

06:14

just doing the my own thing but im sure that will change in time like what

06:18

I did start to notice in the last year though in regards

17

or you know anyone around the weekend. It's kinda like oh when

03:47

are you free like when can you get somebody to mind your kids or

03:51

we go somewhere that you can bring them with us but

03:55

With me It's so easy to be spontaneous and kind of yeah.

04:00

18

myself. Well, why didn't I say yeah to go out and that night

17:30

out? Or why didn't I go there? You know that kind of way where

17:34

it's harder to go anywhere. It's harder to do anything that

17:37

you're kind of like, oh, I wish I had gone out more. I had seen

17:41

my friends more, when I didn't have kids

19

children is like I think having a child brings out the child in

13:26

you as well. when you're going on day

13:30

trips and doing childlike things especially

13:31

if you're lucky enough to have had a good childhood,

13:34

it gives you a reminder of things you did as a child

13:37

20

- if they can play with the kids. But even if they're just playing
- 05:54
- in the garden or whatever, we do a lot and I love that.
- 05:57
- day trips out and Movie nights in it just kind of
- makes things like sort of worthwhile Researcher) yes,
- 06:03
- I can understand that, its almost like you are cherishing these times

21

Participant Yeah its everything that I do with the kids, kids have always

15:28

Been a massive part of family and even know that I am older and

15:30

Have my own all of my brothers and sisters have children,

15:34

we get together and do everything with the kids I live for that

22

so yeah. It's it's a little bit of pressure, but also its just

05:38

Downright hurtful if I'm going to be honest with you

05:41

Like these remarks and interrogations in a social circle

05:45

Like I already find things hard myself I mean I dread a friend

05:49

been pregnant, I dread Mother's Day, It's all just so painful and cruel

05:53

when you cant have that simple thing you are supposed to

05:56

have and been asked these questions is hard

23

I feel very pressured in society to have kids people are always

27:11

Asking but people are asking questions that sometimes

27:14

aren't so easy to answer, that's the harsh reality

27:18

24

04:44

this could be a personal thing as well, I think

04:48

there's an expectation within society as a female

04:50

that I will have kids and I cant say I feel the

04:55

pressure. I think maybe as I grow older it's a personal

04:58

biological pressure I feel, but I definitely think

05:01

there's an expectation and people ask me about

05:04

Kids regularly and I'm sick of it there is more to me you know

25

17:06

PARTICIPANT I never felt directly left over.

17:10

But you see all of my friends have children and sometimes

17:14

When you're the only woman that doesn't have kids

17:18

Your kind of like I better get on board.

17:22

26

- within society. **Researcher** Did you ever feel pressured to have kids? **Participant**
- 09:53
- I would have to say yes for sure, there is
- 09:56
- always pressure its like when you get engaged people ask
- 09:59
- When are you having a baby? You have your first baby, when are you asked
- 10:03
- When are you having your second baby cause it's like oh you can't leave
- 10:06
- that first baby on their own. You need to have another baby.
- 10:09
- Or if you get married you get asked when are you having babies. I just
- 10:13
- don't agree with it. I just think there's too much pressure
- 10:16
- on women these days to have kids and just too much pressure on
- 10:19
- women to give an answer as to why they don't have kids

• 10:22
27
 24:37

Are you having children or when you're going to have a baby

24:40

as a woman in a relationship for as long as I have been in.

24:44

We get asked these kind of questions and you know.

24:47

I don't want to come out and tell them what's actually

24:50

really going on and what our plan is because first of all, I

24:54

don't think we should need to explain because we know

24:57

What our plan is. Second of all, you

28

08:18

there wasn't too much pressure a few years ago but

08:22

When we got married people were like when is the babies coming?

08:25

Its like ok you are married so now your expected to have kids

08:28

And almost like That's your only purpose get married have kids

08:30

I feel sorry for women who are not in these positions

29

People seem to either not know things or are just nosy

04:57

I remember just after we got married at the time

05:00

my eldest child was four and after we got married, we

05:04

went on honeymoon and unfortunately had a miscarriage

05:06

and I remember coming back for my honeymoon and people saying

05:09

to me well any honeymoon baby and I had just miscarried

30

I think there is so much pressure within society to have kids but

15:43

I don't think its just women there is a man that I work with he had his first

15:47

child recently at 40 and 5 years leading to up it, it was constantly topic of talk,

15:50

he was always asked would he have children and when

31

experience, people say kind of jokingly, so I'm still at the

08:43

point where it's said. Kind of like, **oh times ticking when are**

08:47

you two going to have babies. All of this stuff like I definitely

08:50

feel it. Its said in a joking way. You know there's probably a

08:54

seriousness behind it, but it's not kind of annoying it adds

08:59

To your already life pressures and I get a bit embarrassed like

09:03

Asking when are you going to have a baby is very personal

32

We would both live at home and with our parents so like people

25:57

will say oh, you know Do you not live together. And then they are like

26:01

Surely at this stage your looking to have kids

33

But there is the expectation that people and society put on

23:27

you not only have children and have them healthy and afford

23:30

them and all the rest have a gentleman's family. A boy and a girl

23:33

34

friends, people in the bank or just the supermarket it would be

05:37

these comments like, **you would want to give her brother a sister. You**

05:41

know she's she's four now. That was my first brush with social pressure

05:45

It was like they couldn't comprehend why I hadn't got another in four years

05:48

Like they automatically expected me to have another child

35

flight in the corner and you know my sister in law has one

06:08

child. And medically she couldn't have another. She's

06:10

an only child. An often people would make comments **like God**

06:13

Love her shes an only child You know all this kind of

06:16

stuff? Yeah, like almost like like guilt and.

06:20

36 the gender of the baby is another thing. Like I have

08:15

two girls and I remember having my second child and

08:19

she was a girl and people saying ah you have to go for your boy

08:20

37

You have your first baby; you then get asked when are you

16:09

having your second baby cause it's like oh you can't leave

16:11

That first baby on their own you need to have another baby

16:14

38

it again and hopefully never do I. You know at the time I felt

12:13

like shame. I felt like id failed as a woman, as a mother

12:15

For not giving my child a sibling id wonder what is

12:19

Wrong with my body, and been asked stuff did not help us

12:22

39

- if we did the same as well, if I had two boys, they would say go for a
- 12:19
- a girl It seems like people are never just like
- 12:23
- happy enough to for you. I do think to myself I'm actually happy, you
- 12:26
- know, sometimes If I say to people that 2 is enough
- 12:30
- people are like what? Why wouldn't you try for a boy? It's like
- 12:33
- Hang on a minute stop shaming me
- 12:35
- into thinking. I need to have a certain number of kids or I need
- 12:39
- to give them a brother or you know, things like that. So does
- 12:42

40

never got asked before would I have kids or did I want kids or

21:56

anything? cause I was quite young but now that I have one

21:59

I do find people asking quite a lot so would you

22:03

like a second one or would you go again or something? You know

41

11:35

I think if people were struggling with fertility,

11:37

they'd never dream of saying it to another woman because they'd

11:40

be so aware of what they're going through that this other

11:43

woman could be going through as well. Yeah, so it's like that.

42

to have them, whatever it is. I think yeah, the more educated you

11:28

Are on infertility the more you probably stop asking those direct

11:31

questions I think anyway.

43

On the other hand to be fair to people they just don't know

11:55

the truth. So how do I expect them to help or

11:59

be sympathetic when I wasn't

12:02

willing to tell them people won't just know this stuff I suppose

12:06

44

Researcher And the next question is, do you

08:13

ever feel pressured to have children.

08:17

Um, I would say I used to with my grandmothers they would ask

08:22

when you're gonna have kids since they both since passed away and

08:28

Now that I am single its not as much as it used to be but people do ask.

08:33

I don't even think they realise that they are doing it

45

do yet. You know what? What might seem like a little harmful

24:24

joke to a big group of people could really

24:27

hurt somebody, you know whether it be the one of the partners in

24:30

the relationship or both of them. And you know they just.

46

- you know? People are doing different things
- 17:17
- And go through different things
- 17:22
- I'm not saying its rude i'm saying you need to go there
- 17:25
- And ask people the most personal things
- 17:29

47

Where is your babies, where is your house, when are you getting?

26:46

Married people think you have a money tree out the back and you

26:50

Can do what you like whenever you like its like come on

26:54

48

I am fully aware on circumstances surrounding parental situations

27:25

Be I am also fully aware that so many people are not

27:27

Its time society started talking more about this like I know

27:31

More and more ads on TV are showing fertility struggles

27:33

and unplanned pregnancy but there still needs to be more done

49

There are pages on social media for awareness

27:52

on these types of things, but you need to go

27:56

look for these pages, something needs to be

27:59

designed to get the attention of everybody.

50

[participant] I don't think there's enough in the media to be honest

12:08

They need to jump on board and do more like I have noticed

12:10

That with the media there tends to be success stories. So anytime I

12:14

see anything about you know Oh my God me and my partner

12:18

we're experiencing infertility. But now we have a baby through

12:22

IVF and you know, sometimes it's not that straightforward

12:25

for people either. It's well and good putting all these campaigns out

12:28

but we need to see two ends of the story and not just the successful