

**An exploration of the experiences of pregnancy during employment in female dominated industries and the investigation of the effects of pregnancy on employment in the cosmetics/aesthetics industry.**

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**Abstract**

This study presents data from a set of interviews, which explores women's experiences of pregnancy and work. It focuses primarily on the participants experience during pregnancy, their work-life balance and their insight as employers. Social, economic and political transformations across Ireland from 1973 have transformed the labour market extensively. The Irish female labour participation has grown substantially providing women with independence and equality, although somewhat delayed in comparison with its European neighbors. In today's society it has become a commonality that women maintain dual roles of both work and family, which is complex in itself. The difficulties surrounding motherhood and more specifically pregnancy during employment are critical to understand from an employer's point of view. This study highlights the subjective nature of women's experiences, employers concerns regarding pregnancy in the workplace and also investigates improved practices to placate any bias or discrimination of pregnant employees in the future. The results do not correlate totally with the academic research in this field; employer's perceptions of pregnant employees were found to be more positive than previous results. The size and sector of a company were identified as influential factors of the overall pregnancy experience for employees in female dominated industries. These results suggest increased education and working policies are required across

smaller and privatized sector to reduce any hostility and also the use of flexible employment to encourage the return of women post maternity leave. Another issue that was highlighted was the maternity leave pay gap between the private and public sector, which may force new mothers back to employment prematurely to negate financial stress.

**Keywords:** female-labour participation, women, pregnancy, work-life balance.

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## **Introduction**

Shinall (2018) once conveyed 'it is difficult to know what to expect when you are expecting, particularly in the workplace'. This research paper is investigating the lived experiences of employed females during their pregnancy and also their insight as employers managing pregnancy in the workplace. The particular group of women that took part in this research piece are employed in the aesthetics/cosmetics industry, which is largely female dominated. Thus removing the gender discrimination aspect from the investigation, which has been reported as a potential factor in pregnancy discrimination (Adams L. M., 2005). Discrimination is commonly understood as differential treatment on the basis of group membership that unfairly disadvantages a group. Discrimination can derive for a number of reasons and sometimes unintentionally. Therefore It is important to understand how implicit and unconscious bias can affect peoples decision-making in the workplace, a concept that can be ambiguous and underreported. The employers in this study as mentioned are all mothers, allowing the exploration of potential homophilic tendencies. Homophily is the tendency for people to exhibit a stronger social tie with those who share their traits (Edo, 2013). There is an element of relatability between employer and employee surrounding pregnancy in this study.

The most commonly reported stereotypes of pregnant employees or returning mothers to the workplace are largely negative. Botsford Morgan et



al(2013) stated that employers perceive these women as inflexible, incompetent, lacking commitment to work and requiring extra accommodations in the workplace following maternity leave. However the majorities of these employers were male and perhaps stereotyped this minority group due to lack of experience and unfamiliarity (Bygren, 2017). This research paper investigates pregnancy in a female dominated industry and through the lens of female employers that have experienced pregnancy. The concerns of employers are explored and potential solutions that may be utilized to reduce friction between work and family roles such as flexible employment, increased education and policy development. There is a growing body of research on the importance of achieving work-life balance for women with dual roles to maintain a healthy, happy lifestyle. The availability of flexible employment has been demonstrated as appealing to working mothers, allowing them to combine both responsibilities and avoid any detriment to their long term career (McQuaid, 2009). The cosmetic industry is an arena that could utilize flexible working as clinics have extended working hours to provide for clients. The research found that motherhood doesn't solely affect career progression but other factors such as the type of sector, size of firm and also familiarity of employer with pregnancy. Additionally the findings identified that employers view on pregnancy is not filled with worry and concern but rather joy and happiness for their employees. The main concern being whether mothers will return to work following maternity leave. It is necessary to address these concerns for future employees and resultantly eliminate pregnancy stereotypes amongst employers.

## Aim

It is proposed to explore the lived experiences of pregnancy in the Irish cosmetics industry, a predominantly female industry and also to investigate the perceptions of employers on pregnancy and if any discrimination exists. The study involves conducting six interviews with female employers within the cosmetic/aesthetic industry in Ireland whom have all experienced pregnancy in the workplace. The interviews will aim to gather the women's personal experience of pregnancy and also their insights as employers of pregnancy in the workplace. This study will aim to supplement the research that is already present surrounding the topic of pregnancy in the workplace. Another objective of this paper is to propose any solutions that will ensure a stress free experience surrounding pregnancy for both employee and employer.

## **Literature Review**

### Evolution of Gender Labour Equality

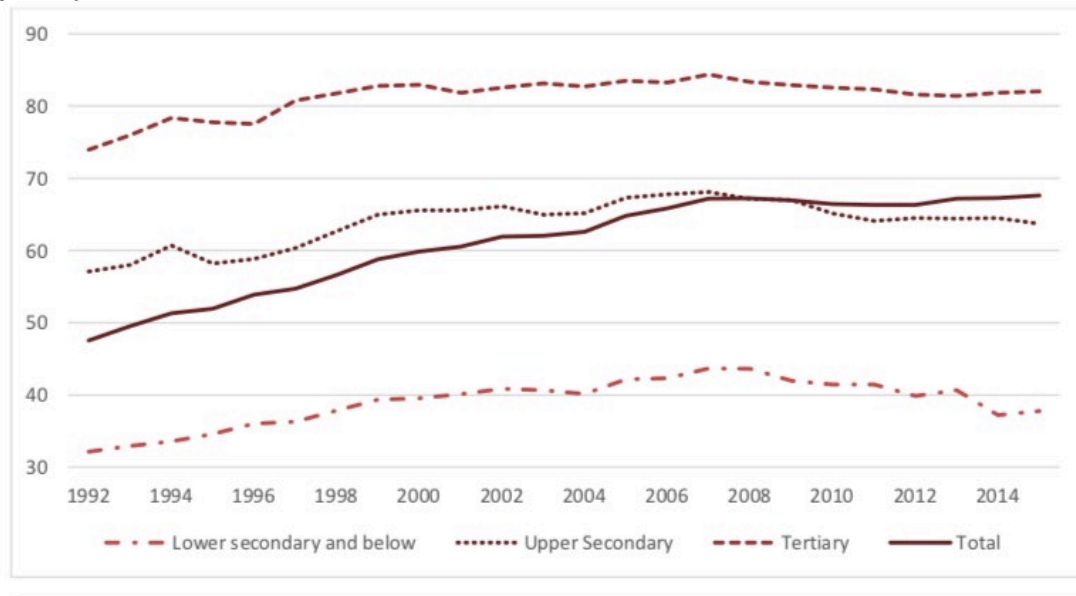
In terms of gender-based inequality, there have been profound changes in western society over the past 60 years specifically the change in women's roles and opportunities to paid employment (Russell, 2017). Female labour market participation in the European Union has increased from 41.3% in 1991 to 45.8% in 2021 (The World Bank, 2021). In terms of Ireland, a similar trend was observed with the female counterpart increasing by 6.5% in the same period. There are a few macro historical theories which indicate that the increased female labor participation is due to long term industrialization, however research suggests that economic development is not solely accountable and that other factors are responsible such as the development of state policies, and growth of education systems, family systems and national labor market systems (Hegewisch, 2011). The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) of Ireland placed significant research on the issue of gender and the labor market from its primitive years. There were two large studies carried out in the 1970s, giving the ESRI extensive evidence for their first report: Commission on the Status of Women in 1973. This report was not only of high significance in the history of gender relations in Ireland in 1973 but additionally identified features in the subsequent evolution of women's employment in Ireland (Russell, 2017). Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, required changes in legislation to provide equal treatment for women, which was a monumental factor for the change in women's role in the labour market. Additional factors

such as education, the changing of normative gender culture, family status, taxation and policy reform and fertility were identified as pivotal in the evolution.

In recent years, the influences of education and family status have been at the forefront of the development of female and male workforce participation. The increased attainment of education in Ireland from the 1960s to the twenty first century played a significant role in the labour market engagement. The female population gained more than the male in terms of education during this period. In 1966 almost 70 per cent of Irish men had primary education and 62 per cent of women. By 2011, 34 per cent of the female Irish population has Third level education, compared to 28 per cent of men (Russell, 2017). The female labour participation rate has been shown to be proportional to level of education (see figure X). Berscholz & Fitzgerald(2016) postulated that the rising level of educated females provided an extremely employable pool for when labour demand increased and other socio-cultural and legislative limitations weakened such as the Marriage Bar abolishment. The Marriage Bar, which was in place from 1893 and forced women to retire upon marriage, an initiative to prevent women rising too high on the salary scale, was removed in 1973 in conjunction with Irelands entry to the EEC. Ireland underwent substantial economic growth between 1994 and 2007 known as the Celtic Tiger period, which in turn doubled employment rates (O'Connell, 1999). The increase in the rate of female participation was rapid and jumped from 42 per cent in 1990 to over 63 per cent in 2007. Irish female participation rates quickly met the EUs

average in 2007, in comparison to the other western European countries that had experienced this over a much longer period since World War II (Russell, 2017).

Figure 1: Female Labour Participation Rates by Level of Education (20-64 years) %

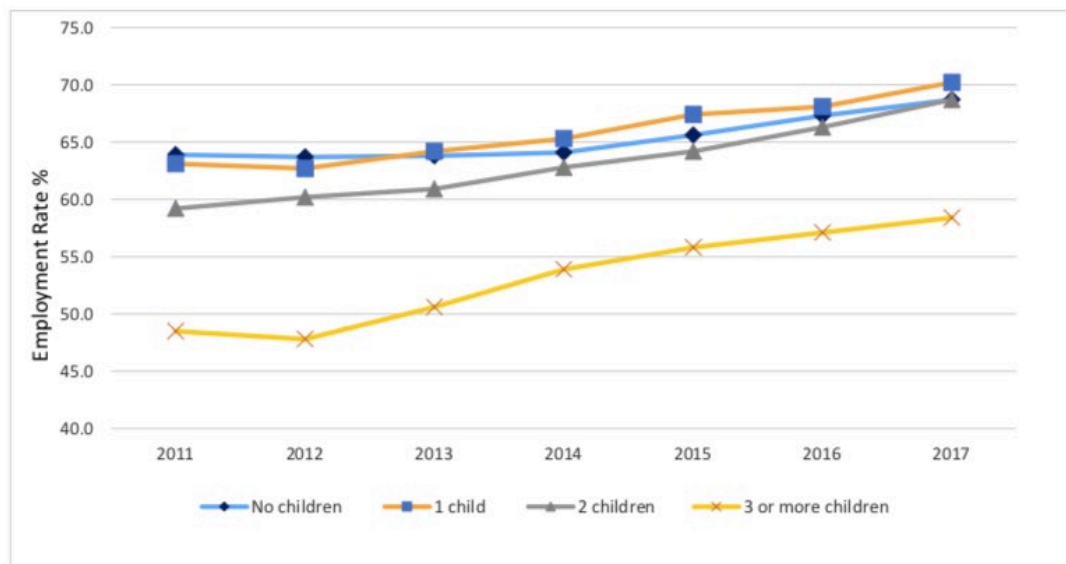


Source: OECD (2018)

Family status has also proven to have a significant effect on female participation on the labor market (Russell H. Q., 2009). During the 1990s participation rates of women aged 35 with 2 children was strongly influenced by their earnings; women earning half of the average wage had a 25 per cent participation rate whereas others earning double the average wage showed a 96 per cent involvement in the labor market. There was also a significant shift in the social and economic view from the 1970s, where the focus was on 'married' vs 'single' to the 1990/2000s, where women were classed as having children or not having children. This shift signifies the disconnect between childbirth and marriage, and also that childbirth rather

than marriage was the outstanding contributing factor to women’s labor participation. Additionally there was a significant difference in participation rates among lone mothers with children in pre-school versus school aged children between 1998 and 2007 (Russell H. Q., 2009). This highlighted the expense of childcare and need for improved Community Employment Schemes for this particular demographic during this period, Interestingly, there has been an increase in the employment rate for females with children from 2007 (see figure 1). In 2017, the OECD reported that the highest employment rate in women was amongst those with one child at 70.2%.

Figure 2. Female employment rate by number of children, 2017 (15-64 years)



Source: OECD (2018)

As previously mentioned, the increased female employment rate can be closely correlated to the attainment of education. Females with higher levels of education, maintain employment levels more steadily as the number of children in their family increases compared to this with medium levels of

education (Callaghan, 2018). Another factor that is influential to female labour participation is the change in behavior surrounding when couples choose to have children and how many children they have (Bercholz, 2016). In the 1980s the average age of mothers at their first birth was under 25, the average today is 31. Ultimately this means that childcare issues are not relevant to the females labour decisions in there 20s, giving them more autonomy in their careers.

### Pregnancy in the Workplace

While there is substantial literature on the impact of motherhood and childbearing on women's careers and the transitions back to work, these studies concentrate on the period post pregnancy. The literature relating to treatment of pregnant women in employment, discrimination and legislation is a separate deluge of research, which has not been as extensively investigated (Russell H. W., 2011). Kazama and Hebl(2003) have established a typology of the different types of bias experienced by pregnant women in the workplace. Their studies identified two disparate forms of pregnancy discrimination; formal which consists of overt actions such as denying access to employment or negative job related outcomes and informal which is categorized by interpersonal discrimination such as hostility, rudeness, frowning. There are a number of negative stereotypes that pregnant women and mothers are perceived as in work settings, which drive the hostile attitudes and discrimination. (Botsford Morgan, 2013). Current research identifies a number of negative stereotypes associated with pregnant

employees such as inflexibility, lack of commitment, incompetence and an added need for employers to accommodate. These problematic stereotypes are the cause for a substantial amount of pregnancy discrimination in the workplace. Some research has been carried out to investigate whether the relaying of counter stereotypic information to an employer/hiring manager would reduce bias towards a pregnant candidate. Botsford Morgan et al (2013) found that it did not reduce hostility felt by the pregnant applicant, however the study was carried out in a retail setting only, which may have been attributable to the outcome.

### ***Inflexibility***

There is a strong perception that women are the primary caregivers at home and that they are constrained by their familial commitments. The social role theory explains why women still perform the majority of housework and childcare while performing paid work (Eagly A. H., 2002) and the traditional concept that family and work roles are discordant still perseveres. An ideal worker is one that is seen as fully unconstrained, allowing he/she to fulfill their work adequately. Given the traditional norms and perceived constraints of mothers, there is an assumption that pregnant employees/mothers can be inflexible with their work time and approach as they have other commitments/constraints (Botsford Morgan, 2013). The IHREC reported that a striking 16 percent of women whose hours did not change post maternity leave stated receiving fewer opportunities for training and 19 percent reported fewer promotion opportunities (Russell H. W., 2011).



### ***Lack of Commitment***

Commitment can be defined as the state of being dedicated to a cause(work). Motherhood is associated with the stereotype of lack of commitment and social theorists have investigated the underpinnings of this extensively. Eagly et al (2000) identifies the social role theory, whereby men and women are separated into their stereotypical roles of breadwinner and caregiver. This theory suggests that a female's inert function is to be a mother so therefore a work role becomes secondary. Hays(1996) describes this as 'intensive mothering', whereby a mother is perceived as always being available to her children and as a result cannot be dedicated fully to her professional role. These perceptions of motherhood and its function in the workplace have been illustrated countless times in research and recognized as a norm. Ultimately, it is believed that an ideal employee can dedicate themselves totally to their role, unrestricted by family (Botsford Morgan, 2013). This perception gives rise to negative treatment of pregnant women and mothers as there is an intrinsic belief that they cannot commit themselves fully as workers.

### ***Incompetence***

Incompetence in the workplace can be defined as the inability to complete a job to a satisfactory standard. This stereotype has a number of underlying theories, which ultimately associates motherhood with incompetence in the workplace. The lack of fit model (Eagly A. H., 2002) identifies that there is an incompatibility between feminine (warmth, kindness, caring etc.) and

masculine characteristics (competitive, powerful, instrumental etc.). As pregnancy and motherhood are the epitome of femininity, the perceived characteristics are heightened. An employer therefore has a pre-conceived idea of a pregnant employee versus a male. Another theory which underpins the association of incompetency with pregnancy/motherhood is the expectation states theory, which focuses more on performance evaluation and promotion (Wagner, 2002). The theory suggests that when there is a distinction made between people (mother vs non-mother) and one group is held in a higher esteem, this becomes a status characteristic. This ultimately places a non-mother ahead in performance appraisal or promotion due to their status characteristic versus a mother.

### ***Need for accommodating pregnant employees in the workplace***

The event of childbirth is a physical experience for women that inevitably lead to a period of time off work to recover and bond with their baby, which is known as maternity leave. There is a common perception by both employers and fellow employees that these new mothers will need prolonged assistance when they return to work, a judgment that can cause friction and negativity in the workplace (Gates, 1998). There are legal protections in place for pregnant employees to provide appropriately safe working environment (ACT). However the accommodations that are required by employers such as limited overtime hours can be perceived as a burden and therefore cause them to avoid hiring pregnant women (Botsford Morgan, 2013).

## Academic Research on Pregnancy Discrimination

Upon reviewing the literature on pregnancy discrimination in the workplace, it is conceivable that pregnancy does not only create a barrier for a woman in her current job but also for a woman trying to attain a new job. Kazama and Hebl (2003) reported that there was minimal evidence of explicit formal discrimination towards pregnant job applicants who were enquiring about job opportunities in organizations. However pregnant applicant's experienced unfavorable treatment from managers such as brow furrowing, rudeness and staring. It has been suggested that disclosing an applicant's pregnancy prior to an interview may prevent 'psychological surprise' on the interviewer and may counteract any negative effects of their condition (Cunningham, 2007). This theory has been applied in terms of disabled job candidates, however others argue that this disclosure is irrelevant to the hiring process and should not be considered. Ultimately a pregnant job applicant must determine the best approach for them, keeping in mind that her condition is likely to affect the hiring outcome.

Becker et al (2019) presented that childbearing potential affects callback rates for job vacancies in female dominated industry's. This study had a number of interesting findings; married females with no children had a lower probability of callbacks versus married women with children, highlighting that childbearing potential influences hiring probability. A second finding was that mothers applying for full time positions were more likely to receive

callbacks versus part-time positions; which suggests that mothers applying for full time roles are independent of their family situation and in their employers perception “must have” childcare arrangements in place. This highlights discrimination against mothers that apply for part time positions, the perception being that the candidate may be preoccupied with their family needs and unable to give full effort to their work position. A study carried out by Duguet and Petit (2005) on the effect of child bearing age on hiring success, it was found that women of a younger age and therefore higher probability of childbearing received significantly less callbacks in comparison to similar aged males, when applying to highly qualified roles. The authors attributed this to potentially higher maternity costs that would be incurred by the company. However similar design studies found no discrimination in terms of sex and parental status (Bygren, 2017).

### Industry Specific Factors

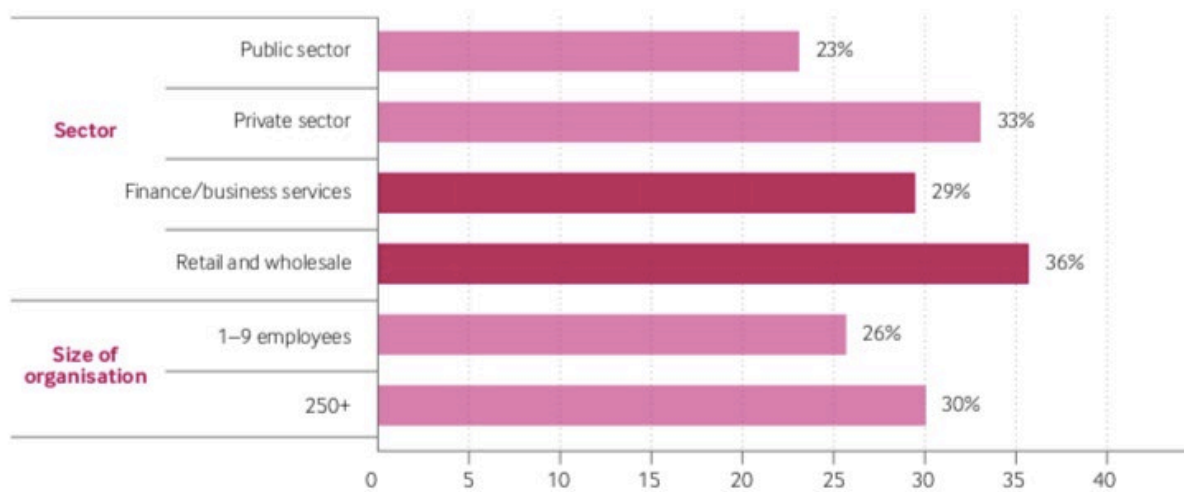
A number of factors affect the culture and policies of a company surrounding pregnancy, maternity leave and allowances. Newman and Ryan (2020) highlighted that a company’s ability to offer benefits is often down to factors such as the company’s size, industry, region, ownership and turnover levels. In 2020, 74% of companies with over 500 employees offer additional maternity leave benefit in Ireland, compared with only 45% of companies with less than 50 employees. Another study highlighted that women in firms with less than ten employees were less likely to experience unfair treatment

in comparison with larger firms of 250 employees or more. Larger companies with over 500 employees tend to have more established policies and procedures that protect employees whereas mid sized companies (10- 250 employees) tend to have a more relaxed stance thus providing more scope for mistreatment. Studies have reported that women working in smaller firms face a higher risk of discrimination and employers in smaller firms expressed more negative views about pregnant employees (Young, 2005); (Adams, 2005).

Male dominated industries, which are particularly labour intensive, tend to have a high female turnover level following childbirth. A report published by the IHREC, identified that the largest portion of women moved jobs in the agricultural, manufacturing and construction industry (13 per cent) to other sectors following maternity leave (Russell H. W., 2011). The sector that saw the least movement was retail and wholesale, with only 3per cent changing sector. These statistics highlight the reality that certain industries are a less appealing and suitable occupation for new mothers. The agricultural, manufacturing and construction roles tend to be more physically intensive which may deter mothers that have undergone childbirth and may also be breastfeeding a baby, two physically demanding events. In terms of pregnancy discrimination, an EOC study reported that aspects of a job were more influential than a woman's personal characteristics on the likelihood of undergoing fair treatment (Russell H. M., 2017). An estimated 45% of women suffer from tangible discrimination in the workplace, and it is has been found

that it is most prevalent in the retail and wholesale sector, which is largely female dominated.

Figure 3. Unfair treatment during pregnancy by sector and size of organization.



Source: OECD (2018)

A number of studies suggest that women working in the private sector are at greater risk of pregnancy-related discrimination than those in the public sector (Adams, 2005). Figure 3 presents the information gathered from 1,622 pregnant employees experiences of treatment during pregnancy in terms of their industry sector and company size. There is a multitude of malpractices and mistreatment that span from the time an employee informs their workplace of their pregnancy and can in some cases persist permanently in their careers. Women have reported employers reluctance to let them go to antenatal appointments during work time, lack of provisions made for physical duties and some experiencing a motherhood penalty on their salary (Wattis, 2012). It is understood that increased awareness and

implementation of equality policies in the public sector may justify these differences.

### The Legal Background

Extensive legal frameworks have been developed in Ireland and Europe to protect pregnant women in the workplace and it is illegal for women to be discriminated against at work because they are pregnant or for a reason relating to their pregnancy. The vulnerability of pregnant women in employment in terms health and safety, protection against discrimination and unfavourable treatment to reintegration into employment is recognised in maternity-protection legislation and anti-discrimination legislation (Russell H. W., 2011). However it is less clear whether such legal protection also extends to the hiring process and unfortunately, pregnancy discrimination appears to remain a barrier to full equality for women in applying for new jobs.

The legislative change in the late 1970s in the form of the Health (Family Planning) Act 1979 was highly significant as contraception was legalized. In the 1960s marriage rates in Ireland were increasing, which was viewed as a block to the female labour supply (Fahey, 2000). Irish women had significantly high fertility rates in this period and pregnancy was almost solely confined to marriage. The total fertility rates (TFR) in Ireland were noticeably higher than Europe's average at this time, however due to the

Family Planning Act 1979 the TFR began to drop and meet the European norm. It is also important to note that Ireland still has considerably larger average family sizes in comparison to neighboring countries (Fahey T. K., 2012).

The Employment Equality Acts of 1998 and 2011 outlaw any workplace discrimination in terms of job opportunity, pay, work experience, training and promotion. The nine grounds on which the Acts prohibit discriminatory behavior are gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, membership of the traveller community (Workplace Relations Commission, 2020). Despite the legislative protection in place there is still disparity in the recruitment/hiring stages. If a candidate is rejected for a job application they do not have access to information regarding hiring decisions and also the caliber of the other candidates. McGinnity et al (2009) notes that pursuing discrimination cases related to recruitment can prove to be very challenging as the information required can be difficult to attain. The recruitment process itself can be very subjective in nature also, which as a result can be problematic in providing objective data. The legal processes in Ireland are traditionally costly and due to the nature of discrimination, the benefits can be tentative, discouraging cases being taken which is why such a minimal amount goes forward (McGinnity, 2009). In-depth research was carried out by Russell et al (2009) on discrimination in the Irish workplace, which reported that only 6% of people that had experienced discrimination had made an official complaint, or pursued legal action. The research also noted



that an extensive range of resources such as knowledge of one's rights, support and language skills are needed to respond adequately to perceived discrimination which marginalized groups may not have access to.

### Conscious vs Unconscious Bias

Employer attitudes towards pregnant women in the hiring stage of the recruitment process are an area that has been investigated insufficiently. It is crucial to understand fully the reasons of employer's attitudes, whether they are unconscious or conscious in nature. The investigation of implicit employer bias is of significance in terms of measuring any discrimination towards pregnant women in recruitment processes. Greenwald and Krieger (2006) have investigated the theory of implicit bias- which is the theory that humans have unconscious mental processes which lead to stereotyping and in some cases discrimination. This theory suggests that unconscious bias can cause people to form assumptions about groups/categories of people based on previous information that may not be statistically relevant. Although there are laws in place to prevent pregnancy discrimination, there is little to suggest the employer's full understanding of how bias may be present unconsciously. Stigmatization of certain groups is formed as a result, which can impact a person's decision-making and intergroup judgment. Eagly (1987) defined a more specific theory to the gender stereotypes named "the social role theory", which presented that each gender had expected roles associated with it. The inferences that a perceiver from each gender is associated with the activities that men and women generally perform in their

typical social roles; men's tenancy of breadwinner and the higher status/power role and a woman's occupancy of a homemaker and lower status roles (Eagly A. W., 2000). A number of these stereotypes may unconsciously influence an employer's perspective, which needs to be investigated more extensively. One that has been identified is the association of pregnant women and excessive absences from the workplace (Halpert, 1997). Pregnant employees stated that their supervisors were significantly concerned about their work being covered during their maternity leave and whether they would return to work or not after the birth of their child. This assumption can be derived from the social role theory; an employer automatically perceives a pregnant woman/mother as not fully capable of fulfilling both work and home duties.

A second explanation for potential bias is the role congruity theory (Eagly, 2002), which proposes that people rely on pre-existing attitudes rather than information on an individual and his/her performances. The biases are more apparent when stereotypes are strong e.g performance in male-dominated industries. Similarly pregnancy highlights the feminine gender role characteristics. The female gender role comprises primarily of the affectionate, nurturing and kind characteristics, which are contrary to the typical traits of a 'leader' such as forceful, confident and controlling (Cunningham, 2007). Because of this incongruence, a pregnant woman therefore may not be perceived as a competent, valuable employee. An earlier theory that is of a similar basis is lack of fit model, which theorized

that when the characteristics of a person conflict with their workplace role, expectations of failure increase.

### Homophily

Homophily is the tendency for people to exhibit a stronger social tie with those who share their traits. It is also known as 'own group bias' and is applicable to an array of characteristics; race, gender, socioeconomic group, age. Edo et al (2013) has identified two reasons for homophilic association, the first is simply the preference for homogeneity and the second is that individuals feel that communication, interactions and bonding is easier with others of similar characteristics. An extensive review was conducted by Edo et al (2013) on various studies that assessed discrimination across a number of countries. It was found that discrimination against minority groups/individuals and partiality for majority groups was a commonality. In terms of recruitment, homophily can cause employers to select candidates that they can relate to which inevitably generates discrimination to the other candidates. A number of social and cognitive psychologists have studied the prevalence of discrimination in the recruitment process with a focus on unconscious bias. The most common bias that have been identified are gender, race, sexual orientation and pregnancy. There is limited research on the specific experiences of pregnant women in recruitment stages of a job, however the concept is existent (Walker, 2019).

Research has identified the presence of homophilic discrimination against pregnant women in employment settings. Halpert(1997) reported that males

typically scored pregnant women lower in performance ratings and were also more likely to have conservative opinions about the impact of pregnancy on a career and maternity leave. Although the findings can also be categorized as gender discrimination, there is a homophilic element as males cannot specifically relate to female pregnancy and therefore perhaps discriminate unconsciously. In the same study, males were identified as more openly discriminate towards pregnant women in terms of job promotion, a significant number indicating that they would refuse a promotion to the employee. Cunningham (2007) found that there were no significant gender differences upon investigating the effects of pregnancy on hiring decisions. The study presented interview tapes to hiring managers of women that were visibly pregnant and not and then measured the ratings. Interestingly, it was noted that female hiring managers rated the pregnant women significantly higher on certain characteristics such as maturity, competency and leadership, while the male counterpart rated the pregnant candidates 'aggressiveness' as significantly higher. The reason for this is unclear but perhaps the ratings were inflated purposely to compensate for not recommending the pregnant candidate.

### Work-Life balance

There are an increased number of women in the labour market in Ireland and the UK, however following pregnancy a significant amount reduce working hours or exit the labour market altogether (Chung, 2017). The reduction in working hours allows women to balance their family and work needs but to

the detriment of their career progression and which effectively increases the wage pay gap (Sigle-Rushton, 2007). There are solutions that can negate departures from the labour market such as teleworking, part time working hours and flexi time that give employees more control over when and where they work. In 2009, 57% of all companies across 27 European countries offered flexi-time to employees, an increase from 49% in 2004. Research has shown that the use of family-friendly arrangements such as flexi time and teleworking has increased the time parents spent with family, reducing the conflict between work and home commitments (Allen, 2013). The EOC study (Adams L. M., 2005) and the Maternity Rights Survey (La Valle, 2008) highlighted how flexible-working arrangements can reduce the likelihood of pregnancy-related workplace discrimination. The provision of flexible working arrangements may signify that the employer is aware of and concerned for employee welfare. The use of flexi-time and teleworking however is not suitable for all industries especially the service and retail, which are typically more female dominated sectors. The IHREC reported that 75% of women were in workplaces that offered at least one of the flexible working options post maternity leave but that there was a deviation between public and private sectors; 19% of public sector employees had access to four or more options for flexible work whereas only 8% of women in the public sector (Russell H. W., 2011). There are a multitude of factors to consider when looking at work-life balance for female employees post pregnancy. As mentioned above the type of industry and whether it be public or private sector are all influential to the degree of flexibility that employees are provided. Also in order for women to care effectively and pursue

employment progression concurrently, it is crucial that both employers and government understand and acknowledge how these two concepts overlap and connect.

## **Research Objectives and Methodology**

This chapter will outline and discuss the research design chosen for this study. It will present justification for the research design chosen for the study and also alternative methods that could have been used. The discussion will focus on the advantages and limitations of interview-based studies, sampling methods and data analysis.

### **Research Objectives**

The aims of this research paper are (a) to explore the pregnancy experiences of women in a female dominated industry, (b) to investigate the presence of pregnancy discrimination in the cosmetics industry and if so at what level and (c) investigate the effects of pregnancy on employment and potential solutions to alleviate any issues. To achieve these the following four research objectives will be satisfied:

#### **Objective 1**

To conduct interviews with six females in managerial positions of clinics in the cosmetics/aesthetics industry whom have also experienced pregnancy and motherhood.

#### **Objective 2**

To gather the pregnancy experiences of females employed in a female dominated industry.

### Objective 3

To investigate the perceptions and effects of pregnancy in the cosmetic/aesthetic industry from an employers perspective

### Objective 4

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the data collected taking into account previous research and literature.

### Challenges in Measuring Discrimination

The occurrence of discrimination is becoming increasingly subtle in nature, which makes it extremely difficult to identify even by the perpetrator when making a decision. Studies have highlighted the intricacies associated with measuring discrimination particularly in the hiring stage of recruitment. River (2012) investigated the reason that it is so difficult to measure the basis of a hiring decision, finding that a major element is due subjective and subtle factors. Traditionally the majority of research that has been collected regarding hiring decisions has focused on objective data that is achievable and focuses on easily observed characteristics and demographics. As outlined in the literary review, more often than not hiring decisions are made unconsciously or intuitively. Therefore directly asking people about their decisions and reasoning is not possible.



## **Design**

The selection between a qualitative and quantitative is crucial for appropriate data collection. The use of qualitative measures allows a gathering of descriptive data such as human experiences and opinions, conveying them into subjective data whereas the use of quantitative research expresses statistical data and analysis (Duffy, 2008). In this study, a qualitative design will be used to gain an insight into employers/hiring manager's views and beliefs on employing pregnant applicants in the cosmetics industry, which is typically a female dominated industry. As the number of participants in our study will be limited due to the specificity of our study a qualitative approach is most appropriate.

The nature of this research is exploratory as there is very little information about pregnancy discrimination in the cosmetics industry. The selected design for this research is a snowball sampling method in the form of a semi-structured interview. This sampling technique is utilized when conducting qualitative research, with a population that is hard to locate or significantly small in size. The target sample of this study is hiring managers/employers of the cosmetics industry, which is a very specific group, proving the primary data source to be a challenge. The researcher is familiar with an employer in a well-established cosmetics clinic and further similar candidates may be introduced through this contact.

There is a variety of qualitative research methods that can be applied, for example; surveys carried out via phone call, questionnaires, one on one interviews and normative surveys. It is important to identify both the advantages and limitations of each qualitative research method in order to ensure that one chooses the most appropriate method for research. Questionnaires have been proven to be an successful method for research when the researcher is attaining data from a large sample size and when they require minimal effort from the respondent (Shaughnessy, 2012). Due to this particular sample size being so small in this research and because the respondents are conversant with the researcher, it would be inappropriate to use the questionnaire method. Another issue with the use of a questionnaire in this particular case is that the researcher does not have control in regards to the order of the questions within the questionnaire so this can have an effect on the respondents answers. (Bell,2007). Surveys that are carried out over the phone are commonly used in qualitative data collection and can be particularly useful for large populations. Hippler and Schwartz (1987) have indicated that in telephone interviews, people commonly take less time to form a judgement or to come to an answer. This can have an effect on the level of detail that may be required from the respondents. The answers that are typically needed from respondents needs to be complex, personal and detailed, which is encouraged more effortlessly in face to face interviews.

The use of an interview style that includes questions that are exclusive to the type of information that the researcher requires is very important in regards

to obtaining reliable and efficient data for the research (Shaughnessy, 2012). Interview questions can be structured, unstructured or semi-structured. A structured approach is verbally administrated which allows minimal or no room for follow up questions and or unnecessary elaboration. The unstructured approach is carried out with minimal organization and will not reflect and predetermined theories and ideas (Gill, 2008). Lastly, the semi-structured approach are made up of several important questions that are predetermined while simultaneously allowing the researcher to go off track and pursue certain ideas or responses in further detail. The researcher will carry out one to one semi structured interviews that follow the topic guidelines (table 3). One on one interviews are more personal and allow the researcher to have more control over the presentation of the data collection, this is particularly important for a qualitative study strategy. It is common for respondents to become confused with some questions during the interview process but the interviewer can clarify it immediately. Evidently, there are many positive aspects to using interviews, however there are also some limitations. The most common limitation is the interviewer being bias to the topic. This can occur by inaccurate recording methods, the interviewer could edit recordings to suit their conclusion. Another element of bias from an interviewer is that they could direct the respondents answers, judgements or opinions (Shaughnessy, 2012). It is important that the interviewer minimises interviewer bias by making sure that the questions being asked are pre planes and to ensure that each interview follows the same exact layout. It is also vital to ensure that the interviews are transcribed verbatim. It is vital that the researcher is thorough with the undertaking of personal interviews

and to take the adequate time needed to conduct, transcribe and analyse each interview.

### Selected Design Method

The research method chosen were semi-structured interviews that were carried out via Zoom call at a suitable time for each participant. Prior to the interviews, each interviewee was given a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) to read and complete to ensure confidentiality. The duration of the interviews are to be around thirty minutes in total per participant. The interview structure is made up of four key areas and further broken down into sub questions (Appendix C)

### Participants and Recruitment

A sample of six participants was selected to be interviewed through the use of snowball sampling. The interviewer was familiar with two of the participants, whom then referred four suitable candidates. The criteria for the sample was (a) female, (b) in a managerial position in the cosmetic/aesthetic industry and (c) had experienced pregnancy during employment. The sample group ranged in age from 34-57years (mean=46years), five married and one separated, number of children ranging from 2-4 (avg=3). The method of the research is also cost-effective which aligns with budget restraints on the researcher.

### Data Analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Any identifiable information was then removed from the transcription. The use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis methodology (TAM) instrumented the analysis of data. TAM is comprised of 6 steps; the familiarization of data, the generation of initial codes, identification of themes, theme review, finalization of themes and producing the report. The use of thematic analysis helps to determine whether the data collected can reflect a true representation of practices and environment surrounding pregnancy in the cosmetics industry.

## Findings

**Table 1** Themes, subthemes and illustrative quotes

Theme	Subtheme	Illustrative quotes
<b>Pregnancy in the workplace</b>	Reaction of employer/colleagues	<p>'they were fantastic', 'very excited for me and work continued as normal'.                      'great excitement'. 'I worked for the HSE so your come day, your go day doesn't matter'.                      'it was nice to share'. 'I was the first pregnancy that my boss had to deal with so there was learning both sides'. 'a little bit of friction at the start'.                      'it was all positive, it was I think a shock as we were in a very small business'                      'it was well received and only kindness'.                      'being the boss, you don't really know what the others are saying'</p>
	Effects on career progression	<p>'So glad I didn't give up my job'. 'didn't affect my career progression'. 'my job only accelerated after having kids'. 'Pregnancy is not an illness'.                      'No effect at all'. 'my youngest was 8 and I had good back up from home'. 'it's easier to start a business when you have a cushion of a partner that has a regular income'. 'Pregnancy is not an illness'                      'yes, it did affect my career progression.' 'had the opportunity to be self-employed, paid very well but I turned it down as if I ever wanted to have a third child, the security of my job and protection would be at risk'. 'you're not able to give 110%'.                      'You're putting in 110% before but only 80% after pregnancy'. 'Quite bad as I couldn't juggle the two, it's really hard'. 'feeding your child yourself, it does create so much more complications'.                      'Certainly, I don't think having children made any difference'.</p>
	Gendered industries reactions	<p>'I think men would embrace pregnancy'. 'it depends hugely on how big the business is, and on the managing director'                      'people make prejudice decisions, consciously or unconsciously'.                      'gendered industries play a huge factor from listening to peoples stories'</p>
<b>Work-life balance</b>	Guilt	<p>'I feel guilty working and I only work two mornings'. 'I did feel guilty and really struggled with that'. 'I'm a bad Mom for wanting to go back'.</p>
	Work as an escape	<p>'home life is probably much more stressful'. 'business, it was like going on stage, a little bit of an escapism'.</p>
	Struggle	<p>'I couldn't do five days. I just couldn't I would absolutely burnout'. 'I couldn't juggle the two'. 'hard to manage the home life, it's just so overwhelming'.</p>

**Effects of pregnancy on women's employment**

Cost of training

'Some extra training is required, as they've forgotten a lot of the skills'. 'training people is expensive'. 'can be quite a rigmarole to get someone to be even legal to step into a building'. 'Training them in, which can take three or four months'. 'would I invest in training someone who is going to be gone straight away'. 'can be crippling on a business'.

Fallout post pregnancy

'you would hire and invest in them, and they just leave. There's no guarantee'. 'would question whether they would then come back'. 'and a lot of the times women don't return after nine months'.

Quality of employee

'if they were an absolute superstar, we would wait for them'. 'I'd wait for her for five years'. 'an employee was an asset and a benefit to our company, they were looked after for maternity'.

## **Results**

Thematic analysis identified three prominent themes in the data: (1) pregnancy in the workplace; (2) work-life balance pre and post pregnancy; (3) effects of pregnancy on a woman's employability and pregnancy in terms of the employer (see table X).

### **Theme 1: pregnancy in the workplace**

In discussing their personal experiences of pregnancy in the workplace, each participant reported largely a positive experience in terms of their employer and colleague's reactions. However there were mixed experiences in terms of the effect pregnancy had on career progression and also the perception of industry specific reactions. These have been further broken down into subthemes for analysis.

#### *Reaction of employers/colleagues*

All six participants described the responses from their employers/colleagues as a positive one; describing the experience as 'fantastic' and that there was 'great excitement' surrounding it. One of the participants recounted that the news was 'well received and with kindness'. Although the general experience of the participants was a good one, there were also two participants that reported an element of stress or 'friction' with their employers. One participant noted that it was their employers first experience of pregnancy in the workplace so there was a small amount of friction at the beginning, however this was only momentarily as there was 'learning on both sides' accomplished early on. Another participant reported feeling stressed to



inform their employer due to the small size of the business (two employees in total) and the knowledge of how difficult it would be to replace her. Ultimately the employer was happy to hear the news but it was a bit of a 'shock'.

One of the women only had experience as a CEO so did not have an employer to inform; again the experience was a positive one but she mentioned her position in the company may have prevented colleagues being fully forthcoming with their reactions – 'being the boss you don't really know what the others are saying'.

#### *Effects on career progression*

There was a definite divide in this subtheme amongst participants; four of the women reported that pregnancy and becoming a mother had very little to no effect on their job progression whereas two of the participants reported the opposite. Two participants in the first group described pregnancy as 'not an illness', and therefore not affecting their career. As one participant had already opened her own clinic before her first pregnancy, her job progression was already developed so this may not be as relevant to this participant.

The second group of women expressed pregnancy as a definite hindrance to their career progression. One participant taking an eight year sabbatical following her first pregnancy, which was unplanned but logistically made sense as her partner was opening up a new business that required the majority of his time and energy. This participant also highlighted that

coinciding breastfeeding and working as difficult – ‘feeding your child yourself, it does cause create much more complications’. The second participant discussed turning down a self-employment opportunity, which ‘paid significantly better but would provide no security or protection’ to her if she was to have another child. Both women reported not being able to give one hundred and ten percent during the immediate period after returning from pregnancy.

#### *Industry specific reactions*

As all of the participants work in the aesthetics industry, which is female dominated, the following subtheme was not based on their own personal experiences but their perceptions on whether the gender of an industry affects the reactions to pregnancy. The majority of the women believed that the male dominated industries would have a very different and less desirable reaction to pregnancy versus female dominated. One participant noted ‘gendered industries play a huge factor from listening to client’s stories’. It was mentioned that there is prejudice amongst people whether that be ‘conscious or unconscious’ in employment. Contrastingly one of the participants described men as very embracing towards the news of pregnancy and that reactions were more influenced by the size of the business and also ‘hugely on the managing director’ rather than the gender of the industry.

## **Theme 2: Work-life balance**

In terms of working hours, half of the participants reported a permanent reduction post pregnancy while the other half maintained the same working hours. All of the participants noted the limited amount of time for themselves in the early years of motherhood, one stating that the 'luxury of all the time that they used to have before was gone'. Other factors such as guilt and shame for returning to work were conveyed by half of the participants. Some of the women described their home life as more stressful than work so there was an element of escapism to being in the clinic.

### *Guilt for returning to work*

Three out of the six interviewees described feelings of guilt and shame when returning to work following maternity leave; one participant felt that she was 'a bad Mom for wanting to go back'. Wattis (2012) reported that although women are feeling guilt and shame for returning to work and undertaking dual roles, this then leads to them overcompensating for working long hours by spending any free time with their children. Emotional conflict has been reported as evident for these women as they view themselves as inadequate mothers for not 'performing sufficiently'. This constant guilt prevents the working mothers from allocating any personal time for themselves as the needs of their children overrides their own.

One of the women did not return to work for a number of years following having children so there is little comparison to be made in terms of guilt.

### *Work as an escape*

Half of the group mentioned that work and home life almost reversed roles during motherhood, especially in the early years. Home life was the 'more stressful' entity, whereas work became the escape. Similarly research has recounted women's opinions on how paid work provided a much-needed break from childcare. Two of the women advocated for women returning to work after pregnancy and how important it was for their self-confidence and identity. Many of women's experiences and views highlight the positive experience work has on their lives in terms of stimulation, having an alternative space for expression and self-esteem (Wattis, 2012).

### *Struggle*

Half of the participants described life post pregnancy as 'overwhelming' and struggled with maintaining a career and mothering. Two of these women reduced their working hours to part time in order to continue both roles; one reported that she 'couldn't do five days, as she would absolutely burnout'. Working part time is a common strategy employed by working mothers in order to manage their responsibilities. However the option to work part time and flextime is dictated by the demands of the workplace (Chung, 2017). The third woman from this group took an eight-year work sabbatical as she 'couldn't juggle the two'. Additionally her partner was setting up his own business, which made sense logistically for her to remain at home during these years.

### **Theme 3: Effects of pregnancy on women's employment**

It is an overriding theme that pregnancy affects women's employability from an employer's point of view. The most common factors/reasons for this were the wasted investment of training employees and also the worry that employees do not return after maternity leave. All of the participants disclosed that they would not hire a pregnant job candidate for the same reasons. However half of the participants shared that exceptions would be made for employees of exceptional talent. Another factor that was mentioned was the size of the company and the lack of maternity leave cover played a part in the affordability of maternity leave for employees. Further elaborations of the results are presented below under the subthemes of cost of training, fallout post pregnancy and quality of employees.

#### *Cost of Training*

Five out of six of the interviewees noted that in terms of hiring women of childbearing age, the biggest factor that came to mind was that training investment would be wasted. Firstly the training in the aesthetics industry is particularly expensive and the cost can be 'crippling' to a company if training was paid for and there was no return due to maternity leave. Secondly, one participant mentioned the 'extra training' that is required post maternity leave for employees that forgotten or lost skills. Overall training costs are heightened and in some cases from a business perspective wasted due to pregnancy.

### *Fallout post pregnancy*

A common factor in terms of employment pregnancy was the risk that an employee would not return after maternity leave. Four out of the six interviewees mentioned this concern, one reported that there was 'no guarantee' that an employee would return which could incur losses of investment in training for the employer. One participant stated that 'a lot of the times women don't return after nine months off', which she had experienced a number of times.

### *Quality of Employee*

Although the overriding belief is that pregnancy does affect employees employability and can financially cost these businesses, half of the interviewees noted that the caliber of employee was a factor that was extremely important. As the industry is in the private sector, the government does not afford to maternity leave. It is down to the discretion of your employer whether they want to provide maternity pay or not. One of the interviewees described a particular experience where she 'fought tooth and nail' with the company director to pay an employee during her maternity leave. She valued the employee as 'an asset and benefit to the company' and wanted to keep her in the company post-maternity leave. Two other interviewees mentioned that a position would remain open for a returning employee if they were of a high quality; 'would wait for her for five years', 'if they were an absolute superstar, we would wait for them'.

## **Discussion**

Semi-structured interviews were carried out in order to gain an understanding of both employee and employers perceptions of pregnancy in the workplace. The workplace selected is the aesthetics/cosmetic industry which is a female dominated sector providing a specifically female insight into the topic. Additionally each interviewee has experienced pregnancy in the workplace and also has the perspective of being the employer. The findings from the interviews offer valuable insights into the earlier research conducted in chapter X. The analysis section has presented three key themes, which appeared consistently throughout the interviews. The key themes will now be presented with reference and comparison to relevant literature.

Following the interview analysis, a number of findings reiterated previous literature evidence but also some gave a different insight into pregnancy in the workplace and the underlying constructs. The experience of pregnant women in female dominated industries was largely expressed as a positive one. All of the participants that were employed as nurses in the public sector during their pregnancy experienced a very positive reaction and treatment from colleagues and employers. Interestingly the two women that were employed in the private sector during their pregnancy experienced small amounts of friction with their employers. The discordant experience of one of the women can be attuned to the employers unfamiliarity with pregnant employees and resultantly any policies and procedures which were required. A number of studies have suggested that women employed in the private sector undergo worse treatment than women in the public sector due to a

lack of tried and tested policies and grievance procedures (Young, 2005). During the period of 1999 and 2008, 69% of pregnancy discrimination cases in Ireland arose from the private sector (see table X). Another factor that attributed to stress during pregnancy was the size of the business in which one of the women was employed. The employer was in a small amount of shock when informed of the pregnancy due to the fact that the business had only two employees. Similarly, Adams (2005) found that firm size influenced a risk of discrimination or mistreatment and that women working in smaller firms were more at risk of this. Ultimately the development and structure of policies and also the governmental maternity leave pay are two major factors that influence the treatment of pregnant employees in the workplace.

There is extensive research to confirm the negative impact pregnancy has on female career progression termed 'penalties of motherhood' (Waldfogel, 2007). The effects of pregnancy on job progression are multifactorial in nature, which requires a broad investigative approach. The factors that need to be taken into consideration are the woman's age at each pregnancy, the gaps between each birth, the partner's career and ability to support, the timing of the woman's pregnancies in terms of her career, the pregnancy experience and the woman's ability to adapt to motherhood. Contrary to past research there was a divided response to the impact of pregnancy on career progression. The majority of interviewees reported pregnancy having no effect on their job progression, which contrasts with extensive research. It is important to note that the sample group was selected due to their managerial positions so may not be a true representation of the female working



population. McIntosh (2012) and Hakim (2006) both investigated the short and long term cumulative affect of pregnancy on women's job progression to find there was a statistically significant impact. A factor that needs to be further looked into is the ages of dependent children relative to the mother's career position. The impact on career progression has been reported as incrementally and detrimentally reduced relative to the dependent child/children's age (Waldfogel, 2007), information that was not obtained in the interviews but may be useful for further research. Perhaps if the sample group was larger, a more distinguishable conclusion could be achieved for this aspect of pregnancy. One third of the participants found pregnancy undoubtedly prevented their ability to progress in their career. The women did not share similar experiences and both attuned their inability to progress for different factors; one turned down a higher paid self-employment role as a sole trader. However the lack of job security in terms of maternity leave and benefits deterred her as she was planning on having another child, a common occurrence according to Hakim (2006), who argues that women reject greater responsibilities to concentrate on the family through personal choice. The second participant took a career break following her pregnancy, attributing this to allow her husband to set up his own business. Research has argued that the reason women take this position of carer and nurturer is due the acceptance of the gender roles in the 'family' model, which limits their career opportunities (Longhurst, 2008). Although this gender role expectation is becoming less evident in society, it is still present and defines family structures. . There is the debate that gender has more of a role to play

than motherhood, however this is difficult to identify in this study as the cosmetics industry is largely female dominated

In terms of work-life balance post pregnancy, there was a divide of perceptions amongst the mothers. Half of the group returned to work before the nine-month maternity leave had finished while the other half reduced their working commitments following having children. The reduction of working hours is the principle means by which half of women manage dual roles (work and home) (Hakim, 2006). Although societal and cultural norms have changed over the past twenty years in terms of women's participation in the labor market, care continues to be viewed as a feminine activity, which women must balance with paid work. Concurrently there has been a worldwide intensification of employment for a number of reasons leading to atypical and longer working hours in today's society (Wattis, 2012). Such changes have transformed the work-life balance debate into a work and care rhetoric. Evidence from the data suggested that the participants who returned to work at full capacity, struggled to find time for personal activities and even began to find work as an escape, away from the somewhat chaotic home life. This highlights the intense lifestyle that is required by mothers who continue to work full time post partum, an issue that has been termed a 'crisis of care'. Crisis of care is the consequent care deficit such as exhaustion or lacking of self-care. McGee (2020) has hypothesized that this social problem of a care deficit is a consequence of female labor redirection coupled with continued provision of care in their home life.

Every interviewee reported that they would not hire a pregnant job applicant for a role in their clinic, ultimately due to cost of training and maternity leave pending. It is difficult to classify this opinion as bias as inevitably the new employee will need a period of time off within the first year of employment, adversely affecting the business. Employer attitudes towards pregnant women in the recruitment process remain an area that is insufficiently developed, as it is difficult for an employer to ignore the obvious risks in employing a pregnant employee. It is more useful to measure the attitudes of employers towards current employees falling pregnant to identify any bias or discrimination. Research has identified a number of common perceptions of pregnant employees by employers such as inflexibility, lack of commitment, incompetence and a requirement to accommodate the pregnancy (Botsford Morgan, 2013). The interviewees mentioned no apprehensions around the employees ability's to work during pregnancy, which could be as a result of their own experiences of working during pregnancy. Halpert(1997) reported that males typically scored pregnant women lower in performance than females due to an element of gender discrimination but also the lack of shared experience and relatability to pregnancy. Thus highlighting the different reactions from male and female dominated industries towards pregnancy. The major concern of employers in this study was the question of whether the employee would return following maternity leave as a number had experienced disappointment previously. One even reported needing to take an unplanned career break following pregnancy, highlighting the unpredictable nature of this period. A need for prolonged assistance following return from maternity leave was also a concern for employers, a

common belief that can lead to friction in the workplace (Gates, 1998). The size of the firm/company is indicative of the ability to manage these issues. In a survey carried out on pregnancy discrimination across the UK, the main concern of smaller to medium sized companies was uncertainty surrounding cover and the return of women post maternity leave (Young, 2005).

The participants reported that the childbearing age of a job applicant does not affect their hiring decisions, an uncommon finding to the literature. Becker et al(2019) presented that even in female dominated industries, the callback rate to married women with no children was significantly lower than those married with children. It is to be taken into consideration the size and sector in which these businesses are categorized. All companies within this study are relatively small which may be a relative factor. The majority of discrimination occurs at the CV review stage by 'recruiters', who shortlist CVs by making quick decisions based on whom they believe will be most successful at the interview stage. As the clinics in question are relatively small in size, they do not use recruiters to fill job positions. This may negate CV discrimination towards applicants of childbearing age, a commonality reported in bigger firms (Duguet, 2005). Additionally when hiring managers conduct interviews rather than CV audits, the focus is placed on the candidate's skillset and suitability rather than demographic information.

## **Strengths and Limitations**

This qualitative study is to our knowledge the first study of dual pregnancy experiences of an employee and employer in a female dominated industry. One of the major strengths of this research piece was the purposive sampling technique, which enabled a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of pregnancy in the workplace. Additionally, a validated method was used to analyze data in the form of thematic analysis. The questions selected for the interviews were open-ended to mitigate against any bias; however the occurrence of response bias in qualitative research is common and must be taken into consideration. The sample represented employment in the private sector only; this could be inclusive to public sector in future research to investigate the differing opinions in terms of maternity pay/governmental allowances. Another limiting factor to this research was the lack of questioning on the demographics of the participants children relative to their career progression, something that has been identified as pivotal to women's career development. Lastly a larger sample size would have benefited the study, although the specificity of the sample will make this quite problematic. Further research in this area is required to compare both public and private sectors in terms of pregnancy in the workplace. Another interesting direction for future research would be the impact of dependent children's ages on females.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study offered an in-depth qualitative feedback on participant's personal experience of pregnancy in the workplace and also their perception of pregnancy as an employer. The results of the interviews both contrast and correspond with previous research carried out. The Discussion chapter presents the reasoning behind these results. The second objective of this study was to gather the experiences of the participants during pregnancy in the workplace and whether there was any forms of discrimination and if so the key correlations. The results of the interviews have shown that participants employed in the public sector experienced no forms of ill treatment throughout their pregnancy, however there was minor friction and tension experienced by the participants in the private sector. A more focused insight into the sectorial differences is required to eradicate any discrimination. As outlined in the literature review, discrimination towards pregnancy and a woman's childbearing potential is present in employment. Although the majority of research is based on male dominated industries, there is some evidence in the female counterpart. The third objective of this study was to investigate the perceptions and effects of employee pregnancy in the aesthetics industry from an employer's perspective. The results demonstrated the main concern of employers was the uncertainty around women returning to employment post maternity leave. A possible solution to alleviate this may be the introduction of a part time work incentive by the government to re engage mothers back to work. There is a need for

heightened levels of awareness around discrimination, equality and policies. There are a number of potential solutions for the issues at hand such as: increased awareness around equality, introduction of private sector maternity supplements.

### Broad Sectorial Recommendations

#### Recommendation 1

The ability of private sectors to provide their employees with full salary while on maternity leave is an important objective that needs further attention. The current system of paid maternity leave in Ireland has developed organically since 1952. At present there are legislations in place that provide each mother with twenty six weeks paid maternity leave. The statutory protection has strengthened, giving the right to take maternity leave and crucially to return to work. Although the Irish system has provided a solid foundation to employees in terms of protection, there are unequal entitlements that remain between genders and sectors in the labour market that need to be rectified. The issue of achieving a work-life balance is evident amongst the Irish population especially in the private sector. An EU directive on work-life balance was implemented in August 2019 with one of its main objectives being to better support work-life balance for workers and carers. Public sector employees receive 100% of their salary while on maternity leave whereas only 60% of private sector employees receive the same. Private sector employers do not receive adequate governmental

supplementation, which discourages them from providing this incentive to their employees. The data from this study suggested that 50% of the women returned to work prematurely and experienced an overwhelming period due juggling both motherhood and employment. A recommendation to offset this would be a 100% maternity pay top up across the public and private sector with SIF payments to encourage mothers to ease back into employment without the financial stress. The IGEEES review reported that private sector weekly average earnings in 2020 is €642, this is almost two and half times the SIF payment, which could reduce the ability of working mothers to take their entitled leave. In order to financially achieve this, it is recommended that the twenty-six weeks paid leave is reduced to the EU standard of sixteen weeks nationwide, which would provide the excess needed for the private sector top up.

## Recommendation 2

The results of this study have highlighted the unfamiliarity of smaller sized firms with pregnancy in the workplace. Pregnant employees experienced friction at times as a result of lack of knowledge on the employer's behalf. This emphasizes the need for increased education and also the requirement for policy in small private sector firms. Price (2011) contends that in order for equality to be accomplished, organizations require a practical and systematic approach in the form of policy. Policy-making is not the only part of the process; an investment in education of both employees and employers is crucial. Education should encompass training, development practices,



equality policies and a clear communication strategy to ensure the workforce is educated. The familiarization of pregnancy rights will alleviate any tension between the workforce and allow the process to be enjoyable and easy for all parties. This study found that women in the public sector experienced only positive reactions from their workplaces during pregnancy, this can be attuned to the familiarity of their employers with pregnancy and the long term system that was developed.

### Recommendation 3

The main concern for employers in the aesthetic industry in terms of pregnancy in the workplace is the potential for an employee to not return following maternity leave. An option to prevent this may be providing a gradual return period or flexible working hours post maternity leave to encourage employees back to work, a method that has proven to be successful in the UK labour market (Chung, 2017). Flexible working allows the employee to have control over when or where they work. Ultimately the use of flexible working arrangements (flextime) provides the employee with the ability to alter the timing of their work and/or vary the number of hours worked per day/week. In terms of the particular aesthetics clinics in this study, there is potential for flextime. Each of the clinics open later on at least two evenings a week to accommodate for particular customers. The clinics could provide returning mothers with the option of increased working hours on three or four days a week to allow employees to maintain full time hours whilst having more time at home. This option is something that is down to

the discretion of the clinic owner and implementation may be highly useful amongst a largely female workforce. Research has also demonstrated that, similar to other types of job autonomy, workers' control over their work schedule can alleviate work and family conflict (Kossek, 2006).

### Specific Organizational Recommendations

- As all of the cosmetic clinics in this study are small scale businesses, it is recommended that human relations(HR) companies are outsourced to aid with training. Unconscious bias training for recruitment is highly recommended to negate any discrimination, this training typically lasts 60 minutes and can be carried out through an online continuous professional development (CPD) accredited course which costs €25-€35 per person.
- It is recommended that the company's policy regarding the return to work after pregnancy is updated to include options such as a graduated return to full time hours or flextime. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (2020) advises that this policy development can be added to existing employees duties, one that has an aptitude for people management. Alternatively a specialist could be outsourced for a one-off consultancy fee to update the existing policy. The first option is more cost-effective as there is no specific fee, whereas the cost of a consultant can range from a daily rate of €100-200 (Chioconi, 2020). It is essential that time allowances for doctors

appointments are included in the working policies, which improves transparency between employer and employee.

- The policies surrounding pregnancy in the clinic must be made available to all candidates during the recruitment stages. This provides an individual with a sense of comfort and security that there are systems in place to negate any forms of discrimination or bias.

### Conclusion

By looking at pregnancy in employment, a number of factors are relevant to the overall picture. The views of both the pregnant employee and the employer are critical to gain a true representation. Motherhood has been shown to have different affects on women's career progression; some found that they were penalized whilst others conveyed that their careers were largely unaffected by having children. Although there is substantial literature to suggest that there is motherhood penalty apparent amongst working mothers; this study has shown that this can be averted by other factors such as a supportive working environment, informed employers and an established maternity system and policy. In terms of the employer; a common concern is the uncertainty of a pregnant employee returning after maternity leave. Solutions to alleviate this such as flexible working hours or a graduated return to full time hours may be suitable for employers in the cosmetics industry. It has been postulated that the age of dependent children is directly proportional to the detrimental impact on career progression, a

potential route for further research that could explain further the different experiences of women's journey through motherhood and employment.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Reflective Learning Statement**

The aim of this reflective learning statement is to showcase my journey as I completed my research piece. I will outline my experiences from selection of methodology, challenges and opportunities that I was faced with, the main findings that arose from the process and also the skills that I developed and utilized throughout the project.

The past 5 months have been both stressful and challenging but most importantly a learning experience for me. The difficulties were exacerbated by the covid pandemic at present, removing access to the college, library and face-to-face meetings with classmates and supervisors. The first stage of this project was selecting a topic that I found interesting and that I also had adequate access to. In terms of the HR profession, I have an interest in equality and discrimination in the workplace so I wanted this to be a factor in my research topic. After discussing with my supervisor Corina, I decided to use my occupation in the cosmetics industry. I was working in the cosmetics industry as a patient liaison officer at the time and decided to utilize this resource for my research. I decided to focus my research on the area of pregnancy discrimination in the industry as the workforce is typically female of childbearing age. My engagement with the module and materials offered through lectures and Moodle gave me a deeper understanding of the processes required by organizations to ensure fair and legal treatment of employees.

The research that I conducted for the literary review section provided me with in depth knowledge of the phenomenon of pregnancy in the workplace. I selected a semi-structured interview design to gather data from employees and employers of clinics. This investigation ensured that my interview questions were suitable to induce the correct information from the interviewees. I had to carry out interviews with people I had not met before which is something new to me. This process required an element of confidence and composure, as the interviews were audio recorded. In order to obtain the correct information, the interview questioning needed to be executed precisely. I conducted the interviews via Zoom call due to covid regulations. As each interview passed, I found myself growing more confident during the conversations. I avoided asking any leading questions and tried to stick to the predetermined questions. I then used thematic analysis to categorize the interview data, which allowed me to discuss the findings in great detail in my discussion chapter.

I fortunately developed a number of important skills throughout this process. The first skill I learned was interviewing techniques, something which I would be comfortable with conducting now. Following the completion of one of my interviews, a participant offered me an employment role in her clinic. I was extremely grateful for this opportunity and the networking element of this project became very relevant. I gained a good understanding from the employers perspective that I was unfamiliar with prior to the interviews. Although the employers were female and very accommodating to pregnant

employees, they were business conscious and had to always keep their priorities to the clinic at the forefront. I was familiar with Microsoft Word and the Zoom application but I am very proficient in both following the research.

## **The Investigation of Pregnancy in the cosmetic/aesthetics industry.**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide it is important for you to read this leaflet so you understand why the study is being carried out and what it will involve.

Reading this leaflet, discussing it with others or asking any questions you might have will help you decide whether or not you would like to take part.

#### **What is the Purpose of the Study?**

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of pregnancy in the a female dominated industry such as the cosmeutical industry.

#### **Why have I been invited?**

You have been purposely selected to participate in this study as you are a female employer in the cosmetics industry that has also experienced pregnancy in the workplace.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you whether you would like to take part in the study. I am giving you this information sheet to help you make that decision. If you do decide to take part, remember that you can stop being involved in the study whenever you choose, without telling me why. You are completely free to decide whether or not to take part, or to take part and then leave the study before completion.

### **What will happen if I take part?**

You will be asked to complete a short interview anonymously over Zoom Call to adhere for Covid-19 restrictions. After signing a consent form, the investigator will ask you a series of open questions prompting you to answer freely in your own words on experiences you have had in relation to the research question. It is estimated that the total time to complete this interview will be less than 30 minutes.

### **What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?**

By taking part in this study you will be participating in an interview that will occur outside of work hours during your personal time. You will be required to answer questions relating to your personal experiences of pregnancy and also questions about your employment. Some of the information is of a personal nature. You have the right to seek human intervention by contacting the lead researcher (name and contact details below).

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

By taking part in this study you help in providing the researcher with valuable data that can be used to collate codes and themes to be used in further research on this topic area. This will help the researcher to formulate analytical answers to the research question proposed.

### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential and anonymous?**

Yes. Your name will not be written on any of the data we collect; the written information you provide will have an ID number, not your name. Your name will not be written on the recorded interviews, or on the typed-up versions of your discussions from the interview, and your name will not appear in any reports or documents resulting from this study. The consent form you have signed will be stored separately from your other data. The data collected from you in this study will be confidential. The only exception to this confidentiality is if the researcher feels that you or others may be harmed if information is not shared.

### **How will my data be stored, and how long will it be stored for?**

All paper data including, the typed-up transcripts from your interview and your consent forms will be kept in locked storage. All electronic data; including the recordings from your interview, will be stored within a password protected system. All data will be stored in accordance with University guidelines and the Data Protection Act (2018).

### **What will happen to the results of the study and could personal data collected be used in future research?**

The general findings might be reported in a scientific journal or presented at a research conference, however the data will be anonymized and you or the data you have provided will not be personally identifiable, unless we have asked for your specific consent for this beforehand. The findings may also be shared with other organizations/institutions that have been involved with the study. We can provide you with a summary of the findings from the study if you email the researcher at the

### **Who is organizing and funding the study?**

The organizer of the study is National College of Ireland.

### **Who has reviewed this study?**

Before this study could begin, permissions were obtained from the National College of Ireland(NCI).

The faculty of the Business School Research Ethics Committee at NCI have reviewed the study in order to safeguard your interests, and have granted approval to conduct the study.

### **What are my rights as a participant in this study?**

[Individual's rights under GDPR](#) if participating in this study include:

- A right of access to a copy of the information comprised in their personal data (to do so individuals should submit a [Subject Access Request](#)).
- A right in certain circumstances to have inaccurate personal data rectified.
- A right to object to decisions being taken by automated means.
- If participants should be dissatisfied with the University's processing of personal data, they have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. For more information see [the ICO website](#).

**Contact for further information:**

**Researcher email: [x19216254@student.ncirl.ie](mailto:x19216254@student.ncirl.ie)**

**Researcher Mobile Number: +353831265057**

**Supervisor email: [csheerin@ncirl.ie](mailto:csheerin@ncirl.ie)**

**Name and contact details of the Data Protection Officer at NCI**

## Appendix C: Interview Structure

### **Introduction**

- Thank participant for taking part in this research piece.
- Offer participant opportunity to ask any questions and answer them satisfactorily.
- Obtain basic demographics such as age, marital status .

### **Rapport-building :**

1. Can you tell me a bit about your role in your clinic?
2. Can you talk me through your work history?
3. How would you describe the nature of your work?

### **Topics**

There are three primary themes that will be explored in these semi-structured interviews. Main themes with probing questions outlined below:

#### **Personal experience of pregnancy in the workplace**

1. Can you tell me a little about your experiences of pregnancy at work, so from that moment of telling people you were pregnant, how you felt about that, what your perceptions were of that/how you went about it- formally/informally etc.
2. How did colleagues react to your pregnancy? Positive/negative



3. Did you have a good relationship with your line manager at the time?  
How did your manager respond when you let them know you were pregnant?
4. Do you think reactions to pregnancy you experienced were fairly generic or do you think the reaction is quite unique to the sector ( prompt so when you consider the female dominated nature of the business)
5. Do you think reactions are different in gendered spaces so for example in a male-dominated industry?
6. So having got past letting people know you were pregnant, what has been your experiences ( good or bad) of pregnancy in terms of your career?
7. How would you describe your work/life balance pre and post pregnancy- what has changed and how

**Effects of pregnancy on a womans hirability?**

1. In terms of employment, do you think a woman who is pregnant should divulge this prior to an interview?
2. Does the industry influence disclosure so do you think that women are more comfortable sharing the news in certain sectors relative to others?
3. In your experience, in practice ,do factors like age, marital status, pregnancy etc influence hiring decisions ( for example is there unconscious bias or does legislation protect against this. If a man and

a women are being interviewed for the same job, both aged 30, both married - who gets hired? Potential for pregnancy

4. Now if two job applicants presented for an interview, both of similar age and experience, but one was pregnant. Do you think this would affect the hiring decision?

### **Pregnancy in terms of the employer**

1. If an employee informs you of their pregnancy, is there any concern/worry about their position going forward? If so in what capacity?
2. Have you had any experiences with employees falling pregnant before and if so how was the overall interaction/process?
3. This industry is largely female dominated, do you think this has any affect on attitudes towards pregnancy?
4. Do you know of any legislative rights that are applicable to pregnant employees? Mat leave, pay, parental leave
5. Do you think people are informed adequately with regards pregnancy in employment?